“The Only True Feminist is a Pro-life Feminist”: Pro-life Activism and the Discourse of Women’s Rights
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Table of Contents

Abstract ................................................................................................................................. 3
Introduction .......................................................................................................................... 4
Abortion in America: History and Background ............................................................... 12
Penn for Life and Methodology ....................................................................................... 21
Pro-Woman, Pro-Life Discourse ..................................................................................... 36
Centering Women in Grassroots Pro-Life Activism ....................................................... 60
Conclusion .......................................................................................................................... 75
Appendix ............................................................................................................................. 93
Bibliography ..................................................................................................................... 107
Abstract

In this paper, I argue that pro-life advocates have begun to employ discourses of women’s rights, empirical research, and public health in the argument that abortion harms women in order to reach the ‘mushy middle,’ those unconvinced by anti-abortion arguments premised exclusively on fetal personhood and Christian teachings. Instead of pitting the life of a fetus against women’s rights to bodily autonomy, abortion is framed as detrimental to both the woman and the fetus. This liberal framing of the issue, however, has not been evenly adopted by pro-life constituents, as evidenced by the continued primacy of the fetal personhood argument to members of Penn for Life, a pro-life student group at the University of Pennsylvania. I also argue that this rhetorical shift given rise to forms of activism, particularly crisis pregnancy centers, that afford pro-life women significant leadership over the direction of the movement.
Introduction

In January 2015, March for Life, the organization that oversees the largest annual pro-life march in the country, unveiled a new logo. Its old logo pictured a red rose laying across the Capitol Building. The new logo shows a graphic rose over the words “March for Life: Education & Defense Fund”, its petals and stem simplified into bold delineated shapes. The red rose, writes Jeanne Monahan, President of the March for Life Education and Defense Fund, is a symbol of mourning for the “55 million unique Americans” abortion has killed. But the new logo is significant because it represents the interests not only of fetuses, but also women: the petals of the rose form the shape of a woman cradling a child in her arms. “We march for moms and babies. Abortion not only snuffs out a life filled with potential, it harms a mother emotionally, psychologically, and physically,” writes Monahan in a press release about the logo on Life News.

The centering of women in the logo of one of the core mainstream pro-life organization indicates a larger shift in rhetoric and grassroots activism. In this paper, I seek to answer how pro-life organizations, activists, and politicians came to incorporate a discourse of women’s rights into an end goal of stopping abortion. The questions that guided my research were: what is the relationship between woman-centered pro-life rhetoric, anti-abortion legislation, and grassroots activism? Has centering the experiences of women who have had abortions changed the overall strategy of the movement? Finally, what happens to grassroots pro-life activism as the movement internalizes elements of feminist rhetoric?

My own interest in the pro-life movement began in 2011, when, as a freshman in college, I began volunteering once a week as a clinic escort, waking up at 5:50am every
Saturday morning to catch the dawn train to an abortion clinic in Philadelphia’s Chinatown. For two hours, I and the other escorts donned bright yellow vests, identifying us as clinic volunteers, and walked patients through the line of pro-life protesters into the clinic. I started escorting after meeting another student through a campus feminist group who encouraged me to join, in much the same way that students first became involved with Penn for Life, a pro-life group at the University of Pennsylvania where I conducted fieldwork.

In Pennsylvania, as in all states except for Colorado and Montana, there is no buffer zone law. This means that sidewalk counselors—or pro-life protesters, depending on where you stand on abortion—come within feet of the clinic entrance. At this clinic, as at many others across the country, protesters stood right across from the door—praying, chanting, wearing sandwich boards depicting graphic images of aborted fetuses, and following women from as many as three blocks away. Their comportment varied greatly; there were the old white men in knee-high socks and new balance sneakers, shouting, “Baby-killers! Abortion is murder!” There were young women in long skirts who smiled at me brightly and said good morning, and pleaded with women entering the clinic that there were other options—even, other “choices,”—waving brochures for crisis pregnancy centers and promising that there was a family waiting to adopt.

Virtually the only rule, as a clinic escort, was not to engage with the protesters. It was, the volunteer coordinator told me, not our goal to argue with them. Our purpose was to get patients into the clinic as seamlessly as possible. So I would approach women who looked like they might be walking towards the clinic and ask if I could walk with them,

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1 Massachusetts had a buffer zone law until it was struck down by the U.S. Supreme Court in June 2014. Some municipalities have buffer zones.
positioning by body between theirs and the sidewalk counsellors, and try to drown out the pro-life protesters by instructing them, as slowly and loudly as I could, where to go when they entered the building. This non-engagement rule, while no doubt intended to prevent confrontation between escorts and protesters, had the side effect of creating the perfect anthropological other: the people on the other side of the yellow rope who I was not to speak with. And so through escorting, two things began to happen simultaneously. My conviction grew that access to reproductive healthcare, including abortions, was deeply necessary. But so, too, did my curiosity grow about the other side of the street.

In 2011, the fall semester of my sophomore year, I wrote a series of unpublished articles for my journalism class which followed a pro-life beat. This culminated in a profile of a local Crisis Pregnancy Center (CPC) which had grown out of a pro-life group at a local church and was run by volunteers, mostly women, many of them with “procreation stories” of their own—pivotal narratives from their reproductive histories (Ginsburg 1989). These women were pro-life because of their own personal experiences. They had kept unplanned pregnancies and found great joy at these unexpected sons and daughters. Their friends had been told by their doctors to “just get the abortion and go on vacation” and had been saddled by regret for decades. I believed their stories, and began to feel myself growing distant from pro-choice rhetoric that dismissed pro-life women as suffering from false consciousness.

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2 One interview subject emphasized her preference for the term Pregnancy Resource Centers (PRC's), but I use the term Crisis Pregnancy Center or CPC because it was most commonly used by members of Penn for Life. This name change, however, also shows the framing of the centers is being refined; the name of the centers is shifting from depicting pregnancy as oppositional to women’s interests to one which depicts centers as passively offering support and options.
I began to trace this constellation of lived truths, no two quite alike, no one fully comprehensible in its magnitude to an outsider looking in; each and every one of them real and fully felt by its protagonist. When these women said that they were pro-life because they had seen abortion harm women – or had been those women who abortion had harmed— I believed them. When my friends and fellow escorts who had had abortions said they had made the decision best for them and had no regrets, I believed them too.

Through my experiences chronicling pro-life activism, as well as through attending other events like the 2012 National Right to Life Conference, the largest annual pro-life gathering in the country, I began to notice strategic disagreements and rhetorical differences. Some CPC volunteers disapproved of sidewalk counseling because it did not, they said, provide women with unplanned pregnancies a real alternative to abortion. Some activists grounded their opposition to abortion in arguments of racial injustice—the pro-choice media brought attention to a billboard in New York City which, alluding to the high rate of abortion among African-American women, stated “the most dangerous place for an African-American child is in the womb.” I read this argument, which claims abortion is a form of racism, as parallel to the increasing attention that American pro-life actors place on sex-selective abortion in China and India; in all of these cases, the womb—and particularly the wombs of women of color—are places of risk that require regulation.

Sparked by my experience as an escort, this is a body of writing which grew out of several years’ worth of concentrated interest in ripples and fractures within the pro-life movement. When I have tried to describe this project to fellow pro-choice activists, I am
met with the assumption that the endeavor will somehow further fights for abortion access. This is not my intention for this paper. Although I unequivocally support access to abortion, this is a project premised first and foremost in curiosity. I wanted to know what this partial shift in rhetoric indicated about the goals and directions of different facets of the pro-life movement.

I decided to focus on the anti-abortion argument that abortion harms women because it best demonstrates the degree to which the pro-life movement mirrors liberal pro-choice rhetoric in situating its opposition to abortion in a discourse of public health and liberal human rights. I will analyze the discourse around what legal scholar Reva Siegel calls the woman-protective anti-abortion argument, or WPAA, which I see as parallel to the rising numbers of women-run crisis pregnancy centers, by going through newsletters, books, articles, and press releases by pro-life activists. These include articles from major media outlets for the pro-life movement LifeSite News and Life News. I analyze ‘Making Abortion Rare: A Healing Strategy for a Divided Nation’ because the text and its author, David Reardon, and the research institute he founded are key actors in the adoption of woman-centered anti-abortion arguments, as identified by pro-life activists as well as scholars of the pro-life movement (Rose 2011, Siegel 2007). I also engage with scholars whose focus is the pro-life movement specifically (Ginsburg 1989; Kelly 2012; Rudy 1997), as well as those who focus on women’s agency in conservative religious movements (Klatch 1987).

In order to contextualize the woman-protective anti-abortion argument within the larger liberal human rights discourse that the mainstream pro-life movement increasingly employs, I conducted ethnographic fieldwork with a pro-life group based at the
University of Pennsylvania. For six months, from November 2014 through April 2015, I attended meetings and special events organized by Penn for Life, a self-described secular, pro-life student group. I found this group by doing an internet search for pro-life groups in the Philadelphia area and reached out to this one because I was curious about how an anti-abortion group on the campus of a fairly progressive urban university framed their opposition.

Although my analysis emphasizes the strategic element in situating abortion in this discourse, I do not mean to detract from activists’ genuine concern that abortion harms women, perpetuates racism, etc. As the president of the group aptly observed in our initial meeting, any movement must frame its argument in the interests of broad appeal. Thus, opposing abortion as a public health threat must be seen as both a larger strategic decision to decrease the numbers of abortions and as an earnestly felt additional reason to oppose abortion.

I found no immediate contradiction between separating myself and my actions into distinct spheres bounded by time and purpose. As an anthropologist of the pro-life movement, I respectfully engaged with my subjects; had I been accompanying my friend to get an abortion through protesters on the same day as fieldwork, I would have had no qualms about confronting them. I strove to portray my subjects as accurately and with as much empathy as possible; at the same time, I forwarded Planned Parenthood emails to listservs, participated in and organized pro-choice educational events, etc. Nonetheless, as someone who is potentially effected by anti-abortion legislation, I was, as Ginsburg put it, “both curious anthropologist and concerned native” (Ginsburg 1989).
In Chapter 1, I begin with a brief history of the criminalization of abortion in the United States and the rise of the contemporary pro-life movement. While the more recent woman-centered shift is a major change from post-Roe vs. Wade rhetoric that focused solely on the fetus, it is also strikingly similar to late nineteenth century anti-abortion arguments. I also introduce the development of a theory of ‘Post-Abortion Syndrome’ by pro-life researchers, which builds a body of scientific research used to counter abortion access.

In Chapter 2, I discuss some methodology and some of my findings from my fieldwork with Penn for Life. While students involved with Penn for Life grounded their stance on abortion in secular logic and faith-based reasoning, I found that for the most part they did not employ woman-centered anti-abortion arguments. I argue that this is due to Penn's overwhelmingly socially progressive environment, in which Penn for Life members end up focusing on building internal pro-life community.

In Chapter 3, I lay out some of the key points of the woman-centered pro-life discourse. This posits women as innocent victims who are easily confused or misinformed about abortion. This new push for compassion for women who have had abortions, or women with unplanned pregnancies, means that it is abortion providers who are demonized by pro-life advocates. However, there is more at play in the frame shift, namely that it is indicative of how the language of social justice has become imperative for any issue. Rather than change the terms of the debate from one which assumes the fetus is a full person and thus abortion constitutes murder, the woman-protective anti-abortion argument concedes that women’s choices do matter.
In Chapter 4, I suggest that given Kelly’s findings that most women who become clients at Crisis Pregnancy Centers have already decided to carry the pregnancy to term, pro-choice criticisms of CPC’s could be unwarranted. I also argue that activism that has arisen alongside WPAA affords women significant leadership roles within the pro-life movement. I also suggest ‘false consciousness’ is not a useful framework for theorizing the prominence of pro-life women, suggesting instead that beliefs structure individual realities.

In my conclusion, I suggest that woman-centered anti-abortion rhetoric and activism presents opportunities for finding common ground on reproductive rights issues other than abortion that other forms of pro-life activism do not.
Chapter One: Abortion in America: History and Background

Moral and legal obstructions to abortion before quickening were absent in the US until the early 19th century. In the early 19th century, doctors, who were primarily educated white men, used abortion to monopolize medical practice, pushing out healers, midwives, and apothecaries (Ehrenreich and English 1973). This campaign was so effective that although in 1800, abortion was legal in every state, by 1900, it was illegal everywhere except to save the life of the woman (Mohr 1978). They did this by using a medical and moral discourse to stigmatize abortion. Scientific research about the procedure, then, have been mobilized by the pro-life movement to support a moral argument before; and that moral argument has not always been based in Christianity, but served as a way of convincing legislators and the public to contribute to doctors’ power. Thus, anti-abortion actors have long been concerned with appealing to the wider public and tailoring their argument to that purpose.

Through the early 20th century, however, abortion was still widely practiced. Gold estimates that hundreds of thousands to a million abortions were performed annually by the early 1940’s (2003). The criminalization of abortion had the largest impact on working class women, who could not afford the cost of the procedure.

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3 The terms ‘pro-life’ and ‘pro-choice’ are misleading when used to describe late 19th century actors because they precede the current prolife and prochoice movement and were fundamentally different in the context within which they situated their viewpoints on abortion.

4 The history of doctor’s manipulation of the issue also raises the question of reliance on medical regulation, an institution which, like the state, has historically both supported and opposed abortion access.
In the period of time between abortion's criminalization and legalization, individual physicians were the actors with the most power over abortion access.\(^5\) Because individual family doctors were the ones who decided when abortion was ‘medically necessary,’ they retained control to deem ‘therapeutic’ abortion necessary for not just the physical, but also the psychological, health of the woman. “Therapeutic abortion” might include women who said they were emotionally distressed or threatened suicide meant that only women with more financial resources could access legal abortions. The state of women’s mental health, then, has been used an argument for and against access to abortion.

In the 1940’s, the general ambivalence of the medical community began to turn as technologies made physical risks to women’s health increasingly rare in the United States. In order to ensure compliance with the law, hospital committees became the ones to decide whether abortion was permissible or not, making the procedure more exclusively available for wealthy women who could afford to influence the committee (Munson 2003: 80). More obstruction led to more illegal back-alley abortions. As control over access tightened, women increasingly died or suffered serious health conditions from unsafe illegal abortions. Attention to these discrepancies in the middle of the 20\(^{th}\) century brought efforts to legalize abortion, thus transferring power over access from individual doctors to legal rights and political campaigns. In 1959, the American Law Institute drafted guidelines for when women should be allowed to have abortions.

\(^5\) Another key development was the use of ultrasound imaging, contrasted with quickening, which transposed authority on the fetus from the pregnant woman to a machine of surveillance. This allowed fetal personhood to be treated as an empirical scientific fact determined by a machine, rather than contingent on the pregnant woman.
The Finkbine case was one of the first times that abortion became a matter of public interest, and when abortion was viewed in terms of morality. In 1962, Sherri Finkbine, a pregnant mother of three and television show host, found out that the pills she had been taking contained Thalidomide would cause fetal deformities. She and her husband contacted the press to warn other women about Thalidomide, and scheduled a therapeutic abortion at a local hospital. When the story became national news, the hospital committee refused to perform the abortion, and the Finkbines ultimately had to fly to Sweden to obtain the procedure. This is an early example of how women’s personal narratives play a huge role in the presentation of abortion – both in supporting access, and, with the surge of woman-centered anti-abortion rhetoric, opposing it.

Post-Roe Pro-Life

In 1973, the Supreme Court ruled in the landmark case Roe v. Wade that abortion was legal up until fetal viability. Although a few scattered organizations began to oppose abortion reform in the late 60’s, it was not until after Roe v. Wade that pro-life mobilization began, and at its core was the Catholic church (Munson 2008:85). The rhetorical and legal use of the fetal personhood argument in the decade after Roe v. Wade was centered on the attempt to have fetuses defined as persons within the Fourteenth Amendment. Numerous versions of the Human Life Amendment, which would have overturned Roe v. Wade, were introduced into Congress in the 70’s, but did not pass the floor.

The pro-choice movement formed in response to nascent pro-life movement in years post-Roe v. Wade. Many of the women who participated had a background in lobbying and legislative work. This meant that dominant approach of pro-choice
organizing was liberal feminist rather than grassroots or leftist feminist. It was also dominated by privilege, liberal privacy argument also allows for government to justify not providing childcare, reproductive healthcare for low-income women, etc (Rudy 1996: 89).

A major piece of eighties pro-life propaganda is 'The Silent Scream,' a film of a suction abortion narrated by former pro-choice advocate Dr. Bernard Nathanson, who became a key pro-life activist. 'The Silent Scream' epitomizes—and is itself a cornerstone of—fetal personhood argument; it focuses almost exclusively on the fetus' development, its capacity for pain, etc. President Reagan screened the film at the White House, distributed a copy to every member of Congress, and entire text of the thirty-minute film was entered into the Congressional Record (Halva-Neubauer and Ziegeler 105). In the decades after Roe, at both the legal and grassroots level of discourse – the language and reasoning used in bills and on the ground in pamphlets, billboards, and films — the anti-abortion argument was centered on the fetus. Within this exclusive subject, however, were different strategic frames still present in pro-life arguments, for example, the use of empirical research like biological facts about fetal development and biblical reasoning about the sanctity of human life.

The Human Life Amendment was effectively abandoned as a tactic after it failed majority vote in Senate in 1983. Pro-life activists began to seek other, more incremental tactics at obstructing abortion access. Instead of one concerted effort to pass a constitutional amendment that would have made abortion illegal in the whole country,

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6 The liberal rationale to oppose abortion seems surprising because it is so closely associated with the Republican party; however, this is a fairly recent alliance; Republican party first took official anti-abortion stance on platform in 1980 (Munson 2008: 87).
there were more attempts to limit access at state level using variety of rhetorical and legal arguments (Halva-Neubauer and Ziegler, 102). This is an element of pro-life legislation that has remained constant—legislation is targeted primarily at the state level. In the eighties, the arguments were still focused on fetus, many of them either seeking to limit abortion either through fetal homicide or fetal pain laws (Halva-Neubauer and Ziegler, 104). With the development of a theory of ‘Post-Abortion Syndrome,’ or PAS, however, the discourse began to shift towards one which opposed abortion on the grounds that it harmed women.

While there are many factors that led to this strategy shift in pro-life discourse and organizing, I would like to suggest that one reason for its development was in response to a wave of violent and nonviolent direct action in the 1990’s. In this period, there were dozens of clinic bombings, murders and attempted murders of abortion providers, and other attacks. 7

Randall Terry, a used car salesman, was the first to make anti-abortion direct action an evangelical mission (Rudy 45). The tactic known as ‘rescuing’ was primarily grounded in theology and religious awakening (Maxwell). It involved large-scale nonviolent sit-ins at abortion clinics around the country. Operation Rescue greatly increase the number of pro-life people risking civil disobedience. Before the founding of the national movement, less than 1,000 people had been arrested for pro-life activism;

7 Another factor, which also proved the importance of women's narratives of abortion to the pro-life movement, was the reopening of Roe v. Wade by the original plaintiff, Norma McCorvey, as well as the companion case, Doe (Sandra Cano). Because these landmark abortion decisions were made on the grounds of women's rights, it follows that the attempt to overturn them would employ the same rhetoric.
after national office opened in Binghamton, New York, in 1987, more than 55,000 arrested.

Although Operation Rescue grew out of the mainstream pro-life movement, it eventually found itself at odds with larger organizations like National Right to Life Convention. “Rescuing” was increasingly discouraged by mainstream organizations and other leaders in pro-life movement because its illegal tactics attracted negative press. The NRLC currently does not formally associate with or acknowledge Operation Rescue because the only support legal means of anti-abortion activism. Operation Rescue’s $70,000 in court fees, ultimately closed the national office and buckled organization in 1990. Now there are smaller decentralized Operation Rescue groups that operate along similar lines but are semi-autonomous (Rudy 1996: 46).

I read this as meaning that direct action at clinics was largely spent as a tactic--It was associated in the eye of the public with violent or aggressive behavior. In addition, pro-choice actors also responded to this escalating violence by passing the Freedom of Access to Clinic Entrances (FACE) Act, and some states also passed buffer zone laws. This meant that protesting, or sidewalk counselling, outside of clinics was linked to the possibility of violence. The physical space outside of the clinic had been codified in law, providing incentive to bring pro-life activism to newer frontiers: that of direct services rather than direct action.

