

Interactive Framing Dynamics and Ideological Boundaries  
in the American Abortion Debate

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Kia Heise

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Dr. Teresa Swartz, Dr. Lisa Park

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## **Introduction**

While the ideologies of the pro-life and pro-choice movements are seemingly diametrically opposed, their framing strategies over time are deeply interconnected, resulting in a blurring of ideological boundaries between the movements. Since the legalization of abortion in 1973, the pro-life and pro-choice movements have been constantly engaged in a process of framing and counterframing, with each movement gaining political advantages at different times in the last 40 years (Rohlinger 2006, McCaffrey and Keys 2000, Esacove 2004). Successful counterframing forces a social movement to reframe or clarify their argument, and in this interaction, the pro-life and pro-choice movements have, at times, borrowed from and co-opted the language of the opposing movement, which can be advantageous or hazardous to a movement's success (Benford and Snow 2000).

In this dissertation, I illustrate the interactive nature of strategic framing processes of the American pro-life and pro-choice movements and the process whereby movements borrow and co-opt language and imagery from opposing movements. Illustrated by two case studies of reactive and strategic counterframing in the pro-choice and pro-life movements, I show how such framing complicates the boundaries between these movements' ideologies. What was once demarcated as progressive becomes a champion of conservative causes and vice versa. I extend social movement theories of interactive framing processes and boundary demarcation by contributing an analysis of instances

where activists blur ideological boundaries between movements and risk weakening the collective identification of movement adherents.

I have identified two “cases” that exemplify this interactive framing process and the subsequent blurring of ideological boundaries between the pro-life and pro-choice movements—1) pro-choice activists framing abortion as “good mothering” and 2) pro-life activists framing abortion as “Black genocide.” First, I explore the historical and cultural context of each framing strategy, as well as the motivations and goals of the movement actors utilizing them. Then, in the case of framing abortion as “good mothering,” I explore how pro-choice movement activists attempt to respond to countermovement attacks by reframing abortion using the language of “good mothers” and “morality” traditionally used by the politically conservative pro-life movement. In the case of framing abortion as “Black genocide,” I explore how pro-life movement activists attempt to reframe abortion using the language of racism and inequality traditionally associated with politically liberal civil rights activists. I argue that as each movement responds to countermovement threats by borrowing and co-opting language and imagery from the opposing movement, the ideological boundaries between the pro-life and pro-choice movements are blurred. Blurred boundaries threaten the stability of each movement by weakening collective identity ties and risk marginalizing and alienating certain movement adherents

In PART ONE of this dissertation, I argue that the framing of abortion as “good mothering” is a response to the success of the pro-life rhetoric that frames women who abort as bad mothers. This case study illustrates the interconnected nature of framing and counterframing processes. By attempting to frame women who abort as good mothers making moral choices, the pro-choice actors utilize the *culturally resonant* values of good motherhood and child-centered choices that have been central to pro-life framing over the years (Snow and Benford 1988). In this way, they hope to destigmatize abortion and abortion patients using language of the pro-life movement and expand the boundaries of “morality” to include abortion. This framing tactically avoids the “choice” and personal autonomy frameworks of the mainstream pro-choice movement, which have been consistently attacked and weakened since their emergence after *Roe v. Wade*. The pro-choice advocates using this framework hope to mobilize support for abortion rights from that segment of potential adherents who are uncomfortable with viewing abortion as simply a woman’s personal choice or legal right. However, their framing abortion as moral and women who chose abortion as responsible marginalizes the many women who fall outside of the realm of “good mothers” making “responsible choices” for their children. In my analysis, I show that, while framing abortion as good mothering acknowledges women’s emotional connections to their fetuses and responds to a feminist call for destigmatizing abortion through a “moral framework,” it may also pose a significant risk to the larger movement. This case study contributes to our understanding of the framing/counterframing process by exploring the risks of responding to countermovement attacks “on their terms” (Benford and Snow 2000). While such

reframing provides an opportunity to mobilize new supporters, it may be just as likely to alienate core constituents (Ferree 2003). Because movement activists under attack are seeking to restore their movement's moral status, they are likely to reframe their movement using culturally resonant language of the successful countermovement. In doing so, they may contradict or challenge their movement's core ideologies and divide the movement. I draw on theories of boundary framing and collective identity to show how this interactive and reactive framing blurs the ideological boundaries between the pro-choice and pro-life movements.

In PART TWO of this dissertation, I argue that the re-emergence of "abortion as Black genocide" framing in the anti-abortion movement should be understood as a response to the rise of the reproductive justice movement led by women of color that criticizes the pro-choice movement for ignoring racism within its ranks. This case study also illustrates the interconnected nature of the framing and counterframing processes in the abortion debate. By framing abortion as "Black genocide" these pro-life movement activists are attempting to mobilize greater support among African Americans and utilize the increased focus on race in the abortion debate to their advantage. They claim that Black Americans are specifically targeted for extinction by the government and Planned Parenthood. These activists, many of whom are African Americans, draw on the history of racially discriminatory population control programs and the relatively high rate of abortion in the Black community today to argue that abortion is a continuation of racist eugenic practices stretching back to slavery in the United States. In their degree of *credibility* and *salience* to African Americans, this frame is hypothetically likely to

appeal to the targets of mobilization. However, I argue this proposed *frame extension* deeply conflicts with the racial ideologies of conservative Republicans—the pro-life movement’s core constituents—in its focus on race and racism. In order for a frame to have resonance, it must be credible, and credibility depends on three factors: *frame consistency, empirical credibility, and credibility of the frame articulators or claimsmakers* (Benford and Snow 2000). I suggest that the ‘Black genocide’ frames lacks consistency as well as credibility with both conservative Republicans and Black civil rights leaders. This research contributes to our understanding of the framing/counterframing process by exploring the risks of frame extensions that tactically utilize the language of the opposition and risk blurring the boundaries between the opposing movements and alienating certain key constituents.

These cases illustrate the difficulty of boundary demarcation when language, imagery, and framing that were once associated with the pro-life movement become associated with the pro-choice movement and vice versa. Thus, interactive counterframing confuses and shifts boundaries. In this research, I extend social movement theories of interactive framing and boundary demarcation processes by contributing an analysis of instances where activists blur ideological boundaries between movements—in an attempt to weaken their opponents’ claims on certain language or imagery that is damaging to their movement—and in doing so, I argue, risk weakening the collective identification of movement adherents.



## Chapter 1

### Social Movement Framing Theory

Social movement framing is a *strategic* process—deliberative, utilitarian, and goal directed (Benford and Snow 2000). Social movement organizations (SMOs) are actively engaged in the production of meaning. The very purpose of a social movement is to present a different meaning to some specific problem or situation and to convince observers to favor their interpretation of events (Snow and Benford 1988, Benford 1993, Gamson 1992, Rose 2011). SMOs seek to control the images and language related to their cause, and these efforts evolve over time. Some movement actors may attempt to redefine the meaning of certain words and thereby create new ways of seeing the world (Benford and Snow 2000, Feree 2003, Staggenborg 1995). Based on the work of Goffman (1974), social movement scholars call this process “framing.” The concept of “framing” is now conceived as central to understanding social movements and implies a dynamic, evolving process, which grants agency to movement actors in the construction of reality (Snow et al. 1986, Benford and Snow 2000). Through this framing process, social movement actors “attempt to construct shared meaning about who we are, how the world is, and how it should be” (Esacove 2004). When a movement actor proposes a new way to interpret the social world, they intentionally challenge previous understandings. This strategic deployment of frames results in what has been termed a “collective action frame.” The purpose of collection action frames is “to mobilize potential adherents and

constituents, to garner bystander support, and to demobilize antagonists” (Snow and Benford 1988:198).

In the creation of a collective action frame, social movement organizations must first identify the problem and decide whom to blame (“diagnostic framing”), propose alternatives (“prognostic framing”), and encourage others to join (“motivational framing”) (Snow and Benford 1988). “Prognostic framing” involves an agreed upon plan of action to address to problem. “Motivational framing” entails what Gamson (1995) refers to as the “agency” component of framing and provides a rationale for engaging in collective action.

### **Counterframing**

Framing is not a one-way process, but is always negotiated and contested by an SMO’s *interaction* with supporters, opponents, and the media, as well by changes in public opinion and available resources (Meyer and Staggenborg 2008). Additionally, critical political events, such as changes in legislation, court rulings, or elections influence movements’ actions. Movements must continually adjust their framing and tactics in response to these interactions and events—many of which cannot be predicted (Meyer and Staggenborg 2008). Frames are strategically created, but always within a pre-established framework. A social movement cannot simply project any version of reality and be accepted, but is challenged from both outside and within the movement (Benford and Snow 2000). Additionally, cultural and political constraints restrict the types of framing that social movement organizations can draw on. *Counterframing* entails a

rejection of or challenge to a movement's diagnostic or prognostic framing by an opponent, which in turn results in a reframing of the original movement framing. A growing number of empirical studies examine movement-counter movement interactions and strategic framing choices (see Andrews 2002; Bernstein 1997; Dugan 2004; Esacove 2004; Fetner 2001; McCaffrey and Keys 2000; Munro 1999; Peckham 1998; Rohlinger 2002, 2006; Meyer and Staggenborg 2008).

Meaning-making is a contested process and frames can continuously evolve based on interactions between the movement and counter movement and the 'outside world.' The presence and framing choices of a counter movement influences the framing, language, and tactics of a social movement (McCaffrey and Keys 2000). Successful counter framing can powerfully affect opposing movement activists by putting them on the defensive and forcing them to change or clarify their positions often (Benford and Snow 2000). If a counter movement is unsuccessful in its attempts to discredit its opposition, it may attempt to co-opt some of the opposition's language or images and use them as its own. Repeated counter movement attacks will force a movement into a defensive posture. A failure to respond to repeated counter movement attacks may result in a movement's demise. The presence of a strong counter movement can be both a threat to movement success and an opportunity to mobilize supporters (McCaffrey and Keys 2000). Opposing movements influence each other directly through their framing and counter framing processes as well as indirectly through their influence on the political environment (Meyer and Staggenborg 2008). If a movement does not face a strong counter movement and is successful, it eventually becomes institutionalized. However, the

growth of a countermovement changes this dynamic. As a countermovement gains advantage, the movement must respond to these threats by encouraging mobilization, and then the opposing movement must respond (Meyer and Staggenborg 1996, 2008; Zald and Useem 1987).

Movements attempt to overcome countermovement attacks by utilizing themes that they hope will be culturally resonant, mobilize supporters, and demobilize opponents (McCaffrey and Keys 2000). McCaffrey and Keys (2000) explore competitive framing between social movements and identify three responses to ideological challenges by opponents: *polarization-vilification*, *frame saving*, and *frame debunking*. *Polarization* defines “us versus them,” *vilification* frames an opponent as corrupt or evil, *frame debunking* is an attempt to discredit competing ideologies, and *frame saving* is an attempt to save or restore a frame that has been criticized.

The first SMOs to enter a conflict limit the framing choices of SMOs emerging later in the cycle by creating the dominant frame, which has the potential to become “sticky” (Snow and Benford 1992). Dominant frames provide a common language and focus. As a social movement conflict begins, the original movement chooses where and how the battle will be fought (in the courts, in the legislature, on the streets, etc.). The countermovement must enter the battle on the movement’s terms and fight to gain momentum. Once the countermovement gains enough support and resources, they can attempt to take control of the terms of the “battle.” In the fight between two opposing movements, the political advantage will shift back and forth over time and the advantaged side will generally have control over the focus of the conflict. The

disadvantaged side is most likely to attempt to reframe the debate in order to regain control (Meyer and Staggenborg 2008). When SMOs feel that authorities are sympathetic to their cause, they are more likely to seek institutional change through legislation and the courts. However, when they feel that unsympathetic authorities are blocking these opportunities, they are more likely to engage in direct action tactics (Meyer and Staggenborg 2008).

Framing contests also occur within movements about how best to project a specific version of reality, referred to by Benford (1993) as “frame disputes.” Research has shown that such disputes can both hurt and strengthen a social movement (Benford and Snow 2000). Countermovement threats may create new opportunities for movements to mobilize supporters in opposition to these threats (McCaffrey and Keys 2000). As a movement attempts to successfully respond to a countermovement, it is likely to experience framing disputes within the movement, as members may disagree about the best way to respond to the counterframing and not all SMOs within a movement may be willing to modify their framing or demands (Meyer and Staggenborg 1996, 2008).

### **Frame Extension and Transformation**

The efforts of a social movement to mobilize new supporters have been called *frame alignment processes* and include *frame bridging*, *frame amplification*, *frame extension*, and *frame transformation* (Snow et al. 1986). The frame alignment process is a strategic effort to link the interests of the social movement with potential supporters (Benford and Snow 2000). *Frame bridging* links together two or more frames with the

goal of bringing certain groups of potential supporters to a movement or linking social movements together. *Frame amplification* attempts to draw in supporters by framing a movement in terms of certain culturally resonant beliefs and values. *Frame extension* is a process in which movement organizations seek to gain potential supporters by strategically appealing to the perceived values of those potential supporters (Snow et al. 1986). *Frame transformation* proposes new meanings of certain issues, with hopes of transforming how they are understood (Benford and Snow 2000).

In order for a movement to undergo frame transformation, “new values have to be created and nurtured, old meanings or understandings discarded and erroneous beliefs reframed” (Snow et al. 1986:473). Frame changes are prompted by a perceived lack of correspondence between a movement’s framing and the ideas and values held by potential constituents (Snow et al. 1986). When movement activists are disillusioned with the lack of change, they are more likely to propose frame adjustments in order to attract new followers. Frame extensions can restart a stalled movement (Snow et al. 1986), but also have the potential to lead to instability within a movement if movement activists disagree about the changes. When social movement organizations attempt to reframe the movement’s message, there can be tension over the “purity” of a movement (Benford and Snow 2000, 625). Frame transformation comes with several significant risks for a social movement. It can lead to intramovement disputes and weaken a movement or may fail to resonate with target audiences. A frame designed to resonate with a particular group’s cultural narrative may not resonate with another group’s narrative (Snow and Benford 1988). A frame shift, however, may also succeed drawing in new supporters.

Research on frame extension serves to “underscore the fact that movement framing processes are frequently contested and negotiated processes, not always under the tight control of movement elites” (Benford and Snow 2000: 625). For example, a SMO may identify with an identity community yet articulate issue positions and pursue goals contrary to the community’s presumed core issue positions. Hipsher (2007) defines such SMOs as *heretical social movement organizations* (HSMOs). She examines two social movement organizations that can be understood as heretical—Feminists for Life and Catholics for Free Choice. Framing is an especially difficult process for HSMOs because they are hoping to appeal to potential supporters as well as the mainstream identity community, even as they challenge the basic principles of that community. Pro-life feminists are seen as inauthentic feminists and pro-choice Catholics are seen as inauthentic Catholics. Hipsher examines how social movements use *doctrinal litmus tests* to demarcate who belongs within the “identity community” and who does not. Since *Roe*, the abortion issue has been a litmus test for determining whether one is authentically Catholic or feminist. In order to manage the stigma of being labeled heretics, HSMOs amplify particular traditions and values of their identity communities in their frames (Hipsher 2007). *Value amplification* involves the reinvigoration of values that are considered important to potential adherents but have not been utilized to mobilize collective action among these individuals (Snow et al. 1986:469). This is necessary for stigmatized groups that hope to be accepted in the mainstream and transform their communities’ collective identities (Hipsher 2007).

