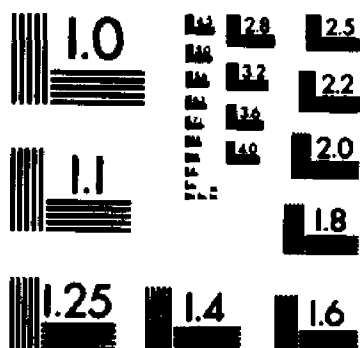
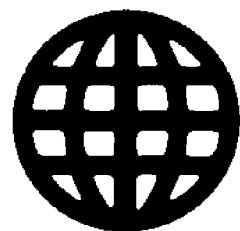


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**RECONSTRUCTING GENDER IN AMERICA: SELF-DEFINITION AND SOCIAL
ACTION AMONG ABORTION ACTIVISTS**

City University of New York

Ph.D. 1986

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**RECONSTRUCTING GENDER IN AMERICA:
SELF-DEFINITION AND SOCIAL ACTION AMONG ABORTION ACTIVISTS**

by

Faye D. Ginsburg

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty
in Anthropology in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philoso-
phy, the City University of New York.

1986

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This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in Anthropology in satisfaction of the dissertation requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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Abstract

RECONSTRUCTING GENDER IN AMERICA:

SELF-DEFINITION AND SOCIAL ACTION AMONG ABORTION ACTIVISTS

Adviser: Professor Vincent Crapanzano

This thesis is a symbolic analysis of the contemporary battle over abortion and was organized around the controversy as it occurred in one locale, Fargo, North Dakota, following the opening in October 1981 of the first clinic in the state to offer abortions. Analysis focused on the course of this conflict over two years and, in particular, on the grassroots female abortion activists who were involved. Life story narratives with key pro-life and pro-choice women in Fargo show how abortion activism serves to organize disorderly life transitions for individuals and generational cohorts, especially those affected by socio-economic shifts in which the contradictions between wage labor and motherhood are particularly apparent. The struggle over abortion and its interpretation does not represent two pre-existent positions. Rather, the conflict is itself part of the reconstruction of gender in America as a meaningful social category in America -- a process of self-definition through social action -- at a time when American culture and the place of women in it seem in disarray.

Local material was analyzed in relation to the history of abortion practice and activism in America, from the 19th century to the present. Special attention is given to growth of the right-to-life movement. Its diverse and primarily female membership is organizing to protest and reverse what they see as the dehumanizing effects of the increasing

commercialization of human life. These views suggest that abortion activists are the most recent manifestation of moral reform movements in America which have mobilized to resist penetration of the "domestic domain." Now, as women have fewer children and move increasingly into wage labor, domesticity is more and more defined by and reduced to reproduction. Thus, control over the womb, the last unambiguous symbol of an exclusive female arena, is particularly threatening in the current context.

PREFACE

This work was influenced, fundamentally, by two people whom I had the good fortune to meet at a formative moment in my own life and intellectual development. These women, Joan Kelly and Barbara Myerhoff, each died recently and prematurely of cancer. Though both lived barely half a century, they contributed radically new perspectives in their work and teaching to our knowledge of history and anthropology, and the more specific subjects they each addressed, such as the Renaissance or life histories. The sense of loss is compounded, knowing that we can only imagine the work they might have done had they lived on into old age. Like other students and colleagues of theirs, I find myself writing to them, for them, as a way of acknowledging that their visions endure in the endeavors of those who they influenced. This thesis was written with the hope that it might shed some light on the shadowy corners of knowledge that these two illuminated in their work and lives. It is dedicated to Joan and Barbara because, in many ways, it would not have been written without them.

It is difficult to describe in a few words what I learned from these women, how they radically altered my understanding of my self and my studies. If I can reduce the lessons to their simplest terms, they come to this: that one cannot understand social life, history, or culture until one attends to the voices and experiences of women as well as men, even and perhaps especially those whose lives challenge one's own, whose place in the world seems a puzzle. This recognition was an essential part of the the motivation that sent me off to try and untie the Gordian knot of the enduring conflict over abortion as an

issue setting women against each other in contemporary America.

The route to knowledge that Joan Kelly and Barbara Myerhoff each taught and travelled was based on a process that requires one to constantly turn and look at oneself, even while engaged in looking out at the "other." In their pedagogy, understanding comes from struggling with and grasping the relationship that emerges when one's self is included as part of the process of inquiry. The words sound almost clichéd as I write them, slogans of the 1960's: "the personal is political," "reflexivity," "the Heisenberg effect" and so forth. However, the process of carrying out research with this intent is perhaps one of the most challenging and disturbing projects that one can set out to do. For a scientist, it goes against the conventions of western science built on logical positivism and the privileged role of the observer which have passed into mainstream anthropology. In the last decade people in the field began to question seriously the virtue of maintaining the illusion of a rigid boundary between the observer and the observed. This seems a logical if late development for anthropology since the mainstay of its method -- participant-observation -- calls for the systematic violation of that boundary. As Vincent Crapanzano notes in his pioneering study, Tuhawi (1980), the recognition of other ways of constituting reality is always threatening and may produce a sort of "epistemological vertigo."

The threat of such an encounter and its possible transformative effects is difficult enough when the subject is at some cultural or historical remove. When the "other" represents some very close opposition within one's own society, as was initially the case in my work

with right-to-life women, taking on the native's point-of-view is even more problematic. The process begins to feel like internal tectonics as the layers of one's own thought and unexamined beliefs begin to shift and collide and take new shape in relation to the people one is struggling to understand. Both Joan and Barbara helped me to accept rather than resist the transformations such work requires and I hope it is better for it.

As I became part of the lives of the people I studied, my ideas changed and deepened as I experienced the world from the multiple points-of-view I encountered in the field. My intention is to offer a perspective that acknowledges the agency, motivation and intentionality of all those with whom I worked. This perspective is central to the thesis. With it, I have been able to use anthropology in a way that shows how abortion activists are engaged in a process of reshaping the very conditions that, in some sense, shaped them. It is not my place or task here to take a partisan position. Rather, I hope that readers will suspend for a moment what they have always believed to be the "truth," to listen to voices other than their own. My intention is that the work you are about to read will reveal the dynamics of the contemporary dilemma over abortion with appreciation for its complexities and the depth of feeling that it arouses for those who have made that cause a central concern in their lives.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

It is, inevitably, overwhelming and humbling to try and summarize briefly the many sources of inspiration and support that sustain a dissertation. Should I unwittingly forget some key person, I offer my apologies in advance if, unwittingly, I have done so. First thanks are due to Vincent Crapanzano and Jane Schneider for seeing me through not only the thesis but also my graduate career. Each has been an inspiration through their own research and a constant source of encouragement and guidance. I am particularly appreciative of the faith they had in my abilities from early on, even when my own was weak. Both knew when to nudge me along but generally left me the wide berth I seem to require. I hope this work reflects well on their teaching and is some repayment for all they have done. Thanks go as well to my other committee members from the Graduate Center, June Nash and Roger Sanjek, as well as to Sydel Silverman, the chair of the Anthropology program. I have been greatly enriched by their teaching and research and am grateful to them for the confidence in me and the enthusiasm they sustained for this project. Rayna Rapp, my outside reader, was and continues to be, from my first encounter with her written work in 1979, a model for the possibilities of politically engaged research. Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, Riv-Ellen Prell, and Susan Harding have been "unofficial" sources of rich intellectual and emotional support, particularly when my spirits flagged. In addition, I would particularly like to thank fellow students Elizabeth Brusco, Claire Riley, Pat Sacks, Lyn Tiefenbacher, and Joan Turner who, at different critical stages, offered much-needed encouragement as well as entertainment. I

am grateful as well to Jan Olsen, Greg Pratt, and Ben McCoy with whom I carried out the first phase of this project in 1981-82, a documentary production for WCCO-TV, Minneapolis. For good-humored word-processing assistance at the eleventh hour, I am indebted to Margaret Newman.

The generosity of the many people I worked with in Fargo, North Dakota can never really be repaid. I am especially appreciative of Sylvia Morgan who shared her home, her family, her history, and her remarkable spirit with me during my second stay in the field in 1983. For all their cooperation and good faith I particularly want to thank Jane Bovard, Susan Richard, Cathy Kram, Lyn Wilson, Cindy Phillips, Betty Coleman, and Susan Hill.

This thesis would not have been possible without the financial support I received for my research. For these awards, I am grateful to: The Charlotte Newcombe Dissertation Fellowship in Ethics and Values, 1982-83; The American Association of University Women Dissertation Fellowship, 1983-84; Sigma XI Research Award, 1983; and David Spitz Dissertation Award in the Social Sciences, CUNY, 1983-84.

Finally, I owe an immeasurable debt to my parents, Benson and Pearl Ginsburg, who seemed always to take pleasure in my rather unconventional intellectual curiosity; and Debby, Nathan, and Sonya Szajnberg, with whom I lived for part of the write-up period, for their much appreciated emotional support. I am grateful to Ted Mooney for his loving companionship, great faith in my creative abilities, attention to my writing, and patience with the burdens that extended fieldwork places on loved ones. And I thank Fred Myers for his unexpected help in steering me through the final passage of this voyage.

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PART I. INTRODUCTION

Chapter 1: Introduction

The passions aroused in the current debate over abortion rights indicate that there is more to the conflict than single-issue politics. For many, it provides a symbolic focus for the assertion of mutually exclusive understandings of a broader range of themes at a time when the society and the place of women in it seem in disarray. The power of this controversy to arouse intense commitment on the part of female activists in particular reveals its potent metaphorical connection to critical sources of cultural and social identity, especially in relation to sexuality and reproduction.

In order to understand the abortion controversy from "the actor's point of view," in the context of everyday life, my field research was set in one locale, Fargo, North Dakota,¹ a small metropolitan center and crossroads providing commercial and service industries for the surrounding rural area. The residents of Fargo -- numbering about 61,000 -- pride themselves on their clean air, regular church attendance, rich topsoil, and their actual and metaphorical distance from places like New York City. The orderly pace of Fargo's daily life was disrupted in the fall of 1981 when the Fargo Women's Health Center -- the first free-standing facility in the state to publicly offer abortions -- opened for business. A local pro-life coalition against the clinic formed immediately. Soon after, a pro-choice group emerged to respond to the anti-abortion activities. Each group has evolved and fissioned. Both have approximately 1000 members and a hard core of ten to twenty activists.

The three years that I have spent following the local conflict in Fargo included two six-month periods of fieldwork in 1982 and 1983.

During the first stint, I was also working as a producer for a documentary on the clinic controversy;² local people viewed me as a journalist, a position which enabled me to establish rapport quickly. The show, broadcast in the spring of 1982, was well-received by pro-choice and pro-life activists alike so that when I returned in 1983, my credibility for being able to understand both positions was not in question. During the second six months I spent in Fargo, I lived with a family and identified myself as an anthropologist. In addition to following the development of the organizations that formed for and against the clinic and participating in community life in general, I also collected life histories from 35 people involved in the conflict, in order to see how their activism and personal and historical experiences were intertwined.

My goal was to understand how this grassroots conflict shaped and was shaped by people's experiences of self, gender, family, community and culture in a specific setting. I viewed local activists as cultural agents mediating between a social situation they inhabit in the present and a desired alternative future, a world they are envisioning and enacting in their abortion activism. In a situated contest such as Fargo, one can see more generally how abortion comes to signify conflicting social and personal identifications capable of mobilizing and polarizing people. It thus illuminates larger cultural processes that set the context for the intense struggle over the interpretation of gender in contemporary American culture that is being played out in the abortion controversy.

Organization of the Dissertation

This thesis takes as its primary subject the emblematic position of abortion as a rallying symbol polarizing contemporary female-based social reform movements. While my focus is on activists involved in the current abortion controversy as it has been played out in a grassroots struggle over an abortion clinic, I also situate my material in a historical framework. This sort of perspective enhances an anthropological understanding, particularly when studying one's own society. It helps to clarify the underlying principles through which people struggle to make sense of problematic experiences in their everyday lives, a process that results in what Anthony Giddens has called "practical consciousness" (1983: 24-25). So, for example, in Part V, I trace the history of female-based moral reform movements in America to find -- in the continuity of general cultural themes and discontinuity of particular symbols -- how categories of gender and politics are interwoven, "put to empirical risk" in action (Sahlins 1985), reorganized and reproduced in new form. In Part I, I briefly outline the frameworks I use to interpret, from an anthropological perspective, the grassroots abortion conflict which is the subject of this thesis.

In Part II, I trace the origins of the current debate to shifts in interpretation, practice, and policy regarding abortion in American history. In the nineteenth century, the focus of Chapter 2, abortion served as an issue that consolidated a movement to enhance the status of the medical profession in this country. I examine this first public controversy over abortion in relation to the people and conditions that were responsible for the enactment of wide-ranging legisla-

tion that made abortion virtually illegal throughout the U.S. by 1900.³ The historical evidence suggests that by the 1860's, abortion had widespread popular acceptance. Therefore, the efforts by doctors to criminalize its practice required that they succeed in reinterpreting its meaning. Through the efforts of the physician's crusade, abortion and pregnancy became subject to medical and legal intervention. Thus, the most marked physical attribute distinguishing the category female were made subject to what Michel Foucault would call a new sexual discourse in which

...the mechanisms of power are addressed to the body, to life, to what causes it to proliferate, to what reinforces the species, its stamina, its ability to dominate, or its capacity for being used... Sexuality was not a mark or a symbol, it was an object and a target...it was an effect with a meaning value (1978: 147-148).

Chapter 3 addresses the transformations of "meaning value" in the practice and interpretations of abortion in the twentieth century at the national level -- from the early underground networks to the "precipitating incidents" such as the Finkbine case -- that triggered popular support for reform and then repeal of anti-abortion laws. The 1973 Supreme Court decision, *Roe v. Wade*, is analyzed in relation to these changes, and as background to subsequent developments. I then provide an overview of the activism of the 1970's and 1980's, the main subject of this thesis. Particular attention is given to the right-to-life movement and its relationship to the more general conservative shift in American culture and politics over the last decade.

In Part III, I ground the controversy in the grassroots setting where I did field research, Fargo, North Dakota, and examine how national developments were experienced at the local level. In the 1960's, the debate was primarily among professional elites directly

involved in the issue -- health care professionals, social workers, lawyers. By contrast, the activism of the last decade, takes the shape of an intensely polarized popular struggle, engaged in primarily by female activists, focused more on more on the delivery of abortion services in local communities. However, it is not just abortion as a medical procedure that is in question; in the movements formed around it, abortion has become a critical signifier in American culture for contending interpretations of gender, sexuality and reproduction. In Chapter 4, I cover developments in Fargo from 1967 until 1981, with particular attention to the 1972 statewide referendum on abortion when the drama of a decade later was first rehearsed. Chapter 5 is, in a sense, the heart of this thesis; it describes and analyzes the conflict that ensued over the opening of the Fargo Women's Health Organization, the first clinic to offer abortion services in the state of North Dakota. For the local pro-life movement, the availability of abortion in their own community represented the intrusion of secularism, narcissism, materialism and anomie, and the reshaping of women into structural men. Pro-choice activists reacted to right-to-life protesters as the forces of narrow-minded intolerance who would deny women access to a choice that is seen as fundamental to women's freedom and ability to overcome sexual discrimination. Both positions made their claims through populist arguments. Each asked for support by presenting itself as under attack, yet simultaneously claimed to represent the "true" interests of the community.

When pro-life forces failed to close the clinic through conventional political tactics, they shifted their strategy. They are currently engaged in a battle for the clinic's clientele. Competition

is increasingly focused on winning the minds, bodies and power to define the women who might choose to violate a basic cultural script in which pregnancy necessarily results in childbirth and motherhood. Chapter 6 explores in detail this latest manifestation of the controversy. Special attention is given to the root metaphors and dramatic themes which give shape, meaning, and visibility to opposing understandings of abortion and its attendant meanings in the local body politic. The visit of a network television team to Fargo illustrates the way the conflict is systematically distorted in the national media and the impact that has on the course of local events. This chapter also examines how the the conflict takes on a particular shape when the context is a small-scale, face-to-face setting. An attachment to and pride in local sensibilities is voiced by women on both sides. The "community" has become a locus of interpretive struggle, expressed organizationally in the independence each group maintains from national affiliations and mandates. In a setting like Fargo, where there is a dense overlapping of social networks, the opposition cannot be encountered simply as the rhetorical "other." Opponents are well-known to each other; their humanity cannot be denied but must be incorporated and transcended. Thus, while neither position can exist without its real or imagined opposition, each is engaged, nonetheless, in a positive, culture-reconstructing agenda on its own terms.

It is this process, in which a particular understanding of self is enacted through abortion activism that lays the framework for Part IV, "Activism As Self-Definition." In life stories I collected with activists one sees how, in constructing an identity around an issue defined dialectically, the "other" is a critical counterpoint on which

one's own identity depends. Chapter 7 lays out the theoretical framework for interpreting life stories in which Mannheim's views of the bases for the formation of "political generations" are central. Individual narratives reveal how abortion provides activists on each side with different but interrelated paradigms for reconstituting and claiming a possible vision of being female that meshes with their historical and biographical -- and especially reproductive -- experiences. In these life stories, the narrators take symbolic control over problematic transitions in the female life cycle in contemporary America, defined generationally. Pro-choice activists cluster in a cohort born in the 1940's. Their life stories, analyzed in Chapter 8, indicate that the social protests of the 1960's, including the second wave of feminism, was a central experience for almost all of them. Most describe their encounter with these movements as a kind of awakening or passage from a world defined by motherhood into one filled with broader possibilities. Right-to-life women (Chapter 9) cluster in two cohorts. Those born in the 1920's were most active in pro-life work in the early 1970's. A second cohort, the one currently most active, was born in the 1950's. This latter group claims to have been or even be feminist in many respects (i.e. on issues not directly related to sexuality such as comparable worth). For many, their commitment to the right-to-life movement is described as a kind of conversion; it occurs most frequently around the birth of a first or second child when many women of this group decided to move out of the paid work force to stay home and raise children.

As each group struggles to come to terms with problematic historical and life cycle transitions, each group lays claim to a particular

view of American culture and the place of men and women in it. In Part V, I present evidence to support my argument that their visions and actions are the most recent expression of enduring cultural themes regarding gender in America. In female moral reform movements that have been periodically active over the last two centuries, these themes have been continually reconstructed. Generally, these movements can be seen as efforts on the part of women to control penetration of their social domains and their cultural understandings of self by what is coded as an intrusive masculine culture, often identified with the expansion of the market. In casting men and women in opposition, these female reformers have also been claiming the precedence of gender over class when the latter is defined without regard to the labor or social position of women. Chapter 10 describes the emergence of home and workplace as separate gender spheres in America in relation to industrialization. The rhetoric and action of religious and social purity reformers of the 18th and 19th centuries are interpreted as movements to resist the penetration of a non-monetized domain by market forces identified as masculine. In the period from the Progressive Era to World War II described in Chapter 11, female reform movements grow progressively more secular, allying with the state to serve the interests of an entrenched domesticity to which women were culturally assigned, for example in the battles for protective legislation of the 1920's.

The last chapter covers the period from the second wave of feminism in the 1960's to the abortion movements of the 1980's. Within the right-to-life movement, the terms of female defense against male predation are revived but with a new twist. The pro-life construction

of sexual antagonism is directed not only at men and aspects of the economy and culture coded as male. It is also directed at women who, by putting wage labor over domesticity, seeking sexual pleasure for its own sake, pursuing material gain, or rejecting motherhood, are acting, in their view, as men. This is set against the pro-life identification of "true femininity" with the self-sacrificing traits our culture still identifies as natural to mothers. Opposition to abortion, then, is a gesture against what they see as the final triumph of self-interest, a principle which represents both men and the market. From this point of view, women are distinguished ultimately by their reproductive capacities and the attributes seen to follow from acceptance of that difference. Women who endorse abortion are denying that difference and hence are "like men" although they possess the critical biological features that would make them women. In "naturalizing" femininity as a woman's stance towards her reproductive capacities, the category female is simultaneously produced by and revealed as disconnected from the female body. Thus, the right-to-life position rests on a view of gender that is, ironically, both essentialist and radically cultural. I conclude with a discussion of the political impact of their efforts to reconstruct gender in this mold. According to the right-to-life perspective, the policies they endorse should increase rather than diminish women's position, by invoking the authority and resources of the state in defense of pregnancy. The pro-life agenda is intended to support, protect and enforce the position of women as mothers and thus reclaim in new form a particular understanding of gender and its relation to the distribution of power in American society.

Theoretical Frameworks for the Thesis

The Political Context: The Abortion Controversy and the New Right

I began to explore the idea for this research on female grassroots abortion activists in 1980, the year that Ronald Reagan was elected, an event that has come to be associated with what is called the rise of the New Right. I was interested in trying to understand this rightward swing in the United States from the point of view of those engaged in conservative social movements at the local level. Given my motivation, this thesis, though it addresses activists on both sides of the abortion issue, is engaged more often with analyzing the pro-life position because of the insights it offers into the political and cultural shifts of the last decade.

As I read the journalistic and scholarly works coming out on the New Right, I became even more curious. Most who wrote on the topic, it seemed, were either intent on uncovering a conspiracy, or focused exclusively on the political organization and leadership of a few well-known groups and leaders -- Phyllis Schlafly and the stop ERA movement, Jerry Falwell and the Moral Majority, Richard Viguerie and the National Conservative Political Action Committee (NCPAC). Few had gone out and talked to the people who these movement leaders claim as their supporters, to find out who they are, how they live, and what motivates them. Generally, local-level activists are assumed to be rather ignorant people, at the mercy of the "forces of modernity," pawns of organized religion and conservative politicians (e.g. Crawford 1980; Eisenstein 1981; Merton 1981).

Because the right-to-life movement seemed to challenge such

simplistic explanations, it became the initial and enduring focus for my research. I discovered that contrary to popular stereotypes, pro-life activists are generally well-informed, alert to and involved in much of what is considered to be mainstream culture and politics. Many are educated professionals who have the resources and privileges that come with such position. The organization of the movement de-emphasizes hierarchy; it is extremely and purposefully decentralized. The largest and most representative umbrella group, The National Right to Life Committee (NRLC), claims over ten million members in 3000 chapters across the country. In addition, there are innumerable local groups such as the one I studied that form in response to specific community developments. Currently, pro-life activity is most engaged and effective at the local level and for that reason is particularly appropriate for anthropological research. Right-to-life groups draw their strength from local social life. Unlike the direct mass-mail organizing of some of the New Right groups such as NCPAC, pro-life activity is embedded in the kind of ongoing face-to-face interaction that is the stock and trade of the anthropological enterprise.

The movement should be distinguished from the New Right in other respects as well. The mainstream right-to-life movement has, for the most part, resisted efforts of New Right leaders to claim the abortion issue as their own and co-opt existing groups. Such alliances are seen as potentially dangerous to the single-issue organizing style and philosophy that characterizes the pro-life movement. In addition, the political conservatism and laissez-faire capitalism that comprise the New Right program are not central to, and often at odds with the mainstream right-to-life agenda. This movement, like many other

single-issue groups, encompasses a broad range of ideological positions, from radical pacifism -- Pro-Lifers for Survival, an anti-nuke group, for example -- to liberal Catholics and Protestants, to fundamentalist Christians. Despite the differences between these people, most share not only the goal of recriminalizing abortion, but also a critique of what they see as an increasing materialism, and a narcissism displacing nurturant ties of kin and community. In other words, much of their agenda could be interpreted, more generally, as part of an effort to reform the more dehumanizing aspects of contemporary capitalist culture. In this respect, their concerns are more similar, in many ways, to those of some of their pro-choice opponents than to their supposed allies on the New Right who favor a more libertarian conservative social philosophy. Pro-choice and pro-life women are similar in other ways as well. They do not divide neatly along ethnic, economic, occupational or religious lines. At the local level, where activity is strongest, grassroots activists on both sides of the abortion issue are primarily white, middle-class and female (Granberg 1981; Luker 1984). Thus, despite efforts to write off the right-to-life movement as the resentment of working-class Americans, even a cursory profile of activists reveals that neither political ideology nor class is the salient diacritic marking people opposed on the abortion issue. Rather, the movement reveals the priority of the interpretation of gender as a problem engaging women in this culture.

The Conflict As A Challenge to Essentialist Views of Women

The right-to-life movement calls into question the idea that women -- even those with similar class and cultural backgrounds -- experience themselves and act as a homogeneous social group with a universal set of interests. Women for and against abortion divide most clearly in their interpretations of gender and their different solutions to the unequal effects of sexual activity for men and women. Pro-choice activists consider inequalities between the sexes to be rooted in social, legal and cultural forms of gender discrimination and they seek to remedy that condition by structural change in the economic and political system. From this point of view, safe and legal abortion is seen as an essential safeguard against the differential effects of pregnancy on men and women. It is the minimum condition enabling heterosexually active women to have the power to control whether, when and with whom they will have children.

Pro-lifers, on the other hand, accept difference, but not necessarily hierarchy, in the social and biological roles of men and women. Their reform efforts are directed toward creating and promoting a social and political context that they feel will protect and enhance the essential condition that, in general, distinguishes male from female: pregnancy and motherhood. In their view, social changes which could be interpreted as casting reproduction and childrearing as a liability are anti-woman. For right-to-lifers, then, abortion is a condensed symbol for the devaluation of motherhood and the central attribute assigned to it in this culture: the self-sacrificing nurturance of dependents. Abortion represents, in addition, a threat to social guarantees that a woman with children will be supported. It is

seen as undermining an informal cultural code that links sex with reproduction and male support of families. Regardless of differences, both groups are working to reform American society, culturally and politically, through a variety of social, legal and political processes.

Understanding all this, the question remains: how is it that women who in many ways resemble each other more than they differ have come to promote such radically opposing views of reproduction and sexuality? And, why has abortion in particular become so polarizing and potent a symbol dividing contemporary women? What makes the termination of pregnancy so potent an image for freedom or decadence (depending on your point of view) in the American body politic?

The Symbolic Framework: The Construction of Gender in America

A System At War with Itself

In a classic essay entitled "External Boundaries," Mary Douglas addresses the metaphorical relations between body imagery and social structure as follows:

The more a symbol is drawn from common forms of human experience, the more wide and certain its reception... The body is a model which can stand for any bounded system. Its boundaries can represent any boundaries which are threatened or precarious...the powers and dangers credited to social structure are reproduced in small on the human body. Each culture has its own special risks and problems. To which particular body margins its beliefs attribute power depends on what situations the body is mirroring (1966: 115).

Douglas then goes on to outline four forms of body boundary violations, their cultural placement and the social structures associated with them. The last case she cites, which is most applicable to this thesis, she describes under the heading, "A System At War With Itself," one in

which danger is posed by internal contradictions, when one set of basic postulates of the culture is denied by a second. Using the example of the Lele of Central Africa for whom the pregnant woman and unborn child are considered both particularly vulnerable and dangerous, she sets out the characteristics of the internally warring system.

The danger of sex...is largely related to the attempt to treat women simultaneously as persons and as the currency of male transaction...

Males and females are set off as belonging to distinct and mutually hostile spheres. Sexual antagonism inevitably results and this is reflected in the idea that each sex constitutes a danger to the other (1966: 152).

Douglas' framework provides a useful model for understanding some of the symbolic elements in the right-to-life movement articulated both by leadership and grassroots activists. Three themes seem to predominate in the metaphorical connections made between abortion and American culture. Broadly outlined, these are:

1. A discourse of antagonism to "irresponsible sexual behavior" identified as natural to men, and unnatural to women.
2. A discourse of protection of victims. The "unborn child," the elderly, the unwed mother, and the handicapped are central images around which the movement organizes its crusade. They represent the most extreme versions of human dependency in our society -- those who because of disability, misfortune, or life cycle position cannot function independently or participate in productive activity.
3. A critique of market rationality and instrumentality in human relations which they see as growing and dangerous trends that must be reversed.

These visions paint a particular portrait of our culture, its central dilemmas, and the remedies that should be instituted. They are tied to two central images of abortion: the destruction of the fetus, and the violation of the boundary of the woman's impregnated womb by male authority figures. As Bernard Nathanson, the narrator of the most recent film produced by the Right-to-Life movement tells the audience

as it watches an abortion take place: "You are seeing the silent scream of a child threatened imminently with its extinction by the presence of an aggressor in its sanctuary."

In right-to-life rhetoric, these themes are used to claim identification with other social groups in America, both contemporary and historical, such as feminism. A short section from A Private Choice, a book by John Noonan, one of the key philosophers of the movement, is illustrative.

When strong and comprehensive anti-abortion statutes were enacted in 19th century America, the militant feminists had been outspoken in their condemnation of abortion...If the practice was resorted to at all, their leader Elizabeth Cady Stanton said, it was because of "the degradation of women by men." Abortion, the physicians attacking the practice agreed, was often imposed on women by men anxious to avoid their responsibility for children they had fathered ... Who wanted abortion in 1970? Only a minority of any section of the population favored it, but the stablest and strongest supporters of the liberty were white upper-class males (1979: 48-49).

Noonan goes on to quote from Eugene O'Neill's play, Abortion, written in 1914. In it, the protagonist Jack Townsend, a rich young college student, impregnates a local town girl for whom he arranges an abortion which proves fatal to her and the fetus. Noonan musters this, along with statistics and legal arguments as evidence for his case that abortion casts women as the victims of male lust and the uncaring penetration of upper-class privilege into the ranks of the less fortunate.

Noonan's subtext, connecting abortion to feminist roots, is not uncommon in the movement. While stereotypes cast right-to-lifers as unswervingly hostile to feminism, much of their rhetoric seeks to claim the same territory charted by the women's movement. In her pro-life dissent from the Rockefeller Commission on Population, Gracie Olivarez

wrote that abortion was "anti-women's liberation," because it subverted the equality of men and women. Equality, she observed, meant "an equal sharing of responsibilities by and as men and women."..Abortion on demand confirmed "the existing irresponsible attitude some men have toward their relationship to women and their offspring" (from Population and the American Future 1972: 160-161, quoted in Noonan: 48).

This case poses a counter-example to what some anthropologists consider to be a general rule of symbolic oppositions between the sexes. In their 1981 book Sexual Meanings, a cross-cultural collection on gender and sexual symbolism, anthropologists Sherry Ortner and Harriet Whitehead write that

nearly universally, women are seen as tending toward 'self-interest' and particularistic concerns without regard for social consequences, while men are seen as more concerned with the social good (: 7).

Their generalization simply recasts the essentialist arguments of structuralism in which the assignment of female to nature and male to culture are considered to be the fundamental truth of the symbolic and social organization of gender worldwide.

The American instance I am interpreting subverts this formulation on at least two counts. First, in the gender model expressed in the rhetoric of these movements, it is not the natural divisive woman who must be controlled but the wild lust of men that must be regulated by the civilizing influence of women for the benefit of the social good. To twist a phrase from Levi Strauss, it is women in American culture who are responsible for converting raw masculinity into cooked domesticity, just as they bring the unformed natural matter of infants into the world and transform them into cultural creatures. As one pro-life leader phrased it, in a voice that echoes the cadences of late 19th

century feminists,

The New Woman..is mother of the citizens of the 21st century. It is she who will, more than anyone else, transmit civilization and humanity to future generations..in the face of unremitting cultural change (Connaught Marshner, quoted in Jepsen 1984: 32).

If the ideal attributes assigned to gender in a given cultural setting are rooted, at least in part, in what it is that men and women do, or should do in daily life, then the parallels of the American case with Douglas' example of a system at war with itself is appropriate. In their political, economic and social definitions, men and women have been set apart as belonging to separate if not mutually hostile spheres of activity, which are, nevertheless, interdependent. Writ small on the human body, the moment of particular risk in the system is expressed in the penetration of the female arena -- nurturance, self-sacrifice, childrearing and domesticity -- by forces identified as oppositional, predatory and masculine. I am not proposing that one simply rearrange the pieces of a static structuralist gender paradigm. Gender and sexual practice are continually reinterpreted through the resistance of women to the imposition of what they see as male cultural forms that corrupt and exploit women if left unchecked.

The Historical Context

In their larger agenda, in their style of organizing and in their social profile, grassroots activists on both sides of the abortion issue resemble other social reform movements that have emerged periodically in the United States. The themes of the victimization of women by male lust, and the protection of the weak against the depredations of self-interest unleashed have recurred for at least two centuries. They are most prominent as central elements in female-led moral reform movements, mobilized around issues in which assault on a female domain is a primary image. These movements emerged with the growth of industrialization, capitalism and the accompanying material and emotional separation of domestic and wage labor that came to be identified as male and female arenas of activity. This symbolic reconstruction has taken a variety of organizational forms. For example, nineteenth century social purity reformers established Knights of the White Cross groups to reform male sexuality. Other organizing has been more politically explicit, such as in the protective legislation campaigns of the social feminists of the Progressive Era. Like the abortion conflict, these other social reform movements sought alliances with religious and state authorities so that law and public policy would conform to and enforce their view of what would most enhance women's position in this country.

The participation of women in social movements engaged in reformulating the cultural order and the construction of gender in it demonstrates how these themes are continually reorganized and given new meaning in relation to socio-economic change. That their interests may not, in fact, represent the interests of all women, is another matter.

The sort of cross-fertilization of historical and anthropological paradigms and material has gained currency in the last decade and greatly enhanced understandings of "the past in the present" in each field.* An historical frame is particularly helpful on two other counts. It is a device for achieving distance in a study of one's own society. In addition, a temporal perspective reveals continuities and changes in the shape and structure of the relationship between what are culturally defined as private and public domains. The danger of the long view, however, is that it can lead to a determinism in which causality rests in abstract concepts as if they, rather than people, were the sources of all volition and power in human action.

Self-Definition Through Social Action

More generally, over the last two centuries in America, female social reformers including those in the contemporary abortion battle, have been using political activism to challenge the control of the domestic domain to which they have been assigned. It is my argument that in so doing, women act continually to adjust the boundaries of those spheres to fit the shape of new experiences in their lives that seem at odds with the available interpretations of gender. As this seemed to be the case from my reading of other female moral reform movements in America, I decided to test out this idea in my own research. To that end, I collected life stories from the female activists with whom I worked in order to understand the relationship between their commitment to the abortion cause and their everyday experiences.

The life history narratives of these grassroots abortion acti-

vists pivot around transitions in relation to reproductive events which were experienced as discontinuous, generating a "life crisis." By life crisis, I simply mean a period in the life cycle lived as a stressful interruption, marked as a shift from one culturally defined stage of life to another. It seems that for many of the women I interviewed, the crisis emerged out of the dissonance they felt between the conditions they faced -- for example, a transition to motherhood -- and the available cultural resources for structuring that change, cognitively and socially. This hardly seems surprising as increasing numbers of women, especially those with young children, are entering or staying in the wage labor force; and as what we think of as traditional marriage arrangements are increasingly unstable. At this particular historical moment, then, the relationship of women to procreation and the work of mothering is the object of tremendous logistical and interpretive struggle. And some women reaching adulthood in the midst of such conditions are using their activism on the issue to give orderly if intolerant shape to disorderly experiences. Abortion activists, like other moral reformers who preceded them in American history, view themselves as directing the transformation of the culture to the betterment of both themselves and the whole society. In studying the contrasting views represented by opposing positions on the abortion issue, my "field," then, is not the particular community in which I worked, but the social and symbolic organization of gender and reproduction in the United States.

Situating the Problem: From Place to Process

In the 1960's and 1970's, as research in anthropology shifted increasingly to the study of complex societies (Arensberg 1961), debates concerning community studies focused on the issue of typicality. Most critiques concluded that the analysis of face-to-face social settings -- the stock and trade of the discipline -- cannot accurately represent the larger whole of a society encompassed by a nation state. The very utility of studying a "community" as object or sample was called into question (Leeds 1964; Boissevain 1975; Wolf 1966, 1982). Counterproposals argued for a change in research agendas, from identifying microcosms of "culture" or "social structure" to illuminating social processes abstracted from the close observation of daily event (e.g. Van Velsen 1967). Max Gluckman, considered one of the founders of "processual anthropology" that grew out of these concerns, refined methods using what he called "situational analysis" or the "extended--case method" (Gluckman 1967). Ideally, use of a well-chosen event or situation (such as Gluckman's analysis of Zulu-white relations through the ceremonial opening of a bridge in southern Africa) would act as a sort of prism, refracting with new clarity previously unvoiced social divisions in a specific case. The selection of the case is based not on its typicality but its explanatory power for a particular theoretical problem (Mitchell 1983), a subtle but critical shift in orientation for community-based social science research in contemporary complex societies.

Because such analysis is predicated on prior knowledge of the dynamics of the case in question, there is a danger that the situational analysis might be used simply as an illustration of an assumed

context. The researcher sensitive to the limiting conditions of the larger political-economic order must be careful not to attribute agency and intentionality entirely to that domain and thus reify the community/society dichotomy once again. Rather, the goal of such work is to clarify how macroprocesses take on meaning for people in different settings and, if possible, to understand the structural limits to and possible avenues for change and collective action. The vitality of a process-oriented approach lies in its power to show how, in the round of daily, observable events, people contend with conditions in a creative way, reorganizing social and symbolic relations to meet their own circumstances.

The Social Drama

Broadly sketched, abortion emerged in Fargo as a public controversy that catalyzed local activists around two events separated by a decade, each of which mirrored the course of the conflict at the national level at the time. The first wave of activism occurred between 1967 and 1972, over efforts to liberalize North Dakota state abortion laws. The second -- which focused on the delivery of abortion services -- began in late 1981 when the clinic opened and endures into the present, with the actors involved and intensity of activity varying over time. The controversy in the 1980's, though more local in its manifest social organization than the first wave, had come to represent more fully developed divisions regarding the construction of abortion and its attendant meanings which were taking shape more generally in America.

In Fargo, as in other cases, abortion activists mobilized around "precipitating incidents," (e.g. Leahy 1975: 80). They engaged in

conflict characteristic of what Victor Turner has called "social dramas,"* as a moment of revelation of social divisions that may not, at other moments, be apparent. In Turner's view

...disturbances of the normal and regular often give us greater insight into the normal than does direct study (1974: 34).
Conflict serves to bring fundamental aspects of society normally overlaid by customs and habits of daily intercourse, into frightening prominence. People have to take sides, in terms of deeply entrenched moral imperatives and constraints (:35).

Turner's use of the dramatistic metaphor can be expanded to consider the innovative possibilities in social process that he sought to illuminate. The obvious gap in the analogy to theatrical performance is the fact that when the stage on which the social drama takes place is the social organization of daily life, the actors involved operate not necessarily by a predetermined script, but through continual improvisation. What I am suggesting, then, is that in order to see the transformative potential in a social drama, one must attend not only to its phases and the larger "arenas" and "fields" in which it takes place, as Turner suggests. One must look as well for the less visible dynamics through which scripts are constructed and revised and parts are cast and rehearsed, what Michel Foucault calls "the tactical polyvalence of discourses.". As Marshall Sahlins comments in his introduction to Islands of History,

as the contingent circumstances of action need not conform to the significance some group might assign them, people are known to creatively reconsider their conventional schemes. And to that extent, the culture is historically altered in action. We can speak even of "structural transformation" since the alteration of some meanings changes the positional relations among the cultural categories, thus a "system-change" (1985: vii).

In the following discussion and analysis of the abortion controversy in Fargo, I then expand the context in time and space in order to better

understand how this conflict represents not only divisions but transformations in the symbolic and social organization of gender in contemporary America.

1. Like Muncie, Indiana, described in the classic Middletown studies (Lynd and Lynd), Fargo is small enough to provide a coherent social universe, yet sufficiently large and diverse to encompass farmers and professionals, a working class and a university community; Catholics, Lutherans, Evangelicals, a small Jewish population and some native Americans. While many people in Fargo view themselves as politically conservative, they also value a tradition of populism and defense of the individual rights. The recent discovery of oil in the area, the use of the state as a nuclear missile base, and the legalization of gambling have all brought new wealth to Fargo; yet, for long-time residents, they also engender a nervousness that undesirable and irreversible social change is being imposed on them from without.

2. I worked as associate producer for an hour-long documentary on the conflict in Fargo over the clinic. The show, entitled "Prairie Storm," was produced for the Public Affairs Unit of WCCO-TV, Minneapolis (CBS), and was broadcast in April of 1982.

3. The most comprehensive overview of the nineteenth century abortion battles is James Mohr's 1978 work, Abortion in America: The Origins and Evolution of National Policy NY: Oxford University Press. In the following section, I rely primarily on Mohr, as well as the historical sections in Kristin Luker, Abortion and the Politics of Motherhood, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984; Rosalind Petchesky, Abortion and Woman's Place, NY: Longman, 1984; Raymond Tatalovich and Byron W. Daynes, The Politics of Abortion, NY: Praeger, 1981.

4. See for example: Marshall Sahlins, Islands of History, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985; Eric Wolf, Europe and the People Without History, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1982; Marc Auge, The Anthropological Circle, N.Y. Cambridge University Press 1979.

5. In his development of the process approach for his research, anthropologist Victor Turner has paid particular attention to temporal, spatial and dramatic dimensions of daily life. Turner's terms, which I use describing my work, consist of:

fields...the abstract cultural domains where paradigms [sets and rules for social action] are formulated, established, and come into conflict...

arenas...the concrete settings in which paradigms become transformed into metaphors and symbols with reference to which political power is mobilized and in which there is a trial of strength between influential paradigm-bearers...

social dramas...which represent the phased processes of their contestations (1974: 17).

6. The "social drama" provides an interpretive frame I draw on in analyzing the Fargo material. In Turner's definition,

Social dramas...represent sequences of social events..organized primarily through relations in time rather than in space,...

The phase structure of social dramas is not the product of instinct but of models and metaphors carried in the actors' heads (1974: 35-36).

The four phases accessible to observation are:

1. Breach...a symbolic trigger of confrontation or encounter;

2. crisis...a tendency for the breach to widen and extend until it becomes coextensive with some dominant cleavage in the widest set of relevant social relations to which the conflicting or antagonistic parties belong...a threshold between more or less stable phases of the social process (: 38-39);

3. redressive action. In order to limit the spread of crisis, certain adjustive and redressive "mechanisms,"... informal or formal, are swiftly brought into operation by leading or structurally representative members of the disturbed social system (: 39);

4. reintegration of the disturbed social group or of the social recognition and legitimization of irreparable schism between the contesting parties...(:41).

Turner's approach highlights the dramatic confrontation between "paradigm bearers"

PART II. THE CONSTRUCTION OF ABORTION AS A SOCIAL ISSUE IN AMERICA

Chapter 2: Abortion As Practice and Discourse: The 19th Century

Introduction

In the twentieth century, battles over restrictive abortion policy have occurred in most industrialized nations: sixteen countries liberalized their laws prior to the Roe v. Wade decision in 1973 that legalized elective abortion in this country.¹ In the 1970's, the Netherlands, Austria, West Germany (1974), France (1975), and Italy (1978) liberalized their laws and practice (Tatalovich and Daynes 1981: 10). In Europe, while organized interests differ from country to country, controversies over changing abortion laws are similar in many respects to the American experience. Activist movements on both sides of the issue agitate for change through dramatic public demonstrations and court cases which challenge the status quo, mobilize public opinion, and shift the grounds for debate. Usually, the conflict moves from the medical to the political arena. As an international survey of abortion practice noted nearly a decade ago,

Some of the most innovative services have evolved outside of the law and there is considerable passage of women in need across frontiers of legislation and medical practice (Potts, Diggory and Peel 1977: 391).

Among third world countries, most Asian nations have liberal abortion laws, although resources for obtaining abortions are limited in some cases, such as India (David 1980: 66). In the Caribbean, and Central and South America (with the exception of Cuba) and in most of Africa (excepting Tunisia where abortion is part of a state population control policy), abortion is illegal or permitted only when pregnancy threatens the physical survival of the mother (Cook and Dickens 1978; David 1980: 64-67).² Research on abortion from these countries -- as well as the USSR, Japan, and the Eastern European and Scandinavian

nations -- was frequently included in American conferences and publications of the 1960's as examples of what might occur if abortion were legalized in the United States. However, there is no evidence that the experiences of these nations have had any direct effect, political or otherwise, on the abortion reform movement in America.

What is instructive is the way such material is interpreted by participants in the current American controversy. From this perspective, how these policies relate to actual practice is not the issue. Historical and cross-national examples are used selectively by activists on both sides to frame and "prove" an understanding of the cultural place and meaning of abortion. Profiles of global abortion policy, for example, have been used by contemporary right-to-lifers to claim that their position represents a "traditional" point of view in the face of "modern, secular" disregard for the sacred nature of life. In fact, the casting of abortion as murder, unconditionally, is a relatively recent belief (particularly in America)² and does not characterize either its cultural shape or social practice in what are considered "traditional" societies. George Devereux, in a survey of abortion in 350 pre-industrial societies based on the Human Relations Area Files sample, concludes:

there is every indication that abortion is an absolutely universal phenomenon, and that it is impossible even to construct an imaginary social system in which the woman would not feel at least occasionally impelled to abort (1967: 98).

Likewise, in a comprehensive historical study of contraceptive practices, Norman Himes (1970) maintains that "the human race has in all ages and all geographical locations desired to control its own fertility."

While abortion is, apparently, ubiquitous, the particular shape it takes and the meanings assigned to it differ widely according to

specific conditions of history, culture and locale. In Devereux's survey, for example, the scope of views on abortion is broad and variable, ranging "from mild resignation to deep horror." The existence of abortion practice is inferred, generally, from the existence of sanctions. This indicates, of course, that even where prohibited, women continue to have the desire and means to abort. According to Devereux and others, women have used a range of methods to abort, from magic, herbs and chemical mixtures to self-inflicted violence.

The ubiquity of abortion, both historically and cross-culturally, as well as the fact that knowledge and assistance are generally passed through female networks (Devereux 1967: 136-137), are claimed by some scholars as evidence for a covert, oppositional, women's "folk culture" of abortion (e.g. Gordon 1976: 3-46). Demographers Kingsley Davis and Judith Blake (1956) suggest that abortion practice is a form of female resistance, since it is one of the few forms of fertility control that can be carried out without male knowledge or consent (1956). While abortion can exist as a "uniquely female practice, which men could neither control nor prevent" (ibid: 224-225), this view ignores the fact that abortion can be and is, in some situations forced on women against their will. In addition, it suggests a false universality of female interests, what anthropologist Michelle Rosaldo described as a tendency in feminist theory to cast women in pre-industrial cultures "as the bearers of primordial human need...in an endless and essentially unchanging fight to keep men from making claims to female bodies" (1980: 392). What abortion and the use of other methods of fertility control by women in such societies does demonstrate is that such practice is a conscious choice,* and that the interests of men, women

and different sectors of a given society in limiting fertility may be in contention and are sensitive to changing social conditions. As Rosalind Petchesky comments in her comprehensive study of abortion in America,

These changes concern the cultural symbolism and social relations of fertility control, suggesting that as with the economic distribution of goods, control over fertility is a matter not only of technology but of the total arrangement of power in society (1984: 25).

Recognizing then, that abortion and other intentionally used forms of fertility control are not the products of modernization but a common practice in most societies,⁸ the question remains as to why and how differences emerge both in its cultural construction and historical practice.

The following overview of abortion as a practice, an issue and a symbol in American life demonstrates the interpretive range it has encompassed at different historical moments.⁹ The anti-abortion policies achieved by the doctor's crusade in the late nineteenth century are instructive to the present case. The results of this campaign set the legal doctrine and parameters for thought and action on abortion over the last 150 years and the context out of which current activism emerged.

The Nineteenth-Century Abortion Crusade

According to historian James Mohr, author of the pioneering study Abortion in America, until 1850,

the practice of aborting unwanted pregnancies was, if not common, almost certainly not rare in the United States... Moreover, this practice was neither morally nor legally wrong in the eyes of the vast majority of Americans, provided it was accomplished before quickening. (1978:16)

In nineteenth-century terms, quickening was the transitional point in pregnancy after which fetal life was considered to have its own integrity. Based on when an individual woman began to feel fetal movement, it usually occurred in the third or fourth month of gestation. Until 1821, when Connecticut enacted the first American statute against abortion, America followed English common law in which the destruction of the fetus after quickening could be punished by fine and imprisonment. Given that testimony for quickening, by definition, could only be determined by the pregnant woman herself, enforcement of this regulation was minimal (Mohr 1978: Chapter 2; Luker 1984: 14; Degler 1980: 237). In a sense, then, the 1973 Roe v. Wade decision which divided the legal regulation of abortion by trimesters represents a modern revision of the common law quickening distinctions, after a century of legal doctrine in which aborting a pregnancy at any time, from conception to term -- with provisional exception to protect the health of the mother -- constituted a criminal act.

By 1850, as part of routine revisions of American legal codes, 20 out of 33 states had enacted some official version of the English common law. From the evidence of court cases and physicians' records, abortion was, or at least was considered, a marginal practice resorted to by women, pregnant out-of-wedlock and fearful of the social consequences of an illegitimate child. In the eyes of the law, such women were deserving of compassion (Mohr 1978: 44-45). Accordingly, legislation was aimed at regulating the activities of those performing abortions. For example, an 1858 court interpretation of New Jersey's law stated:

The offense of third persons under the statute is mainly against her (the mother's) life and health. The statute

regards her as the victim of the crime, not as the criminal, as the object of protection, rather than punishment. (State v. Murphy 1858, New Jersey Reports 83: 630, cited in Degler: 237-8)

The push to reforelate abortion anytime after conception as a crime began in the latter half of the nineteenth century. It was part of a concerted effort to gain control of the practice of medicine in the United States by what were known as "regular" physicians. (Mohr: 147). These doctors, trained at established medical schools in traditions of rational research according to an allopathic medical model, found themselves in competition with lay healers, homeopaths, and, increasingly, abortionists. The drive of regular physicians to professionalize beginning with the founding of the American Medical Association (AMA) in 1847, must be understood in the particular context in which American medicine developed in the nineteenth century. While European medical practice evolved within well-organized guilds, such organizations did not exist in America. By the early 1900's, with the democratization of the professions that occurred during the Jacksonian era, American doctors were working in a virtual open market (Mohr: 32-33). As Luker describes it:

Healing in this country started out primarily as a domestic rather than a professional skill (women and slaves often developed considerable local reputations as healers) and therefore anyone who claimed medical talent could practice ... (: 14) From the earliest days of the medical profession in this country, therefore, physicians wanted effective licensing laws that would do for them what the guild structures had done for their European colleagues, namely, restrict the competition (: 17).

In the view of nearly every scholar of this topic and period, it was the physician's anti-abortion campaign that accomplished this goal.

In 1857, Horatio B. Storer, a Harvard-trained doctor specializing in obstetrics and gynecology launched a national drive within the

ten-year old AMA to lobby state legislatures to criminalize induced abortion from conception on. In addition, he wrote, and encouraged others to publish, professional and popular books to persuade the American public that abortion was both dangerous and immoral. According to Mohr:

the steadily growing AMA would remain steadfastly and officially committed to outlawing the practice of abortion in the United States, both inside and outside that organization, and the vigorous efforts of America's regular physicians would prove, in the long run, to be the single most important factor in altering the legal policies toward abortion in this country (: 157).

Between 1869 and 1880, the efforts of the crusade bore fruit in the passage of forty anti-abortion statutes. These new laws set a legal frame for regulating abortion that differed significantly from the common-law based statutes of the first half of the century. In the legislation enacted after the Civil War, induced abortion at any point in pregnancy became a crime. In addition, immunities for women were revoked, and the powers of the state were enlisted, through anti-obscenity laws, to restrict the practice of abortion through provisions that imposed fines for advertising abortion-related services and materials (Mohr: Ch. 8).

The campaign's goals of consolidating the professional status of regular physicians were accomplished in a number of ways. In Mohr's view,

By raising the abortion question and by highlighting the abuses and dangers associated with it, regular physicians could encourage the state to deploy its sanctions against their competitors (: 160).

In articles, editorials, and in testimonies before legislative bodies, doctors urged that the informally-educated practitioners, and other "irregulars" be prohibited from practicing not only abortion, but

medicine in general. At the same time, the campaign provided a means for the regulars to enforce standards of practice and behavior in their own ranks. Anti-abortion crusaders would disclaim and even testify against other doctors willing to perform abortions.

In addition, the campaign enabled the regulars, who were generally white, well-educated, upper-class and native-born, to enhance their status for their own clientele who came, for the most part, from the same social strata. Basing their arguments for fetal life on medical research and theories, physicians placed themselves as an enlightened elite determined to inform an ignorant public. Through their activism, they demonstrated both scientific and moral superiority.

Lobbying became holy work for those physicians who believed that the United States was damning itself as a society by continuing to commit moral sins on a massive scale without even realizing it. The theme of saving America from itself was a common leit-motif throughout the medical campaign against abortion after 1860 (: 166).

James Mohr, Carl Degler, and other scholars of American history consider that the physicians succeeded in part because of their access to advances in science (e.g. Mohr 1978: 204; Degler 1980: 247). Historians of medicine question whether such training actually resulted in greater survival rates for patients of regular physicians, at least until the 1880's when the anti-abortion battle had virtually been won (Rosenberg 1977; Reiser 1978). Luker suggests, for example, that it was because physicians could not demonstrate greater healing ability that abortion was so critical for them.

Because they could offer no direct, easily observable and dramatic proof of their superiority, regular physicians were forced to make an indirect symbolic claim about their status...only abortion gave physicians the opportunity to claim to be saving lives (: 31).

As further evidence, she notes that physicians were conspicuously

absent from other social reform issues of the time such as temperance, abolition, women's rights, and social purity; none of these issues, she argues, would have given doctors the special status that abortion provided.

Abortion did not, of course, simply appear on the horizon ex nihilo as an appropriate means for the particular ends of American doctors. The campaign took place in the wake of a dramatic upsurge in the visibility of abortion in America, and in the context of a general shift in the social bases of its practice. The increased public awareness of abortion by the mid-nineteenth century was due, initially, to its commercialization. By 1850, abortion was "a service openly traded in the free market...one of the first specialities in American medical history." Newspapers, magazines, popular health manuals and even religious publications, reaching both urban and rural readerships, carried advertisements for abortionists as well as abortifacient drugs and home treatments, and continued to do so until the 1870's when anti-obscenity laws made public promotion of abortion illegal (Mohr: 47-50).

The proliferation of abortion-related advertising between 1840 and 1870 is regarded by most historians of the period as an index of an increase in attempts to abort. The actual effectiveness of abortifacient methods is not the issue here. The boom in business -- one woman abortionist reportedly spent \$60,000 on ads in 1871 alone -- is considered both a response to an existing market and a stimulus to its expansion. In other words, the public manifestations of the traffic in abortion -- in ads for services, in the thriving abortifacient drug market, and in widely read popular health manuals -- are taken as

indirect evidence for growing knowledge, acceptability and practice of abortion (Mohr: 52-69).

Historians rely as well on the writings of American physicians as testimony to not only the rise in abortion attempts, but to a shift in the social demographic profile and motivations of the population using it.⁷ Estimates from a range of sources suggest that during this period, approximately twenty percent of all pregnancies were purposefully terminated.⁸ Increasingly, those women who aborted were married, native-born, educated Protestant women from the middle and upper classes (Mohr: Chapter 4).

As the public became more aware of changes in both the frequency and social context of abortion, physicians directed their efforts toward gaining interpretive control over this situation. While in the 1970's, evidence of women's widespread use of abortion was used to justify efforts to demand its legalization, in the nineteenth century, the same trend became a call for criminalizing the practice. Analyzing this material in her comprehensive study of abortion, political scientist Rosalind Petchesky argues that the condemnation of women using abortion went beyond the goals of consolidating control over American medicine; it tapped into the conservatism of the post-bellum era.

The shifting class base of abortion, even more than the overall rise, undoubtedly accounts for the severity of the political attack against it...Abortion brings the sexual aspect of fertility and its control into the open, and for this to occur among married, "respectable" women was to shatter delicately established boundaries of class, race and gender (1984: 78-79).

The physicians' crusade against abortion, like the nativist and social purity movements that were also prevalent in the late nineteenth

century, linked female sexuality to misogynist and eugenic doctrines" as the following quotes illustrate. In an 1867 edition of the Detroit Review of Medicine and Pharmacy (2), one doctor wrote:

Among married persons, so extensive has this practice become that people of high repute not only commit this crime, but do not even shun to speak boastingly among their intimates of the deed and means of accomplishing it. Is there a physician present whose experience does not fully confirm this statement?...the exceeding prevalence of evil is to be found among an entirely different class, and the fruit of legitimate wedlock in every grade of society, high and low, but especially the former, is the prey of this destroying Moloch (Moris Stewart, January 1867: 7-8; cited in Degler: 229) 229-239).

Such rhetoric expresses not simply a concern that women in general were participating in an act newly defined as immoral; its outrage is directed at married women of the same class and social background as the regular physicians themselves. In aborting, these women were enacting, apparently without remorse, a desire to control their own sexual and reproductive conditions. The writings of Storer and other anti-abortion doctors portrayed any practice that interfered with reproduction of white middle-class women in particular as threatening, not only to what they considered to be "female nature" but to marriage, the family, and the very future of society as well (Storer 1868).¹⁰ Thus, abortion came to signify, more broadly, the "betrayal" of men by women who chose to limit their fertility. In this construction, women were held responsible for the decline of the race (Gordon 1977: Chapter 5). Consider the following passage:

the annual destruction of foetuses [is such that] the Puritanic blood of '76 will be but sparingly represented in the approaching centenary. It would be a paying investment to some showman to catch and preserve a pure American for fifty years hence, he would be a phenomenon. (J. J. Mulheron, "Foeticide" Peninsular Journal of Medicine, September 1874: 389; cited in Mohr: 167).

The Demographic Transition and The Rise of Domesticity

The efficacy of these anti-abortion arguments is better understood when placed within the larger context of a general fertility decline in the United States. Between 1800 and 1900, the fertility rate¹¹ for white American women fell from 7.04 -- a rate higher than any ever recorded for a European country -- to 3.56 (Coale and Zelnick 1963: 34-5). The most rapid rate of decline occurred between 1840-1860. While this coincided with the years of abortion's greatest visibility, if not practice, one cannot determine whether the fall was the result of abstinence, abortion or contraception, all of which were gaining in use at the time and tend to reinforce one another.¹²

The growing practice of fertility limitation and abortion in particular was a topic of increasing public concern in the late nineteenth century. Initially, it was associated in popular writing with urban areas, insofar as they signified "sinful centers where people went to live unnatural lives" (Mohr: 99). This folk theory resembles hypotheses proposed by certain scholars of "the demographic transition"¹³ which associate patterns of steady population decline with the spread of urbanization, industrialization, the loss of arable land and other extrinsic socio-economic conditions.¹⁴ These explanations have been called into question in the last two decades on the basis of historical studies of patterns of fertility declines in both Europe and America and research with contemporary pre-industrial societies.¹⁵ In the case of the United States, for example, birthrates fell as rapidly in rural as in urban parts of the country, during a period when eighty percent of Americans were still engaged in agricultural production.¹⁶ By the 1860's, the ubiquity of birth control

practice was widely recognized. Abortion in particular was considered common not only in urban centers but in "every village, hamlet and neighborhood in the United States" (Mohr: 286).

In the face of such evidence, a number of scholars have offered alternative explanations for the demographic transition in America, stressing factors of human intentionality and consciousness rather than socio-economic development or technological innovation.¹⁷

Some, for example, attribute the fertility decline to what they call "the rise of the modern family" (Shorter 1977), influenced and characterized by an attitude of planning and rationality in which children are viewed as investments measured against current and potential resources -- a "new fertility ethic" identified with capitalism as well as the Enlightenment ideology of individualism (Aries 1972; Noonan 1966; Flandrin 1976). These cultural shifts are also seen as contributing to more equality within familial relations. In a summary of this position, Lawrence Stone maintains that the increasing practice of birth control from the eighteenth century on is the product of the greater cooperation between husband and wife, the

companionate marriage, more child-oriented family attitudes, and...a shift away from the patriarchal traditions of the seventeenth century...as well as the separation of "pleasure from procreation" (1977).

In a similar interpretation of the American demographic transition, Daniel Scott-Smith attributes causality to increasing female independence and control over conditions of daily life within their assigned spheres of family and household, a phenomenon he calls "domestic feminism" (Scott-Smith 1979).