_History of Post-abortion Syndrome_

Although the 1980’s saw a spate of acts of pro-life terrorist attacks on abortion clinics and abortion providers, behind the scenes, the woman-centered anti-abortion movement was building. In 1987, President Ronald Reagan asked Surgeon General C.
Everett Koop to begin work on a report that would detail the negative health impacts of abortion. Koop, a known pro-life advocate, and co-founder of the Christian Action Council, which would become Care Net, was to model the report on the earlier successes of his antismoking campaign. By informing the public of this alleged threat to public health, the Reagan administration hoped to deter women from seeking abortions. Once they knew what harm abortion caused, no woman would choose to undergo such a procedure. Thus, it would have decreased the overall number of abortions by supplying women with information, but stepping back to let them make their own decisions. But after conducting research, Koop found that there was no conclusive evidence that abortion caused or did not cause long-lasting harm. Nonetheless, the report represents a key turning point in pro-life strategy. Even though Reagan's cabinet had supported abortion restrictions, including passing the Hyde Amendment, which prevents federal funding from covering abortion services except in the case of rape, incest, or to protect the life of the woman, they also sought to limit abortion access through proving its harmfulness to women.

Pro-life research institutes at this time were just starting to produce reports on abortion's impacts on women. Vincent Rue, a pro-life psychotherapist, who directed the

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8 Studies that find abortion results in long-lasting depression or other health and psychological problems have been debunked are contested by major medical organizations (see appendix for responses to Post-Abortion Syndrome). Research studies show that finds comparable results for carrying an unwanted pregnancy to term. Siegel relates how the South Dakota Task Force to Study Abortion ignored studies from the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists, the American Medical Association, and others that found there was no correlation between surgical abortion and psychological health, cancer, reproductive health, etc., instead using research on Post-Abortion Syndrome from Vincent Rue, David Reardon, and several other pro-life researchers (Siegel 2008: 1681). This raises the question of the strategic importance of offering scientific references to support claims; an audience with neutral views on abortion, if confronted with a report with some scientific references presenting evidence that abortion
Sir Thomas More Clinics of Southern California, began researching what he called Post-Abortion Syndrome, or PAS, in the early 1980's using the framework of contemporary work being done on PTSD. Working with doctoral student Anne Speckhard, Rue expanded the symptoms associated with PTSD in his research on a self-selected group of women who had had abortions. Rue presented his research at the 1982 National Right to Life Convention, and through this new audience founded Women Exploited By Abortion (Siegel 2008: 1658). Through its connections to the Christian Broadcast Network, WEBA was able to reach a large intra-movement audience. Reardon cites Feminists for Life as the first group to propose redress for women “injured by abortion” (v). In 1993, Reardon also wrote Abortion Malpractice, a guide for personal injury attorneys; the following year, Life Dynamics sponsored a 3-day conference for attorneys on abortion malpractice (v).

In its early stage, the other intra-movement use of PAS was its use by CPC volunteers to use its scientific studies and personal narratives to dissuade women with unplanned pregnancies from choosing abortion. This demonstrates a clear link between woman-centered anti-abortion research and grassroots activism. Women with unplanned pregnancies—the clients of pregnancy resource centers—were the ideal audience for Rue’s research.

*Rise of Woman-Centered Anti-Abortion Argument*

Siegel sees the origins of woman-protective anti-abortion argument, or WPAA, in the Post-Abortion Syndrome, and details how the PAS, a mental health condition parallel harms women, is unlikely to research the specific studies. The scientific research is calculated as another way to appeal to a secular, liberal audience.
to PTSD, was converted into a rhetorical strategy to limit access to abortion through a legal framework (2008). Siegel argues that the WPAA was initially rejected by key pro-life leaders, but was later embraced by most for its strategic usefulness, particularly as the escalation of pro-life violence in the early nineties marred the movement’s public image.

Siegel argues that the WPAA was first used in the 1980's to center voices of women who had had abortions within the movement and draw more to it, particularly to attract more women to crisis pregnancy centers, and was originally contested by particularly male pro-life leaders for its perceived wrong focus on women's experiences over the value of fetal life. She argues that it has gained more widespread acceptance because within the pro-life movement for its potential to convince 'the mushy middle' that abortion is wrong (Siegel 2008: 1657).

Paralleling the development of PAS and the rise in crisis pregnancy centers, anti-abortion rhetoric has come to oppose abortion on the grounds that it is damaging to womens' physical and psychological wellbeing. Pro-life women may employ this argument as well as call upon their authority as women speaking against abortion (Kelly 2012). In Chapter Three, I will explore this idea further in arguing that centering the experiences of women who have had abortions has changed the overall strategy of the movement, increasing backing for more support-based forms of activism like post-abortion counselling and crisis pregnancy centers.
Chapter Two: Penn for Life and Methodology

In this chapter, I will discuss my methodology for conducting fieldwork and some observations about Penn for Life. Penn for Life serves more as a home base for pro-life students at UPenn, who are in a severe minority, rather than as a significant pro-life presence on the Penn campus. Its focus is more on internal community than mobilizing students who disagree with them or are undecided about abortion. Rather than uniformly frame their argument in liberal humanist terms, members of Penn for Life retained their highly individualized stances on abortion, many of which are conservative pro-life views. Because woman-centered arguments are mobilized to sway those uncertain about abortion, it makes sense that members of a group less focused on appealing to the middle majority would hold conservative stances and frame their beliefs mostly in terms of fetal personhood. Given how socially progressive the environment is, Penn for Life members instead hoped to change their peer's views of pro-life advocates, rather than expect to change their minds about abortion from the outset.

Methodology

I initially hoped to find a crisis pregnancy center as a field site, given they are the most direct correlation to the woman-centered argument and have a high ration of women volunteers. However, given the timeframe of the project and the nature of the field site — it would be difficult to guarantee that I would not interfere with the center's clients—I opted to do fieldwork with Penn for Life, and focus more on argument formation in the
context of a liberal campus. My findings from observation and interviews with Penn for Life members do not map exactly onto my observations about woman-centered prolife activism, but are relevant in painting a picture of what sectors of the pro-life movement participate in more liberal discourse, how, and why. It also demonstrates the increasingly hybridized pro-life stance, which can, and is, defended no longer in strictly religious terms, but also by some secular and progressive actors.

Penn for Life, like any college group, is composed of students ages 18-22, who are doing this as an extracurricular activity as part of an academic, social, athletic, schedule. So a more complete analysis would be to look at students involved with Penn for Life five or ten years after graduation and see how, if at all, their university education has shaped their pro-life involvement. I can only theorize that even though their ideological positions were by no means mostly on the progressive side of pro-life movement—some were opposed to abortion at any stage of pregnancy and in cases of rape or incest—the roles that they will play will tend to the secular and leadership roles.

I followed other feminist anthropologists’ lead in identifying myself as pro-choice at the outset of my research beginning with my introductory email to Penn for Life’s board (e.g. Kelly 2012; Ginsburg 1987). In previous experiences interviewing pro-life activists, I had found that this was a better approach than feigning impartiality or pro-life leanings. I also hoped that approaching the often emotionally fraught subject of abortion with complete honesty and an expressed interest in open dialogue would demonstrate to my subjects that I was not trying to hide anything. Throughout the course of my research, members of Penn for Life treated me and my viewpoints with respect.
There was only one occasion where I felt I was being asked to change my views on abortion.

I attended Penn for Life meetings and events from November 2014 to April 2015. Exceptions included internal board meetings, which group members requested that I not be present at so that new members could feel they were discussing ideas in a familiar space. There were also several events that I was not able to attend which were not explicitly hosted by Penn for Life but that were announced on the listserv, and which a minority of students involved with Penn for Life participated in. These included the national March for Life on January 23rd in Washington D.C. and a benefit dinner for a crisis pregnancy center in Cherry Hill, New Jersey. By request of the group members, I did not record or jot down notes during public events and meetings, instead recording observations from memory directly after each event.

I was concerned, throughout my fieldwork, that Penn for Life members might think my intentions were to portray them as fanatics—that my thesis was mere fodder for the pro-choice movement. I tried to emphasize, when relevant, that I was there because of curiosity, and that while it was impossible to approach this or any issue without bias, I was striving to be aware of my positionality. I believe that this work may be as useful to pro-choice activists seeking to learn more about the origins and uses of woman-protective anti-abortion argument in order to respond to it as it could be to Penn for Life members looking to think reflexively about the how the group relates to the rest of campus.

I also chose this group because I felt that I would be able to relate to members of Penn for Life better in terms of our similar age and status as students. Because at the time of writing I was living in West Philadelphia and taking a class at the University of
Pennsylvania, I used the same library and community spaces as many of my subjects. We could commiserate about our workload, distance from winter break, etc. I found that our peculiar combination of shared and juxtaposed traits both convenient in establishing rapport and slightly unsettling. It was as though I was studying my mirror image: undergraduate students in their early twenties at a prestigious East Coast university, and residents of West Philadelphia—but also people who I also held deep-seated ideological differences on abortion and its attendant issues of patriarchy, agency, reproductive healthcare, etc.

Although I had not been doing fieldwork in any official capacity for the past few years, my informal interactions with pro-life activists proved invaluable in allowing me to enter into conversations with members of Penn for Life. The series of articles I wrote on local pro-life activists three years ago, for example, acclimatized me to the linguistic differences that demarcate the two sides of the issue. I entered the field having already groomed myself to refer to their stance as 'pro-life' rather than anti-choice, protesters as sidewalk counselors, etc. I was desensitized to some of the more polemic terms that pro-lifers use to refer to abortion clinics and providers, such as 'abortion mills,' 'baby killers,' although this more hyperbolic rhetorical devices were rarely employed by Penn for Life affiliates. I was familiar enough with key actors and texts in the movement to be able to discuss them.

I also conducted one-on-one interview with three Penn for Life members, which I audio recorded. Two of the interviews were with undergraduate students, and the third was with a faculty member at the University of Pennsylvania School of Medicine. These three subjects volunteered to be interviews after I emailed the group listserv several
months into beginning fieldwork. I was familiar with the students from other Penn for Life events; the faculty member I had not met before our interview. The names of all subjects have been changed. Emily was my first contact for Penn for Life – we were in touch over email before I came to my first meeting. A junior pre-medical student from the Philadelphia area, Emily was eloquent about her views at meetings and events. She was particularly interested in opposing abortion from the field of bioethics. Rob, a sophomore in the Wharton School of Business, identified himself as the most liberal student in Penn for Life; he found abortion permissible up to six to eight weeks of fetal development, and in the cases of rape, incest, and endangering the life of the woman. He was an engaging interview subject, and seemed eager to discuss his views with people of all different viewpoints for the sake of curiosity and a desire to further his own knowledge. Michael, a faculty member at the University of Pennsylvania School of Medicine, is a 47-year-old married father of three. He identified himself as not very active with Penn for Life but was on the listserv and sometimes went to events. Interviewees all stated their familiarity with arguments that support abortion access. They held well-informed, nuanced viewpoints that showed their willingness to engage critically with pro-choice rhetoric.

Group Structure

The participants in Penn for Life who attended meetings and events were undergraduate students, although some faculty members and other people affiliated with the University of Pennsylvania were on the group listserv. They came from a variety of
disciplines: pre-medical students, psychology student, multiple students at Wharton School of Business and political science. The group’s larger meetings and events, which were held irregularly (I was asked not to attend the Board meetings), generally had between five and twelve students in attendance; the student population at the University of Pennsylvania is over 21,000, about half of whom are graduate students. There is significant crossover with Penn Christian groups but they made it clear that Penn for Life has no religious tenets or official affiliation with them. At the first Penn for Life event I attended, a potluck brunch in a dorm lounge, one of the members commented jokingly that one-third of the members were from South Carolina – so there is some significant crossover between students from the South, practicing Christians, and active pro-life students. This potluck, and a dinner in the spring semester, served more as a space for pro-life students to be in community, a place where their viewpoints could be validated by each other but also challenged. The target audience was students who already hold pro-life views.

In addition to some events, the group also held meetings irregularly.

Lizzie and Joe facilitated the meeting, moving through the power point slides and responding to questions from other group members. The group seemed to me, as it did throughout my fieldwork, horizontally organized, with its members listening respectfully to each other’s ideas. While it seemed like there was a smaller core of students who were more active in the group, and thus were more familiar with each other and took on more responsibilities, overall the meeting space felt uniquely democratic. I did not notice any group members speaking significantly more than others, nor did the male members seem to occupy more space in decision-making processes than the female members. ⁹

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⁹ Field notes, January 19th, 2015.
Penn for Life was both connected to mainstream pro-life organizations and events and maintained its own distance. Every year, for example, several students generally attend the annual March for Life in Washington, D.C. However, not all students agreed with this as a strategy to repeal abortion; Rob voiced his overall disenchantment with marches in making change.

_Faith and Secular Thought in Penn for Life_

Like Munson, I found that the relationship between faith and secular logic is complex for pro-life activists. “Individual activists seldom understand their activism as a consequence of some prior religious faith. Instead, the relationship between religion and the pro-life movement is better understood if we consider the two as overlapping spheres of action” (2008: 9). Activism and faith, in other words, can influence each other; there is no linear or causal relationship between the two. Munson finds that involvement with pro-life activism actually generates strong pro-life sentiments, rather than the other way around.

I was reminded of the various small non-confrontational but cumulative ways in which pro-life spaces, regardless of their purported secular or religious status, are overtly Christian spaces. Although Penn for Life defines themselves as secular, even from the first brief meeting, the potluck, it was clear that the majority of the members were practicing Christians; two wore wooden crosses, perhaps an inch and a half long, around the neck; one student wore a shirt with “I got 99 problems but my faith ain’t one” in scrawling cursive script, and metal cross necklace; two other students mentioned
involvement with the Newman Center, the Catholic center at the University. At the National Right to Life Convention, for example, speakers would end their talks with prayers, people I met would end conversations with “God bless you.” While the relationship between secular or non-Christian pro-life activists and Christian pro-life activists is beyond the scope of this thesis, I believe a key connector would be groups like Penn for Life, which is officially secular but has mostly Christian members. These students belong to different overlapping communities; they are educated, they hold a degree from a prestigious Ivy League East Coast school, they are fluent in the discourse of liberalism and human rights, but at the same time, they are practicing Christians grounded in faith. As part of an overall effort to ensure the space was welcoming to people of different religious beliefs and backgrounds, senior students in Penn for Life made sure that protestants were represented on the Board of a largely Catholic group.

One commonality I found among numerous Penn for Life members was that while they might believe being pro-life is an issue of faith, or have come to it through Christian communities, they also strongly believed that abortion is wrong from a secular, rational perspective. When asked why the group wasn't explicitly Christian, Emily answered, "People will say, I'm prolife because I'm Catholic, I'm prolife because I'm Christian, I'm prolife because I'm prolife. Certainly my views on abortion were formed by being Christian, maybe even initiated by that, but I'm prolife because I'm prolife." They wanted the group to be open to anyone who was pro-life, and so separated that from other political and religious viewpoints.

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10 Field notes, November 15th, 2014, potluck event at University of Pennsylvania campus dorm, Philadelphia, PA.

11 Interview, February 20th, 2015.
Like many campus groups, there is significant ebb and flow in student participation – some years generate more interest than others. This year, however, seemed like more of a placeholder year; I got the feeling at meetings that there was some relief in knowing and meeting other Penn students who are pro-life, because the campus is so overwhelmingly pro-choice. The primary mode of output from Penn for Life was building pro-life community at Penn. The group is not, for example, expending its energy counseling outside of clinics, or pushing for the Human Life Amendment to be passed, but rather serving as a community for Penn affiliates who are pro-life. Because of this purpose, its members hold varied viewpoints on abortion.

Members of Penn for Life are keenly aware, and even self-conscious, of how small their group was given the size of the student body. After the Bart Stupak event, turned to me and asked, "be honest, are you pleased at how small Penn for Life is?"

Another planned event, a ‘cemetery of the innocents’, was cancelled due to a lack of participation. After describing the low turn-out for a recent film screening event, one subject continued,

"We all care about the issue, we have feelings about the issues, but we feel like we can’t actually make much of a change at all on a campus like Penn’s. It’s disillusionment, I think, like, that’s sort of why I think we shouldn’t do stuff like cemetery of the Innocents, like things of that nature, those aren’t going to be successful at Penn. Those aren’t going to be successful in most places, the only places where those would be successful are places with a very large student base already. Because that’s like more of a confirmation, like, ‘hey, we’re doing stuff,’ like even if it’s a minority relative to the campus as a whole, you need a big enough group that it isn’t like, 95% of students are just walking by, being like, what the heck is this, these pro-life
kids, that's why I still think the most effective way of dodging all this would be like debating with the Pavlovian society, or trying to co-host an event with the women’s center.”

He added that Penn is extremely pre-professional, which means it's difficult for other extracurricular groups, like Penn Quidditch, which he was involved in, to survive. This is why I believe there was no particular prevalence of woman-centered arguments: because the campus was so unreachable as an audience that it could not be considered the 'mushy middle.'

Given the difficulties of reaching out to the campus, Penn for Life members framed their intention as changing people's minds about stereotypical pro life activists rather than immediately convincing them abortion is wrong. Rob, for example, said "Talk to people in the middle who you might not convince them, but at the very least you'll further the discussion, you'll make it so that when they next think of a pro-life person they won't think of the bible thumper with the picture of the aborted fetus, but they'll think of you and the views that you're presenting." Emily also saw her roll as representing a pro-life presence on campus. What Penn for Life does, she said, is provide "a way for people who are prolife to come together...even if people don't show up for meetings, or people are on the listserv, the fact that we show up at campus fairs, I think that is evidence that there's this other way of thinking...and I say that because I would say the majority of students

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12 Interview, April 8th, 2015.

13 Interview, April 8th, 2015.
on Penn's campus are not pro-life, a lot of people tend to have prolife views in personal leanings, but they tend to have other views in legal contexts.\textsuperscript{14}

\textit{Varied Viewpoints}

Woman-centered arguments against abortion did surface in my interviews, but in at least two were not framed as the primary reason to oppose abortion. Rob drew his beliefs that abortion can harm women from women in his family's personal narratives of pregnancy loss. He also mentioned sex-selective abortion in China as another way in which women are harmed by abortion, something also brought up by Emily.

An example shows the variety in viewpoints among members of Penn for Life. Rob and Michael, two subjects who both grounded their pro-life stance in fetal personhood, held differing views about the place of the Bible in those views. Describing his reasoning for being pro-life, Rob said, "The Bible doesn't say anything about abortion, the few thing it says, like "knitted together in your mother's womb" are metaphorical, there's nothing like 'at this point in time, the fetus is now a full human being with personhood'. So my Christian beliefs actually don't demand a stance one way or another."\textsuperscript{15} On the other hand, after emphasizing that the facts of fetal development were too often neglected in the abortion debate, when asked about the relationship between biology and faith-based reasoning, Michael responded, "I think in the Bible, it's clear that the fetus is more than

\textsuperscript{14} Interview, February 20\textsuperscript{th}, 2015.

\textsuperscript{15} Interview, April 8\textsuperscript{th}, 2015.
just an organ or a bunch of cells, it's life." He also saw any attempt to distinguish between human life and personhood as part of a liberal pro-choice agenda, but this very subject was the topic of debate among Penn for Life members at the informal dinner in January 2015.

Given progressive social context of Penn’s campus, I expected Penn for Life to be well-versed in woman-centered arguments against abortion, but did not find this to be true. Said one interview subject,

"Penn for Life is surprisingly conservative, actually, I’m surprised there aren’t more … it seems like pretty much everyone is conservative, at the very most, I might be the most liberal person, and I’m a moderate who’s conservative, like from the ppl I’ve talked to, so it’s kind of …unfortunate, I guess, …you went to the Bart Stupak event, right? Like the prolife democratic senator, I would think that there would be more ppl like that, with views similar to his, but there aren’t, at Penn for life, at Penn in general, but I feel like at Penn, if you are a liberal, and even if you’re just positive towards the pro-life cause, if your’e not prolife yourself, you sort of keep that quiet, because the people who have that view are people who care about issues … you wouldn’t be accepted by pretty much any of the other groups on campus."  

This was another key observation: the differences in students involved with Penn for Life’s unique positions on abortion. Some supported abortion access up to several months, in the case of rape, incest, or endangerment of the life of the woman; others made no exceptions. An individual’s stance on abortion can be derived from multiple reasons; there can also be people with very different viewpoints in the same group. I found both of these to be true of Penn for life. The woman-protective anti-abortion argument is still disputed among the individual members of any given pro-life group. The differences in opinion among students active with Penn for Life exemplifies that although the woman-centered argument has increasingly gained support in the past two decades, it

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16 Interview, April 6th, 2015.
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is by no means the dominant argument and does not necessarily map exactly onto more liberal groups.

On how woman-protective argument is integrated haltingly into pro-life discourse — Penn for Life has been hosting a ‘cemetery of the innocents’ in the spring for the past (?) years. These outdoor displays—generally of flags representing some number of abortions—are a common pro-life tactic for raising awareness of the issue. As the name ‘cemetery of the innocents’ implies, it frames abortion as wrong solely through arguing for fetal personhood; it represents the ‘babies killed by abortion.’ Penn for Life may have integrated the woman-centered argument into personal beliefs and other events, but is still premised on the fetal personhood argument.