## **Frame Resonance**

Important to this research is the concept of *frame resonance*. The degree to which a social movement's frame is resonant with potential adherents is associated with how effective the frame is at mobilizing them to action. Resonance depends on the credibility of a frame. As Benford and Snow (2000) argue, credibility depends on three factors: *frame consistency, empirical credibility, and credibility of the frame articulators or claimsmakers*. First, a frame is inconsistent if there are apparent contradictions between a social movement organization's beliefs, claims, and actions. Contradictions are hypothetically problematic for an SMO, but little research has been conducted on the effects of frame resonance (Benford and Snow 2000). Next, a frame's resonance is affected by perceptions of *empirical credibility*. The claims made need not be factually verifiable, but must be at least "believable" by potential movement adherents. Last, a social movement's claims are hypothetically most effective if they come from speakers who are perceived as credible (Benford and Snow 2000). In a framing contest, the social movement with the greatest credibility is likely to succeed.

Resonance also depends on the salience of a frame to the lives of potential supporters. Three dimensions of salience have been identified: *centrality, experiential commensurability, and narrative fidelity* (Snow and Benford 1988). Centrality has to do with how central the issue is to the lives of the target audience. Experiential commensurability is associated with how closely the potential adherents can relate to the



frame. Hypothetically, if a frame is too abstract, mobilization is less likely. Lastly, narrative fidelity, or “cultural resonance,”—the extent to which a frame lines up with the target’s “cultural narrations”—has been shown to have a significant impact on frame resonance. Utilizing the values and language of a group increases the potential for successful alignment (Luna 2010).

In her research on feminist framing of abortion in the United States and Germany, Ferree (2003) examines the concept of frame resonance and questions the basic assumption that movements will always opt for resonant frames. She argues that taking this relationship for granted ignores the power dynamics privileging certain types of dominant discourse—measuring success simply by the extent to which a movement conforms to this dominant discourse. Also, understanding the framing process in this way reduces it to simply “marketing.” Many actors within a social movement seek more than short-term strategic effectiveness. Some social movement activists deliberately utilize nonresonant frames that “may be ineffective in the short-term and even dangerous to the movement” (305). Those activists are often outside of the mainstream movement hoping to significantly change the movement and are therefore more likely to take such a risk. Some actors opt for radicalism over resonance.

### **Interactive Movement Framing**

Movements are continuously responding to opposing movements’ framing and actions, but insufficient attention has been paid to *the process* of framing and reframing messages in response to an opposing movement (Benford and Hunt 2003, Dugan 2004).

Countermovements inevitably impact the social movements they oppose (Meyer and Staggenborg 1996, Zald and Useem 1987; McCaffrey and Keys 2000; Rohlinger 2002). In her examination of an anti-gay initiative in Colorado, Herman (1997) shows how movement actors reframed their message in response to audience's reactions. She found that the anti-gay rights movement activists reframed their message from one of Biblical condemnation to a more rights-based approach, arguing that homosexuals did not deserve "special rights," when they realized that Colorado voters were more likely to respond to a secular appeal. Fetner (2001) shows how opposing social movements affect each other's framing processes in her analysis of the gay and lesbian movement and the Religious Right's anti-gay movement. She finds that, after the emergence of strong anti-gay movement organizing, gay rights organizations shifted their framing of those specific issues that the anti-gay rights group addressed in their framing, but did not change their framing on issues not addressed by the opposition. This data supports the claim that the actions of opposing movements can greatly influence a movement's framing decisions. Dugan (2004) explores the potential consequences of refusing to respond to counterframing by documenting how opposing social movement organizations—the Christian Right and the gay, lesbian, and bisexual movement—respond to each other's messages. Dugan describes how the pro-gay rights organizations resisted reframing their message in response to opponents' framing and argues that this resistance ultimately weakened movement success.

In his "insider's critique" of the social movement framing perspective, Robert D. Benford (1997) encourages future research in social movement framing to engage with

*dynamic* framing processes and not simply with the frames themselves. In other words, he calls for an increased focus on the processes associated with the social construction, negotiation, contestation, and transformation of frames (415). He also points out that many studies of social movement framing focus on a relatively narrow slice of time, and encourages social movement researchers to examine “continuities and changes in framing strategies, their forms, and the content of frames over the life of a movement, throughout a cycle of protest, or across an historical epoch” (416). As Benford points out, essential to an understanding of *dynamic* framing process is an examination of the conflict inherent in framing decisions. Framing is a consistently contested process, and disputes erupt from within and between movement organizations. Benford (1997) also offers a critique of what he called an “elite bias” in research on movement framing, as researchers are more likely to focus on movement elites than rank-and-file members and on official materials created by mainstream organizations. Thus, research on movement framing processes is “top-down” by design. Benford encourages researchers to design more studies that examine the interactions of non-elites as well as elites. In this research, I examine interactive and reactive framing dynamics of the pro-life and pro-choice movements. This research responds to some of Benford’s critiques by attempting to illustrate the fundamentally *interactive* nature of movement framing, examining the potential internal and external hazards of *reactive* framing, and investigating the perspectives of non-elite movement actors.

## **Boundary Demarcation and Collective Identity**

Scholars concerned with boundaries make a distinction between symbolic and social boundaries. In this work, I am primarily concerned with the symbolic boundaries that demarcate opposing social movements. Lamont and Molnar (2002) define symbolic boundaries as “conceptual distinctions made by social actors to categorize objects, people, practices, and even time and space...tools by which individuals and groups struggle over and come to agree upon definitions of reality” (168). Symbolic boundaries separate people into groups.

Social movement scholars have emphasized the importance of boundaries in the creation of collective identity (Reger 2008). Identity communities are based on boundaries—supposed moral, cognitive, affective, and behavioral differences—drawn between “us” and “them” (Taylor and Whittier 1992). Movements construct three sets of identity categories: protagonists (sympathizers, beneficiaries, advocates), antagonists (opposition actors), and audiences (neutral or uncommitted observers). Yet, as Hunt, Benford, and Snow (1994) point out, these categories are not clear-cut and can become sources of intramovement dispute. As social movements make distinctions about who belongs and who does not—as seen in past research on the exclusion of gay men in the Black community (Cohen 1999), exclusion of the North American Man-Boy Love Association by the gay/lesbian community (Gamson 1997), and sadomasochists by the lesbian community (Phelan 1989). Boundary demarcation is a process utilized to define group membership by pointing out the differences between community members and those outside the community and *boundary framing* involves a strategy of contrasting

one's ideas, practices, and tactics with those of other groups involved in the social/political contest (Hipsher 2007, Taylor and Whittier 1992, Gamson 1997). Boundary demarcation happens both between and within social movements (Hunt et al. 1994, Hunt and Benford 2004; Hipsher 2007). Research has shown that SMO activists maintain and actively enforce the constructed boundaries (Hunt and Benford 2004, Benford 2002). Such boundaries are necessary in social movement conflicts in order to delineate the boundaries between movement protagonists and antagonists (Benford and Snow 2000). "Put simply," Gamson argues, "identity requires difference" (1997; 181). Organizing people around a collective identity requires not only drawing attention to commonalities, but also pointing out differences (Gamson 1997).

Based on his research on intramovement disputes, Gamson (1997:181) argues, "The 'achievement' of collective identity is inevitably tied to some degree of boundary patrol," and that "all social movements, and identity movements in particular, are thus in the business, at least sometimes, of exclusion." He shows that boundaries are not only drawn between "us" and "them" outside of the movement, but also between particular subgroups within a movement. He argues that in a political environment where rights are distributed to groups based on discernible boundaries, this process of exclusion is advantageous to a social movement (Gamson 1997). Clear membership boundaries are "useful for mobilization (one knows who is a potential participant and who is not), for collective grievances (one knows for whom a claim is being made), and for group solidarity (one knows to whom one is tied)" (Gamson 1997: 181). Benford (2002, 71) argues, "Having carefully constructed a clear demarcation between the "good" folks and

the “bad,” movement adherents seek to preserve those distinctions.” If these boundaries prove unstable, the movement framing can lose credibility and “frame resonance” (Snow and Benford 1988).

*Thus, what happens to clear ideological boundaries in the abortion debate—those that create the collective identities needed for mobilization and group solidarity—when pro-choice activists attempt to respond to criticism by focusing on the trauma of abortion and notions of morality and “good” mothering? What happens to these boundaries when pro-life activists attempt to frame the movement as feminist and anti-racist?* In this research, I extend social movement theories of interactive framing processes and boundary demarcation by contributing an analysis of instances where activists blur ideological boundaries between movements—in an attempt to weaken their opponents’ claim on certain language or imagery that is damaging to their movement—and, in doing so, I argue, risk weakening the collective identification of movement adherents.

In the following section, I explore the framing/counterframing process of the pro-life and pro-choice movements since the early 1970s. This review lays the groundwork for understanding my findings below. By reviewing some of the most significant framing shifts over time, I intend to show that the pro-life and pro-choice movement leaders make framing decisions based on the interactive relationship between the two movements and important political events affecting both movements.

## Chapter 2

### Pro-Life And Pro-Choice Framing And Counterframing Processes

The American abortion debate provides an excellent case to study the ways that opposing movements influence each other. Abortion has been one of the most controversial political issues in the past four decades and stands apart from other social movement conflicts in its permanence and polarization. However, the meaning attached to abortion is not static, but changes over time with shifts in framing strategies of the pro-choice and pro-life movements. Both movements have changed their tactics over time, with varying levels of success (Petchesky 1990, Saletan 2004, Solinger 2001). In any movement, leaders must decide how to present and interpret a social problem so as to gain the broadest support for their cause. Pro-choice and pro-life activists clearly struggle against each other for public support of their interpretation of abortion. The pro-life and pro-choice movements have changed their framing strategies and tactics in response to the framing strategies and tactics of the opposing movement, as well as critical political events, and political advantage has shifted back and forth between the movements over the last four decades (King and Husting 2003, Meyer and Staggenborg 2008, Staggenborg 1991, 1993).

## **The Development of the Abortion Rights Movement and “Choice” Framework**

The pro-choice movement’s basic framework rests on the argument that has that abortion is a woman’s individual right and her personal choice. Some abortion rights activists and scholars have criticized this framework over time as too weak or unstable to protect abortion rights. However, abortion rights were not always based on this “choice” framework. In the decades preceding *Roe*, abortion reform movements were framed as both public health—focusing on fatalities from unsafe abortions—and population control campaigns (Condit 1990). Abortion rights movement activists were mainly drawn from population control organizations and the women’s rights movement (Staggenborg 1991). Organizations like NOW, NARAL, and Planned Parenthood joined forces with population control organizations like Zero Population Growth and the Population Council (Ziegler 2009). However, the framing of abortion as a tool of population control grew increasingly unpopular as it was compared to eugenic birth control policies of the past. As the population control framework waned, the women’s rights framework grew. By the late 1960s, the feminist demand for abortion rights was more radical. Feminists argued for complete repeal of abortion laws instead of simply loosening the restrictions. They also endeavored to frame abortion legalization more as a matter of woman’s rights, and less as a way to protect physicians who performed abortions. Buoyed by the success of the 1960s women’s rights movement, large groups of women began to demand the right to abortion, arguing that the right was essential to their autonomy, and utilizing such phrases as “Abortion on Demand and Without Apology” and “Get Your Laws Off My



Body” (Wilder 1998, 77-78). However, as the liberal dominance of the 1960s waned, feminist arguments for abortion rights lost public support and anti-abortion activists succeeded in blocking the repeal of abortion laws in several states. Consequently, abortion rights activists shifted their focus to the courts, arguing that abortion restrictions violated women’s right to protection and privacy—following the precedent that had been set in the 1965 *Griswold v. Connecticut* ruling which legalized contraception for all women (Ginsburg 1989, 40-41). Abortion rights advocates found the “privacy” framework appealing in part because it allowed lawmakers and the public to remain neutral on the controversial abortion issue. In other words, the Supreme Court did not need to address the morality of abortion, but only a woman’s right to be left alone (Copelan 1990, 36). Reframing abortion as an individual right to privacy helped to expand the public support of the movement (Ginsburg 1989, 39-40) and in 1973, the Supreme Court ruled in *Roe v. Wade* that women, *in consultation with their physician*, have a constitutionally protected right to have an abortion in the early stages of pregnancy *free from government interference*.

After the success of *Roe v. Wade*, many women’s rights activists moved on to other projects, effectively leaving the abortion rights movement without a strong base for several years while the anti-abortion movement gained momentum every year (Ginsburg 1989, 72; Kolbert and Miller 1998). Additionally, the sweeping ruling in *Roe* effectively shut down public discussion of abortion rights (Baker 1990, 183), filtering everyone into two camps, pro- or anti- abortion rights (a gradual state-by-state change would have potentially resulted in less opposition). It was not until 1981 when the Supreme Court

nearly overturned *Roe* that abortion rights activists reemerged and unified. Mainstream abortion rights activists generally adopted the “choice” framework over the “rights” framework that had prevailed in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Mainstream feminist groups after *Roe* wanted to design a respectable movement with a broad base and believed “choice” was more palatable to the general public and less threatening than “rights” (Fried 1990, 5-6; Solinger 2001, 4-5). The new pro-choice movement rarely mentioned the “A word” and attempted to sanitize its own demands, hoping to not appear too threatening or too selfish (Fried 1990). However, some scholars have argued that the focus on “choice” ended up hurting the movement in the long run because “choice” can so easily be associated with “bad” choices (Solinger 2001). Throughout the 1980s, abortion rights were being so widely attacked—in Congress, state legislatures, and in clinics—that very little time was left for strategic planning on the part of the weakened pro-choice movement (Wilder 1998, 74). Before *Roe*, the right to an abortion was one of many reproductive rights demands made by the women’s movement (Fried 1990, 5-6), but in fighting to simply maintain the basic right to an abortion, the pro-choice movement did not seek to expand these rights, and *Roe v. Wade* ended up being the first and only major victory for women’s reproductive autonomy.

The passage of the Hyde Amendment in 1976—which banned federal funding from being used to pay for the abortions of poor women—and the election of anti-abortion president Ronald Reagan in 1980 were significant setbacks for the pro-choice movement, but also served as a rallying point for mobilizing new activists (Staggenborg 1991). The strong backlash against abortion left the pro-choice movement in a defensive

position, mainly responding to countermovement attacks. In the 1980s, the pro-choice movement was faced with an increasingly militant pro-life movement, and was forced to direct resources away from the courts and to the streets, defending abortion clinics from direct action protestors (Staggenborg 1991, McCaffrey and Keys 2000).

### **The Development of the Pro-Life Movement**

The *Roe v. Wade* decision set into a motion a strong antiabortion movement among social conservatives and the Religious Right (Risen and Thomas 1998, Munson 2008), which has increasingly gained political power throughout the years. The pro-life movement's framing has been very dynamic, responding to changing political opportunities and evolving pro-choice campaigns, which has likely kept the movement alive (Rose 2011). The Supreme Court's upholding of the basic right to an abortion over the last forty years has not caused the movement to abandon its goals. The anti-abortion movement was small and far less active before *Roe*. While they had the support of many politicians, they were not nearly as organized or mobilized as the abortion rights movement (Meyer and Staggenborg 2008). The pro-life movement as we understand it today emerged with the outrage over the *Roe v. Wade* decision. At this point, the anti-abortion leaders had to make decisions about how to frame their movement, mobilize people to take a stand against abortion, and compete against a well-organized abortion rights movement (Staggenborg 1991).

Before *Roe*, the abortion rights movement had the strategic advantage. Thus, the anti-abortion movement that arose in response to *Roe* began their fight in the arenas

chosen by the abortion rights movement—state legislatures and the courts (Meyer and Staggenborg 2008). The anti-abortion movement first attempted to overturn the decision in the courts, but failed to do so. Realizing the futility of this strategy, they then attempted to ban abortion through Congress, as well as attacking federal funding for abortion and fetal research. They also worked with sympathetic state legislatures to pass anti-abortion bills, but since the abortion rights movement still held advantage in the courts, these state-level restrictions were mostly struck down. The first major victory for the anti-abortion movement came only three years after *Roe* with the passage of the Hyde Amendment in 1976, which banned federal funding for abortion. Buoyed by this victory, the anti-abortion movement continued to fight abortion rights at the local, state, and national level (Meyer and Staggenborg 2008).