These interpretations avoid the pitfalls of assuming that the decline in fertility is the result of "new techniques" or are an

unconscious response to socio-economic conditions. However, this work has been criticized for universalizing a class-specific marital profile and demographic trend and for casting women's position in the nineteenth century in uncritical terms. While women may have been gaining more "power" within the domestic sphere, what is glossed in that evaluation is the fact that female lives were also increasingly circumscribed to that arena, and the work and ideology of maternity and domesticity which defined it (Ryan 1975; Welter 1968). Regarding the increasing emphasis on motherhood as a vocation in the late nineteenth century, Rosalind Petchesky writes:

This fact more than any other would shape women's need and desires regarding fertility and the "demographic transition" that resulted...but differently -- for middle class and for poor women.

...motherhood and domestic management were the economic functions of bourgeois wives, as industrialization increasingly removed productive tasks from the home and segregated housewives.

The opposition of nineteenth century feminists to abortion, then must be seen in this light. Fewer and better children and sexual "purity" became dual badges of class and racial identity for white bourgeois women at the same time as they were being asserted as pledges of resistance to men's domestic and sexual power (:44, 45).

Abortion and the First Wave of Feminism

Even a cursory reading of the complaints against women by anti-abortion physicians makes clear that they were less generous than twentieth-century historians in their interpretation of nineteenth-century feminism, even though both attribute the increase in abortion to it. Doctors in the anti-abortion campaigns attributed the prevalence and spread of abortion to women acting "unnaturally." Abortion was seen as part of a "female folk culture" handed down from mother to daughter or spread among kin and friends and cast as threatening if for

no other reason than the challenge it posed to regular physicians. Doctors in Detroit, for example, claimed that "almost every neighborhood or small village has its old woman of one sex or another who is known for her ability and willingness to provide abortion for a pecuniary consideration" (Mohr: 161). Birth control and abortion in particular were linked as well to the ideas introduced by the first wave of feminism in the 1850's. In Mohr's assessment,

Many physicians believed that feminist ideology outside the home had its counterpart in the upsurge of abortion among women in the home, and that the former was partly responsible for the latter, creating "a tendency to force women into men's places" (Mohr 105).

In connecting abortion with feminism, doctors shifted the locus of blame from the abortionist to the woman herself who was accused of taking more interest in selfish and personal ends than in maternity. Thus abortion came to signify female disruption of harmonious domestic relations and ultimately, the social order in general, a construction which resembles much of contemporary right-to-life rhetoric.

Unlike the contemporary case, however, nineteenth century feminists did not condone abortion and in fact, found themselves in an unlikely circumstantial alliance with the physicians who opposed them, particularly in the years after the Civil War. Broadly put, these feminists interpreted abortion as yet one more piece of evidence of the unhappy consequences for women of unbridled male lust. Abortion and birth control were considered immoral in large part out of fear that they would encourage promiscuity on the part of men. Elizabeth Cady Stanton, writing in the first volume of the feminist journal Revolution published in 1868, declared that abortion represented "the degradation of woman" (1868). Stanton's colleague Matilda Gage,

writing a few months later, declared "this crime of 'child murder,' 'abortion,' 'infanticide,' lies at the door of the male sex" (Gage 1868). The solution to the problem was not abortion; rather, they advocated greater access for women to education, the vote, and control over the conditions of motherhood.

Given these basic assumptions, many feminists found themselves in the anomalous position of endorsing the anti-feminist physicians' calls for anti-abortion legislation. While continuing to blame thoughtless, tyrannical husbands for the huge numbers of abortions in America [they] considered the practice as a threat to and exploitation of women and noted with approval the efforts of the N. Y. state legislature that year to proscribe it more vigorously (Mohr: 113).

What this reveals, in addition to the nature of anti-abortion politics and coalitions in the late nineteenth century, is how abortion could encompass a range of cultural meanings. Opposition to it was consistent with contradictory interpretations of the social order on the part of feminists and physicians. More generally, their positions were expressive of a gender antagonism inherent in the sexual division of labor and the cultural separation of male and female spheres at the time. Each held the opposite sex responsible for what they saw as the decay of the culture and especially, in their view, the pernicious increase in abortion.

However, from cases reported in newspapers, medical accounts and court records, it appears that most abortion decisions were in fact made by mutual agreement between the woman and man involved in the pregnancy. As noted above, historians cite this as evidence for the rise in "companionate marriages" as well as a growing awareness and expression of sexuality on the part of American women (Degler 1974). Others see in the mutuality of the abortion decision a channeling of

female sexuality into maternity. In this view, husbands were enlisted to "a cultural mandate that more and more defined motherhood in terms of the care and socialization of children, as opposed to the physical bearing of them" (Patchsky 1984). For Mohr, abortion was the outcome of a negotiation between pleasure and upward mobility for middle-class couples,

an acceptable means toward a mutually desirable end, one of the only ways they had to allow themselves both to express their sexuality and affection toward each other with some degree of frequency and to postpone family responsibilities until they thought they were better prepared to raise children.

Whatever explanation one accepts, it is clear is that abortion was not only more visible and widespread but had become part of normal marital patterns among the representatives of the dominant American culture of the time -- the white, Protestant middle and upper classes. It seems particularly ironic the campaign to delegitimize its practice went into full swing at the moment of abortion's greatest acceptance. Recognizing this, the physicians's efforts to persuade both the public and state legislators to enact laws that would prohibit abortion relied on their being able to reorganize the framework of meaning in which abortion was understood as legitimate. As in most struggles for political power within a democratic system, their efficacy required that they gain interpretive control.

To succeed in this part of their campaign, the anti-abortion physicians undertook a systematic effort to convince the public of abortion's dangers to their health and morals, beginning with the publication of two popular books by Horatio Storer, Why Not: A Book for Every Woman (1865) and Is It I? A Book for Every Man (1867). The physician's arguments in essence were directed at convincing American

woman to abandon the "outdated" doctrine of quickening; their rhetoric assumed that these women were committing the moral crime of abortion only out of ignorance of the value of fetal life.

therefore they [the doctors] were obliged to act in order to save women from their own ignorance because only physicians were in possession of new scientific evidence which demonstrated beyond a shadow of a doubt that the embryo was a child from conception onward (Luker: 221).

By the 1870's, their position was making its way into popular health manuals and the press, most notably in an investigative series "The Evil of the Age" run in the New York Times during 1870-71. The pieces portrayed leading abortionists as profiteers, growing rich through the exploitation of innocent and vulnerable women. The description of the body of a woman who died from a botched abortion -- "a new victim of man's lust and the life-destroying acts of abortionists" -- is exemplary of their rhetoric (The New York Times, August 27, 1871 cited in Mohr: 179). Apparently, the interpretation of abortion as the product of undomesticated male sexuality was appealing both to journalists and their readers.

It is important to note that the groups which allied in the nineteenth century to endorse criminalizing abortion -- physicians, feminists, the popular media -- were the very constituencies most active in advocating its legalization one hundred years later. Likewise, the positions of clergy on abortion during the nineteenth century was contrary to the twentieth-century role many have taken as leaders in right-to-life efforts. Despite systematic attempts on the part of the AMA to persuade religious leaders to support their campaign, most remained more or less uninvolved, apart from a few relatively powerless groups such as the Congregationalists and Old School Presbyterians.

The Roman Catholic Church issued a pastoral and then a papal condemnation of abortion in 1869 (Mohr:182-186). However, at the time, with Catholics constituting less than 10% of the population and representing primarily working-class and immigrant populations, their influence wielded little power.¹⁰

The Final Victory: The Consolidation of Anti-Abortion Policy

The physicians' campaign received an unexpected boost from the anti-obscenity crusade led by Anthony Comstock. In 1873, Congress passed "the Comstock laws" which included abortion-related material in its definition of obscene publications. Although the law was directed primarily at inhibiting traffic in what were considered pornographic and contraceptive products, it nonetheless enabled Comstock to pursue and prosecute abortionists throughout the 1870's.¹¹ Comstock's zealous enforcement of the new laws coincided with a significant shift in the judicial treatment of abortion legislation in the courts. Historically, the courts had been tolerant in interpreting abortion cases, ruling out circumstantial evidence for example. Beginning in the 1870's, they began to take a hard line against abortionists; the burden of evidence and proof shifted to the accused and convictions became more frequent (Mohr: 226-236).

In 1878, Comstock succeeded in arresting the country's wealthiest and most well-known abortionist, Madame Restell of New York City. Anticipating her probable conviction, she killed herself 24 hours before her trial. The Restell incident served, as have sensational legal cases in the more recent controversy over abortion, as a public drama marking a pivotal shift in the dominant interpretation of

abortion.

As Madame Restell evidently realized and acknowledged in her dramatic fashion, American society no longer seemed willing to afford abortion the salutary neglect it received during the first half of the century. (Mohr: 199).

Madame Restell's death dramatized how the physicians' crusade, with the help of the anti-obscenity campaign, had succeeded in persuading the public and judicial bodies in every state that abortion was a criminal act.

Although the doctor's built their campaign around a rhetoric which claimed the absolute right to life of the fetus, they did not call for the unconditional outlawing of abortion that would logically follow from such a position. Rather, they sought legislation that would leave the abortion decision, in some cases, up to the doctor's judgment. It is the therapeutic abortion exception, finally, which made clear that the aim of the crusade was not to prohibit abortion but to bring its definition and practice entirely under medical control. As Kristin Luker points out in analyzing the doctors' stance,

the logic of the physicians need to upgrade their status meant that they could not simply advocate the elimination of all abortions. They sought instead to regulate abortions, thereby serving their own professional goals...By 1900 only six states did not include a "therapeutic exception" in their abortion laws, a clause stating that any abortion undertaken by or on the advice of a physician to preserve the life of the mother was legal. These laws in effect gave physicians almost unlimited discretion in deciding when an abortion was necessary...and none of the laws described exactly what constituted a threat to life (:32-33).

Physicians, in fact, resisted any legislative efforts to specify what would justify abortions. By leaving the legal language vague, "life" could encompass a range of possible interpretations, from actual physical survival to the broadest psychological, social and economic conditions affecting a mother's well-being. The campaign, then, did

not establish the unconditional "personhood" of the fetus. Rather it provided

a reallocation of social responsibility for assessing the conditional rights of the embryo against the woman's right-to-life, both morally and broadly defined. From the late nineteenth century until the late 1960's, it was doctors, not women, who had the right to make that assessment (Luker: 351).

The reconstitution of abortion as deviant, at best an exceptional medical decision, at worst, a potential crime, had a number of concrete effects. Advances in antiseptic and surgical techniques at the end of the nineteenth century might have made the procedure even less of a health risk than childbirth (as it is today) (Mohr: 239). However, the new conditions which required that it was infrequently or illegally performed turned the nineteenth-century physicians insistence on the physical danger of abortion into a self-fulfilling prophesy.

A second predictable effect, was an overall decline in the incidence of abortion and its association once again with the desperate young woman pregnant out of wedlock, or lower-class and immigrant wives. Thus, the new anti-abortion policy increased the disadvantages of the poor; privileged upper-income women had access to the physicians and enjoyed the financial resources that obtaining a legal abortion now required.

The control over abortion and their profession gained by the regular doctors was part of the broader centralizing and rationalizing tendencies that characterized America's transition to a regulatory welfare state, beginning in the late nineteenth century. The increase in asylums, schools, charities, prisons and other such agencies during this period represented an overall trend of that era toward the political and professional control of particular relationships of human

dependency in the name of science and social reform (Zaretsky 1982). In classifying abortion both as a criminal offense and as a health problem, pregnancy and its consequences were made subject to state and medical intervention. The "new discourse" of abortion redefined and regulated the most distinctive aspect of female sexuality, a process Michel Foucault calls the creation of "bio-power,"

Such a power has to qualify, measure, appraise and hierarchize...the juridical institution is increasingly incorporated into a continuum of apparatuses (medical, administrative and so on) whose functions are for the most part regulatory (144).

This is the background that enables us to understand the imperative of sex as a political issue (1978: 145).

What the physicians accomplished in their crusade, then, in addition to consolidating the status and control of medical practice in the United States, was not only the enactment of anti-abortion legislation that was maintained until the 1960's. The nineteenth-century campaign against abortion, succeeded as well in altering the "meaning-value" of what, until 1850, had been a tolerated if not legitimate act. Their campaign however, did not succeed in making monolithic the new signification of abortion, nor did it eliminate its practice. Assigned to the realm of medical judgment, abortion was removed from public view and debate. In so doing, a range of practices and interpretations persisted, all of which emerged again in the 1960's when abortion became once again, the focus of a public controversy, a symbol and practice in contention.

1. Among industrialized democracies, these countries were: Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, Sweden, Switzerland, and Japan. In Communist bloc countries, Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, East Germany, Hungary, Poland, Rumania, Yugoslavia, the People's Republic of China, and the U.S.S.R. all legalized abortion after World War II. As population rates fell in the 1960's, Czechoslovakia, Rumania, Bulgaria and Hungary reinstituted more restrictive measures. For an overview of international abortion policy, see David P. Henry, "The Abortion Decision: National and International Perspectives," in Abortion Parley, James Burtchaeil, ed.; N.Y. Andrews and McNeel: 1980: 59-98; and, Jean Van der Tak, Abortion Fertility and Changing Legislation: An International Review, Lexington, Mas.: Lexington Press, 1974.

2. Such policies are consistent with prevailing religious doctrine in the Mideast (Islam) and most of Latin America (Catholicism). In Africa, anti-abortion measures are considered the direct legacy of colonial law (Tatalovich and Daynes 1981: 14).

3. If one accepts burial customs as indices of the cultural status of fetal life, then attitudes apparently run the gamut: the fetus may be buried in the same manner (and therefore comparable) to an adult; or disposed of like garbage (indicating a different categorical status) (1967: 43-45). Regardless of the treatment of fetal remains, however, sanctions against abortion are not framed according to the abstract right to life of any potential child. Rather, the issue at stake is, generally, the rights of others to what a specific child would come to represent socially to those connected to the biological mother and father. Where abortion is condemned, the wronged party is not the fetus but often the husband, maternal uncle, or the kin group.

4. Many scholars of the "demographic transition" have viewed birth control, including abortion, as the invention of industrial societies. Even those who recognize the existence of birth control practice in pre-industrial societies nonetheless cast it as an unconscious adaptive response to threats to group survival. In this view, the "traditional" individual is no more capable of intention than "the individual robin or rook is conscious of having too large a population, but like robins and rooks, people respond sensitively to social pressures" (E.A. Wrigley, "Family Limitation in Pre-Industrial England," Economic History Review 19, 1966: 82-109.) While cultural rules that delay marriage or proscribe sexual intercourse with nursing women may have systematic and unintended effects of regulating populations, the nearly universal evidence of contraceptive practice, and abortion in particular, clearly refutes this image of the "unconscious native."

5. See for example, Moni Nag, "How Modernization Can Also Increase Fertility," Current Anthropology 21, (October 1980).

6. The most comprehensive overview of the nineteenth century abortion battles is James Mohr's 1978 work, Abortion in America: The Origins and Evolution of National Policy NY: Oxford University Press. In the following section, I rely primarily on Mohr, as well as the historical

sections in Kristin Luker, Abortion and the Politics of Motherhood, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984; Rosalind Petchesky, Abortion and Woman's Place, NY: Longman, 1984; Raymond Tatalovich and Byron W. Daynes, The Politics of Abortion, NY: Praeger, 1981.

7. Given that many of the physicians who published in medical journals at the time were central in the anti-abortion campaign, one might question the reliability of their accounts. However, as Mohr notes, the evidence is overwhelming and in any case, is the only data available.

In dealing with a subject as inherently difficult to measure as abortion, even in rough aggregate terms, the estimates of contemporary physicians must be taken seriously, for they are the best and most systematic estimates historians are likely to get...Medical writers throughout the period unanimously supported the conclusion that the incidence of abortion rose dramatically around 1840. To document this belief among the country's doctors would be to list virtually every medical statement on the subject between 1850 and 1890 (Mohr 1978: 45).

8. Sources include: A Systematic Treatise on Abortion (1866) and On the Homeopathic Treatment of Abortion (1860) written by Edwin M. Hale, a leading spokesman for the field of homeopathy, which was in competition with the allopathic-style medicine practiced by the regular physicians. Until 1867, when he published The Great Crime of the 19th Century, Hale was not intolerant of and, in fact, performed abortions. On the basis of his experience in the Chicago area, Hale concluded that approximately twenty percent of all pregnancies were aborted.

Anti-abortion crusader Horatio M. Storer, in an 1868 book Criminal Abortion: Its Nature, Its Law, B. Its Evidence, (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1868) written with attorney Franklin Fiske Heard, estimated on the basis of officially recorded figures that twenty five percent of pregnancies resulted in abortion. It should be noted that these figures generally combined spontaneous and induced abortions.

Other medical reports from cities, such as Boston, Philadelphia, and Amherst; as well as from rural areas in Iowa, Maine, Michigan, Illinois, Minnesota, and Wisconsin, gave similar figures, estimating that anywhere from one-fifth to one-third of all pregnancies were terminated.

9. For the effects of nativism on American physicians, see Graham Barker-Banfield The Horrors of the Half-Known Life: Male Attitudes Toward Women and Sexuality in Nineteenth Century America. New York: 1976.

10. The physicians' stress on the decline in "native" birth rates presaged the race suicide arguments brought against white middle-class women who promoted fertility control through abstinence in the Voluntary Motherhood movement of the 1870's.

11. The fertility rate is the average number of children born to a woman between puberty and menopause. Nineteenth rates are based on the fertility of white women between the ages of 14 and 45. There is no reliable data in the nineteenth-century for the black population.

12. Angus MacLaren argues, in Birth Control in Nineteenth Century England (London: Croom and Helm, 1978), that one can infer a rising abortion rate in conditions of increasing use of partially reliable contraceptives and general fertility decline. The theory is, basically that in the initial stages of increased contraception usage, there is a high rate of unwanted conceptions, for which abortion provides a back-up form of birth control.

A similar argument, based on twentieth century data from Japan and Chile is made by demographer Abdel Daman. He writes: "when developing societies are highly motivated to accelerate their transition from high to low fertility, induced abortion becomes such a popular method of fertility control that it becomes a kind of epidemic" (Abdel R. Daman, Abortion and the Demographic Transition in Rapid Population Growth: Consequences and Policy Implications, Report of a Study Committee of the National Academy of Sciences, Baltimore: 1971: 481).

13. The demographic transition describes a gradual process associated with industrial development in which there is a shift first from high to low mortality rates, resulting in population expansion, followed by a similar decline in the birth rate, presumably through the introduction or increased use of new contraceptive techniques. There is a voluminous literature on the topic ranging across many fields, and encompassing a number of critiques.

14. Of research carried out in America, the correlation between reduced fertility and loss of arable land is the only one of these associations that has been verified by research. Yasuba, and Forster and Tucker attribute this finding to the delay of marriage as second and third generations engaged in agricultural production have less access to resources (Yasukichi Yasuba, Birth Rates of the White Population in the U. S., 1800-1860: An Economic Study, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1961; Colin Forster and G. S. C. Tucker, Economic Opportunity and White American Fertility Ratios, 1800-1860 New Haven: Yale University Press, 1972. A 1976 study by Easterlin shows, however, that not only is the formation of new farm households delayed; members of these households also stopped having children earlier, indicating the decline is also due to some intentional use of contraception ("Factors in the Decline of Farm Family Fertility in the U. S.: Some Preliminary Research Results," Journal of American History, 63, 1976, 600-612.)

Easterlin's findings are similar to those of historians using the "family reconstitution method;" Their work indicates a major fertility decline in eighteenth-century Europe in regions that were not yet industrialized. Their data also shows "a new and different type of fertility control" which resembles that used by the American farmers Easterlin studied. These women intentionally used contraception once "target family size" was achieved (John Knodel and Etienne Van de

Walle "Lessons from the Past: Policy Implications of Historical Fertility Studies," Population and Development Review 5, June 1979: 217-245, 233; and, Etienne Van de Walle, "Alone in Europe: The French Fertility Decline Until 1850" in Historical Studies of Changing Fertility, Charles Tilly, ed. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978: 257-288.

15. Studies of pre-industrial societies -- both contemporary and historical -- demonstrate that such groups possess(ed) and use(d) fertility control methods. These might include "unconscious methods" such as delayed marriage or prohibitions on sexual intercourse during lactation -- i.e. methods that might not be intended to control conception, but nonetheless have that effect; as well as more deliberate practices such as abstinence, coitus interruptus or abortion. Two examples of anthropological writings supporting this view are Polgar, Steven, "Population History and Population Policies From An Anthropological Perspective" Current Anthropology 13 April 1972; and Moni Nag (see note 85).

For a representative view of this view critique within history, see the edited collection Historical Studies of Changing Fertility, Charles Tilly, ed. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978; and Norman Himes, Medical History of Contraception, New York: Schocken, 1970.

16. In fact, average household size was actually greater in urban and small town settlements than in rural regions between 1850-1880 (Robert V. Wells, "Family History and the Demographic Transition," Journal of Social History, 9, Fall 1975: 1-19.

17. Perhaps the most simple refutation of the technological innovation argument is simply that from ancient times until the twentieth century, techniques of birth control essentially remained unchanged. For a summation of the debate, see Etienne Van de Walle, "Motivation and Technology in the Decline of French Fertility" in Family and Sexuality in French History, Robert Wheaton and Tamara K. Hareven, eds. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1980.

Among those who regard human intentionality as a significant causal factor, there are a range of hypotheses. Two representative examples are Robert Wells, "Family History and the Demographic Transition," Journal of Social History 9, Fall 1975: 1-19; and Philippe Aries "On the Origins of Contraception in France" in Popular Attitudes Toward Birth Control in Pre-Industrial France and England, Drest and Patricia Ranum, eds. (1972, first ed. 1953) Both assume that the desire to control fertility is more or less a human universal. However, they argue that its practice became more prevalent and acceptable with the development of capitalism, and the increasing emphasis on rational control and calculation of not only production, but human life in general, what some have called "a new fertility ethic."

For a thorough discussion of these issues, see Petchesky: 27-34.

18. As Luker notes on this topic:

"Nineteenth century abortion laws were by no means passed in response to Catholic concerns. If anything, they were passed in response to feelings against Catholics, in particular, their high fertility rates.*

[Her note]

- * Although nineteenth-century anti-abortionists admired the unwillingness of a largely Catholic immigrant population to use abortion, it was feared that they would "possess New England," as Bernard Sinclair put it in 1892, because native-born Protestant women were using abortion so frequently (Crowning Sin of the Age, p. 17). (1984: 60)

19. Anthony Comstock, head of the New York society for the Suppression of Vice, spearheaded a successful anti-obscenity movement in the 1870's, and was instrumental in getting Congress to pass an act for the Suppression of Trade in the Circulation of Obscene Literature of Articles of Immoral Use; It was signed into law by President Grant in 1873. For further information, see David J. Pivar, Purity Crusade: Sexual Morality of Social Control: 1868-1900, Westport, Connecticut, 1974: 78-130.

Chapter 3: The Reinterpretation of Abortion: The 20th Century Conflict Abortion Practice Prior to Legalization

The anti-abortion statutes and the medical definitions of abortion that were in place throughout the United States by 1900 were more or less accepted as official policy, judging from the lack of public debate regarding abortion until the late 1950's. For example, the Reader's Guide to Periodical Literature lists only a single article on abortion before 1930. In the next decade, there were twenty five and in the 1940's, twenty six (Plant 1971, cited in Sarvis and Rodman 1974: 7). During the first half of the twentieth century, what discussion occurred took place among medical, legal, and social service professionals in meetings, conferences and edited volumes.¹ While the participants addressed the medical and legal questions that became the focus of debate in the 1960's, they received little popular attention at the time. One editor reported that "bookstores refused to stock his book,..and many newspapers refused to review it" (Rosen 1958: 146).

While abortion was not yet a subject of public interest, the rising concern of professionals involved with its practice indicates that large numbers of American women continued to seek abortions, despite the physical danger, illegality and social stigma involved. One of the first comprehensive statistical surveys, published in 1936, estimated, from a sample of 1,241 pregnancies, one abortion for every 3.28 births. (Taussig, 1936: 185).² A Kinsey Institute study estimated that 90% of premarital and 22% of conceptions within marriage were terminated (Gebhard et. al 1958: 93-94;54). In the opinion of most participants and observers of the contemporary debate, it was the growing gap between the practice of abortion and the nineteenth-centu-

ry legal doctrine that catalyzed and defined the first wave of agitation for legislative reform of abortion laws (Sarvis and Rodman 1974; Tatalovich and Daynes 1981; Luker 1984).

Since it appears that women were having abortions during the first half of the century as well, one might well wonder what accounts for the relative quiescence on the issue until its seemingly sudden emergence as a social issue during the 1960's. Linda Gordon, in her study of the history of the birth control movement, addresses the question by asking why women did not oppose a law that they were clearly inclined to disobey. She suggests that the lack of organized female support for legal abortion in the early part of the century was an outgrowth of sexual and class conservatism. This was manifest in the acceptance, even by feminists, of "race suicide" and "maternal instinct" arguments, levelled against women seeking to control their fertility, and influential through the 1920's (Gordon 1977: 236-7, 243).

Rosalind Petchesky maintains that the medical profession, and an increasingly powerful eugenics movement promoting population growth absorbed

the feminist idea of women controlling their pregnancies into the framework of medical control over disease (:84). Sex, in this formulation, became a subtext of hygiene; yet it was also perceived as a "point of access" to population control and therefore a legitimate object of public scrutiny (:72). Constrained in a medical straitjacket to secure legitimacy, birth control and abortion would not again become a focus of a mass movement until the late 1960's (:91).

Kristin Luker focuses on the medical profession in her explanation:

Abortion was not a public or social issue for most of its history because medical 'ownership' of abortion as a phenomenon served to undercut potential opposition from all other quarters [a situation which] depended on the ability and

willingness of physicians to present a united front against the 'outside world' of non-physicians (:41-42).

Doctors had successfully transformed the grounds of the debate, invoking the authority of morality within a positivistic scientific and technical discourse. Of the groups who might have challenged the medical model, neither lawyers, clergy nor women's organizations had the expertise to compete with the physician's claims to superior knowledge of the issue. In Luker's view, other interpretations would gain credibility only when the medical consensus began to disintegrate.

The potential for that disintegration was apparent in the range of practices that existed both within and outside of the medical community. On the basis of statistical and medical reports from 1926 to 1960, the likelihood for obtaining a legal abortion was almost random, indicating a wide variation among physicians as to what constituted a danger to maternal health, the primary ground on which abortion was permitted (Luker, Appendix 2, Table 1 "Ratio of Therapeutic Abortions to Total Deliveries, Selected U. S. Hospitals 1926-1960": 257-9). In the testimony of women who obtained illegal abortions during this period, many attribute their choice to the unpredictability of physicians in agreeing to provide abortions under the therapeutic exception (Luker: 40 ff.). A second contributing factor was the expense of medical care until the introduction of medical insurance on a general basis after World War II (Shryock, 1948: 409-430). Thus, many women (and some men) engaged in a practice that resisted and circumvented efforts at legal and medical control of pregnancy. This sort of muted alternative practice engendered a counter-understanding to the dominant interpretation on abortion; the result was what Michel Foucault would call a "tactical polyvalence of discourses" regarding

abortion (Foucault 1980: 100-101).

Dr. Frederic Taussig, writing in the 1930's, commented on "the frankness with which decent women discuss the matter among themselves."

the most striking evidence of the attitude for the public is the fact that when positive evidence of guilt is brought in the trial of an abortionist, he is rarely punished by the jury before whom the case is tried (Taussig 1936: 49).

The existence of informal networks providing women with the necessary information for procuring abortions outside of hospitals; and the circumstantial and direct evidence of community-level tolerance if not sympathy for the practice are testimony to the persistence of an oppositional view to the prevailing legal and medical definitions.

By the 1950's, medical advances for treating conditions that had most frequently posed threats to maternal health -- tuberculosis, cardiovascular disease, pernicious vomiting -- were such that pregnancies that endangered the actual physical survival of the mother became increasingly rare (Luker: 54-55). As doctors who had more liberal interpretations of "life" continued to provide abortions on the basis of other less dire indications, the differences between them and their colleagues with narrower views regarding maternal health became apparent (Pacer et al 1959). Within the medical profession, the threat of potential conflict between the adherents of strict and broad interpretation of the law prompted the establishment, beginning in 1945, of hospital abortion committees (Gutteacher 1970: 73) to mediate abortion cases. Whatever their intent,³ the effect was to further restrict women's access to legal abortion (Wilson 1959: 189-97). As the decision-making process became more public, its legitimacy was increasingly called into question as arbitrary (Schaupp, 1964: 353) and sexist (Phelan and Maginnis, 1969: 91). According to Luker, it

was this growing breakdown in consensus among physicians performing abortions, that generated the first activism for reform of restrictive abortion laws.

Doctors grew concerned about the possibility that differences in interpretation might lead to lawsuits; and more liberal doctors objected to what they saw as the "unfairness" of the policies instituted by hospitals. To protect themselves from accusations of performing "too many" abortions, doctors (and to some extent other professionals concerned with the problem of illegal abortion) began to advocate clarification of the laws (161).

In the late 1950's, minor efforts to reform abortion laws to reflect medical practice were initiated, most notably in the well-respected American Law Institute's (ALI) proposal (as part of their draft for a Model Penal Code). The ALI recommended legalizing therapeutic abortions in cases that would "gravely impair the physical or mental health of the mother"; in which the child would be born "with grave physical or mental defects"; or if the pregnancy resulted from rape or incest" (ALI: Model Penal Code: 1962). However, there was little public interest at the time in pursuing the battles that even these minimal reforms would require.

The Emerging Crisis: Mobilization for Abortion Law Reform

That situation changed in 1962 with the case of Sherri Finkbine, the opening act for what was to become a full-scale social drama. Much as the arrest and suicide of Madame Restell in 1878 marked the denouement of tolerant abortion policies in the late nineteenth century, the Finkbine incident revealed the growing breach between existing legal and medical doctrine on abortion and its actual practice (Hole and Levine 1971: 283).

In 1962, while pregnant for the fifth time, Sherri Finkbine, a

resident of Arizona, discovered that the sleeping pills she had been using were thalidomide; a press report alerted her to recent medical research which found that the drug was likely to produce extreme birth defects. When she queried her doctor as to what to do, he advised and scheduled an abortion although Arizona law allowed the procedure only to save the life of the mother. Out of concern for other pregnant women who might have been taking the drug, unaware of its potentially harmful effects, Mrs. Finkbine contacted a local reporter. She asked that a warning be printed and that her name be withheld. On the morning of her scheduled abortion, the paper ran a black-bannered front-page story headline, "Baby-Deforming Drug May Cost Woman Her Child Here." Fearing prosecution should anyone bring a complaint, the hospital cancelled the abortion. The Finkbines' doctor requested a court order to perform the operation, claiming it was necessary for preservation of the mother's life. Although the judge dismissed the case and recommended the abortion, the hospital still refused to oblige until the laws were clarified. The Finkbines eventually went to Sweden, received approval for and obtained an abortion there. The fetus was, in fact, grossly deformed (Finkbine 1967: 15-25; and interview in Luker 1984: 62-65).

The Finkbine's story became an immediate cause for comment, from small-town papers, to leaders of church and state. President Kennedy announced that FDA drug regulations would be increased and asked Americans to dump thalidomide tablets. The Vatican issued a statement denouncing the abortion as murder (Tatalovich and Daynes: 45-46). The rhetoric of Time magazine was typical of the mass media's presentation of the issue:

Despite strict anti-abortion legislation in the United States and the often exorbitant expense involved in getting to countries with more lenient laws, abortion statistics continue to rise yearly in a striking case of conflict between the mores of a people and their legal code. ("Abortion: Precept and Practice" July 13, 1962: 52-53).

A married mother of four and hostess of a local Romper Room Show, Mrs. Finkbine was neither a radical, an activist nor "sexually irresponsible." She had very much wanted her pregnancy and considered abortion justified only in exceptional cases. She judged her choice to be unfortunate, but necessary and correct. As James Mohr comments:

While sympathy for Mrs. Finkbine's agonizing plight was still a long way from sympathy for abortion on demand for any reason whatever, every person who wondered what she would do in the same situation was taking a step -- consciously or unconsciously -- toward a willingness to weigh considerations that involved the quality of life against the absolute of life in any form for its own sake (252).

The Finkbine story has achieved the status of a "mythic charter" for the pro-choice movement as the event that first awakened public concern to change restrictive abortion (e.g. Hole and Levine 1971: 283).

It provided a small-scale drama that foreshadowed the volatility and polarization of sentiment that came to characterize the national controversy over abortion as it took shape over the next two decades. Specifically, it revealed how hospitals were responding more to fear of legal prosecution than the needs of female patients. More generally, it dramatized the growing discrepancy between abortion law and practice.⁴ In other words, it revealed the gap between norms and praxis, a space out of which change or conflict inevitably comes. As Edmund Leach puts it:

When you look at what people actually do, as distinct from what they are supposed to do, most of the category distinctions of our social thinking tend to disappear (1977: 11).

The Finkbine case made visible a growing movement for abortion

reform among health care professionals during the early 1960's, what has come to be accepted as "the first stage" of the re-emergence of abortion as a social and political issue in the twentieth century. At this point,

discussions of abortion were restricted to small, well-defined groups of elite professionals, public health officials, crusading attorneys and prominent physicians...[who] were as successful as they were precisely because the issue had not yet been defined as a "women's issue."...those outside the professional circles who had a moral opposition to liberalized abortion remained in large part an unawakened constituency (Luker: 66-67).

Concomitantly, a second constituency, representing what was to become a more radical force, was beginning to organize by setting up and providing public abortion and birth control counseling and referral services.² Underground abortion information had been in existence, informally, through networks of women, sympathetic physicians, and social service workers. While such unofficial referral networks shared with the new "above ground" groups the goal of assisting women in finding qualified and humane abortionists, they remained covert, simultaneously subverting and accepting the law. The new, more militant referral groups operated openly, inviting arrest and conviction in order to challenge the laws (Hole and Levine 1971: 254).

In the late 1960's, abortion rights activists began to gain both more credibility and visibility as well as concrete victories. Between 1967 and 1972, fourteen states³ passed legislation to permit therapeutic abortions, according to the ALI recommendations. The lobbying efforts that helped produce these successes gained strength as a broader range of groups began to affiliate with the expanding abortion rights movement: The National Organization of Woman (NOW) (1968); the American Medical Association (AMA) (1967); the American Civil Liberties

Union (ACLU) (1969) (Sarvis and Rodman: 9) and Planned Parenthood World Population (1969) to name a few.⁷ As the conflict became more intense and polarized in the 1970's, especially with the mobilization of right-to-life forces after 1973, a consensus over the construction of the issue, for or against, emerged. In the late 1960's, however, controversies erupted within many of these associations over the decision to align with forces for legalized abortion. These struggles indicate the range of interpretations abortion carried within different contexts.

Planned Parenthood, for example, though currently identified by right-to-life groups as in the vanguard of advocating abortion on demand (e.g. Glasow 1985: 7-11), was reluctant at the time even to endorse reform. Placed in historical context, what seems strange is that the population control establishment would even consider endorsing abortion, given the nineteenth-century population experts' condemnation of abortion in the name of fear of "underpopulation," and "race suicide" (Gordon 1977: Chapters 6 and 7).

It was only by the 1940's and 1950's that public and private agencies concerned with fertility control began to reorganize their views and policies around fears of overpopulation, (although many of the eugenic assumptions of the prior era remained) (Petchesky:118-122). Accordingly, contraception became not only more acceptable but an explicit goal in policy making circles, made manifest in a number of government measures taken during the 1960's, notably:

- the Federal Drug Administration's approval of the commercial distribution of oral contraceptives ("the pill") in 1960;
- the Supreme Court's 1965 rulings legalizing the sale of contraceptives to married couples on the grounds of rights to privacy (*Griswold v. Connecticut*, *Baird v. Massachusetts*),

critical precedents to the 1973 abortion ruling;

-President Johnson's approval in 1967 of an annual budget of over twenty million dollars for contraceptive programs (Mohr: 250-51; Petchesky: 124-5).

These actions marked not only government support of contraception, but reveal as well the increasing role of the state and private foundations in creating and carrying out population policy at home and abroad.

In the context of these developments as well as the growing practice and visibility of abortion, those involved professionally with fertility control began to

accept abortion as a socially necessary additional weapon in the war against overpopulation that they had been waging for some time (Mohr: 251).

Nonetheless, the population control professionals joined the abortion reform movement in 1969 with great caution. Writing in 1967, Planned Parenthood president Alan Guttmacher voiced the nervousness with which his organization approached the issue.

Today, complete abortion license would do great violence to the beliefs and sentiments of most Americans. Therefore, I doubt that the United States is as yet ready to legalize abortion on demand, and I therefore am reluctant to advocate it in the face of all the bitter dissension such a proposal would create (Guttmacher 1967: 12-13).

Similarly, although abortion rights has been popularly identified with the women's movement, the first official feminist endorsement of that position generated "a very painful confrontation with our own conflicts on abortion" (Friedan 1968). The statement refers to the dispute that erupted over adoption of an abortion repeal statement² at the Second Annual Convention of NOW in November 1967.

Few NOW members disagreed privately with the premise that abortion laws should be repealed: the opposition was based rather on the fear of what such a stand would do to the public image of the organization...such a radical stand might detract [sic] potential allies from joining the cause for

women's rights...Its passage caused the resignation of some of the opposition from NOW and indirectly caused the formation of other women's rights organizations (Hole and Levine 1971).

The Shift From Reform Repeal: The Abortion Rights Movement

The divisions in the women's movement over the abortion issue were part of a growing split between reform and repeal advocates. As one radical feminist described it,

"reform" and "repeal" are actually fundamentally incompatible ideas...Proposals for "reform" are based on the notion that abortions must be regulated, meted out to deserving women under an elaborate set of rules designed to provide a "safeguard against abuse."..."Repeal" is based on the quaint idea of justice: that abortion is a woman's right and that no one can veto her decision and compel her to bear a child against her will (Cisler 1970: 283).

That interpretive split took on organizational expression. Those committed to repeal formed groups -- some evanescent, some more enduring -- devoted to direct action as a political strategy. For example, in January 1969, the New York chapter of NOW founded New Yorkers for Abortion Law Repeal, which promoted repeal on the basis of radical feminist principles, and lobbied against reform campaigns that would still maintain medical restrictions on abortion practice. The radical feminist women who eventually formed Redstockings became well-known for their dramatic techniques. They invaded the New York

State legislature hearings on abortion, and then held their own counter-hearings (Willis 1971: 117-118). This confrontational style was used in other parts of the country as well -- including a nationwide "strike day" -- August 26, 1970 -- in which dramatic demonstrations were held in a number of American cities (Hole and Levine: 295-299).⁹ In addition, radical health activist groups throughout the country organized referral services, challenging both legal and medical control of abortion.¹⁰

In the view of both participants and observers to the abortion repeal campaign, the radical feminists, although few in number, created effective pressure for legislation; they "functioned as shock troops in the struggle to break through legal barriers" (Petchesky: 127). Additionally, their reinterpretation of abortion as an unconditional right for women succeeded in bringing that perspective into the debate. Although feminists had made clear that their position -- concrete access to abortion for all women -- differed from the liberal "right to choose" formulation, the two views were conflated as abortion rights' activists consolidated around the goal of elective abortion.

This new position of the abortion rights movement, which supplanted the medical model, was most clearly expressed in the formation of the first (and what became the dominant) national group committed to repeal, the National Association for the Repeal of Abortion Laws (NARAL), which became the National Abortion Rights Action League after 1973. NARAL was established at the First National Conference on Abortion Laws, held in Chicago in February 1969 (Lader 1966: 9). The following statement by one of NARAL's founders, indicates that it was

not just abortion as a medical procedure that was being redefined for activists, but also its position in relation to key symbols in American culture.

If we could make a national association and succeed in overthrowing the tyranny of abortion laws, it could offer a vision of action and accomplishment at the most fundamental democratic level. It seemed to me the country needed this desperately: that if the present social order, or any order was to survive, the individual had to prove to himself once again that a revolution was still possible. The whole abortion movement was, in effect, an act of faith (Lader 1973: 88).

The redefinition of abortion as a democratic right helped bring an expanded constituency into the movement. The list of NARAL's sponsors reflects how the constellation that had emerged by the late 1960's in favor of abortion repeal had grown far beyond the original professional elite to include not only feminists, radical clergy, liberal lawyers and politicians, health professionals, population control and welfare rights advocates but more conservative groups as well, such as Church Women United, the YMCA and even the Commission on Uniform State Laws.

By 1969, the movement had rejected medical definitions outright and began to attack the very existence of abortion laws by introducing legislation and pushing for the passage of repeal bills into state legislatures, beginning with New York in 1969. Their actions served as a political recognition of the fact that the reasons most women sought abortions were not those indicated by the "therapeutic exceptions" recommended by the ALI -- rape, fetal deformity, incest, or maternal health. Rather, they had to do with women's desire to weigh if, when, and with whom they would have children, taking into account existing family size, financial considerations, marital status, work conditions and the like, motives not unlike those of American women

born a century earlier.¹¹

Through direct action, lobbying, and confrontational politics, the expanding abortion rights coalition succeeded in influencing legislators in New York, Hawaii, Alaska and the District of Columbia to repeal restrictive abortion laws in 1970.¹² The success of these state level abortion repeal efforts virtually ended after 1970 as pro-life forces began to consolidate and successfully block efforts at legislative change (Leahy 1975: 34-37). Between 1970 and 1973, the failure of a Midwestern NARAL offensive in state after state reflected the growing strength of right-to-life efforts (Tatalovich and Daynes: 626)

As a result, pro-choice forces began to shift their focus from state legislatures to the courts, challenging the very constitutionality of existing abortion legislation. Briefly put, the position they took was that the anti-abortion laws that were on the books in most states were constitutionally vague, and more importantly, were a violation of the civil rights of women, specifically the constitutional guarantees, to equal protection and privacy, according to the broad interpretations of the fifth and fourteenth amendments that had been established in the 1965 rulings on contraception in *Griswold v. Connecticut*.¹³ On these grounds, the abortion rights campaign picked up momentum. By 1971, seventy criminal and civil cases were pending in over twenty states. Under the pressure of this "judiciary activism" (Tatalovich and Daynes: 65), the Supreme Court agreed to hear two of those cases: *Roe v. Wade*, a nineteenth-century Texas law typical of the anti-abortion statutes passed during the physicians' crusade; and *Doe v. Bolton*, a Georgia law allowing therapeutic exceptions based on

the ALI Model Penal Code.

On January 22, 1973, the Supreme Court handed down decisions addressing the separate issues raised by each case. The rulings essentially legalized elective abortion in the first trimester with restrictions to protect maternal health in the second, and the potential life of the fetus in the third.¹⁴ The decision bypassed the tedious and uneven process of fighting for repeal on a state-by-state basis, an unexpected victory for abortion rights activists.¹⁵

What neither the Court nor anyone else anticipated was that the Roe decision would mobilize a new and much stronger opposition to abortion rights.¹⁶ It was not only the substance of the Court's decision that generated so much reaction on both sides but the fact that it represented an enactment of social policy at the Federal level. As James Mohr commented:

The American public...is far from unanimously reconciled to the centralizing tendencies so evident in American social policymaking, and some citizens seem to have opposed the Roe decision primarily because it was such a forceful reminder to them that they were no longer free to establish, or in this case preserve, policies in their own local areas that the nation as a whole would not support (Mohr: 260).

The Right-to-Life Movement: Background and Overview

The nature of the abortion controversy shifted dramatically after Roe v. Wade. The pro-life movement mobilized into a national, well-organized effort in direct response to Roe v. Wade, recruiting and attracting a new constituency, large numbers of "ordinary citizens" and especially women (Luker: 145). As Tatalovich and Daynes note:

In contrast to the elitist support for abortion reform during the 1960's, the opposition to abortion during the 1970's developed as a grassroots mass movement...The pro-abortion forces were effective in pressing for change

without directly involving the general public; to counter that success, the anti-abortion forces turned to mobilizing the masses against the Supreme Court decision, [and were able] to recruit followers, raise money, and fashion an extensive organizational apparatus through working at the local level (Tatalovich and Daynes: 84).

The first formal pro-life organization, The National Right to Life Committee (NRLC), grew out of battles in the late 1960's as ad hoc groups organized to oppose efforts to repeal anti-abortion laws. While pro-life activism includes a multitude of organizations, the largest and oldest of these, the NRLC, represents the mainstream of the movements. It claims over ten million members in three thousand grassroots groups around the country (Paige 1983: 57).

The fledgling movement took coherent shape as a national organization with the help of the Roman Catholic Church. In 1967, the National Conference of Catholic Bishops (NCCB) budgeted fifty-thousand dollars to fight abortion reform efforts. The following year, the Family Life Division of the United States Catholic Conference organized a national network of the local pro-life leaders who had already begun to consolidate informally. While much of the movement originated and ultimately developed independently of the Catholic Church, that institution was critical as a support system. The Church provided an infrastructure, communications network, material backing, ideology and people -- in short, the resources and organizational facility that helped mobilize the movement in its early stages into a national presence (Leahy 1975: Ch.2; Patchesky 1984: 252-254).¹⁷

The Roe v. Wade decisions still stand as a critical symbolic marker for the right-to-life movement.¹⁸ Organizationally, the ruling signalled the shift of the movement to a grassroots base was more and

more uncomfortable with the Catholic Church's increasing efforts to maintain centralized control. In June of 1973, a committee of nationally prominent pro-life activist leaders voted, at their annual meeting, to sever their connections with the Church and established an independent National Right to Life Committee, electing a Methodist woman as their first president. The NRLC board is composed of representatives from each state, each of whom has a vote; decisions are made by majority. The organizational structure mirrors the NRLC's self-image as a "broad-based, voluntary, non-denominational, non-sectarian organization" that draws its strength from grassroots support (Leahy 1975: 40).

While the NRLC has developed along an independent course from the Catholic Church, the two organizations nonetheless draw support from each other in their efforts to prohibit abortion. In 1973, the Family Life Division of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops (NCCB) outlined a plan to gain support for a constitutional amendment that would recriminalize abortion. Their method, spelled out in the 1975 "Pastoral Plan for Pro-life Activity" complemented NRLC's grassroots organizing efforts. The Catholic plan called for and eventually established pro-life committees in the 18,000 parishes across the country to monitor and influence national and local elections.¹⁹

What distinguishes the NRLC from the Catholic Church, and most other pro-life groups, is its commitment to maintaining a diverse constituency from right to left, united around the single issue of the "right-to-life." As a recent editorial in the National Right to Life News stated:

It is NRLC's "single-issue" policy which permits it to represent, and to work effectively with, individuals who

agree on little except the right-to-life issues (Johnson 1984).

For example, contrary to current popular stereotype, the NRLC included a vocal "progressive" component from the outset. Pro-lifers for Survival, an anti-nuke pacifist group was founded in 1971 and Feminists for Life organized soon after. The "progressives" continue to have influence and visibility within the movement.²⁰ Their articles appear regularly in national NRLC publications and they have urged and gained NRLC support of liberal candidates who are against abortion, such as Hatfield, Eagleton, and Oberstar (Paige 1983: 223).

While the stated *raison d'être* of the growing pro-life movement has been to overturn the Supreme Court ruling through a constitutional amendment,²¹ activism has focused increasingly on local-level conflicts and events. By creating and imposing local ordinances or harrassing local abortion providers within the bounds of free speech, picketing facilities or staging sit-ins at clinics, pro-life groups adopted, over the 1970's, direct action techniques not unlike those used by the more radical activists in the abortion rights struggle in the late 1960's. In both cases, the intent was, in part, to challenge the law and force judicial clarification of the issue.

For right-to-lifers, these actions served to test the areas left unclear in the Court's ruling by introducing local, state and federal legislation to limit the availability of abortion.²² All of these regulatory efforts were immediately challenged by pro-choice forces, specifically, the American Civil Liberties Union, the Planned Parenthood Federation, and the Center for Constitutional Rights (Paige: 110). Because rulings on these regulations by local courts were mixed, it was only a matter of time before these questions would be brought

before the Supreme Court once again for resolution. However, with two exceptions, the high court declined to rule on any of them until 1983.²³ As a result, these issues endured as expanding and intensifying arenas of local conflict between pro-choice and pro-life forces for the rest of the decade.

The growing national political strength of the right-to-life movement was dramatically marked in the 1977 Congressional passage of the Hyde amendment, which allowed states to prohibit the use of public funds [Medicaid] to pay for poor women's abortions, except to save the mother's life.²⁴ First introduced in 1974, it catalyzed eleven weeks of Congressional debate over the question of the government's obligations to provide support for abortion services. Since then, each Congress has accepted a version of the Hyde amendment.²⁵ Connie Paige, in her study of the right-to-life movement, assesses that the passage of the Hyde amendment

was probably the right-to-lifers' finest hour. It was one of the few measures that had the support of large numbers of voters and one of the few areas in which they could command consistent, decisive victories. They would not have nearly so much success from now on, although that would not become apparent for awhile (:112).

For the pro-choice cause, on the other hand, abortion as a feminist issue was losing its persuasive power. In the arguments over the Hyde amendment, not a single defense of public funding for abortion used the argument that women have a fundamental right to social and reproductive autonomy, a point of view that had been compelling in 1973. It was not only the passage of the Hyde amendment, but its substantive meaning -- that the state is obligated to uphold certain rights but not to provide the resources to implement them -- that indicated the broader decline of the liberal hegemony of the 1960's.

The New Right and the Abortion Issue

By the late 1970's, the general conservative swing in the country during the earlier part of the decade had consolidated around a coherent political agenda, what is known as the rise of the New Right. The name has come to be identified with two scenarios: a widespread sea-change sweeping the ideological currents of American society to the right; or, a coalition of right-wing politicians, religious leaders, and "pro-family" groups, all linked through "hi-tech" mass organizing in an effort to take control of at least the Republican party, if not the country. Whatever the appropriate imagery, in 1977, this constellation of conservatives adopted a strategy to broaden their influence by developing a "pro-family" campaign. In an effort to gain support for their conservative agenda, New Right leaders targeted fundamentalist churches and single-issue groups concerned with the "traditional" social roles of family, church and school. Their hope was to fuse them into a "winning coalition" that would bring electoral success to their candidates and programs (Crawford 1980: 36; Conservative Digest, May-June 1980).²⁴

The NRRC, well-organized at both top and base, with a dedicated grassroots following, was just the sort of single-issue group the New Right was looking for: a populist, cross-class social movement that had not been allied to right-wing causes more generally. New Right leaders hoped to recast the right-to-life position in its most conservative interpretation, linking it to their vision of the proper role of

government, family and sexuality in American society (Conservative Digest 1979). Leary of co-optation, the NRLC leadership refused to ally with the New Right. To do so would have undercut one of the primary benefits of their single-issue organizing which, by tolerating multiple interpretations of opposition to abortion, can sustain a large and diverse membership. The comments of a pro-life writer regarding this summarize the moderate right-to-life position on the question of allying with the New Right.

[Retaining our independence] underscores the importance of a movement maintaining its perspective and its "soul." If we lose sight of our ultimate purpose, our cause suffers...we are neither New Right nor the Old Right, nor the official Roman Catholic Church, nor fundamentalist sect; not Republican or Democrat, conservative or liberal, black or white. We are committed to the sacredness of human life and proud of that fact (National Right to Life News, 11/24/83: 7).

Nonetheless, in the popular media, the anti-abortion movement was increasingly associated with both the religious right and the New Right, a distortion which, judging by the responses, was making the moderate right-to-life leadership uneasy. The NRLC made a point of publicizing the liberal/democratic races that they supported that were anathema to the conservative program (Paige 1983: 223). An article in the liberal evangelical Christian magazine Sojourners warned

The unholy alliance between the anti-abortion movement and the right-wing must be directly challenged by those who seriously and consistently espouse a pro-life commitment (Nellis 1980).

The U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, by clearly linking its "human life" position to support of a nuclear freeze and increases in social welfare, has further distanced a large part of the pro-life movement from other conservative interests. In short, despite the hopes and plans of the New Right leadership to create what would have been an unprecedented alliance between Catholics, conservative politicians, and

Protestant fundamentalists over the abortion issue, such an alliance has been ephemeral at best.

A number of writers view the anti-abortion movement as simply a part of the New Right's drive to impose conservatism on American political and social life (e.g. Pethchesky: 242). Such interpretations fail to recognize important distinctions between and even within the the two camps in terms of ideologies as well as political strategies. Mainstream pro-life activists, though diverse in their broader associations -- from pacifism to millenarian Christianity -- generally share a critique of cultural trends representing market rationality, individualism, and the prevalence of career convenience over nurturant ties of kin and community. This view is at odds with the militarism and laissez-faire capitalism that are central to the New Right program. The point is that abortion is a symbol in contention not only between the pro-life and pro-choice movements; the New Right, religious right and mainstream right-to-lifers are each struggling to gain material and symbolic control over its larger meaning and practice as well. By 1979, the New Right leaders, frustrated at their inability to win over the mainstream pro-life movement, set up rival right-to-life groups that have been in intense competition with the NRLC.²⁷

The antagonism between the factions claiming abortion as their issue finally led to a face-off in Congress in 1981. The battle lines were drawn over divergent strategies regarding anti-abortion legislation. The New Right supported the Helms "Human life" bill, while most of the NRLC and the Catholic forces backed the Hatch state's rights amendment. The fight was not only over tactics; it dramatized a serious struggle for leadership of the movement and the interpretation

of its cause. Division in the ranks was such that ultimately neither proposal made it to the floor for a vote (Roberts 1981).

It is important to recognize that while this division on legislative strategy separated the moderate from the conservative wings of the movement, both accepted a "mainstream" approach to political action. The goal of passing an amendment challenging *Roe v. Wade* serves as a pragmatic focus as well a vision that gives the movement coherence and popular momentum. While their broader ideological agendas and specific tactics may differ, both NRLC and New Right activists choose to work within the existing political system and gain legitimacy in the public eye. They accept the same "rules of the game" as their opponents. Their shared aim was is to win over the American public.

Insofar as public opinion is understood to be shaped by and reflected in the mass media, pro-life activists of all stripes have pitched their efforts toward gaining favorable coverage in the print and electronic media, a concern which permeates all of the mainstream pro-life writing. In the words of Sandra Faucher, Director of the NRLC Political Action Committee, "Every pro-life group believes it has been victimized by media bias" (1982: 63). Dave Andrusko, editor of the NRLC's newsletter, in an essay entitled "Zealots, Zanies, and Assorted Kooks: How the Major Media Interprets the Pro-Life Movement," writes that for the "media elite"

Pro-lifers (and even more so pro-family people) are synonymous with repression, political and sexual. The buzz words practically leap off their typewriters: punitive, prudish, Victorian, rigid, repressed, hysterical, etc. (1983: 192).

Their assessment that the media has been negative in its portrayal of the pro-life movement is not altogether wrong, although it has not always taken the particular angle they describe. Reporting that

followed the Congressional fiasco in September 1981 declared the movement to be in serious disarray (e.g. Bennetts, The New York Times, 9/22/1981). By the mid-term elections in 1982, it was not only The New York Times that saw the right-to-life movement as losing its political effectiveness. Pro-life efforts in the Congressional elections of that year generally failed. According to a Times-CBS poll, 74% of the freshmen members of the 98th Congress favored legal abortion, as opposed to 54% in the 97th session (New York Times, 11/4/82). New Right leader Terry Dolan, while predicting exponential growth for his own movement, declared that the right-to-lifers had made clear to Congress that they were a "paper tiger" (quoted in Paige: 239).

His opinion has proved itself to be both true and false. The mainstream NRLC's continued resistance to the New Right has diminished its overall utility to the right-wing program. And, since 1981, the right-to-life suffered two serious setbacks. In June of 1983, the Supreme Court ruled that a variety of state and local ordinances designed to restrict abortion practice were unconstitutional, underscoring the position it took supporting elective abortion in the 1973 rulings.²⁸ Soon after, an additional blow was dealt the pro-life cause. The Hatch and Helms amendments (see note #42) lost in Congress for a second time. Together, the events of the summer of 1983 served as an endorsement of the pro-choice status quo. Unless the American public suddenly reverses its decade of steady support for legal abortion, right-to-life forces are unlikely to reverse these defeats through national anti-abortion legislation (National Opinion Research Center, October 1984). United in purpose but divided in means, right-to-lifers have altered their tactics to meet new conditions.

Right to Life Violence: Revival or Last Resort

Since the setbacks of 1983, the relatively moderate philosophy and strategy of the NRLC have lost their hold as a sort of centripetal force binding a divided movement. In the last two years, there has been a dramatic escalation in violence directed against abortion clinics.²⁹ Most observers both inside and outside the pro-life movement view the recent rise in such activity as a response by more radical pro-lifers to the two-pronged defeat of right-to-life efforts to bring about change within the political system.

The violent incidents have captured widespread media attention and evoke ambivalent reaction from moderate pro-life activists. NRLC president Dr. Jack Wilke, for example, condemned the July 4, 1984 firebombing of the National Abortion Federation headquarters in Washington D.C. by the radical fringe Army of God, acknowledging it can only hurt his own organization's image and future efforts. Nonetheless, he took the opportunity to equate abortion with violence pointing out that "Every second living human being that goes through their [an abortion clinic's] front door is killed." Whether the publicity will ultimately hurt or help the right-to-life cause is unclear; what is clear is that this development represents a major power shift for the movement.

Until the watershed summer of 1983, the mainstream leadership had managed to control the more radical elements of the movement. Confident that victory through legitimate political and educational means was close at hand, local and national leaders had been able to dissuade

extremists from taking overtly violent direct action that might undercut public sympathy for pro-life efforts. Despite the fact that the movement has become well-organized, gained a large membership, and become quite sophisticated regarding political action, it has had only modest successes, from the pro-life point of view, in gaining direct political victories through legislative or judicial channels. The decline in the persuasive authority of the moderates can be seen in the histories of those activists apprehended thus far for bombing and arson of clinics since 1983. Profiles of these people indicate that until that time, they had either not been officially active in the movement at all; or had participated in political efforts and/or non-violent demonstrations outside clinics, the mainstay of moderate grassroots right-to-life action throughout the country. From the evidence to date, it appears that the destructive violence at clinics is being carried out, for the most part, by fanatic individuals peripheral to the mainstream, both locally and nationally. However, their marginality, both social and in relation to the movement as a whole, hardly renders the actions of these people insignificant. These extremists represent a hyperbolic expression of a more general shift in the style of pro-life protest toward what is called "direct action."

For those who had long scorned the more or less civil tactics that had dominated the movement's political style since 1973, the moment of disarray became an opportunity. Splinter groups that have advocated "direct action" bordering on violence and terror -- harassing patients, holding sit-ins, intimidating abortion providers -- have emerged with new confidence, convinced that restraint and civility have proven ineffective. These activists -- whose contempt for the "main-

stream style" is now openly expressed in epithets such as "wimps for life" -- have focused their efforts on dramatic demonstrations directed at abortion users and providers. While they distinguish their actions from the bombings and arson that have attracted so much attention, it is not altogether clear where or whether the line between these two kinds of behavior should be drawn.

Proponents claim that "direct action" is rooted in traditions of American civil disobedience. However, their behavior verges on the terroristic in its effects as the threat of greater destruction is now omnipresent. Tactics have a variety of manifestations which typically include accosting women using abortion clinics by blocking access, confronting them verbally and bodily, following them or even tracing license plate numbers and calling them at home, entering clinics and disrupting procedures, pouring glue into frontdoor locks, etc. Actions also extend to those who provide abortion services. Doctors and clinic personnel have had their homes picketed, received threatening letters and phone calls, and been publicly slandered. As vandalism at clinics increases, leases are lost and insurance costs become prohibitive. Security guards, bomb checks and escorts for patients are now considered essential.

For this new style of right-to-life activist, building or maintaining a public image as reasonable good citizens is simply beside the point. They are succeeding on their own terms by immediately disrupting abortion services and gaining media attention. Elasha Drogin, for example, president of what is considered an extremist right-to-life group, Catholics United for Life, expressed these sentiments succinctly.

People with the stick-to-it-iveness to be involved with a movement like this for ten years are getting a little impatient with the National Right to Life Committee. They want to see more happen. They want more activity...more radical thinking. The Right to Life Committee is losing people while we're gaining (quoted in Paige 1983: 77) .