I felt the continued primacy of the fetal personhood argument most acutely after attending an informal pizza dinner with group members at a University City place on February 7th, 2015. When I arrived, there were four students seated around the table, two of whom I recognized from meetings. The only female student left shortly after I arrived, and the ensuing discussion between three male members of the group and myself was premised entirely on theorizing fetal personhood.

I realized something: in the entire hour-and-a-half discussion about abortion with three cis-gendered men, not once was gender, sexism, women’s rights, or abortion’s affects on women brought up. The entire conversation was built on abstract philosophical terms: what was “right”? What should be “allowed”? What were differences—biologically, legally, philosophically—between human life and full-fledged personhood? There were no anecdotes or specific life histories. There were three men discussing, abstractly, when life began.¹⁸

One event co-hosted by Penn for Life that exemplifies its critical stance on the issue was a talk by Bart Stupak, a former pro-life democratic senator. First of all was the setting of

¹⁸ Field notes, February 7th, 2015.
the event—it was co-hosted by the Penn Political Review and the Pavlovian Society, a liberal-leaning group that Penn for Life had held debate events with in past years. The setting felt like one in which civil dialogue over difference was standard; from the questions students asked after Stupak spoke, it was clear that many both disagreed with his stance on abortion but were also willing to engage with him in the spirit of civil discussion—as academics, social scientists, and aspiring politicians.

On January 21st of this year, during the period I was conducting fieldwork, one student involved in Penn for Life, Hannah Victor, published a guest column entitled “When We Love, We are being Pro-Life: Reflections on the anniversary of Roe” in the Daily Pennsylvanian, the UPenn student newspaper. It became, she told me proudly a month later, the most-commented on article of the day, with nearly a hundred comments.

This article was written by Hannah as an individual, not as an official column representing Penn for Life. But while it cannot be taken to stand in for the group’s views as a whole, it is an example of an anti-abortion argument targeted at a progressive student body. At the first meeting of the spring semester, Hannah stressed the importance of reaching out to their primary audience: women at the University of Pennsylvania who were considering, or might at some point in their lives, consider having an abortion.

The article invoked fetal personhood as well as women's rights in opposing abortion, as well as both scientific and Christian reasoning.

“I believe that love seeks truth. I believe that the unborn are human, from the moment of fertilization. As a nursing student, I know that science suggests no less. As a person of faith, I know that God intricately formed me in my mother’s womb.” (Victor)

The article, built around the refrain of loving as a guiding ethic, incorporates both fetal personhood and woman-centered arguments against abortion (For full article see
appendix). It also mentions opposition to euthanasia as part of the same guiding principle of caring for the weakest – “those who cannot speak for themselves.”

Victor opens with describing how her pro-life position has shifted from abortion-specific to defined through a wider lens of human rights. She then details the ways in which she sees abortion as a threat to women’s rights specifically. Victor mentions several common woman-protective anti-abortion arguments, such as coerced abortion and sex selective abortion.

The most explicit reminder that the pro-life argument is premised first and foremost on fetal personhood, including for those involved with Penn for Life, came at the end of my interview with Michael. He reached into his pocket and asked, "Actually, can I give you something?" Sure, I said, thinking it was a business card or a brochure. Instead, he pulled out a bubblegum-pink model fetus and handed it to me. He continued,

"You can throw it away. This has been in my pocket for about an hour. This is a model, end of first trimester, can I give it to you? You can do whatever you want with it, throw it away. This is the size, weight, probably approximate squishiness of an actual fetus at twelve weeks. No one can tell me that this is not a life. No one can tell me that you can tear its limbs from its body. Nobody. And if we had a window there, in front of the womb, nobody would choose abortion." 19

I do not think this should be held to be typical of Penn for Life, because this was the only time in not just interviews but six months of sporadic fieldwork that I was being asked to change my own views on abortion. At the same time, this is a plain account of what happened; I set out to study the pro-life rhetoric of abortion's harm on women, and still a fetus was put into my hands.

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19 Interview, April 6th, 2015.
Chapter Three: Pro-woman, Pro-life Discourse

In this chapter I will analyze David Reardon’s landmark book, ‘Making Abortion Rare: A Healing Strategy for a Divided Nation,’ as well as articles from Life Site News and Life News that illustrate the key rhetorical points of woman-centered pro-life rhetoric. Woman-centered anti-abortion arguments respond directly to pro-choice arguments, demonstrating a keen familiarity with them. They have been developed expressly to appeal to sway the ‘mushy middle,’ those who are undecided about abortion. A combination of Christian and secular evidence is used to support this argument, which still relies heavily on beliefs about fetal personhood. Some of the ways of framing abortion as harmful to women include emphasizing coerced abortion and sex-selective abortion, which fit into a larger context of human rights used to oppose abortion. In defining themselves as pro-woman actors, pro-life advocates also reclaim 19th century feminists who opposed abortion and defend their own contemporary pro-life women actors.

Written in 1996, ‘Making Abortion Rare’ addresses a pro-life audience to give a broader outline of the reasons to adopt a woman-centered pro-life framework. I have chosen to analyze this book because Reardon has been one of the main pioneers of using woman-centered strategy. So while his particular viewpoints should not be taken to represent those of every pro-woman, pro-life activist, it is relevant to frame an analysis of woman-centered pro-life work in the context of one of its loudest voices, which has also met with its fair share of criticism from within the pro-life movement.
Reardon is a key figure in woman-centered pro-life work, and one of the first to emphasize Post-Abortion Syndrome; in 1988, David Reardon, founded the Eliott Institute to conduct research studies on the purported harmful effects of abortion to women’s physical and psychological health. In his first book, ‘Aborted Women: Silent No More,’ Reardon underscored the importance of post-abortion work in building the pro-life movement, advocating for recovery groups for women who have had abortions. The Eliott Institute has three full-time staff members to date.

The development of a theory of Post-Abortion Syndrome in public health has been integral to what Reva Siegal calls the woman-protective anti-abortion argument, or WPAA.

“Whereas PAS grew up in therapeutic and mobilizing relationships in which abortion-hurts-women argument had important strategic functions...as a political discourse designed to rebut feminist, pro-choice claims, WPAA came to internalize elements of the arguments it sought to counter—fusing the public health, trauma, and survivors idiom of PAS with language of the late-twentieth-century feminist and abortion-rights movement” (Siegel 2008: 1669).

‘Making Abortion Rare’ also lays out a strategy for how Post-Abortion Syndrome can be mobilized into legislation and larger campaign that seeks to limit abortion on the grounds that it harms women. Reardon’s strategy hinges on four main discursive strengths: receptivity to women’s rights, patient’s rights, legal action for medical malpractice to bankrupt “abortionists,” and providing politicians and leaders with a new reason that conforms to liberal logic to oppose abortion (Reardon, 133). In addition to legislation and direct services that fall into these four categories, Reardon also proposes funding a fully staffed ‘Post-Abortion Healing and Research Foundation’ to supplement woman-centered work being done by other pro-life organizations.
In “Making Abortion Rare,” Reardon is largely concerned with convincing pro-lifers of the necessity of woman-centered services and arguments. He writes in the introduction, “many pro-life leaders, and certainly many more grassroots activists, are far more comfortable with the familiar “defend the baby” arguments. One reason is that they do not fully understand the strategic importance of the pro-woman approach. The bulk of this book addresses this concern. A second reason arises from the feeling they have that the pro-woman approach involves a shift away from the moral center of our argument.” (Reardon, 4). In Chapter One, “Remaining True to Ourselves,” Reardon acknowledges skepticism among pro-life leaders that employing use of woman-centered argument detracts from what should be the exclusive moral focus of opposing abortion, the life of the fetus. Those who employ woman-centered argument posit women’s interests, rights, and health as inherently tied to the fetus’, so the strategy remains true to the core of the pro-life argument: it arises from the conviction that abortion is wrong because the fetus is a human life and is used in conjunction with this original argument.

Reardon both believes abortion is harmful to women and believes framing it as such is vital to the goals of the pro-life movement. Thus, ‘pro-woman, pro-life’ rhetoric is both a strategic move and also a genuinely held belief.²⁰ Reardon claims that the middle majority would have to support measures like providing women information about fetal development and clinic safety regulation because they are only in women’s best interests. "If the demand for such reforms is articulated in a voice of nonjudgmental concern for

²⁰Reardon sees post-abortion healing as key to the success of his strategy for several reasons. “In helping post-aborted women and men to move beyond denial, resentment, and shame, we will also be helping them to become active witnesses for the sanctity of life. This is a good end in and of itself. But it is also good for the Church and the pro-life movement” (Reardon, 102).
women, the middle majority’s defensiveness will completely dissipate” (Reardon, 27). I suggest that the recent turn towards employing this language of social justice to oppose abortion demonstrates the degree to which any group must defend their actions within a secular liberal discourse of human rights, including women’s rights.

Frame Extensions

Woman-protective anti-abortion arguments arose because of the limited influence of arguments centered on fetal personhood. Reardon says of the pro-life position that

“The central argument was, and continues to be, that the unborn child’s right to life must supersede any lesser rights or desires of the child’s mother…this traditional pro-life strategy has been successful at motivating like-minded people to volunteer, to vote pro-life, and to donate to the cause. But it has failed in its attempt to swing the middle majority of Americans—those who are simultaneously both anti-abortion and pro-choice. The hearts of the middle majority are hardened toward the unborn because they are focused on the needs and autonomy of women. To gain their support, we must talk about the people whom they are chiefly concerned about: women.” (Reardon, 131).

The reason that Reardon and other pro-life activists embrace this rhetorical shift is because they found their original argument ineffective. Rose argues that the pro-woman anti-abortion framework employs both the language of women’s’ rights and science to assert that abortion harms women. She sees this rhetorical

\[21\] Reardon writes that “accepting the fact that the middle majority’s concerns are primarily focused on the woman is a prerequisite to developing a successful pro-woman/pro-life strategy. Rather than trying to reduce public sympathy for women, we want to increase it and align it with our own outrage at how women are being victimized. By increasing public empathy for the suffering of women who have had abortions, by emphasizing the fact that women are being exploited by the abortion industry and coerced by others into unwanted abortions, and by focusing on expanding the legal rights of women to seek redress, we are aligning our interests with those of the middle majority in a way which advances our political agenda” (27).
shift—what she calls a ‘frame extension’—as targeting women who have had abortions, the ‘mushy middle’, and policymakers to oppose abortion. Frame extensions occur in social movements when their current operative mode proves ineffective or new opportunities arise (Rose 2011, Tarrow 1998). These rhetorical and strategic shifts may cause tension within the movement or reinvigorate, or some combination of the two (Rose 2011, Benford and Snow 2000, Zald 1997). This frame shift necessitates or has engendered different conceptions of women with unplanned pregnancies. Rose analyzes newsletters from the Eliott Institute, the pro-life research institute founded by David Reardon, and compares these to older pro-life organizations like Focus on the Family to understand how the argument has shifted. Pro-life arguments in the decade after Roe v. Wade are more likely to pit the interests of the pregnant woman against those of the fetus, depicting the former as calculating murderer and the latter as innocent victim (Roth 2000, Rose 2011). This is a major shift from post-Roe anti-abortion rhetoric, which posited the fetus as in an oppositional relationship with the woman: “we must reject every ideology which frames the abortion issue in terms of a mother versus her child. We are both pro-woman and pro-child” (Reardon, 11). Reardon advocates “the pro-woman sandwich”

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22 The rise of woman-protective antiabortion argument might also serve as a case study for how social movements revise their arguments to gain the broadest support. Siegel’s analysis of social movements finds that “rarely if ever do advocates succeed in persuading officials to adopt a movement’s views unmodified. To earn the confidence of the people, advocates must counter opposing arguments and are often moved to revise their claims in the quest to persuade. The quest to persuade disciplines insurgent claims about the Constitution’s meaning, and may lead advocates to express convictions in terms persuasive to others, to internalize elements of counterarguments and to engage in other implicit forms of convergence and compromise” (Siegel 2008: 1650). I am interested in whether or how this shift has shaped pro-life praxis. Because Siegel’s area of focus is woman-protective rhetoric and the sorts of anti-abortion legislation it produces, she does not discuss the impact it has on grassroots activism, which I will discuss in the next chapter.
approach, which opens and closes any anti-abortion point with expressed compassion for women (26).

Reardon’s ‘pro-woman/pro-life’ strategy realizes the negative effect of using moralistic language for women who have abortions and suggests a more sympathetic approach. Reardon admonishes Christians and pro-life activists for discriminating against women “pregnant out of wedlock,” admitting that the stigma they have created “this condemning attitude shamed, and continues to shame, many women into seeking abortions. For this, we too share in the guilt of abortion” (Reardon 7).

Reardon also suggests that the pro-woman, pro-life approach is a solution to one of the major issues dividing the pro-life movement: legislation that bans abortion except in the cases of pregnancy by rape, incest, or that endangers the life of the woman. Reardon discusses the tension between ‘pragmatists who support legislation that permits abortion in the case of rape, incest, or pregnancy that endangers the health of the woman and those who only support legislation that outlaws abortion under any circumstances. The ‘pragmatists’ believe that this legislation would have broader support and thus is good placeholder until abortion under all circumstances can be made illegal; the ‘purists’ believe that it actually legitimizes the pro-choice position by legitimizing some reasons for abortion. Reardon maintains that the pro-woman approach is more achievable because of its broad appeal, but would also provide justification for opposing abortion even under those circumstances, citing himself in “Aborted Women: Silent no More” for the
unsourced statistic that women who have abortions for these reasons are the most likely
to have psychological issues afterwards. 23

Although the WPAA has been increasingly employed since the late 80’s, it may
be used in conjunction with the original fetal-protective argument (Rose 2011). WPAA
arose because, and is used in conjunction with, the belief that the fetus is a human life—
Reardon acknowledges that this argument will not work on people who believe that even
if the fetus constitutes a life, it is trumped by women’s rights.

“Since the middle majority are open to the concerns of women, they will
empathize with the grief of post-aborted women, and, in so doing, they will
be drawn into implicitly acknowledging the unborn for whom the tears are
wept...in the final analysis, the humanity of the unborn child is revealed to be
the only explanation for why abortion causes women so much grief and
suffering” (Reardon, 9).

Even the most pro-woman anti-abortion rhetoric is founded in fetal personhood.

Abortion, Reardon is saying, does impact women negatively, but the "only explanation"
is the fetal life they have killed.

The Language of Women’s Rights and the Middle Majority: Responding to Feminist
Critiques of the Pro-life Movement

In his introduction, Reardon states that his goal is “to educate the public about
how women are seriously injured and exploited by abortion”. The purpose of his book,
then, like the bulk of Reardon’s pro-life activism, revolves around convincing the middle
majority that abortion actually harms women physically and psychologically, so even

23 This particular point, like the overall argument for Post-Abortion Syndrome, overlooks the impact of
structural oppression on mental health. Survivors of sexual violence (high rates of mental health issues)
regardless of their pregnancy status, but rather because they are survivors of sexual violence.
from the perspective of women’s rights it only makes sense to oppose it. This frame
extension arose from familiarity with feminist arguments, including resurrecting late
nineteenth century feminists who opposed abortion. Only through paying attention to the
strength in the opponent’s argument, and its appeal to a middle majority largely
ambivalent about abortion, could pro-life leaders have devised this strategy.

Reardon differentiates, for example, between people who are ‘truly’ pro-choice
and ‘pro-abortionists’, challenging pro-life activists to determine between the two rather
than gloss everyone who supports abortion rights as pro-abortion. Only top Planned
Parenthood executives at Zero Growth Population genuinely believe abortion to be a net
good, he says; most people who are pro-choice admit that it is not ideal but is a necessary
ever (30). Reardon believes that the pro-woman strategy could appeal to “ambivalent
feminists”, a subgroup he characterizes as pro-choice but not pro-abortion—people who
wholly support legal access to abortion, might not themselves have an abortion, and
support women’s ability to make their own decisions about abortion’s morality, including
coming to the conclusion that it is unethical (25).

Swaying the Middle Majority

Siegel provides a telling example of the calculating move to frame abortion as
harmful to women. She quotes Jack Willke, head of the National Right to Life
Committee, who in the years shortly after Roe V. Wade had developed fetal personhood
arguments employed by pro-life movement. However, after doing market research in the
early 1990s, Willke became convinced that the pro-life movement could only convince
the middle majority to oppose abortion by speaking the language of women’s rights—by combatting the pro-choice movement in the terms of their own argument.

“We did the market research and came up with some surprising findings. We found out that while three-fourths or more of the people in the United States now admitted this was a child who was killed, two-thirds of the same people felt that it was all right to give the woman the right to kill. We found out that the basic problem in the minds of the general public was that, by their own evaluation, most were undecided on this issue. They felt that pro-life people were not compassionate to women and that we were only “fetus lovers” who abandoned the mother after the birth. They felt that we were violent, that we burned down clinics and shot abortionists. We were viewed as religious zealots who were not too well educated. Clearly, their image of us was one that had been fabricated and delivered to them in the print and broadcast media by a liberal press.

After considerable research, we found that the answer to their “choice” argument was a relatively simple straightforward one. We had to convince the public that we were compassionate to women. Accordingly, we test marketed variations of this theme. Thus was born the slogan “Love Them Both…”” (as quoted by Siegel 2008: 1671).

Willke’s statement demonstrates a familiarity not only with feminist praxis but also criticisms of the pro-life movement. The frame shift attempts to solve these issues by responding to these criticisms on their own terms: in the language of women’s rights. Much like the “I See Two” campaign, woman-centered arguments do not replace the fetus with women as the subjects of primary concern, they instead demonstrate concern for both, and their interests are seen as shared.

*Opposing Femicide and Coerced, Unwanted, and Unsafe Abortions*
Part of the strategy to show that it is ‘pro-choice’ to oppose abortion is to highlight cases in which women are forced into having abortions (See appendix for further discussion of forced abortion and femicide). Reardon is correct in assuming that opposing coerced abortion corresponds with feminist goals about women’s agency. Forced abortions in China, then, are used as ‘evidence’ of the reality of forced abortions everywhere in the world (Reardon, 78).

Pro-life actors use the pro-choice talking point that women don’t want to have abortions but circumstances compel them into the procedure to support his anti-abortion argument. “In describing the despair which leads women to abort, Frederica Mathewes-Green of Feminists for Life of America gives us this compelling word-picture: “No woman wants an abortion as she wants an ice cream cone or a Porsche. She wants an abortion as an animal caught in a trap wants to gnaw off its own leg.” This quote is so powerfully accurate that it has even been reprinted by Planned Parenthood. Why? Because pro-abortionists have long wanted to diffuse the notion that women abort for selfish or casual reasons. They want the public to sympathize with the desperation of women seeking abortions because they want to convert sympathy for women into support for abortion” (Reardon, 105). Reardon, however, interprets this reluctance to have abortions as ‘proof’ that women think it is immoral but feel compelled into the procedure. “All too often, pro-lifers have tended to characterize aborting women as selfish and immoral. A far more accurate generalization would be to portray aborting women as confused and driven by despair” (Reardon, xiv).24 This relates back to Reardon’s

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24 Reardon offers a list of statistics, sourced to his first book, ‘Aborted Women, Silent No More,’ and Mary Zimmerman’s Passage Through Abortion (pp. 62-70), although no specific study is cited to support them. It is unlikely, given the lack of evidence, that these statistics are accurate. Even assuming that they are, these speak to the need to look at structural inequalities that contribute to high abortion rates,
suggestion to other pro-life activists to embrace women with unplanned pregnancies and cease to judge women who have had abortions. 25

An article by Maria Vitale Gallagher, who participated in the #iSEETWO campaign, demonstrates that the argument about feticide ties in the centrality of fetal personhood and concern for women’s wellbeing. She writes, “the decision to abort a baby is not a reproductive decision. It is a decision to end the life of an innocent human being—often, a girl human being, who will never be able to have a child of her own after her own life has been snuffed out.” The specification of the gender of the fetus—gender, here, implicitly falling into an even binary that can be determined in utero—is used to support Gallagher’s argument that abortion harms women, including unborn women. She points out that this ruptures the whole ‘natural’ order of procreation and nurturance; every aborted female fetus is the loss of not just a human, not just a woman, but a mother. This also ties in to framing of abortion as harmful to society at large; here it disrupts generation after generation.