Throughout the 1970s, the anti-abortion movement took the strategic lead. Case in point, the abortion rights movement began calling itself “pro-choice” in response to the anti-abortion’s identification of themselves as “pro-life” (Meyer and Staggenborg 2008). During this time, pro-choice movement organizations spent significant time and resources responding to attacks by the pro-life movement, leaving little time for proposing new initiatives and policy changes of their own (like increased abortion access). Abortion rights supporters focused all of their attention on keeping abortion legal. Thus, in the decades after *Roe*, where and how the abortion debate took place was largely determined by the anti-abortion movement (Meyer and Staggenborg 2008). With the election of anti-abortion president Ronald Reagan, the movement gained significant support in Washington, but the apparent threat to abortion rights also mobilized the pro-

choice movement anew. When Reagan failed to deliver the sweeping changes promised, the pro-life movement shifted gears from the legislative arena to local abortion providers (Meyer and Staggenborg 2008).

The pro-life movement quickly became associated with the Republican Party. In 1976, Republicans added an anti-abortion position to their national platform. At first not all Republicans were on board—for example, Republican nominee Gerald Ford was in opposition—but by 1980, the Republican Party was deeply committed to the anti-abortion movement (Meyer and Staggenborg 2008). Following this trend, the Democrats eventually also became strictly associated with the pro-choice movement in the early 1980s. Major pro-life and pro-choice organizations enforce these distinctions by establishing abortion “litmus tests” for each political party (Meyer and Staggenborg 2008). By the 1990s, public opinion on abortion had become increasingly polarized, and deterministic of party identity (Adams 1997).

### **Moral Framing and the Church**

Besides Catholic leaders and some physicians, there were few outspoken anti-abortion activists before *Roe* (Blanchard 1994, Risen and Thomas 1998). At the time of the *Roe v. Wade* decision, the Catholic Church was the only organized opponent of abortion rights, and Church leaders immediately called for a complete rejection of the decision on moral grounds. The Religious Coalition for Abortion Rights (RCAR) was formed in order to counter the Catholic Church’s seeming monopoly on the religious morality arguments. National leaders of the liberal and moderate Protestant

denominations and Jewish organizations hoped that, as a religious organization, their critiques of the Catholic Church would carry more weight than those from secular organizations. Evans (1997) finds that the organization's framing strategies changed over time as they attempted to respond to increasingly prominent pro-life movement framing. From 1973-1980, RCAR mainly framed abortion rights as a matter of religious freedom. Because RCAR worked closely with secular pro-choice groups, their focus on the rights and autonomy of women influenced how RCAR framed their movement work as well (Luker 1984, Staggenborg 1991). RCAR's framing choices were influenced by their need to 1) align with the secular pro-choice groups; (2) make a "rights" claim for Congress; (3) counter-frame against the Catholic Church; and (4) mobilize a wide variety of supporters. Since RCAR was attempting to directly attack the Catholic Church in their framing, they argued that the Catholic Church did not have a right to impose only one religious doctrine on all U.S. citizens—hoping to invoke the value of "separation of church and state" in favor of abortion rights (Esacove 2004). In a similar vein, Rohlinger (2006) finds that in the early 1980s, Planned Parenthood attempted to discredit the pro-life movement by framing them as simply an extension of the Catholic Church.

The pro-life movement took note. The National Right to Life Committee (NRLC), the oldest and largest pro-life organization, was initially formed by Catholic Bishops before *Roe v. Wade*, but after *Roe*, attempted to distance itself from the Catholic Church and publically portrayed itself as non-religious and focused on the constitutional "right to life" granted to each human being, including the unborn. The National Right to Life Committee initially focused their attention on passing a constitutional amendment to

overturn *Roe* (Evans 1997). Use of a “rights-based” discourse is a clear attempt to appeal to a broad range of potential supporters (Rohlinger 2006). NRLC hoped to move away from morality-based anti-abortion arguments of the Catholic Church. For example, to counter the framing of legalized abortion as a medical necessity to save women’s lives, the NRLC used medical professionals to campaign against abortion.

The Catholic Church initially struggled to gain popular support for the anti-abortion cause. It was when the anti-abortion movement was linked with the Evangelical Church and the so-called “pro-family” movement—abortion was framed as an affront to women’s proper roles—that the anti-abortion movement was able to mobilize a significant number of supporters (Zald and Useem 1987, Ginsburg 1989). Then, as the Evangelical community became increasingly mobilized, women who abort were increasingly framed as selfish and immoral. In response, from 1980-1992, RCAR changed its central framing to focus not simply on a woman’s *right* to make ethical decisions for herself, but on her *ability* to make responsible decisions. By 1992, RCAR focused on portraying women as capable of wise decisions, and arguing that the decision to have an abortion could be morally correct (Evans 1997). Evans points to organizational materials entitled “How Good Women Make Wise Choices” and “Respecting the Moral Agency of Women” to show this transformation.

### **Fetal Personhood and Fetal Rights**

In the decades following *Roe*, pro-life activists mainly utilized rhetoric of fetal personhood. By using this type of framing, activists hope to illicit a feeling of sympathy

for the fetus as an individual person separate from the woman who sustains it (Daniels 1996, Condit 1990, Ginsburg 1989, Luker 1984). This framing of the fetus as separate from the mother was not always part of the anti-abortion rhetorical toolbox (Rothman 1989). The Catholic Church facilitated this framing when they took a leadership role in the movement in the wake of the *Roe* decision. Anti-abortion activists believed that they needed to change the terms used in the abortion debate if they hoped to sway public opinion (Rohlinger 2006). Fetal personhood is the central idea around which all other beliefs in the pro-life movement revolve (Munson 2008). Mainstream pro-life groups, including the National Right to Life Committee, American Life League, and Human Life International, all primarily employ a fetal rights frame, as do the majority of actors in the pro-life movement (Trumpy 2014). Fetal-centered anti-abortion tactics include images of fetuses disconnected from women's bodies, either represented as innocent babies yearning for life or as bloodied and dismembered (Cannold 2002), exemplified by such campaigns as NRLC's "Abortion Stops a Beating Heart" (Rohlinger 2006).

Almost immediately after *Roe v. Wade*, the anti-abortion movement began using the phrase "right to life" in response to the focus on women's rights and the constitutional right to abortion granted in *Roe v. Wade*. These efforts culminated in the Human Life Amendment (HLA)—a proposed constitutional amendment that would grant personhood to the unborn under the Fourteenth Amendment and thereby reverse the Supreme Court decision that fetuses were not persons. Many versions of the HLA were introduced in Congress in the 1970s, most never making it out of committee (Halva-Neubauer and Zeigler 2010). In the 1980s, pro-life activists were encouraged by the election of pro-life



president Ronald Reagan and Republican control in the Senate, but in 1983, the HLA again failed to pass. After that vote, most pro-life activists abandoned their hopes of a constitutional amendment and instead focused their energies on restricting abortion—making abortion rarer and less acceptable—incrementally through clinic regulations, “informed consent” laws, and mandated waiting periods (Halva-Neubauer and Zeigler 2010).

In her research on anti-abortion frames from 1973 to 2006, Rose (2011) finds that early activists relied on the “maternal-fetal conflict” in order to frame fetuses as victims and women as perpetrators of violence undeserving of empathy. Clearly, this dominant frame was not intended to appeal to women who had already chosen abortion, but mainly to conservative Christians’ moral views (Rose 2011). Fetal-centered discourse claims that a fetus has the same legal rights as a born person. Under this framework, fetuses are children who have been abandoned and brutally murdered by their mothers and thus require the protection of the state through legislation that establishes their humanity and restricts the ability of women to obtain abortions—the fetus is the victim and the mother is the victimizer, guilty of the “sin” of abortion (Cannold 2002). Abortion was framed as a binary choice—women’s interests and rights in direct opposition to the rights and interests of the fetus.

In 1987, Petchesky observed that pregnant women were increasingly being positioned in opposition to their own fetuses. The ‘woman versus fetus’ frame takes many forms. When ultrasound technology allowed for the fetus to be visualized, antiabortion groups began to use fetal imagery as a part of their campaign (Petchesky

1987, Kaplan 1994, Rose 2011). The 1984 release of pro-life film *The Silent Scream*—which features a filmed sonogram of a 12-week abortion narrated by anti-abortion physician Bernard Nathanson—exemplifies this rhetorical tactic. The woman is literally disembodied—all the viewer sees are the sonogram images—except a passing comment that she, a feminist, completely disavowed the practice of abortion after seeing the film (Petchesky 1987). The film’s main purpose is to suggest that the fetus feels pain. The film purports to show the fetus attempting to move away from the suction device as it enters the womb. The narrator claims that the fetus open its mouth in pain —“the silent scream”—as the suction reaches it. The film was very successful—Ronald Reagan showed it in the White House and copies were distributed to every member of Congress (Halva-Neubauer and Zeigler 2010). In fact, in a 1984 speech, Reagan used a fetal-centered frame, declaring, “doctors confirm that when the lives of the unborn are snuffed out, they often feel pain, pain that is long and agonizing” (Halva-Neubauer and Zeigler 2010). This framing ultimately led to proposed legislation that would require abortion doctors to inform women undergoing later abortions that a fetus can feel pain and would require them to offer the patient anesthesia for the fetus. Pro-choice activists and Planned Parenthood responded by denying that a fetus has the ability to feel pain, and arguing that pro-life activists were simply attempting to make the procedure more expensive, and therefore more difficult to obtain (Halva-Neubauer and Zeigler 2010). The National Abortion Rights Action League (NARAL) responded to the film by attempting to shift the focus away from the fetus and onto women by holding “speaks-outs” of women’s personal experiences with abortion (Meyer and Staggenborg 2008).

Halva-Neubauer and Zeigler (2010) argue that the pro-life movement's focus on fetal personhood re-emerged after the 1992 Supreme Court decision in *Planned Parenthood v. Casey* which reaffirmed the right to an abortion, but allowed states to begin restricting access. *Casey* was significant because it allowed states to further restrict abortion *in the interest of fetus*, and it therefore shifted the focus of the legal abortion debate from women's privacy to the fetus. *Casey* essentially allowed states to promote a pro-life agenda as long as the "ultimate" decision was left up to the woman (Halva-Neubauer and Zeigler 2010). For example, laws requiring abortion clinics to show patients ultrasound images before their procedure are attempts to personify the fetus and frame women as lacking sufficient information about the development of their fetus. Such tactics attempt to appropriate the positive experience of viewing an ultrasound—when doing so with a wanted pregnancy—in order to elicit an emotional response that may prevent a woman from aborting (Halva-Neubauer and Zeigler 2010).

This enduring framing is very clear in antiabortion billboards from organizations like Pro-Life Across America that feature pictures of babies "speaking" about their own development in the womb: "I had hiccups...even before I was born!" and "I'm Dad's Little Man!" This type of tactic focuses wholly on the fetus, likening them to a baby and giving them a voice. Such images blur the boundary between fetus and baby and reinforce the idea of the fetus as autonomous and separate from the mother (Petchesky 1987). A significant example of this tactic gaining political ground and social acceptance is in criminal sanctions of child abuse or neglect against alcohol- or drug-using pregnant women (Pollitt 1990; Flavin 2008) and fetal homicide laws (Halva-Neubauer and Zeigler

2010). Color photographs depicting dismembered aborted fetuses are also a clear example of the personification strategy. Pro-life activists believe that if people actually see what abortion looks like, they will no longer support it. However, Halva-Neubauer and Zeigler (2010) argued that use of these images has generally backfired as the general public finds them repulsive and links their use to extremism.

### **The Rescue Movement and Evangelical Dominance in the Pro-Life Movement**

By the mid-1980s, the pro-life movement had failed in its attempts to outlaw abortion, and many activists were disappointed by the lack of progress despite the promises of pro-life president Ronald Reagan. Some organizations shifted their focus to more direct action tactics—attempting to literally “save” babies at abortion clinics. The legislative failures of the mainstream pro-life movement in the early 1980s—the HLA and similar bills that would outlaw abortion—encouraged younger, more militant pro-life activists to turn to direct action and violence that became known as the “rescue movement” (Blanchard, 1994, Risen and Thomas 1998). The “rescue movement” of the mid and late 1980s was preceded by a small number of left-leaning abortion opponents in the 1970s who were inspired by the civil rights and anti-war movement. More politically conservative anti-abortion activists then adopted their strategies of civil disobedience and passive resistance (Risen and Thomas 1998). These newly mobilized activists came less from the Catholic Church, as early abortion opponents had, and more from Evangelical dominations, which as Risen and Thomas (1998) point out, helped build a bridge between

the Evangelicals and the “New Right,” forming a strong and lasting connection between the pro-life movement and the Republican Party.

The “rescue movement,” led mainly by the organization Operation Rescue (OR), represented a significant tactical shift from simply protesting abortion to “rescuing” babies by blocking women’s access to clinics and attempting to shut them down entirely (Risen and Thomas 1998). These new recruits were more prone to conflict—and violence in some cases—than abortion opponents of the past who emphasized peaceful resistance. According to Risen and Thomas (1998), sixty thousand protestors were arrested in the course of OR’s “rescues” alone. In their attempt to appeal to a secular public and justify their direct action protests and civil disobedience, these pro-life organizations framed themselves as the civil rights movement of the 1980s (Johnson 1997). Using the civil rights collective action frame of African Americans in the 1950s and 1960s, the anti-abortion movement hoped to appeal to secular human rights groups and the general public. However, Johnson (1997) argues that Operation Rescue’s ideologies and tactics were incongruent with human rights leaders—specifically Gandhi and King—who they claimed to emulate. In general, however, they were not taken seriously as a continuation of the civil rights movement, and the culturally resonant framing of Christian morality remained the dominant framework for the movement (Silliman et al. 2004, Johnson 1997). Maintaining this dominant framing was essential to the success of the movement because the vast majority of supporters were conservative Christians recruited from churches.

By the early 1990s, direct action tactics became increasingly costly for the pro-life movement. Following several violent, and sometimes fatal, attacks on abortion clinics and clinic employees, Congress passed the Freedom of Access to Clinic Entrances (FACE) in 1994, which prohibited clinic blockades and threats against abortion clinic staff, and the National Organization of Women (NOW) and other pro-choice groups brought several lawsuits against individual activists and Operation Rescue (Risen and Thomas, 1998). The pro-choice movement attempted to frame the pro-life direct action tactics as endangering the health of women by preventing them from obtaining safe health care (McCaffrey and Keys 2000). However, those anti-abortion activists who were the most militant continued to protest clinics, even in violation of the new law. During this time, there were several murders and attempted murders on abortion doctors and clinic staff, which significantly lowered public support for the anti-abortion movement (Meyer and Staggenborg 2008). However, it also made it more difficult for clinics to find doctors to perform abortions, further restricting women's access to abortion. When anti-abortion activists shifted to direct action tactics, the pro-choice movement responded by mobilizing supporters in defense of abortion clinics and organized their own direct action tactics, including speak-outs, demonstrations, and escort services for women seeking abortions (Meyer and Staggenborg 2008).

Mainstream pro-life organizations, like the NRLC, did not publicly endorse and rarely even discussed Operation Rescue's tactics, hoping to silently distance themselves from their extremism without creating division with the pro-life ranks. Rohlinger (2006) argues, however, that refusing to openly condemn Operation Rescue ultimately hurt the

mainstream pro-life movement because it reinforced negative views about the movement's goals and leaders. While ultimately unsuccessful at stopping abortion, the rescue movement was hugely successful in drawing public attention to the abortion issue, increasing the power of the Religious Right and widening the gap between abortion rights opponents and supporters (King and Husting 2003).