Joseph Scheidler, founder (in 1980) of the Chicago based 1800-member Pro-Life Action League and author of Closed: 99 Ways to Stop Abortion, is equally open in his contempt for letter-writers and lobbyists. He espouses the "doctrine of necessity" -- a view that violence is permissible as a last resort when it must be used to stop or prevent greater violence [i.e. abortion] -- to justify actions such as illegally entering clinic operating rooms and disrupting abortions in progress. As Scheidler puts it:

When the law is so twisted, it is obvious that one has to fight it, and when the law sanctions killing of innocent people, maybe you have to break a law to save lives (quoted in Roeser 1983: 15).

While Schiedler claims a philosophy of non-violence and blames the media for linking his actions with those of violent extremists, he nonetheless makes public his sympathy and identification with those more radical than he. For example, in August of 1983, Scheidler led a demonstration in front of a Catholic hospital to protest the appointment of Dr. Hector Zevallos, the abortion clinic owner who had been kidnapped and held at gunpoint for a week in 1982 by two pro-lifers who called themselves "The Army of God." En route to the protest, Scheidler stopped to visit the wife of the man convicted of that kidnapping and of bombing two clinics. Scheidler made a point of informing the media of this detour (Roeser 1983).

The zealotry and controversial actions advocated by Scheidler had consigned him, until recently, to the fringe of the pro-life

movement. He was seen as disruptive of efforts to gain the moral and political high ground through prudent action. However, as the pro-life movement has attempted to regroup after its defeats, people like Scheidler have gained at least some new legitimacy with the mainstream. In an unprecedented move for the NRLC, Scheidler was invited to speak at their annual convention in 1984. He was among a handful of national pro-life leaders who met with President Reagan in 1984 during their annual January 22nd "March for Life" in Washington D.C. As alternative modes of political discourse appear closed, more extreme styles of action are apparently more appealing, or at least seen as worth the risk.

Although Scheidler and the activists he represents, are becoming more acceptable among moderates, if they are embraced, it is with some misgivings. In a recent review of Scheidler's book in the NRLC's newsletter, James Bopp, Jr., NRLC's General Counsel, writes

What separates [Schneider's] arguments from traditional pro-life thinking is that a tactic is now advanced as the ultimate pro-life strategy which demands the full effort of all right-to-lifers.

This alternate strategy represents a radical departure from the focus of traditional right-to-life activity in two important ways. First, right-to-life educational activities have primarily focused on informing and motivating the great number of uncommitted persons to a pro-life philosophy and action. By contrast, Mr. Scheidler's focus is on battling those most committed to the pro-abortion philosophy.

Secondly, the right-to-life movement has focused on increasing the respect for all human life in society and restoring the protection of human life through our laws. ..with the law changed, the power of the state turns against the abortionist...Only in America, pro-life in its heart and mind, will babies ultimately be safe (National Right to Life News, 7.26.85: 6).

Another pro-life leader and critic of Scheidler explains,

He doesn't care if his demonstrations play into the wrong

hands, to his cause's short-range, even long-term disadvantage...Anti-abortion pragmatists warn him that the main impediment to passage of pro-life legislation is the prejudice that is part of a far right that often coddles racism.. Impudent, erratic, and passionate in all aspects, and an enemy of calm deliberation he may be: but of all the nation's pro-life leaders, he is most magnetic (Roeser 1983).

In looking at the larger context created by both the media and government response to the "direct action" faction, it seems that the extremists are in a particularly advantageous position. The media in general gives disproportionate attention to violence and conflates those who carry out that activity with the movement as a whole. It is not only that the press needs a good story and that violence sells newspapers. The profession of journalism is dominated by liberals who favor abortion; not surprisingly, the more extreme and reprehensible pro-life activities which paint the movement in the worst light receive the most coverage (Lichter and Rothman 1981). The net effect is to further polarize the controversy.

At the same time as the press portrays the right-to-lifers as more monolithic and fanatic than they actually are, perhaps overestimating the significance of those involved in violence, the Reagan administration lends support through the opposite approach. The position of the director of the FBI, William H. Webster, is that attacks on abortion clinics do not constitute terrorism because they have not been carried out by an "organized group" that claims responsibility for them. The FBI's jurisdiction is "true terrorism" that aims to "overthrow the Government." As one director of an abortion clinic commented

This comes dangerously close to official sanction of terrorism. Mr. Webster almost invites terrorists to go ahead and blow up abortion clinics as long as they don't take credit for it (Hern 1984).

In Everett, Washington, where the Feminist Women's Health Center

which opened in August 1983 was finally closed after being firebombed three times, violence carried out by a single individual has engendered a support group after the fact. According to a local moderate pro-life leader, Sharon Codispoti, some grassroots pro-life members are endorsing the bombings because they succeeded in closing down the clinic. The man convicted of the attacks, Curtis Beseda, has a following now. At the same time, local moderate pro-life leaders have dropped back, disillusioned and disturbed that a movement dedicated to the preservation of life at all costs should resort to violence.

In an essay On Violence, Hannah Arendt writes

Violence does not promote causes, neither history nor revolution, neither progress or reaction; but it can serve to dramatize greivances and bring them to public attention... And indeed, violence, contrary to what its prophets try to tell us, is more the weapon of reform than revolution. ...the danger of violence, even if it moves consciously within a non-extremist framework of short-term goals, will always be that the means overwhelm the end...The practice of violence, like all action, changes the world, but the most probable change is to a more violent world (1969: 79-80).

Curtis Beseda and other radical right-to-life fellow travellers have succeeded on the terms that Arendt spells out. They have achieved the short-term goal of closing or hampering the work of individual abortion clinics. And in their view, they are serving the cause of moral reform of a society that they see as having decayed under the influence of secular and material values that diminish the sanctity of life. For activists like these, violence is an obvious and rational course of action.

For moderate right-to-lifers such as Sharon Codispoti, Beseda and his counterparts have already gone too far. In Arendt's terms, their violence has allowed the means to overwhelm the end. In Mrs. Codispoti's words,

We have a pro-life President. We can still work through the legislature. There are many things we can still do to work toward saving lives without bombing, without terrorizing people. These people will stop at nothing to stop abortion (Quoted in Mawyer 1985: 59).

Despite these sentiments, it seems unlikely that the violence will decline in the near future. As the promise of gains through mainstream tactics appears unfulfilled, the appeal of violence grows. Commenting on the conditions under which extremism has emerged in American social history, Thomas Rose writes

Violence is a political resource when the bargaining process provides no other alternatives, or at least when some groups perceive no other alternatives. Political violence is an intelligible pattern of interaction that exists in America, but we refuse to understand and confront it as integral to our life (1969: 30).

Charles Rice, one of the pro-life movement's leading legal theoreticians sees people like Beseda and Scheidler as the crest of a "new pro-life movement" in which "there will be no more compromises." And indeed, Scheidler's plan is to co-opt the pro-life movement for the radical activists. Using the civil rights and anti-war movements as models, these extremists see the politics of disruption, made even more effective by the unstated threat of greater destructive violence, as the only way to achieve their goal. The NRLC's philosophy of embracing as many adherents as possible, they claim, has only splintered the movement into hundreds of tiny groups.

For a movement that is stymied as to an immediately effective strategy, people like Scheidler are both appealing and dangerous. He may breathe new life into the spirits of long-term activists discouraged at the minimal gains of 15 years of legislative efforts; in the process, the movement may be changed beyond recognition. The question is whether Scheidler, Beseda and others will become the heroes or

villains of the pro-life movement, the sources of its unity and ultimate success, or the polarizing agents who will divide the right-to-life movement and cause its division or final demise. In any case, their dramatic demonstrations bring issues to the public's attention, by gaining media attention in whatever form. With the Supreme Court and Congressional defeats of 1983, the available arenas for political action have been reduced; as a result, radicals and moderates are increasingly competitive. This friction is apparent in conflicts centered on the local delivery of abortion services. It is at this level, in the communities where they live, that pro-life forces of every persuasion currently have their most direct impact.

Conclusion: The Controversy As Interpretive Struggle

In an essay analyzing extreme political movements in the twentieth century from an anthropological perspective, Edmund Leach writes:

the moral status of any particular item of practical behavior will depend on how it is interpreted. It can be made to fit a variety of different norms according to the judgment of the observer. Action which is seen as disorderly and criminally offensive by one social group may be viewed as the epitome of heroic virtue by another. But where two such groups, with contrasted cultural values are incorporated within the matrix of a single political domain of larger scale, irresolvable conflict may result. And all modern states are culturally pluralistic in just this sense.

...the seemingly irrational sectarian violence which appears to be such a characteristic feature of our present age is symptomatic of this particular kind of inconsistency and ambiguity (1979: 12).

The process Leach describes characterizes the emergence, shape and escalation of the abortion controversy over the last 15 years, as the issue increasingly signifies "contrasted cultural values." In the 1960's, the debate was narrowly based and relatively civil, carried on

between professional elites over the question of permissible exceptions within the existing restrictive medical and legal definitions of abortion. By the 1970's, and especially since *Roe v. Wade*, as activism spread to a broad grassroots base, the signification of abortion became generalized and polarized.

Assesing the character of the changes in the right-to-life movement over the last decade, Tatalovich and Daynes write:

community conflict has been the dominant feature of the abortion issue during the period since *Roe v. Wade*. A community conflict is not a restrictive concept. It embraces the entire polity, from elites to masses and it is an intensely polarizing struggle that persists for some time. The absence of political moderation is a key attribute of community conflict..the success of political activists relates partly to their ability to cultivate public approval and thereby claim a degree of legitimacy for change..the abortion debate in the 1970's became much more intense, ideological and emotional.

In the 1980's, the scope of the conflict over abortion has expanded to the point where this controversy affects the whole nation. Abortion politics are not limited to any region of the country or any level of government.

In focusing on the local level, the controversy has not diminished; rather it has intensified.

The increased availability of abortion over the last decade has come to signify, for the pro-life movement, the dominance or at least prevalence of a fundamentally different (and unacceptable) interpretation of the world imposed from without. Thus, right-to-lifers consider the appearance of an abortion clinic in their community as an intrusion into their domain of what they perceive as a radically other aspect of the culture. Since pro-choice activity after 1973 has focused on extending services into parts of the country where they had not previously been available, the escalation of local-level conflict over clinics was almost inevitable. What is at stake, then, in communi-

ty battles such as the one in Fargo, is more than the issue of abortion services in one's own backyard, so to speak. These dramas are enactments of mutually exclusive interpretations regarding the parameters and possibilities of female sexuality, reproduction and identity and a contest for symbolic and material control over their definition and practice in the body politic.

1. The National Committee on Maternal Health held a conference on all aspects of abortion in 1942, the proceedings of which were collected in the volume, The Abortion Problem, Howard Taylor, ed., Baltimore: Wilkins and Wilkins, 1944). While the conference and book addressed many of the problems that became the focus of debate in the 1960's, it received little public attention at the time (Calderone 1958: 7). Twelve years later, the New York Academy of Sciences and Planned Parenthood Federation of Americas sponsored an Arden House conference on abortion - the proceedings of which were published in 1958 (Mary Calderone, ed. Abortion in the United States, New York: Hoeber-Harper). This event inspired the Kinsey Institute to publish its research on abortion in a book that became a classic on abortion in the United States (Paul Gebhard, W. B. Pomeroy, C. E. Martin and C. V. Christenson, Pregnancy, Birth and Abortion, New York: Hoeber-Harper, 1958). Other works published before 1960 include a collection edited by psychiatrist Harold Rosen Therapeutic Abortions: Medical, Psychiatric, Legal, Anthropological and Religious Considerations (New York: Julian, 1954), re-issued in 1967 as Abortion in America; and William Glanville's essays on legal questions, The Sanctity of Life and the Criminal Law New York: Knopf, 1957.

2. For a summary of abortion statistics during this period, see Luker, 273-274. As she points out, the statistics are problematic. Samples are drawn from women seeking contraceptives, and figures from spontaneous and induced abortions are often combined. It should be noted, as well, that the 1930's were distinguished as a period of rapid fertility decline. See Deborah Dawson, Denise Meny and Jeanne Ridley, "Fertility Control in the U. S. before the Contraceptive Revolution," Family Planning Perspectives Volume 12, (March/April 1980).

3. Abortion committees were to:

- 1) serve as deterrents to the indiscriminate use of therapeutic abortion;
- 2) they act in the best interests of the patient;
- 3) they are a medico-legal safeguard for the physician; and
- 4) they serve as repositories for the accumulation of data concerning the utilization and outcome of cases submitted for the therapeutic interruption of pregnancy.

Keith Russell, "Therapeutic Abortion: 10 Years Experience With Hospital Committee Control" American Journal of Obstetrics and Gynecology 89: 349-55 June 1964.

4. The issue was dramatized again in 1964 when a German measles epidemic hit the United States, resulting in the births of over 20,000 congenitally abnormal babies. In some states, doctors who performed abortions on pregnant women with rubella faced losing their licenses (Tatalovich and Daynes: 47).

In the same year as the rubella epidemic, a group of doctors, theologians and social workers formed the Association for the Study of

Abortion to compile and circulate data on abortion in order to garner public support for revising abortion law (Sarvis and Rodman 1974: 9).

5. Notable among these referral agencies were: The Parent's Aid Society in New York (1965) formed by Bill Baird; the Association to Repeal Abortion Laws (1966) established by Pat Maginnis in California; and the Reverend Howard Moody's Clergy Consultation Service (1967) operating out of Judson Memorial Church in New York City (Hole and Levine 1971: 253).

6. The states which passed reform laws between 1967-1972 were: Arkansas, California, Colorado, Delaware, Florida, Georgia, Kansas, Maryland, Mississippi, North Carolina, New Mexico, Oregon, South Carolina, and Virginia.

7. Nearly one hundred national organizations endorsed abortion repeal or reform prior to 1973, from the Moravian Church to the American Jewish Committee, to the Sierra Club. For a nearly complete list of these groups, see Table 2.2. Tatalovich and Dayne 1981: 66-67.

8. The statement, part of NOW's Bill of Rights for Women read:

The right of women to control their reproductive lives by removing from the penal code laws limiting access to contraceptive information and devices, and by repealing penal laws governing abortion.

9. For overviews of feminist organizing on abortion prior to 1973, see Hole and Levine, 299-301; Petchesky, 125-132; Luker: 95-125).

10. The Association to Repeal Abortion Laws founded in July 1966 by medical technologist Pat Maginnis was the first total repeal organization, maintaining that abortion is the only surgical procedure considered to be a criminal offense. ARAL's political activities included civil disobedience through direct action, referral services, classes in self-abortion -- as well as more conventional forms of political actions such as lobbying (Hole and Levine: 295-96).

11. Regarding the similarities between different periods of fertility decline in American history, Rosalind Petchesky writes:

The conditions of declining fertility in the 1960's and 1970's are not historically unique but resemble those surrounding American women born in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Over 20% remained childless throughout their lives. The childbearing cohorts of the late 1940's through the late 1960's had about 10%.

It is not the trends of today but the "baby boom" pattern of early and teenage marriage, legitimated pregnancies, and early and more frequent childbearing that constitutes the anomaly of the twentieth century (112).

12. For a summary of these battles, see Tatalovich and Dagler: 70-74. For more complete accounts, see:

N. Fujita and Nathaniel M. Wagner, "Referendum 20 - Abortion Reform in Washington State" in The Abortion Experience, Harold Osofsky and Joy D. Osofsky, eds., New York: Harper and Row. (1973: 232-261).

Alan F. Buttmacher, "The Genesis of Liberalized Abortion in New York" in Abortion, Society and the Law, David Wolburt and J. Douglas, ed. Cleveland: Case Western Reserve, 1973

Lawrence Lader, Abortion II, Boston: Beacon Press, 1973.

Bernard Nathanson, Aborting America, New York: Pinnacle Books, 1979

Pat Steinhoff and M. Diamond, Abortion Politics: The Hawaii Experience Honolulu: Hawaii University Press, 1977.

13. For discussion of how the privacy principles were applied to the abortion case, see Roy Lucas, "Constitutional Limitations on the Enforcement and Administration of State Abortion Statutes," North Carolina Law Review, June 1968.

14. The Roe v. Wade case involved an 1854 Texas law which barred abortion except when the woman's life was in danger. Doe v. Bolton was a Georgia reform statute which allowed abortions to be performed, with the approval of a hospital committee, to save the mother's life, or in cases of rape or fetal abnormality.

The court ruled that a state could not intervene in the abortion decision between a woman and her physician in the first three months of pregnancy. During the second trimester when (according to medical practice in 1973) abortion is possibly hazardous, the decision is still essentially between a woman and her physician. However, the state's interest in the health of the mother permits regulations to protect maternal health, e.g. by permitting regulations that require abortions from the fourth month on be performed in hospitals. When the fetus is potentially viable, during the third trimester, the state may prohibit abortion except when it is necessary to preserve the life of the mother.

These rulings were based on the doctrine of "the right to privacy," a broad interpretation of the 14th amendment's protection of personal liberty: that the state shall not deprive any person of life, liberty or due process of law. It was not based on the position argued by attorneys Sarah Weddington and Margie Pitts that women have an unconditional right to abortion. Regarding the fetus, the Court ruled that the unborn are not recognized in the law as persons in the whole sense.

See U.S. Supreme Court, Roe v. Wade, 410 U.S. 113, 1973, and Doe v. Bolton, 410 U.S. 179, 1973.

15. A number of feminists have critiqued the Roe v. Wade decision for sustaining the medical model of abortion. Reproductive rights attorney Nan Hunter describes Roe v. Wade as

a highly brokered decision. What women got was a limited right, hedged in all around by doctor's prerogatives. The court was unambiguous about its intent in that regard. The abortion decision in all its aspects is, inherently and primarily, a medical decision (quoted in George Scialabba, "The Trouble With Roe v. Wade," The Village Voice, 7.16.85).

Petchesky has a more or less similar critique. The right to privacy doctrine, she points out, asserts the personal and individual character of pregnancy, rather than acknowledging it as a condition that affects women as a class. She also argues that

despite its limitations, Roe v. Wade generally reflected the liberal climate [of the broad approval in the society for ...feminist ideas about equality and self-determination]. It established the legality and legitimacy of abortion, and it did so within a normative framework that emphasized women's health rather than abstract moralism or "fetal rights." In this sense, it was progressive, and its immediate impact was to expand women's access to abortion significantly.

For a useful overview, see Kristin Booth Glen, "Abortion in the Courts: A Laywoman's Guide to the New Disaster Area," Feminist Studies, Volume 4, February 1978: 1-26.

16. Why the Court decided to rule as it did can only remain subject to speculation, and there has been a good deal of it. For a lively journalistic reading of the abortion decision, see Bob Woodward and Scott Armstrong, The Brethren, NY, Avon, 1981: 271-284. In Luker's view,

from the official data presented to the Court, abortion reform appeared to be a national movement that commanded widespread public support. If this movement did not get satisfaction with the Roe and Doe cases, it was doubtless prepared to argue others...Conversely, the justices could conclude from the amicus briefs presented to them that the pro-life movement was perilously close to what its detractors claimed it was: a small, isolated group, ideologically suspect because of the predominantly religious nature of its beliefs.

Another incentive for the Court...was the fact that over a dozen states had liberalized abortion laws with different and often conflicting provisions [which] served to complicate rather than clarify the issues...Until it offered a ruling, the Supreme Court would have to deal with a growing patchwork of conflicting state laws (:142-43).

Also by 1973, public opinion polls showed considerable support for liberalized abortion; opposition to it seemed small and sectarian.

17. A number of works on the development of the right-to-life movement have been written, mostly by pro-choice activists and journalists - who strongly disagree with the pro-life perspective and tend to look primarily at the leadership of movement in terms of its connections to the Catholic Church and the New Right.

18. On the anniversary of the ruling, a "March for Life" is held in Washington D. C., drawing anywhere from thirty to fifty thousand grassroots supporters from around the country. Leaders of the movement, often at odds during the rest of the year, join together in a general display of *communitas* for this annual event which generally includes a meeting with the President. These demonstrations of renewed solidarity and commitment to the struggle are carried out in local communities as well, particularly in areas where there is an abortion clinic. For many activists, the ruling stands as a turning point at which they converted to and joined the cause (Luker: 137).

19. For a good summary of these developments, see Petchesky: 252-254; and Paige: Chapters III and IV.

20. Pro-lifers for Survival, Feminists for Life, and other right-to-life "progressives" organized a demonstration in Washington D.C. in 1972 nicknamed the Woodstock of the right-to-life movement. It incorporated standard symbolic elements of the anti-war movement, from the burning of birth certificates, to the singing of "Give Life A Chance" (Paige 1983: 69, 103).

The platform of New York State pro-life leader Ellen McCormack who ran for president on the Right-to-Life ticket supported federally-funded daycare, gun control and detente (New York Times 2/27/76 and 11/14/76).

21. The amendment strategy has taken two foci. One would declare that life begins at conception. Introduced at almost every Congressional session by Senator Jesse Helms, it has become known as either the Helms or the Human Life Amendment (HLA). The other strategy seeks to return the abortion legislation to the states. Senator Orrin Hatch (R, Utah) was the originator and sponsor of this proposal; it is commonly referred to as the Hatch or State's Rights amendment.

The HLA has been favored by "purists" because it symbolically represents the key element in the right-to-life position. However, because it poses a direct challenge to the authority of the Supreme Court, it is considered difficult to pass and is not favored as a strategy by much of the movement. The Hatch amendment is endorsed by the more moderate right-to-life forces, including most of the Catholic pro-life leadership. It is considered more likely to pass because it constitutes less direct a threat to the judiciary. It also has the support of those who object to the expanding role of the Supreme Court in policy-making.

In any case, passing a Constitutional amendment is extremely difficult. It must receive the backing of a 2/3 majority in the House and the Senate, and then be ratified by 3/4 of the states. Even when it is clear that the required votes are not there, right-to-lifers have pushed these proposals through Congress and state legislatures to

obtain a public record on where representatives stand on the issue. These voting records played a significant role in the mobilization of abortion activists to defeat or elect particular candidates on this "single issue." For a detailed account of the growing role of abortion activists in elections, see Paige, Chapter VIII.

22. In addition to efforts to simply ban the procedure, the bills and ordinances raised questions regarding requirements for:

- parental or spousal consent;
- hospitalization for second and third trimester abortions;
- disposal of fetal remains;
- informing a woman of the 'human-like' characteristics of the fetus;
- a 24-hour waiting period between the scheduling and carrying out of an abortion;
- municipal zoning and regulation of abortion clinics;
- the presence of a second doctor for late abortions when the fetus could be viable.

23. In July 1976, the Court ruled, in *Planned Parenthood of Central Missouri v. Danforth* that it was unconstitutional for husband's or parents to have veto power in a contested abortion. In 1977, in *Belotti v. Baird*, the Court ruled that states could require parental notification in the case of an abortion for a minor, provided that alternative means of obtaining consent were available, i.e. the approval of a judge if just cause were shown as to why parents should not be informed (The New York Times, July 3, 1979, March 24, 1981).

24. The Hyde amendment, named for its sponsor Henry Hyde (R, Ill.), is attached to annual appropriations for the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), formerly the Dept. of Health, Education and Welfare. Currently, only 15 states provide Medicaid funding for abortions.

The principle behind the Hyde amendment, that the state has no obligation to pay for abortions, has been expanded in practice. In recent years, abortion funds have been cut off for government employees, Peace Corps volunteers, members of the military and their dependents, and working women dependent on employment-related pregnancy disability benefits (New York Times, 7/1/1980).

25. When the Hyde amendment first passed in 1976, it was immediately challenged by Planned Parenthood and ruled unconstitutional by Judge John Dooling of the Brooklyn Federal District Court. This decision was overruled in 1977, when the Supreme Court ruled, in *Maher v. Roe*, that states are not obligated to pay for non-therapeutic abortions, thus allowing the enactment of the Hyde Amendment. In 1980, in *Harris v. McRae*, the court again upheld the constitutionality of withholding federal funds for abortion (*Harris v. McRae* 448 U.S. 297, 1981).

For an overview of some of the political issues -- particularly the "control of the Federal purse" -- entailed in these issues, see Tatalovich and Daynes: 184-186.

Most analysts see Harris v. McRae as inconsistent with Roe v. Wade. Petchesky, for example, notes that "it attacks the idea that women's right to abortion is so fundamental that no woman should be denied it...and that decent health care is a basic human need. It is impossible to reconcile the position the court took in 1980 with its opinion in 1973" (1299).

Radical feminist lawyer Catharine MacKinnon argues that the Hyde amendment and the attendant Supreme Court rulings are consistent with Roe v. Wade in that the "privacy" doctrine" assumes the liberal view that "private life" is a realm of autonomous, freely contracting individuals, rather than "a realm of pervasive inequality that requires public remedy"

(Catharine MacKinnon, "The Male Ideology of Privacy: A Feminist Perspective on the Right to Abortion," in Radical America, Volume 17, #4, July-August 1983).

26. There was little pretense as to the goals behind the New Right's "pro-family" agenda. As New Right political strategist Paul Weyrich commented in a special report on his movement in a 1979 issue of Conservative Digest, "The New Right is looking for issues that fit the bill...gun control, abortion, taxes and crime..Yes, they're emotional issues but they're better than talking about capital formation."

27. In 1979, NRLC staff person Judie Brown left that organization and began working with New Right leader Paul Weyrich to set up the American Life Lobby (ALL), while her husband Paul set up the Life Amendment Political Action Committee (LAPAC). With aid from New Right fundraiser and strategist Richard Viguerie, and with a mandate to organize fundamentalist Christians, ALL claimed 68,000 on its mailing lists by 1981. These New Right right-to-life groups have been in intense competition with NRLC since their inception. Fights over membership, political strategy, and ideology are frequent, as is oblique slander between the leaders of each group (Paige: 148-150, 169).

Though they never formally joined the New Right's "winning coalition," the NRLC was, nonetheless, among the principal beneficiaries of the 1980 conservative political victories. These campaigns yielded ten new "pro-life" seats in the Senate and 25 in the house (National Right to Life News, 11/10/1980).

28. The cases ruled on were challenges to local ordinances passed and challenged in Akron, Ohio and Virginia, Missouri. In brief, the court struck down as unconstitutional the following restrictions:

- Abortions after 12 weeks of pregnancy must be done in hospitals only;
- Physicians must inform patients of dangers of and alternatives to abortion;
- Physicians must enforce a 24-hour waiting period on patients;
- Physicians must dispose of fetal remains in a "humane and sanitary" manner.

The vote on these was six to three. The dissenters were Associate

Justices O'Connor, Rehnquist and White.

The following restrictions were declared constitutional by votes of five to four:

- Abortions after 12 weeks of pregnancy must be done in hospitals or clinics;
- A second physician must be present during abortions which occur when the fetus might be able to live outside the womb (currently at about 24 weeks gestation);
- Minors seeking abortions must obtain consent from a parent or a judge.

The most substantial dissent to the rulings came from Justice Sandra Day O'Connor, who wrote that the court is "clearly on a collision course with itself...It is certainly reasonable to believe that fetal viability in the first trimester of pregnancy may be possible in the not too distant future...The state's interest in protecting the potential human life exists throughout the pregnancy" (The decision and quotes from the O'Connor dissent come from coverage in The New York Times, and USA Today, 6.16.83.)

In the fall of 1985, the Court is expected to rule on two other cases involving state efforts to restrict access to legal abortions, a move considered surprising because the appeals present issues similar to the 1983 rulings. The cases, the Illinois Abortion Law of 1975 and the 1982 Pennsylvania Abortion Control Act, involve questions of "informed consent" (Pa.); the criminalizing of abortion when viability is a "possibility" and whether the state can mandate what abortion procedure can be used in late pregnancies in order to enhance the chances of a fetus not being killed in the abortion (Linda Greenhouse, "Justices Widen Review of State Abortion Curbs," New York Times, May 21, 1985.)

29. Figures compiled by the National Abortion Federation, a pro-choice watchdog organization, showed 115 violent incidents involving 46 clinics between 1977 and 1982. From 1983 and March 1985, there have been 319 acts of violence affecting 238 clinics.

According to the National Abortion Federation, "acts of violence" include invasions, vandalism, death threats, bomb threats, assaults, burglaries, kidnapping, arson and arson attempts, and bombings. The figures cited are from a March 1985 report, "Summary of Clinic Violence as Reported to the National Abortion Federation," National Abortion Federation, 900 Pennsylvania Ave, S.E., Washington D.C., 20003.

PART III. THE CONTROVERSY AS A SOCIAL DRAMA IN A GRASSROOTS SETTING

Chapter 4: Improvising the Script: The First Phase of Conflict, 1967-81

Introduction

The Fargo Women's Health Organization, run by a local abortion right's activist, is one of ten such facilities set up in small metropolitan areas by the National Women's Health Organization, a business headquartered in New York City. For the Fargo-Moorhead community, its opening in the fall of 1981 became the focus of a full-scale controversy engaging the attention if not the energies of much of the community.

The first word of the clinic's opening was met with anger and bewilderment. The transformation of a white clapboard house into a "convenience store for abortion," as opponents called it, provided the perfect image of evil imposed on innocence for people unwilling to believe that abortion and all it represents for them could be present in their quiet city. The clinic's appearance and location at the edge of a residential district close to a commercial strip (so that it is regulated as a business) embodies for some a disturbing image: the world of home and hearth slipping over the boundary of domesticity into the public arena of commercial exchange.

The sentiments of one pro-life activist -- nurse, mother of six, widow of a well-known Fargo professional -- were typical of many.

It's just a little house, a little paint, a little plumbing and it's a business. I truthfully don't think there are many people in this nice rural community who would start it on their own.

The feeling of "we" and "they" was exacerbated by the fact that the clinic is run from offices in New York City. This activist spoke as if the very need for abortion were being imported from Fargo's structural opposite on the East Coast.

I couldn't believe that an abortion clinic would open up here. In New York maybe, but right here in Fargo? I just couldn't believe it. They've got money behind it and they just railroaded it in. And the laws are on their side. All we can do is pedal on. I'd like it to happen that they stay here and they lose money and they have to shut down because people just don't need abortions in Fargo, North Dakota.

The possibilities of pluralism are, apparently, shaky in a moral world. It is one thing to acknowledge (regretfully) the local presence of "bad girls" who are unwilling to view motherhood and marriage as the inevitable outcome of sex. It is quite another to tolerate an institution that implicitly and publicly condones the separation of sexual pleasure from childbearing, marriage and domesticity. In the face of this impending social change, the pro-life forces in Fargo rallied, determined to dramatize their resistance to the alternative view of female sexuality represented by the presence of an abortion clinic.

The Setting¹

Fargo, with a population of 61,308, is small enough to provide a sense of a coherent social universe; yet, as the largest city in North Dakota, sitting just across the Red River from Moorhead, Minnesota (population 30,000), it encompasses a diverse population. Settled by German and Scandinavian immigrants who came in the 1870's at the urging of agents for the Northern Pacific railroad, Fargo has been the marketing and financial center for the wheat farmers of the region since the 1880's when grain elevators first began to mark the otherwise utterly horizontal North Dakota landscape. The construction of two major interstate highways in the 1970's helped to offset the effect of the decline of the railroads in the 1950's. Through the growth of the trucking industry, Fargo reinstated its role as a major

crossroads on east-west and north-south land transport routes.

Agriculture is the economic backbone of the city, which serves the needs of approximately 3000 farmers in the surrounding 50-mile radius. In addition, it operates as a distribution center to both Dakotas, northwestern Minnesota, Wyoming and Montana. Fargo is home to 300 major businesses and industrial companies as well as 81 manufacturing firms, most of which are involved in the processing of farm products and the production of farm equipment. Steiger Tractor, for example, the largest of 30 farm machinery firms in the area, claims it has made Fargo "The Four-Wheel Drive Tractor Capital of the World." Printing, metal-working, and concrete production rank as significant secondary industries. All told, manufacturing, finance, communications and wholesale trade employ approximately one-third of the local work force not engaged directly in agriculture.

Of those employed in non-agricultural salaried jobs, one third work in service industries. Education and health are prominent in this sector. Three universities and five technical schools in the Fargo-Moorhead area teach about 20,000 students and employ around 1000 instructors. Another 1000 teach in the 32 public and ten parochial schools that serve 15,770 primary and secondary pupils in the sister cities. Five hospitals and three clinics make Fargo-Moorhead the largest center for medical care between Minneapolis and Seattle, employing over 4000 people. Retail trade, providing another 8000 jobs, has flourished in the areas since the completion, in 1972, of a 16-acre shopping area to the west of the city just off the interstate, on what had been wheat fields and "prairie chicken" land only two decades ago. The new highway has also encouraged the growth of numerous

hotels and fast-food restaurants along its route, the latest technological advance in Fargo's 100-year history as a center for tourists and travelling salespeople in the region. With over one-third of the work force employed in relatively low-paying service occupations, it appears that Fargo's economy is changing in step with the rest of the United States. Between 1973 and 1980, 70% of all new jobs in the private economy were in retail trade and in services, especially health care and "eating and drinking places" (Rothschild 1981: 12). What this indicates is that unpaid household labor -- food preparation, laundry, care for dependents -- is increasingly being replaced by a low-wage, primarily female "pink-collar" labor sector. This expansion of a commercial service sector reflects a general transformation in the sexual division of labor and the relationship of households and the men and women in them to the overall economy.

Many Fargo residents take pride in their tradition of progressive populism and defense of individual rights, yet view themselves as politically and socially conservative in relation to the rest of the country. This takes shape in frequently expressed concerns that undesirable social change is being imposed on the region from without; the discovery of oil in the western prairies and the legalization of gambling to benefit charities in 1977 have exacerbated such worries. A blackjack pit boss in a posh casino in Fargo put it epigrammatically.

My mother can't understand what's going on. She says, "Kyle, how can there be gambling going on in the state where Lawrence Welk was born?"

The Fargo-Moorhead area has over 90 churches serving 50,000 adult members, over one-third of whom are Lutheran, and just under one-third are Catholic. The balance belong to non-Lutheran Protestant denomina-

tions, with Fundamentalist and Evangelical congregations growing faster than any others in the area. The Chamber of Commerce boasts that the Fargo-Moorhead area has the highest regular church attendance of any standard metropolitan area. This fact takes on significance in light of survey research which shows that regular participation in church is one of the most significant variables associated with anti-abortion attitudes (Blake and Pinal 1980). That correlation was demonstrated in the defeat of efforts to liberalize abortion laws at the state level when abortion reform legislation was first introduced in 1967; and again, more than a decade later, in the reaction of Fargo residents to news that abortion services were going to be offered in their city.

The Social Drama

In the following discussion and analysis of the controversies that took place over abortion in Fargo, I use Turner's model of a social drama. In Turner's definition,

Social dramas...represent sequences of social events..organized primarily through relations in time rather than in space,...

The phase structure of social dramas is not the product of instinct but of models and metaphors carried in the actors' heads (1974: 35-36).

The four phases accessible to observation are:

1. Breach...a symbolic trigger of confrontation or encounter;

2. crisis...a tendency for the breach to widen and extend until it becomes coextensive with some dominant cleavage in the widest set of relevant social relations to which the conflicting or antagonistic parties belong...a threshold between more or less stable phases of the social process (: 38-39);

3. redressive action. In order to limit the spread of crisis, certain adjustive and redressive "mechanisms,"... informal or formal, are swiftly brought into operation by leading or structurally representative members of the disturbed social

system (: 39);

4. reintegration of the disturbed social group or of the social recognition and legitimization of irreparable schism between the contesting parties... (:41).

The Initial Breach and Crisis: 1967-1973

The abortion controversy first took shape in North Dakota around the introduction of abortion reform bills to the state legislature. From 1967 until the Supreme Court ruling of 1973, the crisis that emerged reveals how, at the local level:

- national developments had effect and took distinctive shape;
- pro-life and pro-choice activists organized and consolidated membership, organization and ideology;
- a context was set for the more highly charged and divisive conflict that erupted with such intensity in 1981.

In the 1960's, the existing North Dakota abortion law permitted the procedure only to save the life of the mother. Though rarely enforced, the law had the expected inhibiting effect on practice. Hospitals in the state rarely performed abortions. A few private physicians were known by word of mouth to be sympathetic in providing abortions for their own patients and/or referrals to out-of-state doctors for other women. While it is difficult to generalize about illegal abortion in America, it appears that in Fargo, the informal provision of abortion practice changed over time in a pattern similar to that of the rest of the country (Luker 1984: 92-108).

The experiences of three generations of women in one family provide a quick sketch of the changing social and cultural place of abortion over the last half century. The grandmother, born in 1910 -- a divorcee with the responsibility for supporting several small children

during the Depression -- recalled realizing she was pregnant and being completely overwhelmed at the thought of having another child.

I got up one day and I knew I was going to do it. I decided to clean the house from top to bottom and I know I did it [aborted] scrubbing the stairs. And for years, I guess, I couldn't even sweep those stairs without feeling guilty.²

One of this woman's children, born in the 1930's, was adamant that her own offspring would be well-educated about sex and contraception. When her own daughter reached the age of 12 in 1971, she told her that if she (the daughter) got pregnant "she would be at the abortionists before she could blink twice." The mother had names of people who performed abortions before they were legal; when they became legal, she knew exactly where to go for the best care. The young woman who received this education, born in 1958, has become an adamant abortion rights activist and has played a prominent role in defending the clinic.

One older woman who had been part of the early underground referral network described how it operated over the last half century from the perspective of the physician's involved.

During the 1930's, a number of doctors who people knew would do abortions practiced here. For example, if a woman in her 40's with high blood pressure and four kids got pregnant, they would help her out. In the 1940's and 1950's, it was a common scenario for a teenager to be brought in for a D. and C.³ The nurses would just deal with it and let it go. But by the end of the 1960's, it was no longer possible for a doctor to do an abortion as they had fifteen years before. They wanted legal protection for what was becoming customary.

In North Dakota, as was true throughout the country, the only organized constituency to back the first efforts to legalize abortion was the state medical association whose head was eager to legitimate the abortions some of the doctors in the state had been performing.

The background and motivations of the woman who first introduced

the bill -- Ronna Hartman -- were similar to those of others who pioneered abortion reform legislation in the 1960's (Luker 1984: 69-71). She had not previously been an abortion advocate; as a freshman representative, Ronna was looking for an issue to represent.⁴

My first session in the legislature was in 1967 and one of the things that struck me was that most specialize in one field. So I thought, "What am I going to be good at?" And here were a whole bunch of men making all these decisions about the lives of women and children and the women themselves know more about it than the men do. So then I thought, "Well maybe that's what I should do..." So I started searching around the legislation of other states and the first thing I came across was Colorado's abortion bill, but there was no information about abortion available in Fargo, North Dakota at that time. I mean you wouldn't even say the word.

I tried to talk to my doctor about it. The impression I got was "Don't rattle any cages. Right now we can do what we have to do, but you start monkeying around and things won't get better. They could get worse." So then I went to the legislative Council Director and I told him I wanted the bill drawn for the legal termination of pregnancy and I thought I was going to lose him right there. He just looked at me horrified and said, "Do you have any idea what will happen to you if you introduce the bill?" And I didn't have any idea.

Her lack of awareness of the issue's potential volatility was due not to ignorance; rather, it characterized the nature of the conflict at that time. Because of the relative invisibility of the issue, Ronna, like many of the early participants in the abortion reform movement did not see it as explosive or highly charged, capable of rallying serious opposition (Luker 1984: 108).

When Ronna introduced reforms in 1967, the main support she received was from state medical interests. Although her interest was in representing women, she did not yet have feminist backing, because

There wasn't such a thing at the time that I knew of. I have always said that I accidentally got into the women's movement. We really didn't hear much about it in North Dakota at that time.

Initially, opposition to reform was minimal; the proposed bill

lacked only five votes to pass. By the next session, in 1969, when Ronna sponsored reform legislation again, anti-abortion activists had begun to organize. The Catholic churches, which were beginning to put money and energy into the issue on a national basis, bussed parishoners in from around the state to attend the hearings. The crowd was such that the hearings were moved to the highway department's auditorium. The bill received only 15 votes and Ronna was deluged with hate mail.

I remember after that bill I actually got sick. I had to leave and go to my hotel room. All this mail, the terrible things they said to me at the time from the floor of the house. It's murder, you're killing babies...They made it seem so awful, things I would never associate with myself. But I have to admit it gets to you after awhile. You get yelled at enough and it does something to you.

Her surprise not only at the existence of an opposition, but with the substance of their arguments, indicates how quickly the social construction of the issue altered as abortion became a matter of debate and eventually, a symbol encompassing and representing two worldviews. What had been considered a normal legislative procedure in 1967 -- introducing a bill to change a nineteenth-century law that no longer seemed appropriate -- was now defined as a breach by the newly-emerging opposition to abortion reform.

The right-to-life forces in North Dakota in 1969 were typical of the nascent stages of pro-life activism nationally. They formed initially on an ad hoc basis in response to efforts to reform and repeal abortion laws in state legislatures (Luker 1984: 127-137). By 1971, when Ronna introduced abortion reform for a third time, they were well organized though not yet large, well-known, or popularly-based.

This time, before I went out there, I got a telephone call from the Associated Press. "What have you got to say about

this new organization?" "What are you talking about?" "Well, that Right-to-Life group." I didn't know anything about it. "Never heard of it..Who's involved?" I asked.

Ironically, the first head of North Dakota's Right-to-Life Committee, a Lutheran, a surgeon and a state representative, had helped draft the first abortion reform bill in 1967. This reflects, in a sense, how similar the activists in the first stage of abortion organizing were to each other. Initially, each position was defined and dominated by professional elites -- doctors, lawyers, clergy, policy makers -- who came into contact with the issue through their work (Luker 1984: 127-28; Leahy 1975: 45-53). Of those who testified on both sides at the state hearings in North Dakota, most were doctors, clergy, and social service workers; two prominent pro-life leaders were brought in from Minnesota and, by report, gave "devastating testimony" which ensured the defeat of the proposed reforms.²

The hearings and votes in North Dakota paralleled the national situation: in state after state, it became clear by 1971 that right-to-life forces, though small in number, could successfully block any move for revising the law through legislative reform. In North Dakota, as the chair of the state Right-to-Life Committee (NDRLC) recalled:

They [the pro-life leaders] saw where the abortion people were going and that they were working on more and more legislation to liberalize abortion laws..So there was a grassroots reaction in North Dakota and several other states, you know, not to let this kind of thing that was happening in New York happen here. So some of them got together and said, "We've got to get this going and we need some kind of coalition." So the NRLC has been grassroots from the very beginning because it was founded by chapters through the state organizations and then became a national organization, not the other way around.

The 1972 Referendum: Improvisation and Rehearsal

Despite the emerging right-to-life opposition, several doctors, convinced that popular opinion would be in favor of reform, gathered 10,000 signatures for a state referendum on abortion in 1972. They neglected, however, to organize an educational campaign to garner support. When they approached Ronna for help, she felt she had reached her limit on the issue, especially in an election year. Two friends, Ethel and Millie, who she knew from the League of Women Voters (LDWV), agreed to take over for her. A brief account of the referendum battle in N.D. and Fargo in particular shows how the issue and the opposing groups were beginning to take shape, creating social and symbolic divisions around abortion that endured and developed and emerged anew in 1981.

Ethel and Millie, both born in the 1930's, were members of Fargo's professional upper middle class. Each had gone to an elite college, married local professional men -- a lawyer and a doctor -- and devoted themselves to raising families and to community activities such as the PTA, the YMCA, the AAUM and the liberal Protestant churches to which they belong. Both women saw their interest in abortion rights as an extension of their long-standing advocacy of birth control and sex education, but not from a particularly feminist perspective. Their social position and attitudes regarding abortion are typical of one segment of the abortion rights constituency at that stage of the movement's development. Ethel, for example, had worked for nearly a decade as a volunteer at the Family Planning Center that had opened in the 1960's. She linked her overall concern with birth control and abortion to a twentieth-century version of the nineteenth-century

eugenic arguments that had been used against abortion. Her stance resembles that of many of the early supporters of abortion repeal who tied the issue to class interests, expressed through fear of overpopulation.

I have always felt that Malthus was right. The population bomb was going to explode, that we are developing an underlying population for which we have no use, a part of society that doesn't fit in. I feel strongly about the government allowing young girls to keep their babies [AFDC programs].. And I think the other great social problem we have is the refusal of the father to take responsibility for the child.

The idea of abortion reform was new to most residents of North Dakota who were going to be voting on the referendum. For that reason, and because of the circles they travelled in, Ethel and Millie were relatively unprepared for opposition.

The YWCA and the American Medical Association (AMA) auxiliary and the AAUW came out early with pro-choice statements. They were very modest. They were so rational that we thought their would be no problem getting people to accept it. It was a shock to see what people would do, to find out how angry they were. We thought we were trying to be moderate.

While Ethel and Millie may have been protected from knowledge of the controversial potential of the issue due to the social world they inhabited, this world also provided them some measure of protection from its consequences.

You really got labelled. You must realize that every hamlet, every little village, everybody had someone to do their advertising, to say how terrible abortion was. And this was a subject you didn't talk about. You didn't know the necessity. It was something you associated with bad girls who needed punishment.

Had my husband been a retail merchant, I would have had to think about doing it. But I had a lot of independence because my husband was head of his own firm and reasonably prominent. I was secure and I didn't care about politics. So I was probably less afraid of all the opposition.

Most Fargo residents recall first hearing about the issue during

the 1972 referendum campaign. Through the referendum process, an issue that might have remained in the confines of the legislature, was brought into a more broadly-based arena and catalyzed local-level activists. It was the appearance of the abortion issue close to home, then, that generated right-to-life support beyond the already committed professional elites. Luker's characterization of right-to-lifers mobilized during a comparable period in California could apply to the new recruits in Fargo at that time.

Most of those mobilized between 1967 and the eve of the Supreme Court decision were still those who were strategically placed in the social world to notice the abortion situation...They were physicians, social workers or people who counseled unmarried pregnant women. (: 135)

The following fragment from Caroline, a woman who became active in pro-life work during the 1972 referendum, provides a sense of how that "strategic placement" operated in gaining right-to-life support.

I didn't have any feeling one way or the other until the referendum came up. Until then, it wasn't an issue I had to think out my feelings on. I was working as an ob-gyn nurse, a labor nurse. I'm sure that accounts for a lot of my feelings about life, working with women who miscarried or had stillborns. The doctor I was working for dragged me to a meeting. Right-to-life was in a formative phase then locally. He was doing a lot of speaking, going out and presenting his views on abortion. He felt it was really important that there be a positive side. We had a slide show. We went around wherever we were invited, to small towns, to church groups to colleges.

Although many people were surprised at the existence of opposition, the nature of the controversy as it was defined at that point was much more moderate when compared to the dynamics that took shape a decade later over the clinic. In 1972, the issue had not yet come to represent two cultural stances. The activists during this first phase, because they shared certain professional interests, were less likely to cast those who took the opposite tack as being wholly unlike them-

selves. In Luker's view, because of their professional identities, they

faced a number of pressures not to appear "fanatic" on the pro-life issue but to be "dignified" or "professional" in pursuit of goals.

For example, virtually all of the early pro-life activists had some friends who disagreed with them on abortion (: 146).

For Caroline, it was not simply that she already had friends who supported abortion rights.

We became friends through speaking together. It's almost humorous. We'd be put opposite each other on TV and then go out for coffee afterwards. At that time, there were so many people who didn't know; today it's pretty commonplace for people to know what abortion is.

To "know what abortion is," as Caroline put it, entails not some objective knowledge of abortion. It refers to the significance it took on as pro-choice and pro-life activists consolidated not only their organizations but a chain of cultural associations as well that abortion, over the next ten years, would come to represent for each position.

The initial stages of that process were taking place in Fargo during the referendum, particularly for right-to-life activists. Popular pro-life wisdom casts abortion rights advocates as outsiders, imposing their will on "community values." In fact, the right-to-life mobilization, while building on sincere concerns of local people such as Caroline, received more assistance, resources, expertise and leadership from outside the state than did the pro-choice cause, which had virtually no external support. The 1970 abortion repeal victories in four states had stimulated the growth of a national strategy on the part of the NRLC to combat the growing abortion rights efforts. Meetings and frequent communication, supported initially by

the Catholic Church, reinforced the organizational and personal ties among prominent activists in each state. For example, a right-to-life veteran of the Washington state referendum came to North Dakota to assist them in their battle (Leahy 1975: 38).

By 1971, the NRLC had developed two of their key pieces of literature, the Handbook on Abortion, by Jack and Barbara Wilke; and the "Life and Death" brochure featuring a greatly-enlarged photograph of a fourteen-week fetus which, a decade later, has become both an emblem and a cliché of the right to-life position. However, in 1972, North Dakota was the "test market" for this new image. Its apparent shock value, coupled with a strategic distribution scheme proved effective, at least in winning the vote. As Ethel recalled:

They distributed this color brochure with a picture of the fetus door-to-door in Fargo and the rest of the state on Sunday and Monday, so we couldn't respond since the vote was on Tuesday. I remember I went and spoke the night before the election when that darn pamphlet landed on people's doorsteps. I got this absolutely tremulous woman who came to talk to me. You could see that her faith was really shaken...Well the referendum was defeated very badly [78% in the state, 64% in Fargo], and it was a real setback.

The defeat of the referendum served, temporarily, as a redressive action. Rather than reintegrating the "disturbed social group," it served to legitimize the "irreparable schism between the contesting parties." In addition, it succeeded in dramatizing the strength of the opposition sufficiently so that pro-choice activists were chary of publicly advocating abortion rights. And, the vote is still cited today by right-to-lifers as proof positive that North Dakotans don't want abortions in their state to receive public approval.

In a sense, the legislative and referendum battles in North Dakota served as improvisations on contending cultural themes that

abortion was coming to represent. In 1972, the more polarized understandings of the issue that developed over the next decade were just beginning to be formulated; the script for the social drama to come was being rehearsed. During this first enactment, antagonistic groupings were not so much revealed as constituted.

While overt conflict over abortion was rare in Fargo during the next ten years, pro-life and pro-choice forces endured and consolidated, evolving in relation to local and national developments. During the 1970's, then, the script was revised, players were recast, and the action was restaged; by the time the controversy erupted for a second time in 1981, the drama had intensified and taken more coherent shape.

Revising the Script: The Effects of Roe v. Wade

While pro-life forces considered the referendum a clear victory, their sense of success was short-lived. The passage of Roe v. Wade two months later overrode the vote and spurred many who had been catalyzed by the North Dakota battle to become more involved nationally. Ann Webber, current chair of the N.D. Right-to-Life Committee (NDRLC) recalled:

Well, then in 1973, we were shocked with Roe v. Wade. We didn't just have an abortion question then. We had a Constitutional question. But it wasn't our idea. It was those seven guys on the Supreme Court that rewrote it. And that surprised the pro-abortionists even more than it surprised us. They were not at all prepared for that kind of success on the basis of one court case.

Ann's assessment of her opposition was indeed correct. Ronna Hartman still remembers vividly her own reaction to the ruling.

In 1973, the miracle happened. I was sitting on the education committee and all of a sudden someone slipped a note in front of me that said, "The Supreme Court just legalized abortion." It's very rare you get to see something through to

the end like that and it's an incredible feeling.

For pro-choice activists both locally and nationally, the Supreme Court ruling had the ironic effect of undercutting the immediate base of their organizing campaign; their central goal had been achieved. A midwestern NARAL activist summed up the effort succinctly.

Everyone assumed that when the Supreme Court made its decision that we'd gotten what we wanted and the battle was over. The movement lost its steam.

By contrast, the right-to-life movement picked up momentum in two directions, both of which took organizational shape in Fargo. The pro-life state leadership chose a strictly political route. They began to organize local right-to-life committees throughout the state to push for a "human life amendment". The president of NDRLC who was also a representative to the state legislature promoted the group's agenda primarily by introducing pro-life bills at every legislative session. Such efforts were also backed by the Catholic Church's pro-life network which had a contact person in every parish who could "generate 1000 phone calls in an hour if anti-life or anti-family legislation comes up." Political organizing was, however, minimal and more or less inactive at the local level.

A second group of pro-life supporters who first were mobilized in 1972 -- mostly women in their 50's and 60's -- maintained their activism in a different direction. They chose to focus on providing "alternatives to abortion" and founded a chapter of Birthright, an international organization set up to provide emotional and material support for women with unwanted pregnancies, in order to deter them from choosing abortion.* The woman who was president of Fargo's Birthright chapter from 1972 until 1982 explained why she chose to

channel her interests in that direction.

I decided to work for Birthright instead of the Right-to-Life Committee because I was a nurse and I wanted to help the girl who was pregnant. It's just placing a hardship on the whole society and I felt I knew the reproductive system. I knew I could talk to them, and I had children. I was a mother, and I love babies. I mean I really like babies. My wedding day I said, "I'll take three girls and three boys." I will always help the girl who was pregnant, no questions asked. If you don't want abortion, then you better help the girl who is pregnant.

Gradually, because of the visibility and potential availability of abortion, women with unwanted pregnancies -- particularly unwed teens -- were acquiring a new "meaning-value," not only for activists but for the community in general. The same year that Birthright was founded, one of the two homes for unwed mothers that had been established in Fargo in the 1920's ceased operating because it could not fill its 35 beds; the second shifted its services to women with drug or delinquency problems. This changing signification of female sexuality was taking shape on a national level as well. Regarding this process, Rosalind Petchesky writes:

In the context of an (lawful, clinical) abortion, the sexuality of the teen-age girl takes on a very different meaning from what it has in the context of an out-of-wedlock birth, especially for white middle-class teenagers... One-half million unmarried teenagers a year getting legal abortions represents a "sexual event" that cannot be concealed and therefore must be measured, sealed off, studied, categorized, regulated and contained (1984: 209-210).

In Fargo, this process of reinterpretation of the social meaning of unwanted pregnancies became apparent in confrontations between "professionals" and activists at public community meetings. Social service workers and public school teachers who had been dealing with problem pregnancies expected -- as did activists on both sides -- that with legalization, abortion services would become available locally.

The primary counselor for unwed teens in Fargo, Mary Mintz, described how the growing availability of abortion looked from her perspective.

I had been doing abortion counseling service since long before the Supreme Court ruling. There were people doing back alley abortions in West Fargo and I would do anything to stop that. For awhile I would help patients make calls and then I decided it was dangerous and not right. And then, all of a sudden, girls were hearing about doctors in South Dakota, and I wanted to know if it was safe. So I used to send people to them even though it was 300 miles away. You could see the handwriting on the wall, that a clinic would open here eventually.

After the Supreme Court ruling, Mary and several other social service workers, formed a task force to find someone in the community to provide abortions. After meeting three or four times, the group decided to hold a public meeting on the issue.

I'll never forget it. We had placed a very carefully worded ad in the paper just to be sure we would get anyone from the community who was interested. Well, the Catholic churches alerted their people to come to this meeting and make their opinion known. Hate calls started pouring in. Then, at the meeting, all these big-bosomed women with their chins jutting out, in their 50's and 60's, walked in. I thought I was going to get lynched. Some of the doctors started ranting and raving about abortions, and even Dr. _____ who makes referrals said he would never do it.

Thus, while right-to-lifers had only a minimal presence in formal state politics, they sought to control through informal means, the interpretation and practice of abortion at the local level. One of the early pro-life activists explained what motivated action to obstruct the implementation of local services:

When it becomes legal it becomes right. And if it's available, people will abort much more readily. They'll think it's right. It's just so abnormal. I believe in people's rights but I also believe in maintaining some community standards.

Since abortion was irrefutably legal, pro-life activists shifted the grounds of the conflict to the "grey areas" left unclear in the Court's decision -- questions regarding a woman's rights to have access

to abortion -- and aimed at restricting the delivery of abortion services through whatever means possible. In Fargo, "gatekeepers" such as Mary Mintz were targeted and harrassed for making abortion referrals. Of the five hospitals and three clinics in the area, none would provide abortions.

This was the case not only because of the specific presence of pro-life opposition; it was also due to the substance of the Roe v. Wade ruling as well. The working out of that decision in practice made clear that although it was popularly identified as a victory for the feminist demand that a woman have "the right to choose," the ruling grew out of different premises. The doctrine of "the right to privacy" on which Roe v. Wade was based was intended to uphold a doctor's right to make a medical decision. The court offered no provision or guarantee for making abortion available.⁷ And, the health care system did not respond uniformly to the increasing demand for abortion services.

The gradual realization of the uneven availability of abortion in Fargo and many other parts of the country catalyzed, throughout the 1970's, pro-choice efforts to ensure more widespread, low-cost abortion services (Tatalovich and Daynes 1981: 104). This resurgence in abortion rights activism in response to what was viewed as an abdication of responsibility by the medical community was part of the arena in which the clinic opening was staged. The following overview of this medical context is critical to understanding the developments in Fargo during the late 1970's, and helps clarify the processes through which national policy regarding reproduction is translated into local terms.

The National Arena: Abortion Practice in the 1970's

Implicit in *Roe v. Wade* was an assumption that physicians and health institutions would respond to the decision "in a manner that reflects society's delegation to doctors a virtual monopoly control over the delivery of health services" (Jaffe, Lindheim and Lee 1981: 31). Within five years of the ruling, termination of pregnancy became the most frequent operation performed on adults in the U.S. (ibid: 7). However, it was not the mainstream medical community that acted to meet this demand. The statistics are compelling. In 1973, out of approximately 6000 general short-term hospitals in the U.S., only 1,064 offered abortions; ten years later, despite the tripling in the number of abortions, only 1,405 hospitals performed them. (Catholic hospitals are excluded in these figures.) Of these, only 16% are public hospitals, which are the main health care resource for poor women (Henshaw, Forrest and Blaine 1984: 123).

While the adoption of new services by hospitals generally spreads in a wave from large teaching hospitals to smaller institutions (Moch and Morse 1977), the case of abortion is apparently atypical. According to at least one study, the range in hospital policies is accounted for primarily by the personal attitudes of medical personnel, hospital officials or the governing body (Nathanson and Becker 1980: 126). The lack of hospital response to community needs for abortion is hardly surprising if one looks at the performances of hospital committees between 1945 and 1973. This transfer of authority for abortion decisions from doctors to senior medical staff had the opposite effect of the stated intent, to make abortions more equitably available. Committees arbitrarily imposed personal or religious views on

patients (Sarvis and Rodman 1974: 36-45). Hospital administrators and boards, concerned more with the hospital's image than women's health care needs, feared that too high an abortion rate would brand them as a "mill." The effect of these policies was that between 1945 and the mid 1960's, reported hospital abortions dropped from 30,000 to 8,000 (Lader 1966: 24).

The reluctance of hospitals to provide abortions, and the growing evidence that out-patient abortions could be done with safety (Nathanson 1972: 403) created the need and opportunity which led to the establishment of free-standing abortion clinics throughout the country. Such facilities, almost non-existent before 1970 except for a few "underground" operations, numbered 679 in 1982,⁹ and accounted for 77% of all abortions that year (Henshaw and O'Reilly 1983: 124, Table 6) and nearly all the growth in abortion services. Emerging out of the pre-1973 abortion referral network run by feminists, clergy and health-care activists, these clinics now form a network that operates more or less independently from the mainstream health institutions -- other than through referrals and back-up arrangements with hospitals in the event of medical complications.⁹ According to studies by the Center for Disease Control (CDC), clinics have a better overall safety record than hospitals (Brimes, Cates, and Taylor 1978: 323). They are distinguished from hospitals in other ways as well. Clinics generally provide "more and better abortion services, with significantly lower complication rates, more attention to counseling and birth control and at a much lower cost than the nation's hospitals" (Petchesky 1984: 128).¹⁰

While free-standing clinics have successfully filled the vacuum

left by the medical establishment, there are still striking differences by region and state in the availability of services. While the number of women who have had to leave their home state for an abortion dropped from 25% to 6% between 1973 and 1980 (Henshaw and O'Reilly 1983: 12), there were still no abortion providers in 78% of all counties in the country, home to 28% of women aged 15-44 (Henshaw, Forrest and Blaine 1984: 119). Commenting on this situation, authors Jaffe, Lindheim and Lee write:

Poor distribution of health services is endemic in the U.S. But the delivery pattern for abortion services that has emerged since 1973 is beyond precedent...medically simple procedures like abortion usually are provided by physicians and hospitals near the patient's home (1981: 15).