Gallagher’s second point cites the unsourced statistic that “as many as 60 percent of abortions are coerced.” This, she says, means that “these women are not making a free will decision.” She refutes the foremost pro-choice argument, which is that women

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explaining, for example, why abortion rates are high among low-income women and women of color. “40 percent of women who experienced post-abortion problems were still hoping to discover some alternative to abortion when they went to the abortion clinic for counseling; over 80 percent say they would have carried to term under better circumstances or with the support of loved ones; between 30 and 60 percent of all women having abortions have a positive desire to carry the pregnancy to term and keep their babies; approximately 70 percent have a negative moral view of abortion and are choosing against their consciences because of outside pressures; over 75 percent would not have sought an illegal abortion—presumably out of concern for safety; and over 60 percent report having felt “forced” to have the abortion by others or by circumstances” (Reardon, xiii).
should be granted the opportunity to make their own reproductive decisions, by saying that women are being forced into having abortions. She links this argument to wider WPAA by adding that “other people are making the decision for them, subjecting them to the possibility of bodily injury, emotional damage, and a lifetime of regret.” This brings to mind Siegals’ critique of WPAA—that it is first argued that abortion is coerced, and then says that even if women do voluntarily choose to have an abortion, they should not have done so.

Christian and Secular Reasoning

The pro-life argument has become increasingly hybridized not only in its main arguments against abortion, but also in the evidence used to support those arguments. The pro-woman, pro-life approach is characterized by a combination of conservative Christian ideas about gender roles and secular scientific research; the Bible is as likely to be referenced as a psychological study.

In a January 2015 article on Life News, Bilger, who is the Education Director for the Pennsylvania Pro-Life Federation, introduces the recently started #iSEETWO campaign, a collaboration between Focus on the Family and other pro-life organizations. Like the revision of the March for Life logo to include a mother and a child, the #iSEETWO campaign’s goal is to bring ensure that those who oppose abortion are centering the experiences of women and mothers, and that those who support abortion acknowledge the fetus as a separate person. Also telling is the specific people who are
asked to participate in the campaign: a former abortion center director, a pro-life lawyer, former pro-choice journalist, pro-life doctor – in other words, a cross-section of liberal, secular pro-life activists in progressive, predominantly pro-choice fields, as well as Dr. Alveda King, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.’s niece and prolife leader. 

Maria Gallagher, a former pro-choice journalist, describes her conversion:

“...as I began to put my journalistic skills to work, conducting more in-depth research, I discovered some startling facts—that a heart starts beating only 24 days after conception...that brain waves can be detected a mere 43 days after a child is conceived. I came to see that life must have a logical beginning, not an arbitrary one based on subjective feelings. Reason led me to the pro-life movement; careful analytical thinking keeps me there...Where once I saw one individual, now ISEEITWO — mother and child, connected by a sacred bond that no human being has a right to sever.”

Gallagher’s statement epitomizes the new hybrid pro-life argument. She, like the other subjects of the campaign, is a pro-life woman; in addition, her career and worldview are depicted as firmly grounded in secular logic—“reason led me to the pro-life movement, careful analytical thinking keeps me there.” She was introduced to what were presented as impermeable facts of fetal development, yet the “bond” between “mother and child” is rendered “sacred.” Scientific fact is presented to support a spiritual truth.

The belief that faith is compatible with science – indeed, that God speaks through science—is present in other pro-life advocates’ framing of their use of research.” For example, Joel Brind, an endocrinologist who has contributed anti-abortion research,

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26 Beyond the scope of this paper is the role of “conversion” stories figuring in pro-life and pro-choice movement. Each side uses narratives from people who formerly held opposing views as ‘proof’ that their respective position is correct.

wrote that after converting from Judaism to Christianity, “With a new belief in a meaningful universe, I felt compelled to use science for its noblest, life-saving purpose.”

Chamberlain discusses some of the practices common to these scientists, such as repeating the same claims in different publications to make it appear there is a larger body of research than there is. Brind, for example, authored nine articles in The National Right to Life News linking abortion to breast cancer. This research may also be used to found research institutes and advocacy groups that generate more studies that support the original point. Then again, while the reports showing there is nothing to suggest the link between abortion and breast cancer, for example, come from the largest and most reputable institutes in their field, no scientific research is ever fully free from bias and social and cultural norms (for example, Martin 1991).

Reardon’s book is replete with unsourced statistics and claims about abortion, recalling Surgeon General Koop’s criticism of woman-centered anti-abortion strategy—that there was no conclusive evidence from reliable studies that showed abortion harms women. This combination of tactics is meant to appeal to the widest audience possible—

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28 What critics call ‘quasi-scientific’ or B.A.D., Biased, Agenda-Driven science, is also used to argue against contraceptive availability. Chamberlain quotes from David Hagar, an OB/GYN who opposes Emergency Contraception (EC) on the grounds that it constitutes an abortion, submitted a minority report to the Food and Drug Administration (FDA). Hagar said of the it, “God took that information, and He used it through this minority report to influence the decision.

These studies do not necessarily pass without pushback from other scientists. Chamberlain writes, “In a 2004 letter to the editors of the Journal of Anxiety Disorders, two researchers critiqued a paper by Reardon and his associates Phyllis Coleman and Jesse Cougle. “We believe that Cougle, et al., operate with strong political views regarding abortion, and unfortunately their biases appear to have resulted in serious methodological flaws in the analysis published in your journal,” they wrote. Of Reardon and his colleagues they added: “All are involved in building a literature to be used in efforts to restrict access to abortion.”
non-Christians in the ‘mushy middle’ and religious leaders who are already active in the pro-life movement.

Reardon employs a combination of conservative Christian ideas about gender roles and the family and secular scientific studies to support his argument. Many of the studies do not meet scientific standards for research. In the first chapter, for example, under the sub-heading “The Natural Order of Things,” he argues that the wellbeing of mothers is inextricable from the wellbeing of their children. “In God’s ordering of creation, it is only the mother who can nurture her unborn child. All that the rest of us can do, then, is to nurture the mother. To help a child, we must help the child’s mother” (Reardon, 4). It is taken as self-evident that the maternal bond between women and children is intrinsic to women’s nature; Reardon employs gender-essentialist argument that conflates women with mothers. However, he also cites the testimony of a pro-life psychiatrist, Dr. Julius Fogel, a former pro-choice activist and obstetrician who performed thousands of abortions that “destroying a pregnancy” also harms women (5). This combination of Christian-rooted gender essentialist views and secular social science is also present in, for example, some defenses of creationism that employ scientific research.29 The third piece of supporting evidence he claims is a quote from Pope John Paul II, further underscoring that the foundation of conservative Christian thought and actors in the pro-life movement.”30

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30 Pope says pro-life movement need to become “courageously ‘pro-woman,’ promoting a choice that is truly in favor of women. It is precisely the woman, in fact, who pays the highest price, not only for her motherhood, but even more for its destruction, for the suppression of the life of the child who has been conceived. The only honest stance...is that of radical solidarity with the woman.” (As quoted by Reardon: 6, John Paul II, Crossing the Threshold of Hope (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1994), 207.).
Humanist pro-life actors like members of Penn for Life might espouse some of the same anti-abortion rhetoric—that abortion leads to breast cancer, addiction, suicide, etc but grounds these in scientific studies. The pro-life movement’s arguments become increasingly hybridized, opposing abortion in terms not only religious and moral, but also secular liberal, from the position of women’s rights, public health, racial justice.

Chamberlain raises an important issue, which is the overall inaccessibility of scientific writing, which has the effect of implying authority to an audience that does not have the tools to fact-check its claims. “It reinforces the notion that its content is too difficult for the average person to grasp. While it increases the value of science and the statue of scientists in our culture, the necessary posture of uncertainty renders the process vulnerable to papers that appear to challenge that uncertainty but which embody bias.” That science should be treated as the word of truth—the scientist a sort of prophet—makes all research-based claims sound persuasive and authoritative. This relates to the imperative use of scientific and liberal humanist discourses in opposing abortion and also in building support behind any viewpoint, a point which I will return to later.

Conservative Christian thought remains a pole of pro-life rhetoric. Reardon’s book is replete with explicitly Christian references—using the Bible, the Pope, and other Christian leaders as hard evidence, and linking the fight to end abortion to evangelical endeavors. He writes that using scientific research is part of a larger strategy to publicize “God’s moral law” (11). “Research and education about the dangers of abortion, then, are not just grist for political reform. They are also leaven for spiritual reform. As people become more aware of all the hardships abortion causes to women, men, siblings, and society, they will begin to respect the wisdom of God’s law. They will begin to think,
“Maybe all these religious folk weren’t so crazy after all. If they were right about this, when every other power in society said they were wrong, maybe they’re right about other things, too.” (Reardon, 11). I will discuss the tension over the evangelical aims of Crisis Pregnancy Centers in my fourth chapter.31

Combined Interested of Woman and Fetus

Another common aspect of woman-centered anti-abortion arguments is the identification of women’s interests with those of the fetus, and the valuation of both. In the "#Iseetwo" campaign, for example, the audience is asked to “Help us remind people that when we look at a pregnant woman we see two precious individuals who deserve equal rights and protections.”

Other quotes from the #iSEETWO campaign illustrate how pro-woman rhetoric is collapsed into fetal personhood argument. Anne O’Connor, a lawyer, writes that “women don’t need a fabricated right to terminate a new life within them. That’s not freedom to choose – that’s oppression. As a lawyer, #iSEETWO.” Emily, for example, the pre-medical student who is interested in bioethics and who derives her pro-life position from that as well as other places, would be exactly the sort of person featured in the “I see two” campaign: an educated woman in a social science / natural science field for whom secular thought is a large part of her worldview and views on abortion.

This framing was also common among Penn for Life members. When asked what role she saw that women play in the pro-life movement, Emily responded, “We believe in
women's rights. We also believe in the rights of the unborn fetus." She mentioned sex-selective abortion as another reason to oppose abortion, and continued,

"when you're for women's rights, you're also for the rights of the child. Women's rights is grouped with children's rights, when you see initiatives like WHO or the UN, children are a vulnerable population, even when prolife people look at women's rights, we look at women's rights as also including fetus's rights, and they have to be in conjunction with each other."32

Anti-abortion argument and the Language of Social Justice

Social movements are in a constant state of flux; the use of an argument reflects the form of reasoning most likely to appeal to the largest audience. Whether it succeeds or not is highly variable. This is why the frame shift is important—and why it has only been greeted with significant friction within pro-life movement. For the pro-life movement to center its stance in a secular discourse of human rights is an admission of proof that Christian or religious doctrine is no longer sufficient as a persuasive argument—that it needs to be supplemented with the hard facts of psychological studies and the testimony of the (at least some) of the women whose bodies are in question. It may, and often does, serve as a guidepost for right and wrong on abortion and other issues, but the word of the Bible is not the exclusive guidepost for ethics. Perhaps people should treat it as the only source of truth, but the tacit agreement is that the Bible alone cannot reach 'the mushy middle’ to change their minds on abortion.

32 Interview, February 20th, 2015.
In many ways, the fetal personhood argument fits into the liberal discourse of human rights that surrounds other social issues.\textsuperscript{33} For example, there is the common refrain that issues of oppression harm not only the most marginalized but people at every level of society. Thus, the pro-life rhetorical shift is a part of a much broader frame shift—of American morality as a whole. For an issue or cause to gain footing, it must be defensible in at least a scrim of secular human rights or social justice. Liberal democratic conceptions of human rights supplant religion as the standard for morality. This does not mean that it may not employ other modes of reasoning or rationales, but that it must also include this.\textsuperscript{34}

I suggest that the recent turn towards employing this language of social justice to oppose abortion demonstrates the degree to which any group must defend their actions within a secular liberal discourse of human rights, including women's rights. From one perspective, this means that a surface-level concern for women’s rights does not necessarily correlate with real action in orientation of protecting and expanding those rights; on the other hand, it implies that there is a tacit agreement that these are widely accepted rights. That pro-life activists should decry forced abortion, for example, both expresses a concern for women’s agency and conceals an effort to limit that agency.

\textsuperscript{33} The huge difference, as those who support abortion access would argue, is that the fetus is not a full-fledged person with rights that should trump the person in whose womb it resides.

\textsuperscript{34} Specific examples of pro-life discourse employing rights-based language—bumper sticker: “Equal rights for unborn women”—even though key pro-life leaders—Phyllis Schlafly, (others), have opposed the Equal Rights Amendment (on the grounds that?). Much discourse around forced and coerced abortion in China and India as well as in the US (appendix). Lots of ‘Right to Know’ legislation and rhetoric about ‘informed consent’—what this translates into is bills and statutes for required minimum waiting periods for abortions, requirements for doctors to inform patients that fetus is whole separate human being, ultrasound requirements, etc.
In ‘Women’s Rights and Pro-Life Perspective Go Hand in Hand,’ Andrew Bair opens the article with a discussion of the importance of International Women’s Day, several days before the article was published on Life News. Bair sets the scene for fetal rights by using the example of women’s rights, writing “when basic human rights are denied to one group in a society, that violation affects society as a whole.” This also echoes the pro-life discourse around the tie between abortion and what they see as the moral bankruptcy of modern United States. Campaign with signs and statements to illustrate their point that “abortion harms men”, “abortion hurts fathers”, “abortion hurts grandmothers,” etc. Bair further lays out the scene for arguing for men’s role in the pro-life movement—in a way that parallels arguments for white involvement in anti-racist work—by suggesting that “both men and women should take the time to contemplate on the status of women.”

For example, the student who introduced Bart Stupak encouraged the audience to attend a symposium on “social justice” after the talk. 35 No more specifics about the contents of the symposium, such as what sorts of issues would be covered, were given. As evidenced by students’ follow-up questions, this was an event that drew a crowd with diverse political beliefs; one person asked a question about ending racism and police brutality; another questioned the political usefulness but slipping morals of allowing for abortion in the case of rape, incest, or endangering the health of the woman. Nonetheless, it was offered as something of interest to anyone in the audience.

The framework of human rights incorporates the discourse of racial justice as well. Bair closes his article by quoting Martin Luther King that “injustice somewhere is a

35 Field Notes, December 4th, 2014.
threat to justice everywhere.” He continues, “it was not only African Americans who were called to condemn slavery. It was not only women who were called to reject gender discrimination…our laws must respect the lives of all people, including both women and their unborn children.” WPAA, then, is often grounded in this larger framework of social justice.

But rather than using a lens of human rights to think about nuance of case-by-case basis or larger structures of oppression, human rights is employed as a different, but no less universalizing and absolutist, framework for morality. In this way it is not markedly different from a conservative Christian worldview. 36

Targeting Abortion Providers

One of the keys to Reardon’s argument hinges on legal and medical standards that doctors provide patients with information about health risks before they consent to any procedure; because abortion is harmful to women, he reasons, doctors must inform them of all attendant risks. In keeping with Reardon’s urging of pro-lifers to empathize with women with unplanned pregnancies and women who have had abortions, and the harmonious relationship between women and fetuses, doctors and clinics emerge as the new enemy. This focus on doctor’s responsibility uses the language of patients’ rights to

36 For example, rather than raise questions about for-profit abortion providers to question a for-profit healthcare system (?) – should hospitals or health insurance agencies all be for-profit? – or the larger framework of capitalism and the existence of for-profit service providers in general—the critique of wealthy abortionists and ‘abortion mill’ is stops short of critiquing any other for-profit enterprise. If pro-life actors are truly critical of profit-based enterprises by virtue of valuing income over the treatment of its clients and workers, one would expect a much broader set of social issues for pro-life actors to take up: living wage, ; would expect that all pro-life t-shirts and accessories are produced under ethical work conditions.
shift culpability for abortion to medical providers. This means that Reardon’s proposed legislation focuses on regulating and criminalizing abortion providers rather than women (see appendix for further discussion of legal applications of WPAA). As part of this effort to demonize abortion clinics, they are criticized as being for-profit operations.

Halva-Neubauer and Ziegler analyze legal and rhetorical frameworks since the U.S. Supreme Court’s 1992 decision in Planned Parenthood of Southeastern Pennsylvania v. Casey (503 U.S. 833) argue that pro-life discourse increasingly posits abortion as harmful to both the fetus and the pregnant woman, shifting blame onto abortion providers rather than women. Rather than posit their relationship as oppositional, as in the first two decades after Roe, the woman is figured as a victim. This argument also supports traditional gender role perceptions of women as mothers “by nature.” Halva-Neubauer and Ziegler argue that Casey was a landmark assertion of the state’s interest in protecting fetuses (103). Halva-Neubauer and Ziegler that language of even fetal personhood arguments post-Casey were less anti-woman (107).

The pro-life frame shift means that women who have abortions can no longer be cast as the enemy in anti-abortion rhetoric. This means that the only party left to take the blame is the “abortion industry,” which is framed as for-profit. “To truly reframe the political debate to our advantage, it is not enough to simply highlight the part of the frame touching on the rights of the unborn. Instead, we must expand the frame to include more parties, so that we can convincingly show that it is we who are defending the authentic rights of both women and children. In short, we must insist that the proper frame for the abortion issue is not women’s rights versus unborn children’s rights, but rather women’s and children’s rights versus the schemes of exploiters and the profits of
the abortion industry” (Reardon, 33). This maligning of abortion providers implies a critique of market rationality and capitalism at large that is absent from conservative Christian activism in any sector except for the abortion industry.37

Gallagher ends the article by writing, “women are at the heart of the pro-life movement. They always have been and they always will be. So, let’s get to work, ladies, and show the kingpins of the abortion industry that we can, and must, be heard. “ To complete Gallagher’s argument, an exemplary iteration of pro-woman, pro-life rhetoric, is the figuration of abortion providers as a masculinized, for-profit sphere—“kingpins” implies masculine, industry links to pro-life arguments about abortion for profit.

The language used to target abortion providers also employs the discourse of women’s rights, particularly the right to safety and redress. Reardon’s recommendations for ‘safety’ requirements for abortion providers include requiring abortion providers to have medical malpractice insurance in the three-to-five million range, extending the statute of limitations, extensive documentation of doctor’s recommendation for abortion, and screening for high-risk factors. Reardon suggests federal legislation, which he calls the Full Disclosure Act, that would include mandatory notification of side effects of abortion, “Women who are denied their civil right to full disclosure would be entitled to a compensatory award of not less than $200,000 and not more than $2,000,000 without having to prove any other injury…” also suggest that this could be used to monitor the organizations that receive federal funding, “the grant recipient would be solely responsible for all amounts awarded to a plaintiff for violation of the full disclosure requirements [and violation] would automatically make the offending agency, and an
parent agency, ineligible for federal funds under all funding Titles, for any programs, for a period of ten years” (Reardon, 95).
Chapter 4: Centering Women in Grassroots Pro-life Activism

In this chapter I will discuss the changes accompanying grassroots pro-life activism as the movement internalizes elements of feminist rhetoric. Like Kelly, I argue that centering the experiences of women who have had abortions has changed the overall strategy of the movement, shifting direct action away from sidewalk counselling and sit-ins and towards post-abortion healing and crisis pregnancy centers (2012). Reardon suggests that the pro-woman framework necessitates taking leadership from pro-life women, particularly women who have had abortions. Indeed, to demonstrate that they are truly pro-woman, the pro-life movement will need to continue to transfer primary leadership to women and become involved in issues other than abortion.

Rather than seeking to decrease number of abortions through legal means, crisis pregnancy centers appeal to women’s agency to decrease the number of abortions. Laws that criminalize or put restrictions on abortion providers bypass the fact of women’s agency. These assume that the only actors are the clinics and the state. Crisis Pregnancy Centers, on the other hand, take as a given that women have decision-making capacities and seek to minimize the net number of abortions by appealing to women’s individual decisions.

This relates to some pro-life actors’ goals of ensuring women do not choose abortion, even if it is a legal option. Reardon writes that “the political goal of making abortion illegal has always been a truncated vision. Our real desire has always been to create a culture where abortion is not just illegal, but is unthinkable” (Reardon, xv, emphasis in original). The strategy is reliant on larger cultural and ideological shifts as well as legislation. Reardon advocates gradual legislative impediments to abortion rather
than an attempt to overturn Roe V. Wade completely (37). Legislation and grassroots activism are not mutually exclusive; they may overlap in working towards the same goal and using the same rhetoric, but the relationship of these two spheres to the state, the local, and the individual is different. 38

Finally, I consider the position of pro-life women, who make up the majority of CPC volunteers. Women active in social movements that appear to limit their own autonomy have long been subjects of interest for the questions they raise about agency (Bachetta & Power 2002, Klatch, Kelly, Chong). Pro life women must be acknowledged as agentile; at the same time, their actions appear to contradict their own best interests. I will argue that pro-life women activists are agentile within the constraints of their own ideology. It allows women to gain leadership positions in communities where they might not be assured it; they become respected authorities on a subject. When the pro-life stance is related to a larger traditional family values belief system that posits women as mothers, it is within those constraints that women can be agentile. I build on Mahmood’s proposal that we consider survival rather than agency and explore further how belief structures reality.