### **The “Partial Birth Abortion” Debate**

In the early 1990s, the pro-choice movement fought to pass the Freedom of Choice Act (FOCA)—an attempt to ensure the legal right to an abortion on the federal level. In response, the pro-life movement focused their framing on a very rare “late-term” abortion procedure called “dilation and extraction,” which they renamed “partial-birth abortion” (PBA). Pro-life activists described PBA as gruesome and disturbing and attempted to make late-term abortion seem like the norm rather than the exception. They argued that the passage of FOCA would increase the use of this procedure (Esacove 2004). The national campaign to ban “partial-birth abortion” was incredibly successful for the pro-life movement, dominating the abortion debate and putting the pro-choice movement on the defensive (Rohlinger 2006). The PBA framing was initially conceived as an effort to defeat FOCA, but ultimately became the most hotly contested abortion issue of the 1990s (Halva-Neubauer and Zeigler 2010).

The pro-life movement had been aware of the “dilation and extraction” procedure in the early 1990s, but initially referred to it as “brain suction abortion.” In 1995, the NRLC began using the term “partial birth abortion” because it tested better in focus

groups (Rohlinger 2006). “Dilation and extraction” was the term of the pro-choice movement, and was deemed too scientific, while “brain-suction abortion” was too extreme and provoked an uncomfortable response (Esacove 2004). In 1996, NRLC introduced the Partial Birth Abortion Ban in Congress and in several state legislatures, which would dominate the conversation about abortion for several years. The NRLC succeeded in focusing the debate on the unborn child and away from women’s rights (Rohlinger 2006). Congress was quick to support the ban, which represented the first time Congress voted to restrict an abortion procedure since *Roe v. Wade* (Esacove 2004). The ban was only stalled by President Clinton’s 1996 and 1997 vetoes on the grounds that the ban did not include an exception to save a woman’s life. However, in 2003, George W. Bush signed the bill into law (Halva-Neubauer and Zeigler 2010). The pro-choice movement poured significant resources into opposing this bill, but were not able to stop its eventual passage (Esacove 2004)

Esacove (2004) finds that throughout the framing/counterframing surrounding the PBA ban, the pro-choice movement most often framed late-term abortion as a medical necessity and a legal right. Pro-choice activists argued that Congress did not have the right to legislate the type of procedure a physician could or not perform, which as Esacove (2004) argues, drew on medical, constitutional, and extremism frames. This type of framing evolved over time into the “Who Decides?” campaign that was ultimately successful for the pro-choice movement in its appeal to the values of individualism and liberty (Esacove 2004, Toner 2007).



Esacove (2004) points out examples of framing inconsistency from both the pro-life and pro-choice movements in the contest over PBA. Her examples illustrate how movements change their framing based on their opponents' framing in ways that may not always be consistent with the movement's dominant frames. She shows that, at times in the framing/counterframing process over PBA, pro-life movement leaders portrayed fetuses aborted by PBA to healthy, viable babies, describing them as moments away from birth, and at other times, described PBA as being used on "undesirable" babies with disabilities, invoking an entirely different emotional response. Then, she shows how the pro-choice movement attempted to combat the pro-life focus on the fetus by drawing attention to the tragic stories of wanted pregnancies that had "gone wrong" or threatened the life of women. The fetuses were portrayed as babies who already had names and would be mourned like any born child. In doing so, the pro-choice movement attempted to take power away from the pro-life claim to the fetus by utilizing "personification" (Esacove 2004). This was a departure from their first defense which portrayed the women needed late-term abortions as young and unprepared to be mothers. Such a frame—focused on women who were hurt by abortion restrictions—had not been prominently used since before the passage of *Roe v. Wade* (Esacove 2004). The women enlisted to speak on behalf of late-term abortion rights were described as religious, conservative, and moral women who were forced to make a tragic choice—the antithesis of the image of a selfish, irresponsible woman who was invoked by the pro-life framing. The pro-life movement responded at first by disregarding this counterframing and these women's claims to victimhood. Then, they increasingly referred to the women who spoke out in

support of the procedure as “sadly misinformed” about the choice they made (Esacove 2004). Abortion rights supporters responded, claiming that this framing was insensitive and disrespectful of women’s agency.

Esacove (2004) also observed a framing conflict over who were the *true* advocates for women’s health. Pro-choice organizations claimed that they were protecting women’s health by preserving the option for this procedure. They focused on the fact that the proposed PBA ban did not contain an exemption for when women’s pregnancies threatened their health or lives, arguing that supporters of the ban were therefore more concerned about politics than about women’s health and lives. On the other hand, pro-life organizations responded to this framing by arguing that later abortions were inherently very dangerous procedures, and accused their opponents of endangering women by refusing to restrict abortion in any way. In this way, the pro-life movement attempted to discredit the claim that they were not concerned about women’s lives (Esacove 2004). This research clearly shows the interactive nature of framing and counterframing processes.

### **Pro-Life, Pro-Woman**

The dominant rhetoric of the pro-life movement has consistently been focused on the fetus and the immorality of abortion. While this is still the major framing of the movement, some pro-life leaders have pursued a frame extension that they hope will attract new supporters—the argument that women are hurt by abortion (Rose 2011). This frame utilizes the language of women’s rights and women’s health from the pro-choice

movement in an attempt to frame the pro-life movement as a protector of women. In 1972, a group of women who identified as both pro-life and feminist formed the organization Feminists for Life after one of the founding members was reportedly rejected from the Ohio chapter of the NOW for her anti-abortion beliefs (Hipsher 2007, Oaks 2009). Pro-life feminists believe they have been unfairly rejected from the larger feminist movement and argue that abortion is anti-feminist because it represents violence against women and fetuses, hurts women emotionally, and devalues motherhood (Oaks 2009). In order to attract a new type of supporter, Feminists for Life attempts to deemphasize the contentious legal battle over abortion and to portray themselves as a voice of reason above and outside of liberal and conservative rhetoric (Oaks 2009). Feminists for Life frames abortion as violent and therefore anti-feminist, arguing that the only true feminist choice is to save the life of the baby (Halva-Neubauer and Zeigler 2010). These “woman-centered” activists have attempted to position themselves as the *true* feminists. They argue that it was the pro-choice movement who created the perceived conflict of interest between the woman and the fetus. They hope to lay claim to the woman’s interests as well as the fetus’ by claiming that both women and the unborn are hurt by abortion and to portray themselves as “defenders” of the lives of both women and babies (Halva-Neubauer and Zeigler 2010). They argue that the interests of the fetus and the woman are not opposed, but are the same, in contrast to the previous pro-life framing that was criticized for valuing the life of the fetus over the life of the woman. Hipsher’s (2007) analysis of Feminists for Life’s framing strategies during the period 1972 to 2000 reveals five broad themes. First, they argue that women do not choose

abortion, but are coerced into it either by lack of support or deceitful “abortionists.”

Second, they argue that abortion is patriarchal—another way for men to control women and their bodies. Third, they argue that abortion represents a lack of respect for life, and since a feminist perspective values non-violence, abortion is contrary to these values.

Fourth, they claim that abortion harms women physically and psychologically. And finally, they claim that widespread support for abortion indicates our culture’s devaluation of mothers and motherhood.

The mainstream pro-life movement did not initially adopt this framing, but it gained popularity over time, especially in recent years. The mainstream movement has utilized the pro-life pro-woman (PWPL) framing in addition to the major fetal-centered strategy since the mid 1980s (Cannold 2002). This focus on women gained steam over time, led by organizations like Feminists for Life and the National Right to Life Committee. PWPL organizations today include the Elliot Institute, Operation Outcry, and the Silent No More Awareness Campaign (Trumpy 2014). Examples of this framing include Feminist for Life’s “Women Deserve Better Than Abortion” and “Refuse to Choose” campaigns and NRLC’s “Love Them Both” campaign (Toner 2007, Rohlinger 2006, Oaks 2009).

The PWPL frame is rooted in gender essentialist ideologies. According to PWPL advocates, women have an inherent desire to mother, nurture and protect children. Thus, no woman freely chooses abortion, but is coerced or pressured by others to do so (Trumpy 2014). While the fetal-centered approach frames women who abort as making a rational, calculated, and selfish choice, the woman-centered approach frames women who

abort as targeted and deceived victims of the abortion industry. These activists rarely discuss the fetus at all, except in relation to the woman as a mother. This strategy is also a way to avoid discussion of the “hard” cases that cause division within the pro-life movement—abortions in the case of rape, incest, fetal abnormality, and women’s health. These activists argue that women facing an unplanned pregnancy are confused and distressed and that male partners, parents, and doctors pressure a woman facing an unplanned pregnancy into aborting her child. They utilize feminist rhetoric when they accuse the “patriarchal culture” of being pro-abortion, anti-woman, and anti-motherhood (Cannold 2002).

The goal of fetus-centered framing, specifically the personification of the fetus, was to encourage the observer to identify with the fetus. The woman in question was purposefully pushed out of the image and, when she was discussed, she was subject to contempt. This type of framing is based in conservative Christian notions of morality and clearly not designed to appeal to women who have had abortions. Rose (2011) shows that early anti-abortion activists did not express interest in women’s rights because they did not fit into the overarching frame of abortion as sin. In the woman-centered approach, the innocent woman “hurt by abortion” replaces the innocent fetus (Cannold 2002). This absolution, as Cannold points out, is a major part of the appeal of this framing for women who feel guilty about past abortions. They are welcomed into the pro-life movement, pardoned for their “sins,” and allowed to redirect their blame to the “abortionists” who killed their babies. Abortion doctors, clinic staff, and the pro-choice movement in general are blamed for targeting women in distress for their own profit (Cannold 2002). The

woman-centered focus makes the woman the second victim of abortion. Pro-life activists who advocate this frame hope to mobilize post-abortive women by absolving them of their guilt and allowing them to blame abortion doctors for coercing them into having an abortion (Rose 2011). Additionally, Cannold (2002) points out that activists using this frame do not always explicitly oppose the legality of abortion, because they hope to portray themselves as apolitical, arguing instead that their goal is to protect women's rights from abortion providers that would violate them. PWPL activists argue that abortion must be illegal in order to protect women from exploitation, not primarily because of the personhood of the fetus (Trumpy 2014).

Pro-life activists who utilize the woman-centered framing today argue that they are continuing the *true* fight for women's health and rights begun by their predecessors in the nineteenth century. Feminists for Life and other pro-woman pro-life activists argue that early feminists like Susan B. Anthony, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Mary Wollstonecraft, and Jane Addams saw abortion as exploitation of women. They argue that early "first wave" feminists should be models for women today, not the pro-choice feminists of today. While pro-choice activists today argue that the anti-abortion declarations of early feminists must be placed in the context of women's unequal social positions and unsafe abortion practices of the time, PWPL activists argue that abortion is and always has been antithetical to women's rights and their "true nature" as mothers (Rose 2011). They claim to be more authentically feminist than pro-choice feminists and argue that legal abortion perpetuates a male-dominated society where women and motherhood are devalued (Oaks 2009). While pro-choice feminists would agree that we

live in a patriarchal society that devalues motherhood, they would argue that abortion access is essential for women's equality.

The pro-woman framing is a response to criticism that the anti-abortion movement is insensitive towards women's needs. This reframing also attempts to delegitimize the pro-choice movement's claim that they are women's only advocates in the abortion controversy (Cannold 2002). While the pregnant woman choosing abortion was once framed as selfish and callous, she is now framed as a deceived victim of greedy abortion providers (Halva-Neubauer and Zeigler 2010). To relieve women of the responsibility of abortion in this way is also a way to strip power away from "choice." If a woman is fundamentally incapable of making a rational choice to abort her child and is necessarily coerced by abortion doctors to do so, it is only logical to place stringent restrictions on abortion access in the interest of protecting women. Under this formulation, the constitutional basis for abortion—a woman's right to make her own choices—is no longer logical. This framing allows for sympathy for women facing unplanned pregnancies and women who have had abortions while simultaneously seeking fetal personhood under the law and attempting to outlaw the abortion procedure. As Cannold (2002) argues, the woman-centered approach denies the agency of women, arguing that if women were fully informed about realities of abortion and provided the resources to keep their babies, they would never "choose" abortion.

The most basic difference between the pro-life feminists and pro-choice feminists is what abortion means for women's equality. For pro-life feminists, abortion is anti-motherhood and patriarchal. Because these women see motherhood as a woman's most

valuable role, they believe abortion represents further oppression of women and their bodies. They argue that pro-choice feminists want women to be more like men, and reject their biological connection to children. They point to the lack of support for working mothers as a symptom of legalized abortion (Oaks 2009). They believe that liberal feminism attempts to erase the differences between men and women and force women to be like men. In order to claim a “feminist” identity, Feminists for Life amplifies their similarities to First Wave feminist traditions (Hipsher 2007). They attempt to reframe the 1970s women’s movement as a movement created by men in opposition to women’s interests. Pro-life feminists believe that no woman would choose abortion if she had the social support and resources to help her raise a child. To them, “choice” is not choice at all, but an imperative to have an abortion. They do not support abortion even in the case of a pregnancy resulting from rape because they believe that abortion is only a further violation of a woman, not a solution.

In line with the framing that abortion hurts women, women-centered activists argue that women inevitably regret their abortions, and use pseudo-medical language to claim women suffer from what they call “post-abortion syndrome” (PAS). They argue PAS symptoms include increased rates of depression, anxiety, substance abuse, and suicide following abortion, often using personal stories of women who claim they suffer from PAS (Trumpy 2014). Abortion, in this framing, is always a tragic and traumatic event. There is no mention of the positive feelings that may result from an abortion (Cannold 2002; Halva-Neubauer and Zeigler 2010). PWPL groups urge women who have had abortions to speak out about their negative experiences. They see this tactic as the



most effective way to reach politicians and the general public (Trumpy 2014). This is the central goal of the pro-life organization Silent No More. Post-abortion syndrome, described by anti-abortion activists as a type of PTSD, was first introduced in 1981 and laid the groundwork for the shift towards a more scientific anti-abortion framing (Rose 2011). While it has never been acknowledged as a medical syndrome, pro-life activists claim that “greedy” abortion doctors who only care about making money purposefully deny women information about PAS and that they have the right to be fully informed of the risks. In this way, they utilize both “rights” and “health” framing (Rose 2011). This woman-centered framing also challenges the mainstream pro-life movement by placing authority in the hands of women who have had abortions and not in religious leaders or physicians. These women—all of whom tell stories of guilt, loss, and injury—are encouraged to tell their tragic stories with the goal of stopping other women from making the same mistake. Women holding signs reading “I Regret My Abortion” created by the organization Silent No More are a common sight at anti-abortion protests in recent years. These tactics respond to the common criticism that the pro-life movement ignores women’s experiences. By encouraging women who regret their abortions to speak out, they are able to claim feminist goals and dodge these types of criticisms. Woman-centered anti-abortion activists argue that the fetal centered approach has alienated many women by framing women who choose abortion as immoral and selfish and has largely failed to turn public opinion against abortion (Cannold 2002). They also argue that fetal centered tactics lead women to believe that pro-life activists are judgmental and lack compassion for women. For those who may be too uncomfortable with the fetus-centered,

moral framing, the pro-woman framing offers a more sympathetic alternative. This “woman and fetus” framing is likely to appeal to women who believe that motherhood is a fundamental part of women’s identity, as well as those women who are uncomfortable with the individualist character of some pro-choice framing (Halva-Neubauer and Zeigler 2010).

Halva-Neubauer and Zeigler (2010) conclude that pro-woman rhetoric has succeeded in gaining the approval of the ambivalent majority by shifting the blame for abortion from women to abortion providers. The emergence and proliferation of Crisis Pregnancy Centers and call-in hotlines are also examples of the pro-life movement’s increased focus on women. Crisis pregnancy centers, such as Birthright, have been in existence since the 1960s, but became increasingly common and connected to the mainstream pro-life movement in the eighties. The explosion of CPCs was part of an effort to counter accusations that the pro-life movement did not care about women (Ginsburg 1989). These types of pro-life efforts are clearly succeeding on the legislative front, as CPCs have secured public funding in some states (Halva-Neubauer and Zeigler 2010).