Given the rise in and stabilization of the abortion rate,¹¹ one might ask what the effect is of this uneven distribution of abortion services.¹²

Research on factors affecting abortion practice show that the local availability of abortion services is the single most powerful determinant of variations in abortion rates in the U.S. (Borders and Cutright 1979: 117-133; Henshaw, Forrest, Sullivan and Tietze 1982:8; Jaffe, Lindheim and Lee 1981: 34). This is perhaps most evident in the statewide variation in abortion rates (the number of abortions/1000 women of reproductive age, i.e. 15-44.) While the rate for the U.S. in 1980 was 29.1%, it ranged, by state, from a high of 43.6% in New York and California (with 289 and 535 providers respectively); to a low of 12.0 in Utah (five providers) and 12.6 in North Dakota and South Dakota, each of which had two providers (Henshaw 1983: Table 7; Henshaw and O'Reilly 1983: Table 9). In assessing these figures, Jaffe, Lindheim and Lee write:

This extraordinary range of services does not occur in the delivery of other health services. One could ask if there are comparably wide differences among women in different communities to account for these extremes. The fact is, however, that there are not large differences among U.S. women in the factors relevant to the abortion decision: rates of unintended pregnancy, contraceptive practice, and desired family size. In addition, industrial and rural states in all regions can be found among the "high" rate areas, as are cities in the traditionally conservative Deep South and Midwest. Clearly, any simple explanation such as the "conservatism" of Middle America compared to the cosmopolitan characteristics of the two coasts, cannot be sustained. In fact, the only major difference between areas with high and low abortion utilization is the availability of abortion facilities (1981: 16).

While these authors are correct in emphasizing the ubiquity of the need for abortion services, what they overlook in their evaluation is the social and cultural context that resists or encourages the establishment of facilities in a particular locale. The Fargo case, together with the hospital studies cited above indicate that, the medical community is extremely sensitive to local pressure. Thus, it is easy to understand why, in a social environment sufficiently hostile to abortion to make powerful hospitals nervous about offering abortion services, free-standing independent clinics might be reluctant as well to open for business.

1. Information for this section is drawn from the following sources:

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A History of Fargo North Dakota and Moorhead Minnesota

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"Fargo: The Largest City in North Dakota,"

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St. Paul, Minn.: Minnesota Dept. of Economic Development, 3/1981

Office of the North Dakota Conference of Churches, Bismarck, N.D.

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Tweton, Jerome and Theodore B. Jelliff

North Dakota: The Heritage of A People, Fargo, N.D.: N.D.

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U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census 1970

"General Social and Economic Characteristics of North Dakota" Table 85

U.S. Dept. of Commerce, Bureau of the Census 1980

"Supplementary Report: Advance Estimate of Social, Economic and Housing Characteristics, North Dakota" Table P-3

2. In an informal study conducted by students at the University of North Dakota at Grand Forks, women born at the turn of the century reported that they used few methods of birth control, but had a range of "home remedies," i.e. abortion methods, for terminating unwanted pregnancies (Sherry O'Donnell, personal communication).

3. D. and C. refers to dilation and curettage, the most popular abortion technique in the United States until recent years, and still the most widely used procedure for early termination of pregnancy. The cervix is dilated to allow the insertion of a curette, a scraping instrument, into the uterus, in order to scrape the pregnancy from the uterine wall (Sarvis and Rodman 1974: 89).

4. The experiences of Assemblyman John Knox and Anthony Beilenson in California, who introduced the first abortion reform measures into that state's legislature in 1961 and 1963 respectively, were almost identical to those of their counterpart in North Dakota. They had no prior experience on the issue, and were moved by their initial exposure to the sufferings caused by illegal abortions. As young politicians, they wanted to "make a name for themselves by supporting causes that were new but not dangerously controversial," indicating how differently abortion was perceived as a political issue at that time. For more detail and interviews with Knox and Beilenson, see Luker 1984: pp. 66-72.

5. According to participants at the 1971 hearings, the bill was done in by testimony from the Mecklenbergs, who were among the earliest prominent leaders of the Right-to-Life movement. Founders of the well-respected, moderate Minnesota Citizens Concerned for Life (MCCCL), they were also instrumental in the break of the National Right to Life Committee (NRLC) from the Catholic Church. (They are Methodists.) Dr. Fred Mecklenberg is an ob-gyn. Marjorie, his wife, was a former home economics teacher, mother of four and a key figure in setting up support services for pregnant teens in Minnesota. She is currently working for the Reagan administration. For more detail, see Paige, 1983: 82-85.

6. Birthright, established in 1968 in Canada by Louise Summerhill, now has about 510 centers in the U.S and 85 in Canada. They are non-denominational, non-profit, local operations run by volunteers, with small annual budgets from local donations. The national office provides each chapter with a small portion of its \$80,000/year income to establish a telephone "hotline." By the national organization's own estimates, they see about 500,000 women a year. See Louise Summerhill, The Story of Birthright, Thaxton, Va. Sunlife Press; and interview with Denise Coccioni, Birthright's U.S. director, in "The Pro-Life Juggernaut" James Ridgeway, The Village Voice, 7.16.85: 29.

In Fargo, until recently, the group operated out of volunteers' homes, on an annual budget of \$2-3000. It offered pregnancy tests, medical help from sympathetic professionals, and "shelter homes" to approximately five to seven pregnant teens/year.

In 1982, under pressure from LIFE Coalition to be more active, the group became more professional. They opened an office, hired a director, began to advertise and aimed for a budget of \$20,000/year. They receive about 60 phone calls and provide about 15 pregnancy tests a month, and place about 7 unwed mothers in homes in a year. Recently they have started a "Parent's Support Network" for the families of pregnant teens. While the group claims to be non-denominational, most of its board, volunteers and support come from Catholic clergy and laity.

7. "The [Roe v. Wade] decision vindicated the right of the physician to administer medical treatment, according to his professional judgment, up to the points where important state interests provide compelling justifications for intervention [maternal health and the viability of the fetus]. Up to these points, the abortion decision in all its

aspects is inherently, and primarily, a medical decision, and basic responsibility for it must rest with the physician" (Roe v. Wade, 410 U.S. Supreme Court 42 1973: 166) (emphasis added).

In the companion Doe v. Bolton decision, the Court ruled that abortions did not require the approval of hospital abortion committees. While this had the effect of increasing women's access to abortion, it was intended to support the physicians right to make and carry out medical judgments. See Doe v. Bolton, 410 U.S. 179 (1973): 189.

8. I have combined the authors' figures for free-standing clinics and physicians' offices in which 50% or more of the visits were for abortions; and for clinics that offer abortions as one of a range of services.

In addition, the authors' cite 714 medical offices where abortions are performed but are less than 50% of the caseload. Together, these non-hospital services account for 82% of abortions (Henshaw, Forrest and Blaine 1984: Table 6, p. 124).

9. It is ironic that these facilities, which were created to fill the breach left by the medical community, were then held suspect because of their lack of affiliation with it. A theme that surfaces over and over again in right-to-life arguments, for example, is that many of the clinics (69%) are run "for profit" by physicians, individuals or corporations. (Non-profits are run by women's health collectives, Planned Parenthood affiliates, or voluntary organizations.) These pro-life accusations regarding profit-making clinics are part of their more general critique of the increasing materialism of American life: they assert that abortion has become an industry making millions of dollars off the misfortunes of women. Given this point of view, it is hardly surprising that one of their strategies since 1973 has been to "put abortion out of business." The metaphors equating abortion with undesirable commercial establishments are constant: clinics are referred to as "convenience stores," "7-11's," "stop and chops," and the like.

A recent study of non-hospital abortion providers showed virtually no difference between profit and non-profit facilities in terms of services offered, patient fees, load and location. See Henshaw, "Free-standing Abortion Clinics: Services, Structures, Fee," Family Planning Perspectives, Vol. 14, Number 3, September/October 1982; and Uta Landy and Sarah Lewit, "Administrative, Counseling and Medical Practices in National Abortion Federation Facilities," ibid.

10. For example, 86% are open on Saturdays or have late hours to accommodate patients' schedules. Unlike hospitals, almost all clinics have specially trained abortion counselors. Such counseling, available for "significant others" as well as patients, generally includes a review of the medical risks, a description of the procedure, birth control information, and often a discussion of possible alternatives to abortion. 80% of clinics encourage parental involvement in the decision. Most require in-house pregnancy tests; perform the abortion within a week of that test, and provide optional post-abortion check-ups (Henshaw 1982; Landy and Lewit 1982).

11. Between 1972, when abortion was legal in 28 states, and 1982, legal abortions rose from 586,760 to 1,573,920, a rate that has been essentially stable since 1980. For a complete review of the statistics, see the Center for Disease Control Abortion Surveillance Annual Summaries; and Henshaw, Forrest and Blaine, "Abortion Services in the U.S., 1981 and 1982," Family Planning Perspectives, Vol. 16:3, May/June 1984, Table 1: 120).

12. Henshaw, Forrest and Blaine, in their 1984 overview of abortion in the U.S., note the following obstacles imposed by the need to travel to obtain an abortion: expenses are increased due to transportation and lodging costs, loss of work time, and the possibility -- due to increased delay -- of aborting at a later stage of pregnancy at which abortion is not only more expensive, but more dangerous to the woman's health.

These problems are particular burdens for poor and teen-aged women who are often those in greatest need and with the least resources. For example, a study for the CDC based on 1974 data from Georgia showed that for every ten miles that a woman lived outside of Atlanta, where abortion services are located, abortion rates for teens dropped by 11 per 1000 live births (J.D. Shelton, E.A. Braun and K.F. Schulz, "Abortion Utilization: Does Travel Distance Matter?" Family Planning Perspectives 1976, Volume 8: 260).

Chapter 5: Prologue, Breach and Crisis: The Clinic Controversy, 1981-82

The general sketch in the preceding chapter is, more or less, the larger, setting in which the second public conflict over abortion took place in Fargo. It erupted in 1981 when it first became apparent that abortion services would be offered in the area. The social drama that unfolded shows how those who came actively to oppose the clinic were simultaneously contributing to and resisting the changing signification of abortion as its practice shifted from the realm of the private, illicit and unseen, to the tolerated, public and visible.

The Pro-Choice Actors

Throughout the 1970's, women in the Fargo-Moorhead area who wanted abortions were faced with either driving at least 500 miles, or using one of two doctors in the state whose reputations were questioned by pro-choice and pro-life activists as well as medical and social service professionals. Despite the apparent need, the introduction of safe, readily available abortion services to Fargo was slow in coming. It occurred in large measure due to the dedication of one activist, Kay Bellevue. Because of her own negative experiences with the health care system during the birth of her first child, she became involved with the women's movement in the early 1970's. Through that activity Kay became connected to feminist networks both locally and nationally which provided her with critical cultural, social and material support. Access to these resources was essential to creating the conditions that allowed Kay to fulfill her dream of opening an abortion clinic that would meet the needs of women in Fargo as she understood them.

Kay Bellevue moved to Fargo from another Midwestern city in 1972.

At the age of 27, she was married with three children. She had been actively involved with La Leche League (a national organization promoting natural childbirth and breastfeeding) for six years, and had a growing interest in feminism. Shortly after moving to Fargo, Kay became aware of and involved with a group that was starting a local chapter of the National Organization for Women (NOW). Her desire and decision to focus on reproductive issues divided her from the others in the group who had lived through the 1972 state referendum defeat of abortion reform.

That was when I really began educating myself on the issues, and I got real frustrated because they [other Fargo feminists] did not want to get involved with abortion. They thought it might be construed as being linked with the ERA and that [passage of the ERA] was of utmost importance to them.

Kay quickly became identified as the spokesperson for the pro-choice position on abortion in the community. She spoke occasionally in public and testified at the state legislature, keeping informed on the issue through contacts at a large abortion clinic in Minneapolis, the nearest large city.

In 1974, a National Abortion Rights Action League (NARAL) staff person, looking for an organizer for the Upper Midwest region, got Kay's name from the Minneapolis clinic and contacted her by phone. As Kay recalls:

I remember the phone conversation specifically. She said, "There's going to be an organizing conference in Sioux Falls, South Dakota. I wonder if you would be willing to come down there and attend the conference, see how it's done and make the commitment to do the same thing in North Dakota. You don't have to answer yes or no. I know this is a major decision. I'm sure you want to think about it and talk to your husband about it."

So I went ahead and went to the organizing conference and then I held one in North Dakota. Of course no one

was willing to take over the state coordinator's position except me. Although it started out as a larger participatory group, it became in many ways a paper organization, a committee of three to four women.

NARAL's inability to draw local support was due not so much to lack of local concern, but to the negative stigma abortion still carried in Fargo despite its legalization. One of the women who worked with Kay on the state NARAL committee in the late 1970's recalled:

We didn't say boo about abortions back then, not around here, anyways. Even after legalization. We worked very diligently. We got a brochure together, we had articles of incorporation. We had meetings. But in those days we were pretty quiet.

Feminism in Fargo

Although organizing people around pro-choice efforts was difficult in the mid 1970's, a local women's movement was gaining momentum. The brief efflorescence of feminism in Fargo between 1974 and 1980 was a central experience for most of the women who emerged as pro-choice activists in 1981, and played a critical role in reshaping local consciousness regarding gender.

Feminism first "went public" in 1974 when a nascent local chapter of the National Organization for Women (NOW) marched through the main shopping mall with petitions for the ERA. The next year, a statewide coalition of pre-existent women's groups -- the YMCA, the AAUW, the Business and Professional Women's Organization, the League of Women Voters -- joined with NOW and ran a successful lobbying campaign for passage of the ERA. That same coalition, under the auspices of the three universities in the Fargo area, sponsored a series of public lectures during 1975-76, which Kay took responsibility for organizing. The events covered a range of issues from "morality and others," to

"self-determination," to "the family and the law," as well as theatre and art events featuring local talent. Entitled "A Declaration of Interdependence," each lecture featured a prominent national figure, such as Betty Friedan or Elizabeth Janeway, along with a local counterpart. Thus, in their structure, the events drew connections between national feminist concerns and those of women in the Upper Midwest. In so doing, Fargo feminists were claiming and reshaping the agenda of the national women's movement to fit the North Dakota environment, as the following statement of intent demonstrates.

The legacy of the plains begins with the pioneer woman's influence on the land; it is sustained by women's accomplishments in the home and the community, and the impact of women workers on our industries and institutions within our society; it requires the recovery of women as a natural resource. These are the qualities we celebrate in the year of our Bicentennial and Commemoration of International Women's Year.

With each program in the series, interest grew until, as one of the organizers recalled:

We had to change the auditorium from week to week because the crowds kept getting bigger and bigger and bigger. We'd sit and have coffee afterwards and when the series was over we couldn't let go, and the Baker's Women's Center emerged out of that in the fall of 1976.

Statements from the founders of the Center give a sense of how the women in Fargo were further clarifying their local interpretation of feminism.

We are feminists, but we are not rabble-rousing bra burners. We named the group the Baker's Center for Women because we are also feminine and the idea of baking bread is very woman-oriented. It also has a spiritual meaning in the sense of breaking bread together, a communion of people with similar needs.

This kind of rhetoric, along with the Center's location at the United Campus Ministry, emphasized, as did its name, the local feminists'

insistence on symbolic connections with home, family, domesticity and religion, what Fargo feminists in 1981 called "midwestern feminism." This term describes their selection and accommodation of ideologies to fit the social organization of local life sufficiently to allow them to be effective in achieving at least some of their goals. For example, a series of lectures on the issue of sexual assault led to the establishment of a Rape and Abuse Crisis Center. Between 1977 and 1983, the Center grew from a two-person operation to a well-respected service agency with a staff of ten and an annual budget of \$265,000, raised mostly through local philanthropy. As the Center's Executive Director explained:

Our evolution and sensibility fits in with the women's movement here. The Rape Center was identified as feminist to the degree that I would hear a group of businessmen at a restaurant talking about "the amazons who work at the rape center." But there was another blend, which is why the Center made it, of normalcy, of common people strong in their beliefs about feminism but who managed not to turn people off. So community support has really grown. Rape is an easy issue here compared to abortion.

This brief sketch is intended not only to show the context out of which pro-choice support came; it also indicates that local opposition to abortion was not necessarily anti-feminist as it was locally defined. Even among ardent Fargo feminist activists, the abortion issue sometimes drew ambivalent reactions.

There is no issue in the women's movement in which I can more readily accept opposition. If someone starts having opposing views on any other issue, I question their support for feminism. The issue of abortion is one where I can tolerate dissension.

In Kay's view, fear of local opposition and the fact that legal abortion was the status quo made the abortion issue a difficult one around which to organize.

In fact, the explanation may be even more simple: even people who felt strongly on the subject were unaware, for the most part, that abortion was still essentially as unavailable locally as it had been prior to legalization. The woman who eventually became the president of the pro-choice group that formed in 1981 described her own misconceptions.

By the time in 1973 when I understood that abortion was legal, I thought you could just go to the Fargo Clinic and get one and I thought great. It's covered by health insurance. It's finally a normal procedure and people understood the need for it.

By the mid-1970's the lack of abortion services and the increasing success of right-to-life efforts to restrict them became more publicly visible. In 1977, the Hyde amendment banning the use of Medicaid funds for abortion passed in Congress. In North Dakota, as Kay remembered,

I was out at the state legislature in 1977 testifying against a bill to block federal money from any agency making abortion referrals. I was so pissed off when the bill passed [it was eventually declared unconstitutional] that I went back and listed my home phone number as the Abortion Referral of North Dakota. I did a lot of abortion referrals. And one of the reasons I became so committed to opening something here was people would just call over the phone and say, "Why isn't there something like this available in Fargo?" And the more I got those phone calls, the more I thought something has to be done about this.

Since support from feminists or physicians in Fargo was not forthcoming, Kay's access to expertise and resources outside the local arena was essential to accomplishing her larger goals. Her role as state coordinator for NARAL provided those connections and clarified her framework for activism as well.

Through my involvement with the national organization, it became clear to me that it is a political issue as much as everybody would rather it would not be. And lobbying is not effective unless you have people there who are

sympathetic to your point of view. You can talk your head off to the conservatives in the North Dakota state legislature and it doesn't do any good.

Anyway, while I was on the NARAL Board, I met Sharon [who had been setting up clinics in small cities throughout the country] and I said, "Gee, if you ever want to come to Fargo let me know." And lo and behold, two years later, in 1979, I got this phone call. "My assistant has done some research and we're really interested in coming to Fargo. Would you be interested in working with us? Without somebody like you, it's not even worth it."

In 1979, Kay began working to set up the clinic and, not surprisingly, met with resistance from the outset. As has been the case for other clinics in small metropolitan areas, one of the most difficult steps was finding a location. Between 1977 and 1979, over eight clinics had been hit by fires, all but one of them in the Midwest (Tatalovich and Daynes 1981: 113). No one wanted to take the risk of renting to an abortion clinic. Finally after two years of searching, a realtor who had been personally affected by abortion agreed to rent an old house to Kay and Sharon, which they would renovate into a clinic. In order to keep the owner anonymous, the business was conducted through a blind trust. The local work crews were not told what the eventual use of the building would be. Sharon's prior experience in setting up clinics convinced her that as soon as word was out that an abortion clinic was in the works, pro-life people would attempt to bring zoning restrictions against it in order to stop it. Her fears proved to be justified.

The Pro-Life Actors

A veteran of the right-to-life activity around the 1972 referendum recounted with some delight how she found out about the clinic through the criss-cross of social networks that characterizes Fargo. Her discovery was the "precipitating incident" that catalyzed the second wave of pro-life activism in Fargo, the breach that triggered a social drama that has endured for four years.

John [a pro-life doctor] called me up and said, "Corinne, there's an abortion clinic going up in Fargo. My friend who's a doctor at the _____ Clinic called me up and told me he was approached by an organization wanting to know if they would take care of any girls that needed to be hospitalized. So I said, "Let's start digging. Let's go down to City Hall and see if there are any building permits.." I knew they would never list it as an abortion clinic, so I looked at anything that sounded suspicious.

I picked the building and I hung around but I couldn't get anything out of the guys remodeling the building. So I asked who was doing the plumbing and the guy was the father of a friend of mine from pro-life. So she got the blueprints and it was obvious then. So we decided, ok, we're gonna form a group. And that's how it all got started.

The mobilization of local pro-life sentiment around the clinic made it clear how much the right-to-life movement had changed since the referendum ten years earlier. While the Catholic Church had played a primary role in 1972, by 1981, the organizing was carried out by grassroots leaders of local right-to-life chapters. And, rather than the male professionals who had been the core of the right-to-life opposition, the founders of the group opposing the clinic were almost all female.

About a month before the clinic was scheduled to open, a variety of local people opposed to abortion banded together to form a coalition called LIFE -- Life Is For Everyone -- led by Linda Anderson. Born and raised on a Midwestern farm, Linda is now the wife of a farmer and

part-time salesman, a man she met in college in 1973 where they were both involved the youth division of the NRLC, Save Our Unwanted Lives (SOUL). As a devout Catholic, Linda believes the taking of any innocent human life is wrong, but she sees abortion as a special case linked to broader concerns. Like most of the other pro-life activists in Fargo, she takes the legalization of abortion as a sign of growing narcissism in American society, symbolized by the unwillingness of women to carry an unwanted pregnancy to term.

I think it says an awful lot about our society, an awful lot. You know, when we hear about the "me-ism" concept, this is typical of the abortion issue. Sure it may not be easy to carry a pregnancy through nine months, but here again, are you thinking only of yourself or are you thinking of your unborn child? The decision whether or not to have that child should be made before the woman is pregnant. If she does not want to have a child, then she should take steps so that she does not have a child. If she does get pregnant, then she better be able to accept the responsibility of carrying that child to term and not taking that child's life.

Linda taught home economics and then served as a banquet director at a local hotel until the birth of her first child. Now, with two children and a third on the way, her time is filled with childcare, running the farm with her husband, and serving as president of LIFE, a job which includes supervising office staff and volunteers and speaking to the public.

The New Right in Fargo

While at the surface level the LIFE Coalition appears to have emerged wholly in response to the clinic, in fact, it was a manifestation of three trends that had been growing since the late 1970's. Conflated and identified at the national level as "The New Right," these organizational processes included:

1. the consolidation of the Right-to-Life movement and strategy;
2. the rise of a new style of political conservatism; and
3. the growth and spread of born-again Christianity.

The North Dakota Right-to-Life Committee (NRLC) had been holding state conventions every autumn since 1978 in different cities throughout the state. While these events had little immediate political effect, they served to consolidate networks, provide training for people, and refine the "pro-life position" among members. When the convention was held in Fargo in 1980, the event was organized by Ann and Linda, leaders in the local Right-to-Life chapter and founders of LIFE Coalition.

Linda and I had our baptismal fire at that convention. We went to the national convention that year in Omaha to see the kinds of things they talked about and types of programs we should cover. And then I've gone a few times to the national Board meetings and so I really learned a lot.

The skills they gained through the experience were critical to the successful mobilization of LIFE Coalition in 1981.

As the right-to-life movement consolidated at the state and national level through its own organizational structures, the anti-abortion position became associated, increasingly, with the emerging political efforts of the New Right. The complexity of this process was apparent at the national level in the struggle for control of the abortion issue between the "moderate mainstream" National Right-to-Life Committee and more traditionally conservative political action committees.

Anti-Feminism

In addition, the issue was increasingly associated with a growing conservative anti-feminist movement, the emergence of which was clearly marked in 1977 at the International Women's Year (IWY) Conference in Houston, Texas. The Fargo delegation included both pro-choice and pro-life activists. At the conference itself, nearly 25% of the delegates were opposed to at least some portion of the proposed feminist agenda. Phyllis Schlafly, head of Eagle Forum, a group she organized to stop passage of the ERA, held an independent press conference at the event in order to voice her objections to legalized abortion, lesbian rights and the ERA. Due in part to Schlafly's high public visibility, the right-to-life position came to be identified as a distinguishing feature of anti-feminism. The conflation of these two positions persists despite the fact that many pro-life activists do not share Schlafly's views. Nonetheless, at the IWY, her action gave dramatic expression to the sentiments of an increasing number of women who dissented from at least some of the feminist program and its claims to represent the interests of all women.

A similar enactment of this growing division between women, focused on the abortion issue, occurred at the 1980 White House Conference on Families. The following passage from a Fargo right-to--life activist who attended the conference is illustrative.

In 1980, I was elected to be a delegate to the White House Conference on Families. I was put on a state committee and we just did brain-frying things trying to work out these issues on abortion. And we went back and forth and back and forth. Our committee turned out to be pretty close, 50-50, you know. But I tell you after three days at the state level and going on to the national level, I really drew my opinions on it.

You know, I strongly believe in equal opportunity for women. And I didn't like being labelled at this White House Conference that I was against all these rights for women just

because I took this stand on abortion.

They say they're open-minded. I was a Democrat and labelled as being liberal all along and all of a sudden I took a stand on that issue and I was put in with everybody else like Phyllis Schlafly. Some kinds of things she says I really have trouble with, like she strongly believes in a fortified nation and I don't know about that. That's why I didn't like the idea that they [Schlafly et al] completely took control. You all get lumped up; you are all considered a part of the right wing, you know.

I used to criticize conservative people but when you're put into things with them, you start seeing some good things about them, too. You know, liberal and conservative doesn't make sense anymore. It really doesn't.

New Christian Right

The success of the right-to-life push in Fargo rested not only on the consolidation of pro-life forces nationally and locally and the growing conservative shift in the country. It was aided by a third development as well. During the late 1970's, Evangelical Christian activity -- what has come to be known as the the New Christian right -- had taken root and grown in the area as it had in the rest of the country.¹

In Fargo, this new style of worship was introduced informally as people, and especially women, from mainline congregations began to join and form prayer groups. These groups were based, primarily, either at the block or neighborhood level, or through local chapters of national organizations such as Women Aglow.² Initially these developments were looked askance. In their membership, they violated what had been strictly maintained boundaries between different denominations, such as Lutherans and Catholics. In their worship style, they promoted behavior such as speaking in tongues and laying on of hands that was looked on with suspicion. The popularity of the movement was such, however, that the mainline congregations, nervous

that they were losing adherents, began to incorporate charismatic worship style and other similar innovations into their own religious practice. By the late 1970's, these groups began to have a more formal presence as membership in Evangelical and Pentecostal churches, such as the First Assemblies of God, began to swell.³ Their increased visibility was due not only to their increasing numbers but to their entry into the political arena as well, on issues such as abortion.

While many analyses of the pro-life movement attribute much of its growth and appeal to the urgings of Fundamentalist and Evangelical Christian leadership, the way in which they became identified with the abortion issue in Fargo reveals a more complex cause-and-effect relationship. Most of the pro-life activists in Fargo who converted to born-again Christianity did so after they had developed a strong commitment to the right-to-life cause. The explanation most often given for the switch in religious affiliation was that these churches took a stronger stand against abortion than their former congregations. This was true even in the statements of former Catholics who became Evangelicals, and in cases where pastors only took a stand on the abortion issue after much pressure from right-to-life members who had recently joined the church. One local pro-life woman who left a mainline Lutheran church to join an Evangelical counterpart described this process:

You know, the Pentecostal churches are the fastest growing in the nation. The Evangelicals and the Assemblies of God. And that's true for this area. And it's funny. When LIFE Coalition formed, it was the first time a lot of people from other religions had any contact with Assemblies of God. And some of our good pro-lifers that were Catholic joined the Assemblies at the time that all this was emerging. Like a lot of pro-lifers, I've come to find I'm very conservative with my religion, but I'm very liberal with my political views.

Well, we [she and her husband] joined the Evangelical church and at the same time, the Evangelical community was claiming to be more pro-life. National Christian leaders like Dobson, LaHaye, Schaeffer and Koop have spoken out enough to say you gotta get involved. In our area alone, in the last couple of years, the biggest amount of our speaking engagements has been for the Evangelicals.

In 1980, a number of Fargo right-to-life leaders made an effort to bring one of the influential pastors of the Assemblies of God congregation into the pro-life ranks. By his own report, he was "converted" to the right-to-life cause after one screening of what has been their central film, "Assignment: Life."

I saw the film "Assignment: Life" and it really shook me up. I didn't even know what right-to-life was about. I thought it was a Catholic issue. I showed the film to 22 Evangelical ministers here. We reached 2000 people in three showings. When we showed it here, we got a lot of attention. We had pro-choice pickets outside. The media was here. That was great. I like controversy....

As I began to speak out, women would come to me about their problem pregnancies. From doing that, I've grown to hate abortions. And it looks like with the Supreme Court it will become more common. I was fighting it so strongly when the clinic came and there was no way we could stop them. I've learned to accept that it's here and we have to help. We try and build our ministry around needs and that includes the abortion issue.

While his church holds no official position on the issue, the fact that this pastor now serves on the board of LIFE Coalition has marked his congregation, unofficially, as a central anti-abortion constituency.

As is true nationally, this unprecedented alliance around abortion among evangelical Christians, Catholics, and certain mainline Protestant denominations is not particularly solid. On the one hand, "churchhopping" is now frequent and has brought with it an increased tolerance among lay people that was unheard of twenty years ago when Catholics and Lutherans were hesitant even to converse in public together. At the same time, this phenomenon has bred competition for

congregants as the Assemblies of God and other smaller born-again congregations draw members away from other churches. In addition, considerable tension persists due not only to competition, but also because of clear differences in political styles and strategies. The pastor of the Assemblies of God clearly understood how these other factors entered into the rather shaky coalition over abortion he maintained with other parts of the community. As he explained,

I'm a pawn for LIFE Coalition because I'm an Evangelical and they want to expand their base. But we're very aggressive and they perceive us as taking over things. I like the conflict. We're proud of it. LIFE Coalition isn't used to that.

While the pastor of the Assemblies of God views his approach as courageous, the head of the pro-life division of the Catholic diocese sees the Evangelicals as politically naive and potentially undermining in their crusading enthusiasm. In the view of this priest,

We work with First Assemblies. They used to have their own anti-abortion group two years ago [1980]. They disbanded it when we formed LIFE Coalition. The alliance is thin. Politically, they are novices. They are so hep on stopping the clinic. We know we are beat from the legal point of view. But we thought we could expose them to the public.

I feel very good about what we've done. We've had a lot of effect and not come off as condemning or as rabble rousers, but as caring people.

Tensions between the two groups have flared up periodically, both nationally and locally, particularly since 1983. However, in 1981, in the immediate crisis around the clinic opening, the differences between the "mainstream" right-to-lifers and the Evangelicals were momentarily submerged in the initial press for unity.

From Breach to Crisis: The Clinic Opening

LIFE Coalition brought the conflict over the abortion clinic into the local political arena with their first action, a petition to the City Commission. They requested that the the Commission revoke the yet-to-be-opened clinic's building permit, on the grounds that it did not list abortion as one of the services it would offer. One of LIFE's Board members described how the petition served to generate broad pro-life support in the community, even among those who had not been mobilized previously.

The clinic was the first thing that really brought everybody together. We contacted all the different leaders of the pro-life movement that had their own offices to attend the City Commission meeting. There must have been 700 people at that first meeting.

We passed out petitions and got signatures there and that was our first mailing list. That's what we call "hallway recruiting." So Linda organized the names, Corinne worked on getting volunteers, and I organized the prayer vigil outside the clinic building. And it was amazing. It had been completely unorganized and then everybody came together. So we opened up about the same time the clinic did. At first, you have the spirit and you don't have the form, and then you have the form and the spirit.

In the absence of the Mayor, the four-member City Commission voted two to one, with one abstention, to revoke the clinic's building permit. The first-term Mayor, a liberal Democrat who had received substantial support from feminist groups in his election campaign, immediately reinstated the clinic's permit when he returned from out-of-town the following day. He declared the clinic was fully legal under federal and state law. Discriminatory enforcement of local regulations, he argued, would simply involve the city in a costly, dead-end lawsuit. The members of LIFE Coalition, stymied by the actions of their Mayor -- a Presbyterian from rural Iowa who is now an econo-

nics professor and father of two -- predicted his defeat in the mayoral elections six months away.

In the meantime, a second pro-life force emerged. A team of two self-styled Evangelists calling themselves Partners In Vision published a full-page ad in a biweekly shopper, denouncing abortion. They asked for contributions for their efforts and a city-wide vote on abortion. To follow up on their ad, the Partners sent letters to 5700 businesspeople and professionals, asking them to send money and cast a vote on abortion on a ballot enclosed in the mailing. The last sentence of their letter, with its implications that votes would be made public, did them in with the citizens of Fargo.

Your failure to respond may be considered as unconcern and a vote in favor of the abortion clinic by the general public.

The editorial run by the Fargo daily newspaper summed up the generally angry response to such tactics.

Our paper has traditionally been opposed to abortion on demand and we continue that policy strongly. But we are opposed to this effort to force a certain segment of our community to express personal views on a moral subject that has nothing to do with their professions or businesses.

All persons have a right to their private views and should not be penalized for exercising that right. This episode has been unfair to those persons who have sincerely objected to the clinic and expressed that displeasure in measured and lawful forms (Fargo Forum, October 20, 1981).

By dramatizing the mailing as a violation of privacy in the sphere of commerce, the editorial helped to crystallize opposition to Partners In Vision on the part of LIFE Coalition's membership.

More generally, the incident demonstrated how the struggle to gain control over the presentation and interpretation of the abortion issue was occurring as much within the local pro-life movement

as between it and its more obvious pro-choice opposition. The reaction of LIFE's members to Partners In Vision made clear not only the thinly veiled struggle between the "mainstream" and born-again Christian style and strategy. The pejorative depiction of the Partners as "outsiders" allowed LIFE to distance themselves from the two. As one of LIFE's leaders put it,

They're not part of us. We can't disclaim them too much because it looks like you're disclaiming your own basic principles. We just didn't give them much support or rally to their cause. They might have had their hearts in the right place, but they certainly didn't have their heads in reality. They sincerely believe in the issue, but they're using it to promote themselves. The national media would have taken them and made them the whole story. These two were disassociated people who created a lot of media hype but had no roots.

A lot of people who supported them were disappointed that it wasn't going into the mainstream movement. It taught us something though. They could reach a certain element that we hadn't directed ourselves to.

The Partners had only shallow roots in the community and were looked on with some suspicion by the more established residents of Fargo who make up the ranks of LIFE. One Partner, a resident of the area since the late 1970's, is a salaried special assistant to Jerry Falwell. The other, who had opened a Christian coffee house called the Holy Smoke Shop, had only recently settled in town. Because they were newcomers to the area, and acted in a way that violated norms of appropriate behavior, Partners in Vision could command no moral authority as representatives of community sentiment. Thus, they discredited a potent subtext of LIFE Coalition's position, to achieve legitimacy through community support and control.

If the activities of Partners In Vision rallied anyone, it was, ironically, their pro-choice opponents. A group calling itself Citizens for A Real Choice (CRC) took out a full-page newspaper ad, a

statement defending the clinic with over 2000 signatures. Although there were no abortion rights groups in place in Fargo in 1981, CRC was able to mobilize almost as rapidly as their LIFE counterparts by tapping into pre-existent networks. Formally, these included the numerous feminist groups that had consolidated during the mid 1970's; and the traditionally liberal organizations that had supported the 1972 referendum such as the ACLU, the YWCA, and the AAUW. Informally, pro-choice activists mobilized friends and kin who had been passive supporters of abortion rights to "go public" in a moment of crisis. The following description by a college librarian who was mobilized to support the clinic is typical.

When the health clinic controversy came up, it just picked me up and motivated me to get involved. It was a topic of discussion in various groups I attended, like NOW and the Women's Equity Group at the university. And I'd known Kay through political work. So I got in there very quickly; I was on the original board. But for awhile, it was very ad hoc, just a group of concerned people. I was getting signatures for the ad, getting money. There was lots of discussion about what we should do, a big push for going public with our side, letting people who read The Fargo Forum [the local daily newspaper] know there are people who are pro-choice.

The clinic really needed support then. I guess I first thought of myself as a woman. But the whole born-again movement and this legislating morality, none of that sits too well with me either.

Initially, the spokesperson for CRC was Janice Sundstrom, a professional woman active in state and local politics who took a considerable career risk in embracing a public pro-choice stand. While her current social position and commitment to feminism fit the stereotype both right-to-lifers and some social scientists have of pro-choice women, there was little in Janice's early personal biography that would distinguish her from local pro-life women. She grew up in the area, in a family that lost its farm during her childhood. A year

after completing Catholic high school, she married her "steady," a man who now works as an accountant. When she became pregnant, Janice dropped out of college to raise her first and then her second daughter. Ten years ago, with her interest in politics growing, she went back to school and eventually earned her law degree. Her position on the abortion issue reflects almost a complete reversal of the views she had as a young woman.

I was raised a Catholic and was much opposed to abortion and somehow between 1968 and 1971...I came to realize that women were going to have abortions whether they're legal or not. And unless they're legal, some women will die in the process. My change in attitude, my personal feeling about abortion, grew out of a sensitivity to the place of women in this society.

As activities on both sides escalated their campaigns in Fargo, abortion became the topic of countless Sunday sermons and Rotary Club luncheons. Each side dramatically enacted their claims to both religious and secular authority. LIFE Coalition held a rally of 400 people who marched around City Hall singing patriotic songs, culminating in prayers and performance by Evangelical musicians. The following Sunday, Citizens for A Real Choice sponsored an ecumenical prayer service at the university, featuring Gloria Steinem as a speaker.

Despite all the controversy, the clinic opened on October 1, 1981 with only a silent prayer vigil outside, a protest that LIFE members have maintained faithfully ever since, even through the winter of 1982, the coldest on record in North Dakota. Two weeks later, a last effort was made by Partners In Vision to stop the clinic. A petition with eight signatures was presented to the City Commission by an attorney hired by Partners, requesting that the clinic be closed until public hearings could be held to establish local rules for its opera-

tion. Just before Thanksgiving, in front of an expectant and divided crowd, the City Commission voted unanimously to deny the petition. Their vote affirmed the position of the Mayor and, in a sense, presaged his re-election in April 1982. Despite their best efforts, pro-life forces were unable to find a candidate to run against the incumbent.

The efforts of LIFE and Partners In Vision to constrain the clinic through local political channels were an attempt not only to stop the availability of abortion services locally. They served as well as an assertion about the nature of their "community" and who has the authority to define it. In the ongoing claims made by either side, it is not only abortion but Fargo as well that figures constantly as a contested symbolic domain. The following statements made to the press by leaders from each side following the ruling are illustrative.

Speaking for LIFE Coalition,

Obviously, as far as we're concerned, this is a tragic thing to happen to our fine city. We have been able to avoid it for so long, but it's here now and it really is tragic.

Speaking for Citizens for a Real Choice:

This represents some real long-term kind of damage to this community. I think that this type of political activity is among the most dangerous, the kind that effects people's relationships with their friends and neighbors for years and even generations to come.

Each group portrays itself as fighting against trends in American culture being imposed on them, from which their own identity is drawn by contrast. From the pro-life perspective, these are the forces of secularism, narcissism, materialism and anomie. For pro-choice activists, their struggle was with narrow-minded intolerance. Each side, then, balances a complicated position of sustaining, simultaneously, an oppositional stance toward a particular vision of American culture and

an assumption that their position represented the "true" interests of the the local citizenry.

While the Commission vote served as a "redressive action," it quelled the overt conflict only momentarily. The leaders of LIFE Coalition, in fact, were aware that their campaign with the City Commission was a battle they were likely to lose in terms of its stated goal. They saw it, retrospectively at least, as a valuable performance, nonetheless, of their position to the community in general, and a means of rallying new people to their cause. During the period of the City Commission hearings, LIFE rapidly built their membership to over 1000. Organizationally, they formed a board representing various pro-life groups in the community, opened an office, started a newsletter and began to concentrate on speaking and gaining a good public image. As Linda Anderson explained,

Our big problem when the facility opened was that people thought we could stop it. Your most important asset is time in a movement like this because you know the issues.

If they see us as strident and antagonistic, the person in the middle will go to the other side. Education is the thing.

The continual regression to crisis that characterized the controversy over the clinic in Fargo is, in Turner's model, typical of social dramas. However, the contestants are not simply doomed to repeat endlessly the same dramatic enactment of opposition. As temporal structures, such phased contests are tentative in their resolution and open to new creative possibilities as long as alternative goals and means of attaining them are possible.

1. For an excellent overview of the New Christian Right, and the contemporary and historical place of Evangelical Christianity in the United States, see New Christian Politics, Anson Shupe and David Bromley, editors; Macon, Ga.; Mercer University Press, 1984.

2. Women Aglow is an international, interdenominational charismatic Christian organization. (The male counterpart to Aglow is the Full Gospel Businessmen's Fellowship.) Founded in Seattle in 1967, the group's headquarters are now in Edmonds, Washington. There are now 1300 chapters worldwide. North Dakota has chapters in practically every town and city, and two area boards to oversee them. Members pay \$10 to join; these funds go to serve the 122 chapters outside the U.S. The group emphasizes the two central "gifts of the spirit" that are central to the Pentecostal Christian experience of speaking in tongues: one is receiving and speaking a "prayer language"; the second is the gift of speaking prophecy in public, i.e. interpreting the content of charismatic speech. This behavior, as well as singing and "joyous prayer" indicate being "alive to God and aglow in the spirit."

Aglow meetings are held once a month and are not a substitute for church. Members are expected to be active in their own denominations. The group is strict about order. Each chapter is run by a board, and has four advisors, usually men. Women are expected to wear skirts and seek the advice of husbands or other men. Meetings are also ordered. They begin with "praise and worship" which includes time for "prophesying" when people interpret the meaning of people's testimony while speaking in tongues. There is usually a scheduled speaker, during which interruptions are not allowed. At the end of a meeting, anyone is allowed to talk privately with Aglow board members, counselors and advisors.

The emphasis on healing, personal growth, solving problems such as alcoholism and indebtedness resemble the secular "human potential" movement. Their concerns also resemble, in many ways, those of feminist groups. They stress consensus in their meetings and reducing violence and competition in the culture; the group encourages turning to other women for pleasure, inspiration and help with personal troubles through the strength and companionship of "prayer sisters."

3. In Fargo, between 1976 and 1982, the membership of the First Assemblies of God quadrupled. During the year I was in Fargo, the church would regularly draw 800 people for their three weekly worship services, many of them "visitors" from other churches. The church had also started a campaign of sending out busses to poor neighborhoods to bring children and adolescents to the services. Their "music ministry," led by a handsome young pastor who had been a rock-and-roll musician before he received Jesus, was particularly successful in reaching teen-agers. The church's ability to engage this age group was cited by a number of recent adult converts as one of the important reasons they had joined the church. They wanted to counteract the "drugs, sex and rock-and-roll" subculture at the high schools; the mainline congregations they had formerly belonged to seemed to hold very little appeal for teens.

At the end of 1983, First Assemblies was building a huge new complex on the outskirts of Fargo that reportedly would hold over 2000 people for a single worship service. The funds for the building

project were raised entirely from congregation membership.

4. "Assignment: Life" is one of the central films used by the pro-life movement to recruit new members. It is advertised in The National Right to Life News, by its distributor, American Portrait Films, as an "uncompromising 52-minute documentary on abortion in which journalist Ann Summers makes a personal odyssey into life and death. Shows actual abortions and a live birth.

The movie is, in fact a crudely produced docu-drama. The "plot" is a conversion tale. A young female journalist (a fictional character) is assigned to cover "the abortion issue" by her older male editor. She takes the assignment reluctantly. As she proceeds on her "investigation," the actress conducts actual interviews with almost all the key leaders in the right-to-life movement, as well as "average women" such as a reformed prostitute, and a child who announces, "If abortion had been legal, I wouldn't be here." The reporter also visits a California gynecologist who allowed her to film a suction abortion. She gradually comes to the conclusion that abortion is murder.

During the time I was in Fargo, this film was quite popular and shown at least once a month at some kind of pro-life gathering. Judging by audience response, it had a lot of "shock value" for new recruits, and solidified conviction among the converted.

Chapter 6: The Clinic As Interpretive Battleground

Prayer Vigilantes

Fargo's right-to-life activists, recognizing they were unlikely to get rid of the unwanted clinic, were determined to gain control over its interpretation. Having tried and failed in the political arena, LIFE shifted its goals to winning away the clinic's actual or potential clientele. The dramatic performance of their opposition was restaged in the physical and symbolic environment surrounding the clinic itself. Volunteers dedicate two hours a week to walking back and forth along the sidewalk, clinic, engaged in silent prayer, often with a Bible in hand. The following list of instructions is given to "Prayer Vigilantes," as they call themselves, for their "Peaceful Prayer Walk."

1. This is a 2 person vigil of prayer only, not a demonstration.
2. Pray silently and unobtrusively.
3. Stay on sidewalk - keep moving - do not get in anyone's way.
4. DO NOT: Argue, explain, discuss, answer questions with [sic] anyone including press. (If the press comes say only that you'll talk to them at another location when you are finished.)
5. Do nothing demonstrative except walk and pray -- no signs or gestures.
6. Do not congregate - 2 cars for 2 people.
7. Do not cross boulevard, grass, etc. Stay on sidewalk.

WE ARE CALLED TO LOVE

Those who participate describe it as "a sacrifice on our part to show the outcry of concern we have over the death chamber in Fargo."

The actions of prayer vigilantes draw attention to the clinic's presence and offer an alternative interpretation of its activities to the public. However, the vigil seems less of an outward sign to the community, and more a means of generating internal conviction and support among activists and, in particular, new recruits in particular.

Almost every issue of the monthly newsletter has a short piece on the subjective experience of the vigil in which the theme of redemption is prominent. The following selections are exemplary. In the first, the idiom is overtly religious.

During the course of my prayer vigil, I asked God to tell me how he wanted me to pray. After this, the Lord showed me the house -- the Abortion Clinic -- wrapped in barbed wire. I meditated on the meaning of this, how impossible it would be to enter it if it were bound in this way. Then the wire turned into a crown of thorns, some red with the blood of Jesus. The words came to mind -- "My love can close those doors." The prayers of the faithful can bring love to bear. ("Thoughts About Prayer," LIFE Coalition Newsletter, December 1981)

The second takes the form of personal testimony.

About 4 weeks to the day before Christmas, I was walking my usual time (from 10 to 11 a.m.) on the Prayer Vigil. I was alone as I usually am on the walk. I had been reading my prayer book and had been reflecting on life as a whole and the importance of each person's life -- the hard things we go through, the joys -- and all the help we need from each other. My oldest sister had just died on November 7. She had just dropped dead. I was missing her and thinking of her life which included tragedy and much suffering on her part. In spite of her hardships, I thought of her faith in God, her strengths and also her failings and guilt that resulted from these weaknesses.

I then thought about the girls and families where mistakes had been made and these girls were being counselled and having abortions as I was walking there in front of the place where this was going on. I thought about the counsellors [sic]. I prayed for all concerned and prayed especially that counsellors were doing just that -- a thorough job -- and my, what a disservice to the girls if life is treated lightly. Each girl's life is so important that decisions made are of utter importance. She has to live her life the day, or month or year after the counselor has sat across from a desk and said "whatever". Anyhow, these were my thoughts that morning. ("A Walk In November," LIFE Coalition Newsletter, January 1982)

While the prayer vigil provides an activity that sustains interest and activist support, the prayers are effective in and of themselves. They appear to be effective as what Austin describes as "performative

utterances" (Austin 1962: 6); i.e. they neither describe nor report nor are they simply cathartic. Whether intended or not, for those who utter and hear the prayers, the very act transforms the area around the clinic from a sidewalk, lawn and entryway into a highly charged battle zone for "prayer warriors." As Linda explained,

We really believe prayer is one of the most changing things in our society. It's a totally different thing to be in the presence of the abortion facility and the evil performed there. You are battling the evil force and it is draining.

Another woman explained:

Prayer is one method of attack and the others -- whether legislation, rallies, counseling, personal opinion offered at a crucial time, are all made more effective if prefaced by prayer.

Sidewalk Counselors

On the anniversary of the clinic's opening, LIFE Coalition responded to internal criticism that they were not being sufficiently active in fighting the clinic, and to external accusations that they had no compassion for the women seeking abortions. The Coalition hired a "problem pregnancy counselor" and organized what they call a "sidewalk counseling program." Sidewalk counselors behave very much like the prayer vigilantes: they walk quietly, usually in twos, back and forth in front of the clinic. In addition, they approach people entering the clinic and give them literature and suggest they think about alternatives to abortion. They also hand out business cards with LIFE Coalition's phone number which people can call for help, i.e. sources of emotional and material support for carrying an unwanted pregnancy to term. If the counselors succeed in talking to anyone, they attempt to engage them in conversation and suggest they retreat to a local coffee

shop to talk over the decision "before it's too late." Generally, such encounters are unusual. Indeed, in 1983, the success rate of these counselors was so low that when they finally did assist someone, who unbeknownst to LIFE members the clinic had turned away because of her ambivalence, it was a local news item for a week.

Despite the difficulty in achieving their stated goals, LIFE nonetheless puts considerable time and effort into the counseling endeavor. The sidewalk counselor coordinator described the work involved.

The prayer vigil only requires one or two workshops a year. The counselors have a much more involved process of training. They need workshops, meetings, phone calls, baby-sitting services. The workshops are vital. They provide support, and generate enthusiasm, and we have to constantly train new people. Mostly they come through other volunteers.

The kind of person who works best is someone who is pro-life but really feels for the woman. Someone who is super anti-abortion can't do it.

Thus, the sidewalk counseling provides an effective vehicle for recruiting women who are pro-life but are neither vehement in their views nor inclined to political activism.

At all the training workshops I attended, at least half in attendance were new volunteers. (These meetings usually had about ten people, two of whom were LIFE staff or board people.) Almost all the trainees were women, usually in their mid to late twenties, and generally friends of women already engaged in pro-life work who had urged them to come. Considerable time is devoted neither to counseling technique nor to political strategy; rather, most of the talk centers on depicting and assigning meaning to the "other," the woman having the abortion. For example, at one meeting, the following typology was offered by LIFE's problem pregnancy counselor.

There are three types you encounter going to get abortions:

1. Women's Libber: She needs a lot of education. She's hostile and cold.

2. Ambivalent Type: She is conflicted and let's others make up her mind for her.

3. Ignorant: The kind that is really pro-life but doesn't know there is another way.

She then offered a broader interpretation of the meaning of abortion.

Abortion is a sign of a decline in the culture. With Christianity came the acceptance of the child without it having to bear its father's sins. I view this as the rape of motherhood, of the gender, of the uterus, of the womb. If you think sex is natural, birth is even more natural. The first love you feel is for your mother. What is the furthest reach of the devil? Not murder, not sex, not rape. It's abortion.

In such discourse, which is a staple of these frequent, small, face-to-face meetings which maintain and generate pro-life membership, abortion is constructed through metaphorical processes, into "one illuminating, iconic, encapsulating image" (Nisbet 1969: 4). In the example cited above, as is often the case, abortion is fused with the imagery of destructive, decadent and usually male sexuality. It is cast opposite pregnancy, birth, maternity and childhood innocence as the domain of creation, pure motive and nurturant love.

The activity of sidewalk counseling promotes an interpretation of abortion in particular and the society in general to several audiences: women using the clinic, local pro-lifers and Fargo residents in general. LIFE Coalition members were self-conscious of this goal. In fact, they considered developing a reputation for moderation and compassion at least equal to if not more important than reaching women using the clinic. These audiences for whom the performances in front of the clinic are intended -- the clinic staff and clientele, the Fargo citizenry, friends and kin, and potential recruits -- are deeply intertwined, as is clear in the following explanation given by Linda

Anderson.

In the East, they have sit-ins. I doubt that we'd get women here to do that. The community would turn against us. The women have to deal with their family and friends. Their husbands have to be supportive.

I don't think we'll ever turn around the situation. The most we can do is meet the needs on a one-to-one basis. Educating people to know that abortion is not the way. It's kind of like stirring the pot. We've started with what we're doing. I don't want to picket out there cause we'll scare them. It's the most we can do. If we picket we can't reach them. We've worked so hard to prove we're loving and caring.

Reinterpreting the Unwed Mother

In the spring of 1983, LIFE Coalition decided to open a "Problem Pregnancy Center" to back up its sidewalk counseling campaign. That decision was in part a reflection of a new emphasis in national pro-life strategy to promote "alternatives to abortion" (National Right to Life News, Volume 12, No. 1, 1/12/84). It also indicated the increasing prominence of the "young unwed mother" as a focus of concern, a signifier of sexual disorder, and a "social problem" in Fargo and America in general.

In an article entitled "Women As A Social Problem," author Nancy Henley discusses how the construction of "problematic women" is an essential part of recent political action on "women's issues."

It is clear that for many of the women's issues to emerge in recent years, the process is one of redefinition as much as, or more than, definition. There are assertions of how to name and view a problem, what the "real" problem is, what is wrong with the old definition and so on.

Rather than look at changes in the objective conditions to explain the identification of something as a social problem, we should look at the claims-making activities of people and groups and examine the origins of the claims-making activities.

Since the definition of a social problem is an important determinant of governmental actions, it is no wonder that

intergroup conflict takes place over the definition (Henley 1982: 15-16).

The struggle in Fargo over redefining and claiming women with an unwanted pregnancy was taking place not only between pro-life and pro-choice activists: it extended to social service, voluntary and governmental agencies, and divided constituents within the pro-life ranks as well.

In its initial stages, LIFE had worked together with Birthright, which, since its foundation in the wake of the 1972 referendum, had been helping pregnant teens find "alternatives to abortion." Birthright had been the project of the first wave of local pro-life female activists, mostly older women, many newly widowed ten years ago. Now, most of them were in their mid to late sixties. By 1983, new LIFE activists, primarily younger women who are more politically involved in the national right-to-life movement than their predecessors, became increasingly impatient with Birthright. In their view, it was too low-key, unprofessional, and insufficiently public in its local presence. As LIFE focused its efforts more and more on "reaching the woman" which is also Birthright's agenda, the conflict intensified. Linda Anderson explained:

We told them you need to get an administrator and run ads or we were going to duplicate services that would overwhelm them. The old Birthright board didn't want to rock the boat. I was just amazed. They ran the organization like a morning coffee klatsch.

Under pressure from LIFE, Birthright hired a new director who was instructed to be more aggressive. She began to raise money actively and advertise in the local paper and on radio stations.

Birthright attempted, as well, to enter the arena of professional social service workers that counseled pregnant teens in Fargo by

hanging posters at some of the agencies in town. The reaction of social service worker Mary Mintz was similar to that of most of her colleagues. As Fargo's primary counselor for unwed mothers since the late 1960's, Mary harbored little sympathy for any newcomers into the field.

I saw this Birthright poster and I tore it down immediately. And two weeks later there was another one. This time, I crumpled it up and put it in my drawer. My boss didn't understand and I had to explain. I said, "Gary, it's like advertising Chevrolet's at a Ford dealers. It's another agency."

In 1972, Mary had been the only counselor for problem pregnancies in Fargo; that same year, the main home for unwed mothers in town closed down due to disuse. Ten years later, in addition to Mary, there were three other "problem pregnancy counselors" working at two church-related agencies (Lutheran and Catholic). Two state-sponsored programs offering nutritional, medical and social support to pregnant single women had been organized by the N.D. State Council on Problem Pregnancy (formed in 1982.) A daycare center for single and poor mothers was for the first time receiving support from the United Way (although it had to redefine its purpose as "preventing juvenile delinquency"). In 1983, the local Junior League began a community advocacy group for "school-age parents," and several support groups for single mothers sponsored by social service agencies were in place. And, by the end of that year three pro-life groups -- Birthright, LIFE, and activists from the First Assemblies of God -- each had "problem pregnancy centers." In short, over one decade, groups in Fargo dealing with teen-age and unwed mothers, including the abortion clinic, expanded from two to twelve. Each has a different understanding of the "problem" and the "solution."

During that same period, the number of unwed pregnant adolescents

in North Dakota tripled, going from 428 to 1305. Rosalind Petchesky points out how the combination of the rise in teen pregnancy and legalization of abortion has contributed to the creation of a new category of "problematic women."

On the level of popular practice, abortion has become, perhaps for the first time in history, a phenomenon predominantly of young, unmarried white women...a large proportion of them teenagers, many living with their parents. One-third of all women receiving abortions in 1978 were teenagers, another one-third were aged 20-24 (mostly unmarried) and 70 percent of all pregnant teenagers getting abortions were white.

These facts create a reality that helps to construct the social meanings of sexuality in contemporary American culture and politics. Abortion -- organized, legal abortion -- is associated with sex because it is seen to reveal sex; it is a signifier that helps make sex visible and therefore subject to scrutiny and an inevitable defining of limits between the licit and the illicit. Above all, it helps identify and categorize a new sexual subject: the "promiscuous" white teenage girl (1984: 209).

The young unwed mother is not only a new sexual subject. In Fargo, no longer the guilty social outcast to be shunned, she has become the target of a small and expanding "problem pregnancy industry."⁴ This development is readily apparent to those involved. As Mary Mintz expressed it,

There really is competition between agencies. They don't admit it. Nobody says we're competing but we are. The bread and butter of this agency is adoption. 65% of unwed girls opt to have abortions. And nearly 95% of the rest keep their babies who can. Very few release their babies for adoption. I want our agency to be the best and first so of course I'm competitive.

At the LIFE board meeting when the plan for starting a center was first discussed, the sense of this activity as an "expanding market" was explicit.

It's like a business. If they [the abortion clinic personnel] don't get enough clients, they'll have to close the doors.

LIFE's decision to open its Problem Pregnancy Center despite all

the other services available and Birthright's expansion in particular, meant increasing competition for sources of local support for pro-life work. In a sense, LIFE was determined to "control the market" in pro-life alternatives to abortion. This was clear not only in their conflict with Birthright. A few months later, one of Evangelical Christian men who had started Partners In Vision opened yet another pregnancy support center with his wife and a board of director made up primarily of congregants from the Assemblies of God. Injury was added to insult when they named it Life Clinic, a rather obvious attempt to benefit from the carefully cultivated reputation of LIFE Coalition. The LIFE Board tried but was unable to stop this new effort, although they did persuade the "clinic" to change its name.² The run-in foreshadowed a more serious split ranks that emerged over the following six months between these two pro-life groups.

While LIFE's Problem Pregnancy Center gets few clients -- most are women who mistake it for the abortion clinic -- the Coalition's investment of time, energy, and money in such an endeavor is an indication of where they locate the "problem" that leads to abortion. Phrased in terms of individual motivation, the woman who seeks an abortion is, to use their words, considered "kind of weak and uneducated." Therefore, pro-lifers are convinced that, if she felt adequate emotional and material support, and if she had knowledge of fetal life as they see it, she would not choose to abort.

Root Metaphors and Dramatic Themes

Role of the Fetus In Conversion, Sacrifice and Redemption

The idea that knowledge of fetal life will "convert" a woman to the pro-life position -- has been a central and increasingly dominant theme in both local and national right-to-life activism. A popular quip summarizes this position: "if there were a window on a pregnant woman's stomach, there would be no more abortions." Their conviction that conversion will take place after seeing the "truth" about abortion relies on the way that knowledge of the fetus is constructed. In the pro-life interpretation, emphasis on the fetus as "the unborn child" constitutes a "root metaphor," a paradigm" from which many subsequent structures may be unpacked" (Turner 1974: 51). Such symbolic frames produce

a certain kind of polarization of meaning in which the subsidiary subject is really a depth world of prophetic, half-glimpsed images, and the principal subject, the visible, fully-known...at the opposite pole to it, acquires new and surprising contours and valences from its dark companion... because the poles are "active together" the unknown is brought just a little more into the light by the known (1974: 51).

In right-to-life visual material, two representations of the fetus are continually placed together. The principal subject is the magnified image of the fetus -- for example, floating intact inside the womb, or focused on tiny perfectly-formed feet held between the thumb and forefinger of an adult. These pictures are usually in warm amber tones, suffused with soft light, rendered more mysterious by their separation from the mother's body. Juxtaposed to these photographs are gruesome, harshly lit, clinical shots of mutilated and bloody fetal remains "killed by abortions," what pro-lifers refer to as "the war pictures."³ Thus, the qualities evoked by the visions of the principal subject

--the mystery of conception, warmth, unconditional nurturance, radical innocence and maternity -- are continually contrasted with their possible violent destruction.

In the 1983 version of a popular slide show produced by NRLC President Jack Wilke, the associations to these images are expanded to take on more explicit political meaning. The "war pictures" of the fetus are intercut with old news photos of Southeast Asian civilians burnt by napalm. These slides are accompanied by the following narration.