38 The shift is far from decisive; I am not arguing that all forms of pro-life activism are now woman-centered. In the same way that woman-centered rhetoric is controversial among pro-life leaders, key actors also debate what constitutes appropriate pro-life strategy. “Perhaps even more important to the direct action movement is the healing of post-aborted women and men. For example, in Washington, D.C., on January 23, 1989, a sit-in rescue was led by pro-life women, all of whom had themselves had abortions. The media censored the fact that these rescuers were all “dissatisfied customers.” But if, in their burgeoning numbers, the women and men who have recovered from post-abortion trauma should seek to emulate this type of protest to protect other women from the same fate, the courts and the press could not ignore this effort for long” (Reardon, 135). If the post-abortion movement centers on the ‘suffering’ of ‘post-abortive men’, there is no reason that leadership will shift towards pro-life women. However, I think it is unlikely that this would happen because of the keen understanding that the “middle majority” is more receptive to women as an authority on abortion.
Centering Pro-life Women and Reclaiming Feminism

Reardon suggests ‘reclaiming’ the identity of feminism for the pro-life cause, detailing the 19th century feminists “who were both pro-chastity and pro-life” (143).

Reardon invokes woman-centered anti-abortion argument from late nineteenth century (p. 14-15). Reardon also advocates for the language of liberal agency to the pro-life cause, and even goes so far as to write that “the only true feminist is a pro-life feminist” (Reardon, 145).

“...I believe we should also take back the terms “freedom of choice” and “reproductive freedom.” The pro-abortionists don’t have a copyright on these terms. We can and should use these terms to emphasize the fact that we are the ones who are really defending the right of women to make an informed choice; we are the ones who are defending the freedom of women to reproduce without fear of being coerced into unwanted abortions. For this reason, and others described below, I believe our pro-woman/pro-life legislation should be called the Freedom of Choice Act. We should openly battle for the privilege of defending the freedom of choice. (italics added, Reardon, 96-97)

Reardon continues,

“Some pro-life strategists dislike the idea of a pro-life bill called the Freedom of Choice Act because they fear it would only “confuse” grassroots supporters. But this confusion can easily be cleaned up through the network of pro-life publications...by calling our pro-woman bill the Freedom of Choice Act, we will actually be forcing the process through a momentary confusion which leads to greater clarity...

Furthermore, the symbol of “choice” has a lot of appeal to the middle majority, thanks to the millions of dollars spent on public relations by pro-abortionists. There is no reason why we should not be bold in capturing this banner for our own cause, especially given the form and intent of our bill, which truly does enhance choice...Finally, win or lose, by engaging in a public “wrestling match” over which side is representing freedom of choice for women, the middle majority will undergo a healthy disorientation, The clear-cut stereotypes which they have been fed by the media will be disrupted. The line of issues separating pro-abortionists from anti-abortionists will be confused. The banner of “choice” will become torn in two, with each side claiming ownership, and it will no longer be possible to lead the middle majority simply by advocating “choice”” (96-96).
Reardon is not the only one to suggest legislation titled to make it indistinguishable from pro-choice legislation. Bair ends his article by discussing bills proposed by elected pro-life women, such as the Women’s Right to Know Act, which he says “offers a woman the chance to view an ultrasound and observe the heartbeat of her unborn child prior to an abortion.” The bill, would have forced women to view an ultrasound, but Bair uses language that employs choice—“offers the chance.” Pure WPAA in that argues that women should be informed, assumes that women have abortions with no knowledge of what their decision entails.

Pro-Abortion Group Trashes Jonie Ernst as “Window Dressing:” Can’t be Pro-Woman Since She’s Pro-Life Steven Ertelt Ertelt mocks the pro-choice criticism of Ernst, writing that she “can’t possibly be pro-woman because she takes a pro-life view opposing abortions, which kill little girl babies and kill and injure the women having them.” The specification of the sex of the fetus as “little girl babies” is meant to demonstrate the hypocrisy of pro-choice feminism; those who claim to support women’s rights are actually responsible for killing “unborn women.” To drive the point home—perhaps for those readers who do not believe the fetus is a person, so its gender is irrelevant—Ertelt states the unfounded claim that abortion “kill[s] and injure[s] women.”

CPC’s as Form of Activism that Acknowledges Women’s Agency

Siegel quotes a 1992 Christianity Today that demonstrates a keen understanding of the strategic potential of crisis pregnancy centers in responding to common criticisms of pro-life activism. “Three complaints are made against the prolife movement: that it is
dominated by men, that it treats women’s tragic dilemmas judgmentally, and that it does
nothing to care for babies after they are born. The work of CPC’s overturns each of these
charges.”

Crisis pregnancy centers are pro-life, volunteer-run organizations that are intended to
convince women with unplanned pregnancies to choose to carry them to term. Activism
associated with CPC’s—including not only provision of direct services such as
counselling and ultrasound imaging but also fundraising and directorial positions—is the
largest form of pro-life activism in the United States (Munson 2008). There are about
2500 crisis pregnancy centers in the US, outnumbering the 1800 abortion providers two
to one (Belluck, 2013).

Crisis pregnancy centers are meant to provide support and assistance in carrying
unplanned pregnancies to term, and as such may provide such free direct services such as
GED training, adoption referrals, and in-kind donations for goods like diapers and baby
clothes. CPC’s are generally founded on Christian principles and may have an
evangelical mission as well. CPC’s may require some participation in Bible classes in

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40 Belluck, 2013: “Women who come in are constantly telling us, ‘Abortion seems to be my only
alternative and I think that’s the best thing to do,’ ” said Peggy Hartshorn, president of Heartbeat
International, which she described as a “Christ-centered” organization with 1,100 affiliates. “Centers
provide women with the whole choice.”

Cities like Austin, Baltimore and New York have tried regulating centers with ordinances requiring them to
post signs stating that they do not provide abortions or contraceptives, and disclosing whether medical
professionals are on-site. Except for San Francisco’s, the laws were blocked by courts or softened after
centers sued claiming free speech violations. Similar bills in five states floundered. Most legal challenges
to “Choose Life” license plates failed, although a North Carolina court said alternate views must be
offered.
exchange for use of free services, or provide Christian-centered activities through which women can earn points that can be put towards goods.41

Thirteen states directly fund Crisis Pregnancy centers, and another 27 offer “Choose Life” license plates, which raise funds for CPC’s. In 2011, Texas increased financing for the centers while cutting family planning money by two-thirds, and required abortion clinics to provide names of centers at least 24 hours before performing abortions. (Belluck: 2013). Crisis pregnancy centers have been criticized for spreading misinformation on abortion, including claiming that abortion has negative health consequences and leads to breast cancer, depression, and even suicide. If Post-Abortion Syndrome provides the literature, CPC’s provide the outlet or physical space associated with it. They have also been criticized for actively coercing women into giving their babies up for adoption.

The overall strategy of crisis pregnancy centers—of providing compassionate support for women with unplanned pregnancies but also making them better Christian

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41 In her study of how Christian activists negotiate compassion and endless giving with a desire for accountability from the people they help, Elisha finds that this paradoxical relationship is rooted in Christian notions of gift-giving. Elisha discusses the classed dimensions of how Christian activists view their voluntarism, noting that the populations they serve are expected to conform to middle class notions of humility and gratitude (2008: 175). Activists may see this structure as clients providing their fair return on receiving voluntary help, a paradox which may cause some tension in how volunteers see their work (Kelly 2012, Omri Elisha (yr?).While limitless generosity with no anticipated return is idealized, underlying this is the belief that the greatest gift of all, heavenly salvation, commands eternal gratitude and submission to God’s authority (Elisha 2008: 157). One of the ways that activists encourage responsibility is by entering into long-term relationships with them (Elisha 2008). This desire for reciprocity may be another factor in the increase in crisis pregnancy centers, in which counsellors have the option of fostering more personal long-term relationships with women rather than brief, sometimes aggressive interactions on the street outside abortion clinics.).
women—is contentious within the pro-life movement. Some CPC counsellors and sidewalk counsellors prioritized overall clients’ wellbeing rather than evangelizing (Kelly 2012, Ginsburg 1991). Some critics within the CPC movement and larger pro-life movement, particularly men in leadership positions, disagree with this woman-centered approach on the grounds that the real reason to oppose abortion is that the fetus is a human life, and providing other services is beside the point (Kelly 2012). Some also are concerned that “any prevented abortions are based on addressing women’s self-interests but not their morality or the humanity of the fetus” (Kelly 2012: 213). This reveals tensions within the pro-life movement about core values versus strategy and imaging—and the possibility that some people oppose abortion for the wrong reasons. Given Kelly's finding that most women who use crisis pregnancy centers have already decided to carry the pregnancy to term, they might not be preventing abortions, but they could be supporting women just the same.

This strategy, like woman-centered anti-abortion rhetoric, is not unanimously supported by pro-life leaders. Bill Cunningham, in his article “Pro-Life Pro-Choicers? Is Extremism in Defense of Unborn Children a Vice or a Virtue?,” writes, “as shocking as it may sound, there is growing evidence that significant numbers of U.S. pregnancy center staffers are committed to “empowering women” but ambivalent about “saving babies.”

This perverse abortion-tolerant mindset mirrors the parochialism of pro-life

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However, other tactics also have their critics. Rob expressed his disdain for aggressive protesters:

"Let me first acknowledge that there are some pro-life communities that are awful, there are some people who go around with picket signs, not even picket signs, but the gross pictures of aborted fetuses and they stand around outside an abortion center harassing women, that's just ridiculous. I don't believe in that, because you're not helping anyone. You're not changing anyone's mind with that, you're just making them feel worse about themselves." (Interview, April 8th, 2015).
demonstrators who sometimes seem so obsessed with saving babies that they display indifference to the plight of women in crisis pregnancy.” (as quoted by Siegel 2008: 1667). Cunningham goes on to disagree with the downward trend in showing graphic images of aborted fetuses, arguing that the pro-life movement should not shy away from its moral groundwork in order to be more amenable to women with unplanned pregnancies and the ‘middle majority.’

The overall strategy of crisis pregnancy centers is contentious within the pro-life movement because it embraces the the fact that women prioritize the direction of their own lives. Volunteers at crisis pregnancy centers are concerned with “giving women options”—they take as a given that women are capable of making their own informed decisions. Although it seeks to leverage that agency to encourage women to carry pregnancies to term, it still reveals enough of a grasp of women’s autonomy to repel some pro-life leaders.

Of course, just because CPC’s recognize that women have decision-making capabilities does not mean that all those choices are held to be equal; on the contrary, there is only one ‘right’ choice, and that is life. The strategic aim of crisis pregnancy centers is not to make abortion illegal, nor to make it inaccessible, but instead to ensure that individual women carry their pregnancies to term by depicting this as the best choice and providing the resources necessary to do so.43

Pro-life women and activism
The literature on conservative and religious fundamentalist women is extensive and varies in interpretive frameworks. Some scholars, particularly second wave feminist anthropologists, have argued that conservative women suffer from false consciousness. Others have emphasized that conservative women's agency is more nuanced than false consciousness vs. full leadership because they knowingly choose to enter into sometimes subordinate positions (Avishai 2008 and Chong 2006). Still others have suggested that agency should be decoupled from its progressive associations, and that conservative women's lives should be understood through the lens of survival rather than choice (Mahmood).

Kelly argues that gender-essentialist ideologies and gendered roles within pro-life activism afford conservative women significant autonomy over the direction of pro-life activism (2012). The majority of pro-life activists are women (Kelly 2012). “In their efforts to reshape the social order, activists involved in the contemporary abortion controversy, like women involved in prior moral reform movements in America, always face a dilemma: they must struggle within the terms of the culture’s existing understandings of gender in order to mobilize the social power they need to transcend those limits” (Ginsburg 1989: 210).

While initially led by male directors, since the 1990’s the Crisis Pregnancy Center movement has increasingly been led by women, a shift that has been paralleled by a turn away from confrontational tactics, such as employing graphic images of dismembered aborted fetuses, to more counselling services and ultrasound imaging, activists hoped to counter pro-choice accusations that those who opposed abortion offered no real support
to women with unplanned pregnancies (Kelly 2012). This corresponds with pro-life leaders' opposition to woman-protective anti-abortion argument. On the other hand, Kelly found that some of the CPC activists she interviewed felt that nonconfrontational, supportive work was the only correct form of pro-life activism (2012: 215).

Agency and Pro-life Women

As I have already stated, I take at face value that pro-life women, such as those involved with women’s rights, do see their position as serving the best interests of women. Klatch sees the different interpretations of womanhood as the core of pro-life womens’ opposition to abortion. Right-wing pro-life women and feminist pro-choice activists have some shared values but diverge in their interpretations of gender and in strategy for achieving equality (Klatch 1987, ). Many pro-life women are acutely aware of how patriarchy shapes their lives, and may even derive their anti-abortion stance from

Scholars of pro-life activism have identified several different factors that cause pro-life activists, regardless of gender, to organize around the issue, including biological availability, high-profile news stories, procreation stories, shifts in routine or social network (Ginsburg 1989, Maxwell 1995, Munson 2010, McAdam 1986). Munson also finds that the pro-life movement targets college students specifically to become involved in activism (2010). In analyzing motivations of male and female prolife activists who engage in direct action tactics like clinic sit-ins, Maxwell finds that men more frequently explain ‘sacrifice as a reason, while women act because of obedience to God’s word or motivated by love (2002). Activists who engage in sit-in tactics, regardless of gender, more frequently cite religious convictions and are more likely to have had a born-again experience (Maxwell 2002). Women are more likely to cite a desire to save a life, while men are more likely to cite a desire to act (Maxwell 2002). More men than women use martial or war imagery (Maxwell and Jelen 1995). Intriguingly, Maxwell finds that 43% of women who participate in sit-ins do so because they believe that women are being coerced into having abortions, implying that they, too, are deeply concerned with womens’ agency (2002: 221)—even if their chosen form of direct action does not allow for the agency of women who decide to have abortions. This demonstrates that there is not a linear connection between ideology and activism—a more woman-centered ideology, derived from respect for women’s agency, can still result in a form of activism that directly counters that agency.
how they understand patriarchy and how to confront it. The centrality of nurturance to pro-life women is aligned with their interpretation of women’s rights, which retains some elements of liberal feminism (Ginsburg 1989, others).

Some conservative women seek to extend women’s rights within traditional gender roles rather than transcend or fundamentally change them (Klatch 1987, Ginsburg 1991, Kelly 2012). By seeing the possibility for agentile change as confined to the home, female pro-family and pro-life activists echo earlier 19th century proto-feminist arguments about women’s rights, which sought to imbue motherhood with more value because of its nation-forming role. As “mothers of the citizens”, women are seen as the moral bedrock of society (Klatch 1987: 145).

Valuing nurturance is integral to both pro-choice and pro-life activists in their rationales for defending or opposing abortion (Ginsburg 1989: 185-189, Ginsburg 1991). Nurturance occupies a central place in American culture as being defined through femininity (Ginsburg 1991). The definition of nurturance, however, is contested, defined by pro-life women as closer to biological reproduction. Paradoxically, many pro-life women view nurturance as both a natural state for women and as an idealized quality that women must work towards (Ginsburg 1989: 195, one other). The framing, then, of motherhood as a choice takes as a given that women have agency. Klatch finds that the ideological paradox of conservative women as social activists is justified through framing it as “power behind the throne”.

For conservative women who hold this worldview—and not all do—abortion is a break with the cultural logic that affords them power in their role as mothers. This is a self-reifying belief because that is how these women are living—for women who are
homemakers and mothers in heterosexual marriages. They are proponents of what fits best into their own worldview. As already discussed, personal narratives of pregnancy and birth, either from the activists themselves or from women close to them, figure prominently in female pro-life activists narratives (Kelly 2012, Ginsburg Contested Lives date). So the surge in narratives from women who feel they have only benefitted from keeping unplanned pregnancies or only regretted having an abortion bolsters these worldviews. Abortion is already a symbolic threat to femininity and motherhood. Pro-life women, like pro-choice women, are only deriving their beliefs from their personal experiences and those of the women around them.

Pro-life Movement and Capitalism

Klatch finds that while sympathetic to some of the core ideas of womens’ rights, conservative women ultimately believe that feminism is narcissistic, for women only concerned in improving their own lives at the expense of their families and even society (Klatch 1987, Manninen 2014). Feminism poses a threat to gender essentialism; conservative women see the only way to self-fulfillment as through traditional womanhood, equated with the nurturing labor of motherhood and housework (Klatch 1987). Conservative women fear that feminists are proponents of a completely masculinized world, in which all relations are market relations and the only labor with any value must exist in the economic sphere, which is associated with the masculine (Klatch 1987). Feminism is seen as parallel to humanism; conservative Christians
criticize it for its centering of humans rather than God (Klatch 1987). Feminism is seen as degrading being a mother or homemaker (Klatch 1987).

Argued Phyllis Schafly,

“If you think diapers and dishes are a never-ending, repetitive routine, just remember that most of the jobs outside the home are just as repetitious, tiresome, and boring. Consider the assembly-line worker who pulls the same lever, pushes the same button, or inspects thousands of identical bits of metal or glass or paper hour after weary hour...The plain fact is that most women would rather cuddle a baby than a typewriter or factory machine.”


Schafly’s statement is representative of some conservative pro-life perspectives on the relationship of the family to the market. In this worldview, there are two occupation types: a waged job in the public sphere—the exclusive domain of men—and full time responsibility for the home and family, the role of the good wife. The very idea of womanhood is conflated with her roles as mother and wife. For women whose world is formed by her role as a mother, it is only within these constraints that she can exercise agency.

Underlying an anti-abortion stance, even with the range of beliefs pro-life activists hold, is often a critique of the perceived importance given to economic relations at the cost of devaluation of unwaged labor like childrearing and housework (Ginsburg 1991, Maxwell 1995). The critique is not of the repetitiveness of the prototypical job per se, but rather the purported claim that women belong in jobs outside the home because these jobs are superior. In addition, tedious and demeaning blue-collar work is given as the only option for work outside the home. A larger critique would center the dearth of jobs that are fulfilling, creative, and provide a living wage for people of any qualifications,
educational level, ability, etc., and that also provide support for workers with families—i.e. subsidized childcare. The pro-life valuation of care work falls short of a full-on critique of capitalism because it views market relations as a fitting sphere for men and the home as the place of women. Central to the idea of the family is its separation from the realm of market relations, in which relationships are built on unquantifiable things like affection and trust (Collier, Rosaldo, and Yanagisako 1982). Abortion, like LGBTQ rights, is seen as a threat to what conservative Christians see as the natural order.45

Ginsburg finds that female activists on both sides of the issue derive their stance on abortion from larger systemic issues involving social reproduction under capitalism. Reproductive issues are always deeply ingrained in the functioning of not only the patriarchy but also capitalism and the state. In a materialist society that devalues caring and other forms of unwaged labor that are often in the sphere of women’s work and the family.

45 This means that the relationship between the pro-life movement and LGBTQ rights is increasingly tense. While some pro-life groups and activists view gay rights ("the gay lifestyle") as a threat to family values much in the way they view abortion, secular pro-life activists must support some minimum of gay rights. "Abortion does at the physical level what homosexual marriage does at the institutional level," Siegel quotes a speaker at a rally opposing two concurrent South Dakota ballot initiatives in the November 2006 elections to ban abortion and same-sex marriage, concluding that both actions went against God’s plan.45

Given the ‘family values’ at the heart of the debate, it is no surprise that the pro-life movement should also ally forces with legislators and actors who oppose LGBTQ rights. However, this synthesized viewpoint—which opposes all actions and ways of living that run counter to a cis-gendered heterosexual family unit headed by a male breadwinner and female mother—is another point of tension within the pro-life movement. As liberal pro-life actors seek to frame opposition to abortion in the discourse of human rights, it is only consistent to support full rights for queer and trans people as well. Also is the recent founding of such groups as ‘Pro-life, Pro-Gay.’ Rob, for example, described how he came to support LGBTQ rights because he saw that it was "logically inconsistent" to support human rights and not support them (Interview, April 8th, 2015).
Their answer for how to amend this imbalance is central: while pro-choice activists see the only answer as to grant women full reproductive autonomy—not only through access to abortion but also through contraceptive, sex education, maternity leave, and childcare benefits, and to make childrearing waged work. The pro-life answer is to solidify moral values of home, motherhood, and the family. “Thus, control over 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 abortion activists on either side” (Ginsburg 1989: 213). From this perspective, abortion is yet another intrusion into values that should be ineffable; to consider whether or not one can ‘afford’ a child is to bring a cost-benefit analysis into the refuge of the home and the womb.
Conclusion

On Anthropology and Plurality

While some outliers in the movement, such as adherents of the consistent life ethic and secular pro-life activists, may derive their anti-abortion stance from different frameworks, the dominant ideological grounding remains in universal morality that posits abortion as akin to murder—either founded in Christian or secular thought or some combination of the two. From this perspective, difference is equated with deviance. At its most extreme, this set of beliefs condemns any childrearing arrangement or sexuality outside of a heterosexual, cis-gendered marriage. Dr. Ronald Godwin, vice-president of the Moral Majority, one of the proponents of this far-right overlapping set of viewpoints, said in a speech entitled “The Family and the Law,” speech presented at the Family Forum II conference, Washington, D.C., July 27, 1982,

“You’ll hear many, many feminists and anti-family spokesmen today talking about history...They’ll tell you that down on the Fiji Islands, somewhere down on an island of Uwonga-Bunga, there’s a tribe of people who have never ever practiced family life as we know it. But they also have bones in their nose and file their front teeth. And they eat rat meat for breakfast. They’re some fairly strange, non-representative people. But they’ll tell you about all the strange aberrations that have popped up in the human family over the centuries in various strange geographical locations. They’ll tell you that in the nineteenth century in the backside of Europe such and such a thing went on. They’ll deal in what is called pseudo-history. They’ll try to build a historical case for the proposition that the traditional family never really was traditional and never really was a dominant force in all civilized societies.”