The 1989 *Webster* decision was essentially an invitation for anti-abortion groups to test and push the limits of abortion restrictions on the state level. They succeeded in passing several restrictive laws across the country, which resulted in the pro-choice movement fighting these laws in the courts. This new era in the abortion debate expanded the political influence of both movements significantly (Meyer and Staggenborg 2008). In 1992, the Supreme Court upheld the right to an abortion, but again allowed states to

enact significant restrictions on the procedure—e.g., parental consent requirements, mandatory waiting periods, “informed consent” laws—as long as they did not create an “undue burden” on women seeking abortion. Under this new framework, the pro-life movement fought for increased restrictions and the pro-choice movement attempted to prove in court that these restrictions did indeed create an “undue burden” (Meyer and Staggenborg 2008). This framing has succeeded in passing “informed consent,” mandatory counseling, and “waiting period” laws, which purport to help women make educated choices (Toner 2007, Cannold 2002). Critics argue, however, that this type of legislation is designed to dissuade women from having abortions. For example, “right to know” policies are designed to inform women of only the potentially negative consequences of abortion, not the potentially positive feelings many women experience after abortion or the various health risks of carrying a baby to term.

The anti-abortion campaign for the “Partial Birth Abortion” ban was highly successful in linking women and fetuses’ interests—in comparing later abortions to infanticide and portraying the procedure as dangerous to women. When upholding the Partial Birth Abortion Ban in 2007, Supreme Court Justice Anthony Kennedy utilized the “abortion is bad for women” frame that has become an increasingly common frame among pro-life activists: “While we find no reliable data to measure the phenomenon, it seems unexceptionable to conclude some women come to regret their choice to abort the infant life they once created and sustained” (Rose 2011). The fact that Justice Kennedy utilized this framing, even while admitting “no reliable data” to support his point, shows how successful this type of rhetoric has been for the pro-life movement. By referring to

abortion in this way, the Supreme Court Justice lent significant support for this framing strategy. Additionally, the 2006 South Dakota abortion ban—entitled the Women’s Health and Human Life Protection Act—contained similar claims about the dangers of abortion, exemplified by this statement: “that to fully protect the rights, interests, and health of the pregnant mother, the rights, interest, and life of her unborn child, and the mother’s fundamental natural intrinsic right to a relationship with her child, abortions in South Dakota should be prohibited” (Rose 2011). While voters later overturned this legislation, the focus on women’s interests marks a sharp contrast to decades of anti-abortion work focused on the fetus and Christian morality.

Rose (2011) points out that the anti-abortion pro-woman narrative is not entirely new as it was also used to restrict abortion in the nineteenth century by arguing that abortion was physically and psychologically harmful to women. Anti-abortion groups used this frame up until the time when second wave feminists claimed rights and health narratives for themselves—the argument that illegal abortions were a public health concern resulting in serious complications and sometimes death—and began to use them more effectively in support of the legalized abortion. Health arguments eventually merged with a focus on women’s autonomy and reproductive control, which effectively restricted the pro-life movement’s ability to use a woman-centered frame. It was at this point, in the years following *Roe v. Wade* that the anti-abortion movement began focusing primarily on the fetus. Rose (2011) shows how the pro-woman frame was revived by some pro-life organizations in the 1980s and 1990s with conditional acceptance from the mainstream pro-life movement. Pro-life leaders using frames

focused on science and women's rights and health—frames traditionally used by pro-choice organizations—hoping that such a frame extension would attract and mobilize new supporters. Rose (2011) argues that the pro-woman frame shift is a result of changing political opportunities. This frame extension strategically uses the rhetoric and images of the opposition in hopes of stripping away their power. Rather than standing in opposition to women's rights, the pro-woman framing claims to represent women's rights. According to Rose (2011), the goal of this frame extension is to challenge the master frame of the pro-choice movement—women's rights. If the pro-life movement can effectively claim women's rights for themselves, this framework loses its utility for the pro-choice movement. The shift in pro-life framing to a focus on women's "rights" also signifies how successful the "rights" framing was for the pro-choice movement. Rose (2011) argues that pro-life organizations likely observed the broad general support of this framework and hoped to capitalize on its success.

This type of framing is somewhat controversial in pro-life circles because it can be understood as abandoning the basic pro-life focus on the immorality of abortion and weakening pro-life arguments. The PWPL activists are challenging the dominant fetal-centric pro-life framing—one of the most well-known movement frames in recent history. Trumpy (2014) examines the pro-woman faction of the pro-life movement, their attempt to transform the movement's central framing, and the intramovement response. PWPL activists argue that the movement's unwavering focus on the fetus has proven ineffective in motivating undecided Americans to support to the pro-life movement and should be abandoned. They believe that engaging directly with the pro-choice movement

in terms of the rights, health, and interests of women will be more advantageous. PWPL activists believe that fetal-centered frames no longer resonate with the American public and hope to fundamentally transform both the central framing of the pro-life movement and the way that the general public understands abortion. PWPL activists consciously co-opt the pro-choice focus on women and attempt to reverse the meaning of women's rights in opposition of abortion. Based on focus groups with traditional pro-life activists Trumpy (2014) finds that some understand the woman-centered framing as a threat to the ideological purity of the pro-life movement and did not believe it would be an effective central frame. However, the majority did believe that it was a useful *frame extension*, to be used at times when the dominant fetal-centered frame was insufficient. Frame extensions are a risk for any social movement. Successful frame extension can result in a reinvigoration of a movement and new supporters, but can also lead to tension within a movement, especially if the extension is not coherent with the dominant frame. In the case of the pro-woman frame extension in the pro-life movement, the framing may conflict too deeply with the dominant fetal frame (Rose 2011). Mainstream pro-life organizations like National Rights to Life Coalition and Focus on the Family continue to utilize morality and the personified fetus in their framing, and show little evidence of adopting the pro-woman frame extension (Rose 2011).

Rose (2011) points out that one way for the pro-choice movement to respond to the pro-life women-centered framing may be to embrace "morality" for themselves. The failure of the pro-choice movement to engage with the moral dimensions of abortion allowed the pro-life movement to easily define abortion and the women who choose it as

immoral (Evans 1997). In a similar vein, the pro-choice movement's focus on the right to privacy ignores economically disadvantaged, vulnerable, or exploited women who are further victimized by being "left alone" by the state. These women may be more likely to feel supported by the pro-woman pro-life activists who acknowledge the situations when women do not experience abortion as a "free choice" but as a requirement (Ferree 2003).

### **Tragic Choices and Moral Anguish**

Since *Roe*, the pro-life movement had continuously worked to legitimize fetal personhood and the success of their efforts was clear in the growing public discomfort with "abortion on demand" (Tonn 1996, Condit 1990, Rothman 1989). In the 1990s, pro-choice activists also attempted to appeal to broader audiences. They hoped to downplay the assertion that a woman's rights outweigh those of the fetus—a sentiment that was increasingly perceived as militant (Tonn 1996). Pro-choice organizations attempted to distance themselves from the more extreme rhetoric of some of their allies. Rohlinger (2006) found that Planned Parenthood responded to criticism by emphasizing broad support among average, rather than activist, Americans. The "choice" framework was beginning to show its limits (Rose 2011). The concept of "choice" was criticized both for not being strong enough to protect abortion rights and for portraying women as selfish (Solinger 2001). Pro-choice activists attempted to move away from the abstract focus on legal rights, and instead focus on the human struggle behind abortion. They wanted to counter pro-life claims that women selfishly chose themselves over their unborn babies. Tonn (1996) examines a framing shift among abortion rights advocates in response to the

threat presented by the *Webster* decision in 1989. Under the weight of the constant criticism claiming that women who choose abortion are selfish, callous, and immoral, some pro-choice advocates attempted to gain public support and “purify” abortion by claiming that women do not make this decision lightly and that when they do abort, they are doing so for selfless reasons (Tonn 1996). Thus, abortion was framed as a very difficult decision that necessarily engenders moral anguish. Many of the women’s stories told during this framing shift focused on rare and tragic circumstances—genetically deformed fetuses, rape or incest, endangerment to the woman's physical health, or spousal abandonment (Tonn 1996). The women were framed as being forced to abort wanted pregnancies because of circumstances beyond their control.

Following this logic, only dire circumstances would excuse a woman from taking responsibility for her pregnancy. These women were legitimized by their status as good mothers. Such an understanding of abortion, however, makes anguish obligatory for all women choosing abortion. Women who abort for less “compelling” reasons are morally suspect. When pro-choice activists attempted to humanize women who chose abortion by addressing their moral anguish, they also risked legitimizing the pro-life claim that vulnerable women are coerced into abortion (Tonn 1996). As Rose (2011) points out, the pro-choice movement was attempting to illustrate the deeper, more relatable side of abortion. However, by acknowledging that abortion can be a tragic and difficult decision, they also offered a clear opening for woman-centered framing attacks from the pro-life movement.



This framing shift was far less about reflecting the realities of the majority of women's experiences, but instead about how the general public understood the pro-choice movement and abortion. Tonn (1996) calls this framing a strategic error, pointing out the fundamental paradox of championing motherhood in order to avoid maternity. She argues that framing abortion as a moral agony is politically self-defeating for the pro-choice movement because it lends support to the opposition's argument that women inevitably feel guilty about their abortion decisions and regret lost motherhood. Under this framing, women who choose abortion violate their own moral code and confess to abortion as a conscious sin. This presents a dilemma wherein women are framed as a morally suspect both when they admit guilt *and* when they do not (Tonn 1996). In the first case, she admits to committing a conscious sin, and in the second, her lack of guilt shows moral bankruptcy. Thus, if a woman expresses relief or happiness after an abortion, she is framed as selfish and unfeeling. The paradox inherent in this reasoning is women are not saved from judgment simply by acknowledging guilt or anguish.

In the following sections of this dissertation, I explore two "cases" of framing/counterframing contests occurring between the pro-life and pro-choice movements, as well as between activists within each movement—pro-choice activists framing abortion as "good mothering" and pro-life activists framing abortion as "Black genocide." These cases illustrate the interactive nature of framing decisions in the pro-life and pro-choice movements. I argue that each of these cases also demonstrates the risks

that activists take when they attempt extend or transform the movement's dominant framing in ways that marginalizes or alienates certain constituents. Such reframing often comes as a defensive response to successful counterframing attacks from the opposition and often utilizes elements of the opposition's language or imagery in order to gain the upper hand.

### WHO HAS ABORTIONS?<sup>1</sup>

- Eighteen percent of U.S. women obtaining abortions are teenagers; those aged 15–17 obtain 6% of all abortions, 18–19-year-olds obtain 11%, and teens younger than 15 obtain 0.4%.
- Women in their 20s account for more than half of all abortions: Women aged 20–24 obtain 33% of all abortions, and women aged 25–29 obtain 24%.
- Non-Hispanic white women account for 36% of abortions, non-Hispanic black women for 30%, Hispanic women for 25% and women of other races for 9%.
- Women who have never married and are not cohabiting account for 45% of all abortions.
- About 61% of abortions are obtained by women who have one or more children.
- Forty-two percent of women obtaining abortions have incomes below 100% of the federal poverty level (\$10,830 for a single woman with no children).
- Twenty-seven percent of women obtaining abortions have incomes between 100–199% of the federal poverty level.
- Fifty-one percent of women who have abortions had used a contraceptive method in the month they got pregnant, most commonly condoms (27%) or a hormonal method (17%).<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Jones RK, Finer LB and Singh S, *Characteristics of U.S. Abortion Patients, 2008*, New York: Guttmacher Institute, 2010.

<sup>2</sup> Jones RK, Frohwirth L and Moore AM, **More than poverty: disruptive events among women having abortions in the USA**, *Journal of Family Planning and Reproductive Health Care*, 2012, 39(1):36–43.

### **Chapter 3**

#### **CASE #1**

#### **Abortion as Good Mothering: Claiming a “Moral Framework” for Abortion Rights**

Scholars and abortion rights advocates in the United States have long criticized the “choice” framework of the mainstream abortion rights movement that emphasizes women’s autonomy and personal freedom, arguing that it has proven to be unstable in the face of anti-abortion/pro-life opposition (Borovoy 2011, Fried 1990, Solinger 2001). Pro-life movement framing has emphasized the “natural” mother/child bond and has generally succeeded in framing abortion as an immoral breach of that maternal bond. Successful counterframing like this can powerfully affect opposing movement activists by putting them on the defensive and forcing them to change or clarify their positions often (Benford and Snow 2000). Repeated countermovement attacks will force a movement into a defensive posture. Thus, movements will attempt to overcome countermovement attacks by utilizing themes that they hope will be culturally resonant, mobilize supporters, and demobilize opponents (McCaffrey and Keys 2000). Consequently, some scholars and activists have argued that the pro-choice movement should adopt a “moral framework” in order to counteract the success of the pro-life movement’s perceived monopoly on morality (Borovoy 2011, Wolf 1995). While scholars have debated this concept in an abstract sense, I contribute an examination of a “moral framework” operating within an abortion clinic. I find that in abortion counselors’ attempts to destigmatize abortion, they depart from the “choice” framework and instead

attempt to frame women to abort as “good mothers making responsible choices” and focus their resistance within a moral framework that privileges women’s roles as mothers. However, I also find that there are certain abortion scenarios that make the counselors uncomfortable and test their “moral” boundaries. I conclude with a discussion of the limits of both the “choice” and “moral” framework for abortion rights.

The counselors, as well as pro-choice movement in general, have a vested interest in portraying women who chose abortion as “responsible choice makers” and resisting negative stereotypes of these women as impetuous and callous. Thus, in responding to pro-life claims and imagery, pro-choice activists tend to divert attention away from the unpleasant parts of abortion, like fetal parts or ‘irresponsible’ patients (Esacove 2004, Ludlow 2008). Clinic counselors, however, are faced with these unpleasant situations on a daily basis. Thus, in the second part of this section, I explore how counselors attempt to balance their desire to frame abortion patients as “good mothers” with their uneasiness about certain abortions and abortion patients. By seemingly reinforcing negative stereotypes about abortion patients that counselors hope to dispel, these patients make counselors uncomfortable. When women are viewed as not acting responsibly, not taking their decisions seriously, or taking the right to an abortion for granted, counselors feel they are disrespecting the sacredness of the abortion right or the commitment counselors make to be at the clinic. Abortion counselors experience intense stigma because of their close association with abortion, and when they distance themselves from “problematic” patients and distinguish responsible choices from irresponsible choices, they are

attempting to disassociate themselves from this stigma. However, in doing so, they distinguish between “good” and “bad” choice makers, destabilizing both the “choice framework” on which the abortion rights movement is built and the proposed “moral framework.” Social movement scholars suggest that when movements respond reactively to countermovements, they often risk hurting the movement (Rohlinger 2002). In my discussion below, I examine how these “problematic patients” complicate the “moral framework” and examine the potential benefits and risks of the pro-choice movement transforming their dominant framing from “choice” to one focused on good mothering, responsibility, and selflessness.

### **The Instability of “Choice”**

The *Roe v. Wade* decision was hailed as a major victory for pro-choice activists, and while it was indeed a significant turning point in abortion rights advocacy, the legal framework that *Roe* was based on presented several problems for the future of abortion rights advocacy. The ruling was not based on the feminist demand for women’s reproductive autonomy (Kolbert and Miller 1998), but on the “the right to privacy,” which mostly empowered the doctors who performed abortions, rather than the women seeking them. Additionally, adopting the framework of “privacy” backfired politically because it significantly weakened the demands for public access for abortion fundamental to the feminist struggle of the time (Silliman et al. 2004, Saletan 2004). Since *Roe v. Wade* was based on a “negative” right, the state could not interfere with a woman’s right to an early abortion, but it was under no legal obligation to provide one. Additionally, the

concept of privacy assumes access to resources and a level of autonomy that many people do not have because of their class position and reliance on the state (Luna and Luker 2013). This legal framework allowed significant room for curbing access to abortion through the courts (Ginsburg 1989). Indeed, it only took three years for legislators to outlaw federal funding of abortions in the Hyde Amendment, effectively cutting off poor women's ability to utilize their right to an abortion. Similar limitations on funds covering federal workers, military personnel, women on reservations, and inmates were enacted in the following years (Kolbert and Miller 1998). In *Webster v. Reproductive Health Services* in 1989 and *Planned Parenthood v. Casey* in 1992, the Supreme Court opened the door for the eventual demise of *Roe*, allowing states the right to enact significant restrictions on abortion access—such as parental notification laws, waiting periods, gestational limits, and restrictions on where abortions can be performed.