Do you remember Cambodia?
We ignored the genocide then until our nation saw the horror through our media. These horrible pictures woke people up.
There is another war going on today. This nation should also see the horror of that reality. Every citizen of this country should see what we call "the war pictures."

[The slide on at this point shows dead fetuses from late abortions piled in garbage cans; it then switches to a shot of a 21 week fetus aborted by a saline injection* which turns the skin a shiny red color.]

We call this the candy-apple baby. The saline must feel like napalm. Neither the abortionist nor the bombardier saw their victim.

Thus, the life and death polarities fixed on the fetus are expanded and given not only moral but historically specific political connotations. The pro-life campaign is symbolically cast as the contemporary equivalent of the anti-war movement; by extension, those who would participate in abortion are unwitting war criminals. In drawing the analogies to war, the aborted fetus becomes a sacrifice offered for the redemption of America. This theme is clear, for example, in the following comments made to me by a sidewalk counselor on the fourth of July.

Ask yourself the question. On the fourth of July we celebrate

all the people who died that we might have freedom. And I'm wondering if some of these children aren't dying so that we will appreciate life, marriage, and relationships more fully. To keep a sixteen-year-old from getting pregnant, she needs a good self-concept. If she has that, she won't get pregnant. If it makes us go back and think of that, it may not be in vain.

The Liminal Subject: The Pregnant Woman

Given the increasing focus on "abortion-prone" teenagers and women as the object of dramatic struggle, the absence of imagery of pregnant women in pro-life visual material is striking. It is an index of the liminality of her position, especially when abortion is an option. She is ambiguous, "betwixt and between fixed points of classification," temporarily set apart from the structural arrangements of the culture (Turner 1974: 232).

In the classic formulation of rites of passage, the liminal subject is hidden and only regains visibility when he or she re-enters the social system with a new status -- one that is more or less culturally predetermined. Reincorporation of the liminal person into the appropriate role serves to legitimate, for the subject and observers, a particular interpretation of social reality as not only necessary but natural. A deviation from that outcome is a serious violation because it exposes that there could be alternative interpretations of not only a particular situation, but the whole cultural order as well. Unexpected occurrences present the possibility that categories and social arrangements could, in fact, be different.

Pregnancy, as the one undisputed experience unique to the female body, simultaneously distinguishes and produces the category female. It has the symbolic capacity to heighten the identification of an

individual woman with her reproductive capacities; thus pregnancy can serve to level and strip women of structural status. The pregnant woman, epitomizing "femininity," becomes a representation of the continuity of biological and cultural life as well. Abortion, implying birth need not be the inevitable outcome of pregnancy, subverts that associational chain. By extension, it signifies a resistance to men's fertility, a withdrawal of unconditional, self-sacrificing nurturance, and a denial of the reproduction of the culture itself.

It is significant that conflict over abortion emerges not when it simply occurs, since its practice is constant. Passions are aroused when it becomes publicly tolerated. Collective acceptance of abortion represents a threat to a basic cultural script that pregnancy "must" result in childbirth and motherhood. The legalization and availability of abortion not only pose the possibility that this need not be the case, but gives authority to an alternative cultural scenario. Accordingly, for right-to-life activists in Fargo and elsewhere, attention and competition is increasingly focused on winning the minds, bodies and symbolic definition of the women who are choosing or advocating the legitimacy of the alternate script implied by abortion.

Angles of Incidence, Angles of Reflection

As the focus of pro-life activity narrowed, increasingly, to the clinic and its clientele, the activists of each side developed a sense of familiarity that grew out of their close and constant physical proximity, and, by necessity, a close monitoring of each other's behavior. For clinic personnel, the presence of the protestors had become a part of their routine; on the rare days when prayer vigilantes

and sidewalk counselors were absent, the staff expressed the kind of unease that accompanies an unexpected change in pattern. They knew individuals by name and even had "favorites" with whom they exchanged pleasantries. Similarly, the pro-life women knew the habits of their opponents, the hours they came and went, whether they were married or had children, the bumper stickers on their cars -- a "Save the Whales" sticker was the source of constant remark. They knew individual voices as well, since someone from LIFE called every week to make a fictitious appointment in order to know what day abortions would be performed.

After two years of this activity, it appeared that the habituation of the two sides to one another enhanced the stabilization of the conflict. Occasionally, the familiarity and knowledge the activists on each side had of each other broke through the structure of opposition that normally held these women apart, defined their differences, constrained their action and charged the field around the clinic. Small incidents stood out as brief moments that broke the proscenium of the ongoing social drama. A clinic counselor slipped on the front stairs and, without hesitating, Linda Anderson ran over to help her; when it was clear the woman was not hurt, Linda quickly returned to her post on the sidewalk.

The recognition of commonality was, occasionally, more self-conscious and substantive, stressing a sense of shared community, both spiritual and physical. When a pro-choice leader who counseled at the clinic published a piece in the newspaper about a sexual assault she had experienced, one of the sidewalk counselors sent her the following note.

After walking out in front of the clinic for two months and seeing and praying for you, I felt a closeness in

the spirit. I've had a longing to talk with you but that is impossible under the circumstances. I lift you before the Lord daily. We also live in the same neighborhood, so there is a closeness there.

Very rarely, the one point of actual convergence in each side's mission, their common concern for the woman with the unwanted pregnancy, actually became apparent, as the following story Kay told me illustrates.

This woman came in and said she wanted to pay for an abortion in advance and when I told her the clinic doesn't accept personal checks, she returned in the half hour with the money. She looked pretty down and out and gave her address as the transient hotel downtown. She never showed up on Wednesday for her abortion and then she called on Thursday to say she was having second thoughts.

I asked her if her concerns were financial and she said yes, that if she could afford it, she'd keep the pregnancy. So I said "Stay there, I'll have someone get back to you."

And I picked up the phone and I called the LIFE Coalition office. The phone rang. Someone picked it up and said, "Hello," and I said, "Hi. This is Kay Bellevue from Fargo Women's Health." There was a long pause at the other end and then the voice says, "Yes?". And I said, "I understand you want to help out women who are carrying a problem pregnancy and don't want an abortion." There was another pause and she says, "Yes?". "Well, I have someone who is in financial straits and I would appreciate it if you could give her a call and see if there's anything you can do." Another pause. "Sure." So I gave her the name and number.

While this was, in one sense, a recognition of common purpose, an overcoming of difference, it was also expressive of Kay's determination not to let the pro-life side claim the woman's ambivalence as a conversion.

The comments of one of the LIFE leaders regarding this incident reveal the difference between their public rhetoric of activists and their privately expressed understanding of their opponents.

If there's common ground, it's because we both care about the woman. I truly believe that Kay cares very, very much about the woman. She believes it is one way that she wants them to

have the option of [sic]. And she sees it as more lucrative, not for herself but for the woman, better for her, and we disagree with that. But I think it's out of her caring for that woman that she is doing what she's doing. And it's out of our caring that we're doing what we're doing. So I'd say that's the common ground.

Constructing a political identity around an issue defined oppositionally is always a complex, dialectical process; pro-life women in particular, require the "other" to exist. In a setting like Fargo, the "other" is constantly present in daily interaction. To ignore their humanity violates a fundamental code of Fargo social life that activists on both sides value. Activists are well aware of the way in which the local arena shapes their behavior.

You know, there's something about a small community..if we would paint Kay as a monster we would lose, and that's what it boils down to, to some degree. Because people know them. People know they aren't monsters. They are people who are trying to do the right thing too. So maybe that forces us to be more tolerant, to try and understand their thinking so that we can accept them better or whatever. It's not that we'll ever agree. But it's nice to know we can disagree and not be totally polarized.

By the spring of 1983, it appeared that LIFE members would focus their activity more and more on their Problem Pregnancy Center. After two years, the social drama had passed through the intense period of crisis; the conflict had stabilized into "a social recognition and legitimization of irreparable schism between the two parties" characteristic of the reintegration that follows a redressive phase. As the conflict appeared to be stabilizing, however, unexpected developments at the national level triggered a new, more violent phase of the local drama over abortion that mobilized actors who previously, had been only peripherally involved.

Revival of the Spirit: Regression to Crisis *

The regression to crisis was precipitated by two unanticipated political developments regarding national abortion policy. In June of 1983, the Supreme Court ruled that a variety of local ordinances intended to restrict the use of abortion clinics were unconstitutional, essentially reiterating the Court's Roe v. Wade position. Shortly after that, both the Hatch amendment and the Helms Human Life bill, the two central legislative strategies of the pro-life movement, were defeated in Congress for a second time. This two-pronged defeat of a decade of national right-to-life efforts to bring about change by working within the political system undercut the authority of the mainstream leadership. As has been the case nationally, Fargo's moderate right-to-life activists -- committed to working within the political system, cultivating a public image of compassion and civility, and stressing public education and alternatives to abortion -- lost control of pro-life activity in the local arena. They were challenged by the emergence of a pro-life group that revived the conflict in new form. This group uses a confrontational style of harassment of abortion patients and providers that verges on violence. While LIFE Coalition is predominantly female, this new group of activists has more men than women; no local clergy associate themselves with it. The relationship between them and LIFE Coalition members is uneasy at best, reflecting what is occurring in the movement at the national level as well.

These new activists call themselves Save-A-Baby; while this name is the one used by the Moral Majority for its anti-abortion efforts,* the Fargo group disclaims any connection with Falwell's organization. Similarly, while nearly all of the people in Save-A-Baby belong to or

attend the conservative First Assemblies of God congregation, both the group and the church deny that there is more than a circumstantial connection. The similarity of their tactics to those of Joseph Scheidler, the charismatic figurehead of the more radical right-to-lifers, are not coincidental. Several of their leaders were inspired to start their protests after hearing Scheidler speak in Chicago, and invited him to come to Fargo.

In contrast to the relatively quiet, low-key tactics of LIFE Coalition, the Save-a-Baby activists stop just short of violence in their weekly demonstrations. They gather outside the clinic in groups as large as 30, scream at women entering the building not to kill their babies, display large signs with Biblical quotes and pictures of whole and mutilated fetuses, block traffic, follow patients when they leave the facility, and even picket the homes of the clinic's administrator and doctor, carrying signs with slogans likening them to Hitler. In addition, they hold press conferences to call for investigations of the clinic's activities, such as the disposal of fetal remains; "expose" local social service counselors who refer women to abortion services; challenge the clinic's compliance with city regulations, such as the fire code; and stage dramatic presentations in front of the clinic on Christian, national or "abortion" holidays, such as the Roe v. Wade anniversary on January 22. On Good Friday for example, they hired a hearse and parked it in front of the clinic. Two women dressed in black got out, began to speak in tongues and laid roses and a tiny coffin on the clinic lawn.

In November of 1984, a stone was thrown through the window of the clinic and though the culprit turned out to be unaffiliated with any of

the local right-to-life groups, this event dramatized the growing concern on all sides that the escalation of harrassment by this new group might lead to serious violence. The Fargo Police Department, which had more or less ignored the clinic until this point, assigned a special officer to the grounds on days when abortions are performed.

The clinic and its supporters have responded to the new right-to-life activity with lawsuits, security guards and a steady round of volunteers who escort patients through the intimidating line of protestors which stands between them and the facility. In contrast to the almost friendly feelings that clinic personnel expressed toward LIFE Coalition's sidewalk counselors, the actions of the new group have placed the clinic staff under enormous stress. As bombings and arson escalated at clinic's across the country, the fear that this could happen at any moment in Fargo became a regular feature in the clinic's daily routine.

Surprisingly, the presence of the protestors has had little negative effect on patients. The numbers of women using the clinic remains more or less constant. Prior to the escalation in pro-life activity outside the clinic, the waiting room had often been quiet, with only an occasional hushed conversation to break the silence. Now, patients joke or express their anger and trade stories with one another about the clever retorts they made, or the ways they evaded the demonstrators. Apparently, the common experience of crossing the picket line creates a momentary bond.

For LIFE Coalition, the emergence of the new group has created a quandary. Save-A-Baby represents only about 30 people, hardly a match for LIFE's well-organized 1300 members. Yet it is the former group that

has captured local and even national attention with its tactics. Given how central the creation of a particular public image is to the various pro-life factions, it is hardly surprising that there is considerable struggle within the movement for access to the resource of media coverage. The nature of this competitive process was demonstrated in Fargo when ABC, a national television network, produced a segment on the abortion conflict centering on Fargo. The following brief analysis of how the show was developed and the local reaction to it, shows how the media collude (perhaps unwittingly) with extremist's efforts. By picking up violent or near-violent action as "newsworthy," to the neglect of the less dramatic but more representative work of moderates, most coverage of the abortion issue makes effective the radical behavior of a vocal minority.

The Dramatic Field Revised: The Impact of National Media

In the fall of 1984, producers for "20/20" a magazine-style news show for ABC with high public visibility, began to explore the idea of producing a locally-based story that would exemplify the increase in violent pro-life activity that had been occurring across the United States for the prior year. They chose Fargo as one of their locations and began to do research, which included talking to me. Since I was one of their key sources of information, it was clear to me that the producers were aware of the presence of a well-organized, broadly-based moderate pro-life group, the LIFE Coalition, as well as the pro-choice organization, Citizens for A Real Choice.

The story that was produced, however, offered no evidence that either of these groups even existed, although it claimed to be showing

how the controversy looked in one locale. Predictably, the producers chose instead to focus on the handful of marginal but highly visible radicals, the year-old Save-a-Baby group. Their actions, unlike those of the moderates, provided "good T.V.," to use the producer's phrase. In fact, the group accommodated the presence of network camera crews by staging even more dramatic demonstrations than usual. On Christmas, one of their members dressed up as Santa Claus and tried to get into the clinic to deliver "toys to the unborn." On January 22, local pro-choice activists were so concerned about the potential for violence in the escalated activity engendered by the presence of television crews, that they kept a vigil around the clinic for 36 hours, despite record cold temperatures. Their presence as an organized group was not even mentioned in the show. This is not to say that the focus on the Save-A-Baby group was particularly sympathetic; it included an investigation and expose of the deceptive practices they use in their efforts to keep women from using the clinic. However, by focusing on extremists to the exclusion of the more moderate activism which provides the context, the show seriously misrepresented the actual shape the conflict takes.

The situation raises a range of questions regarding the symbiotic relationship between mass media and the efficacy of extreme political styles. The following examples of local response from letters written to me after the show reveal the helplessness grassroots activists on both sides feel in encountering the media on a national scale.

From the leader of LIFE Coalition, who was not interviewed:

ABC's "20/20" just got done filming here for their program in January. I am disgusted and disappointed. Almost everyone interviewed were [sic] from the same church, The First Assembly of God. They seemed to be trying to make a connec-

tion with the Moral Majority and Jerry Falwell. They cancelled two interviews with me while they were here, and none of the following groups (all part of LIFE Coalition) were represented in their interviews. 1) N.D. Right-to-Life; 2) Lutherans for Life; 3) Minnesota Citizens Concerned for Life; 4) Fargo Right to Life; 5) National Right to Life Committee; 6) the Pro-Life Office of the Catholic Diocese; 7) Birthright; 8) The Problem Pregnancy Center. They called it "fair" since seven interviews were done on the antiabortion side and three on the pro-abortion side. They also paid women money to interview anonymously and tell how their needs had not been met when working with the pro-life groups!

From the leader of the pro-choice group, also not interviewed:

I was just really mad because I felt like all that effort didn't even matter. I know that it does, but it was really frustrating that they didn't even mention our work. I never realized how much we are at the mercy of the media. Suddenly, I really feel out of control.

And, from the clinic administrator, who was in the show:

It was distorted, but it outraged a lot of people in the community who hadn't known what was going on. And when I look at who is causing distress for us now, it is the people they showed. The problem is, it gives them credibility and coverage that they don't deserve.

The disproportionate attention won by the new group has created confusion and loss of morale for LIFE coalition. One staff member expressed her frustration at being identified with what she considered to be an extremist right-to-life group at odds with her own, despite their mutual concerns.

There is nothing we can do. We don't own the pro-life position or the sidewalk in front of the clinic. They are the radicals and we the moderates. They are just a few people but they are turning others away from us by their tactics. They are out of control.

Despite the friction, the moderates refuse to reveal internal dissent publicly. They continue with their prayer vigil in front of the clinic, unwilling to relinquish turf, even if it means being misidentified. Since the two groups of activists are seen together on a regular basis engaged against a common enemy, it is not surprising that the

public sees little difference between them. Thus, the internal distinction and external confusion between "mainstream" pro-life activists and the more extreme "no compromise" groups that exists nationally is mirrored at the local level. This conflation of distinct pro-life constituencies is created in part by the movement itself, but even more by media's portrayal of it as monolithic, equivalent to its most vocal exponents, be they the New Right or radical "direct action" types such as Scheidler.

As protests have continued outside the Fargo Women's Health Clinic, inside, approximately twenty abortions are performed every week. For women in the Upper Midwest, it has greatly increased their access to abortion services. Statistics on abortion rates in the area support research which shows that geographic availability of abortion services is the single most powerful determinant influencing a woman's ability to obtain a safe, legal abortion (Borders and Cutright, 1979). In the first year of the clinic's existence, abortions performed in the state rose from 2554 to 3076, and increase of 32% (Office of Statistical Services, N. D. Dept. of Health). The staff of the Fargo Women's Health Clinic is committed to providing high-quality care that includes careful counseling and screening of patients as well as post-abortion check-ups. About 50% of the women using the facility are from the immediate vicinity; the rest came from outlying areas, neighboring states and Canada (Office of Statistical Services, N.D. Dept. of Health). As Kay describes the women who use the clinic,

Pretty typically, our patients come from small towns. They didn't want to plan to have sex. They thought that was bad so they failed to take preventive measures. So they end up getting pregnant because they didn't want

to be classified as having premeditated sex. The majority are happy and healthy.

If anything is guilt and trauma-inducing, it's these people picketing in front of our clinic. They try to suggest that we provide inferior care and that's the most distressing thing of all. And because someone makes a living providing necessary services, the whole issue is, to me, a red herring for them to get publicity to make us look bad. I think it's totally irrelevant. That happens to be what free enterprise in this country is all about.

The director of the National Women's Health Organization considers the events that took place in Fargo to be similar to those that she has encountered in setting up other facilities.

Opening a clinic in a non-metropolitan area is about like getting on a roller-coaster ride. You have to take the ups and downs before you come to the end and that's usually when the community begins to accept you. A tremendous amount of emotion surfaces over these votes and reversals, as if people have to show that the clinic was established over their protest. I've seen it over and over again.

She is, in a sense, describing the shape of a social drama. As Turner points out, as a conflict moves through phases of breach, crisis, redress, regression and reintegration,

the nature and intensity of the relations between parts, and the structure of the total field will have changed..Some components of the field will have less support, others more, still others will have fresh support, and some will have none. The distribution of the factors of legitimacy will have changed, as also the techniques used by leaders to gain compliance (1974: 42).

In the crisis catalyzed by the opening of the clinic, opposing understandings of abortion and its attendant meanings in the local body politic became clearly visible. In the dramatic enactments that ensued, these interpretations were "put to empirical risk" and the scope and range of the field was altered in the process.

The Expanded Stage: The Local Conflict in National Perspectives

While the citizens of Fargo may have agreed to disagree, the conflict over the clinic created as much as it revealed previously unvoiced social and cultural divisions. LIFE Coalition remains active, claiming over 1000 members. The organization focuses on educational efforts in churches and classrooms; and on alternative counseling and aid program for women with problem pregnancies. The Coalition has remained self-consciously local and non-partisan. Although many of its members are involved in the National Right-to-Life Committee, the organization is not affiliated with that group nor any other national anti-abortion organization. While LIFE receives financial and organizational support from local Catholic and Evangelical churches, it cannot be reduced to either of those institutions. Approximately 40 percent of members are Catholic, 25-30 percent are Lutheran; the remainder come from a range of other Protestant churches, particularly the growing Pentecostal and Evangelical congregations,⁷ a distribution close to that of Fargo-Moorhead in general.⁸ Given the adamant local focus of Fargo's right-to-lifers, it is important to put this case in the context of American anti-abortion activists more generally.

The right-to-life movement is frequently identified with the New Right whose leaders such as Richard Viguerie use explicitly military rhetoric to describe a war in defense of an endangered ideology. One of the aggressors is, in his view, liberal feminism which, he maintains, encouraged American women to feel like failures if they want to be wives and mothers (1980). According to George Bilder's schema for supply-side economics spelled out in his well-known book, Wealth and

Poverty, marriage is necessary to domesticate male aggression. It links the "short-term sexuality of men" to the "extended maternal horizons of women" and spurs husbands on to greater productivity in the work force (1981). Phyllis Schlafly -- who differs from Gilder in her endorsement of women working outside the home if it does not conflict with child-rearing or a harmonious family life -- is nonetheless famous for her denunciations of "women's lib." That movement is, to Schlafly, responsible for advocating sexual freedoms which she feels have dismantled the social bonds on which the continuity of the culture rests. She seizes in particular upon premarital sex as depriving women of their means for ensuring the support of husbands (1978). Are these views of a gender-segregated division of productive and emotional labor voiced by New Right leaders the same as those of grassroots pro-life activists?

A 1980 survey conducted by Donald Granberg (1981) reveals a complex pattern that distinguishes views of gender and politics of pro-life activists from the sharp anti-feminism of the New Right. The results are based on data from 57 percent (n=426) of 750 dues-paying members of the National Right-to-Life Committee (NRLC) who responded to questionnaires they received in the mail.* The answers given to survey questions on female sexuality and political power subvert stereotypes that link "conservative" views of sex with the acceptance of a subordinate status for women. Based on the NRLC sample, 87 percent disapprove of premarital sex; 75 percent oppose giving birth control information to teens without parental consent (and one-third of those object even with parental consent); and 80 percent feel it is too easy to get a divorce in America. However, 90 percent feel that women "should not leave running the country up to men" and 83 percent approve

of women working regardless of marital status and husband's income.

In other words, on many issues not directly concerning sexuality, the respondents are not anti-feminist. The responses indicate support for women's economic and political power but reflect concern over the loss of two of the major bargaining strategies women have traditionally used for leverage in the "domestic sphere." Briefly put, these are the individual woman's refusal to engage in sex without marriage, which implicitly links female sexuality to procreation and domesticity; and collective pressure, formal or informal, on men to get and stay married and share in the responsibilities for the reproductive consequences of sex. Judith Blake and Jorge del Pinal, in their comprehensive study of abortion attitudes in the United States, offer the following explanation of such findings.

To have total discretion over abortion may trivialize the cosmic importance of motherhood for women who wish to use pregnancy as an instrumentality in their relations with their husbands and their lovers. [In this view] easy access to abortion lessens rather than increases feminine power. A pregnancy that has been embarked upon for the purpose of precipitating a marriage or holding one together no longer has the clout that it once did (1980: 49).

While this may be true for some, for pro-life women in Fargo, opposition to abortion is linked less to a defense of motherhood and more to a critique of the moral failure of the culture in general. "I think there is a general breakdown of sorts in moral values and I don't say abortion has caused it all," explained one activist, a grandmother and feisty organizer in the local Democratic party.

The idea that we can say somebody can live and somebody can die for just any reason -- I think is all tied up with the kind of thinking that's going on today.

Abortion is continually portrayed as a symptom of a deeper need for full-scale social reform.

I think it is due to a decline in morals, the prevalence of situational ethics, what people see on TV. You know, if it feels good, then do it. Why aren't people using contraception? When I was growing up it was unusual for things to go that far. I'm idealistic, I know. But society has to be re-educated. The spiritual training of people has to be changed. The sanctity of human life has to be understood. That comes from families, churches, and to some extent, through schools. You can't legislate morality. But you can make it illegal to destroy other people's lives.

Such fears of increasing selfishness and materialism shape many pro-lifers' assumptions about their opposition, a vision from which moral identity is drawn by contrast. One young woman, the past secretary of the local Right-to-Life chapter, was moved to a display of hostility when she considered her imagined enemy.

These women make me so angry because they are saying if you don't have a choice to have a baby then you have no freedom. They're very selfish. I wouldn't want to get in their way because they'll get rid of me if I'm in their way. They're so set on "me first," I want to get what I want out of life no matter who or what gets in the way.

Most LIFE members are aware that such imagery of the "liberated woman" is fabricated on Madison Avenue. However, such recognition fails to assuage a sense that cherished values are "out of style."

We went through about fifty magazines to find baby pictures to decorate donation cans for our fundraiser and we couldn't find any. Babies aren't in style today anymore. Babies are trouble. They cry; they get sick in the middle of the night. They wake up and interrupt a lot of things. Babies used to sell products, but not anymore. Now it's the nice luscious young gals.

Testimony to such perception is provided by the array of women's magazines at the corner drugstore. The covers of Savvy, Working Woman, Glamour and Self all feature beautiful young women for whom the care of infants and children seems a minor concern at best. Barbara Ehrenreich describes the media portrayal of "liberated women" in the image of upwardly-mobile, corporate men (with considerable disposable

income) as "feminine machismo" (1978). The effect of such mass media imagery is insidious but nonetheless substantial. As Deirdre English points out in her 1981 article, "The War Against Choice,"

Most women who want to have children still cannot make it without a man...Giving up children for a glamorous career may be one thing (although this is an either/or choice that men rarely face) but it may not be a decent trade for a dead-end job in a pink-collar ghetto. If men can no longer support families on a single paycheck, women sure can't. To the less than ardent feminist who is not prepared to pay any price at all for independence, the future looks bleak (: 58).

An interesting perspective on this situation is offered by Kristin Luker in a study of women who have repeated abortions. Luker argues that the subjects in her study, like many American women, feel themselves caught in an "option squeeze" between the disappearing world of ascribed motherhood and the unfulfilled promise of achievement in wage labor and the professions. The women who aborted repeatedly apparently did so when pregnancy failed to transform an uncommitted lover into a husband. According to the author, the failure of conception to compel a marriage is due to a range of social factors, including

the decline in the value of childrearing, the increased availability of wifely goods and services in more specialized sectors of the service economy and the increased availability of sexual intercourse outside of marriage... In the open market of contemporary courtship, women as a class are bargaining with deflated currency (1979).

These changes in the "sexual economy" are as much the cause as the result of the increasing separation of sexual activity from procreation and heterosexual monogamy in contemporary American life. For many who see these trends as threatening, abortion has become a symbolic focus representing negative social change; in particular, it is seen as weakening social pressure on men to take emotional and financial responsibility for the reproductive consequences of intercourse.

This highlights one aspect of the pro-life social critique shared by many pro-choice activists as well: the lack of recognized social forms other than marriage that can reliably ensure emotional and material support of women with children. The litany of dismal statistics gives both sides increasing cause to worry. Nearly 50 percent of American marriages end in divorce, more than double the number reported in 1965, while the number of single-parent families (over 93 percent of which are headed by women) has increased by 100 percent. Within one year of divorce, 50 percent of men default on child support payment. Of women with children under the age of six, almost half work outside the home. (In Fargo, the number is 61 percent.) The wages they and other women receive are, on average, 58 cents to every dollar made by men and that wage gap seems to be widening (U.S. Department of the Census, Department of Commerce).

Such numbers have caused more than one expert to speculate. Andrew Hacker, for example suggest that

The main way women depreciate themselves in the market is by becoming mothers and allowing that condition to dominate their lives (1983: 29).

The "trickle-down" effect of such unimaginative thinking on the conditions most American women face can be read in the conflicting positions of the abortion activists in Fargo. To generalize: pro-choice women would recognize Hacker's interpretation as integral to a system of discrimination against women in the political, legal and economic spheres. The ability to terminate an unplanned pregnancy is thus seen as an essential safeguard providing women a modicum of control within a system of structured inequality. Pro-life activists, on the other hand, see the bearing and raising of children as the

desirable outcome of biological difference. The public acceptance of abortion is a denial of nature. Hacker's view represents the prevalence of "utilitarian" thinking and would be taken as a sign of serious cultural decadence, accompanying the devaluation of motherhood and nurturance in America. Easy access to abortion is seen as decreasing women's power; it undercuts a system in which the linking of sex to pregnancy and marriage is the linchpin for the material security of women with dependents. To work, this system must be seen as inevitable, a "natural order." When a woman can safely and legally terminate a pregnancy for whatever reason, the insistent motivation to connect female sexuality to this cultural chain of events is undone. The links are exposed as social constructions -- i.e. not inevitable -- and the imperative of motherhood as a condition beyond human control is dismantled. The desire of pro-life activists to prohibit abortions for all women is rooted in this understanding of the social consequences of this unravelling. Abortion represents a violation of nature and a terror that a way of life no longer considered valuable will be annihilated.

The polarization of interpretations around the abortion issue casts two possible interpretations of this situation in opposition, thus masking their common roots in and circumventing effective resistance to conditions of sexual inequality faced by women on both sides of the debate.

Inevitably, the question arises: are the two sides hopelessly at odds, destined to an interminable battle for cultural and political dominance? And if this is the case, are right-to-life women simply defending a disappearing way of life, as a number of people studying

the movement maintain? As the material and cultural bases of gender segregation break down, can domesticity stand up to the ever-increasing presence of women in wage labor, the rising divorce rate, a mushrooming service economy, the end of even the illusion of a family wage, the proliferation of young women in skirted suits and running shoes, and drive-in sperm banks ready to be franchised? Many women in Fargo, and America, are invested in a cultural and social system -- by choice and by circumstance -- which connects their understanding of the desirable female life course to childbearing and a husband's support. To write off the pro-life position as "defensive" or "reactionary" is not only a misrepresentation but sidesteps understanding of the appeal and power of their position.

In an insightful article on abortion activists, authors Callahan and Callahan write:

There are, we think, two abortion debates now taking place, one of them tense, open and familiar, the other more relaxed, less public and in some ways surprising. At one level then, there is the fairly primitive monochromatic struggle that takes place between the most public and vociferous activists on both sides. At that level, the debate admits no accommodation.

But the relationship of abortion to deeper values such as feminism, the family, childrearing and the political culture is open to more flexible and interesting possibilities than have been apparent in much of the public debate (1984: 220).

These two levels of debate were present in Fargo. The overt public controversy played out as a social drama over the clinic opening had the quality of irreconcilable conflict commonly associated with the public side of the abortion battle. A second level of discourse, one with "more flexible and interesting possibilities," became apparent in the way activists explained their motivations. In the following

chapter, life stories of pro-life and pro-choice women are used to show how both personal and historical event are given order and meaning through abortion activism. These narratives provide both subtext and context to the dramatic enactments that have been the focus of this chapter.

1. In addition to the focus on problem pregnancies after they have occurred, there is also a growing concern with providing better and earlier sex education for young people. For example, I regularly attended a series of Junior League meetings being run by a high school home economics teacher that brought almost all the social service counselors in the area together to discuss what would be the most effective way to deal with teenage sexuality on three fronts:

- helping teen mothers raising children on their own through education (a special program to help them finish high school) and assistance (support groups and "parenting" classes);
- reaching pregnant teens and assisting them regardless of their decision;
- developing a "preventative sexuality program" in order to diminish what was seen as a local epidemic in teen pregnancy.

Regardless of one's position on abortion or politics, almost all adults who spoke on this topic felt that teenage girls were under enormous pressure to have sex, and that they needed to be told that "It's OK to say 'no'."

Contrary to popular stereotype, many pro-life women and men I spoke with were very committed to bringing responsible sex education into both their homes and schools. (See the life stories for Karen and Peggy in the following section). Predictably, those most interested in pursuing this angle were parents of adolescents. While they were not in favor of pre-marital intercourse, especially for teen-agers, they recognized it as a fact of life and hoped to be able to communicate with young people realistically and effectively. Their opinions and worries seemed to be very similar in substance to those of most pro-choice activists of the same age. Although I didn't inquire systematically into this issue, it is my impression that pro-life women speak as directly about sex to their children as do pro-choice activists, but might be less likely suggest or help a child obtain access to birth control.

2. The new name for their "pregnancy support center" chosen by the pro-lifers from the First Assemblies of God, Fargo Women's Help and Caring Connection, has gotten them into a lawsuit. The abortion clinic, Fargo Women's Health, has sued them for deceptive advertising which includes not only the name but their ads and "counseling" which mislead potential clients into thinking that they offer or make referrals for abortions. In January 1986, the N.D. Supreme Court ruled in favor of the abortion clinic.

3. For an interesting study of right-to-life symbolism, using content analysis and symbolic anthropology, see Laurie Price, "Anti-Abortion or Pro-Life? Public and Private Culture In An American Protest Group," unpublished M.A. thesis, Dept. of Anthropology, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 1977

4. The saline injection or "salting out" method is generally used for late abortions, i.e. after the fourth month. A hypodermic needle is inserted through the abdomen and uterine wall into the amniotic sac containing the fetus. 200 cc. of amniotic fluid are removed and replaced by the same amount of a 20 percent saline solution which kills the fetus and induces labor anywhere from 12 to 36 hours later (Sarvis and Rodman 1974: 90).

Right-to-lifers find this method particularly objectionable since it is assumed to "burn the skin" of the fetus and therefore cause great pain. Also, since it is used for late abortions when the fetus might be viable (i.e. capable of surviving outside of the womb), it is condemned because it directly kills the fetus, thus excluding the possibility that it could be saved. Hysteromies, for example, which can also be used at this stage, are more dangerous for the mother but increase the likelihood that the fetus will survive.

5. The developments analyzed in this section began to take place in July 1983 and peaked over the following year. Since I left the field in September 1983, I have relied heavily on written and telephone communication with Fargo activists for much of the information described here.

6. Jerry Falwell's Save-A-Baby program, introduced in 1984, is working to establish 1000 centers, with a goal of setting up 10,000 across the country. It operates a 24-hour-a-day hotline and claims to have counseled 18,000 women.

7. By comparison, the membership of the National Right to Life Committee is 70% Catholic, and 20% Protestant, with Lutherans and Baptists comprising the predominant Protestant affiliations. In the U.S. in general, approximately 28% of the population is Catholic and 60% is Protestant (Granberg 1981: 159).

8. It is difficult to get a clear picture of religious affiliation. Statistics are taken infrequently and reflect people who were baptized or confirmed in the denomination, not actual attendance or belief. From 1971 estimates of the North Dakota's Conference of Churches, of those who belong to a church in the area, about 30-35% are Catholic, 40% are Lutheran, with the remainder divided between a variety of Protestant churches -- Baptist, Presbyterian, Methodist, Episcopalian, Congregationalist, Assemblies of God -- and a very small Jewish congregation. By 1983, it was clear that the Assemblies of God was drawing people away from other denominations in large numbers. Several ministers in town estimated they had as much of 20% of the church-going population at their weekly services. The picture is further complicated by the fact that people may nominally remain Lutheran while attending Pentecostal services, or participating in informal charismatic prayer groups.

9. The Granberg study was conducted in June of 1980 with the cooperation of the NRLC and NARAL, and funding from the Graduate Research Council of the University of Missouri. The mailing included letters

from the author and a leader of the prospective respondent's organization and a postage paid return envelope. While the NARAL names were selected at random by computer, NRLC preferred that the names be provided by the state affiliates that make up the NRLC coalition. This meant that each state organization had to be contacted and an attempt made to secure its cooperation in the study. 31 states chose to cooperate, and 19 either declined or did not send the requested lists. According to the authors, there seemed to be no regional or state bias from the NRLC names they received. See Donald Granberg, "The Abortion Activists," in Family Planning Perspectives, 13 (4), 1981.

PART IV. ACTIVISM AS SELF-CONSTRUCTION

Chapter 7: Life Stories: The Nexus of Reproduction and Generation

Introduction

The abortion battle has brought into the public domain competing sets of interests in the so-called private sphere conventionally assigned to woman in this culture. In so doing, the boundaries between these domains are subverted, rearranged and constituted anew. For these reasons, my research was designed to illuminate how abortion operates on a symbolic as well as pragmatic level, not only for national leadership and policy-making which have received the most attention, but in the lives of individual grassroots activists as well, the constituency on which the movement is currently built. While the social and symbolic processes are different in each of these arenas, they are effectively articulated in the ways that committed activists interpret their behavior and beliefs to themselves and others as part of an ongoing narrative of their lives.

To better understand this process, I asked activists in Fargo to work with me in clarifying the connections they saw between their sense of personal identity and their abortion activism. The result was a set of what I call life stories,¹ segments of oral autobiographical narratives which focus on the symbolic aspects of social life and the meanings particular forms -- in this case abortion -- assume for an individual. Because the creation of these life stories was so clearly a collaborative effort, I chose to call the people with whom I worked "interpreters" rather than "informants."² While the latter connotes betrayal, voyeurism, and infiltration, interpreter suggests that the ethnographer is more of an interlocutor, in dialogue with both the people with whom she or he works and the audience "back home." These

life stories express what one anthropologist calls a "worldview," the organization of ideas in which the self is the axis (Redfield 1953: 86).³

Specifically, these texts reveal how abortion is effective as an organizing symbol for activists on each side, how it is connected to their different but interrelated understandings of gender, sexuality and reproduction. In an article discussing the role abortion seems to play in activists' lives, authors Callahan and Callahan write:

The general debate has seen an effort, on all sides, to make abortion fit into some overall coherent scheme of values, one that can combine personal convictions and consistency with more broadly held social values. Abortion poses a supreme test in trying to achieve that coherence. It stands at the juncture of a number of value systems, which continually joust with each other for dominance, but none of which by itself can do full justice to all the values that, with varying degrees of insistence and historical rootedness, clamor for attention and respect (1984: 219).

This integrative process that abortion activism seems to produce is made clear in the life stories. As narratives, they illuminate how those dimensions of experience considered "private" in American culture intersect with particular social and historical conditions that distinguish the memberships of each group. In the ways that the rhetoric and action of abortion activism are incorporated into life stories, one can see how cultural definitions of the female life course, and the social consequences implied, are selected, rejected, reordered and reproduced in new form. More generally, they show how activism operates to mediate the construction of self with social, political and cultural processes.

The Utility of the Life Story

The use of life stories provides an alternative to the survey approach used in most studies of the abortion issue. Surveys of representative samples of pro-life and pro-choice activists have not established any clear correlations between such activity and conventional social categories. Activists span and divide religious, ethnic and occupational lines. The core of membership on both sides is, primarily white, middle-class,⁴ and female.⁵ What this indicates is that research based on broad, preconceived categorical measures is perhaps necessary but not sufficient to understanding the sources of and differences in activism.

The best example of the survey approach, Kristin Luker's study of abortion activists in California (1984), finally founders on the limits of its own method. The investigator's sensitivity to the diversity within each movement cannot be sustained effectively; the categories and analysis required in survey research by necessity flatten difference and neglect the question of change over time. Thus, Luker's study ends up levelling activists on both sides of the movement into stereotypes motivated by prior sociological conditions: the controversy is depicted as a static battle between the forces of tradition and modernity. The Right-to-Life movement emerges as the last stand of women in conventional marriage arrangements defending an atavistic "lifestyle" against the forces of progress represented by pro-choice activists and, more generally, contemporary American culture.

This portrait is problematic on several counts. It reinforces the Parsonian notion that industrialization stripped familial arrangements of their instrumental functions, leaving only an expressive "natural"

core, the very center of which is the ultimate symbol of nurturance and affective relations in western society, the mother-child dyad. In a critique of this position, anthropologist Sylvia Yanagisako shows how this position, when used in analyses of female activity in complex societies, reduces women to "a relatively homogeneous mass whose roles as wives and mothers retard their differentiation" (1977: 215). The analysis of right-to-life women as a "gemeinschaft" holdout against the movement of women into a "gesellschaft" context simply reproduces the Parsonian scheme in a new form in which pro-choice women are structurally male.

I would argue that the representation of right-to-life women as housewives marginal to "mainstream America" is a misreading of who these people are and the transformative effects the movement is having in contemporary United States. Because commitment to the abortion issue, for or against, is generally so all-encompassing, the relationship of activism to self-construction is critical to understanding the movement and the basis for its widespread appeal.

For that reason I have used life stories in this thesis as texts in which abortion is a key symbol around which activists are interpreting and reorienting their lives. In each story, activism emerges out of the intersection of specific life transitions with a particular cultural and historical moment, marked as a pivotal point that changed or reinforced the course of an assumed life trajectory. From this perspective, it becomes clearer how women on each side are acting to serve what they see as their own best interests. As such, the narratives provide a rich view of the "emic" dimension; they reveal how political engagement is used to order discontinuities in the life

course -- for an individual or a generation -- when cultural models for their interpretation are in contention.

Method

Daily participant observation in the field site of Fargo, North Dakota, set the frame for this work. However, it did not provide sufficient data for central questions I had regarding the significance activism assumed in people's life course, confirming or changing people's subjective relationship to their own past and future. The one-on-one interview setting provided an opportunity for subjects to articulate at length what they felt were their motivations for activism without resorting to the platitudes of movement rhetoric. Talking outside the context of political meetings and events, away from the monitoring eyes and ears of fellow activists, they were able to voice doubts and dissent as well as felt contradictions.*

I chose subjects who had taken, during the period of my fieldwork, the most prominent roles in local activity and who reflected, by my observation, the range of diversity encompassed in the active membership of each group in terms of age, socio-economic status, religious affiliation, household and marriage arrangements, style of activism and the like. Most of my interviews were with women since the membership of both groups is primarily female, as is the case throughout the country. The men I worked with were either husbands of activists or pro-life clergy. Altogether, I collected:

- 21 life stories from right-to-lifer activists;
- 14 life stories from pro-choice activists.

These individuals reflect, of course, those who were involved in the controversy from 1981-1983, the period during which I conducted

fieldwork. While most of these people continue to be active, each side continues to undergo rapid permutations both locally and nationally. This study necessarily represents only one moment in a continually unfolding drama.

People were interviewed for four to five hours, sometimes twice at the location of their choice where we knew we would not be interrupted. Generally, this was at the home of the interviewee; sometimes at a workplace at the end of the day; or occasionally, during long car trips. I began every session by explaining that all information was in confidence and that names and identifications would be changed in my write up. There were no objections to my tape recording sessions. I also made clear that I would be having similar "visits" (as Fargo residents referred to the interviews) with their opponents.⁷ I explained that my interests were:

- to understand why women were so divided on the abortion issue;
- to provide a more accurate portrayal of grassroots abortion activists since they tend to be overlooked or misrepresented in both popular and scholarly discussions of the issue.

The actual interview proceeded in a straightforward manner. I asked people to tell me how they saw their lives in relation to their current activism on the abortion issue. Since my objective was to interfere as little possible in the creation of the narrative, I only asked directed questions when something was unclear, and to be sure I had relatively comparable material from each person on the following questions:

1. How are experiences of work and family, social and religious activity, and a sense of ones' place in the culture, framed in relation to abortion in the narrative of the life course?
2. Is the consciousness that lead to abortion activism

considered consistent with or a repudiation of prior beliefs and experiences? How is the past negotiated in relation to current attitudes on the abortion controversy, gender arrangements, sexuality and reproduction?

3. What aspects of contemporary life are seen as undesirable, how are these connected to abortion, and what is their real or imagined impact on individual lives? What sorts of political, religious or cultural activities are seen as appropriate correctives to these problems? How are these concerns enacted in the social organization of daily life?

Most responded by recollecting key events which, in their view, led them to their present activity. Generally these were placed in a loose chronological frame -- experiences with natal families; education and work; courtship, marriage and reproduction. In almost all cases, I was a familiar figure to people so that we both assumed a certain amount of prior knowledge. I continued to see people, of course, after the interviews and frequently they would recall things they had forgotten to tell me. In a sense then the interview was not bounded by the framed event itself, but was part of an ongoing dialogue that had been provoked by the first "visit."

The Interaction

I was concerned, initially, that being a young, unmarried, Jewish and thoroughly urban visitor from New York City might pose serious barriers to communication with Fargo women who are mostly married, Christian and from rural or small-town backgrounds. I had private wagers with myself as to which of my categorical positions would be most detrimental to establishing rapport.

Much to my surprise, the fact that I was in many ways "culturally strange" to Fargo served to my advantage. For many, I was the first Jew they had ever met. Interviews frequently ended with curious

questions regarding Jewish holidays, customs and ceremonies. Had I been a member of a Christian denomination, I would have had to negotiate my way through the numerous inter- and intra- church conflicts in town and my questions about religion and frequent "church-hopping" would have been viewed with some suspicion. As a single women, my queries and interest in people's feelings about marriage, birth control, motherhood and the like were treated as natural curiosity; responses were often framed as if I were being counseled for my own future conjugal happiness.

Perhaps the most difficult aspect of my role was my identity as a New Yorker. Stereotypes abound of New York; it is often represented in speech as Fargo's opposite: "Well, they might do that [prostitution, "adult" bookstores, abortion] in New York but in Fargo?." New Yorkers are considered rude, snobbish, morally questionable and unappreciative of middle-American values. As my rapport with people increased, their desire to disengage me from my New York identity became apparent in the sighs of relief and mutterings of "I thought so" that I heard every time I mentioned that I actually grew up in the Midwest, albeit Chicago. My genuine enthusiasm for Fargo life helped mitigate my urban East Coast stigma as well. People began to act as if it were their mission to expose me to the more bucolic aspects of regional life; invitations to visit family farms and home-town reunions were constant.

In addition to negotiating my personal/social identity, I was worried that people would find the interview process itself an intrusion. Relative to other regions of the country such as the urban northeast or west coast, self-disclosure is not a common form of

discourse and was looked askance,⁸ even in settings that required it, for example in the taking of medical histories. From my observations in Fargo, personal revelation occurs infrequently; when it does, it is generally, in highly stylized forms, such as at Alcoholics Anonymous meetings, in religious testimonies, charismatic prayer group meetings, or feminist consciousnessraising sessions. Despite all this, after the first few interviews, it appeared that my concerns were misplaced. People seemed to be talking freely to me and even enjoying the process. At the end of interviews, I always expressed my thanks for the time and trouble people had taken, and for allowing me a somewhat intimate glimpse of their lives. In almost every case, I was thanked in return. I interpreted this response as a reaction to my position. I was a "trained listener," sympathetic, interested, non-judgmental and familiar with the larger context of people's lives. We were, in a sense, interested in figuring out the same questions. In addition, my anomalous cultural status made it clear that I would not be evaluating interviews by the relatively conservative standards regarding behavior and self-expression that are prevalent in Fargo. Since I was not really a part of the community and would eventually be leaving, I could be entrusted with knowledge that might not be safe if told to friends or kin residing in what is a rather closed social setting.

Interpretation

I viewed the interview as part of the ongoing process of reconstruction of memory and experience that provides continuity between the past and current action and belief. In his classic work Remembering, F.C. Bartlett speaks to this aspect of the life history.

Alike with the individual and with the group, the past is continually being remade, reconstructed in the events of the present, and in both cases, certain outstanding events or details may play a leading part in setting the course of this reaction (1932: 309).

The desire of people to continue the conversation beyond the actual interview itself indicated to me that it was the cognitive and integrative aspect of the act of self-reflection, rather than any particular confessional catharsis that made the interview process pleasurable. Anthropologist Barbara Myerhoff noted a similar effect in explaining the delight taken by one of her informants, Jacob, in articulating his life history.

He created for himself continuity by integrating all the phases of his long life into a single narrative account, contemplated by a single sentient being, aware of having been other beings at other points in the life cycle. And he incorporated external historical events into his life account, thus establishing continuity between himself and the times in which he lived, meshing inner and outer history into a unified tale... Jacob was not only constructing a myth, an orderly and moral tale about himself, he was constructing a Self (Myerhoff 1978: 221).

Myerhoff attributes the importance of this life review to the process of ageing.

Reminiscence is no mere escapist desire to live in the past as some claim. Rather it should be regarded as a major developmental task for the elderly, resulting in the integration that will allow them to age well and die well (ibid: 222).

This critical process of ordering and reconstructing is not confined to the aged, though it may be more marked at that stage of the life cycle. It may be equally compelling at critical transitions that occur throughout the life course, particularly when there is dissonance between such moments and the cultural definitions for such change. In an article discussing the lives of Italian peasant women, Sydel Silverman suggests that by looking at what she calls "the

life crisis" -- "a transition from one culturally defined stage of life to another at which there is regularly experienced individual stress," -- one can see more clearly the social organization of gender in a particular society and the function of women in it (1975: 309). I would suggest that such "life crises" may reveal not only regularities, but contention over cultural definitions, particularly in situations of rapid change when the social rules for an assumed life trajectory are called into question.

Most early anthropological studies of transitional life events used life histories as ideal models, meant to illustrate typical socialization processes. The model for this tradition was Arnold Van Gennep's 1908 classic, The Rites of Passage. He writes:

The life of an individual in any society is a series of passages from one age to another and from one occupation to another...Transitions from group to group and from one social situation to the next are looked on as implicit in the very fact of existence, so that a man's life comes to be made up of a succession of stages with similar ends and beginnings: birth, social puberty, marriage, fatherhood, advancement to a higher class, occupational specialization and death. For every one of these events there are ceremonies whose essential purpose is to enable the individual to pass from one defined position to another which is equally well-defined (1908 [1960]: 2-3).

This schema was used by a generation of anthropologists who embraced a homeostatic concept of culture and a view of the individual as a passive recipient of cultural norms. Ritual passage was studied as a means for describing, rather than explaining a particular social formation.

In a 1980 article, "The Rite of Return," Vincent Crapanzano points out some of the problematic aspects in Gennep's approach. Specifically, Crapanzano illustrates how a failure to consider the experiential vantage point of ritual participants can lead to "a

blindness to possible discontinuities in the ritual process and dissonances in the ritual experience" (: 17). In addition, he points out that Gennep's strict distinction between physiological and social transitions fails to take into account the fact that "both the physiological and the social are cultural categories" (:18). More recently, theorists who take more phenomenological approaches have suggested parallels between the periodization of the life cycle offered by "primitive" rites of passage and modern theories of personality development. Crapanzano points out that although this perspective incorporates subjective experience into its frame, it resembles Gennep's in that

it also fails to take into account a possible disjunction between the ritually periodized biography of the individual and his everyday experience of himself, and his personal history with all its contingencies, particularities and deviations (:19).

"Life crises," or culturally marked discontinuous life cycle transitions may indicate a lack of fit between "ideal biographies" and personal history. This view has informed some of the most interesting recent work in demography and social history* and, to some extent, the last decade of studies of life histories in anthropology which have drawn on more interpretive paradigms such as phenomenology and psychoanalysis. Stressing the native's subjective experience, the emphasis has been on deviance as well as conformity to normative models, and the way the two are dialectically structured (e.g. Crapanzano, 1980, 1981; Shostak 1981). Other studies have specifically addressed the question of how disjunction between the individual life-course, cultural expectations, and new historical conditions enable individuals to become agents of social change (e.g. Mintz 1981).

Anthropologist David Mandelbaum's analysis of the life history of the paradigmatic social activist of this century, Mahatma Gandhi, is a model of such an approach. He uses Gandhi's life course to understand

the effective interplay and real relations in the course of which actors may alter the roles, change the nature of the choices, and shift the cultural definitions. So the cultural expectations for a life course may be revised in the midcourse of actual lives...in acts of personal choice and the common ways of working out the recurrent conflicts of life. Some of these regularities are recognized by the participants, others are not (Mandelbaum 1973: 180).

These orientations in which the agency of the actor is prominent provide the framework I use in interpreting the narratives of abortion activists in relation to the social movement which engages them. In the life stories of female grassroots activists involved in the abortion controversy, one can locate sources of dissonance between cultural codes, social process and individual transformation in the life courses of contemporary American women. When the definition of a particular life event -- abortion, or more generally, the transition to motherhood, for example -- becomes the object of a contentious political struggle, it reveals a larger disruption occurring in the social order as well. The battles are loci for potential cultural and social innovation; in life stories, change is incorporated, ordered and assigned meaning.

In the narratives analyzed in the following two chapters, abortion serves as a symbolic frame, providing two mutually exclusive interpretations and arenas of action which give the narrator symbolic control over problematic transitions in the female life cycle in contemporary America. Difficult reproductive events, shifts in household composition and kin arrangements, and tensions between the work of wage labor and mothering are prominent in the texts as sources of critical conflict at

both the individual and collective level. These transitions constitute life crises for women at this moment in American history, I would argue, because of the dissonance between women's experience of discontinuous changes in their own biographies and the available cultural models for marking them, both cognitively and socially. As increasing numbers of women are entering the wage labor market and traditional marriage and familial arrangements seem to be in disarray, it is hardly surprising that the relationship of women to reproduction and mothering in particular is the object of tremendous logistical and interpretive struggle. For women reaching adulthood in the face of such cultural discord regarding the shape of the female life course in relation to the larger social order, at least some use activism on the abortion issue to lend order and meaning to their personal and historical experience.

The "Problem of Generations"

Of the life stories I collected from abortion activists in Fargo, in almost all cases, pro-choice and pro-life alike, women described a coming to consciousness regarding abortion in relation to some critical realignment of personal and social identity, usually related to reproduction. Initially, this recognition only seemed to confound the problem of trying to explain the differences between the women on opposite sides of the issue. From accounts of their early histories, up to the age of 18 or so, it would be hard to predict whether women would end up pro-choice or pro-life in their views. Working-class Catholics became ardent feminists; middle-class college-educated Protestants became staunch pro-lifers. As I puzzled over the seeming convergences

in catalyzing experiences, social backgrounds and even sentiments -- most see themselves as working toward the reform of society as a whole -- I began to consider a more obvious distinction. I noticed that there were almost no pro-choice women in their late twenties or early thirties. Most (80%) were between the ages of 34 to 44 or, in a few cases, in their early twenties. In terms of their reproductive histories, they were either at the end of a phase of their life cycle devoted to motherhood, or were unmarried, divorced or childless. For the most part, these women had reached adulthood -- which in most cases meant marriage and children -- in the late 1960's and early 1970's at a time when feminism and reproductive rights activity were culturally ascendant. When these women sought new cognitive resources with which to understand and frame their experiences, feminism provided an analysis, a community of others, and a means for engaging in social change that legitimated their own dissonant experiences.

Of the pro-life women, on the other hand, the women who were both most active and in the majority (77%) ranged from age 23 to 37; four were in their 60's. Almost all the younger women had infants and/or children at home, had worked prior to having children, and left wage labor when they became mothers. For most, this transition occurred in the late 1970's or even more recently, a period when feminism was on the wane as an active social movement and pro-life and anti-ERA activity were on the rise.

In his classic essay, "The Problem of Generations," Karl Mannheim underscores the importance of this nexus between the individual life cycle and rapidly changing historical conditions in understanding generational shifts in the formation of political consciousness and

social movements. Mannheim writes:

The sociological problem of generations...begins at that point where the sociological relevance of these biological factors is discovered.

This means, in the first place, that our culture is developed by individuals who come into contact anew with the accumulated heritage...a fresh contact (meeting something anew) always means a changed relationship of distance from the object and a novel approach in assimilating, using and developing the proffered material...

in the case of generations, the "fresh contact" with the social and cultural heritage is determined not by mere social change but by fundamental biological factors. We can accordingly differentiate between two types of "fresh contact," one based on a shift in social relations, and the other in vital factors (1952: 381).

To use Mannheim's suggestion, one must consider the intersection of two unfolding processes in order to understand what attracts women to opposing movements in the abortion controversy. One is the "biological factors," the trajectory of a woman's sexual and reproductive experiences over her life course and her interpretation of those events. The second is the historical moment shaping the culture when these key transitional points occur. It is this moment of "fresh contact" that creates the conditions of "a changed relationship" and a "novel approach" to the culture that ensures its continual reorganization.

An instance of such "fresh contact" is manifest in the self-definition and social actions of women engaged in the abortion controversy. The following two chapters offer a detailed analysis of the life stories of a small group of these activists. Their narratives reveal how the embracing of a pro-life or pro-choice position emerges specifically out of a confluence of reproductive and generational experiences. In the negotiation of critical moments in the female life course with an ever-shifting social environment, the contours of their own biographies and the larger cultural and historical landscape are

measured, reformulated, and given new meaning. This process is central to the "changed relationships" of many women to American culture that have generated struggles over conflicting views of the interpretation of gender in the last two decades.

1. In a 1984 review article on life histories in the Annual Review of Sociology, Daniel Bertaux and Martin Kohli use the term "life story" in this way. I find it a useful way to distinguish such narratives from more comprehensive, fully developed narrative texts that would more properly be called life histories, such as Vincent Crapanzano's Juhami, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1980; Sidney Mintz's Worker In the Cage, NY, Norton, 1974; or Marjorie Shostak's Nisa, NY, Vintage 1983. See Daniel Bertaux and Martin Kohli, "The Life Story Approach: A Continental View," Annual Review of Sociology 1984 10: 215-237.

2. Credit for this term belongs to Melissa, the woman in whose home I lived while in Fargo. During the course of my fieldwork, I had occasion to use the word "informant" in conversations with people in Fargo with whom I was working. Although I had long accepted the term as part of the jargon of anthropology, I had always felt uncomfortable with it. One evening, Melissa asked me what the term meant. I explained that it referred to the people who, like herself, were helping me to understand what was going on in the community. She paused -- a long pause appropriate to the rhythms of Fargo conversations -- and then said, "Don't you think we're really more like you're interpreters?" I was struck by her comment and felt her choice of that term better expressed my experience of the relationship I had with people there. They were translating a discourse I was struggling to master. Accordingly, I choose to use that term rather than informant. In addition, it seems to reflect one turn that ethnography is taking in general, and in my own work.

3. Redfield describes worldview as:

the picture the members of a society have of the properties of characters upon their stage of action...the way the world looks to the people looking out (B6)

It is the property of existence as distinguished from and related to the self (Robert Redfield, The Primitive World, Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 1953: 91)

4. As Rayna Rapp notes in her excellent essay, "Family and Class In Contemporary America," in B. Thorne and M. Yalom, eds. Rethinking the Family, NY: Longman, 1982,

If ever a concept carried a heavy weight of ideology, it is the concept of class in American social science. We have a huge and muddled literature that attempts to reconcile objective and subjective criteria, to sort people into lowers, uppers, and middles, to argue about the relation of consciousness to material reality... (170).

"Social class" is a short-hand for a process, not a thing..by which different social relations to the means of production are inherited and reproduced under capitalise.

...there are shifting frontiers which separate poverty, stable wage-earning, affluent salaries, and inherited wealth (170-1).

Recognizing this, as well as the complicated questions raised by the sticky question of the relationship of "class" to women's unpaid

domestic labor, I use Rapp's definitions for middle-class families and households in this thesis.

Households among the middle class are obviously based on a stable resource base that allows for some amount of luxury and discretionary spending...Middle-class households probably are able to rely on commodity forms rather than kinship processes to ease both economic and geographic transitions.

The families that organize such households are commonly thought to be characterized by egalitarian marriages (181). (For egalitarian marriages, see David M. Schneider and R.T. Smith, Class Differences and Sex Roles In American Kinship and Family Structure, Englewood Cliffs, 1973.

This definition is consistent with those used in the studies I cite as evidence for the middle-class basis for the abortion movement as a whole. It offers a good general description of the households and families of activists I worked with in Fargo. I do not mean to dismiss class but rather want to underscore that the opposing positions on abortion are not isomorphic with distinctive groups of people situated differently in the social relations of production.

I use the life histories in particular to show how much more complicated the process is, and the multiple settings from which identity is drawn. For example, with regard to class, I examine the relationship between childbirth, family income, and religious participation in relationship to subjective and collective identity of female activists.

5. See, for example, Daniel Granberg, "The Abortion Activists," Family Planning Perspectives, Volume 13, no.4, July-August 1981; Susan Harding, "Family Reform Movements: Recent Feminism and Its Opposition," Feminist Studies, Volume 7, No. 1, Spring 1981; and Raymond Tatalovich and Byron W. Daynes, The Politics of Abortion NY: Praeger, 1981: 116-137.

Granberg's random sample survey of members of the National Abortion Rights Action League (NARAL) and National Right to Life Committee (NRLC), which is the most thorough of all research to date, gives the following breakdown of selected demographic and social status characteristics:

<u>Characteristic</u>	NARAL (n=472)	NRLC (n=426)
<u>Sex</u>		
Female	78%	63%
<u>Race</u>		
White	98%	98%
<u>Marital Status</u>		
Married	55%	87%
Separated/Divorced	15	2
Widowed	4	2
Never Married	26	9
<u>Education</u>		
High school graduate	3	9
Some college	14	32
College graduate	37	26
Advanced degree	36	32

Annual Family Income (1980)

less than \$20,000	28	24
\$20,000 - \$40,000	37	49
\$40,000 - \$60,000	18	16
more than \$60,000	17	11

Subjective Social Class

Lower	0	0
Working	7	14
Middle	77	72
Upper	16	14

Residence

Rural/Small town	12	25
Medium-sized city: 10-100,000)	19	28
Suburban	31	24
Large city: + 100,000	38	23

(Table 1: 158)

6. The following passage from Linda Anderson, the leader of LIFE Coalition, is illustrative:

Sometimes I think I'm too sympathetic. Isn't that terrible? I think I understand the other side too well. I see their arguments and I understand them. I just think there has to be somebody that can say what needs to be said better than I can.