(as quoted in Klatch 1987: 126, Ronald Godwin,).
Godwin calls his fabricated subjects “strange” three times in the span of a few sentences: he strives to impress upon his audience how “non-representative” any “tribe” or people from “backside of Europe” that anthropologists or social scientists might use as proof that family structure varies hugely across and within cultures. The racialized—or outright racist—implication hover beneath Godwin’s statement: the subject in question is “a tribe” that is symbolically distant from “all civilized societies”, on the Fiji Islands—specifically, on the foreign-sounding “island of Uwunga-Bunga.” It may well be true, Godwin is saying, that family structures that deviate from the heterosexual, cis-gendered, one-family household have existed in foreign countries, but these are a far cry from how good white Christians form family bonds—and a far cry from the only right or ‘true’ way to have a family. Godwin’s statement reads as a complete dismissal of a fundamental framework of anthropology and other progressive-leaning disciplines whose scope includes a validation of otherness as “pseudo-history.” The existence of ‘otherness’ for Godwin is not proof that the varied manners of human existence are valid but rather proof that deviant ‘tribes’ deviate from the only correct way to live.

I want to return to the point that the understanding of human rights deployed in pro-life rhetoric is one which generalizes and obfuscates nuance rather than centers it. A nuanced, localized understanding of women’s rights, would, for example, understand the hijab—or, for that matter, the miniskirt—to fall anywhere on a spectrum from oppressive

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46 This belief in a single proper family structure is also the reason for conservative Christians’ critique of queer families, single-parent families, and matriarchal households—the prevalence of the latter seen as a root cause of social problems in black and urban communities. This line of reasoning overlooks high rates of incarceration for black men as one of the leading causes in this, in itself an issue engendered by structural racism of the criminal justice system. In short, even if the concern were to preserve a heterosexual nuclear family, there is an exceptional blindness to structural inequality. Because blame for social problems is located in the individual, the framing of the “abortion industry” as a profit-driven, capitalist system marks a significant shift for pro-life actors.
to emancipatory. From this more careful, anthropological understanding of human rights, it is simple to oppose forced abortion and support abortion access for those women who feel it is their best decision. Both scenarios should be framed under a larger context of reproductive justice: of healthcare and social services available for people in different circumstances, rather than a one-size-fits-all approach that uses the very language of rights to take them away.

An equivalent frameshift for those who support abortion access, framed in the language and worldview of the opposite side, would entail engaging with definitions of fetal personhood. Numerous anthropologists have demonstrated that personhood—what beings, human and otherwise, are considered agentile and accorded certain privileges, expectations, and state-defined rights—is always premised on cultural definitions. (And culture—the way we live—is always in conversation with historical, racial, economic, religious, and individual experiences). And I think the pro-choice movement would actually do well to underscore this and use it to bolster support for abortion.

Scheper-Hughes is particularly poignant—in how extreme poverty and lack of basic healthcare, itself a product of structural inequality, has shaped views on life and death—terms like ‘infanticide’ casts an absolute moral judgement that does not take into consideration the harsh conditions of those lives. This problematizes, too, the simplistic notions of ‘choice’ and ‘agency’ integral to liberal feminisms, which too often also overlook how structural inequality means that there are few options, but rather, to bring in Mahmood again, survival.

I bring up these examples because the idealized pro-choice position should be aligned with a fundamental tenet of anthropology, the decentralization of morality. If
actors and organizations who believe there is no room for open engagement and respect for cultural practices and beliefs different from their own shape the direction of pro-life activism, it is difficult to imagine how the movement can align itself with a definition of human rights that is critical of structural inequality.

However, as those at least claim to support women’s rights gain leadership in the movement, there arises potential to appeal to them for support on issues of women’s rights other than abortion. They must make good on their stated commitment to women’s rights by providing real support for women without the resources to raise children.

The same necessarily applies to those who identify as pro-choice. Feminists have long noted that to be pro-choice is not to be pro-abortion, but rather to support women make the reproductive decisions best for them—to provide those options with financial and emotional support and without judgment. I want to clarify that writing as one who is staunchly pro-choice, I cannot treat the woman-centered pro-life movement as fully concerned with increasing women’s agency if, for all the emphasis on women’s voices and personal reproductive histories, they cannot make room for those women who decide to have abortions.

Thus, the idealized pro-choice viewpoint—acknowledging that different organizations, politicians, and people have individualized beliefs that fall under the category of ‘pro-choice’—supports a wide range of reproductive rights, including not only access to affordable, safe, and destigmatized abortion, but also pre-natal and post-natal health, an end to sterilization abuse, childcare support, and maternity and paternity leave. The term ‘reproductive justice’ provides a more complete framework to analyze and act on these issues. It is from this holistic approach to healthcare and building
community support, which is espoused by Kathy Rudy in Beyond Pro-Life and Pro-Choice: Moral Diversity in the Abortion Debate to suggest how those who both support and oppose abortion might better support women. I agree with Rudy that no woman should bring a pregnancy to term against her will; at the same time, no woman should have to obtain an abortion because she cannot afford to raise a child (1996: 108). While Rudy lays out a critique of of the places in both arguments, I further her analysis by several key issues and frameworks for actions for furthering women’s reproductive autonomy.

Rudy belongs to different often conflicting communities—Catholic, Evangelical, feminist—and is empathetic to each’s position on abortion. This makes her a unique voice with the potential to listen and speak to different sides of the issue. Rudy ultimately sees repeal as the best response to abortion, arguing that each community should stop wasting resources fighting for legal change and instead focus on achieving its view of ‘the good life.’ (Rudy, 1996: XXI). Rudy argues that pro-life Christian communities should offer more services to women with unwanted pregnancies, while feminists should focus on shifting childrearing responsibilities away from women and single mothers (1996).

One of the first points to take away from this work is that we are constrained by the current linguistic and ideological terms employed to discuss abortion. Members of Penn for Life expressed feeling constrained by the terms of the debate and the political division between democrats and republicans. Rudy says that positionality and the language we use to talk about it is key in stances on abortion, and that we think we’re referring to the same thing when discussing abortion but our views of what abortion
actually is and means are different (1996: XII). Rudy says that there are both polyvalent meanings attached to abortion, but these become flattened into a “with us or against us” channeling into two camps, either pro-choice or pro-life (1996).

Rudy discusses how the two possible stances on abortion is only one of the ways in which language on the subject shapes and is shaped by the two opposing ideological frameworks on the issue. “Human subjectivity is either present or absent in our philosophy; there is no room for an ontological in-between. There is no way to comprehend a fetus as both part of the mother and a separate being, or a woman as being more than one subject (but less than two) during pregnancy. She is either a woman (who happens to be pregnant) or a pregnant woman (the bearer of another separate human being). The difference between these two views is at the heart of the abortion debate.” (Rudy 1996: 135). Pro-woman, pro-life actors believe the latter: women are accorded many rights, but they do not extend to the fetus within them. Because of this oppositional strategic and linguistic framework, those who support and oppose abortion cannot fully conceive of or put into action a plan that would allow either camp to struggle for its vision of ‘the good life.’

My first recommendation, then, is to actors on either side to fully engage with the counter-perspective on abortion and to think critically about their relationship to other with their respective stance. Do pro-choice spaces—college feminist groups, women’s centers, grassroots leftist feminists groups, larger pro-choice non-profits—fully and non-judgmentally support women who choose to carry unplanned pregnancies to term? Are pro-life spaces involved in other life and death issues like domestic violence, police brutality, drone strikes? Have core organizations on either side of the abortion debate
historically centered the rights of women of color, low-income women, women immigrants, and incarcerated women, and how might they confront those histories to better take leadership from these populations now? How has the apparatus of the state worked for or against opponents and proponents of abortion?

Areas for further research

For the sake of brevity, I have focused exclusively on the pro-life movement, even though it was formed in reaction against pro-choice organizing. A more complete assessment of pro-life rhetoric and strategy necessitates research on pro-choice evolution in these areas as well. There is particularly fertile ground for legal scholars to analyze the anti-abortion legislation since Roe V. Wade to determine what rationales are most effective in the court of law. If WPAA is working, then pro-choice legislative advocacy groups need to ensure politicians are not misinformed about abortion’s purported effects on women. Another concern for pro-choice audience is that we should focus on what frameworks hold up best to support access to abortion, both legally and on the ground. If Reardon’s suggestions are followed, for example, and there is a pro-life effort to ‘reclaim’ even the label of feminism as necessarily anti-abortion, how do we emphasize the pro-choice position as committed to women’s rights?

The roles played by pro-life groups on liberal college campuses also necessitates a longer timeframe for fieldwork – what roles will those involved in Penn for Life go on to play in the larger pro-life movement five or ten years from now? How will the campus
group evolve over several years, given that membership is always in a state of fluxus for students at a four-year college?

*Rethinking Pregnancy Resource Centers*

I want to return to what I would go so far as to call the radical potential of Crisis Pregnancy Centers. If they are truly concerned with supporting women’s choices—even if they oppose abortion—I believe that they are a step in the right direction of Rudy’s call for communities to provide what they see as ‘the good life’ for women. I want to also center an alternate legacy of American Christian activism, which is founded on compassion for all life, and criticizes the structure of its own church and the actions of its own government. Beyond the scope of this paper is to draw the connection between Crisis Pregnancy Centers and such recent movements and what might be termed the Christian left: actors as the Leadership Council of Women Religious, faith-based organizations who have opposed the School of the Americas, etc. Perhaps the best comparison for crisis pregnancy centers are Doris Day’s Catholic Workers movement. Each house subscribes to a general philosophy of service to the community, with volunteers living alongside the people they serve, but may vary greatly in types of service offered.

This is, to be sure, a generous reading of crisis pregnancy centers, but one which strives to peel back the label of ‘pro-life’ and see the varied worldviews and forms of activism compressed into an identity. Crisis pregnancy centers require more ethnographic fieldwork to understand how much they pressure women into keeping pregnancies or
giving children up for adoption, and how much they truly support women who do not have the resources to raise a child. Kelly’s finding that 90% of women who use CPC’s have already decided to keep their pregnancy is key here; if they are using coercive methods, they are a threat to women’s reproductive autonomy. Contingent on the accuracy of this finding, I suggest that crisis pregnancy centers are the only form of pro-life activism that strives to support women, but that support needs to go further in providing financial resources for families throughout raising children.

This means that while I support efforts to regulate crisis pregnancy centers’ misleading advertising—they need to say up front that they not only do not provide abortions, and actually oppose them—I would not support an effort to shut them down completely. I oppose the reallocation of state or federal funding to crisis pregnancy centers over abortion clinics or healthcare facilities. All too often it is the very same actors who oppose abortion that also cut funding to social services like education and healthcare. It is worth reiterating here that (x%) of Planned Parenthood’s services are contraception, STD/STI testing and pap smears. When funding is cut for Planned Parenthood, it is basic healthcare services that are affected in addition to abortion access.

Stupak recounted how he is in the minority—or perhaps even completely outside of—the pro-life movement for supporting funding to Planned Parenthood for this very reason. My willing admission of crisis pregnancy centers’ potential for positive change is not a step towards opposing abortion. I have not been swayed woman-protective arguments. But I see the intent of crisis pregnancy centers as support-based model for women with unplanned pregnancies a step towards providing Rudy’s ‘the best life.’
Reproductive Justice and Capitalism: Towards a Structural Critique

Pro-life and pro-choice movements are crippled, too, for their weak or nonexistent analysis of how patriarchy moves through capitalism and the state. Progressive and pro-choice actors who are aware of the history of how abortion became the reproductive right rather than one issue of many have argued for a broad-based understanding of reproductive justice.

When pro-life actors integrate liberal feminism into their argument, it can serve as a reminder that struggles for women’s rights have historically marginalized women of color, queer and trans women, and working class women, while neglecting a larger structural critique financial inequality. Bair, for example, in describing the struggle for women’s rights, writes that “In the United States, women’s rights have come a long way. In just the last century women went from being second class citizens without even the right to vote, to leading major corporations and being elected to public office.”

I want to return for a moment to the understanding of women’s progress laid out by Bair. There is no mention of queer (let alone trans) women, women of color, working class women, or any other group marginalized within the monolithic category of women. The feminism of the pro-life movement most closely approximates (if the comparison can be drawn at all) the straight, white, educated, upper-class feminism that has come to dominate the fight for abortion access. Not only are politicians and CEO’s overwhelmingly (white) men, but a female CEO is no guarantee for the advancement of
women’s rights even within that particular company. Bair completely misses the larger critiques of capitalism and the state in a way no worse than liberal feminists do.

Bair writes that “pro-abortion feminists viewed children as an obstacle to women’s success in the professional world…they pitted mother against child. They forced women to decide between an education or a career and their unborn child.” Here, a pro-life actor accuses those who support abortion access as “pitting mother against child,” a complete reversal from earlier pro-life rhetoric that posited the fetus’ interests as opposed to the woman’s. Here he also blames those who support abortion access for being at fault for the structural sexism that keeps women from earning the same amount as men and makes workplace policies hostile to parents.

Bair is correct in his assertions that “Roe vs. Wade did not eliminate poverty…or even the playing field for women in the workplace.” This points once again, however, not to a flaw in the argument for abortion access but to situate that right within larger and more deeply entrenched structures of inequality generated by capitalism and interlocking systems of oppression.

“Legalized abortion has provided society an excuse not to provide the full range of resources to pregnant women. Society would much rather offer abortion than confront the very real issues faced by mothers trying simultaneously to advance themselves and care for their children. The pregnant college student, for instance, is often forced to decide between the life within her and her education. The availability of abortion on demand removes the pressure for universities to provide resources on campus for pregnant students or those already raising children. The women’s movement has not fully succeeded if society continues to tell pregnant mothers that they must decide between their children and their occupational aspirations.”

47 Sheryl Sandberg and Harvard domestic workers debacle

48 As I will discuss in the final chapter, if pro-woman pro-life actors truly believe that the opposition between women and the workplace is a major factor in abortion, they will logically support workplace or state-provided childcare programs and initiatives for maternity and paternity leave.
Bair’s conclusions have elements of truth to them—but absent are the demands for affordable childcare, or any internal critique of the pro-life movement for failing to offer comprehensive support services to women with unplanned pregnancies.

I want to make explicit the latent critique of capitalism in Rudy’s statement. It is time that both pro-choice and pro-life activists asked not just why low-income women have disproportionately higher abortion rates than their wealthier counterparts, but why perpetual inequality exists at all, and why it is gendered. As Marxist-feminist scholars have argued for decades, capitalism and its interlocking systems of oppression devalues unwaged labor like childrearing. Activists on either side of the issue cannot ignore the fact that many of the women who have abortions do so because they cannot afford a child, and must campaign for expanded resources for working-class parents.

An approach that transcends the limitations of current pro-choice and pro-life activism would be to provide public support for all reproductive decisions—paid maternity and paternity leave, subsidized quality childcare, an end to sterilization abuse, accessible support for gender affirmation surgery. The problem with this starry-eyes proposal for common ground between those who care about women but oppose and support abortion is that, as I have laid out, the actors and organizations that make up the pro-life movement would need to share some common values and elements of a worldview. While conservative Christian actors might not be able to work across difference, I believe that actors like Penn for Life and Bart Stupak—who may support sex education, LGBTQ rights, and contraception—are equipped to do so.
Recommendations for Pro Choice Readers

It has been beyond the scope of this project to discuss the formation of the pro-choice movement and controversies and shifts within it. One element of pro-choice organizing, as well as of feminist organizing in general that I would like to bring up, is the near complete disappearance of direct action and autonomous direct services. I suggest that leftist feminists respond to crisis pregnancy centers with pro-choice direct services which, by remaining unaffiliated with major nonprofits funded through the state, can access communities that major nonprofits have marginalized, or communities that no longer have legal access to abortion because of legislation that has made it inaccessible.

The second wave of feminism, dating from roughly the late 60’s to the late 70’s, generated numerous forms of organizing that were critical of or existed in direct opposition to the state: consciousness raisings held in participants’ living rooms, womyn’s centers founded through takeovers, grassroots domestic violence hotlines staffed by volunteers. Look at the vast majority of feminist nonprofits, and you will find that they began as grassroots struggles to provide the services needed in their communities. To take an example from my hometown, the Boston Rape Crisis Center was founded as a hotline staffed by volunteers. It is now a state-funded liberal feminist nonprofit, which comes with both advantages and disadvantages: there is, for example, some marginal measure of funding security through the state, the social services always in danger of being cut. But BARC partners with local police; there is no space for a larger structural critique.
Inspired by crisis pregnancy centers, I want to propose a reinvestment to direct services as direct action within feminist organizing. The example of direct service/direct action that I would most like to focus on is Jane, the network of underground illegal abortion providers in Chicago from 1970 – 1972. Organized by a group of local feminists, Jane used participants’ houses as ‘safe houses’ and trained their own abortion providers. Another, more contemporary model is the various childcare collectives in radical urban communities. These decentralized, largely autonomous groups are part of a loose network called the Intergalactic Conspiracy of Childcare Collectives, and meet annually at the Allied Media Conference. They spring from the palpable need for support services for parents in movements for social change—not just providing free childcare during meetings and protests, but also in some cases serving as first-response safety net if parents are deported, etc. These groups are grounded not in the work of liberal nonprofits but in a leftist feminist framework that links reproduction and capitalism. I want to reiterate the potential for those who support and oppose abortion to join forces on some issues, and suggest that fighting for maternity and paternity leave and free or subsidized employer-provided childcare is a place to start.

The effect of anti-abortion legislation does not mean that women do not have abortions, but only that they seek extralegal means. Predict an upsurge in availability on dark internet. Those who oppose abortion would do well to recognize that the “choice” was never between a country with or without abortion, but between safe and unsafe abortion.

In favoring repeal, Rudy essentially proposing extra legal approach to abortion, shifting feminists’ energy away from legislative. I have sensed the gathering energy and
frustration in radical feminist ranks because direct action is largely absent in contemporary liberal feminism in the United States. In the past six months, leftist feminists, including a group in Seattle that overlaps with the International Socialist Organization and Boston Feminists for Liberation, an unaffiliated grassroots group with anarchist leanings that I was an active part of until their decision to protest outside of a local Planned Parenthood. When I escorted patients into an abortion clinic in Philadelphia, the only real guideline was not to engage with protesters because of the risk of escalation and ensuing stress or threat of violence to patients and staff simply trying to enter the clinic. I and several other members of Boston Feminists for Liberation argued with the rest of the group that this tactic was not only ineffective in increasing abortion access, but could actually make entering the clinic more fraught for patients. Our points were met with dismissive leftist rhetoric around the ‘non-profit industrial complex,’ in which Planned Parenthood, despite being the largest abortion provider in the country and serving majority low income and women of color populations with basic healthcare, was still posited as a regressive liberal institution—too enmeshed in politics and reliant on state to be worth building a relationship with. I stand by my beliefs that in order to change nonprofits we need to start off trying to work from within them, rather than burn bridges by acting directly against their basic requests. I agree with my pro-life subject (Luis) that “holding signs does nothing for anyone”—regardless of whether those signs support or oppose abortion.

If we are willing to coordinate complex direct actions and to risk arrest in sit-ins and displays of bravado, why not channel those effort into extending reproductive healthcare to communities that have been denied legal access to it? I am proposing, in
short, the pro-choice response to crisis pregnancy centers—decentralized grassroots collectives that provide abortion services and childcare support. In countries around the world where abortion is highly illegal, these networks already exist. This project, then, would necessarily center feminists of color and take leadership from women in the Global South who already have strategy in place.

Recommendations for Penn for Life

Given the expressed interest in academic discussion of the abortion issue, I propose dialogue and reading groups as a step towards building this kind of coalition. Activists on either side of other polarizing issues, such as the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, could have useful resources on facilitation. There are pro-life pro-choice dialogue groups that already exist, and these would be a good place to start learning what strategies have worked in building common ground between those who support and oppose abortion. In addition, we should think about organizations and individual actors with multiple identities as key players—for example, the Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice, Feminists for Life, Kathryn Rudy, Secular Pro-life groups, Bart Stupak, and, in many respects, groups like Penn for Life whose members may not be liberal pro-life but who are attuned to liberal pro-choice discourse. Think about how to base these discussion groups in more ‘neutral’ spaces and the communities connected with them, such as public libraries and Catholic Workers’ houses.