In 1990, scholars observed that the pro-life movement had thus far dominated the abortion debate, forcing the pro-choice movement to respond to challenges on their terms (Chancer 1990, 113-114). Judging by the nearly constant success of anti-abortion legislation since *Roe v. Wade*, it was clear that state legislatures, voters, and the Supreme Court were waning in their support for “choice” and “abortion on demand” (Fried 1990, 2). The weakening of abortion rights was clearly indicative of pro-life movement success in influencing the public consciousness and mobilizing new pro-life activists. Around this same time, Simonds (1996) saw evidence of the changing societal views on abortion in the way that abortion clinic workers' views shifted from a focus on feminist advocacy in the 1970s to a much more judgmental ‘distaste’ of abortion and the women seeking them

in the late 1980s. Democratic politicians increasingly took weak stands on the issue by saying that they supported the legal right to an abortion but personally opposed the practice, reinforcing the stigma (Chancer 1990, 116). Additionally, in 1996, Bill Clinton made famous the mantra that abortion should be “safe, legal, and rare,” but as Weitz (2010) has argued, such a statement further stigmatizes abortion by framing it as justifiable only in certain, rare circumstances.

By the 1990s, the pro-choice movement was very different from the women’s liberation movement that won abortion rights in the early 1970s, both in its defensive posture and singular focus on abortion (Fried 1990, 9). Fried argued that the major problem with the defensive stance of the mainstream pro-choice movement was in its willingness to compromise. Based on fears of losing everything, the pro-choice leaders had conceded to pro-life demands. Fried (1990) argues that this compromise ultimately legitimized the view that “there are morally acceptable and morally unacceptable abortions and that those decisions are best made by someone other than the pregnant woman” and accepts the assertion that the fetus, rather than the woman, “ought to be the focus of legislative and constitutional protection” (7-8). The result has been a weakening and stigmatization of the pro-choice position, so that even those who support abortion rights view it as a “necessary evil, morally problematic, [and] something to be avoided” (Fried 1990, 14; Wolf 1995; Borovoy 2011). Additionally, the notion of “choice” ignores the many women—poor women, young women, women of color—who do not have a full range of reproductive choices (Solinger 2001). “Choice,” then, is inherently dependent on class and race privilege and deems some women good choice makers and others bad

choice makers—an ideology that has gained significant traction in debates on abortion, birth control, motherhood, and welfare benefits. Solinger (2001) argues that “choice” is a highly “undependable foundation for guaranteeing women’s control over their own bodies, their reproductive lives, their motherhood, and ultimately their status as full citizens” (6-7). The fact that *Roe* was quickly dismantled over those first decades is not surprising given that the first anti-abortion laws were directed at “the most politically disenfranchised women” who had the least power to protect their rights (Kolbert and Miller, 99). (As I detail in Part II of this dissertation, the reproductive justice movement, led by women of color, emerged out of this recognition of exclusionary “choice”).

### **A Moral Framework For Abortion Rights**

Many scholars have argued that the “choice” framework is not strong enough to defend abortion rights against anti-abortion attacks and has ultimately hurt the abortion rights movement (Fried, 1990, 5-6; Solinger 2001 4-5). Some activists and theorists have argued that the pro-choice movement should instead adopt a “moral framework” for abortion rights, which they argue would more adequately respond to the success of pro-life framing. For example, Borovoy (2011) implores the pro-choice movement to look “beyond choice” and instead frame abortion rights as an issue of social stability and responsible parenting. She argues that the “choice” framework is not only ineffective, but also irresponsible, and does not acknowledge the responsibility women show to their families when they have abortions. Borovoy points out the fact that many Democratic politicians have backed away from aggressive promotion of “rights” and “choice,”



instead opting for a position closer to Bill Clinton’s 1996 pronouncement that abortion should be “safe, legal, and rare”—which she argues, “reflects a liberal attempt to recognize the moral dimension of the problem” (2011). She makes the case that to find a way out of the current state of the debate—an ideological deadlock between a woman’s “choice” and a fetus’ “life”—the pro-choice movement should instead focus the abortion rights debate on the value of good parenting. Borovoy points out that it is somewhat surprising that neither side of the abortion debate has a central focus on positive family outcomes, considering the symbolic value placed on strong families in the United States. Additionally, since abortion rights in the United States are based on a “right to privacy”—a negative liberty—the state has no obligation to protect the health of women. Borovoy makes the case that when we single out abortion as an issue of privacy, we ignore the myriad other rights that women need for true reproductive health—subsidized day care, job security, a “family wage,” quality public education, and universal health care. She ultimately argues that while a “choice” framework was effective for legalizing abortion, it is not strong enough to withstand the current attacks on abortion rights, arguing that a moral framework, simultaneously “compatible with [both] liberal and feminist values,” is needed. While Borovoy acknowledges that the pro-choice movement has had little room to explore a family-centered abortion policy because of a near constant need to defend access to abortion, she argues that understanding abortion in terms of family obligations is a stronger moral framework for the future than a focus on choice, rights, or autonomy.

Ludlow (2008) also argues that “choice” is an incomplete framework for the abortion rights movement, arguing instead for recognition of women’s embodied experiences when choosing abortion. Based on her personal experiences working in an abortion clinic, Ludlow claims that abortion patients’ understandings of their own experiences do not follow either the traditional pro-choice or the pro-life narratives. While the pro-life movement often frames the “mother” as an adversary to her “unborn child,” the pro-choice movement also frames the “fetus” as a distinct entity from the woman. Thus, she argues that the abortion debate, and specifically the pro-choice movement, must move beyond “simplistic dichotomies” and recognize the complex relationship between women and their fetuses (Ludlow 2008). In response to the pro-life framing of abortion patients as bad mothers, the pro-choice movement generally attempts to divert attention away from the fetus completely, focusing solely on women’s rights. However, Ludlow (2008) argues that this strategy is a misrepresentation of women’s own lived experiences of pregnancy and abortion, advocating a reconciliation of the concern for women and for fetal life (43). In a 2004 essay, Frances Kissling, former president of Catholics for Choice, also advocated for the pro-choice movement to combine respect for women’s rights with a recognition of the value of the fetus, pointing out, “It has long been a truism of the abortion debate that those who are prochoice have rights and those who are against legal abortion have morality” (Kissling 2004, 8). In Catholics for Choice’s framing of abortion as a moral decision, the organization distinguishes itself from the larger pro-choice movement, which tends to ignore such ethical and moral considerations (Hipsher 2007).

Naomi Wolf made potentially the most controversial case for the pro-choice movement to adopt a “moral framework” and has faced significant criticism for her problematic 1995 essay “Our Bodies, Our Souls” in *The New Republic*. She argued that the pro-choice movement has lost majority support because of its refusal to “speak about good and evil” (Wolf 1995, 26). She argued that the pro-choice movement has abandoned ethics by ignoring the value of the fetus and by not admitting that the death of a fetus is a “real death.” Wolf believes that the “choice” framework has lost the battle and only a “moral framework” will speak to the millions of Americans who are in the “mushy middle” of the abortion debate—those who want to support abortion rights while also condemning it as a moral failing. To Wolf, many in the pro-choice movement have become what critics have claimed that they are—“callous, selfish and casually destructive” (26). Wolf wants women to hold themselves accountable for the “evil” that is abortion and mourn the life that is lost through the act, even if the abortion was deemed necessary. Irresponsibility and selfishness are important themes for Wolf, who makes a significant distinction between a woman who has an abortion because she cannot afford a child and a woman who does so even if she could afford to keep the child. For Wolf, when a poor woman chooses abortions, she is making a responsible decision for that potential child. However, when a well-off woman chooses abortion, she is making a selfish choice—or at very least not considering the best interests of the child. While Wolf acknowledges that any woman has the freedom to choose abortion, she stresses that women and the pro-choice movement should not frame such choices as good mothering. Wolf’s problematic essay shows how a moral framework can work to shame certain

women who choose abortion, framing those women as irresponsible and selfish—the very stereotypes that the pro-choice movement has been fighting since 1973.

### **“Good” and “Bad” Mothers in the Abortion Debate**

Motherhood holds a deep-rooted symbolic value in American culture, and debates over the place and meaning of motherhood incite strong emotions. Many of our most heated political and social debates revolve around mothers—how motherhood should happen (e.g., abortion, birth control, reproductive technologies), the role of mothers in the economy (e.g., mother’s employment, family-friendly workplace policies, welfare reform), who should be allowed to mother (e.g., teen parenting, marriage and adoption rights for same-sex couples), and so on. Feminism and motherhood have been quite uneasy bedfellows, and understandably so—motherhood remains central to normative contemporary gendered expectations for women, and feminists have consistently criticized this link as limiting and damaging for women, regardless of their motherhood status (Ridgeway and Correll 2004). However, the powerful experience of giving birth and the intense connection that many women feel with their children is not something that many women would readily hope to abandon (Glenn 1994). Many women find positive value and identity in being a mother, but also must confront the social and material costs that accompany motherhood. Feminists face the challenge of valorizing women’s biological and emotional capacities, while also resisting being defined by them (McMahon 1995). Contemporary images of “good” and “bad” mothers have their roots in Victorian ideals of women’s natural ability to nurture (Ladd-Taylor and Umansky 1998).

Many mothers fall outside the dominant ideology of a “good” mother—minority, poor, single and teen mothers are often cast as unfit parents under this ideology. Throughout the twentieth century, millions of American women have been deemed ‘bad’ mothers by virtue of their race, class, age, marital status, or sexual orientation. Under the contemporary American ideology, a good mother is selfless, child-centered, and sacrifices her own desires for those of her children (Hays 1996).

The pro-choice and pro-life movements have each utilized conceptions of “good” and “bad” motherhood in their framing strategies. As Kristin Luker points out in her now classic study of the abortion debate, the mother/child relationship is generally understood to be “the most intimate, most sacred, and most self-sacrificing relationship of all” (Luker 1984, 165). In her research, Luker found that pro-life and pro-choice activists differed mainly in their definitions of proper motherhood—with pro-life activists viewing motherhood as the most important role for women and pro-choice activists viewing motherhood as one of women’s many possible roles. She observes that the “abortion debate is so passionate and hard-fought because it is a referendum on the place and meaning of motherhood” (Luker 1984, 193). It draws on beliefs about children, families, sex, religion, and gender roles so deeply held that they feel natural to both sides.

Esacove (2004) shows that in the debate over the Partial-Birth Abortion Ban, the pro-choice movement attempted to counter criticism of the procedure by invoking images of “good” mothers in various ways. First, the pro-choice movement framed such later abortions as necessary because they are most often needed by women who are least prepared to be mothers, invoking an image of a poor, young, and irresponsible mother

and the chance to avoid that situation. Then, as the pro-life movement changed its tactics, the pro-choice movement reframed the women needing later abortions as married, religious women, with wanted pregnancies, who had experienced complications with the pregnancy—i.e., good mothers in tragic situations (Esacove 2004). Similarly, Evans (1997) found that the Religious Coalition for Abortion Rights (RCAR) changed their framing over the years as the pro-life movement gained traction. In the years after *Roe v. Wade*, when the Catholic Church held a prominent position in the pro-life movement, RCAR mainly framed the right to an abortion in terms of religious pluralism, arguing that the Catholic Church did not have the right to dictate the laws of the nation. As the Evangelical anti-abortion movement—which was more likely to frame women who obtained abortions as immoral and irresponsible—gained strength, RCAR changed their tactics and began to argue that the abortion decision was not at odds with morality and that women making these decisions could indeed be acting responsibly (Evans 1997).

Similarly, McCaffrey and Keys (2000) found that the National Organization of Women also changed its framing strategy on abortion rights in response to pro-life framing by claiming that women do not end pregnancies for “light or frivolous reasons,” but instead for “compelling reasons, ranging from severe economic hardship to disabling ill health, to responsibilities for children already born, to pregnancies resulting from rape or incest” (McCaffrey and Keys 2000, 55). Tonn (1996) also points out that starting in the 1980s, in order to combat the pro-life framing of abortion patients as cavalier and unfeeling, the pro-choice movement began to highlight women who were forced to choose abortion because of tragic circumstances outside of their control—“genetically

deformed fetuses, rape or incest, endangerment to the woman's physical health, or spousal abandonment” (Tonn 1996, 269). Many scholars have argued that this type of framing actually weakened the pro-choice movement’s position because under this formulation, there are acceptable abortions and unacceptable abortions. By focusing attention on the most tragic abortion cases, on the most vulnerable women, or on the most compelling justifications, the abortion rights movement risks creating a situation in which some abortions are considered justified and others are considered frivolous, even among pro-choice people.

Shifts in movement framing and the attempt to reframe abortion as a good mothering have certainly influenced the way women who are “on the ground” in the abortion debate—local activists, abortion clinic employees and abortion patients themselves—navigate the stigma of abortion. In the first section of Part I, I show what a “moral framework” focused on good mothering looks like in an abortion clinic. The abortion counselors I interviewed attempt to expand the boundaries of morality to include abortion as a moral choice. In this way, they respond to the call for incorporation of a moral framework in abortion advocacy, as well as the call to acknowledge women’s own experiences with and understandings of abortion. Their descriptions also show a clear response to pro-life movement success—specifically the framing of women who abort as bad mothers. However, the counselors also discussed situations when abortion and abortion patients made them feel uncomfortable and challenged this framing of abortion patients as responsible and “good mothers”—patients who they think waited “too long,”

patients who return for multiple abortions, and patients who take the “sacred” right of abortion for granted. As I discuss in the second section of Part I, in counselors’ discussions of these “problematic” patients, notions of morality and responsibility loom large. I argue that when actors in the pro-choice movement attempt to distance themselves from “problematic” patients in the interest of deflecting stigma, they reinforce a distinction between “good” and “bad” choice makers. Finally, I discuss the potential effects of adopting a “moral framework.”

Abortion counselors offer a unique window into the private world of abortion care, separated from the larger movement battles, but simultaneously a product of them. As witnesses to these controversies, the counselors do not have the option of ignoring the problematic or uncomfortable sides of abortion. To the majority of women going through an abortion procedure, abortion counselors are the only representatives of the pro-choice movement with whom they will come into contact. Therefore, clinic staff members likely have significant power in determining how patients will understand and respond to their abortion experience. If abortion counselors perpetuate larger stereotypes about the appropriateness of certain abortion situations, the patients will be more likely to internalize these perspectives.

## **Data & Methods**

### **Abortion Counselors**

To the majority of women going through an abortion procedure, clinic workers are the only representatives of the larger pro-choice movement with whom they will



come into contact. And yet, clinic workers have been understudied in social research on the abortion debate—researchers most often interview pro-life or pro-choice activists on an organizational level. Those researchers who have looked closely at the experiences of abortion counselors have found their experiences to be fraught with stigma and emotional complexity—described as “dirty work” and intense “emotional labor” (Harris et al. 2011, O’Donnell et al. 2011, Joffe 1978, Wolkimir and Powers 2007). However, among all the actors in pro-choice movement, it is the clinic workers who provide the space for a woman to make use of her constitutional right to an abortion and who experience the day-to-day realities of abortion politics. Clinic workers offer a complicated, and perhaps more holistic, perspective on the abortion experience than is often expressed by pro-choice activists.