Like on the radio show I thought, you know, I just hadn't represented anything right. I remember going into the bathroom and just bawling. I just think there's gotta be people, you know, that have the words for things. I mean, who am I? I sit there trying to think of the word for something and I know my being there is right, and I know somebody has to speak out, but it's still very difficult for me to do.

7. This might have been problematic, but due to the circumstances that first brought me to Fargo, was not. I went to Fargo in 1981-82 as a producer for a television documentary about the opening of the clinic and the controversy that ensued. Both sides apparently felt the program accurately portrayed their position since each group -- pro-life and pro-choice -- was using the show in public presentations. As a result, when I returned for eight months of fieldwork in 1983, my credibility as someone who would listen open-mindedly to people on both sides of the debate was not an issue.

8. For example, a favorite joke I heard often while in the field, part of the "Sven and Ollie" genre of laconic Scandinavian genre of humor common to the area, captures the emotive style:

(Sven to Ollie): You know Ollie, I love my wife so much I almost told her once.

9. See for example, Michael Anderson, "The Emergence of the Modern Life Cycle in Britain," The Journal of Social History, 10(1) 1985; Alice S. Rossi, "Life-Span Theories and Women's Lives," Signs, 6(1) 1980: 4-32; Alice S. Rossi, ed. Gender and the Life Course, NY, Aldine, 1984; and Tamara Hareven, ed. Transitions: The Family and the Life Course in Historical Perspective, NY: Academic 1978.

Chapter 8: The Pro-Choice Narratives

The "Pioneers"

While most of the pro-choice activists in Fargo were born between 1945-50, a few older women had been pioneers in the first wave of efforts to legalize abortion in the late 1960's and early 1970's. Most notable among these early abortion advocates was Ronna Hartman, now in her late 60's, who introduced North Dakota's first bill to reform abortion laws. She saw the issue as a natural extension of women's concerns, something she felt dedicated to represent after having spent three decades of her life as a full-time homemaker and mother. Ronna proposed the abortion legislation in 1967, her freshman term in the State House of Representatives, unaware of the potential volatility of the issue.

Up until I introduced the bill, I can't think of anyone who ever said anything really derogatory or cruel to me, and all of a sudden there was an avalanche.

It was hard to imagine anyone hurling epithets of "Godless murderer" at Ronna, the lively, recently-widowed woman who was recounting the events that earned her the title of North Dakota's "abortion lady." Dressed in a crisp white cotton blouse, blue skirt and plain leather pumps, she looked very much the part of wife, mother and community volunteer that she had played before she entered politics at age fifty. Of the handful of state legislators who were women (there were five her first term), Ronna was the only one, until recently, who espoused feminist causes; on the abortion issue in particular, she had been opposed by some of her female colleagues.

Ronna attributes her distinctive perspective to her mother's

influence, beginning with the story of the circumstances of her own birth.

My mother was a very unusual woman. She decided to divorce my father when I was born in 1916 and that was unheard of...My father was very well off and good to my mother as far as material things went. When I was due, he parked her in the hospital and he went over to the Superior which was really a whore house. She had a very strict Baptist upbringing and was sorely upset. And she decided she wasn't going to bring her children up with that sort of thing...When she got home, she convinced him she wanted to have a business, a beauty parlor...He went along with that, bought all the equipment and got everything set up and then when he went off on his next big toot, she moved it all to Bemidji. She planned it all out. She knew she had no skills and four children. She'd been married, like all girls then, right out of high school. So then she married a miner, but she was independent as a breeze and did what she wanted to do...

But I think my mother always had a certain amount of guilt because she did the divorce soon after I was born..So she always treated me differently. I was the family pet.

Ronna's view of her special relationship to her mother that marked her as unusual early in life crystallizes in the story of her menarche.

As I look back, I had a lot of troubles menstruating. I have only one ovary and was told I would never have children. So my mother decided that if that was true, I better have a career and it shouldn't be just anything. Wouldn't I like to be a lawyer? So I guess I would have to say that all that was planted in me early on.

The dreams, however, were deferred for five decades by historical and economic circumstance. Caught in the pinch of the Depression, Ronna went to nursing school rather than college, then quit to marry a man who eventually became manager of an insurance company. By her own description, she lead a "very traditional life;" she raised three children and was involved in the PTA, Cub Scouts, and women's groups of the Republican Party and the Presbyterian Church.

I think now that it's all over and years have passed, I can look at the Depression and say it was a good experience for me. That sounds terrible but I learned it doesn't hurt to be poor. And everybody was in the same boat. An orange was a big treat. You

learned to value the things you did get. In retrospect, it interrupted my education and did things like that, but you made the best with what you had. Like I told my kids, if I die tomorrow, don't shed one tear, cause I've lead a good life.

In her 40's, Ronna joined the local chapter of the League of Women Voters, a voluntary women's organization engaged in research and education to improve the political process.⁴ When she was nominated to be president of that group, she asked permission of her husband, fully expecting him to say no. Instead he encouraged her, noting she was "getting crotchety" since their last child left home that year; she accepted the offer, a moment she describes as "the beginning of her liberation." Several years later, two friends suggested she run for office. The idea took root immediately and flowered into 18 continuous years as a state representative, an unexpected second career to the first phase of her life spent as homemaker and mother; and a fulfillment of both her own and her mother's early ambitions.

Between 1967 and 1973, Ronna introduced abortion reform bills three times into the state legislature, and was met with increasing opposition at each attempt.

How did I get through that? Well, you're young and you believe you're right, and the more obstacles placed in your path the more strength you summon..But you can only keep yourself steeled up for so long.

After four years of being the only one in the state talking on the subject and travelling all around, I had reached the point where I couldn't do a good job of it anymore.

Ronna continued with her agenda to represent the interests of women and children on other fronts besides abortion. She introduced bills to improve treatment of juvenile offenders, to enforce child support payments, to support displaced homemakers and criminalize spousal rape. While Ronna recognizes the legislative progress for women that she

helped to implement, she nonetheless is concerned about young women today who she feels are unappreciative of the battles fought by an older generation, people like herself.

I worry a little about what's happening now. I read something about the kids in college and how conservative they are... and I get angry because I know so many young women lawyers and doctors and they are the suggest bunch of people. And I think, "Oh my God they haven't the faintest idea how people fought so that they could get into that kind of law school. I wish it had been that easy for me..."

It's too easy to reach maturity when this is an accomplished fact, like it's always been there for you. And that is the mentality you are talking about on the abortion issue that this group coming up is going to have. How long has it been? 1969 to 1983? A lot of people became adults during that time and I guess we have to accept that's the way life is.

The shift in attitudes Ronna is describing is what Mannheim called "the problem of generations."

...with the advent of a new participant in the process of culture, the change of attitude toward the heritage handed down by his predecessors is a novel one (: 384).

Whether a new generation style emerges every year, every thirty, or every 100 years... depends entirely on the trigger action of social and cultural process (: 403).

The dilemma is, in a sense, how to reproduce in the present a particular stance regarding gender and politics given that the historical and cultural conditions that shaped most of the pro-choice activists no longer exist. Ronna's fears that a new generation, which presumes feminist gains to be the status quo, will not maintain support for abortion rights. It is a worry she shares with other abortion advocates, many of whom are twenty years junior to her.

Pro-Choice Activists: The 1940's Cohort

The women activists who organized the pro-choice efforts to defend the Fargo abortion clinic in 1981 were born, for the most part, between 1945-1950. They represent a range of backgrounds in terms of their natal families, yet all were influenced as young adults by the social unrest of the late 1960's and early 1970's, and by the women's movement in particular. For some, their "fresh contact" with these social movements was experienced as a moment of "conversion" from ideas and values with which they had been raised; for others it was expressed more as an "awakening" of some truth felt but never fully realized. While their current household, conjugal and work arrangements differ, for almost all, the strong commitment to prochoice activism in particular was connected to specific life cycle events, generally having to do with experiences and choices around sexuality, pregnancy, and childbearing, including the choice not to have children.

The central figure of the current controversy in Fargo is Kay Bellevue, the woman who opened the abortion clinic in 1981. Because of the role she played as a local pro-choice activist for the last decade, her story is particularly illuminating for understanding how grassroots abortion rights activity developed in Fargo and in the life of its key local leader.

Kay grew up in the Midwest, the oldest of seven children, the daughter of a Baptist minister and a woman who was a homemaker and part-time worker in the public school system. As is the case for many of the pro-choice activists, Kay began her narrative with the biographical "reasons" for what she sees as her oppositional stance toward the culture which she traces to a key family member:

I always perceived myself as different from other kids. As a preacher's kid, whether it was true or not, I always felt people expected me to be perfect and to behave in a ladylike manner...My dad was always interested in what was going on politically and took a keen interest in the anti-war movement and rights for blacks. I was the apple of his eye and he's always been proud of the things I've done. My dad's a real independent person and I see a lot of that in me.

Although she stopped going to church when she got married -- something she feels could stigmatize her in a community noted for its church attendance -- Kay nonetheless connects her activism to religious principles of social justice learned in her natal family.

I have always acted on what to me are Judeo-Christian principles. The Ten Commandments plus love thy neighbor. I was raised by my family to have a very very strong sense of ethics and it's still with me. I have a strong concern about people and social issues. I've had a tough time stomaching what goes on in the churches in the name of Christianity. I've found my sense of community elsewhere...

It's very distressing to me that, particularly the people opposed to abortion will attempt to say their moral beliefs are the only correct ones...I think pro-choice people have a very strong basis in theology for the caring, loving perspective they have on abortion as do the anti-abortion people have a basis in theology for their strong, loving caring perspective about the fetus.

In her senior year of college, Kay got pregnant and married and soon after moved to Denver where her husband was pursuing graduate studies in English. Like almost all of the women activists, regardless of their position on abortion, Kay's transition to motherhood was an event surrounded by ambivalence. Although her behavior was not in fact that different from that of many right-to-life women -- i.e. as a young mother she worked part-time and became involved in community associations -- Kay's interpretation of her actions stresses the limitations of motherhood; by contrast, pro-life women faced with the same dilemma emphasize the drawbacks of the workplace. Not surprisingly, for both groups of women, voluntary work for a "cause" was an acceptable and

satisfying way of managing to balance the pleasures and duties of motherhood with the structural isolation of that work as it is organized in America.

I enjoyed being home, but I could never stay home all the time. I have never done that in my life. After being home one year and taking care of a kid, I felt my mind was a wasteland. And we were so poor we could almost never go out together.

Dividing childcare with her husband and babysitter, Kay started substitute teaching and taking classes. In her early 20's, she became active in a local chapter of La Leche League, an international organization promoting breastfeeding and natural childbirth. She marks this as a key event.

I met someone, I don't remember who or how who said, "You should come to a La Leche League meeting with me because one of their sessions is on prepared childbirth and after your experience, you might appreciate hearing what they're talking about." My first child had not been a pleasant birth experience so I went and I was really intrigued. There were people talking about this childbirth experience like it was the most fantastic thing you'd ever been through. I certainly didn't feel that way. I had a very long labor. I screamed, I moaned...my husband thought I was dying.

So anyway, this group introduced me to a whole different conception of childbirth and my second experience was so different I couldn't believe it.

And the way I came to feminism was that through all of this, I became acutely aware of how little physicians who were supposed to be doctors for women actually knew about women's bodies. So I became a real advocate for women to stand up for their rights, starting with breastfeeding.

Kay's story of how she came to be an abortion rights advocate unfolds as she and I drive past expanses of rich black prairie topsoil being readied for spring wheat planting. The trip is one Kay makes every week to bring information about the clinic she administers and its services to the hundreds of small towns across the state where

information on birth control, let alone abortion, is hard to come by, even in 1983. Over half the clinic's patients come from rural regions of the state that Kay and I visit. The small towns where we stop are marked from the surrounding prairie by little more than a grid of eight or nine streets, a railroad stop, a grain elevator, a bar, a coffee shop, and five or six churches. The pamphlets with information on the clinic that Kay drops off are placed on shelves in tiny medical waiting rooms next to boxes of Girl Scout cookies and calendars from the local tractor sales outlet. It was Kay's concern for the lack of available abortion services for the women who live out here that motivated her, eventually to open the first clinic in the state.

A tall blue-eyed woman with a direct gaze and affable manner, Kay looks very much the devoted midwestern mother of four that she is. Dressed in a simple skirt and blouse, her hair in a soft chin-length cut, it is easy to envision her at meetings of the United Way, Cub Scouts, or other community groups she is involved in. What is difficult to imagine is how this woman's activities could have generated so much controversy. The concerns she gives voice to are not so different than those articulated by her neighbors and fellow citizens who so vehemently oppose her work. La Leche League, for example, is a group where one stands an equal chance of running into a pro-life or pro-choice woman; in Kay's case, she met a woman who introduced her to feminism.

Through La Leche League, I made a really good friend and she had read Judith Holes' book, The Rebirth of Feminism. It was at the time when, well feminism in New York was several years into its development, but in the Midwest, it certainly was not, so she and I started talking about some things I had never thought about and that was my introduction to the whole feminist perspective.

Kay's growing sense of consciousness concerning the way women's reproductive needs were mishandled by the medical profession crystallized during her third pregnancy; she remembers being particularly influenced when reading about the Sherry Finkbine case:

She was trying to get an abortion in the country because she was carrying a thalidomide child. At that time, I had never had any connection to abortion and as I read these stories, I began to feel very strongly that this woman had the right to make this decision and who in the world has the right to tell someone that they have to bring a deformed child into the world. I just remember feeling that so very strongly. So the funny thing is, when I look back on it, from my involvement with La Leche League and my strong feelings about a woman's right not to have a child, I felt strongly enough that this was important to me when I chose my physician, even though I had no experience with abortion in any way shape or form.

In 1972, Kay moved to Fargo where her husband had been hired by the university. She joined and continued as a leader in La Leche and got pregnant again. Kay marks this period as one of crisis. Her parents were divorcing and one of her children was having problems.

It was like someone hit me over the head with a sledgehammer. It was only then that I realized how much my husband and I had been acting like our parents. I acutely remember the first time I decided to tell him what was bothering me. I was shaking I was so upset and I had never told anybody how I felt. And from that point on our whole communication pattern changed. And we have had a really, really strong marriage.

Then I ended up having an abortion myself. My youngest was 18 months old and I accidentally got pregnant. We had four small kids at the time and we decided if we were going to make it a family unit, we had all the stress we could tolerate if we were going to survive.

Kay went to a clinic in another state for her abortion and due to complications, stayed in touch with the staff there. A year later, they gave Kay's name to a National Abortion Rights Action League (NARAL) organizer who was looking for people to start chapters in the Upper Midwest.

I talked it over with my husband and he said "Kay, what are you asking me? This is your choice. You do what you want to do." I never told him this, but I went to his boss and said, "I have been asked to do this and I would like to. I feel strongly about it but I don't want to do anything that would jeopardize his job. That's our bread and butter." And he said, "That's your business and there's no way it will effect him."

In her more public role, as was the case in her personal decisions regarding abortion, Kay always linked her activism to a strong commitment to maintain strong family ties. As such, she belied the image that abortion advocacy means an oppositional stance toward marriage, family and children. This stereotype to which most of the pro-choice women in Fargo were extremely sensitive, may account in part for the lack of widespread public support for pro-choice efforts in Fargo even among feminists and liberals ten years after *Roe v. Wade*. Because of this, she particularly resents the casting of pro-choice people by right-to-lifers as being "anti-family."

I think it's easy for them to stereotype us as having values very different than theirs and that's not the case at all. Many of the people who get abortions have values very similar to the anti-abortion people. The Right-to-Life people don't know how deeply I care for my own family and how involved I am since I have four children and spent the early years of my life working for a breast-feeding organization.

The perspective that abortion is "destroying the family" is a very, very narrow one. In my experience, people who have made the choice to have an abortion made it because they want a strong family. How bringing an unwanted child into a family strengthens it is something I have never been able to understand.

By 1977, Kay was providing abortion referrals from her home and was growing increasingly disturbed at the lack of abortion services for women in the area. That same year, at an annual NARAL meeting, Kay made contact with Sharon, a woman on the NARAL board who had been setting up abortion clinics in small cities around the country, and

expressed her interest in bringing such services to Fargo. Two years later, when Kay was asked to be on the national board, she and Sharon began plans in earnest to open a clinic in Fargo.

During that time, my perspective began to change about the kinds of things I was willing to do with my time. I no longer felt the need to argue the issue with anybody. I think it's a natural progression of anyone involved in a cause. You change your perspective as you grow with it. And once the clinic got going, I was real aware I could no longer be spokesperson for abortion rights because my role would be confused.

So I stepped back from the political end of things with some regrets because I enjoyed it. I was frequently tense and yet I found it was something I could do, and I was seen as effective and that was rewarding, especially in a state like this because you can really have an impact on the process here.

In making the shift from activist to professional, Kay has faced new frustrations. As plans for the clinic progressed, and right-to-lifers began to mobilize to stop it, Kay became increasingly worried that something she wanted so badly and had worked for so long to achieve would fall through. Since the clinic opened, facing protesters has become an almost regular part of Kay's work. Picketers are there weekly on the day that abortions are performed. The reward of her work, not surprisingly, comes from the moments that remind her of the initial impulse that sent her off on the trajectory of pro-choice activism in the first place, her desire to make safe and legal abortions available to women who need them.

The very most satisfying thing of all has been when the patients are ready to leave here and they come up and put their arms around me or one of my staff people and say, "Thank you so much. You don't know what a difference this has made to my life. I expected something very different, everyone here was so warm and so caring and non-judgmental." And that in itself is a real reward.

While Kay is grateful that a pro-choice group formed to defend the clinic, her relationship to the entry of new activists has been difficult, a concern voiced by other "veterans" of the movement as well.

I see the other people who have stepped forward as being at the starting growth stages I have passed through and gone beyond. And choices the new leaders have made are not choices I agree with about what needs to be done. But I have been able to say they have to grow the way I had to grow and the best thing I can do is be for there for them if they want advice but allow them to grow at their own pace. There aren't a whole lot of people left from the early days.

One of the pro-choice activists from the "early days" who helped organize the 1981 defense of the clinic was Cathy, a lawyer in her late 30's, and colleague of Kay's from work on feminist causes in Fargo in the mid 1970's.

I believe strongly in the issue but might not have chosen to put as much energy into it if Kay hadn't asked me to help. I think being there with her all along, talking about the idea, looking at this building, talking about that contract. And when they thought they might close the clinic, I was the one who spoke up at the Commission meetings and helped organize Citizens for A Real Choice (CRC) [the pro-choice support group]...and my God, I believe in privacy and respect for a person's body.

After years of activism, Cathy finds, like Kay that her relationship to new recruits is problematic, due not only to a sense of generational difference from the younger women. She sees her "activist fatigue" in terms of her life cycle as well.

Intellectually and philosophically, I am much more comfortable with women who are older and have a feminist value system. I'm getting tired of doing it all. The mid-30's settling down is striking. And there is a part of me that would like to be involved in a relationship and change my life a little. In a sense, either I'm withdrawing or have already achieved a sort of "senior statesman" status.

Although she claims she is slowing down, the range of Cathy's current activities is nonetheless extensive, perhaps even exceeding the schedules filled with commitments that are typical of female activists on both sides. Cathy teaches full-time at the university and is on several faculty committees. In addition to working for CRC, she is a board member of several feminist groups she helped found in the mid-1970's: The Women's Center, The Rape and Abuse Crisis Center, and the State Chapter of the National Organization of Women. She is also active in the local art museum. Her long standing support for the region's artistic talent is reflected in her home, a tastefully-decorated apartment whose walls are covered with local artists's renderings of North Dakota's icons: grain elevators, prairie pioneers, images of native Americans and the like. The enthusiasm she has for this art mirrors her interpretation of the activist work that engages her: it is a way to envision the local landscape anew. In each arena she works in, Cathy strives to reorder symbolically and materially the cultural milieu she claims as her own, without destroying what she values in it.

I believe you work in your own environment. I grew up in a small-town that largely identified itself as republican. I don't know if I learned this from my mother -- I suspect I did -- but early on, the lesson was if you have the ability to affect it and you don't use that ability then don't bitch about it. And I've always been a mouthy sort. I internalized the myths of democracy and religion early on in terms of justice and fairness and I learned real well that's how things should be. Republicans talk a lot about individual freedom and choice and that's what I believe. Because of that I was a strong Goldwater supporter.

And looking at my political development, about the time I started graduate school in 1968, I met some people who were very involved in the anti-war movement, and I started thinking, "What in the hell are we doing there?" It finally clicked in my little noggin and I became one of them. I was the token Republican. I was very involved in the Lutheran

Church; and I had more liberal ideas but I fought for them there too. I always felt that was part of the battle.

Cathy worked for several years in government and out of a "sense of powerlessness" at her job, decided to go to law school in 1973. In much the same way that pro-life women speak of their mothering as a vocation they were "born to," Cathy describes her talents as a lawyer as "innate."

I had a strong social justice orientation and I wanted those credentials. The law comes easily to me. I'm a natural-born bureaucrat. I didn't have a long-range goal. It was just the direction I moved in. In law school, I re-entered the political arena as a Democrat and became involved in that party, and in forming N.O.W., the Women's Center, the Law Women's Caucus and served in the Lutheran Church.

Cathy's engagement with feminism at that point became and continues to be a major part of her life, expressive of her earliest memories of her self. In her narrative, it has the quality of an awakening.

I have a kind of a strange feeling about my role in the women's movement. I mean, to me it's just coming home to where I belong. Working with women and with issues that have an impact on women's lives...And I know that was part of my total being and growing up with it that there's no distinction between the personal and the political. I would assume it's analogous to a black growing up in white culture. So then, all the issues are important and the ones that I can probably work on in the arena that other people need help with are the ones I spend my time on.

Her analogy of the experience of being female to that of being black in America indicates how she places herself oppositionally to what she considers to be the dominant culture.

Much of Cathy's life currently fits the right-to-life (and some researchers') stereotypes of pro-choice women. She is a single, professional, feminist woman, currently middle class, liberal in her political philosophy, and sophisticated in her cultural tastes.

However, from her early history, there is little that distinguishes her, in terms of class, religion, politics, or community background from right-to-life women. Cathy grew up in a small town within a 100-mile radius of Fargo. Her mother, widowed when Cathy was 7, worked as a waitress to support her daughter and herself, with the help of a local network of aunts and cousins. As is the case with many of the women in this pro-choice cohort, she attributes her own independence from conventions of gender, class and regional values to similar traits in her mother.

I think that my mother had started making strong decisions on her own when she was in high school. And her mother remarried a man she didn't like. She [Cathy's mother] earned her way through high school doing everything on the farm and walking to school to get her education.

All that says something about her being a fairly strong and autonomous woman. Part of that means I missed a lot of female socialization because she didn't buy into it. There has never been pressure on me to marry...The only pressure I felt was academic performance...I grew up never having a sense that there was a career I couldn't go into. Never having any role expectations placed on me in my own environment. And those I'm sure were important shaping forces.

Cathy tells that early history in a way that lends order to what she sees as her own deviation from an assumed "normal" life course trajectory. She sees herself as continuing her mother's distinctive stance within a local framework in her work for a more just social order. Cathy is engaged in reconstructing cultural elements that dignify both her personal and social identities which are bound to the qualities of everyday life that she feels distinguishes a place like Fargo from large metropolises.

Here you know everybody because they live down the street and their third cousin is from your home town. And that's what I like about here is that I don't know anybody that knows me only by one of my labels. We have an assumption

about knowing a person as a person, not just as someone who delivers the paper or whatever.

This attachment to and pride in the local community is, in fact, voiced by women on both sides, and gives particular shape to their activism, in the claims they make, the groups they organize, and the institutions they form. It is expressed clearly in the independence each group maintains from national affiliations and mandates. There is an overlap of networks within each group that tends to reinforce solidarity within each movement, and underscore social divisions between them.

Yet in a setting like Fargo, the opposition cannot be encountered simply as the rhetorical "other." Issues of social reform such as sex education, child abuse, victimization of women, community charity are of mutual concern and take on concrete social form. Pro-life and pro-choice activists find themselves together in Parent-Teacher Associations, at the YMCA, in Lamaze classes, as volunteers at the rape center, on church committees, at political party meetings and the like. Cathy, for example, described her strong friendship with a pro-life woman with whom she serves on a board of a community service organization.

I remember when I met Myra and I was really enjoying her and when I found out her position I was really surprised, you know, but I was able to say, OK, I understand. I respect Myra's position and she respects mine and neither of us have any fantasies about changing the other. And I think we both recognize that it's a very complex and difficult issue. I find with Myra that there is unity on other values or at least nothing that leads to conflict.

Thus, the crossover in ideological concerns that exists but is often glossed in public debate has a correlate in the organization of everyday life. The commonalities between pro-choice and pro-life

women emerge as well in aspects of the larger social critique to which abortion activism is linked.

For example, the commitment of Fargo pro-choice activists to abortion rights is continually expressed as part of a larger defense of the cultural values which, in their view, women represent.

It's important that we remember our place, that we remember we are the caregivers, that we remember that nurturing is important, that we maintain the value system that has been given to us and that has resided in us and that we bring it with us into that new structure...It's important that we bring to that world the recognition that 80 hour weeks aren't healthy for anyone -- that children suffer if they miss relationships with their fathers and that fathers suffer from missing relationships with their children...This society has got to begin recognizing its responsibility for caring for its children.

These words are those of Janice Sundstrom, a peer of Cathy and of Kay, and the first woman to run for Attorney General in the state of North Dakota. Considering that she ran as a feminist and a Democrat in a conservative Republican state, her loss with 48% of the vote is as remarkable as the course her life has taken since her Catholic girlhood. Janice grew up in a family of seven children that struggled in the shadow of poverty when their farm was foreclosed in the early 1950's.

Like many of the activists both for and against abortion, Janice traces the roots of her current commitment to early biographical moments. The pro-choice narratives, however, are distinguished by the speakers' emphasis on their differentiation from rather than integration with their childhood milieu. Like Kay, Ronna, and Cathy, Janice finds cause for what she sees as her iconoclasm in her earliest relationships.

In 1945, shortly after I was born, my mom and dad moved here and brought me along and left all the other children with

relations back in Illinois. I think I'm different from the rest of them because I had the experience of being the only child at a time when they had far too many children to deal with...

The transformations Janice eventually experienced are cast, in her story, as almost predictable. However, they hardly seem the inevitable outcome of her youth and adolescence: twelve years in parochial school and marriage to her high school sweetheart a year after graduation followed immediately by a pregnancy.

We were both 19 then and I didn't want to have another child. We were both in school and working and there we were with this kid. But I didn't have any choice. There was no option for me about birth control because I was still strongly committed to the Church's teaching. And then, three months later, I was pregnant again. After Jodie was born I started taking pills and that's what ended the Church for me.

For Janice, her encounters with reproduction and contraception that made her question her church are key events in her story. They are central pivoting moments in her life, which turned her toward alternative cultural models. In this way, her interpretation of her experiences resembles the way that pregnancy, a conversion or return to organized religion, and pro-life activism are linked in right-to-life narratives.

Now a mother of two grown daughters, married to a CPA, herself a lawyer and political activist, Janice considers her contact with the social movements of the late 1960's as catalytic.

It was around that time I remember watching the Senate Foreign Relations Hearings on television in these tin huts with these two little kids on campus and wondering why this man wanted to turn this little Southeast Asian country over to the communists. And then my oldest sister came home and I remember asking her that question and she gave me a whole new way to look at Vietnam.

That sister, Janice's senior by ten years, had left home and become active in politics, working on Eugene McCarthy's staff in Washington.

My sister was an important role model for me. I knew her to be involved in politics when I was 8 and she was 18. There are a lot of girls who grow to womanhood never thinking of themselves as "political" because in their experience no one like them ever was. I grew up knowing that political activity was an appropriate province for a female.

With her sister's encouragement, Janice became involved in politics, worked on McCarthy's presidential campaign and was on the state delegation to the Democratic Convention in Chicago in 1968.

I went to Chicago. I demonstrated with the people on the streets. I didn't have any idea what was going on. Of course, in North Dakota they thought of me as a radical. I remember having my hair done and I was in this little pink and white bra dress and little white sandals and they were shouting "Free Huey" and I had no idea who Huey was...

Here I am a telephone operator from North Dakota and I have two small children and I've never done anything like this before. And my conclusion about Chicago is it's too late when they're this old. You've gotta get them when they're younger. I decided to go back to school and graduated with a teaching degree.

Janice continued in her political work as well and was introduced to feminism by friends who by 1970 were identifying with the woman's movement "and opened it to me and me to it as the case may be. I learned real fast and basically it seemed the lesson was that through law I could help effect change for women so I decided to go to law school and worked to save for that."

Up to that time, I felt very strongly about abortion as my church had taught me to think and somehow between 1968 and 1971--those years were crucial to the political development of a lot of people in my generation--I came to have different feelings about abortion. My feeling toward abortion grew out of my personal experiences with friends who had abortions and a sensitivity to the place of women in this society. It was a recognition that this basic medical service called for by women by the tens of thousands was not available for them and that restriction worked its most severe burden on poor women.

Janice's hopes for her college-age daughters are prominent for her at this point in her life. She hopes that unlike her, they will postpone marriage and prepare themselves for fulfilling work before they have family obligations; these concerns are linked to her pro-choice activism.

It seems to me it's restrictions on abortion coupled with a failure of sex education and a general social milieu that points to sexual activity as some means of personal fulfillment, whatever else it is supposed to mean to children, that leads to the increased rate of unwed parenthood among young women.

What is striking in the connections Janice makes to her abortion rights position is not their difference from her opponents, but the similarities. Like many pro-life women, she is disturbed by cultural currents that promote, in her view, narcissistic attitudes toward sexuality and personal fulfillment in which the individual denies any responsibility to kin, community and the larger social order. Several pro-choice women referred to this constellation of concerns as "midwestern feminism." When I asked what they meant by the term, one woman described it in the following way:

It's a sense of connectedness, a valuing of life, kindness and gentleness and all the qualities that I think are important in human beings.

Another was more concrete:

Well, it's why I don't really even read MS. magazine anymore. It just doesn't talk about my life or other women in Fargo. You know, we still have pot lucks here. We're worried about our community, raising decent kids, our marriages, getting old with or without a man. These are basic priorities that we all have to work together on.

This negotiation of a pro-choice position that establishes their connectedness to family, and community, as they understand them is

prominent for pro-choice women both in their narratives and in the public performance of their activism.

Sherry, for example, president of CRC from 1981-1984, was baffled to find herself attacked as a "women's libber" because of her public role. Suddenly she was accosted by people at work, her mother's friends, or even total strangers who heard her name announced over the loudspeaker at the shopping mall.

Somebody said to me that I just didn't realize what the outside picture of what I do is...Being on the news once a month...once you're public, people think they know you. I always feel that I don't have any power about anything and that all these events just kind of run me. I've never been political about anything. I think people see me as someone who is in more control of my life and of a movement and an issue and of people, and I don't operate from the basis of control at all.

I just can't say no to things that are important to me...most things that have to do with women's issues. And I can't really pick one over the other. The abortion issue is more important to me probably because it affected me personally in so many ways, so many times, I just feel it's a duty.

Sherry's sense of obligation to women's interests is not confined to feminist groups. She was president of the Elkettes (the women's branch of the Elks Club) in 1982, a position she took on in part to remain close to her mother. In addition, she serves as an alumni collegiate advisor for her college sorority, a position she enjoys for the contact and influence with younger women it affords her.

Sitting in the cramped kitchen of Sherry's modest two-story house, I remember a description of her given by another pro-choice activist.

She's every Fargo woman's ideal. Slim, blonde, attractive with a decent job and a husband who travels a lot.

Sherry, dressed in faded jeans and a button-down shirt, looks and sounds unpretentious, almost girlish. She finds the images others have of her disturbing, dissonant with her own history. Her marriage is a rocky one and she describes her work as an administrator in an architect's office as a "a ridiculous job I hate with men who are impossible to deal with." She is trying with difficulty to maintain the life course that was expected of her -- marriage, family, children, church and community -- while accommodating experiences of the last decade that have taken her in different directions.

Sherry was the oldest of two girls born to a couple who met at the phone company where they worked their whole lives. She describes herself as having been a dutiful daughter -- attending Lutheran church activities four times a week until she was seventeen -- and as a teenager, more interested in fun than politics. Like other pro-choice women, she marks her contact with the social movements of the late 1960's as a time when she began to look at things differently, the roots of a view of the world which she feels differentiates her from right-to-lifers.

When I left high school and got to college, the whole hippie generation, the campus unrest, the Vietnam war made a lot of people question...You have to answer things for yourself.

I realized it's dangerous to believe in something beyond being able to ask a question. I don't feel the right-to-life position is invalid. I understand what they're saying. And if they honestly believe life begins at conception, I don't see any other choice for them. It only makes me angry that they don't realize other people don't believe that. And that they can determine what's gonna happen in other people's lives.

I mean people react in ways that you don't expect them to all the time, every day. Who am I to say they're right or wrong?

The unexpected events in Sherry's life in the late 1960's and early 1970's are almost a catalogue of what right-to-lifers call "the hard cases" that are the most persuasive and the core of the pro-choice arguments.

I never thought about abortion at all until my first year in college. In high school, I believed no one had sex, so I didn't. And then my friends started getting pregnant. We had no sex education. I had friends with whom I went to have abortions before it was legal. One got pregnant at my 18th birthday party and I felt this incredible sense of responsibility.

The first time, I went to Winnipeg to a woman's home, I sat out in the living room and looked out the window for the police. I was sure she was going to die. It was really terrifying. It wasn't a subject I could discuss with them and say, I don't think you should do this...It was their decision and they were my friends and I cared about them. It was a growing up story for all of us. I just about flunked out of college because of it.

Her personal encounter with the toll of illegal abortions made Sherry angry, interested in feminism and a passive pro-choice supporter. In 1976, she married and began teaching in the local parochial school and was pregnant within a year.

It wasn't a pregnancy I planned. I was teaching and my husband was selling real estate so our financial position wasn't great. It didn't occur to me to have an abortion. I would work it out no matter what I had to do.

Finally, my daughter was born and I was thrilled. For about 30 seconds. And then the doctor said, "There's something wrong here. There's an opening in the spine." I don't know if I can explain the feelings that I had...I didn't know if I really had had a baby, and then, the doctor came in and told us our daughter was born with spina bifida. She would never have been able to control her bowels or her bladder. She would never have been able to walk. And all of a sudden we heard her start to choke and the hospital social worker said, "Don't worry it's going to be alright," and I said, "No it's not. It's never going to be alright again." And we just stood there and watched our daughter die. And what I can say mostly about that time is that I don't feel anyone has the right to force me to go through that again.

Shortly after that, Sherry was raped one evening on her way home from work. It was the combination of that experience, the traumatic pregnancy and childbirth, and growing right-to-life activity that finally catalyzed Sherry to pro-choice activism.

Right after Melissa died in 1978, I saw something in the paper about how they intended not to allow health insurance to cover abortions and we had thousands of dollars in medical expenses because we had no health insurance. So I wrote a letter to the newspaper and then Kay contacted me and that's how I first got involved in the pro-choice movement.

Once Sherry took a public stand and began to encounter right-to-lifers directly, at the legislature, in city commission meetings, in speaking engagements at Sunday Schools, businessmen's luncheons and homemaker's associations, she began to differentiate more sharply her own identity in relation to her abortion activism.

The way I began to feel about these people who are so anti-abortion for any reason is that it wasn't their experience. They weren't there for me when I needed support. They're out there talking and they're out there complaining and carrying on about the life of the fetus and not one of them is concerned about me. If I don't say something for myself, it might not get said. I don't want to have to leave the country because my own country has made it illegal for me to do what is best for my life.

I really believe that you evolve from a point of trying to control someone else's life into a point that you realize circumstances are so different for everyone that you can't possibly say there's no divorce, there's no abortion. I mean nothing is absolute. And I guess I feel I have evolved to that position and the anti-choice people haven't.

Sherry's views of the pro-choice and pro-life positions reflect the nuanced but critical difference the two groups sustain about human nature and reality.

I think it's really more important that you do good things and you care about people. Sometimes those of us who already exist are more important. Even if someone who is anti-choice said I was well-intentioned but misguided...Well, I think,

then how could you possibly be found wanting when it came to Judgment Day?

I think that if this were a perfect society, everyone would know about birth control and about sex and they would take the proper precautions and they would all work. All pregnancies would be planned or people would say this is fine, I'll deal with this. But that's not the way things are.

Sherry and other pro-choice supporters see their activism as emblematic of a broader agenda for improving the conditions of women's lives in a less than perfect world. However, for most, the enactment of these goals was dispersed over a range of other activities. This distinguishes them from pro-lifers and may be due, in part, to the fact that the pro-choice position is, at least legally, the status quo. Their work in CRC peaked, in general, around its defense of the clinic in 1981 and 1982. Once it was clear that the clinic was safely in place, the group operated more as a "reserve army" ready to be mobilized in case of attack, but not actively engaged in battle or building its forces. As Cathy put it,

CRC is a vehicle that is there to be used at the time that is appropriate but I'm not going to get all concerned about it. The question is, who's got the energy in their life and the drive to do it. Then let them use it. Let that vehicle be their life.

A New Generation?

During 1983, one young woman, Jan Larsen became active in CRC who saw in it just such a vehicle.

After the initial hullabaloo, CRC became an organization that reacted instead of acted. Whenever the anti-choice people would do something, CRC would have to respond rather than take an active role in the community. Personally it means more to me than just the right to abortion. I would very much like to expand out to provide birth control information, referrals to doctors, advocate service for minors, post-abortion counseling.

So I figured the only way to do it was to get on the Board of CRC. The reason I got elected was I organized a picket at the Right-to-Life convention in 1982; so people knew me at the meeting. I felt it was an important thing to do. So what I'm doing is really asking CRC to become something very different than what its purpose was at its inception.

Bringing new vision and energy to CRC, Jan eventually replaced Sherry as president of the group in 1984. When pro-life picketing of the clinic picked up in late 1983, she developed a service to escort patient's through the line of right-to-life protestors. The energy and activity Jan has generated, as well as the escalation of anti-abortion activities in Fargo have momentarily revived CRC, attracting new members to the group for the first time since 1981.

Jan is atypical in a number of ways from the other pro-choice activists in Fargo. At 25, she is nearly a decade younger than most of the other women, and she is motivated by an extraordinary, single-minded commitment. As she phrased it,

If there were a school to minister to women's health, I'd start my own church.

She traces her distinctive interests in part to medical circumstances she faced as an adolescent when she underwent extensive orthopedic surgery.

I think it started for me with my knee. My knee has nothing to do with women's health in the sense that it has nothing to do with my reproductive organs. But I felt terrified of doctors because I was powerless. They gave me morphine for eight days and I went through withdrawal. I freaked out.

Feminist writings of a decade earlier provided Jan with a symbolic framework to order her own difficult encounter with the medical profession.

Feeling that so personally, I started reading about how women have been defined by doctors in terms of hysteria. They would take out her ovaries, cut off her clitoris and send her

home. When I started reading about that, things started falling into place in terms of my personal reaction and fears and anger about my doctors and just how women in general had been treated. It all seemed to fit really well.

And then I guess I started hearing about individual women I knew. About DES. And my friend had an ovarian cyst and was treated horribly by her doctor. And women who have had hysterectomies who don't need them. It just started dawning on me. And abortion. I started reading about what it was like when it wasn't legal.

Jan's illness, occurring right after high school, coincided with late adolescence, a period framed as liminal both in her narrative, and in American culture more generally.

After the operation, I didn't know what I wanted, so I inquired into VISTA and went to Kansas City for two years to work as a community organizer. We're so homogeneous here that going anywhere else is an incredible shock and something everybody should do. It's so important in order to get a sense of who you are and what you want to do. You have to go somewhere else. I grew up in a kind of sterile political environment. VISTA is the place where I learned about politics at its fundamental level, which is the community.

That experience, along with her illness, created for Jan a strong identification with feminism and liberal left-wing social justice causes unusual among her peers in their twenties. When she returned to Fargo in 1978 to go to college, she became involved in a range of grassroots political activities: organizing senior citizens; defending native American land claims; and volunteer work on Dalkon shield litigation, representing women who had been harmed by using that form of birth control. The last turned into a full-time job as a legal assistant when she finished school in 1982. This period could be described by what Mandelbaum calls, "turnings," a point when "a person takes on a new set of cultural roles, enters into fresh relations with a new set of people and acquires a new self-concept" (1973: 181).

As Jan began to be in the public eye, in political protest actions and news accounts about them, her relations with her family changed.

I need to let my family know that I am going to forge my own life and own space in this town. That I'm going to do what I want to do. I don't want to do it to hurt them. I do it because it's what I believe. In a way, it's a credit to them. They raised me to think and know that I have a right to say what I believe. They don't look at it that way.

The oldest of four children, Jan spent the first 17 years of her life in North Dakota in what she describes as a "non-traditional household." Her mother is a career woman and homemaking became her father's responsibility.

If we were gonna have dinner, my dad and I would have to cook it. My mother is real non-traditional in a lot of other ways too. When I was in the eighth grade and went on my first date, I came home and my mother sat me down and told me that saving myself for marriage was a bunch of bullshit. And I should get it over with as soon as I could. Consequently, after every date, I was asked if it had happened. And when in fact it did, when I was 19 years old, and I told her, she sent me a dozen roses in congratulations.

From the time of that first date, I was also told that if I ever got pregnant, I would be at the abortionist -- that's what she called it. I knew that if I became pregnant that, in a sense, I would have no control over it.

While Jan attributes her position on abortion to her mother's influence, her desire to establish a separate identity is an equally prominent theme in her activism.

My mom and I aren't very close. And I think that is connected to her need for me to have a different perspective on sex, and her drive to make me exactly what she wanted me to be. She would like me to be in law school now. I know she loves me. It's just that she wanted me to do everything that she didn't do. It bothers her that I put myself out on a limb. What I have to do is counteract the influence of my mother.

Her relationships with an older generation of pro-choice activists -- Kay, Cathy, and Janice for example -- provide Jan with alternative models of women who, in contrast to her mother, share Jan's concerns

for social justice and women's rights. Unlike these older women, however, who view their lives and activism as unexpected felt responses to personal and historical experiences, Jan expresses much more intentionality in relation to her activism.

I thought a lot about how I wanted to deal with my life when I finished school. Just working wasn't going to be enough, so I decided --it sort of sounds dumb -- but I just pinpointed some things I really needed to get involved with on my own, that I wanted to be part of, that I wanted to have an impact on, and CRC was a real logical choice for me for a number of reasons. First of all, I am really committed, thanks to my mother, to a woman's right to choose. And also, I have had clients that were victims of illegal abortions. And I see a very positive role for CRC and an influence that it can have in this area that is real well-defined for me.

In addition to the intrinsic rewards of activism, Jan's pro-choice engagement is linked to two critical questions for her at this point in her life cycle, as she contemplates the possibility of having children.

I honestly am not comfortable saying that my bottom-line reasoning for believing in the issue of pro-choice is because I don't believe that life begins at conception.

The very most fundamental right, fortunately or unfortunately, is the right to bear children. That's what makes us different. It's our cross and it's also what raises us above. And to not be able to control that single most unique part of us would devastate our entire sense of independence in every other aspect of our lives.

It is important to understand how "independence" is coded in pro-choice terms. For right-to-lifers, Jan's use of the term represents a desire for self-indulgence, a lack of responsibility for one's procreative potential. For Jan and most of her fellow activists, it stands in fact, for the opposite of narcissism. It is not simply a fear that an unplanned pregnancy will interfere with what Luker characterizes as "their abilities to use the valuable 'male' resources - education,

labor-market experience - which [pro-choice] women have in such abundance," as Luker characterizes it (1984b: 110). Doubts about bearing children are intertwined with questions about the social and cultural order that will be reproduced. In Jan's case, she worries that she will inevitably duplicate the familial and cultural relationships that are so problematic for her, and which she hopes, in her activism, to alter in new form. Attuned as she is to the social and economic inequities women face, her doubts about biological and social reproduction are inextricably bound to the lack of alternative arrangements to the nuclear family for raising children,

Biological parents have the greatest potential for destroying or creating a potential individual. If I have a biological child, if she's female, there are so many things that I'll do to her and deal with her similarly to how my mother dealt with me that I would never want to deal with a child like that. The expectations, the things we pass on that we don't want to. But they're in us. It is impossible to expect that they aren't going to influence that young person. I may want to be a biological parent. I'm 25 now and I'm no nearer to feeling I could deal with the responsibility of creating and molding an individual than when I was a teen-ager. God, what a thing to take a chance on.

Through her activism on the abortion issue, Jan is seeking to rewrite the biographical and cultural scripts that she feels were bequeathed to her. In so doing, she is attempting to locate and help create, in the immediate as well as the larger environments she takes as her own, a social order which meshes with her understanding of the world, and which she would want to reproduce. She is an example of Mannheim's point that a generation, in the sense of a particular cultural and political worldview identified with a specific set of social and historical experiences, is not necessarily age-stratified. Yet inevitably, to a new participant in the social process, these take on new meaning.

The fact that people are born at the same time, or that their youth, adulthood and old age coincide, does not in itself involve similarity of location [in the social and historical process]; what does create a similar location is that they are in a position to experience the same events and data... (Mannheim 1952: 388).

Although Jan is ten to twenty years younger than most of the other pro-choice activists, her vicarious encounter with feminism at a particular moment of crisis in her life has, in a sense, replicated for her -- even at a generation's remove -- their historical, political, and cultural experiences.

Conclusion

In assessing the way that abortion opponents view the world in relation to their ideology, authors Callahan and Callahan write:

Both sides are prepared to argue that abortion is undesirable, a crude solution to problems that would better be solved by other means. The crucial difference, however is that those on the pro-choice side believe that the world must be acknowledged as it is and not just as it ought to be.

By contrast, the pro-life group believes that a better future cannot be achieved...unless we are prepared to make present sacrifices toward future goals and unless aggression toward the fetus is denied, however high the individual cost of denying it. The dichotomies are experienced in our ordinary language when "idealists" are contrasted with "realists." (1984: 221).

Pro-choice women in Fargo are "realists" in their approach to political strategy and in the way they express their position in concrete phenomenological terms of cause and effect -- calling on the authority of experience to justify their position. However, a more idealistic "deep structure" to which their public defense of abortion is linked emerges in their narratives as well as in action: the stated and actual preference for non-hierarchical relationships and group organization; their insistence that their activism is not for personal

glory, financial gain or individual indulgence but in the interests of women and social justice. The utopian subtext of their stance is rooted in their historical encounter with feminism. It is expressed as a desire to create a world more hospitable to the qualities and tasks they, as feminists, identify as female: the reproduction of nurturant, compassionate or at least tolerant relationships between friends, family, members of the community, people in the workplace and even the nation as a whole.

1. In Fargo, as in most parts of the country, the League of Women Voters is identified as a liberal, upper middle-class organization. Although many of the founding members of Fargo's chapter fit that description, the members of the currently existing group are approximately equally divided between the two parties. If class is measured by income and occupational status of members (or their husbands), the group is more heterogeneous than its reputation allows. The current dilemma the organization faces is that its constituency, well-educated women with a strong interest in the community, are now working full-time and have less time to devote to time-consuming voluntary activities.

Chapter 9: The Pro-Life Narratives

The First Wave of Pro-Lifers: The 1920's Cohort

I met John when he first got back from the service and he decided he wanted to be an engineer. He had one year left when we were married on December 6 1946 and I worked up until the day Jane was born, November 12th 1947. I wasn't even a bride a year. Well, our Senator, he's not pro-life, sent me a congratulations letter when Jane got a teacher of the year award in 1980. I wanted to take the letter back to him and say, "It was very inconvenient to have this daughter. My husband was in school and I was working. We thought we needed other things besides a child. And had abortion been available to me, I might have aborted the girl who was teacher of the year. What a loss to society that would have been. What losses are we having in society now?"

The speaker is Shirley, a pleasant-looking 63 year-old widow dressed in a grey and white plaid dress with a jaunty, knee-length hem, her hair in a soft short bouffant popular among older women in Fargo. Our interview took place at her dining room table where Shirley has set out -- next to my tape recorder -- coffee, juice and fresh flowers. These touches, along with the neat and comfortable furnishings -- a couch, a barcalounger, a TV going in the background to entertain a resident pregnant teen -- are consistent with the unpretentious, warm hospitality that characterizes so many of the homes I visited here. This middle-class section of Fargo where Shirley lives stretches north along the river, spreading east and west in indistinguishable streets lined with ranch houses and dotted with the sort of young trees that indicate that this is a recently built-up area. Shirley moved here a few years ago when her last child left home. After her husband's death in 1971, she became involved in right-to-life efforts and has remained active in the movement ever since.

The women in their 60's whom I interviewed shared with younger right-to-life women a range of ideologies, religious and political

affiliations, and work and economic histories. They were distinctive, as a group, in the ways their lives have intersected with historical experiences: like many other women born between 1920-25, Shirley went to work as soon as she was able, to help out a large extended family still reeling from the Depression. Although she dreamed of becoming a stewardess, she trained as a nurse and eventually married the brother of a high school chum right after World War II when she was in her late 20's. She quit work after the birth of her first child and raised six children. (Three others died in birth or infancy.) In her 40's, with the encouragement of her husband and the support of the Manpower Training Act, she took a refresher course in nursing and has been working 20 hours a week since then, supplementing her income with insurance and by selling cosmetics from her home. She is, and always has been, a devout Catholic, active in her church. For years, she was a leader in the PTA and the Elkettes, where she still enjoys playing bingo and having a few drinks with long-standing female friends. Alert to national, local and familial events -- a son recently divorced, a daughter with a baby out of wedlock -- she measures herself with thoughtful good humor against a sense of the world changing around her.

I think we're bad on TV, I mean the morals that our children are watching, these soap operas, what's right and what's wrong. There's a lack of commitment, of religion. They cheat and lie and steal and only bad people get ahead. There's one I watch, my daughters got me hooked on it, called General Hospital, and I ask them, "Do you think this is normal? Gad, it must be awful to think you all come from the same mother and the same father. What a dull life you must think I had when I could have been out living it up..."

Shirley is entering what might be considered a typical phase of the contemporary female adult life cycle for her cohort: the early stages of old age and the anticipated changes accompanying that,

coping with the loss of a spouse or a husband entering retirement and the death of one's own parents, and adjusting to the exodus of children from the household and the recognition of their adult status with its attendant joys and sorrows.

What is consistent in the narratives of the women in their 60's is the way they link their pro-life position to their gender identity. That connection is made not through abstract formulations, but through interpretation of specific events. While younger women focused more on the present, the older cohort traced a trajectory back to earliest memories, even to the circumstances of their own birth. Shirley, for example, sees her pro-life work, her career as a nurse, her community activities, and her work as a mother as intertwined, a sense of vocation and identity present from childhood.

You know, a mother is a mother and if you deserve the title, you better work at it and earn it ...I started mothering when I was growing up on the farm. When the sheep would be lambing in the snow, my dad would bring the little ones to me and I'd put them in the oven door and give them a little bottle of milk. That's how I started. They said I was a nurse forever; I was always bringing things back to life.

Shirley first became involved in the right-to-life movement in 1972, during the referendum proposing reform of state abortion laws. After the referendum she helped found member and then became president of a local chapter of Birthright, an international organization set up to provide alternatives to abortion by providing material and emotional support for women with unwanted pregnancies. The first wave of right-to-life activity in Fargo received much of its support from women of Shirley's cohort, many of whom had recently been widowed and were facing the exodus of children from their households as well.

Well, the referendum was over and we ended up at a Birthright meeting and all of us women, the five of us, were widows in

the first year to year and a half. It was really a grief session. And I took my first unwed mother into my home the year after my husband died.

At a moment in their life cycles when the household and kin context for a lifelong vocation of motherhood was diminishing, pro-life work provided an arena for extending that work beyond the boundaries of home and family.

Recently, Shirley applied for the day shift at the student health center where she works and didn't get the job. She thinks this was because they were afraid that she wouldn't give information on birth control. Like many female grassroots activists, even staunch Catholics such as Shirley, this is not the case.

I have no qualms about counseling for birth control. I won't counsel for abortion...I believe that a life that is started should be completed. If they want to be sexually active, let them get on the pill. Let them prevent pregnancy rather than destroy it.

As a figure long identified with the right-to-life activity in Fargo, Shirley feels she has met with discrimination for holding her point of view. This theme is even more prominent in the narrative of another right-to-life woman of this cohort, Corinne.

Though she is also in her 60's Corinne is as feisty as Shirley is sedate, up-to-date on the latest trends and dressed in the current fashion. Slim and wiry, twice divorced and once widowed, she raised her three children on her clerical worker's salary, with some help from her parents. Now, she lives with and cares for her ailing 94-year old mother. While she has been active in pro-life work for the last decade, Democratic politics has been a lifelong passion, a family legacy.

My dad was always a Democrat. Joe Lewis, Joe DiMaggio and FDR and God were all on the same level. I grew up on it,

but as I got active myself, it was a philosophy I supported, you know, legislation for the common ordinary man. I have some really good friends in town who were strong Democrats until they opened their businesses and turned Republican.

Given her dedication to the party, Corinne's pro-life activism has had a high price.

I joined the National Women's Political Caucus when it first started here, locally. This was in 1974 and pro-life was an issue here, although I wasn't that involved yet. I still felt there were a lot of things I wanted to work for in the women's movement. I was pretty good friends with X, (a local feminist leader) until the abortion thing really split us. She was pretty vicious with me when she found out I was pro-life. So then in 1975, the woman who was running the local right-to-life chapter asked me if I would take over for her and even though I didn't feel qualified, I said Ok. Since then, I've testified at the legislature for pro-life issues.

Pro-life activity was relatively quiescent in Fargo in the late 70's, but when the clinic opened in 1980, Corinne was one of the four women who pulled together the local right-to-life opposition together in 1981. Last year she was expelled from the local Democratic Party for supporting a right-to-life candidate who ran on the Republican ticket. When I asked her what motivated her to take a position that has cost her so much, Corinne made an immediate connection to her own first and very difficult pregnancy.

Life itself is no longer sacred. I said it in a speech in 1974. Abortion isn't anything new. I had friends years ago that went and did it. But we've made it legal, so therefore it's easy. I'm sure there are thousands of women..

I was pregnant, my daughter was six months old when I became pregnant again. My husband had just left me. I was three months along when he left. I didn't want that baby. I would never have thought of abortion although I knew it was available...I believe in choice, in picking a career, or whether to buy this or that. But I don't believe anyone has the right to kill another human being. There are many women, including maybe your mother and my mother that hadn't planned on us and weren't happy with the idea of being

pregnant. Look at my son. I was desolated when I found out I was pregnant. I was left in a real tough position.

For Corinne, her right-to-life position gives symbolic order to difficult moments not only in her own reproductive history, but in that of her daughter as well. When Corinne's daughter Anna recently had a still birth in the sixth month of pregnancy, the nurses encouraged both Anna and Corinne to hold the dead baby in order to "say good-bye." Although Corinne went into a severe depression after doing so, she felt the experience

affirmed what I've always believed and what I've always known. The baby is a human being, a part of the human race from conception on.

A third woman of that cohort, Helen, also drew cross-generational connections through her pro-life commitment. She saw her "conversion" to the right-to-life movement as an extension of her experience of being "born again," and both as a repudiation of a prior sense of self that had separated her from her mother, who recently died. She links all of these to the circumstances of her own birth.

You see, I had a sister killed in a car accident before I was born and you can imagine what that did to my family. I don't know if I ever would have been if she hadn't died. That's been something I never talked to my family about but I talk to myself a lot about it. My mother was so sick when she was pregnant with me because she was still grieving. She couldn't eat and they said if you don't eat we're gonna have to take that baby because you're gonna die. They wanted to abort her and she said, "No way."

So when she died last year and all these checks came in, I gave them to LIFE Coalition and as a thank you note to people, I told them about her story, how they wanted to abort her when she was pregnant with me and I am eternally grateful that they didn't. This is a coalition of people who love life and want to preserve the life of unborn babies. It's very exciting to do that. It brought life to me that at her death this could go on.

Helen was raised in one of Fargo's elite Lutheran families, the daughter of a doctor and a mother who "always wanted nice things for her daughter" including an education at a prestigious college. Helen fulfilled her mother's dream; she attended and did well at an eastern "seven sister's school" and went on for a master's degree in social work. "I always thought I'd marry somebody out there and lead a very different kind of life." Instead, she fell in love with the boy next door when he visited her out east after the war. They returned to Fargo together, married and had three children. For most of her adult years, she has led the life appropriate to an upper middle-class wife of a local retail magnate. She has been a leader in the Junior League, the Fine Arts Club, the Lutheran Church, and enjoys bowling and birdwatching in her spare time. In the early 1970's, as a volunteer, she helped establish a private social service agency in town that is the primary adoption placement program for the area. At that time, she was a pro-choice advocate.

Years ago, as a social worker, even though I revered life, I can still see some of those families and how they lived...I remember this one lady who had nine children and the man she was living with wasn't her husband..

So when the thought of the Supreme Court ruling came, I was really for it, I was pro-choice because I thought of those little children and how they lived. And I remember my mother saying "Helena," (she always called me Helena when it was serious) "That's murder..." And I said, "Better those children were never born mother. They live a hell on earth..." and she never talked about it to me after that but I'm sure it hurt her...

By 1975, Helena became a devotee of Yoga and dabbled in the occult. Soon after, she began attending interdenominational charismatic prayer group meetings and became a devout "born-again" Christian, active in formal organizations such as Women Aglow (see Chapter 4,

note #2) and several ad hoc women's prayer groups. This new commitment has affected her life on many levels from the mundane -- she likes to speak in tongues while driving on her motorized lawn mower -- to the more serious; since her conversion she has changed her views on many issues, including abortion.

I came to the point of thinking that abortion was wrong, it is not a way to resurrect the social condition. I don't remember the day when I thought this was wrong and this is right. But it just came to me...

When the clinic opened in 1981, Helen was approached by a member of one of her prayer groups to join the pro-life coalition against the clinic. She joined the group and now is one of their more active board members, praying regularly in front of the clinic and using her social influence to gain friends and legitimacy for the group.

In an article entitled "Metaphor and Self: Symbolic Processes in Everyday Life," anthropologists Dan Merten and Gary Schwartz write:

Metaphor as conveyed by figurative speech and action transforms a ritual participant's sense of self...metaphorical movement operates both on the speaker's perception of the world...and how he or she affectively experiences himself or herself in that situation.

Metaphor is one of the symbolic devices that can shift, reverse, intensify or otherwise change how the self is represented and how the speaker feels about the representation (1982: 799).

For Helen, the religious idiom provided a transformative metaphor of this order.

When they asked me to join, it was the first I ever really thought about it consciously, other than feeling guilty that I had changed my mind personally on abortion...You know there is one scripture in Isaiah 44 that I especially pray for my family and that says "I knew you before you were formed in your mother's womb. Fear not, for you are my witness..." So I'm sure unconsciously this change was coming about.

The Biblical quote Helen chose to explain her change of heart links Helen's engagement with the right-to-life movement to her account of her mother's death. The passage established metaphorical continuity between her pro-life conviction and the opening story of her narrative, in which she reconstructs her own sojourn in her mother's womb, identifying herself simultaneously with her earliest moments of existence and with her mother's trauma as well. As in all the stories of pregnancy and birth told by right-to-life women, the ambivalence of the mother towards that condition -- either through reference to the storyteller's own mother or experience of motherhood herself -- is invoked and then overcome. In Helen's retelling, the denial and acceptance of mother and daughter of each other's lives are merged, and then given larger significance as Helen connects both events, figuratively and materially to the right-to-life movement.

The Generational Bridge: Activists Born in the 1940's

This connection of the right-to-life position with both a transformed sense of one's own values and the merging of divergent generational identities in the act of recollection is present, though less prominent in the discourse of younger pro-life women as well. Peggy Jones, a 40 year old Catholic woman who grew up on a farm in a family of nine, began her narrative on that theme.