Specifically, and given the interest in academic engagement, I propose a reading group as consciousness raising – start with the framework of reading the same texts – important because as I have shown, the abortion debate is founded in multiple
oppositional worldviews, even if the pro-life movement increasingly speaks the same language as secular liberals. The reading group could start off by exploring the first wave of pro- and anti-abortion activism—how there were not the two worldviews we have now. Some advocates for abortion also supported eugenics and sterilization; some anti-abortion advocates used the issue to solidify their exclusive power to practice medicine. Penn for Life might consider reaching out to organizations that could serve as intermediaries between themselves and the Penn Women’s Center, such as Feminists for Life or the Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice.

Pro-life communities should heed Rudy’s advice to become more hospitable to women, mothers, and children—particularly working class and single moms. This means that there should be no childcare fee for parents who attend the National Right to Life Conference, and every space and group that strives to be pro-life—which means, of course, to support those parents and mothers with the least support—must provide childcare, adequate paternity and maternity leave, and a living wage to cover the costs of raising that life which they are so eager to save. If those concerned with abortion rights adopt a wider lens of reproductive justice, their organizations and proposed bills will also support these very same rights.

My last recommendation to Penn for Life is to campaign to improve childcare support options for Penn students, staff, and faculty. This would prove to progressive and implicitly pro-choice organizations and individuals at the University of Pennsylvania that Penn for Life, and pro-lifers in general, are both concerned about women’s’ wellbeing and that of the fetus after birth. Given that childcare rights and maternity leave are issues that fall into the framework of reproductive justice, it seems likely that this could lead to
further dialogue between the two groups. The woman-centered shift in pro-life rhetoric and activism opens the door to this and other opportunities to improve women's lives, and I hope that activists on either side of the issue will be able to exercise its potential.
Appendix

Excerpt from January 19th Field Notes

The Penn Women’s Center had emerged, slowly but surely, as the closest thing to the counterweight of Penn for Life on the campus. In a very heartfelt short speech, Hannah talked about the need to think about the impact Penn for Life could have on the Penn community. She drove home the fact that abortion was not some abstract social ill but was happening right in their neighborhood—that (Penn hospital) provides abortions, and that Penn students, their friends and peers, had had abortions or were considering having them—this was not to shame them, she said, but to remember that women they knew were being harmed by abortion. One student said that the abortion rate in West Philly or University City was much higher than the rest of the Philadelphia area.

One student brought up the Penn Women’s Center, suggesting that they pressured women with unplanned pregnancies into having abortions. A discussion ensued in which students shared knowledge of the Women’s Centre and identified that they did not know for a fact if the center truly ‘pressured’ students into abortion or merely referred for them. Hannah had called the center ‘pro-abortion’, and one of the other board members responded that there was a difference between being pro-abortion and pro-choice—the former believed abortion to be a social good and may involve coercive measure to force women to have abortions, while the latter presented it as an option. Students brought up the possibility of going undercover to the Women’s Center to see what kind of advice they gave students with unplanned pregnancies. They also talked about a campaign to get abortion removed from the services that Penn health insurance covered.

Guest Column by Hannah F. Victor

When we love, we are being pro-life

Reflections on the anniversary of Roe

By Hannah F. Victor 01/21/15 9:52pm

When I was younger, I identified strongly as pro-life. I saw abortion as a pressing matter of public interest and human rights. Today, while I still identify as pro-life, I see abortion as more than just about the rights of the fetus. When I say that I am pro-life, I mean that I believe that life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness should be extended to all humans. Without the right to life, all other rights are impossible. Perhaps most important is the realization that with life comes love.

I believe that love wants what is best for others. I believe that a woman is worth more than abortion. When a woman has an abortion, she may harm herself emotionally and physically. And every time a woman is coerced into having an abortion, women’s rights takes a step back. Abortion can be exploitative—taking advantage of a woman regardless of whether or not she thinks she has benefitted. Abortion deceives women into thinking life will go on as usual following an abortion. Abortion misleads women as to what is forming inside their womb. I believe that love seeks truth. I believe that the unborn are human, from the moment of fertilization. As a nursing student, I know that science suggests no less. As a person of faith, I know that God intricately formed me in my mother’s womb.
I believe that love supports autonomy. Every time an abortion takes place, the human within the womb is stripped of his autonomy. When a woman aborts because of coercion, lack of informed consent or the knowledge that she cannot succeed in life if she chooses to parent her child, not only is her autonomy reduced, but also sexism claims a victory.

I believe that love cherishes and accepts. The label of “unwanted” reflects not on the recipient of the label, but on the giver. Children, disabled persons or older adults considered unwanted are not so because of anything they have done. Instead, the label is indicative of the society that dismisses and rejects them. “Every child a wanted child” suggests that fewer unwanted children decrease child abuse cases. But the problem is that abortion — as the suggested solution to unwanted children — kills them, instead of “wanting” them.

I believe that love begets love. Adoption can be a beautiful picture of loving beyond bloodlines, race and culture. Instead of allowing a child to grow up family-less, adoption receives and calls a child “wanted.”

I believe that love values people. The physically and developmentally challenged are to be protected because value is determined not by what a person can potentially “contribute” to society, but by who they are.

I believe that love lasts. The old are not too old for us to provide them with optimal medical care. I believe that a society that marginalizes the weakest is forgetting the meaning of respect and is forging a path of destruction for itself.

I believe that love is selfless. In our society, the meaning of love is often distorted; one might use the word when talking about a gyro or a hero, or anything in between. True love, the sort of love that gives instead of takes, is selfless. Love that regards others better than self looks out for the best of others. This is seen in the mother who gives up her child for adoption because she wants the best for her child. This is seen in the husband who lovingly cares for his spouse while she is on a ventilator. This is seen in a family that adopts a child with developmental disabilities so that the child can know the meaning of family.

I believe that love pursues and upholds justice. One of the greatest injustices is that of the consistent minimizing of the smaller and weaker. Working to reduce abortion and infanticide and speaking against euthanasia is seeking to promote justice for those who cannot speak up for themselves.

I believe that love builds up. Whenever we encourage someone who is struggling, we show love. Whenever we reach out to help another life, we show love. And when we love, we are being pro-life.

Post-Abortion Syndrome

"Abortion opponents also claim that having an abortion will result in a barrage of negative mental health outcomes. This implication that abortion is psychologically riskier than carrying an unwanted pregnancy to term is misguided, as the most methodologically sound research conducted over the past two decades does not find a causal relationship between abortion and severe negative mental health outcomes. In fact, according to a study published in the Archives of General Psychiatry in 2000, the best indicator for a woman’s mental health after an abortion is her mental health before the abortion. And a review of the mental health literature by the American Psychological Association in 1989, as summarized in the Guttmacher Institute’s May
2006 report, Abortion in Women's Lives, found that women feel the most distress before an abortion; after an abortion, women frequently report feeling “relief or happiness.”

In 19 states, the mandated materials include information on the psychological effects of abortion (see table, columns 3 and 4). In 11 of these states (including Oklahoma, where the materials have not yet been developed), the information is included pursuant to a specific state law; in the other eight states, the information is provided without a specific legal mandate. In 11 states, the information in the materials prepares women to feel a range of emotions after an abortion—from sadness to relief. Women are reassured that after the abortion, it is common to experience emotions that are simultaneously positive and negative. Professional counseling is suggested before and after the procedure so that a woman feels comfortable with her decision; counseling is specifically recommended if a woman experiences symptoms related to depression.

The materials in the remaining seven states provide a less balanced view of the emotions women may experience after having an abortion. In three of these states Michigan, Nebraska and South Carolina—the materials exclusively detail negative mental health outcomes. In Nebraska, for example, the materials state that “some women experience reactions such as sadness, grief, regret, anxiety and guilt,” and information on the possible positive feelings is not included. Moreover, in South Dakota, Texas, Utah and West Virginia, the materials go even further, asserting either that a woman may experience suicidal thoughts or that she will suffer from what abortion foes call “postabortion traumatic stress syndrome.” Materials issued in West Virginia, for example, claim that after abortion many women suffer from symptoms including eating disorders, sexual dysfunction, suicidal thoughts and drug abuse. Notably, neither the American Psychological Association nor the American Psychiatric Association recognizes this disorder.” (Richardson and Nash, 7-8).

Abortion in China: The Pro-life Movement’s Next Frontier

In the past few years, the American pro-life movement has increasingly turned its attention to India, China, and other parts of Asia, and the fact that sex-selective abortion has caused a significant gender imbalance. In 2012, the annual National Right to Life Convention, the largest pro-life gathering in the United States, featured lectures on abortion in China as keynote speakers. Major pro-life news sources regularly carry articles condemning both sex-selective abortion and American feminists’ silence on the issue. The purpose of this paper is to lay out briefly the pro-life movement’s stances on the one-child policy, forced or coerced abortion, sex-selective abortion, and the gender ratio imbalance in China, with particular attention to rhetorical devices used. The pro-choice movement has largely neglected to respond to these issues, because sex selective abortion brings into question the significance of ‘choice’ and women’s agency over their own bodies. I will argue that the reason the American pro-life movement has embraced the fight against sex-selective abortion and forced abortion in China is because it provides an opportunity to demonstrate their belief that abortion is harmful to women, with the ultimate goal of restricting abortion access not only in China but also in the United States. Finally, I suggest a few points that American reproductive rights activists might make in order to respond to the surge of pro-life activity on China.

Following Ginsburg (1989: xi), I refer to the pro-life movement by the name they refer to themselves by. I also use the term ‘sex-selective abortion’ rather than the decidedly more polemical ‘gendercide.’
Before delving into these issues, I need to locate myself as a white American feminist, and to engage with the fact that imperialism can and does take the form of foreign policy, missionary work, non-profit organizations, and feminism itself. My purpose in this paper is to focus scrutiny on the American-based pro-life movement rather than the Chinese government and its policies. To do the former is not to exclude the latter. However, as Nie Jing-Bao suggests in his book ‘Behind the Silence: Chinese Voices on Abortion’, the lead in population policy reform should come from the people it will affect (Jing-Bao 2005: 200). I would add that the primary leadership should come from Chinese women, particularly low-income women, given it is their bodies that become the site where policy is enforced—as is the case with forced abortions and sterilizations. I also want to engage with the “tensions attending the dual character of feminism both as an analytical and a political project” (as cited by Mahmood 2001: 201).

It is relevant to point out that I believe access to safe, legal, and free abortion is a human right: I am, in a word, pro-choice. There can be no apolitical scholarship.

Background on the One Child Policy and Preference for Sons

The one-child policy was introduced in China in 1979 due to demographic concerns about the population’s exponential growth. The policy, which consists of a number of related family planning policies, limits families to one child each. However, there are a number of exceptions to this rule: the policy applies to Han Chinese but not minorities; rural couples whose first child is a girl may have a second child; and couples where both parents are only children may have a second child. In November 2013, the government announced that it would be further loosening the policy, allowing couples to have a second child if one parent was an only child. There is a diversity of ways these policies are enforced, with

“variable levels of rigidity and flexibility across different regions and different years...they range from mild methods—such as economic incentives and fines, propaganda and educational work, the effective distribution of contraceptives, and commitment and subscription of the One-Child Certification—to extreme sanctions—such as mandatory IUD insertions, the refusal of supplies of water and electricity, the unroofing of peasant families’ homes for violation, and enforced abortion for above-quota pregnancies (Scharping 2003)” (Li et al. 2011: 1540).

The one-child policy has been criticized for exerting control over individuals’ reproductive choices as well as for contributing to the sex ratio imbalance. Li et al. estimate the 2000 sex ratio imbalance stood at about 119.9 males per 100 females, an imbalance that has increased over the past few decades (Li et al. 2011: 1536), 103 to 107 males per 100 females is regarded as a stable sex ratio (Ibid.). Li et al. also suggest the prevalence of hepatitis B may affect the sex ration in China and Taiwan. Still, there is some agreement that a major factor in the sex ratio imbalance is the preference for sons over daughters. An analysis of the various factors that have given rise to this preference is beyond the scope of this paper. It is important to note, however, that it should not be simply chalked up to that elusive concept, “culture.” For one, the preference likely varies across region, parents’ age, etc. Recent history may have also made the preference more acute. “The dismantling of rural collectives brought declines in cadre power, shifts of resources into the hands of ordinary peasants, and growing peasant desires for more children, especially sons. Those desires, however, were not so much feudal remnants as reflections of the multiple needs children fulfilled in rural China’s still-familistic culture and socioeconomic: labor, old-age support, family continuity, lineage power, and just plain love and affection (Greenhalgh 2003: 206). I will return later to a likely factor in contemporary son preference, the gender wage gap.
Before I delve into the pro-life response to the one-child policy, sex selective abortion, forced abortion, and the gender ratio imbalance, I want to point out that one central issue evades most Western commentary on these issues: the treatment of overpopulation as a pressing issue. In this sense, the policy is ‘successful’, given that the population growth rate is below two percent (Jing-Bao 2005: 200). Surveys have shown that Chinese citizens may have a range of opinions on specific practices and methods of enforcement like forced abortion, but largely support population policy as a whole. Jing-Bao references a 1997 survey that revealed 94% of those surveyed—“even Catholics”—believe that the one child policy is “beneficial to the individual and the family” (2005: 201).

Orientalism in Pro-Life Commentary

In his article “Five Questions Planned Parenthood Refuses to Answer on Sex-Selection Abortions”, Paul Cooper exemplifies the rhetoric of the pro life movement. He cites an estimate that 200 million girls are “missing... thanks to the practice of gendercide.” He clarifies that “most of those come from China and India where they eliminate more girls every year than America has births” (Cooper 2013). “The sense of ‘we’ and ‘they’” is common in American pro-life rhetoric on abortion in China. Faye Ginsburg noted this ‘othering’ in her study of pro-life activists in Fargo, North Dakota; they conceived of Fargo as a Christian place with Christian values, and urban centers, particularly New York City, as symbolic of worldliness, a place where one could imagine abortions taking place (Ginsburg 1989: 62). The sense that abortion “doesn’t happen in our community” is amplified to further vilify Chinese government, culture, and people—“they eliminate more girls every year than America has births.” The simplistic summaries of why that monolithic group, “the Chinese,” prefer sons further compounds the Orientalist rhetoric of the pro-life movement.

The picture that emerges from pro-life literature on China is one of the totalitarian communist regime—or one of the wicked Asian culture that kills its baby girls. There is little to no background information on the one child policy, nor is there any discussion of the potentially ameliorative effects that recent announcements to loosen the policy will have. In his article “The West’s Deafening Silence on China’s Forced Abortions,” Rick Santorum, 2012 presidential hopeful and darling of the pro-life movement, writes that “China is the only country in the world where more women than men — 40 percent more, in fact — take their own lives.” Santorum then goes on to suggest that the reason for this high suicide rate is forced abortions (2013). His article is exemplary of the astute observation that “China is portrayed as a typical case of ‘oriental despotism,’” in which the state—either the emperor during the imperial periods or the central government in twentieth century—has absolute, totalitarian, and never-truly-beneficent power and the individual is subject to “total terror,” “total submission,” and “total loneliness” (Wittfogel 1957) as cited by (Jing-Bao 2005: 191). Searching for articles on abortion in China yielded such titles as “Communism: What you don’t know is killing the unborn.” China is constantly “othered” throughout pro-life literature on the topic.

“No One Can Be Pro-Woman but Neutral on Forced Abortions”

In addition to editorial commentary on forced abortion and sex selective abortion, there are a number of non-profit organizations that aim to end these practices. Women’s Rights without Frontiers is one of the larger organizations. The organization’s motto is ‘Forced Abortion Is Not A Choice’ against a silhouette of China. On the main site, a large button encourages website visitors, “You can help save lives in China! See how!” The website also hosts a range of articles and news briefs related to the One Child Policy, which shed light on the connections between the organization and American pro-life ideology. One article, posted on December 2, 2013, summarizes a recent study that associates the “dramatic rise in breast cancer...with the
prevalence of induced abortions (IA) under the One-Child Policy” (Littlejohn, 2013). The study
associates the rise of breast cancer with the policy’s enactment decades ago, but does not
mention, for example, environmental factors that might contribute to a higher cancer rate. Most
importantly, the study is not about forced abortions, but abortions in general, albeit under the
modified term “IA” for induced abortions.

This article is significant because the American pro-life movement has linked abortion to
breast cancer as one of various pieces of evidence that abortion harms women. An analysis of
the changing rhetoric of the American pro-life movement is beyond the scope of this paper, but
certainly merits further research. I would suggest that there is a relationship between newer forms
of “woman-centered” pro-life activism, like the rise of Crisis Pregnancy Centers (CPC’s), and the
shift to an ideology that abortion as wrong because it harms women. The crux of pro-life ideology
is still the belief that a fetus is a life and thus abortion is murder, but this one rationale does not
preclude claiming that abortion is also sexist, racist, and classist.

The concern for women’s rights, whether genuine or strategic, is palpable in Santorum’s
article. He writes,

“forced abortion and sterilization are gross violations of a woman’s physical
integrity. They’re a form of torture that should outrage anyone who cares about
justice for women — but they’re greeted with deafening silence because of the
battles over elective abortions in the West. The politics of abortion in the West
makes normally outspoken women’s advocates reticent...while the pro-life and pro-
choice movements disagree on many issues, here is one issue where we should be
able to join hands and join forces...No one can be pro-woman but neutral on forced
abortions. Even those who wish to protect elective abortions should wish to prevent
forced abortions. The sheer violence and pain they inflict upon women should be
enough to bring all of us to work together for change. We who have the freedom to
speak out should use that power for Feng Jianmei and the millions of women like
her.” (2013)

In this article, Santorum never once mentions that he believes abortion is murder under any
circumstances; he has called pregnancy as a result of rape a ‘gift from God.’ Instead, the rationale
he uses is that “forced abortion and sterilization are gross violations of a woman’s physical
integrity.” The argument is carefully crafted to present an issue “both sides can agree on”.

Uneasy alliances

Forced abortion and sex-selective abortion have yielded a number of uneasy alliances.
One of the most puzzling examples is the adoption of Chen Guangcheng by the American pro-life

50 Despite repeated studies that have debunked the link, there is a growing movement among pro-life
activists to demonstrate the causal relationship between oral contraceptives or abortion and breast cancer.
For example, the Coalition on Abortion /Breast Cancer: http://www.abortionbreastcancer.com/index/.

51 Crisis Pregnancy Centers (CPC’s), often volunteer-run pro life organizations, may offer services like free
ultrasounds and pregnancy testing, GED training, and baby clothes. CPC’s have been criticized by pro-
choice activists for using deceptive advertising and providing unfounded information on abortions—for
example, linking abortions to higher breast cancer rates. Sidewalk counseling outside of clinics is still a
common form of pro-life activism, but there are now support groups for women and men with ‘post-
abortion trauma’, as well as links being drawn between abortion and depression, sex trafficking, etc.
movement. Chen Guangcheng, a blind lawyer and activist against forced abortions and sterilizations, was granted political asylum in the US after being beaten on various occasions and imprisoned for four years. "Chen’s fervent embrace by American conservatives, who saw him as a comrade-in-arms in the abortion debate, has always been a curious fit. His campaign to protect the rights of women and individuals from abuse by an authoritarian state shares more philosophical D.N.A. with liberalism than with the religious right" (Osnos 2012). Major right-wing news sources, such as LifeSiteNews, sometimes refer to Chen as pro-life, even though he has never taken a definitive stance on abortion in general.

Women’s Rights without Frontiers CEO Reggie Littlejohn has not only spoken at the National Right to Life Conference, but also testified numerous times for the US Congress, as well as the British and Irish Parliament. Littlejohn is prominently featured in ‘It’s A Girl: The Three Deadliest Words in the World’, a 2012 documentary film that focuses on ‘gendercide’ in India and China. In an article for Slate magazine, journalist Sital Kalantry investigates the background of “It’s A Girl”, finding that the director Evan Davis worked for Harvest Media Ministries, which makes pro-life films.

“The film’s official website encourages people to “[h]elp keep a girl in India alive by donating to the Invisible Girl Project, whose programs encourage Indian mothers to keep their girl children alive.” However, there is no link to the website of the Invisible Girl Project from the Web page on which the donation is solicited (but only from the “partner organizations” page). Only after searching for the charity’s website did I find that the charity states that it “follows pregnant village women [in India] who may be susceptible to committing feticide or infanticide.” The website further states that if their “partner finds that a baby girl’s life has been taken, [the] partner pursues justice for the baby girl in the local court system.” (Kalantry 2013).