This section of the dissertation is based on in-depth, semi-structured interviews with seventeen female abortion counselors who worked and volunteered at a small, private, non-profit clinic in a large Midwestern city. The clinic was located in an urban center, and served women from all over the state and neighboring states. It was primarily an abortion clinic, although they served patients for regular gynecological services as well. The abortion counselors I interviewed for this paper were mostly volunteers, along with a few full- or part-time employees. A counselor’s job is to conduct a short counseling session with each patient individually, in which they ensure that she is informed about the procedure and is making her own decision, and then accompany that patient through the abortion procedure. The counselors were between the ages of 19 and 61 during the time of the interviews, the majority of whom were between the ages 21-30.

Sixteen of the counselors identified as white, and one identified as Asian-American. Fifteen of the counselors identified as heterosexual and two identified as bisexual. Six of the counselors were single, seven were cohabiting with partners, and four were married. Seven counselors had graduate degrees or were currently in graduate school, eight had bachelor's degrees or were currently in college, one had attended some college and one had a high school degree. Eight counselors identified as religious or spiritual and nine identified as agnostic, nonreligious, or atheist. Two counselors had children. All identified as middle class.

I began volunteering as an abortion counselor with the goal of interviewing the other abortions counselors. Because of the highly controversial nature of the work, I wanted to be an “insider” at the clinic before I reached out to request these interviews. I wanted to understand the clinic culture and be able to speak about the procedure using the language of the staff. This process of acclimating to the clinic culture was both emotionally and physically draining. While I was ideologically pro-choice before beginning to volunteer, actually *witnessing* an abortion procedure and being forced to interact with protestors who perceive you as an abortion patient tests these beliefs in a significant way. After a few months of volunteering, I approached the volunteer coordinator, explained my desire to conduct interviews with the counselors and asked for her permission to email the counselors. She agreed and asked me to draft an email that she would forward to the rest of the counselors. Some of the counselors replied directly to this email agreeing to participate and others agreed after I followed up by emailing them

individually. All seventeen of the counselors who were working during my time at the clinic agreed to interviewed.

I was interested in how they understood their experiences of working in such a stigmatized field, why they started working or volunteering at the clinic, where they saw themselves fitting in the larger abortion debate, and how they interacted with patients. Since counselors work alone with patients, the only time a counselor would see another counselor work is during her very short “training period” where she might observe two or three counseling sessions. Other than that, each counselor works somewhat in isolation. Thus, even though I was also working as an abortion counselor, the types of questions I was interested in exploring with the counselors would be unique to each of them.

All interviews took place in person, at a location of the participant’s choosing in 2010. Interviews were audio-recorded and ranged from a half hour to three hours in length. Interviews were transcribed in full and coded for main themes using the qualitative data analysis software Atlas.ti. To maintain their confidentiality, I have assigned pseudonyms to the counselors.

## **FRAMING ABORTION AS GOOD MOTHERING**

Abortion counselors report that patients felt stigmatized by their decision to abort and that most patients internalized this stigma. In response, the counselors describe attempting to destigmatize abortion and comfort patients by reframing the choice to abort as responsible and moral and by emphasizing patients' maternal obligations to their current and future children. In reframing abortion as a sacrifice to a woman's current or potential children, as opposed to strictly using "choice" rhetoric and narratives, the counselors respond to pro-life movement rhetoric that stigmatizes abortion patients, activists and clinic workers. I find that the counselors attempt resist this stigma by reframing abortion as "good mothering" in four main ways: 1) they describe patients' choices as child-centered, emphasizing that women choose abortion *for* their current or future children; 2) they describe patients as adult women, explicitly distancing them from "irresponsible" teens; 3) they valorize planned childbearing, arguing that abortion is the *moral* solution to unplanned and unwanted pregnancies; and 4) they attempt to associate themselves with motherhood in ways that justify and destigmatize their work.

### **Child-Centered Choices**

Women who get abortions face several types of attacks on their character—on their morality, their decency, their virtue, and maybe most significantly, on their sense of themselves as good women and good mothers. In contemporary American ideology, a good mother is selfless, child-centered, and sacrifices her own desires for that of her children (Hays 1996). A woman's sense of self is highly integrated with her identity as a

mother and her relationship to children. Therefore, to make a woman feel that she is being a bad mother when she obtains an abortion incites significant shame and guilt. For the abortion counselors, who are tasked with not only explaining a medical procedure to patients but also attending to a patient's emotional needs, tackling this stigma can be a challenge. The counselors I spoke with brought up several examples of addressing these specific concerns. The most prominent of the resistance strategies was to attempt to reframe abortion as a child-centered choice. In other words, the counselors utilized the same language of motherly love and child protection that the anti-abortion movement uses, but instead argued that abortion was, in fact, an act of motherly love and child protection.

Natalie—a 25-year-old medical student—started volunteering at the clinic to get experience in a clinical setting for her medical school applications, but remained after starting school because she felt the work was very important. She demonstrates the counselors' typical description of their reaction to a patient who internalizes the notion that having an abortion makes her a bad mother. In Natalie's response to such a patient, she emphasizes responsibility, selflessness and protection of children—characteristics of a “good mother.”

I've had patients who are really upset about maybe being in the situation and about their own choice. And they've said things like 'I have other children, like, what does this mean to me as a mother that I'm terminating this pregnancy?'...And I guess I kind of look at it like, I think they're being responsible mothers, because you're choosing to care for the child you have already in a way that, you know, will be best for that child...When people say things like abortion is a selfish choice, like the woman is thinking of herself, why isn't she thinking of the baby? I guess you could look at it like that, but I also think it's kind of selfless. I mean, not everyone is going to have the same reaction to their procedure and the fact that they have an abortion, but it's hard for a lot of

women to rectify it, and if they're willing to take that on so that the children they do have will have a better life and a better mother and a more involved life, that's a pretty brave choice, I think, to make.

In this passage, Natalie pushes back on the framing of women who abort as selfish and argues that abortion can be a *selfless* choice that women make for their children, even when it might be very difficult for them. Such a statement shows a de-emphasis on the “choice” framework of women’s freedom and bodily autonomy and answers a call to recognize women’s identities as mothers and how those identities influence their abortion decisions (Borovoy 2011, Ludlow 2008). On the other hand, her comments also conjure an image of a self-sacrificing woman who relegates all her own needs and desires to those of her children.

Jen—a 30-year-old public health professional—is one of the few part-time paid counselors, but says she considers her work at the clinic basically a volunteer job because her hourly wage is so low. In addressing patients’ feelings of guilt, Jen attempts to refocus patients’ attention back on their role as a mother, insisting that patients make choices about abortion based mainly on the needs of their children. She responds to the notion that abortion is anti-motherhood by pointing out that she’s never seen a patient that didn’t want children.

Well, my favorite thing to tell women is...whenever they're saying...‘I just feel so guilty,’ my favorite thing to tell them is that there’s no guilt involved in being a good mother...And I’ve never had anyone tell me that they just don’t want any children ever and would never even think about it... The kind of choices that women are making to be at the clinic and have an abortion, I think they’re almost always related, if they have children, to that...[they say] ‘I want to do better for the kids I have now.’

When Jen says, “there’s no guilt involved in being a good mother,” she is using the words of the pro-life movement—that frames abortion as the worst form of mothering—in her resistance. She is attempting to redefine good motherhood. To support her point, she draws attention to the motherhood status of her patients, citing that they all want children. In other words, she uses the patients’ motherhood as a defense of their morality.

Brianna—a 27-year-old who works as a counselor and the volunteer coordinator—is one of the only non-medical full-time paid employees at the clinic. She points out that patients often feel abortion is “selfish” and in response she attempts to convince them that, since they are aborting *for their children*, they are not being selfish. She thinks the counselors should help to “normalize” this perspective for the patients.

The vast majority of women, she’s not only thinking of herself when she makes the decision. So, I think we have to be very considerate of that. And help her feel that she’s not being selfish by making an abortion decision. She is considering the whole picture, and I think it’s important to talk about it that way. Especially since a lot of the women we see are already mothers, or want to be mothers someday. So...it’s good to normalize that.

Brianna’s comments show recognition of the fact that the common perception of abortion as selfish stigmatizes the women that come into the clinic. When she says that it is important for counselors to frame abortion as child-centered, she is acting strategically. She is conceding to the ideology that women already hold when they enter the clinic—that the choice to abort is indicative of one’s character—and attempting to turn it on its head. In a way, she is acknowledging that framing abortion in this way can be a form of resistance against stigma, but also draws on, and reinforces the gendered expectation that women should be selfless.

Counselors recognize that patients feel guilty about choosing abortion, but instead of denying that women do or should feel guilty, like the traditional “choice” framework might instruct, counselors instead acknowledge and attempt to normalize those feelings of remorse and loss. Patty—a 59-year-old who has devoted much of her life to abortion counseling—has worked at the clinic for 35 years. She describes her belief that guilt is a normal reaction to abortion, even going so far as to say that it would be strange for a woman to not feel guilty.

I can understand why it would feel bad... ‘I feel guilty choosing myself over this baby or this potential baby.’ I definitely understand that feeling. It’s a very human feeling, especially if you’re a parent. I usually say women with babies and toddlers probably feel it more... ‘I let these children live. Now I’m not letting this one live.’ And you’d almost be inhuman not to have some feelings around that...And I try to normalize tears, normalize sadness, normalize guilt. You’d be unusual if you didn’t feel some guilt. It goes with the territory.

In her insistence that women do take this decision seriously and experience grief after an abortion, she responds to the pro-life framing that women who choose abortion are callous and selfish. However, following her logic, women who do not feel guilty for choosing abortion are cast as abnormal, even “inhuman.”

The counselors are clearly utilizing the pro-life framing of women as mothers from the moment of conception when they describe abortion patients as “mothers.” This language is also a reflection of how the patients often describe themselves and their fetuses—as “mother” and “baby.” In doing so, however, they run the risk of emphasizing a woman’s identity and decision-making as completely dependent on her children. In focus groups with women who identified as pro-choice, Cannold (2000) found a similarly other-centered explanation of the choice to terminate or keep a pregnancy. She finds that,



for pro-choice women, abortion can be seen as the moral, responsible choice as long as the decision is other-centered—abortion was seen as acceptable when the woman was “killing from care,” not when she was making a “selfish” choice (Cannold 2000).

Decisions that were considered justified often centered on a woman’s life circumstances—insufficient maturity, lack of emotional or financial resources, or lack of medical care. Most of all, for abortion to be a moral choice, the pregnant woman needed to consider all of her responsibilities—including specifically a responsibility to her potential child (Cannold 2000). This self-sacrificing, other-centered framing of abortion emerges from and reinforces traditional gender roles of women’s lives as completely child-centered.

### **Responsible Adults**

Another way that counselors attempted to resist abortion stigma was to respond to the cultural conception of abortion patients as irresponsible young girls—a stereotype some counselors confessed to believing before coming to work at the clinic. Darcy—a 24-year-old nurse who regularly volunteers at the clinic—describes her own misconceptions about abortion patients. She disputes the stereotype of the irresponsible teen by instead pointing out that most of the patients she sees are both adults and already mothers.

Most of the people already have kids. It’s not a bunch of teens in there who are like recklessly having sex all the time. You know what I mean? Which I thought...I think that’s totally the stereotype. I think most of the patients are well over twenty. And most of them have a kid and they just don’t want another one. And they’ll be chatting about their kids while they’re having an abortion. And

they go on and on and on, because it's like a happy thought for them to think about.

Darcy points out that women will talk lovingly about their children while getting an abortion—as evidence that these women are good mothers. Darcy is utilizing their status as mothers as proof of their morality. She also juxtaposes her patients with “teens recklessly having sex all the time,” calling attention to a negative stereotype about impetuous young women unsympathetically seeking abortion after careless sexual activity. Distancing the patients from such images attempts to normalize them and their choices. However, this comparison may also strengthen a distinction between acceptable and unacceptable abortions.

Molly, a 61-year-old woman, is the oldest counselor working at the clinic. She was a stay-at-home mother to three children for most of her life, but after all of her children moved out, she sought out a fulfilling part time job and found one in abortion counseling. She described her role at the clinic as a mother/grandmother for all the women that pass in and out of the clinic. She also attempts to resist negative stereotypes about abortion patients when she says that the patients she sees at the clinic are “normal” women:

You know it's interesting. ...An in-law of one of my family members said to me once when he heard what I did, 'Oh, so you must see a lot of women who have been raped.' And he said, 'Oh so you must see a lot of hookers.' No! No, we see the women who live next door to you, and the women who live next door to me...

Molly is, in a sense, working against the framing of women who get abortions as tragic or irresponsible and attempting to normalize them. By using the examples of “women who

have been raped” and “hookers” she is giving examples of potentially the most tragic and the least sympathetic cases of abortion, respectively, and instead framing abortion patients as women “just like you and me” who are making responsible choices for their families. However, by attempting to normalize some women, other women inevitably fall outside the boundaries.

Sally, a 54-year-old photographer, volunteers at the clinic on a regular basis as both a counselor and a clinic escort (volunteers who stand outside the clinic and help woman navigate the protestors). Sally tells a similar story about people’s perceptions of the women who come to the clinic, and in doing so, emphasizes their “goodness.”

[My parents and siblings] are definitely pro-choice, but...they don’t really get it. You know, they have some very old-fashioned ideas about who would be the people [who get abortions]...they think it’s a place where bad girls go.

Sally is framing abortion patients in a positive light, resisting the stereotype that these women are “bad girls.” Nonetheless, like Molly, her comments also potentially reinforce a distinction between “good” and “bad” abortion patients.

Women who choose abortion are often portrayed as callous or cold-hearted. Another way that counselors attempt to claim the moral high ground in the abortion debate is through emphasizing that patients take the abortion decision very seriously and are emotionally affected by it. Natalie describes how she had a stereotypical image about who abortion patients would be before she started volunteering at the clinic.

Before I started...there’s like a stereotypical patient that you think of...that a lot of people who aren’t familiar with clinic work...think of. And...I was surprised there really is not a typical patient. It’s not just like the young, poor, stupid woman who is making this decision on a whim...Like, I’ve never had a patient that didn’t take this really seriously, and for whom this wasn’t like a really hard decision.

Natalie clearly delineates the boundaries of a good abortion patient—someone who is not “young, poor, and stupid” and someone who struggles greatly because of her abortion. Perhaps even more so than the examples above, in her attempt to resist negative stereotypes, Natalie creates a small pool of acceptable abortion patients and leaves many women’s experiences out.

Women who get abortions are framed as irresponsible, either by not taking responsibility for the “life” they created or by not having responsible sex. Abortion counselors attempt to resist this negative framing by instead describing patients as adult women making responsible choices. They distance their patients and themselves from irresponsible or immature women, placing them in a separate category, and potentially reinforcing the very stereotype that they intend to disprove. O’Donnell, Weitz, and Freedman (2011) also found that a few abortion providers in their study drew attention to their patients’ parental responsibilities and focused on those patients who were especially conscientious or especially vulnerable, deemphasizing those who may be seen as irresponsible.

### **Planned Children**

The counselors place a high value on a *planned* family and argue that because abortion can assist in facilitating this, it can be a moral choice. In the following examples, the counselors argue that when faced with an unplanned pregnancy, abortion is a better choice *for that baby*. They argue it is far better, morally, to choose abortion than to bring an unwanted baby into the world. Whereas the pro-life movement frames an abortion as a

betrayal of the fetus, the counselors frame the same act as a sacrifice for the fetus. For example, Darcy argues, "...I don't think you should bring someone into the world if you're not ready or if you can't support it." Similarly, Kelly—a 19-year-old volunteer who is currently attending college—makes the case that it would be wrong to bring a baby into the world if a mother did not want a child or could not support it financially.

I don't think it would be the right thing to do to have a kid if you didn't want it. ...I think planning is good...If it doesn't fit in your plans to have it at that time, I think it would be morally wrong to do it if you weren't financially capable of supporting it.