You know, when I was in my teens, I remember my mother saying she was against abortion, how it could lead to euthanasia and I always used to disclaim that and say, "Oh mother, you're so out of date..." I can just hear myself saying that. And so much has changed since then.

I remember in 1972 when there was that referendum here and I bought a book, The Handbook on Abortion, and I remember being shocked by the pictures of the aborted babies. My own children were five and two, so that was even more shocking to

have gone through pregnancy and know that it's a life and all that.

I first met Peggy at the Fargo parochial high school where she had programmed a day of events on the tenth anniversary of the 1973 Roe vs. Wade decision legalizing abortion. On that occasion, as coordinator of the pro-life section of the local Catholic Diocese, she introduced the play she had written based on the Supreme Court testimony. The staging, with the teachers cast as justices, costumed in choir robes and seated at long tables draped with cloth, was meant to mimic the decorum of the high court but seemed to me to resemble more closely a tableau vivant of the Last Supper. What impressed me was that Peggy had retained in her stage version the most compelling speeches in defense of abortion argued before the court, a recognition of an opposing point of view I had not expected.

Peggy's manner when she greeted me at her office reinforced my earlier impression of her as an open, intelligent and compassionate person. In her speech and dress -- she wore loden green corduroy trousers and jacket, a white turtleneck sweater, with her red hair in a short stylish cut -- there was little that seemed to distinguish her from her pro-choice counterparts. Peggy is one of the small number of pro-life activists in Fargo from the same cohort from which much of the pro-choice support is drawn -- women born between 1940-45.

In the narratives created by the right-to-life women of this age, their concern with abortion reflected issues prominent for them at this point in their life cycles: they are contemplating the changes ahead as they move back into the paid work force and out of a decade or more spent as full-time mothers and homemakers. They are evaluating their marriages in relation to these shifts, particularly as they witness

marital trouble among many of their peers. And, they worry over the effect on their teenage children of the ubiquitous temptations of the American adolescent subculture that have made their way into Fargo life. This last concern was one of the first that Peggy mentioned when I asked her why she became active in the pro-life movement.

Well, I didn't get that involved until the last two years. And one thing I feel keenly about now, and it's probably because my oldest son is 15 and a freshman in high school, but I just firmly believe that the more we can talk to high school age students about what abortions are, and the realities of abortion and its alternatives, that there are people who care...I've personally been speaking in the schools now for these last two years.

I guess I see abortion as being linked in terms of...well if we can respect ourselves enough that we can say no to outside pressures kids are getting today, and I know they are tremendous, then we can feel good enough about ourselves that if we become pregnant, its ok to go through with that. I think a lot of it has to do with the fact that we don't feel good enough...We're pushed from the outside. I mean every magazine you pick up today talks about sexuality and 98% of the teens have had sex by the time they're 19. So you think you're some kind of freak if you don't.

As lay pro-life coordinator for the Catholic Church, Peggy is involved with public education and has made it her personal goal to develop outreach programs to high schools, along with her other work of keeping up with legislation, staying in contact with other national, state and local right-to-life groups, and maintaining ties with parishes throughout the area, each of which has its own pro-life contact. Peggy, like many other right-to-lifers, sees the abortion issue as inseparable from a need for sex education that goes beyond "explaining the plumbing," an obligation which she feels should be shared jointly by family, school, church and state.

I always considered our generation would certainly be open about talking with our kids about sex, and I've tried to be with my family. I think part of the problem is we haven't talked nearly enough about being responsible for our actions. You spill a glass

of water then you wipe it up. There are natural and logical consequences. That's the risk. It's like getting in the car. One of the risks you take is having an accident.

Peggy worries especially that abortion fosters a sense of irresponsibility for the reproductive consequences of sexual activity and makes a concerted effort to discuss these things with her son. She prides herself that now (after practicing by talking to her plants) they can sit at the kitchen table and discuss wet dreams or his 13 year old sister's sudden mood shifts.

When Peggy finished high school in a small town north of Fargo at age 17, "it was assumed you would get married and have kids..." Within two years, Peggy did just that, marrying a man she met at her job as a grocery clerk. He now works in middle management for the phone company. She is grateful that it took her two years (even without birth control) to get pregnant so that they had time to get to know each other "before the kids came." Since then, they have had two and adopted a third, a biracial child. In their late 20's, the Jones' became actively involved in what might be called church-sponsored "marriage reform movements," starting with an activity called Marriage Encounter. Initiated by the Catholic Church, it has become quite popular in the Fargo-Moorhead area (and throughout the country) and is now imitated by other denominations.

It's three couples and a priest and you spend a weekend talking about your marriage and you get into a feeling level through a technique called "dialogue." It's a powerful experience, a renewal in each other and in faith. I remember thinking, "We got married and I thought about God being a part of our marriage somehow that all got lost." That all came back you know, it all fit in. So we got involved and became a team couple and went around and gave weekends.

After five years we quit doing that because eventually we began to doubt, and we got into the Sponsoring Couples program...You work with couples who are getting married...It

reaffirmed us in our marriage and it gives engaged couples a witness. And you do it in your home. So if your kids are unruly, then they see parents in action.

In Peggy's view, the energy they have put into their marriage via these activities (including pro-life work) has enabled them to focus on common goals as a couple and helped them keep their marriage together through what they recognize can be a very stressful period in the family cycle.

We've noticed, my husband and I, with our friends, that now that we're all through our thirties, there's been a heck of a lot of growth, especially for the women. A lot of us have gone back to work or to school. A lot of our friends, about five couples this last year, are experiencing serious marital difficulties because of her growth. My husband and I just really care about each other and how the other is growing and I think our spiritual life together has helped us a lot too, the time we spend in prayer together, that's given us hope when it's been tough. Gosh, I just think that our own marriage is a lot healthier than it was ten years ago. We're a lot more willing to compromise and talk things out.

Karen, Peggy's peer, also has a strong relationship with her husband. As was the case for most of the marriages of right-to-life women I observed, such success is the product of much time and effort. She explains,

One of the problems now is that everyone thinks that marriage should just be easy. Well it's not. It's a lot of hard work, and if you have differences to start with, it's even harder.

Marriages are supported, as well, by the ideologies and social organization of pro-life activities that they participate in together. Other studies of right-to-lifers have noted that married couples most often join the movement together, unlike pro-choice activists. (Leahy 1975: 66). Karen and her husband consider each other to be best friends and he is a staunch supporter of her activism; while he has less time than she does to devote to the cause, the pro-life philosophy meshes with his view of the world. Karen views her husband as atypical; implicit

in that understanding is the idea that most men have little interest in the "domestic sphere."

I think he's unusual in that he's devoted to home and family. To him it doesn't make sense that we would not allow life a chance and I see it as an optimistic viewpoint because what you're saying is all things are possible. He's in horticulture research and he works with plants and likes to grow things. We have almost a quarter of an acre out here in garden. And it carries over into his life. He sees growth rather than destruction. And it isn't just a single issue. He doesn't see the reason for war either.

Karen was born in 1944, the day after her father died, on a farm in Nebraska. To support the family, her mother moved back to her natal home and worked as a schoolteacher until she remarried seven years later. Karen met her husband in college and married him the same year she completed an advanced degree in home economics. Due to her husband's work as a research agronomist, she has lived in Africa until recently, and has devoted herself to running the household and raising her three children. The family moved to Fargo three years ago. They live now in a development on the northern outskirts of Moorhead, between farms to the north and the sugar beet processing plant to the south which dominates the landscape and economy of Fargo's sister city. It's newness is signalled by the absence of the diacritics of urban amenities such as curbs, street lights and house numbers.

Karen's home, which I first visited at a right-to-life board meeting two weeks before the interview, is filled with an unusual combination of Americana and African art objects collected during her time abroad. Recognizing that her years as a homemaker, like her sojourn overseas, were ending, Karen went back to school two years ago to take a refresher course in home economics and shortly after that, became involved in the pro-life movement. Returning to the work force

is a salient concern at this point in her life and shapes her current understanding of self, her social position and her critique of the culture and its relation to her concern with abortion.

I think we've accepted abortion because we're a very materialist society and there is less time for caring. To me it's all related. Housewives don't mean much because we do the caring and the mothering kinds of things which are not as important as a nice house or a new car. I think it's a basic attitude we've had for some time now.

You know, the whole thing got me to thinking about displaced homemakers and they are the most undervalued people in the whole world. The things that a mother does, if she's a good one, a conscientious caring mother, there's no one in the whole world who can take her place. But because she's not paid we don't appreciate her. So when you go out into the world and people say, "What have you been doing all these years?" when you're interviewed for a job. And they have no feeling or compassion. It doesn't pay so it doesn't count.

Contrary to the popular stereotype and consistent with many other right-to-lifers, Karen does not believe women should only be at home with children. In fact, she endorses women working; her criticism is of the dehumanizing effects that wage work has on both men and women. In her program, the current sexual division of labor would change, making work and parenthood easier to combine for both men and women. As she sees it, liberalized abortion is an obstacle to the changes she has in mind.

I think there should be flexible hours so that a mother and father can each have a part-time job. I think there should be shared jobs, consideration made so that daily life can provide as much as possible. That doesn't mean that the child never has a babysitter. But companies should hire people in ways that will allow mothers and father to take care of their children. No one loves them like a mother and dad love those children.

People...women who are married can get maternity leave and go right back. But if we destroy it by getting abortions, we're not going to change it as fast as when we change it by allowing people who are pregnant to have their babies and helping them.

The public acceptance of abortion, then, stands for what she sees as the growing devaluation of nurturance in American culture, a problem which hurts not only women and children but men as well.

Men are liberated in a sense when women are liberated because its liberating to be able to nurture and care for children and its not that confining when you don't have to do it all the time...I mean a woman who has a job or career and a family and a man who has a career and a family find they will balance each other if they work together at it instead of turning the job over to daycare.

Although Karen sits on the board of two local right-to-life groups, she doesn't consider herself as serious an activist as other local leaders. She became involved, she explains, at the insistence of friends and because of the sense of urgency she felt when the clinic opened. Similarly, Peggy took her position because she was bored with clerical work and had been asked by the diocese to replace the former pro-life coordinator who left to have a baby. These women, while committed to the pro-life cause, are unlike others in that they describe their activism as evolving more out of circumstance than passion. The statement with which Peggy closed the interview suggests how their activism intersects with their life cycle positions .

I had been working as a secretary for an insurance firm about 20 hours a week and it was getting tedious. I wanted to move into something else, and I found this to be really healthy for me because it has allowed me to be creative, to have much more self-confidence. I like what it's done for me as a person. I don't see that I'm going to do it for my whole life, for example, I don't think I would have gotten into politics if it hadn't been for my pro-life work. It's really been a life-broadening experience in a lot of ways. I thing my next step is to go to college. At age 40. Imagine that. (laughs).

The Current Activists: The 1950's Cohort

While the move from motherhood to marketplace is absorbing these women in their late 30's, those born a decade later are facing the opposite transition. Sally Nordsen is part of a cohort of women born between 1952-1958 who make up the majority and most dedicated members of Fargo's anti-abortion activists. Like most of the other pro-life women of this group, Sally went to college. There she met her husband who now works in wholesale marketing. They married soon after her graduation; she worked for seven years as a social worker. In her late 20's, she got pregnant and decided to leave the work force in order to raise her children. This choice, while consciously made, was nonetheless marked by ambivalence.

I had two days left of work before my resignation was official but Dick was born earlier than expected. So I left the work on my desk and never went back to it. There were so many things that were abrupt. When I went into the hospital it was raining, and when I came out it was snowing. A change of seasons, a change of work habits, a new baby in my life. It was hard. I was so anxious to get home and show this baby off. And when I walked in the door, it was like the weight of the world and I thought, "What am I going to do with him now?" Well, these fears faded.

So it was a change. When Ken would come home, I would practically meet him at the door with my coat and purse cause I wanted to get out of there. I couldn't stand it, you know. And that's still the case sometimes. But the joys outweigh the desire to go back to work.

I had some hobbies at one time (laughs) but with the pro-life work and my family and church. It's really all I've been able to manage. And there have been times when I've just spread myself too thin. And the kids are the ones that suffer if I get too involved.

The Nordsen home, located in an older neighborhood not far from downtown Fargo, reflects the more gracious era when it was first built: wood moldings, stained glass windows in the foyer, a hospitable

porch well-trafficked by friends and family who drop by frequently and unexpectedly. On the spring day of my visit, the block was its own world. Children at play tested the boundaries between sidewalk and street while mothers watched under the graceful arches of Fargo's prized elms, joined occasionally by some college boys who rent rooms in their homes or an elderly parent out for fresh air.

I first met Sally during a health fair at the local shopping mall where she and a neighbor spent the day at a pro-life information table handing out literature to passers-by. For those who stopped, she explained the life of the unborn with the aid of plastic models of fetal development loaned by a sympathetic obstetrician. Later, at her home, she explained how she became "converted" to the right-to-life cause.

When the abortion chamber came to town, it just hit me that I was responsible for this. I was walking in front of the clinic and all of a sudden, many things just came crashing down, you might say, about my attitudes and values and things...And some of these things I equated with being a free woman were not necessarily good and did not necessarily have to do with freedom. Women's rights were important to me. But sometimes I acted as if I was downtrodden. I have a husband who respects me completely, who shares in the work around the house. I have no reason to complain. I didn't live in a home where I was belittled for being female.

I go around acting like I had to be the champion for women's rights. But I honestly have a hard time with some of the screaming that goes on because some of those women also feel that abortion is one of those rights and they call it reproductive freedom. To me, yes, it is your freedom to choose to reproduce or not to reproduce. But once that's done, you've already made that choice. So when those things get lumped together with women's rights, like equal pay, I get really upset. There are some things, such as abortion, that can actually be destructive to other people. If we are so right, let's not repeat the same mistakes that other people have made. Let's not repeat the mistakes that men have been making.

Her statement was interrupted briefly by a crying child, the younger of her two boys aged three and a half and one who, until this moment, had been snoozing amid recently abandoned toys in a comfortable heap on the floor with the family husky. Sally is extremely warm, with an engaging and available sense of humor even in the presence of two demanding toddlers. Her blonde hair, blue eyes and broad bone structure bear testimony to her second generation Norwegian heritage. Her clothes -- old jeans and a turtleneck -- are the daily uniform of a young mother.

For Sally and the other pro-life activists her age, the move from wage labor to motherhood occurred in the late 70's or more recently. Their "fresh contact" with the culture, to use Mannheim's phrase, at this critical moment in their life histories intersected a paradoxical moment for American feminism. Much of what the prior cohort of feminist activists of the 1960's and 1970's had struggled for appeared to have been achieved. Fargo, for example, by 1979, had an excellent Rape and Abuse center, a women's studies curriculum at the university, two daycare centers for low-income women, several gay and lesbian groups, a women's health hotline and, by 1981, an abortion clinic. Although this represented a major accomplishment, for many of the younger women, the institutions that feminists had struggled to establish over the last decade were now taken for granted. Feminism was identified, more often than not, with its distorted reconstruction in the popular media, in the image of the young, single, upwardly-mobile corporate woman. Women like Sally who have decided to leave the work force for a "reproductive phase" of their life cycle are keenly aware of the disjunction of their choice with the images that surround them.

Sally's colleague, Roberta makes the case succinctly. A 30-year-old Lutheran, married to an auto mechanic, Roberta worked as a college teacher and a graphic designer before she gave birth to her first child. I first met Roberta at a pro-life banquet and fund-raiser. She is now a full-time homemaker, raising her two girls and active in the pro-life movement as well as democratic politics.

They paint the job world as so glamorous, as if women are all in executive positions. But really, what is the average woman doing? Mostly office work, secretarial stuff. Even teaching gets routine after awhile. When you watch TV, there aren't women being pictured working at grocery store check outs.

I just don't see homemaking as any worse than eight to five. I really like homemaking. It's something I've chosen. I can, I bake, I garden, I sew, I see it as an art. I don't say everyone should do it that way. And my husband likes to do it too. People should be able to do what they like to do. That's the part of the women's movement I've really been in favor of.

This is not simply a defense of homemaking as a choice of vocation. It is a recognition of the social and economic consequences of having made a decision that she senses is an unpopular one. The choices Roberta has made represent a critique of what she considers to be the dominant culture. It is important to remember that the pro-choice women only ten years senior to Roberta felt that their decision to do the opposite, leave motherhood for the workforce, was similarly controversial. What this indicates is how rapidly the definition of "normal female behavior" has changed. For example, Roberta sees in the lack of recognition for domestic work, an extension of a more pervasive condition, the increasing commercialization of human relations, especially those involving dependents.

You know, the picture painted these days is how much kids cost. These are the reasons given for most abortions. How much work kids are, how much they can change your lifestyle, how they interrupt the timing of your goals. What is ten years out a 70- year life span? You know, I've done a lot of volunteer work in nursing homes and it's just a lonely world to see women who don't have families...If you don't have your family, if you don't have your values, then what's money, you know?

In her view, legal abortion represents the loss of a locus of unconditional nurturance in the social order; in concrete terms, the threat is constituted in the public endorsement of sexuality disengaged from motherhood. In the right-to-life perspective, this situation serves to weaken social pressure on men to take responsibility for the reproductive consequences of intercourse.

A similar theme emerges in Sally's narrative. She draws on her experience as a social worker as evidence for her case that abortion undercuts women's ability to control men's sexual behavior.

I think men can get away with certain things that women can't, like infidelity, and I don't want to count that in my package of rights. To me sexual freedom is a loving relationship with one person. It came to me at that prayer vigil that all these things follow in a chain. There are consequences we're not ready for and that plays a big part in legalized abortion. And really, the other way I was living, I was really bored. I just wanted more and more and more.

In my work, I saw a lot of people who were part of the middle class and then because of a divorce or having a child out of wedlock, they became part of the welfare system. I saw how really necessary, how many reasons there were to really maintain that relationship. There's a very real world out there. I feel sorry for men that they can't have the same feelings I do about pregnancy. But in the situation of a woman, where all of a sudden after twenty year of a marriage, she has nothing, and he at least has a business or a job or whatever...women just have a different kind of investment in the marriage situation.

To write off such a response as naive is a misreading of the motivations that lead these women and many others who are less politically active, to connect abortion to a dismantling of a system which

links female sexuality to childrearing, heterosexual marriage and the support of husband. Right-to-life women are well aware of the fragility of traditional marriage arrangements and recognize as well the lack of other social forces that might ensure the emotional and material support of women with children or other dependents. Nonetheless, the movement continues to be stereotyped as wholly reactionary, an eddy flowing from the cultural backwaters. Almost all of the Fargo pro-life activists were aware of these stereotypes and addressed them in a dialectical fashion, using them to confirm their own position. Roberta, for example, expressed it in the following way.

If you take the pro-life stand, you're labelled as being against anything else that women stand for. And ironically, it's mostly women in our movement. The pro-choice people say about us, "Well, they must have feelings but they're so put down they can't make up their own minds, you know." And they think we're just saying what we do because that's what men have taught us. Well, if the men have taught us, why aren't the men helping us?

The women I have been talking to are strong and independent, hardly weak women, homemakers by choice because they value that. They support equal pay for equal work. I know about that because I sued the company I worked for and won...No we aren't quiet. You know, we couldn't have a movement if we were all the way we're stereotyped.

There are a lot of pro-life people who choose to stay at home with their children like me. A secondary income is not that important to us. My income would be pretty darn good if I took off for the work force again. My husband alone can support us but we have to pinch and budget and so we don't go to the fundraisers. And now that my husband and I have become evangelicals, we don't really believe in drinking for the sake of drinking. So we're severely criticized for that. Anyway, to completely exclude us for that one reason, being pro-life, just blows my mind.

Roberta's growing religious commitment reflected a similar process, and one that was typical of at least some of her cohort as well. Seen in the diachronic perspective of a life history, the relationship between religiosity and right-to-life activism is not a

simple case of cause and effect, with religious faith a prior condition for pro-life belief, as Roberta's case makes clear. She had not been particularly interested in religion most of her life and had been attending a mainstream Lutheran church in Fargo, more for social reasons than out of spiritual conviction. Like Sally and Helen, her "conversion" to born-again Christianity and the right-to-life cause emerged more or less simultaneously.

The following narrative fragment illuminates some of the functional aspects of that shift. In choosing to leave the work force, Roberta knew she would be greatly reducing the disposable income for her household. The economic consequences of her ideological choice, then, have restricted the activities in which she and her husband can participate. I do not mean to interpret their religiosity as the consequence of a need for frequent low-cost entertainment with readily available childcare, although some of these concerns may enter into their regular church attendance. In moving to an evangelical Lutheran congregation, they have found a setting and a group of people whose values are consistent with those they have been gradually formulating over the last few years.

The church we had been going to didn't take a pro-life stand. I was over at the church one day, in fact, that's where this all really got going for me. I was one of those, what you would call a sleeper. I mean the issue could have been shot in my face and I wouldn't have noticed. But there was an article in the paper about this girl who had an abortion and I was having coffee with some women in the church and I said, "How on earth could anyone ever consider that? What happened to motherhood?"

Well, at the church where we went, we had hoped to get a discussion going because the lady in charge of Planned Parenthood was a member...and they said, "It's such a controversial issue, it will divide the congregation..."

So we joined this Lutheran Free Evangelical Church where they just pure and simple said that they thought abortion is wrong. And we have grown into thinking that it's the best thing that ever happened to us. And it's quite a bit changed our lifestyle. And at the same time, the evangelical community was changing to be more openly pro-life. Some people consider that the Church is so demanding that people have a hard time sustaining commitments to other things. We have Bible Study and church on Sunday morning, evening and night. And I have Tuesday morning Bible study too. And I'm a speaker for pro-life and I take calls. But with the two kids, that's where I draw the line.

In the church and in the pro-life movement, they find a community of peers who support those decisions they have made as individuals, and as a couple.

For the most recent wave of right-to-life activists in particular, the pro-life movement speaks to their concerns. Through it, their own dilemmas are framed as a noble struggle to reform the culture in the interests of women. The Right-to-Life cause legitimates their dissonant experiences as women, as mothers and as political activists. As Roberta explained to me while I cleared my tape recorder from her kitchen table to make room for freshly baked bread:

The image that's presented of us as having a lot of kids hanging around and that's all you do at home and you don't get anything else done, that's really untrue. In fact, when we do mailings here, my little one stands between my legs and I use her tongue as a sponge. She loves it and that's the heart of grassroots involvement. That's the bottom. That's the stuff and the substance that makes it all worth it. Kids are what it boils down to. My husband and I really prize them; they are our future and that is what we feel is the root of the whole pro-life thing.

Conclusion

The collective portrait that emerges from these stories, then, is much more complex than the stereotypes that portray these women as housewives and mothers passed by in the sweep of social change. It is not that they discovered an ideology that "fit" what they had always been. Their sense of identification evolves in the very process of voicing their views against abortion. In the regular performance of their activism, they are, simultaneously, transforming themselves and their community, projecting their vision of the culture into the future, both pragmatically and symbolically. They are astute, alert to social and political developments, and on many issues are not anti-feminist. They approve of and endorse women seeking political power. Most held or had held jobs, some had careers and a few, such as Roberta, had even brought comparable worth suits against former employers. The marriage relationships I observed were generally equitable; husbands helped out regularly in domestic duties and were pragmatically and emotionally supportive of their wives' political work.

Most of these women had encountered and assimilated some version of feminist thought and woven these ideas into their life choices. Yet almost every anti-abortion activist had reorganized these ideas into a right-to-life framework. Sally's narrative of how her ideas have changed as she became active in the pro-life movement is illustrative.

You're looking at somebody who used to think the opposite. I used to think that sex outside of marriage was fine. Now I see I don't believe that anymore. I believe when you practice sex outside of marriage you are taking all kinds of chances, including walking out on each other and not having to accept the responsibility of children or whatever. And to me, once you engage in the act of sex, it's a big emotional commitment. If my boyfriend walked out on me I would be

devastated. I think the world preaches you can have it all...doing lots of things without getting caught and I guess over the last few years, I've really changed my mind about a lot of things.

And when I see the abortion clinic, there's proof positive to me that my values are right and an innocent human being is paying the price for all this.

I think there was part of me that never fully agreed. It wasn't a complete turnaround. It was kind of like inside you know it's not right but you make yourself think it's ok. When I was in college, I loved to read Cosmopolitan magazine, all kinds of magazines and I thought, "This is the kind of life I was meant to lead..." You know, I think part of it is rebellion.

It was a gradual thing that happened, strangely enough, through the whole pro-life area where I just really felt spoken to, that many many things in my life needed to be straightened out. And it's just like somebody that goes through a really bad time, say that's how the pro-life thing affected me.

It is this negotiation of feminism into their own position that distinguishes these younger right-to-life women in particular. Rather than simply defining themselves in opposition to what they understand feminist ideology and practice to be, some claim to have held that position, and to have transcended it. What they consider feminism to be is another issue. The point here is that they assert the prior alliance. Sally, for example, describes her former "liberated" ideas about sexuality and heterosexual relationships as a repression of her true self. The essence of this stance is captured in the title of a pro-life lecture currently popular in Fargo entitled, "I was A Pro-Choice Feminist, But Now I'm Pro-Life." Much in the same way that pro-choice women embraced feminism, this younger cohort of right-to-life women find in their movement a particular symbolic frame that integrates their experience of work, reproduction and marriage with shifting ideas of gender and politics that they encounter around them.

The signification attached to abortion provides activists on each side with different, but interrelated paradigms for reconstituting and claiming a possible vision of being female that meshes with their historical and biographical experience. Activists, as narrators of their life stories, create symbolic control over different discontinuous transitions in the female life cycle that, for larger reasons, are particularly problematic for specific cohorts in ways that mark them as "generations" in Mannheim's sense. In this sense, grassroots activists in each movement not only take provocative stances, but are also engaged in a positive, culture-reconstructing agenda. In an article addressing that topic, authors Callahan and Callahan note,

Both sides tend to share a distrust of that form of libertarianism that would wholly sunder the individual from the community, setting up the private self as an isolated agent bound by no moral standards other than those perceived or devised by the agent...They want to be able to use the past selectively, preserving what remains valuable and rejecting what has either been harmful or wholly overtaken by time, and in general, they see the past as a resource, requiring constant adjustment and adaptation for life in the present (Callahan and Callahan 1984: 220-221).

I am arguing that what these life stories reveal is a more general process. In constructing an identity around an issue defined dialectically, the "other" is a critical counterpoint on which one's own identity depends. Thus, neither position can exist without its real and imagined opposition. On an individual and organizational level they must be both incorporated and repudiated, understood and denied. This process, I maintain, is expressed in their activism and in the narratives they created as well; it is indicative of a central feature in a controversy of this sort. In their differing positions as to what desirable social change should be, each group lays claim not only to

moral authority, but a particular view of America and the place of men and women in it. Their visions and actions are the most recent expression of enduring cultural themes regarding gender that have been continually revised in American social reform movements over the last two centuries. In the following chapter, the current abortion controversy is placed in the context of these long-term cultural and social processes.

PART V: ABORTION ACTIVISTS AND TRADITIONS OF FEMALE MORAL REFORM

Chapter 10: The Emergence of the Domestic Sphere and Female Moral Reform
Introduction: Resisting Penetration

The dialectical construction of gender around the meaning of the domestic sphere is not a twentieth century novelty. Abortion activists did not emerge on the American landscape sui generis but are part of a long-term cultural process. I view the current controversy as the most recent expression of a 200-year tradition of female reform movements actively engaged in defending what they see to be the best interests of women. In the specifics of their rhetoric, action and symbols, one sees how these organizations have been critical in the reformulation of gender and the sexual division of labor in the context of more general social and economic change in the United States.

This legacy of American female activism is rooted in the material and cultural separation of male and female spheres engendered by the growth of industrialization and commercial capitalism beginning in the 18th century. The differentiation of home from workplace that ensued was accompanied by the elaboration of housework, childrearing and family care -- labor that remained in the household and non-monetized -- as an exclusively female domain. In the ideologies that developed to reinforce this arrangement, women were considered morally superior to men, exempt from the world of commerce and more interested in motherhood and the welfare of others than in their own needs, a phenomenon historians have termed the "cult of domesticity" (Welter: 1968). In an increasingly gender-segregated society, male and female domains, negotiated in marriages, households and families, simultaneously required and repudiated one another.

The inevitable growth of the industrializing process that initially

segregated the home worked simultaneously to erode its material base. Gradually, domestic manufacture has been replaced by commodities, increasing the dependency of households and the women in them on a cash and wage labor system. Insofar as the developing capitalist economy and the values of competition, materialism and self-interest were identified as male, female resistance to the penetration of the domestic sphere by the market economy has been expressed in a discourse of sexual antagonism against men.

I am suggesting that these female moral reform movements can be seen as an ongoing effort on the part of women to control penetration of their social domains, their bodies and their cultural understandings of self by what is experienced and symbolically identified as an opposed and intrusive masculine culture. The specific issues that have mobilized women at particular historical moments are not arbitrary. The rallying symbols correspond to those aspects of the domestic sphere felt to be most threatened by the expansion of the market. At the same time, they are used to claim alliances with sources of authority outside the home -- the church, the state, the helping professions -- institutions whose interests intersect at points with those of women. In casting female concerns as unified in opposition to those of men and the market, activists have also been demanding the precedence of gender over class when the latter is expressed without regard to the labor or cultural placement of women. Through their activism in female moral reform movements -- from the evangelical revivals of the late eighteenth century to the temperance and social purity movements of the nineteenth, to current activism around abortion -- women have played a central role in recasting sexual meanings to defend, expand, and

transform the actual and symbolic boundaries of their culturally given domain.

The Eighteenth-Century Evangelical Revivals

In her book, The Politics of Domesticity, historian Barbara Epstein, traces the roots of female activism back to what she calls "the first mass movement in American history" (Epstein 1981:11), the Protestant religious revival known as the First Great Awakening that spread through the socially homogeneous villages of New England during the 1740's. Since the late 17th century, American women had outnumbered men as church members, a trend that continues up to the present (Degler 1980: 298). During the Great Awakening, under the leadership of Jonathan Edwards, both men and women were attracted to the ranks of revivalism. The Awakening's emphasis on personal salvation brought a democratic spirit to Puritanism, contributing to the eventual transformation of that doctrine. The Puritan denunciation of worldly ambition in particular seemed increasingly out of phase with the changes occurring in colonial society as it began to respond to the growth of market systems and commercial farming (Epstein 1981:13). Although men were more likely than women to be drawn into the new mercantile arena that was fostering the breakdown of the old order, Epstein found little difference in the number or substance of the conversion narratives of male and female participants in the Great Awakening. She interprets this as an index of the relative equality of the sexes in colonial New England (in contrast, say, to their position under English common law); which, in turn, she sees as a reflection of the common participation of both genders in the seventeenth-century household-based economy (Berg 1978: 22; Epstein 1981:24-29).

Whether or not one agrees with this interpretation of women's position in the colonial period, Epstein maintains that the fact that

women did not use the Great Awakening -- a moment of subversion of conventional lines of authority -- to voice discontent against men, indicates that "male domination was not widely experienced by women as an issue in their lives" (Epstein 1981:37).

She strengthens her case by comparing it with the male/female differences expressed in documents from the Second Great Awakening that began in 1797 and spread through the recently settled commercial, industrializing towns of the Connecticut River Valley and western NY and which reached a peak between 1825 and 1837 (Degler 1980: 299). Methodist and Baptist preachers, stressing faith over theology and personal salvation as the means of escaping eternal damnation, pulled believers into their fold. In so doing, they undercut the authority of the Congregational and Episcopal clergy, the two leading congregations of the colonial period (Berg 1978:34).

The converts were primarily from the middle strata, shopkeepers and artisans. Two-thirds of them were young, unmarried women (Epstein 1981:46). Epstein interprets the differential participation by gender, and differences in male and female conversion narratives to show how shifts in male/female relations were being experienced and expressed. Men were generally brought to conversion by social pressure from religious female kin and their testimonies stressed the practical rewards of salvation. By contrast, women's confessions were organized around internal torment over their sinful desire to rebel against God's authority. She concludes that:

The divergence in world views of men and women that emerges from the conversion accounts reflects the actual divergence of their worlds...for men's and women's values represented competing social orders. In order to succeed in the world of commercial capitalism, men had to learn to separate morality and sentiment from self-interest, while women, in legitimiz-

ing their own domestic activity, called upon the values of the society that commercial capitalism was engaged in destroying...(p. 62).

The Second Revival, then, was distinguished from the first in its articulation of sexual antagonism, most clearly expressed in women's prayer campaigns in which their piety took on a militant stance in an effort to transform the behavior and worldview of men considered to be irresponsible or irreligious.

Given this situation, what was the relationship between the apparent shift in women's view of their own position vis-a-vis men to the general conditions of their lives? This threshold period between the two centuries was a period of intensive economic growth. The rapid development of modern transportation systems promoted regional specialization and national markets, which in turn stimulated industrial production and ultimately, the substitution of factory-produced goods for household manufacture (Cott 1977). The continued growth of the internal market and specialized production for commercial exchange thus diminished the importance of women's work in production at the same time that it increased the dependency of household economies on cash for basic commodities. The effects on the social organization of gender were multiple. Increasingly, mothers and children were isolated in the home, separate from yet dependent on male wage labor. At the same time, single, childless and poor women were entering wage labor work, as laborers in textile factories, in teaching or in domestic service. Despite the opportunities for women to participate in wage labor, most did so only for limited periods of their life cycle or out of economic necessity. While the scarcity of workers in colonial towns had encouraged the entry of women into the labor market, the growing density of

available labor in industrializing cities eventually bred male opposition to female participation in force in all occupations. Even the most impoverished women in the lowest-paying jobs were viewed as encroaching on what was increasingly seen as the male prerogative of wage labor (Berg 1978: 63).

Such animosity toward women working outside the home was one of the many strands woven into the web that enmeshed women into the material and symbolic boundaries of the "cult of true womanhood" (Welter 1968). Regardless of the actual differences between women, the classing of all females together around the ideology and vocation of domesticity intensified women's gender group identity and their oppositional stance toward what was increasingly identified as a male world of commerce, self-interest and wage work. As historian Nancy Cott observes:

Because it included "all" women and was endowed with social and political meaning, the domestic vocation gained enormous persuasive strength...

Woman's sphere was "separate" not only because it was at home but also because it seemed to elude rationalization and the cash nexus, and to integrate labor with life... (1977: 99).

The appeal of the Second Great Awakening, then, was not only the possibility it offered for playing a role in one's own salvation, a doctrine more suited to a climate of commercial capitalism and Jacksonian democracy than the determinism and pious self-denial of earlier Puritan forms of Protestantism. It also provided women with a vehicle for challenging male authority while emphasizing their own through appeals to the higher authority of God to protect their interests against what they saw as the degradations of men and the market.

Women turned increasingly to evangelical reform as a means of strengthening ideological and communal pressure on men who might be tempted

to abandon dependent women and children as they began to feel the constraints of the burden of support brought about by the shift in the sexual division of labor in a burgeoning cash economy. Deprived of the identity and purpose that worldly occupations were providing for men, women who turned to evangelical Christianity found in it a principle around which to organize their lives, an avenue of public self-expression that received the encouragement of male clergy, and perhaps most importantly, a female community of peers (Cott 1977: ch. 4).

Ante-Bellum Moral Reform Movements

Epstein, Cott and others have focused on this last point, the experience of collectivity and common purpose in evangelical religious activity as the social and cultural basis for the unprecedented proliferation of women's reform organizations after 1800 (Epstein 1981: 87). These associations took on tasks of benevolence in the towns and cities of New England, the mid-Atlantic, and the expanding western frontier, supplying provisions and education to poor women and their children. Historian Barbara Berg, in her study of 150 such voluntary associations, sees their growth as more a response to the disturbing conditions faced by women in these growing urban areas than as an extension of evangelical impulses (Berg 1978: 146-150). Not only did many of these female benevolent societies predate the second Great Awakening; numerous examples of clerical opposition to women's growing reform efforts (Berg: 149-150) indicate their significance as a bridge between the earlier millennial concerns and the more overtly political temperance, suffrage and social purity groups that drew a large number and wide range of women into their ranks.

This shift is perhaps best illustrated in the history of the American Female Moral Reform Society, the largest and most influential of the ante-bellum groups, with 20,000 members in chapters from Maine to Alabama by the 1840's (Smith-Rosenberg 1971: 210). Its members regularly criticized religious leaders who opposed their work (Berg 1978: 154); and, they insisted that the organization be staffed and run by women (Smith-Rosenberg 1971: 216).

In addition to its call for unified action on the part of women to protect their interests, the Moral Reform Society continually exhibited an "angry and emphatic insistence upon the lascivious and predatory nature of the American male" (Smith-Rosenberg 1971: 204) and the need for women to actively make men accountable for what was seen as irresponsible sexual behavior.

A closer examination of the workings of one branch of the Female Moral Reform Society -- the Utica chapter studied by Mary Ryan -- reveals at close range how these shifts in women's understanding of social power and gender relations were played out at the community level. In addition, her study suggests parallels between the dynamics of such groups and certain contemporary efforts:

Like the moral reformers of the 1830's and 40's, the women of the New Right have come to public prominence at a time of major sexual and social change when, for example, the rising divorce rate threatens to sever ties between husbands and wives nearly as frequently as children were separated from parents by the frenetic geographic mobility of the 19th century (1979: 82-83).

The Utica Female Moral Reform Society which incorporated satellites from the surrounding farms and villages, was formed in 1837 in the context of the proliferating associational life that so struck Toqueville in 1831 (1979:106). Utica, located in the heart of "the burned-over district" of upstate N.Y. that had spawned the Great

Awakenings, listed 41 voluntary associations in its 1832 city directory. Their functions ranged from charity to self-improvement.

All of these associations occupied a distinctive space in the social order, somewhere along a muted boundary between private and public life... a voluntary network of like-minded individuals. These associations actually functioned as a major structure of social organization, whatever the community need --be it police or fire protection, a new industry, poor relief, education, an orphanage -- some association rose to meet it. (Ryan 1979: 69).

Like other chapters of the Society, the Utica branch pledged itself to the control of seduction, prostitution and vice, a crusade described in their First Annual Report as "warfare for life" (Ryan 1979: 69). While the core organizers were veterans of evangelical reform, members ranged from well-to-do wives of professionals to "working girls." The majority of members were married women with children whose concerns, as voiced in the society's records were "a repository of the anxieties of mothers."

Who amongst us have not had our hearts pained by the obscenity of little children? Who amongst us does not tremble at least if some who are dear to us should be led away by the thousand snares of the destroyer? (The Advocate of Moral Reform 6/15/1843, in Ryan 1979: 73).

In Ryan's view, the circumstances that generated such anxiety over the loss of parental control were the root cause for the rise of the Moral Reform Society and similar associations that attracted women of the time. As the young people became increasingly mobile geographically in their search for wage labor, familial and community-based means of controlling their behavior diminished (Ryan 1979: 72). These uprooted youths, epitomized in Utica by the clerks, canal boys, servants, seamstresses and prostitutes, represented for many of the women of the city the loss of their ability to exercise control over the next generation. More generally,

The female moral reformers, in sum, anticipated the dangers of unbridled sexuality in the circumstances of commercial and early industrial capitalism; and they constituted themselves...as a direct, collective, organized effort, which aimed to control behavior and change values in the community at large (Ryan 1979: 73).

While the society operated initially through friend, kin and church networks and through the circulation of tracts, petitions and publications, by 1841, the women reformers began to step off their familiar pathways. They would accuse young male clerks on the street of seducing women; publicize the clientele of brothels; and send committees into poor neighborhoods to report on conditions, minister aid. Occasionally they brought to trial men who had violated norms of domestic propriety -- abusing wives, impregnating servants, abandoning children -- while providing the female victims with legal and personal assistance (Ryan 1979: 75- 78). By adapting "male-directed methods of moral surveillance to a new environment and their own interests" (Ryan 1979: 77), the women brought to public attention issues that had been considered private: the specific destructive effects of a sexual double standard. They learned how to "exert leverage beyond their households, outside the women's networks and across the social and economic divisions of the city" (180), crossing the boundary between public and private behavior.

Additionally, the Utica women, like many of the other reformers, turned their campaign toward their own ascribed vocation of motherhood. They specified methods of childrearing "designed to instill sexual control in the very personalities of their children" (177), making connections between the food and clothing permitted children and their later sexual behavior. In the line of maternal duty, they hoped to purge "loose morals" from the next generation. Thus, women acted to

institutionalize the idea that their pious influence in the home could ultimately reform the world in their own interests. While enacting their moral authority in the public sphere, they simultaneously played a critical role in constituting an ideology which served increasingly to confine their sexuality to motherhood and their world to the domestic sphere.

Ryan traces the decline of the Utica Moral Reform Society by 1845 to several sources. By mid-century, as Utica became an industrial center inundated by immigrant labor, it also became more closely integrated into the national economic and political system, so that "vital decisions were transferred from the neighborhood to a formidable city hall and then on to Washington and Wall St." Ryan argues that it was not simply the loss of local social power that caused the organization's demise, but the more widespread acceptance of the discourse of sexual continence (: 81).

Historian Barbara Berg offers a variant interpretation to Ryan's. The documents of the society she studied, in her view, "failed to disclose significant social control motivation but examples abound of women risking their person, property and reputation to assist less fortunate members of their sex" (Berg 1978: 1949).

Benevolent societies were slowly creating change. Whereas the woman-belle ideal had insisted that all females had the same needs, abilities, and aspirations, voluntary organizations enabled their members to recognize that they were not alike. And rather than the isolation or alienation that often accompanies the realization of individual difference, a sense of community with other women developed (Berg: 166).

The First Wave of Feminism

This "sense of community with other women," Berg holds, was the

first glimmer that ultimately expanded into the vision that inspired the movement for women's rights. Similarly, Smith-Rosenberg points out that the moral reformers' assertion of women's interests in the male-dominated world beyond the home, and their creation of organized and politically effective networks of women provided unprecedented models for female action. This occurred at the historical moment when the future leaders of the first wave of feminism were just coming of age.

Interpretations of the moral reform movement as a source of feminism (Berg; Epstein; Smith-Rosenberg) adds an important dimension to the more standard view which traces the origins of the women's rights movement to female abolitionists (e.g. O'Neill 1971:11). In the writings of female abolition leaders and feminists such as E.C. Stanton and the Grimke sisters, it is clear that these women identified the social position of their gender with the oppression of blacks. The rub of this growing self-consciousness against the official exclusion of women from public roles in the anti-slavery cause helped to create the friction that catalyzed the first Women's Right's Convention in Seneca Falls in 1848 (Zinn 1980: 116). However, the organizational abilities and political awareness of feminists such as Stanton and Lucretia Mott were honed not only in abolition work but in the moral reform movements as well. This experience enabled them to turn suffrage agitation into a full-fledged female movement separate from the abolition wing of the Republican Party. By the time of the Seneca Falls Convention, the Moral Reform Society had succeeded in making seduction a crime in N.Y. State and had taken on the need for equitable employment of women as their own cause, urging women to join unions and

insisting on female staffing of the organization, from typesetters to executive officers (Smith-Rosenberg 1971: 209-212). Nonetheless, angry response to articles in The Advocate of Moral Reform by Angelina Griekke which attacked masculine interpretations of the Bible indicated that much of the membership would not go so far as to question the authority of men in families or Christianity.

Post-Bellum Temperance and Social Purity Movements

Women may not have wanted to tamper overtly with an ideology on which their daily life depended for recognition and material support. However, the temperance and social purity movements in the post-bellum era became a new arena in which concern over sexual inequality was expressed in new and more socially effective ways. The antagonism toward men and "masculine values" that had led evangelical women to associate femaleness with piety was now translated into the more secular terms of temperance and sexual restraint as the prerogative of the female domain (Epstein 1981: 89).

Initially, in the early 19th century, temperance groups were organized by Protestant men in what were called Washington Societies (Degler 1981: 315). By the late 19th century, the movement was transformed under the leadership of women, beginning with the Women's Crusade, a mass female assault on saloons in and around Hillsboro, Ohio in 1873 - 1874 (Epstein 1981: 90). In their first action, begun just before Christmas, 100 middle-class and upper-class women prayed before the saloons of Hillsboro, urging the owners to shut down their businesses. Within six months, the "sit-ins" spread to other towns in Ohio, NY, Massachusetts, Pennsylvania and Illinois and were particularly

effective in small communities. In less than two years, these campaigns succeeded in closing -- at least temporarily -- over 3000 saloons through persuasion, harassment or legal technicalities (Epstein 1981: 97). Federal revenues from excise taxes in Ohio and Indiana fell by \$330,000 in two months; temperance bills made their way to Congress. By 1874, the local efforts coalesced in the founding of a national organization -- what would become the largest women's association in America, the Women's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU) (Degler 1981: 315 - 319).

It seems ironic that alcohol proved so effective a symbol in mobilizing women when U.S. liquor consumption was at an all-time low (Epstein 1981: 98). The problem was less the amount of intoxication and more the social organization of alcohol consumption. Drinking was no longer centered in the home as it had been in the colonial period but had moved to saloons, a social space designated as a male world where wages were spent on liquor, gambling and prostitution, thus placing it in direct competition with the home for the emotional and material resources of men (Degler 1981: 316).

In Epstein's analysis, women's campaign to destroy saloons had a double valence, charged by class as well as sex antagonisms. In demanding public recognition and action on the part of the state in defense of values to which they were culturally assigned, women were also helping to complete the cultural transformation begun largely by men in the early part of the century. They were creating a definition of "respectable" middle-class behavior far removed from the preindustrial culture of the previous two centuries (1981: 110). Epstein sees this as expressive of middle-class women's fears not only of an

oppositional "masculine culture" symbolized by saloons, but also of swelling immigrant and working-class populations in their communities (1114).

In its initial stages, the temperance movement was largely white, middle-class and Protestant; and its members took their mission, in part, to be the conversion of the "lower classes" to proper ideas of family life and responsible behavior (Degler 1981: 316). Eventually, the temperance ideology was willingly embraced by women in working-class communities (Faler 1974). By 1885, 30% of local WCTU organizers had husbands who were skilled or unskilled workers (Garfield 1955: 230). What this suggests is that the movement was more effectively serving the interests of women across classes.

The unprecedented and rapid growth of the WCTU over the last decades of the 19th century and first few of the 20th provide an index of its continuing significance as an expression of women's interests. During that period, national membership expanded from 176,000 to 245,000 between 1890 and 1911. IN NY state, where suffrage activism was centered, the WCTU had ten times as many members as suffrage groups (Degler 1981: 317). While their main emphasis was not on suffrage, the membership was not opposed to women taking political action. Frances Willard, its president for 19 years, was elected on a suffrage plank in 1879. Under her leadership, the scope of the WCTU broadened; she linked the temperance cause of defense of the home to a whole range of issues. By 1889, Willard had created 39 departments within the union, addressing causes as diverse as health, labor, social purity, peace and arbitration (Degler 1981: 318).

The WCTU's particularly strong appeal in the growing industrial

towns and cities of America suggests that Willard's placing of temperance within a more general critique of industrial capitalism spoke to those who were experiencing its effects most directly. Her rhetoric and organizing transformed the morality of Protestant female piety and the "cult of true womanhood" into secular terms. She managed to articulate a feminine vision of the social order that succeeded in mobilizing a broad cross-section of American women to social action. The following passage from an 1888 WCTU Annual Meeting shows how she placed her analysis of the impact of the penetration of the household by commercial and state interests in the symbolic terms available to most women of that time.

The home was once almost a world apart in which the state interfered but little. In that home, woman was queen. Now that kingdom has been invaded, her crown despoiled, her very children taken possession of by the state. These changes were inevitable with the progress of civilization. The claims of society grew, but woman, the dethroned queen, demands and has a right to demand that her position of equal authority in the home be recognized in the state (Willard, 15th Annual Meeting of the WCTU, Annual Minutes: 122, cited in Epstein 1981: 129).

Willard's ability to speak to the sensibilities of nineteenth-century women, arguing that only female equality and suffrage would give the family its proper place in public life had dramatic effects. Despite the lack of the vote, WCTU women exercised their considerable influence in political parties and at the polls,¹ organizing to get men to vote for prohibition by stationing themselves outside voting booths along with ministers and children.

Because of Willard's effectiveness in mobilizing masses of women presumed indifferent to women's rights, it is easy to focus on her to the neglect of the movement's social base. Temperance activists are portrayed, generally, as conservatives who were reacting defensively to

the social and economic changes of post-bellum America: the incorporation of households into a market economy and the disruption of families and communities as the next generation was pulled increasingly into wage labor. While the crusaders were certainly articulating fears about changes in the organization of families and households, their views do not distinguish them particularly from their suffrage contemporaries generally considered to be more progressive. And, while the society never openly embraced the suffrage movement, there are, in fact striking similarities between the two groups.

A study by Janet Z. Giele (1961) comparing leaders of the WCTU and The National Women's Suffrage Association (NWSA) shows that both movements had a high proportion of educated women whose philosophies converged on several points. Both argued that women had a unique role to play in society that men could or would not assume; that the position of women in the home needed to be recognized and improved; and that women were morally superior but socially vulnerable to men and needed greater protection. Where they differed, according to Giele, was in their views of how best to advance these causes. Whereas suffrage activists tended to favor what she calls structural reforms in labor, education, and government, stressing the civic and intellectual equality of women as individuals, the WCTU members worked in "other-serving" causes -- charity, childcare or social purity movements. In her analysis, the WCTU women were distinguished by their orientation to the warm affectional world in which they stood. In humanitarian endeavor, they turned to helping the weak rather than interceding with the powerful. They were happy with the image of the traditional woman and rather than change her, they wanted to pull imperfect man up to her level (Giele 1961: 149).

Giele's study shows how two interpretations of gender that are

seen as separate strands in contemporary American life were originally intertwined. Still, her portrayal misses the radical and even militant nature of the battles waged by temperance women (as well as others) against the sexual double standard of the late nineteenth century.

By contrast, Epstein's analysis of the WCTU focuses on antagonism to what were seen as masculine values as a central symbolic theme expressed perhaps most clearly in the actions of the WCTU's Department of the Suppression of Social Evil. More generally, this was part of a movement for social purity that manifested itself in a variety of forms over the nineteenth century. During that era, according to Barbara Epstein,

In the middle class, where the idea of women's engaging in sex outside of marriage was viewed with horror, men's visits to prostitutes were almost taken for granted (1983: 121).

Women's active campaigns to enforce a single sexual standard -- their own -- on men began with the antebellum moral reformers efforts to curb prostitution. After the Civil War, a rise in venereal disease led to government studies which revealed that the profession was on the increase. Police and medical associations sought to regulate such business by confining it to "red light zones" and requiring medical surveillance to control the spread of disease (Degler 1981: 280- 285). Following that victory, Social Purity advocates turned their attention to averting prostitution by addressing what they saw as its causes in the relations of everyday life: women's sexual exploitation by the men on whom they were dependent due to a division of labor that offered few opportunities for adequate female employment. In the legal sphere, the social purists worked to raise the age of female consent to engage in female sexual activity so that by 1900, only two states had limits

below age 14. In addition, they agitated for greater educational and employment opportunities for women to reduce their dependence on marriage and prostitution as their only reliable means of support (Degler 1981: 288). Thus,

social purity grew from a "new abolitionism" directed against prostitution to a totalistic reform movement intent upon transforming the consciousness of society. Social purity advocates considered that transformation possible because they believed that the current set of "human needs" was itself a social product, not a biological instinct (Gordon 1977: 119).

Casting sexuality as a culturally determined product allowed women to demand the control and regulation of men's sexual behavior. The Department of Social Purity in the WCTU inaugurated the Society for the White Cross for men and The Knights of the Silver Crown for boys. Members of these groups pledged to "treat all women with respect, to maintain the laws of purity as binding upon men and women and to fulfill the command, "Keep Thyself Pure" (Epstein 1981: 127). WCTU members, like most social purists, believed the development of civilization to be stymied by the subjection of women to what was seen as men's excessive sexual desire. Harmony and altruism -- traits attributed to "women's sphere" and the vocation of motherhood -- were being eclipsed, they maintained, by competition, greed and the commercialization of human relations, qualities linked with the growth of industry and monopoly capital and directly, or indirectly, with male sexual behavior.

A number of analyses of the late nineteenth century preoccupation with sexual continence and control of male lust have interpreted these concerns as sexual metaphors expressing the frugality and conservation demanded in a nascent capitalist economy when accumulation of capital

was of primary concern (Cominus 1963; Marcus 1960). These interpretations are problematic on two counts: they ignore the significance of gender interests indicated by the prominence of women in the shaping of the social purity movements; and, they do not accurately reflect the development of the American post-bellum economy. By 1860, American industries were producing goods in large quantities; further development of capital required consumption, not accumulation (Newale 1972: 127). In the context of the sexual division of labor, the increasing substitution of commodities for household-based domestic production further eroded the status and economic necessity of the domain assigned to women in American life.

The effects of these shifts did not pass unnoticed by the female activists of the Gilded Age, as historian Mary Jo Buhle points out. These women, most of whom were born between 1819 and 1832 had

an understanding that the vaunted women's sphere of their youth had been blown to the winds. Indeed, the advancement of women from private to public life became the premise of the entire woman question...They believed that industrialism had substantially changed American society and necessarily created a new conception of womanhood (Buhle 1980: 40).

Writing in 1898, Charlotte Perkins Gilman addressed the issue of the declining "bargaining power" of women in marriage in her widely-read book, Women and Economics. As housekeeping, cooking and domestic production were all services that could be purchased by men outside marriage, the fundamental reciprocity between husband and wife was reduced to an exchange of women's sexuality and maternity for the financial support of her spouse. Gilman advocated several solutions for this problematic situation: that women be able to support themselves with wage labor; that domestic labor be collectivized; and that wives increase their value in the marriage exchange by "making their resourc-

es scarce," i.e. controlling their husbands' sexual access and limiting their pregnancies.

In this sort of cost-benefit analysis of the social arrangement of the sexes popularized by Gilman, the attack on prostitution takes on a new symbolic dimension. It is not simply a campaign promoting conservative middle-class morals against the excesses of masculine sexual desire. Insofar as prostitution represented "the imposition of a cash nexus upon relations between the sexes and the division of sex from the family" (Smith-Rosenberg 1980: 62), it further strained the fabric of the domestic sphere that was already unravelling with the expansion of the market economy. Thus, for a broad range of women, prostitution served as a symbol of the penetration of the core of the domestic sphere on which they depended -- sexual relations in marriage -- by commercial values of capitalism increasingly associated with male lust. The anti-prostitution campaign was part of an effort by women to enhance their diminishing position as wives and mothers by denying men the availability of sex through commercial exchange outside of marriage.

Historian Linda Gordon underscores the necessity of placing such ideas and behavior in their historically specific context of the social meaning of sex and reproduction experienced by nearly all women of that era.

In the 19th century, women needed marriage far more than men. Lacking economic independence, women needed husbands to support them or at least free them from a usually more humiliating economic dependence on fathers...Men's responsibility for children was an important pressure for marital stability...The belief that motherhood was women's fulfillment had a material basis: parenthood was often the only creative and challenging activity in a woman's life, a key part of her self-esteem (Gordon 1977: 110).

The Voluntary Motherhood Movement

It is not surprising then, that motherhood, the last arena in women's domain that was not yet monetized or legitimate outside of marriage became a prominent issue of concern and agreement for female activists of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The principle that women had the right to determine the timing and frequency of intercourse and pregnancy took shape in the discourse of what was called the Voluntary Motherhood movement, beginning in the 1870's. The degree to which these ideas spoke to the needs of women of that period is indicated by the variety of groups which advocated voluntary motherhood ideas. They ranged from "free-love" activists who eschewed marriage and monogamy, to suffragists, to the most conservative of moral reformers (Gordon 1977: 95).

While the movement promoted a variety of natural forms of pregnancy prevention -- coitus interruptus, "karezza" (coitus reservatus), abstinence, and especially, a woman's right to refuse her husband sexual access -- it nonetheless condemned contraceptive devices and abortion. Such forms of birth control were seen as unnatural and unsafe and, more significantly, vehicles that would encourage the independence of women and the promiscuity of men (Gordon 1977: 98). Contraceptives were associated with prostitution and more generally, with the separation of sexuality from reproduction. Thus, they also presented the possibility of women as active sexual subjects, an idea at odds with Victorian understandings of female sexuality as dictated by a self-sacrificing maternal instinct. Ironically, as the birth rate dropped and more and more women were entering the paid labor force, this view became more ideologically entrenched. The notion of maternal

instinct

rested on the assumption that the qualities that parenthood requires -- capacities for tenderness, self-control and patience, tolerance for tedium and detail, emotional supportiveness, dependability and wrath -- were not only instinctive but sex-linked...and thus also involved a definition of the normal instinctual structure of the male that excluded these capacities (Gordon 1977: 115).

The identification of the cultural shape of motherhood and biological maternity with the female gender was used by voluntary motherhood advocates to promote acceptance of their efforts for fertility control. The prevailing view of women as selfless and generous, by nature immune to the dehumanizing effects of capitalism, was combined with the language of eugenics that was gaining popularity at the turn of the century. The intertwining of these ideas produced a sort of emotional Lamarckian theory in which unwanted children were considered prone to mental or physical disabilities. By arguing that the conditions of intercourse itself could affect the child's character, the drive to curb men's sexual demands on women was now justified in terms of evolutionary progress (Gordon 1977: 120-124). The use of alcohol, sexual intercourse during pregnancy or in circumstances in which women were unwilling, were viewed as causes of inherited damage. Thus, the right of a woman to refuse her husband sexually became "biologized." It was no longer simply a political argument but an obligation for the betterment of the human race. By extension, many voluntary motherhood advocates argued that the emancipation of women would have immediate beneficial eugenic effects (Gordon 1977: 126-127).

While initially, such thinking was based on women's selflessness as the source of female moral and genetic superiority, by the late 1890's, groups such as the National Purity Association were issuing

pamphlets that declared self-sacrifice in women to be a violation of duty to unborn children (Gordon 1977: 129). Influenced by the Progressive Era's critique of paternalism and its romance with science as the key to social welfare, feminists such as C.P. Gilman and social purists like Frances Willard advanced ideas of "scientific motherhood," thus promoting women's independent development without disengaging female identity from maternity. Their promotion of a child's need for a well-trained mother fueled a campaign for sex education and women's education in general (Gordon 1977: 129-130).

The growing acceptance of higher education for women over the nineteenth century in fact had been won in the name of improving women's abilities to perform their traditional roles as wives and mothers (Beecher 1872). American colleges totally excluded females until 1837 when Oberlin first permitted women to enter; coeducational college were increasingly common by the end of the Civil War (Degler 1980: 310). By 1870, 11,000 women were enrolled in 582 institutions of higher education (O'Neill 1971: 14). However, the publication of statistics at that time which showed that a quarter to half of college-educated women never married (approximately double the number of non-college women) and that they generally had fewer children and harder pregnancies than poor or working-class women led to reaction against popular support for female education (Degler 1980: 314; O'Neill 1971: 80). These figures were well-publicized and by the early 1900's

had turned the voluntary motherhood argument on its head and produced the "race suicide" argument to the effect that voluntary motherhood was lowering the quality of the nation's population (Gordon 1977: 130).

This condemnation of women who limited their fertility has been popularly identified with Theodore Roosevelt. The significance of such

ideas is in their broad appeal at the time, particularly among women. While higher education was being blamed for undermining the vocation of motherhood, in fact, less than 10% of American women had actually abandoned that role in favor of a professional career (O'Neill 1971: 148).

The Suffrage and Anti-Suffrage Campaigns

Why then did demands for women's rights, both sexual and political, provoke so much opposition and divide women at the turn of the century? In Linda Gordon's view, the reaction was fueled by fears that the vocation of domesticity was endangered, at a time when few alternatives were available to most women (1977:133). A brief examination of the anti-suffrage movement -- the most clearly organized opposition to advances in women's rights at the turn of the century -- supports Gordon's view and suggests some parallels to contemporary developments as well.

Like the moral reform associations of the 1830's and 1840's the associations opposed to the extension of suffrage to women were created and run primarily by women. Since they were defending the legal status quo -- they opposed an easing in divorce law as well -- anti-suffragists coalesced in states where suffrage activism was strongest such as New York where, in the 1890's, the "antis" had over 20,000 members (Degler 1981: 352). Most of those prominent in the movement were middle and upper-middle class women with some social influence and likely to be active in women's clubs or reform organizations (O'Neill 1971: 57). Socially, they were in fact difficult to distinguish from suffragists.