The film urges viewers to donate money to an organization that monitors and punishes pregnant women in the very same way the pro-life movement professes is unlawful in China. And yet, “It’s A Girl” has been screened by numerous women’s groups, Amnesty International, and even a chapter of NARAL. In his article “Five Questions Planned Parenthood Refuses to Answer on Sex-Selection Abortions,” Cooper applauds the filmmaker for having “screened the film to feminist and pro-choice groups in hopes to get everyone unified against gendercide” (Cooper 2013). Robin Maria DeLugan, in a completely and utterly uncritical review of the film in Cultural Anthropology, lauds the film for “taking the viewer inside India and China to bring attention to the cultural and political systems that are responsible for gendercide” (DeLugan 2013:649). The fact that the film compares sex-selective abortion in two such markedly different contexts—given their dissimilar population policies and cultures—did not even raise red flags for an anthropologist.

American pro choice activists and organizations have remained largely silent on the one child policy, sex-selective abortion, and the sex ratio imbalance. One exception was the response to the case of Feng Jianmei, which caught the attention of Chinese as well as international media. Feng, a 23-year old woman who was seven months pregnant with her second child, was brutally forced into aborting the pregnancy. In response to a New York Times Article on the case, Nancy Northrup, President and Chief Executive of the Center for Reproductive Rights, wrote a short letter about forced abortions, which was published by the paper. Northrup thoroughly condemned forced abortion, connecting it to other human rights abuses: “Every woman must be guaranteed

52 For more on Chen Guangcheng:
http://www.newyorker.com/online/blogs/evanosnos/2013/06/nyu-china-and-chen-guangcheng.html
the right to dignity and dominion over her own reproductive life. Any government that fails to do so is guilty of human rights abuses, for which it must be held to account” (Northrup 2012). Northrup’s letter was also featured in a news brief in Ms. Magazine.

Bringing it Home: Sex-Selective Abortion in the US

Pro life groups cite two studies using 2000 census data that there is a slight sex ratio imbalance among Korean-, Indian-, and Chinese-American immigrant populations in the United States (NAPAWF 2013). While I do not dispute the findings of the studies, relying on them allows pro-life activists to engage another pro-life trope: the womb of color as a place of danger. Billboards of black babies bearing the words “the most dangerous place for an African American is in the womb” have ignited debates around race, with both pro-choice and pro-life activists accusing the other side of racism. Cooper argues that low-income communities and women of color are targeted by Planned Parenthood; he connects the high rate of abortion among low-income women in the United States with the prevalence of sex-selective abortion among low-income communities in India and China. Pro life activist Lila Rose, who has performed undercover ‘sting’ operations at Planned Parenthood clinics across the country, released a video in May of 2012 ‘exposing’ how a worker in an Austin, Texas clinic “encouraged” women to have a sex-selective abortion. In response to video, Planned Parenthood released a statement saying they opposed sex selection abortion. The bulk of the press release condemned Lila Rose’s video rather than coming out firmly against sex selective abortion. Abortion is presented as a weapon used intentionally against poor women and women of color; women of color, or communities of color, are either painted as passive victims or immoral agents. Either way, the argument begs for intervention.

Pro-life activists and legislators have used the argument that sex-selective abortion is happening in the United States to push for bans on the procedure that would penalize doctors who perform abortions based on the sex of the fetus. To date, six states have passed anti-sex selection bills; as of 2009, there have been a total of sixty bills introduced to ban abortion on the grounds of race or sex (NAPAWF 2013). The Prenatal Nondiscrimination Act (PRENDA), a federal bill that would have banned sex-selective abortion, failed to pass the House in May 2012.

The connection is clear: sex-selective abortion provides a way to rally groups normally estranged by the pro-life movement into advocating for restrictions on abortion. It is true, as Cooper writes, that “it’s hard to defend abortion while being against gendercide,” as Planned Parenthood’s weak response proves(2013). Indeed, the purpose of Cooper’s article is to draw these connections: “by asking some important questions about the commonalities gendercide shares with abortion in America we might all learn something...the answers to these questions might just make most pro-choice Americans question how they can support abortion in America while being against gendercide elsewhere” (2013).

But the most revealing flaw in pro-life opposition to sex-selective abortion is that it is, in a word, repetitive. ‘The pro-life position interprets induced abortion as life-taking... it is unclear why pro-life proponents would gain anything from inveighing against the narrower issue of sex-selective abortion. The argument that sex-selective abortion is discriminatory appears redundant, offering little further moral suasion if one begins with the presumption that abortion under any circumstances is life-taking. Nevertheless, pro-life advocates may sense a partial victory at hand.

because restrictions on prenatal sex selection could result in an overall decline in the use of abortion" (Goodkind 1999: 55). The pro-life movement is opposed to abortion in all cases: be it sex-selective, late-term, due to financial necessity, a pregnancy that is the result of rape or incest, etc. While pro-life activists may be genuinely concerned by ‘missing girls’ and the sex ratio imbalance, they are also, first and foremost, opposed to all abortions everywhere.

Distinguishing between forced abortions, sex-selective abortions, and the gender imbalance

The most powerful tools the pro-life movement has at its disposal are ambiguity and the power of negative association. Forced abortion is not only conflated with sex-selective abortion; the two distinct practices are stand-ins for any abortion, anywhere. “Those condemning sex-selective abortion routinely focus attention on the adjective (that sex selection is discriminatory) to the neglect of the noun (that the practice is manifested through abortion)” (Goodkind 1999: 55). Thus, the first step in laying out a feminist response is to distinguish abortion from the context it is presented, which is purely negative. Abortion is merely the method through which population policy is forced onto women’s own bodies, in the case of forced abortion, and through which a preference for sons is manifested into the gender imbalance. Abortion is not the cause of either issue.

To separate these issues is not to view them in complete isolation. As critics have pointed out, the one child policy may be a factor in, but is certainly not the exclusive reason for, all these issues. Jing-Bao sees the gender imbalance as a result of forced abortion, stating that “the coercive element in China’s birth control program, including pressuring and forcing women to have abortions against their wishes, often at the late stage of their pregnancies, has brought about devastating consequences, such as damage to the physical health of women, emotional and psychological injuries to women and their family members, disproportionate abortions of female fetuses and an increase in the killing and abandoning of female infants” (2005: 189).

The first crucial point in laying out a feminist response is to isolate forced abortion from all other issues. Forced abortion is a human rights violation and should be treated as such. The pro-choice movement can and should come out against forced abortions. This stance fits easily within the rhetoric of control over one’s own body. Indeed, to quote Women’s Rights without Frontiers, forced abortion is not a choice. The actual prevalence of cases of forced and coerced abortion must also be accurately determined. The question of coalition building and compromise across differences is beyond the scope of this paper, but I believe that coming out strongly against forced abortions, and working in solidarity with Chen Guangcheng, is the only possible place where there is a chance to unite pro-life and pro-choice activists.

Furthermore, we need to critically examine what the gender ratio imbalance actually means, rather than draw sweeping statements from inconclusive evidence. Goodkind agrees that prevalence of sex-selective abortion will result in a “future shortage of female adults”, but is incredulous of claims that this would produce “social instability”—that due to large numbers of single young men, there will be an increase in sex trafficking, sexual assault, etc. Goodkind also maintains that “no one really knows whether future sex-ratio imbalances will have a negative impact on women’s overall well-being” (1999: 58). Regardless of the actual effect of the sex ratio imbalance, we can also distinguish between saying that sex-selective abortion is sexist and between advocating for policies that curtail it.

Bans on Sex-Selective Abortion
Goodkind lays out several of the core reasons why banning sex-selective abortion would prove detrimental to women's' rights overall. The biggest risk in supporting a ban on sex-selective abortion is that it may limit women's access to abortion.

“A ban on sex-selective abortion would be ineffective unless women were willing to reveal that they wanted an abortion for such a purpose, an unrealistic expectation. To ban prenatal sex testing altogether (or perhaps to ban doctors from revealing the results) would be more potentially effective as it would deprive parents of the knowledge required for sex-selective abortion. However, as mentioned earlier, to restrict such knowledge could lead to restricting knowledge of other foetal characteristics. Moreover, pro-choice advocates have always cautioned that when governments put abortion services out of reach, women will be compelled to resort to the unsafe "back-alley" providers of such services” (Goodkind 1999:57)

As Goodkind points out, restrictions that would force women into risky "back-alley" abortions is not actually policy that is 'pro-woman'.

Goodkind also hypothesizes that sex-selective abortion may actually decrease experiences of 'post-natal sexism.' "The contemporary use of sex-selective abortion might substitute for (rather than simply add to) postnatal discrimination. Since parents now have the option of sex-selective abortion, daughters (as well as sons) carried to term are more likely to be wanted, and, hence, increases in the sex ratio at birth may be followed by a decline in postnatal discrimination” (1999: 53).

What the American Pro-Choice Movement can Learn

Discrimination against women is as deep—seated across cultures as it is unacceptable. For one, feminists can point out that all cultures are patriarchal, but sexism may take different forms in different countries, cultures, and communities. Valuing sons over daughters is a form of this sexism; the gender wage gap and inheritance laws that favor men over women is another form of this sexism, as is restriction to reproductive healthcare, including access to abortion. We cannot talk about ‘Chinese culture’ as purely oppressive for women, nor should we suggest that all women are oppressed in the same ways—this is no call for ‘universal sisterhood’.

The American pro-choice movement might also use the discussion of forced abortion to point out the disconnect that exists between state policy and women’s lived reproductive experiences. As numerous feminists have pointed out, women were getting and giving abortions long before it was legal, regardless of whether it was safe (e.g. Ehrenreich 1973, Kligman 1995, Oaks 1998). Women will always strive to space children or not have children at all in the manner they choose. In China, the policies may be vastly different, but the disconnect is the same.

If we frame intrusive government policy and deep-seated sexism as the causes of sex-selective abortion, we come through with quite a different set of tentative ‘solutions’ to the issue. We can draw attention to the fact that induced abortion is only the method through which these causes are realized; if there were no preference for sons, there would be no gender ratio imbalance. Theorists have suggested that a major reason for the son preference is a rather logical one: if a family can have only one child, it makes the most sense for that child to be able to earn the most. Thus, initiatives around decreasing the gender wage gap are not only worthwhile goals in and of themselves, but could also decrease the sex ratio imbalance. Focusing on this issue is another way to talk about sexism across cultures, given that the gender wage imbalance continues to be a pressing issue in the United States as well.
We might also use the issue of forced abortions to shed some light on the discourse around late-term abortions in the US. In China, forced and coerced abortions, like the population of undocumented citizens (hei renkou), are both a success and a failure of the One Child Policy (Greenhalgh 2003). The ultimate goal is to restrict family sizes to one child each, and abortions are a useful tool in ensuring that reality. But the 'path of least resistance' would be to ensure unplanned or unwanted pregnancies do not happen in the first place. "The state's preferred outcome is, of course, compliance with the birth control policy through delayed marriage and contraception" (Jing-Bao 2005: 190). The Center for Disease Control estimates that less than 2% of all abortions occur after 21 weeks; most of these are due to fetal deficiencies that were not detected earlier, the possibility of injury or death to the pregnant woman, or because she could not access an abortion sooner. I would argue that the emphasis on late-term abortion, like the emphasis on sex-selective abortion, is another strategy the pro-life movement employs to limit access to reproductive healthcare. As Goodkind has pointed out, if pro-life ideology holds that any fetus—even an hours-old embryo—is a human being with the right to live, why would late term abortions be more egregious than first trimester abortions?

The discourse around sex selection neglects another major point: gender cannot be divided neatly between male and female, nor is gender controllable or predictable. The rights of trans* and genderqueer people have continue to be neglected by mainstream cis-gendered feminists. A focus on these issues is long overdue and could also contribute to building feminist rhetorical strategies to respond to sex-selective abortion. Sex selective abortion has led to a gender ratio imbalance; at the same time, parents can never be sure what their child's gender is. Parents may 'choose' a boy only to find that their child is in fact female.

Of the bundle of issues that the pro-life movement conflates into the one monolithic issue, 'abortion in China,' it is sex-selective abortion that is the most complex. Forced abortion can be confronted through the lens of choice, but sex-selective abortion and the sex ratio imbalance challenge fundamental liberal feminist definitions of agency and bodily autonomy. We must face the difficult reality that women decide—if not ‘choose’—to abort female fetuses because of their gender. In this respect, the discourse around sex selective abortion has much in common with the discourse around abortion based on fetal deficiencies. The one child policy limits ‘choices’ for many parents, but parents still exercise some degree of control over their reproductive decision—even if it is to have a son rather than a daughter. We might consider how to navigate the difficult question posed by Mahmood: “how do women contribute to reproducing their own domination, and how do they resist or subvert it?” (2001: 205)

More than anything, we might use sex-selective abortion to emphasize the need for a framework of analysis that questions and expands our current definition of agency. “Agency, in this form of analysis, is understood as the capacity to realize one’s own interests against the weight of custom, tradition, transcendental will, or other obstacles (whether individual or collective)” (Mahmood 2001: 206). Part of the issue with this definition of agency is that it forces analysis to be based around one of two poles: a woman that is agentile is also resistant, while a woman that is docile and obedient is read as a victims that needs to be saved. “Western literature about the subject, especially mass media reports, usually depict[ing] Chinese women (or more exactly, couples) who have been forced to terminate their pregnancies either as victims of the totalitarian political system or as fighters for the rights of reproduction” (Jing-Bao 2005: 197). Activists on both side of the abortion debate would do well to ask what ‘choice’ actually means. 54

54 It has been my effort to show that the pro-life movement’s stance on abortion in Asia is not only about limiting abortion access around the globe, but is also fueled on the
Conclusion

I suggest that we gradually abandon the term “pro choice” in favor of the more inclusive term ‘reproductive justice.’ Reproductive justice not only provides a more flexible framework to respond to coerced abortion and gender-selective abortion in China, but also a more comprehensive term for other issues that get pushed out by discussions that center on access to abortion. Issues like childcare, forced sterilization, sex education, trans and genderqueer rights, disabled rights, the rights of incarcerated women and LGBTQ prisoners, and sex workers’ rights are also matters of reproductive justice.

Greenhalgh believes that the “bottom-up look at women’s resistance” should be balanced with a “top-down perspective on states and human scientists as agents in creating the discourses and programs” (2003: 197). Another facet to the shaping of reproduction is the influence of ideology, religion, and foreign policymakers. The American-based pro-life movement’s growing focus on abortion in China and numerous other countries is well worth scholarly scrutiny, both for the epistemological value of so complex an issue, but also to bring these issues to the attention of the feminist community. There are myriad opportunities for further research on the subject.

I would hypothesize, from the small sampling of pro-choice and pro-life texts I have analyzed here, that pro-life activists would not take issue with PGD because it does not involve abortion, which is, from their perspective, akin to murder. But there are also a number of raced and classed arguments at play in how reproductive healthcare, including PGD and induced abortion, is considered. I would argue that PGD may elicit more positive reactions not only because it’s the ‘creation’ rather than ‘elimination’ of a pregnancy, but also because it is only available to those couples with the economic resources to afford it—the very same “parents in developed countries” who are cast as wanting to choose the gender of their child for purposes of ‘family balancing,’ rather than a cultural bias against one gender.

55 Some questions for further research: how does pro-life activism outside of the US tie in to missionary activity? What are the dynamics around these issues among Christians, both Chinese citizens and non-citizens, in China? How have the Chinese government’s shifting positions on religion as well as Americans affected pro-life activism in China?
But even with so many unknowns, a feminist response to the pro-life movement is urgently and absolutely necessary. The pro-life movement has already staked its claims on Chen Guangcheng. Already, googling ‘forced abortion,’ ‘sex selective abortion,’ or ‘Feng Jiaomei’ returns almost exclusively articles from pro-life news sources—some of which are not so much about the issues themselves as they are about calling out the American pro-choice movement on its silence around these issues. For once, I am in agreement. The way to engage with complex issues is not to ignore them. We must condemn the practice of forced abortions and support initiatives that will close the gender wage gap, while also defending the right to reproductive healthcare, including abortion, unconditionally. The pro-choice movement’s silence will not combat falsehoods.

Pro Life Research Reports

For example, an article by the LifeSiteNews staff, discusses a report that was produced by the Institute of Marriage and Family Canada. Pro-life media accuses liberal / mainstream media of blatant pro-choice bias; pro-life scientists make same accusation of academics and larger scientific community—hence characterization of these findings as “typically ignored” and “underpublicized.” The article lists several bullet points about the percentage of women who the report finds suffer from long-lasting depression after abortion, etc—typical of pro-life researchers who are building on the idea of post-abortion trauma.

More revealing of the report’s goals, however, are the findings on how abortion impacts relationships and the family. As the article cites, “Women having abortions are 37% more likely to divorce and twice as likely to never marry; 34% of women reported a decrease in sexual desire post-abortion; women who aborted had more positive attitudes toward risky sexual behavior including sex with strangers and being forced to have sex; men whose partners aborted had more positive attitudes toward group sex, sex with strangers, and paying for sex.” The takeaway from the report, then, is that abortion threatens the sacred heterosexual marriage and family unit—that abortion is an immoral behavior that leads to more immoral behavior—abortion is one sin that leads to others: divorce, group sex, paying for sex. The report has some elements of objective scientific fact, but falls back on conservative Christian ideas about the family.

After listing these dangers, the article continues, “there have also been societal impacts resulting from not just abortion but widespread use of contraception. The report discusses how disconnecting sex from babies has created “winners and losers” among both men and women.” In other words, conservative Christian forces oppose abortion, contraception, recreational sex because they negatively impact society.

“Anyone but the most severe ideologue can see that these scientific studies are a legitimate cause for concern, and yet information about the effects of abortion doesn’t reach women who could really use it,” Andrea Mrozek, the author of the report, is quoted in the article. The function of using the language of science is to accuse those who support abortion access as irrational and anti-empirical—the very same accusations made of the pro-life movement, as grounding their views in religion and morality rather than public health or the fabric of women’s everyday lives.

To what degree is pro-life activism in China and around forced abortion and sex-selective abortion led by local Chinese vs. foreigners, or to what degree is it a joint effort? What other factors could contribute to the sex ratio imbalance?
"The report concludes that a better understanding of potential post-abortion outcomes helps women, men and families to make more informed choices." Leveraging the language of choice to oppose not just abortion but also contraception—using surface-level secular—scientific language to oppose recreational sex. The rhetoric is not to deny women agency, but rather to use that to argue that abortion is the wrong choice.

Legal Impact

A more complete assessment of the impact of woman-centered pro-life arguments on abortion access would analyze recent anti-abortion statutes; what percentage of them framed in these terms vs. fetal personhood. While this task is beyond the scope of this paper, I will lay out a few examples of how the discourse maps onto recent legislation, particularly the South Dakota Task Force on Abortion Report. I find that overall, legislation which correspond with Reardon’s proposed tactics, targeting abortion providers for purported safety measures and protecting women from coerced abortions, are increasingly common.

The agenda that Reardon outlines for pro-life politicians has four main points:
1. Protecting women from being coerced into unwanted abortions;
2. Guaranteeing the right of women to make free and fully informed decisions about abortion;
3. Protecting the women most likely to be injured by abortion by requiring physicians to properly screen patients for characteristics which would place them at higher risk of physical or psychological complications; and
4. Expanding the rights of injured patients to recover fair compensation for physical or psychological harm resulting from abortion” (Reardon, 33)

While Casey applies theories about frame extensions to the rhetoric of social movements, I suggest that it also applies to legislation. Particularly because the overall strategy of the pro-life movement is to pass restrictions state by state, a bill that has been proven to work in one state can be applied to another. Some of these tactics that have used WPAA reasoning, such as right-to-know and public health concerns include: parental consent statutes for minors, enforced waiting periods before abortions, compelling doctors to tell patients seeking abortions about health effects, legislating against sex-selective abortion, and mandating structural requirements for abortion clinics.

Notes from The Right’s Reasons: Constitutional Conflict and the Spread of Woman-Protective Antiabortion Argument, Reva B. Siegel

Siegel discusses the relevance of Gonzalez v. Carhart, which upheld the Partial Birth Abortion Ban, in the strengths and limitations of the WPAA. (read through Gonzalez v. Carhart). While fetal personhood provided the rationale to uphold the act, Carhart included as an additional justification that some women regretted abortion (excerpt text). These conclusions were drawn from an amicus brief from The Justice Foundation, which provided testimonies (affidavits?) from women who said they regretted their abortions.

Legislation that includes woman-centered arguments demonstrates hybridized pro-life argument, employing Christian and secular evidence, testimonies from women, and statements about fetal development and rights. The South Dakota Task Force on Abortion, for example, maintains several claims: that a fetus is a human life, that women are coerced into abortion, and that even if they chose it, it was wrong to have done so (Siegel 2008: 1652).
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