The crossover in interests and background of women opposed on the issue of the vote is similar to the contemporary case of activists on

both sides of the abortion or ERA battles. In both cases, these parallels are generally ignored by analysts whose sympathies lie with one side or the other. Some historians, for example, have written off the anti-suffrage work as a conspiracy of the liquor industry (Flexner 1975: 309-9), much as right-to-lifers are dismissed as dupes of the New Right or the Catholic Church. Brewers and clergy have certainly made alliances with organizations whose agendas serve their institutional interests. Similarly, arguments have been made that the post-bellum south "produced a pact between women suffrage and white supremacy" (Kraditor 1965: 200). Nonetheless, such alliances do not explain the motivations of the female activists themselves.

In a study of anti-suffragists, Jane Jerome Canhi (1973)² analyzed the literature, letters and diaries of these women organizing against their own political enfranchisement. She found that their arguments pivoted on two central points. The first was that suffrage, by acknowledging women as individuals with interests separate from their families, would bring dissension to that unit. In the words of one of the "antis," granting women the vote

would shift the basis of our government from the family as a unit to the individual. So fundamental and important a change as this, we believe, would prove inimical to the highest interests of the home (Dyer 1903, quoted in Degler 1981: 353).

Or stated more strongly, the vote would bring

the possibility of civil war to the door of every family (Johnson 1897, quoted in Degler 1981: 354).

This view of the family as the fundamental basis of society whose members are united in their interests rested on an understanding of gender in which men and women are different and complementary by virtue of their biological differences.

The anti-suffragists grant the equality of the sexes. Men are no better than women and science assures us that they are no more intelligent. But the anti insists that the difference between the sexes shall not be ignored...It has fixed our place in the home and in the world, and no matter how far astray we go mentally from our right appreciation of this truth, sex will inexorably drive us back to wifehood and motherhood until the world ends (Jones 1909, in Degler 1981: 352).

Anti-suffragists had little success in impeding the battle for women's enfranchisement. The passage of the Nineteenth Amendment in 1920 giving women the vote ultimately created little significant change of the sort predicted by the anti-suffragists.

The scale and substance of the fight over female suffrage bears a number of similarities to the contemporary battles between women over abortion and the ERA. The controversy emerged during a time when women's legal and economic position was generally improving. And the fight was seized upon, along with women's education, as a symbol for the overturning of the ideology of separate spheres on which the prevailing gender arrangements had been based. Their invocation of motherhood as an essential condition of womanhood became an increasingly prominent theme among female activists, including suffragists, of the Progressive Era. Thus, while the anti-suffrage movement failed in its immediate goal, the construction of gender they presented, resisting the penetration of "male values" into "female domains," took root and flowered.

1. A reporter covering a prohibition election in North Carolina gave a graphic description of their tactics.

A few of the men ran the gauntlet of the women and children to whom they were personally known, but the great majority of the voters viewed the conflict from afar and returned to their offices and homes. The drys won the day (Degler 1981: 339).

On the national level, the WCTU withdrew support for Garfield after he failed to carry out the temperance promises he had made and merged with the National Prohibition Party. In 1892, Willard joined with the populists and chaired their first convention in 1892 (Epstein 1981: 124).

2. Jane Jerome Cash, "Women Against Women: American Antisuffragism, 1880-1920," unpublished dissertation, Radcliffe College, 1961.

Chapter 11: Domesticating the State and the Decline in Female Activism

The Alliance of Domesticity with the State: Social Feminism

The years bridging the 19th and 20th centuries witnessed an unprecedented growth in women's organizations devoted to "the betterment of society." Generally, these movements justified their actions as a defense of motherhood and the cultural values attached to it, a phenomenon historian William O'Neill has labelled "social feminism" (1971). As Eli Zaretsky notes, regarding the changes occurring at the turn of the century,

The central problem that all tendencies of the women's movement faced was that of reconciling the spread of the marketplace with its emphasis on individualism and competition, with the traditional values of "women's sphere" -- benevolence and selfless nurturance (Zaretsky 1982: 211).

The challenge this generation faced was the translation of these concerns into terms appropriate to their own needs as they were reconstructed by the transformation of America into a nation-state built on industrial and monopoly capitalism.

The opening decade of the Progressive Era, the 1890's, was marked by continual upheavals. The country witnessed the greatest industrial depression in its history, dramatizing the deleterious impact that increasing corporate control of American manufacturing was having on the lives of most people. Farmers' revolts and the populist uprisings, the Spanish-American War, violent strikes such as those at Homestead and Pullman, and massive immigration from southern and eastern Europe all contributed to the sense of crisis, conflict and change that generated what one historian has called "the search for order" (Wiebe 1967). Positivism, technical rationality, utilitarianism and scientific authority became the guiding principles for reform efforts designed as

much to quell unrest as they were to ameliorate conditions. Interpreters of the period consider this new "romance with science" as the basis for the cognitive style that shaped mass liberal culture in which the growth of corporations, elite institutions and professions played a central role. And perhaps of greatest significance, it was a period of increasing centralization of governmental control and legislation during which the foundations of the regulatory welfare state were laid. The establishment of institutions such as orphanages, prisons and mental asylums, and the personnel to staff them

were generally defended by the argument that industry had obviated many of the traditional functions performed by the family, thereby requiring the creation of new institutions to perform the tasks the family no longer could perform (Zaretsky 1982: 189).

The intertwining of these themes, the rational management of human dependency with the concerns of female activists for social reform, took its paradigmatic form in the Settlement House movement, initiated in the U.S. with the founding of Hull House in Chicago. Its director, Jane Addams, criticized the paternalistic social Darwinism of the late nineteenth century and its corollary idea of "scientific charity" which blamed the poor for their poverty. Instead, she advocated "maternalism," (an idea first articulated by Lester Ward in the 1880's), a view of governmental social responsibility to the needy as a form of "enlarged housekeeping." Modelled on British prototypes, the Settlement movement was a response to the visibly disturbing effects of industrialization and social stratification in rapidly-expanding urban centers. Socially conscious, college-educated, middle-class women moved into poor immigrant and working-class districts of large cities "in order to bring understanding, practical help,

entertainment, and some intellectual experience to its inhabitants" (Degler 1981: 320). The rapid spread of the Settlement houses by 1900 was no doubt a sign of their usefulness in helping immigrants and poor people cope with life in American cities. As organizations staffed and run almost entirely by women, settlement houses were quickly accepted as an extension of women's sphere, thus providing a purposeful career outside the home to the increasing numbers of educated American women. According to Eli Zaretsky, the Settlement Movement, under the leadership of Jane Addams, succeeded in "bringing the ideology of 'separate spheres' into the corporate era" (Zaretsky 1982: 212). What Addams succeeded in articulating was a transformation of the old doctrine of domesticity which not only permitted female activism in the public arena, but required it.

Many women today are failing properly to discharge their duties to their own families and households simply because they fail to see that as society grows more complicated, it is necessary that woman shall extend her sense of responsibility to many things outside of her own home, if only in order to preserve the home in its entirety (Addams 1908: 41).

Although it was less widespread than the Settlement Movement, the National Consumer's League (NCL) was perhaps equally expressive of the wedding of the progressive outlook to the organizational expertise of women activists, as well as an example of how perceived unity of gender interests produced an effective alliance of women across class lines. The NCL was catalyzed by an 1890 mass meeting of female retail shop workers in New York City who protested their long hours and low pay. Josephine Shaw Lowell, who was initiated into reform work in the Sanitary Commission of the Civil War, organized support for these women workers among concerned middle and upper-class women. By 1900, the League had become a recognized public power in economic and political

affairs, with 90 local, 20 state and 35 auxiliary branches. The group's methods ranged from pressuring individuals with unacceptable employment practices, to promoting a "white list" of employers whose standards met their own, to investigations, reports and lobbying for protective legislation (O'Neill 1971: 97).

Like the NCL, the National Women's Trade Union League (NWTUL), formed in 1903, was also organized by influential middle and upper--class social feminists concerned with the conditions faced by female laborers. Although five million women made up one-sixth of the labor force at the time, they made only half the wages of men, and almost none were organized. Most trade unions were uninterested in, if not hostile to organizing women workers (O'Neill 1971: 101). The NWTUL was most notable in its support at every level of the female garment workers strike of 1909-10; and in helping to develop the working-class female leadership that eventually took over the organization.

The most representative, at least in numbers, of women's organizations of the Progressive Era was the General Federation of Women's Clubs (GFWC), a network of thousands of grassroots groups, comprised mainly of middle-class wives and mothers across the country. The clubs, formed originally for female education and companionship had, by 1900, a Federation of 150,000 members devoted increasingly to civic reform -- from building kindergartens and public laundries to investigating the harrassment of immigrants in New York City (Degler 1981: 325). The members of the GFWC represented a stratum of women with increasing leisure time, more likely to be active in church groups than suffrage, women whose children were in school and whose homes were cleaned

by servants and supplied commercially with all manner of goods and services (O'Neill: 86).

The shift in interest from "self-culture" on behalf of what they saw as women's interests was underscored rhetorically by Sarah Platt Decker's presidential speech to the Federation in 1904.

Dante is dead. He has been dead for several centuries, and I think it is time that we stopped our study of the Inferno and tuned our attention to our own (Dorr 1924: 118, quoted in O'Neill 1971: 89).

If the issues they addressed are any indication -- "inferno" served as a metaphor for the disruption of domesticity that the rapid growth of corporate capitalism seemed to bring in its wake. While individual clubs dealt with concerns as diverse as clean streets or wholesome milk, the Federation as a whole addressed itself increasingly to economic and social reform for women and children. An editorial in their June 1907 Bulletin announced:

Conservation is the *raison d'être* of the General Federation. Conservation of child life, of womanhood, of civic and national integrity (cited in O'Neill: 89).

Protective Legislation and the Family Wage

Under the leadership of Sarah Decker, the GFWC pressured Congress to investigate what other reformers had been urging for years without success: ameliorating the conditions of female and child labor. Their goal of securing protective legislation for this segment of the labor force was shared by almost every women's organization of the time. The National Consumer League lent their support to the campaign by supplying the persuasive evidence. The 600 page brief they provided was critical in winning the Supreme Court ruling upholding the constitutionality of protective legislation for women workers, the *Muller v. Oregon* appeal argued by Louis Brandeis in 1908 (O'Neill 1971: 152). The court's justification of maximum hour limits for female laborers

indicates the persistence of the identification of the female gender with maternity, virtue and dependency, opposed to male lust and irresponsibility.

woman has always been dependent upon man. He established his control at the outset by superior physical strength...Even though all restrictions on political, personal and contractual rights were taken away...her physical structure and a proper discharge of her maternal functions...justify legislation to protect her from the greed as well as the passion of man (Johnson 1926: 49-50).

The decision -- which ultimately enabled the passage of a host of protective statutes throughout the country -- was considered a great triumph by groups such as the NWTUL, the BFWC, the NCL or the Settlement movement. In their view, the state had secured the collective interests of women both as workers and mothers. Thus despite the growing participation of women in the labor force, it was the concern for protecting women's position as wives and mothers around which women rallied. Ironically, the reforms they won were critical in transforming the sexual division of labor in America so that, over the course of the 20th century these two female roles were cast increasingly in opposition. At the time, however

The growth in women working during the early 20th century, insofar as it was a necessity imposed on working-class women, was viewed as a social evil by every feminist organization of the period, as well as by a great many working-class women themselves (Zaretsky 1982: 216)

It was around the principle of protecting women from men and the market through the authority of the state that female reform groups as diverse as the NWTUL, the WCTU, YWCA and even the DAR joined together. They formed the Women's Joint Congressional Union to lobby Congress for further protective reforms such as child-labor laws and maternal-infant health programs, the Married Women's Property Acts and "mother's pen-

sions" (Basch 1979; Degler 1981: 168-169; Leff 1973; Ryan 1983:218).'

What all this indicates is the increasing acceptance of the ideal of a "family wage" as the mediating principle on which the negotiation of male and female spheres should rest. The idea that a male worker should be paid a salary sufficient to support a wife and children had, by World War I become the basis for pay-scales in all war production industries and the critical issue in most labor negotiations (Zaretsky 1982:217).

Despite the support for these reforms by nearly every progressive movement at the time, many contemporary scholars have been critical of the family wage, protective legislation and the range of government policies and institutions which entrenched a social arrangement that assigned men to the role of breadwinner and women to motherhood and unpaid domestic labor. Christopher Lasch, for example, considers the expansion of the government's role in caring for whole categories of dependent people as "an invasion of the private realm," the "proletarianization of parents by the state" by self-interested middle-class professionals (Lasch 1977). Heidi Hartmann -- in analyzing how the family wage and protective legislation for women succeeded in establishing a gender-based occupational hierarchy that has excluded women from equal participation in wage labor -- attributes the reforms she criticizes to a collusion of "capitalism" and "patriarchy" against women (1979). This assignment of blame to abstract forces casts as victims whole categories of people -- for example "women" or "working-class families" -- who were essential, interested parties in the material and ideological transformations in question. There is no question that trade union men opposed the movement for a minimum wage

for women; and that the organization of family life around a male wage and unpaid female domestic labor served both the interests of a capitalist class and a centralized state that increasingly proclaimed children as its most important national resource" (Zaretsky 1982: 218). However, privileging a theoretical concept such as "capital" or "the state" as the agents of oppression sidesteps explanation and dismisses the motivations of actors who participated in the process of change. As Zaretsky notes:

these conflicts must be understood alongside the struggle shared by working-class women and men for a decent family life. At a time when it required everyone within the household to support a family, the idea of a single wage for a single breadwinner was extremely desirable. At a time when most of a woman's adult life span corresponded to the years of pregnancy and childrearing, many if not most women shared the idea that this breadwinner should be a man (1982: 216).

The strength of that position became clear in the widespread opposition of most "social feminists"--almost all of whom were ardent supporters of suffrage -- to the introduction of the ERA to Congress by Alice Paul and the National Women's Party in 1923. To leaders such as Jane Addams, Florence Kelley (NCL) and Frances Willard, women as a gender group required state protection, and the ERA would undermine what they had achieved in this direction. To abandon the hard-won protection of working women by the state would be to leave women workers at the mercy of wage-earning men (Degler 1981:403). Thus, by the early 20th century, female activists had turned from religious to state authority to enforce male support of, or at least buttress, the domain and vocation assigned to their gender.

The 1920's and the Emergence of "Commercial Culture"

The split over the ERA and the National Women's Party gender ideology of the fundamental equality of men and women was only one index of the growing divisions and dissension among female social activists, despite the official gains they had made in the political arena by the 1920's. Organized conservative and right-wing groups such as the Sentinels of the Republic and the Ku Klux Klan which emerged following WWI played on already existing tensions among female activists. For example, the initial support among women's groups for the Sheppard-Towner Bill which funded child and maternal welfare programs, was eventually split by charges that it was a program designed for "female celibates," part of a socialist conspiracy to undermine the family. The program was defeated in Congress in 1929 (Ryan 1983: 220). By that time, in general,

A dramatic transformation of American culture -- fusing sex, love and consumerism -- made the all-female organizations of the feminists seem stodgy and outmoded. The new commercial culture of the 1920's was not so much directly antifeminist as it was cooptive of feminist issues and concerns (Rapp and Ross 1983: 55).

In assessing the causes of the disintegration of female reform efforts, leaders of the Progressive Era movements attributed the decline to the new emphases on individual consumption and sexuality. The new social milieu was seen as eroding the issues, concerns and cultural frame in which female activists born in the 1870's and 1880's had been nourished. Jane Addams, writing in 1930, observed that women had become "masculinized," willing to "dovetail into the political themes of men [rather] than release the innate concerns of women which might be equivalent to a revolutionary force," a change she saw as "associated in some way with the breaking down of sex taboos and the

establishment of new standards of marriage" (1930: 110, 120). Her contemporary, Emily Greene Balch at Wellesley, judged the new generation in similar terms, as too concerned with freedom and self-development. She deplored "the reinterpretation of life in novels, plays and psychological treatises that represent sex as practically the whole center of life" (Addams 1930: 192).

In fact, the very successes of Addams, Balch and their cohort that came of age in the 1890's contributed to the obsolescence of their ideals by constructing the institutions and professions which appropriated and bureaucratized their activism. As Christopher Lasch notes:

in allying themselves with the helping professions, women improved their position in the family only to fall into a new kind of dependence, the dependence of the consumer on the market and on the providers of expert services not only for the satisfaction but the very definition of her needs (1979:27).

The elaboration by the 1920's of what Lasch calls "the tutelary apparatuses of the state," and what Michel Foucault would describe as a new discourse of sexuality and surveillance, were tied equally to the expansion of corporate capitalism requiring ever-greater levels of mass consumption. The doubling of industrial manufacture that was taking place was not in the expansion of heavy industry; rather, it was based on the increasing production, consumption and marketing of non-durable goods -- food, apparel and personal hygiene items; products such as automobiles, sewing and washing machines; and the energy to run such equipment. By 1929, 25 million automobiles were registered in the U.S., 70% of homes were powered with electricity, and the majority of homemakers bought rather than produced bread, clothing and canned goods (Ryan 1983: 221). In the words of the Chamber of Commerce in Muncie, Indiana, in the 1920's,

The first responsibility of an American to his country is no longer that of citizen but of a consumer. Consumption is a necessity (Lynd and Lynd 1956:88).

Consumer credit, installment buying, home mortgages and advertising were developed to enhance the imperative to buy and transformed the household economies and needs of most Americans. By 1929, consumer goods and services had almost completely replaced domestic manufacture in households of all classes (Matthaei 1982: 238). In any case, a \$1 billion advertising industry was acutely aware that women -- as wives or as workers -- purchased two-thirds of the \$70 billion worth of consumer goods sold annually (Branch 1935: 100). The increasing role women played in consumption can be traced to multiple causes. While young single working women of prior generations generally lived with and/or sent their paychecks to their natal families, over 60% of the young female workers in the 20's lived on their own and kept most or all of their wages, even among the immigrant poor and working-class (Ryan 1983:228-29). By 1930, 23.6% of all women were in the paid labor force (Matthaei 1982: 142).

Despite the increasing availability of and participation in wage labor by women, the contradictions this posed to ideals of feminine domesticity were gradually accommodated. Female sexuality increasingly became the object of attention in advertising, the popular media and an emergent teen-age subculture.

The major effect of the heightened interest in female sexuality came down to this in the end: matrimony became more imperative than during the previous decades (Ryan 1983:241).

The proportion of never-married women fell 20% in 1900 to less than 10% for the next generation (Ryan 1983:142). These changes regarding sexuality expressed the symbolic and economic reorganization of

the sexual division of labor. They also had their effect, especially after World War I, in the quiet acceptance of contraception on the part of the middle class, a lessening emphasis on motherhood, and a valorization of heterosexual eroticism, especially women's as a central ingredient of marriage (Epstein 1983:118).

In the years prior to the war, the social purist's arguments for sexual restraint had gradually lost efficacy as the movement's small-town Protestant base was eclipsed by the growth of urban, culturally diverse populations; and their hold over the new generation undercut as young people left their natal families and communities for wage labor in growing industrial cities (Fass 1977: ch.3). If the conservative sexual attitudes of social purity advocates seemed atavistic, the nascent birth control movement, on the other hand, did not gain widespread appeal. This was in part due to its association, initially, with anarchism and socialism during a period of rising conservatism.²

Nonetheless, a significant shift in the use of contraception was taking place. By 1929, studies among middle-class women born around 1900 indicated that 75-90% of them advocated and/or used contraception in marriage; among men of the same age and class, reported sex with prostitutes decreased by 50% from the prior generation while their report of pre-marital sex, generally with fiancées, increased commensurately (Fass 1977:76-77). Changes regarding sex and contraception were due, no doubt, in part to the development of relatively safe, effective and inexpensive devices, especially the Mensinga diaphragm. However, the shift in attitudes and practice was not simply due to technology. If sex manuals, popular woman's magazines or movies of the 1920's are any indication, female heterosexual pleasure within marriage

had become generally accepted (e.g. Lynd and Lynd 1956: 241 ff.), a clear shift from the campaigns against sexual excess of the 19th century. Barbara Epstein calls the increasing acceptance of sexual expression within marriage as the "New Deal of family politics." Commenting on the same period, Mary Ryan notes,

Young women who had been instructed in the new ideology of the family looked to marriage for a "fuller richer "life...or simply "companionship." The newlyweds took up residence in an intimate social space whose function was to produce neither social service nor material goods, but an elusive commodity called "happiness" (1983: 244).

With the development of domestic technology, the productive base of women's sphere was increasingly diminished. As the birth rate dropped from 3.56 in 1900 to 2.45 by 1930 (Degler 1981: 181), and as children spent more time in schools and nurseries (Uhlenberg 1974), the work of mothering was steadily transformed, until

Not only the state and municipality, but private enterprise as well were encroaching on the mother's turf. Reproduction itself became a lucrative frontier of the consumer market in the 1920's and 30's... By 1930, midwives had been effectively banished, and 75% of all births took place in hospitals under the supervision of obstetrician, mostly males. The cost of reproduction increased more than tenfold in the process. Birth control also grew expensive after 1920, becoming the monopoly of well-paid medical experts. In sum, even women's basic reproduction had become imbricated in the marketplace and converted into something more, and less, than domestic labor (Ryan 1983:246).

The Depression: Domesticity Revived

During the Depression, the steady transformation of the household as a locus of non-monetized production into a unit of consumption on which the expansion of capital depended was temporarily reversed. A renewed identification of women with domesticity occurred simultaneously, despite the fact that the total female labor force participation increased by 25.1% during the 30's, a rate greater than that

of any prior decade in the 20th century (Degler 1981:415; Milkman 1979: 518). While the Depression was a period notable for its absence of female activists (other than those involved in labor organizing [Zinn 1980: 396-7]), women nonetheless played a crucial role in buffering families and households against the effects of the economic crisis that followed the 1929 stock market crash. They accomplished this primarily through the replacement of unpaid female labor -- food processing, clothing, gardening, care for dependents and so forth -- for the purchased goods and services on which households in the 1920's had come to rely (Morgan 1939:22). Glass jar sales, for example, were higher in 1931 than they had been in a decade, while the sales of canned goods dropped dramatically; women enrolled in night school classes to learn how to retailor old clothing (Milkman 1979:521).

This renewed material involvement of women in domestic manufacture and family service was reflected in the cultural shift away from the stress on female freedom and sexuality of the preceding decade, a change most immediately apparent in advertising. Products promoted as the key to romantic and sexual fulfillment in the 1920's -- deodorants as the ticket to midnight canoe rides -- were portrayed in the 1930's as amulets against domestic collapse. Lux soap promised to answer the question, "I love you but how can we get married?" (quoted in Ryan 1983:224). A July 1933 issue of McCall's suggested that a particular vaginal douche would resolve:

The Most Frequent Eternal Triangle

A Husband and her A Wife

FEARS (Quoted in Gordon 1977:318).

The substitution of their own labor for commodities was only one strategy women used to compensate for the effects of the economic collapse of the 1930's. Many women revived "domestic industries" their

grandmothers had used, such as taking in boarders, dressmaking, running home beauty parlors and the like in order to supplement family income (Lynd and Lynd: 1937). In addition, families consolidated resources across generations; old and young people, who were experiencing the greatest discrimination in the labor market remained in or were reabsorbed into the households of the middle generation (Elder 1974). This momentary break in the general trend towards nuclear families delayed, sometimes permanently, the formation of new families. Between 1929 and 1932, the marriage rate declined from 10.1 to 7.9 per 1000 (Welter 1948: 199). The number of never-married women in the cohort that was 25-30 in 1935 was 30% greater than that of women born half a decade later (Glick and Norton 1973: 305). During the same period, the birthrate decreased from 2.1 to 1.8% (U.S. Census Bureau 1960).

In addition to these efforts made within households to "take up the slack" of the Depression, an ever-increasing number of women continued to seek paid labor outside the home. Unlike working women in the 1920's who spoke of jobs as a vehicle for independence and identity, the Depression cohort viewed their behavior as a temporary response to family emergency (Cavan and Ranck 1938: 82). The unprecedented increase in the number of women in the paid labor force in the 30's is even more remarkable in that it occurred in the face of virulent campaigns to get and keep women -- and especially wives -- out of the job market. Many cities and states barred married women from any job; 77% of school systems refused to hire married female teachers. According to a 1936 Gallup poll, 82% of Americans concurred with the principle that wives of working husbands should not be employed (Oppenheimer 1970: 44).

The sociologist Ruth Milkman discusses the persistence of women in the labor market during the Depression as a challenge to interpretations of women as a "reserve army of labor" drawn into and pushed out of wage work according to the variable needs of capital. She criticizes this theory, popular in some Marxist and feminist circles, as "mechanistic" and "insufficiently grounded in knowledge of history" (1979: 509). The resistance of women to efforts to expel them from wage work is a reminder

that ideological sex role prescriptions must be viewed not as determinant of, but rather in constant interaction with behavior in analyzing women's experience (1979: 509).

Milkman's research on the shifts in labor during the Depression also shows the inadequacy of theory that fails to take into account the organization of labor by gender in the market economy. As she points out, the segregation of male and female occupations that characterizes the shape of the work force provided a measure of protection for female workers in the 1930's. The occupations in which over 50% of women were concentrated -- "white collar" clerical, trade and service work -- sex-typed as female since the 1920's, contracted less during the Depression than the industrial labor assigned to men (Milkman 1979: 514-520). Although female wage earners were being accused of depriving men of work, there was, in fact, very little mobility between the male and female labor markets; if anything, occupational segregation by sex actually increased during the depression decade (Gross 1968). While in many cases, the responsibility for earning money shifted from husband to wife,

The deviation from traditional sex roles was, thus, to say the least, negatively reinforced by the accompanying experience of economic deprivation for most families...rather, the impact of the crisis was to define women in terms of the

traditional roles more rigidly than ever before..(Milkman 1979: 527).

A number of scholars have puzzled over the three-decade decline in female activism that began in the late 1920's. Lois Scharf, for example, views the Depression as a period of the sort of general social reform during which female activism has occurred in the past, such as the 1840's or the Progressive Era. She then attributes the lack of such activity in the 30's to the need for some stability in a period of overwhelming economic crisis. The new defense of female employment as service to families rather than "selfish careerism," she interprets as a response to the public offensive against female workers in general, an attempt on the part of women to justify their own needs in an environment hostile to them (Scharf 1980).

Alternatively, some view the 1930's not as a period of social ferment but one of cultural consolidation and cooptation of unrest (eg. Susman 1970; Zinn 1980: 384). Other scholars point to the prominence of a handful of women in New Deal policymaking circles, such as FDR's Secretary of Labor, Frances Perkins; Susan Ware suggests that this represents, in some measure, an enactment of post-suffrage expectations for a greater role for women in public life. However, the presence of women in New Deal agencies did not prevent the institutionalization of discrimination against a women workers. Reforms such as unemployment compensation, collective bargaining and social security, ultimately had a conservative impact on gender arrangements insofar as they were intended to enhance the position of men as the sole support of families (Ware 1981: 124-130). In general, then,

On the eve of World War II...the chief patterns of women's work were remarkably similar to what they had been at the end of the 19th . Over four-fifths of working women were

single and only temporarily in the work force prior to marriage; less than 15% of all married women with husband present were employed, and at that, a disproportionate share of the total were black women... (Degler 1981:417).

Thus, despite the growing number of female workers, the Depression experience nonetheless seems to have restored, temporarily, a version of the separate sphere ideology supported by the state that was able, paradoxically, to accommodate the growing participation of women in wage labor.

1. The Married Women's Property Acts, for example, which gave wives the right to earn and spend their own wages were interpreted not so much as granting women greater autonomy but as protecting them from negligent husbands (Basch 1979). In the period between 1860 - 1920 during which the divorce rate rose by 600% (O'Neill 1967), two-thirds to three-quarters of the petitions were made by and granted to women. The grounds in 75% of the cases were cruelty, desertion and neglect to provide; i.e. the issue for women in divorce was not sexual disloyalty but the defection of men from the emotional and material support of wives (Degler 1981:168-69). Similarly, in the early 20th century, the enactment in several states of "mother's pensions" -- public cash grants for widows with children -- was not intended to replace the family but to provide the means to extend to the poor and disadvantaged the familial ideal in which women and children depended on male support (Leff 1973).

2. Early advocates of dissemination of birth control knowledge such as Emma Goldman and Margaret Sanger promoted contraception in the hope that ending sexual repression based on fear of pregnancy would expedite a socialist revolution (Epstein 1983).

Chapter 12: The Revival of Female Activism

World War Two and the Post-War Era

The nature of the work force changed dramatically with the advent of World War II and the huge demand for workers created by war-related industrial production. Between 1940-1944, the female labor force not only doubled; its composition began to shift. While the typical female wage earner during the first half of the twentieth century had been single and in their twenties, 60% of the new workers were 35 or older, and over half of them were or had been married (Milkman 1979: 529). Many had had prior work experience as "working girls" in the 1920's, left the paid labor force upon marriage and were ready to re-enter it once their children were in school or grown.

Joining the labor force for these women was something more than an obliging response to the prodding of the War Manpower Commission...It was not the dictates of international affairs nor supply and demand that drove women to seek employment after 1940, but their own priorities as they evolved over the life cycle (Ryan 1983: 279-280).

Although female workers were laid off in large numbers immediately following the war, they were eventually reabsorbed into the jobs created by the post-war conversion of the economy from war-related to consumer oriented production (Milkman 1979: 533). While employment in manufacturing went up by only 16% between 1941 and 1963, the tertiary sector of the economy -- government, trade, finance, health, transport, recreation, research and education -- grew by 53% (Oppenheimer 1970: 70-75). Given that the clerical and service jobs this expanding sector provided were identified as female labor, it is not surprising that during the same period, male labor force participation declined while the participation of women jumped by 35.8% (ibid). And, as opposed to

1900 when 70% of women working were under 35, the composition of the female labor force gradually began to reflect the adult female population as a whole.

During the Second World War, this meant that wives entered the labor force ...when their children were old enough to be on their own. Through the 1950's, the typical woman worker also retired into domesticity to bear and raise her children. Her stints in the labor force were placed at the temporal edges of the domestic center of her life cycle, before and after years of devoted child care (Ryan 1983: 255).

At the peak of the baby boom in 1955 -- a period identified with female domesticity -- nearly 40% of adult women were in the labor force (Oppenheimer 1970: p. 6, Table 1.2). During the period from 1940 to 1960, while the birthrate rose from 2.10 to 3.52 children per woman, the number of working wives doubled and working wives quadrupled (Jones 1980: 17-18; Chafe 1972:218). In short, the war experience permanently broke the gender boundary between the world of paid labor and the domestic domain of wives and mothers. The fact that this occurred simultaneously to the two-decade upsurge in fertility suggests that the "boom" was as much cause as effect of the cultural preoccupation with maternity in the 1950's. Mary Ryan points out that the boom was not a single trend, but the convergence of three distinct demographic processes: births to couples who had delayed forming families because of the Depression and the war; a generally decreasing age in marriage and family formation for the cohort born during the Depression; and a short-term shift to three rather than two children as a norm (1983: 277).

The historian Carl Degler notes that the coincidence of "the baby boom" with the massive influx of women into the work force contradicts received wisdom which views high fertility as inversely related to

female employment (e.g. note from Gordon).¹

At precisely the time Betty Friedan was writing her book and coining the phrase "the feminine mystique" to describe what she thought was an excessive involvement of women in the home, an ever-increasing number of married women were getting out to work (Degler: 1981:429).

Ruth Milkman offers a somewhat different perspective. While a larger proportion of the female population was having children during the 40's and 50's than at any other time in American history (94% as opposed to 82% in 1900), for most women, the phase of their life following family completion was becoming the longest stretch of their life cycle (Uhlenberg 1975:51-53; Milkman 1979: 535). In other words, the period of time devoted to maternity in relation to female life expectancy has been steadily decreasing, now taking up less than a seventh of the average female life span (Sullerot 1971). Milkman interprets the transformation in women's work as a major shift in women's productive activity, an accommodation both to changes in the economy and the shape of the life-cycle for American women.

Thus, as women's role in the paid labor force has come to take up a longer period of their lives, their family role has yielded more and more of its direct productive functions to the sphere of commodity production, while the reproduction of children, the one commodity which this society still inevitably depends on women to produce, now takes up a much shorter period of their lives (1979: 536).

The postwar expansion of commodity production and the service economy reestablished the shift of domestic production to the marketplace and public sector after the hiatus of the Depression and World War II. The result was an expansion of opportunity in occupational groups sex-typed female; and the increasing availability for purchase of services previously provided by unpaid labor in the household. Nonetheless, the linking of the expanding consumer market to domesti-

city and maternity was readily apparent to American business interests. A 1937 cover of LIFE magazine captioned a photograph of a mass of toddlers, "KIDS -- Built-in Recession Cure - Now 4 Million a Year Make Millions in Business". Market research conducted by Fortune magazine in the 30's projected that young wives and mothers would provide the impetus for \$10 billion worth of home construction, \$60 billion worth of food purchases, \$30 billion spent on family recreation and \$12 billion on home furnishings and appliances (quoted in Ryan: 269).

Domestic consumption was not only evident in sales of cars, washing machines and televisions, but in the construction and growth of suburbs. Between 1950 and 1970, the suburban population doubled, creating a sex-segregated social space "devoted to the immediate reproductive concerns of young families" (Ryan 1983: 269; Wright 1981). Despite the intent to create an environment ideally suited to child-rearing, and the proliferation of new domestic technology, time spent in housework actually increased from an average of 52 to 54 hours a week between 1920 and 1960. This was due in part to the reintroduction of tasks such as laundry into households, shorter spacings between births, and the promotion of new standards of cleanliness and childcare (Vanek 1974). Thus, although the actual amount of time required for maternity had decreased in relation to a woman's total life cycle,

By the 1950's, the ladies magazines were proclaiming "motherhood as a way of life"...Not only were childbearing and rearing granted a position of special honor in wartime and postwar culture, but mothering became the cornerstone of proper child development (Ryan 1983: 272).

This new emphasis, buttressed by childrearing theories of Gesell, Spock and others which promoted the constant presence of the mother, had material effects. Between 1920 and 1960, the average amount of time

women devoted to childcare doubled (Lopata 1971: 207).

The reformulation of an ideology of female domesticity and consuming motherhood was integrated into developing social theory as well. In 1955, Talcott Parsons was defining the family as a narrow isolated unit, an emotional refuge against the impersonal institutions of modern society. As a private subsystem, the ideal home would function through the "instrumental" work of men in the public world; and the "expressive" labors of women at home who were to provide a haven of intimacy and emotional support for children and husbands (Parsons and Bales 1955). The Parsonian view thus managed to interpret anew a separate sphere ideology for a mid-20th century context. Through this lens, "the family" was viewed as a unit stripped of its productive functions as the result of industrialization, so that all that remained was the expressive natural "core," the very center of which was the ultimate symbol of nurturance and affect in American society, the mother-child dyad.

The centrality of maternity to this vision was further elaborated in popular versions of Freudian psychology. The "true adult woman" was increasingly described and identified as masochistic and narcissistic, her sexuality vaginal and maternal. Violence and hurt were considered normal aspects of female sexual pleasure, from the moment of the penetration of the penis to the pain of parturition.

Though penetration of her body be wounding, what matter to one who is loved. The pain she feels will be yearned for pleasure and feminine masochism then reaches its heights (Bonaparte 1945: 129).

The theories of Helen Deutsch managed to update the Victorian conflation of female sexual pleasure with the idea of innate maternal instinct, infusing it with contemporary scientific authority. "In the

normal, healthy woman, coitus psychologically represents the first act of motherhood." The use of anesthetics during labor was interpreted as "a masterpiece of masculine efficiency designed to rob women of masochistic satisfaction" (Deutsch 1954: 107, 258). These ideas reached people and especially women in a variety of ways: the majority of psychotherapy clients were female by the 1950's. In the course of treatment, working women especially were encouraged to return to domestic duties to "recapture their femininity and have more babies" (Deutsch 1945: 331). Women were the most likely patients to be assigned to mental institutions. Psychology became established as an accepted in college curricula as a major particularly popular with women. The tenets of the new female psychology also reached mass audiences through popular magazines and paperbacks. Marie Robinson's, The Power of Sexual Surrender sold over a million copies (Ryan 1983: 266-767). The widely-read popularization of Deutsch's work, Modern Woman: The Lost Sex by Marjory Farnham and Ferdinand Lundberg held that women who worked and sought a life independent from the family were unrealized and trying to become men. The authors recommended that government prizes be given to mothers for every child born after the first.

Thus, by the 1950's, by way of Freudian psychology of sex, the female stereotype had completed another life cycle. Women were directed right back to where they had been a century earlier -- in captivity of the cult of motherhood...The psychosexual imperative only slightly updated the doctrine of separate spheres, temperaments and roles for the sexes. In sum, psychologists had become the high priests of womanhood in the 20th century; their professional status granted them access to the private lives of their clients and thus permitted them to intervene even in the unconscious (Ryan 1983: 266-7).

The 1960's: The Second Wave of Feminism

The three-decade quiescence of female activism and public debate over "women's proper place" ended in the 1960's. Historians of this period trace this resurgence to a number of sources. As women's productive activities shifted, increasingly, from the home to the paid labor force, the "experts'" condemnations of women who rejected domesticity was increasingly dissonant with female experience. Others consider President Kennedy's appointment, in 1961, of a Presidential Commission on the Status of Women as a critical catalyst for the emergence of the second wave of feminism. (e.g. Freeman 1973; Harrison 1980; Ryan 1983: 307-310; Degler 1981: 440 ff.). At the time, it was considered a "kind of consolation prize to women of the Democratic party". The Commission, chaired by Eleanor Roosevelt and Esther Peterson of the Women's Bureau -- both veterans of the Progressive Era -- issued a report, American Women that, in 1963, "put old-fashioned social feminism on full display" (Ryan 1983: 308). It took a stand against the ERA and recommended training of young women for marriage and motherhood. Nonetheless, the report also brought attention to the discrimination encountered by the large number of women, and wives and mothers especially, that had been entering the workforce since 1940. Furthermore, it provided women activists an alliance with the federal government and an institutional base as well; by 1967, all 50 states had established commissions on the status of women set up to research and take action against discrimination. While these too were considered a way for governors to placate women loyal to party politics, they served to bring together female political activists. Confronted with

the evidence of their unequal status, these women began to address what role they would play in ameliorating these discriminatory conditions. As Jo Freeman notes,

These commissions thus created an embryonic communications network among people with similar concerns (1973: 36).

The climate of expectation for change was enhanced by the passage of the Equal Pay Act in 1963 and the addition of "sex" to Title VII of the Civil Rights Act in 1964, a provision that the Executive Director of the EEOC regarded as a fluke and refused to enforce (Edelsberg 1965). The growing recognition of the contradictions between official policy and its enforcement, and more generally the transitions women faced as they moved into the labor force, were articulated in Betty Friedan's book The Feminine Mystique, published in 1963. This work became a watershed document in the emerging women's movement; it gave voice to the conflicts encountered by a whole cohort of middle-class women coming into a critical moment in their life cycles as they entered or returned to wage work after spending a decade or more of their lives at home rearing children. Friedan managed not only to describe this "problem that had no name." She also was instrumental in turning this dissatisfaction into organized political activity.

When officials at the 1966 Third National Conference of Commissions on the Status of Women vetoed a resolution to enforce the sex provisions of Title VII, Friedan, along with 30 other women and men founded the National Organization for Women (NOW), the first feminist organization in the country (other than the moribund National Woman's Party) since the 1920's (Freeman 1973: 36-37). NOW's aim -- "to take actions needed to bring women into full participation in the mainstream of American society now, assuming all the privileges and responsibili-

ties thereof in truly equal partnership with men" -- shaped a new style of liberal feminism that, unlike prior incarnations, rejected "women's sphere" altogether in both tactics and ideology. Reflecting the concerns of the educated, relatively affluent professional woman who comprised its initial constituency, NOW concentrated on structural reform of the legal and economic system. Its agenda addressed a range of issues affecting women, from divorce to reproductive rights to the ERA. Working through the traditional political process and embracing a formal, top-down style, NOW attracted working and professional women to its ranks; by the mid-70's it expanded to over 55,000 members in 800 chapters across the country (Ryan 1983: 309).

Jo Freeman, in her analysis of the second wave of feminism, designates NOW and other "reform" groups such as the Women's Equity Action League and Human Rights for Women as the "older branch of the movement," partly because these groups had an older constituency than and formed before the more radical organizations that came to be known as the Women's Liberation Movement (WLM) (1973:33). Freeman rejects the more frequently used categories of "reform" vs. "radical" (e.g. Hole and Levine 1971) as a misguided effort to fit feminists into an inappropriate left-right spectrum. Rather, she suggests, the significant diacritics marking the groups were generational, signified by differences in structure and style (1973:35).

If the 30 to 40 year old women of the older branch used mainstream political means to redress discrimination experienced by women making the shift from the home to the labor force, the cohort in their 20's -- 40% of the college student population by 1968 -- were the vanguard of more radical female activism in both style and substance.

In Jo Freeman's estimation:

No single "youth movement" activity or organization was responsible for the younger branch of the WLM;...the women in it thought of themselves as movement people" and had incorporated the adjective "radical" into their personal identities. (1973).

Work in radical politics provided women with a network, a style of political action framework for analysis that took shape in the numerous "consciousness-raising" groups that emerged around the country during the late 60's. In addition, the experience of New Left and Civil Rights organizing brought these young women, like female abolitionists a century earlier, face to face with the contradiction of being relegated to peripheral positions while working for freedom, equality, and non-violence. What these women recognized was that their male colleagues were unwilling to extend these principles to women.

In the accounts of the early women's liberation groups, consciousness of gender as a critical issue for organizing often crystallized at moments of public confrontations with men. Affronts to women as a class were frequently expressed in metaphors of male penetration. Stokely Carmichael's remark in 1964 that "the only position for a woman in SNCC is prone" is perhaps the most famous remark in the catalogue of irreparable sexual insults. There are numerous other examples. For instance, the Seattle Women's Group traced its formation to a public Students for a Democratic Society meeting at the University of Washington where a male organizer explained how he and poor white men established rapport by "balling a chick together," thus enraging the women present who eventually left to form their own organization (Hole and Levine 1971: 120). Ellen Willis describes the initial breakaway confrontation between white men and women of the New Left at an

anti-inaugural demonstration against President Nixon in Washington D.C. in 1969.

Dave Dellinger introduces the rally with a stirring denunciation of the war and racism. "What about women, you schauuck," I shout. "And uh, a special message from Women's Liberation," he adds. Our moment comes. M., from the Washington group, stands up to speak. This isn't the protest against movement men, which is second on the agenda, just fairly innocuous radical rhetoric -- except that it's a good-looking woman talking about women. The men go crazy. "Take it off!" "Take her off the stage and fuck her!" They yell and boo and guffaw at unwitting double entendres like, "we must take to the streets" (1971: 113)

It was not only the younger branch" of the women's movement that rallied against the symbolic intrusion of what were identified as masculine interests and culture into women's social and physical body. The refusal of the EEOC to enforce the sex provision of Title VII was a similar affront that catalyzed the founding members of NOW to organize themselves separately from the women's commissions. Thus, both branches of the movement, despite their differences, mobilized against what they saw as oppositional male interests to reconstitute and reclaim a female social domain.

In her analysis of the resurgence of female activism in the 1960's and 70's, Mary Ryan points out that

It would be mistaken to place too much emphasis on the strictly political history, be it the Kennedy administration, the Civil Rights movement or the New Left... In some ways, the collision with conventional politics was incidental to more basic causal factors intrinsic to the gender system itself (1982: 312).

Demographic, economic and social changes coincided to create unprecedented gaps -- what might be termed new liminal periods -- between what previously had been continuous phases of the conventional female life cycle. Between 1960 and 1974, the number of single women between the ages of 20 and 24 rose from 28% to 40%, and it was from this expanding

group that the younger female activists came.

Suspended between the families of their birth and the family of marriage, these women were in an ideal position to reconsider women's place... (Ryan 1983: 313).

Thus they were, in addition to being primarily white, middle class and college-educated, structurally parallel to the older cohort making the transition from motherhood to wage labor. As Ryan describes it,

two generations of women, each in their own way enjoying a reprieve from domesticity, worked unconsciously in tandem to resurrect feminism (Ryan 1983: 313).

The 1970's: A System At War With Itself

By the 1970's, the women activists of the MLM were agitating in the ranks of NOW to include more radical feminist concerns: lesbian rights, legal abortion, subsidized daycare, and the problems of poor and minority women. And more conventional groups, such as the YWCA, the Girl Scouts, and the League of Women Voters began to incorporate feminist concerns such as women's health and child and spouse abuse into their programs (Ryan 1983: 315). The 2000 delegates to the International Women's Year Congress (IWY) held in Houston, Texas in 1977, seemed to substantiate the claims of the second wave of feminism to represent the interests of their gender, regardless of the preeminence of white, educated middle-class women as activists. Funded by the U.S. Congress, the IWY also dramatized the degree to which the movement had gained strength through its alliance with state and political interests. The concerns addressed at the Congress in the 25 resolutions passed there reflected the diverse interests of the gathered constituency: homemakers and lesbians, mothers and career women, urban blacks and rural whites.

However, not all those present were in solidarity with the women's movement. Nearly 25% of the representatives were opposed to at least portions of the feminist agenda and its broader claim to speak for all women. At the IMY, conservative Republican Phyllis Schlafly, acted as spokeswoman and magnetic north for those activists who felt uncomfortable with the women's movement. Schlafly held an independent press conference, where she voiced objections to those issues that she and others perceived as undermining women's interests as wives and mothers i.e. legalized abortion, lesbian rights and the ERA (NY Times, 1977).

Significant in its absence from these complaints was the question of equal pay for equal work, a principle that had, by 1977, been accepted by the majority of Americans who might not otherwise identify as "feminist" (Biele and Smock 1977: 316). Such broad support for this particular issue is hardly surprising. By 1978, over 50% of adult women were in the labor force and their wages hovered at an average of 59 cents to every dollar made by men, a fact that was an affront to nearly universal American ideals of equality and fair play.

Even more conservative magazines, such as Family Circle greeted housewives at supermarket checkout counters with explicit attack on the "sex discrimination" to which housewives and working women were equally susceptible. The working woman, not the feminist per se, was given the largest and most respected treatment in these popular journals. Whole new magazines were devoted to her, The Working Woman, The New Woman, and Savvy for the females of the executive suite (Ryan 1983: 316).

While ads for Gucci briefcases may have paid for these publications, most working women were less concerned with the label on their portfolio than with the size of the paycheck they put into it. Only 1.1% of women laborers earned over \$15,000 in the 1970's. While there was some increase in female participation in the professions, most

continued to work in the low-wage "pink-collar" ghettos of the clerical, retail and service industries. Between 1973 and 1980, 70% of all new jobs in the private economy were in retail trade and services, especially health care and eating and drinking places" (Rothschild 1981: 12). By 1980, one out of every two dollars Americans paid for food was spent in restaurants. Even childcare -- long considered the one aspect of domestic labor (besides reproduction itself) that could not be rationalized -- has been targeted as a vast unexploited market by such bellwether's of American business interests as Barron's. Although only about 10% of the children of working mothers are currently in licensed daycare facilities, this is an increase of 300% over the last ten years. The Kindercare franchised child care centers in shopping malls across the country have been a graphic example of the penetration of capital into this aspect of domestic work (Ellis and Petchesky 1972). In short, work such as food preparation, laundry, sewing and care for dependents that had been carried out by unpaid female labor in households is increasingly provided for by women workers for commercial exchange.

In sum, the abundance of women's domestic labor that once separated the private and public world, and acted as a bulwark against the cold calculations of cash and consuming, was rapidly disappearing (Ryan 1983: 342).

However, despite the increasing availability of wifely goods and services in the marketplace and the the movement of women into the wage labor system, the typical working female in the 1970's still spent an average of 30 or more hours each week on household labor (Vanek, 1974). While birth and marriage rates have dropped to an all-time low, over 90% of American women are married by their early 30's and 87% of these wives have children. A study of what scholars have come to

call "the new home economics" by the Social Service Administration calculated that a mother in the workforce who pays to replace her own domestic services would lose money at least until her children entered public school, at which point she might net an average of \$1,078/year (Berk and Berk 1983). Nonetheless, the income of women with children had been increasingly relied upon as a buffer against inflation, poverty, or -- in the case of over 60% of working women -- as the sole support of a family, maintaining the dual role of mother and wage-earner is a constant strain. From the point of view of the woman balancing two sets of responsibilities:

When I work, I feel like I want to be doing a real good job, and I want to be absolutely responsible. Then, if the little one gets a cold, I feel like I should be home with her. That causes complications because whatever you do isn't right. You're either at work feeling like you should be at home with your sick child, or you're at home feeling like you should be at work (from interview in Rubin 1976: 172).

The steady erosion and monetization of household labor, thus, has simultaneously created jobs for and met the needs of an increasing number of women in the labor force while making families almost wholly dependent on a cash economy for many of their basic needs. This process is the root and flower of the transformation of the sexual division of labor and the productive activities associated with gender from the household out. At a practical level, many women find themselves caught between the disappearing world of ascribed motherhood and the unfulfilled promise of achievement in wage labor and the professions.

Clearly, life in America has changed irreversibly in the last half century. Despite this, one might ask whether a construction of female gender linked to reproduction, motherhood and the work and ideals associated with domesticity has really changed for the majority of

American women. Insofar as the cultural ideals on which the American economy have been based required male wage work and female domesticity, and the personality characteristics attributed to each, the two modes simultaneously demand and define one another. An organization of production based on this particular sexual division of labor created a system in which men and women could not be culturally or socio-economically complete without each other. In other words, the combination of male and female considered necessary to the production of goods, services and the work force, has been seen as essential for the continuity of society as well. As women have moved into the paid labor force, and as the domestic sphere has been steadily defined by and reduced to procreation and mothering, female identity in this system has been increasingly open to contest.

This is evident in the current debate over abortion. Each side represents conflicting interpretations of the shifting social consequences of and connections between sexual activity, reproduction, motherhood and female identity. That these changes challenge deeply rooted understandings of male and female is clear in the passion with which women in particular embrace opposing positions held in the contemporary battle over abortion's legalization. The controversy thus opens to view the continual reconstruction of gender in America.

Conclusion

The Abortion Conflict: Reconstructing Gender in America

In the last three chapters, I have applied the insights of political economy and symbolic approaches in anthropology to a body of historical material to show how particular understandings of gender are produced and transformed in relation to more general socio-economic change. My general argument is that in the development of American culture, home and commerce have been cast respectively as male and female arenas. Over and over, periodic crusades to defend the domain of domesticity are pitched in language advocating the control of both the market and what is considered to be the natural shape of male sexuality. Yet, the particular issues that mobilize such movements are not arbitrary. The symbols around which women have organized represent those aspects of the domestic domain experienced as most vulnerable to the expansion of the interests of both men and the market. As domesticity is increasingly defined by and reduced to reproduction, the violation of the womb -- the last unambiguous symbol of an exclusive female arena -- is especially meaningful and threatening in the current American context and provides the central concern of right-to-life activists.

The pro-life political agenda is not simply a defense of a disappearing domain of domesticity as some have argued. It aims to invoke the authority and resources of the state in defense of pregnancy:

Abortion on demand erodes a sense of collective responsibility for the woman in actual crisis. She is abandoned to heartless individualism. In a society where programs, service, and funding are geared toward abortion rather than

addressing the causes which make pregnancy a problem, the woman in stress is forsaken. Adjustment of health care plans could eliminate one form of coercion to abort. Insurance policies to cover newborns from birth would relieve the economic pressures confronting those who discover that they are to be parents of a handicapped child (Barton 1979).

and calling for the taming of male lust through domesticity.

Abortion unravels the single strongest strand that ties the male into the family unit...Men are using abortion as a way out of their problems. Abortion also permits the woman to adopt the same sexual pattern as the male..the woman is normally the stabilizing force in the male/female relationship, insisting that the man subordinate his sexual passions to the need to provide for the family over the long run (Jones 1980).

The right-to-life movement intends to create new law and public programs that will support, protect, and enforce the position of women as mothers. Thus, the abortion activists resemble other campaigns of resistance to the penetration of culturally constituted female domains by opposing forces. At the same time, they act to claim alliances -- one might say domesticate -- church and state to serve what they see as their own interests, without dismantling the power relations through which sexual inequality is maintained.

However, in relation to prior female moral reform movements, the pro-life construction of sexual antagonism has taken a new turn. It is directed not only at men and the aspects of the economy and culture coded as male. It is also directed at women who, by seeking sexual pleasure for its own sake, pursuing material gain and self-aggrandizement at the expense of others, or eschewing motherhood, are acting, in their view, as men. The controversy thus reveals how women engaged in resisting and transforming the material and ideological circumstances which shape their lives may find themselves at odds not only with men but other women as well.

In the pro-life view of the world, to subvert the fertile union of men and women, either by denying procreative sex or the differentiation of male and female character, is to destroy the bases of biological, cultural and social reproduction. This chain of associations to reproductive, heterosexual sex is central to the organization of meaning in pro-life discourse. For most right-to-lifers, abortion is not simply the termination of an individual potential life, or even that act multiplied a million-fold. It represents an active denial of the reproductive consequences of sex and thus sets forth the possibility of women structurally becoming men. This prospect threatens the union of opposites on which the continuity of the social whole is presumed to rest. In the words of a pro-life activist,

Abortion is of crucial importance because it negates the one irrefutable difference between men and women. It symbolically destroys the precious essence of womanliness -- nurturance... Pro-abortion feminists open themselves to charges of crass hypocrisy by indulging in the very same behavior for which they condemn men: the unethical use of power to usurp the rights of the less powerful.

The pro-life perception of their opponents' gender identity as culturally male -- sexual pleasure and individual ambition separated from procreation and nurturant social bonds -- is set against their own identification of "true femininity" with the self-sacrificing traits our culture still identifies as natural to mothers. For pro-life women, opposition to abortion is a gesture against what they see as the final triumph of self-interest, a principle which represents both men and the market. At a time when wombs can be rented and sperm and zygotes are commodities, abortion is understood by right-to-lifers as an emblematic symbol for the increasing commercialization of human dependency. In their image of the unborn child ripped from the womb, they have

symbolized the final penetration and destruction of the last arena of women's domain thought to be exempt from the truncated relations identified with both male sexuality and commercial exchange: reproduction and motherhood. As another activist explained,

The pro-abortionists call themselves the women's movement making all the rest of us non-women, when in actual fact, the pro-abortionist career women identify fully with the ideal bourgeois male and his individualistic, atomized, carefree sex and his no [sic] responsibility (Juli Loesch, quoted in Paige 1983: 69).

For right-to-lifers, then, being a woman is not simply the consequence of the somatic difference in reproductive capacities, but the acceptance of these biological features as a basis for a presumed female character. The interpretation of gender that underpins pro-life arguments is based not on a woman's possession of, but in her stance towards, her reproductive capacities as signifying a naturally nurturant personality. For right-to-lifers, the category "woman" is produced by but also disconnected from the female body. In this sense, their position rests, paradoxically, on a view of gender that is both essentialist and radically cultural. A woman who endorses abortion denies the links right-to-lifers draw between female reproduction and character and thus becomes "like a man," regardless of the shape of her body.

Therefore, I have argue that abortion embodies a special set of risks and problems, what Mary Douglas calls "a system at war with itself" in which women are cast in dual, contradictory positions (1966: 152). In the American case, women and men are cast as autonomous individuals, yet in the social and cultural organization of the polity, the economy, household, sexuality, and the very reproduction of society, the two sexes cannot be complete without each other. Women who

abort are clearly acting as individuals. As such, they pose a danger to a coexisting definition of women that requires their coupling with men.

What this case demonstrates, is how sexuality, so frequently reified as a biological domain of activity, is always given meaning and value within a historically specific set of cultural conditions. Ironically, the claims of opponents to each represent "the truth" about women is undercut by the very existence of the contest that they have created which draws attention to the "openness" of sex as a signifier. The conflict over abortion, regardless of its particular substance, is a threat to what both pro-life and pro-choice women are trying to do; i.e. "naturalize" their proposed solutions to the problems created by the differential social consequences of sexual activity for men and women.

The assertions of activists on both sides, that they represent the real interests of all women, gives the overt public controversy over abortion, such as that played out over the Fargo clinic, the quality of irreconcilable conflict. However, another level of the debate is apparent in the way activists explained their motivations in life stories. In these narratives abortion not only provides a framework for organizing "disorderly" life transitions and extending a newly articulated sense of self in both space and time. It is significant that they also provide narrators a means of symbolically controlling their opposition. The narratives show how activists, in constructing a political identity around an issue defined dialectically, require the "other" in order to exist. Moreover, to ignore their enemies' humanity violates a central value of concern for others both sides claim. This is what gives these stories their dialectical quality; in them the two

sides are, by definition, addressing the other, and in so doing, incorporate them into their own identity. Thus, in these stories, another level of dialogue, often ignored in symbolic analyses, can be heard.

This other dialogue was audible, if faint, in more public venues as well, such as the number of small incidents around the clinic (described in Chapter 6) when opponents crossed over each other's boundaries: this occurred, for example, when the clinic director phoned the head of the right-to-life problem pregnancy center; or when a pro-life demonstrator came to the aid of an abortion clinic counselor when she slipped and fell. I would argue that in these moments, activists gained a momentary conscious recognition of both themselves and their opponents as women who in many ways share the same concerns and conditions. While this acknowledgement of common humanity between enemies might be called communitas (Turner: 1967), the talk and behavior I am describing occasionally occurs but never really transcends differences. I would prefer to refer to it as an ironic descent.

This sort of counter-discourse, which underscores common elements between opponents, also occurs at other levels of the social system is more accessible to those outside the conflict using other frames of analysis. In my anthropological interpretation of the current controversy, I demonstrate the similarities between those opposed on the abortion issue. By including historical material, I show how the rhetorical and political tactics used by these contemporary activists parallel, in many ways, those used by the temperance movement active a century ago, or the social feminists of the early 1900's. Like earlier American female reformers, grassroots pro-life and pro-choice women

alike envision their work as a full-scale social crusade to enhance rather than diminish women's position. While their solutions differ, both sides share the goal of transforming a society increasingly based on single-minded upward mobility and a cash-based service economy that no longer values or rewards those who care for dependents. This is almost an inevitable outcome in a system in which motherhood and wage labor are continually placed in conflict. By casting two possible interpretations of this situation in opposition, it masks their common roots in, and circumvents effective resistance to, problematic conditions engendered by contradictions in American culture. These are faced by all parties to the conflict, but are played out on women's bodies and lives in particular. In this sense, there is a tragic dimension to the polarization around the abortion issue.

What my analysis makes clear is that the pro-life and pro-choice stances, like all genuine dialectical oppositions, have a number of elements in common. Viewed from an anthropological perspective, one can see in the abortion controversy of the 1980's the most recent manifestation of an ongoing cultural process in which struggles over the material, political and symbolic definitions of gender are intertwined, dramatized, coded and continually transformed. At the practical of daily life -- the place where an ethnographer's project must begin and return -- the dilemmas shared by pro-life and pro-choice activists are apparent to the anthropologist and, on occasion, to the actors themselves. However, the differences are what get played out politically. As the abortion debate has come increasingly to stand for opposing views of gender, the possibility of mutual recognition seems to decrease as each side claims to speak a truth regarding contemporary

as well as past and future generations of women. Thus, despite their shared concerns, the antagonism between women over abortion persists, making this dialectic particularly poignant -- nonetheless inescapable.

1. Degler maintains that if patterns of labor force participation are examined closely, the contradictions are less sharp: while the number of women working outside the home rose by 105% between 1950 and 1973, it appears in recent years that the figure has stabilized at around 50% of the adult female population (Degler 1981: 430-431). And the more dependent their children, the less likely a woman is to be working. In a study conducted in 1973, 47% of female wage earners working less than full time said that domestic and maternal responsibilities prevented them from working more hours (Women's Bureau 1975:51-53). He concludes that for most women, paid work is still secondary and supplementary to what they see as their primary responsibilities as wives and especially as mothers. And, he holds, the willingness of women to shape their work to familial demands accounts for the general social acceptance of women's work outside the home.

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