Similarly, Haley—a 19-year-old college student who volunteers at the clinic—argues that abortion can be a morally superior decision for the best interests of the mother *and* the potential child. She argues that it is better to have an abortion, even a later abortion, than to bring an unwanted child into the world: "I don't think there should be a limit [on how late one can obtain an abortion]. Because I think that in reality, having an unwanted child is worse for that kid."

Several counselors also referenced their own or others' experiences of planned children to make the case that planning a child is very important. Sally references her own experiences of raising two children.

I feel like...it's really hard to raise children. It's also like the most fun thing I've ever done and it's also the most rewarding thing I've ever done. So, it's only made me feel stronger about choice...that it doesn't have to be a hardship...even though it is really, really difficult. But if it's done by choice, at the right time when you really want to have children, it's just the greatest thing in the world. So, [being a mother]...it made me feel even stronger about being pro-choice. Planning a pregnancy is really important and it made me feel even more that way.

Jen also draws attention to the different symbolic meaning between planned and unplanned babies when she tells a story about one of the clinic's physicians who recently had a baby.

Dr. H. was performing abortions while she was pregnant. And two women noticed and asked about if it was weird for her. And she said 'No, this is was a planned baby, I don't think about it here because it's a different situation.'

These comments show the counselors' beliefs that every baby should be planned and financially supported by its parents. This perspective represents a common pro-choice ideology—e.g., mainstream pro-choice organizations have consistently used slogans like “Every Child A Wanted Child.” The counselors call up images of responsible, child-centered women when they argue that, if a woman is not able to take care of a child, it is in the potential child's best interests for the mother to abort. A common pro-choice defense against anti-abortion attacks is to argue that pro-life people do not care about babies once they born—that they disregard the importance of healthy living conditions and stable home environments. The counselors are using similar arguments to make the case that children should be wanted and planned for and that women who choose to abort because they don't feel they can adequately provide for their children are making moral, responsible, and child-centered choices.

Borovoy (2011) makes a case for planned out families when she advocates a family-centered abortion rights framework. Similarly, in an article in *New Republic* entitled “The Conservative Case for Abortion,” Muller (1995) advocates the right to abortion in order to promote healthy families and argues that the pro-life position is at odds with middle-class values of a planned life. This position is unique from the

individual rights perspective on abortion rights in that the focus is on the collective good of society and the family. However, each day, thousands of unplanned or “unwanted” children are born. To make a moral distinction between planned and unplanned pregnancies can also stigmatize those unwanted and unplanned children whose mothers perhaps did not make the most “responsible” choice, calling into question the legitimacy of their very existence.

### **Integrating Abortion and Motherhood**

Recognizing that abortion is often understood as diametrically opposed to motherhood and as a rejection of the values of “good motherhood” (selflessness, caring, affection, etc.), counselors also attempt to portray abortion and motherhood as deeply integrated. While the counselors mostly discussed abortion stigma falling on their patients, they clearly internalized some of this stigma themselves. In this vein, I observed a strategy of positioning themselves and the clinic close to “motherhood” as a way to justify their work. For example, Molly resists the notion that mothers do not get abortions by saying that the clinic “loves children” and claiming her own motherly credentials as evidence.

I remember the first time a married women came in and said to me, ‘I know you can’t believe, you won’t believe it, but I have two kids at home.’ And I said, ‘Well, we’re not anti-kids. We love children. I have three of my own. I have a grandson. We’re not anti-kids.’

Similarly, Brianna references the physician who performed abortions throughout her entire pregnancy as proof that motherhood is not unwelcome in the clinic. “Dr. H recently

had her baby, and...she did procedures when she was like 39 weeks. That was fine with her. And she was back at it, like 6 weeks later.”

Darcy associates herself with motherhood by making it clear that she wants to have children someday and that she enjoys learning about fetal development. Darcy is studying to be a physician and she integrates abortion and motherhood when she says that becoming a mother will not dissuade her from performing abortions.

I want to have kids...and I love studying fetal development and I love that whole process, but I still think abortions are important...And I can see myself doing these procedures and being totally fine. It almost makes it that much more special because...when someone wants to have a baby, it's so amazing. It doesn't really take away from it.

As another way to connect to motherhood, Jen and Brianna both reference their work as doulas for pregnant women—a doula acts as a support person and advocate for a woman in labor. Both Brianna and Jen emphasized that the two jobs are very similar, integrating birth and abortion as two sides of the same coin.

I'm a doula for pregnant women, and I feel kind of like a mini doula during an abortion procedure. Honestly!...That's probably a funny comparison considering it's ending a pregnancy...People find it such an interesting contrast, and I'm like, 'really?' ...It's choosing to [be a mother] or choosing not to...When we talk about why we want to be a doula, we just want to make the experience as memorable, and as comfortable, and as empowering as we can. And it's the same exact thing for abortion...And people just would be like, 'what?' It's unfortunate because to me, it's just a part of somebody's reproductive life. And to me you should feel the same about birth as you do about [abortion]...it shouldn't be any different.

Brianna also attempts to connect herself to motherhood as a way to insulate her from abortion stigma. Since she also works with women in labor, she feels she has a strong argument against the pro-life framing of abortion workers as anti-child or anti-family.



She is internalizing the stigma while simultaneously resisting it. In this quote, she references the protestor who stands outside the clinic every day.

I would say [being a doula] is really similar to being an abortion counselor, only for childbirth...I like it...Maybe it just helps me psychologically too to have my mental responses to, you know, stupid [protestor] downstairs, and things like that...It's even more proof that he doesn't get it, he doesn't get why we're here and what we do, and that we're here to help women, and he just doesn't get it.

One common pro-life claim is that once a woman understands fetal development or experiences having her own children, she can better see abortion for what it is—killing a baby. Counselors instead argue that women who want children, women who have children, and women who work bringing babies into the world can retain their pro-choice views, and in fact, can integrate their views on abortion and motherhood.

I find that abortion counselors attempt to help patients navigate stigma by employing a resistance strategy of reframing abortion as moral and responsible and highlighting patients' maternal obligations. Counselors utilize ideologies of "good mothering" to resist pro-life framing in four main ways: 1) they describe patients as child-centered, emphasizing that women choose abortion *for* their current or future children and reinforce gendered expectations of selflessness; 2) they describe patients as adults, explicitly distancing them from "irresponsible" and "stupid" teens; 3) they valorize planned childbearing, arguing that abortion is the moral solution to unwanted and unplanned children; and 4) they attempt to associate themselves with motherhood in a way that justifies and destigmatizes their work. In this way, they attempt to expand the boundaries of morality to include abortion. The strategies of the abortion counselors I

interviewed in some ways answer the calls of several activists, public commentators, and scholars who have challenged the pro-choice movement to pay greater attention to the emotional side of abortion and reclaim some of the “moral ground” that the pro-life movement has been able to conquer.

However, in the counselors’ attempts to reframe abortion patients as moral, responsible decisions makers, I argue that they ultimately exclude the patients who do not fall into this category. For example, when Darcy says that abortion patients are not “a bunch of teens recklessly having sex all time” or when Natalie says that her patients are not “young, poor, and stupid,” they exclude many women from the moral framework. As another example, Patty says patients would be unusual if they didn’t feel guilt after an abortion, that they would “almost be inhuman.” In doing so, she dictates an expectation for how women *should* respond to an abortion procedure. In the next section, I examine how certain patients or abortion situations challenged abortion counselors’ ideologies and beliefs about the morality of abortion and women who choose it.

## TESTING THE BOUNDARIES OF “MORAL” CHOICES

Clinic counselors expressed strong support for abortion rights and discussed their anger over the success of pro-life tactics in stigmatizing abortion. However, in discussing these themes, they also described several examples of when their work made them feel uncomfortable and forced them to question the “boundaries” of these beliefs. At times, the counselors expressed doubt about whether their patients were acting responsibly and questioned their personal support of certain abortions. They expressed feeling uncomfortable with patients who sought later abortions, frustrated with patients who came back for multiple abortions and angered by patients who were openly anti-abortion. While they were uneasy with certain situations they observed at the clinic, they were also committed to providing nonbiased and supportive care to women and struggled to do so with certain patients. They were generally resistant to any legal restrictions on these “unpopular” abortions in the abstract, commenting that “options” should still be available for all women, but such situations were clearly a source of internal conflict and a challenge to their desired view of abortion patients as responsible and respectful. This tension is representative of the larger moral quandaries of the abortion rights movement. While the pro-life movement is firmly associated with the concept of morality, this research shows that pro-choice people also have moral boundaries—for what is considered an “appropriate” abortion, which would restrict the practice beyond what is legally required.

### ***Later Abortions***

The debate over the morality and legality of later abortions began along with *Roe v. Wade*, when the Supreme Court made a distinction between first, second, and third trimester abortions. While this debate certainly takes place between the pro-choice and pro-life movement and in the general public, it is also a point of contention among people who are pro-choice. Despite the fact that abortions in the second trimester are rare and abortions in the third trimester are extremely rare, clinic workers very often mentioned later abortions and their uneasiness about them during our interviews. The counselors all agree that when a woman finds herself carrying an unplanned pregnancy, it is her responsibility to make a choice about whether to abort as soon as possible. The closer a fetus comes to “viability,” the more uncomfortable the counselors are with the abortion. They expressed feeling conflicted about later abortions—desiring to maintain their strong belief in abortion rights but also desiring boundaries. While none of the counselors said that the procedures were unethical or should be illegal, they had mixed emotions about the appropriateness of the procedure and questioned the maturity and responsibility of women seeking these types of abortions.

Darcy—a 24-year-old volunteer counselor—conceded that women are sometimes forced to seek later abortions because of circumstances out of their control, but points out that in her experience many of the women are simply having difficulty making a decision. She makes the case that sometimes these abortions can be justified, but feels uncomfortable with them nonetheless. When she says that “in some circumstances, it’s

not the mom's fault," she is making a distinction between the majority of patients who seek later abortions because they did not decide quickly enough and the minority of those who did not know they were pregnant and are therefore less "at fault." In her comment, she references the clinic's "cut-off" for how late into a pregnancy the doctors will provide an abortion—which was 15 weeks and 6 days.

As far as being farther along...I know in some circumstances, it's not the mom's fault. But...in most cases...she knows she's been pregnant for a long time...Like I know their decision is hard...but...medically, as a procedure, that's just such a big deal... not just for the baby, for [the woman] too... Like, I'm not politically against it. I know it happens and it's good if they don't want the baby, but it just gets harder. I think it's good that the clinic has...a line where the doctor feels comfortable...Because I think you would get a lot of people coming in here that would be farther along...Most of the people that I've seen that are too far...it's sad because usually their mom...or somebody...doesn't want them to get [an abortion]...and they're really confused about their decision and they just keep waiting, waiting. Then it's too late, and they have to [travel to a different state] and it's just like this huge horrible thing. And by that time it's pretty much a baby. I mean, not really, but I don't know. It's just such a big mess.

Darcy's ambivalence is clear as she vacillates several times in this passage. First she acknowledges that sometimes women don't know they are pregnant and that abortion is a difficult decision, but then she argues against later abortions because they are more difficult for the woman and "the baby." Darcy aligns herself with the needs of the baby when she expresses frustration in the fact that women wait "too long" to the point where complicated procedures are necessary. She says she is not "politically against" later abortions, but then says that she thinks it is good that the clinic has a cut-off because "you would have a lot of people coming in there that would be farther along." Darcy seems to be implying that it is better to keep those problematic patients who waited "too long" out of the clinic. Timing is very important to her boundaries of a "good" abortion. She then

says she feels sympathy for the patients who are “too far” to obtain abortions at the clinic, but concludes by saying that fetuses are “pretty much a baby” at a later gestational age. Darcy also implies that women should take responsibility for their choices and not let other people, like their mothers, influence them. Darcy’s comments are representative of a feeling expressed by most of the counselors—that later abortions make them uncomfortable, but they still support them in the abstract sense. There seems to be an internal tension between wariness over restricting abortion in a formal way and enforcing “responsible” choices from patients in an informal way. Case in point, she supports the voluntary restriction on abortions after 16 weeks at the clinic is appropriate, but not a legal restriction of abortion after that time.

Elise—a 23-year-old volunteer counselor—makes a similar point about patients acting responsibly, framing earlier abortions as much more acceptable than later abortions. Abortions should happen “as soon as possible.” Timing is very important in the counselors’ view on acceptable abortions.

I personally feel that...if you want to do an abortion, you should do it as early as possible. And I don't like the idea of taking that option away...that makes me really nervous...because in some cases it is necessary for whatever reason...but I do think it's...the word irresponsible is popping into my head. I don't know if that's right or not, but you know, a little bit. You have wonder why you had 15 weeks to figure this out and didn't. But everyone's life is different and you can't assume that everyone will figure that out in time. So the option needs to be there. I would just like to hope that it doesn't have to happen all that often.

Like Darcy, Elise is uncomfortable with the idea of taking the option of legal abortions away, but is still clearly conflicted. She refers to women who seek later abortions as “irresponsible,” even though she is hesitant to do so because she recognizes that there are sometimes extenuating circumstances, but hopes that later abortions be as rare as

possible. Haley—a 19-year-old college student who works as volunteer counselor—also shows a discontinuity between how she feels personally and what she supports politically and ethically when she compares the clinic to other clinics.

I know other clinics [go farther] and that I'm a little bit less comfortable with, but I still think that it's fine, you know, ethically. But...at the same time, by that time you should probably know...if you haven't made the decision by that time if you want to have the baby.

Haley is also drawing on themes of responsibility when she says, “you should probably know...if you want to have a baby.” She is conflicted in that she supports the legality of later abortions, but she personally feels uncomfortable with such procedures. Like the others, she is supportive of the time restrictions at the clinic compared to “other clinics,” signifying a distinction made within the pro-choice movement about the appropriateness of later abortions. In this way, the commitment to “choice” diminishes with gestational time.

For Natalie—a 25-year-old medical student— notions of responsibility are also intimately tied to her views on later abortions. She believes that it is only in “rare instances” that women do not realize they are pregnant, and argues that the main reason women wait so long is because they are having a difficult time coming to a decision. Natalie’s conflicted feelings are clear in the way that she seems apologetic, but also defensive, in her support of a gestational cut-off. To Natalie, indecisiveness is irresponsible when faced with an unplanned pregnancy.

I think it's appropriate [to have a cut-off]. I mean, at some point, especially as medical technology advances, we're able to keep babies alive outside of the mother at something like 22 weeks. I mean, that's like, before the third trimester even starts and there are [abortion] providers that go up to that...And I recognize that it's a tough decision, but I do think that there needs to be some responsibility on the side of the women choosing

this...I mean I recognize that there are going to be rare instances in which people don't realize that they're pregnant, but if you have this crisis come up in your life, this unwanted pregnancy, like don't take six months to figure it out...At a certain point, you have to decide and if you don't decide, you go to term. Sorry. I don't know. That's kind of how I feel about it...I mean, that seems really harsh but...you can't just like put it off forever. At some point you're going to give birth.

Natalie also references “viability” as her personal cut-off for how late abortions should be performed. Natalie says that women facing unintended pregnancies have a responsibility to decide as quickly as possible whether or not to get an abortion. She also supports the abortion doctors’ policy to not perform abortion after 16 weeks. She makes the case that, with advances in medical technology, babies can stay alive much earlier than they once could. By this judgment, a fetus becomes a baby as early as a medical team can keep it alive. This ever-changing marker of “life” has the potential to consistently decrease with new medical advancements and further restrict access to abortion each year. In this way, improved reproductive technologies would result in decreased “choice.”

Patty—a 59-year-old full-time paid counselor—also expects a woman to take responsibility for her choices early in the pregnancy so that she can have a more acceptable abortion.

I used to work at a clinic that went farther, and that was more unpleasant. We went up to 18, 20 weeks...I guess it's hard not to think ‘Why'd you wait so dang long?’ You know, ‘16 weeks...in a couple more months, you're gonna have a baby’ ... by the time you're 20 weeks, you're five months, you're almost there... But I guess I have to go back to, it is her body. The fetus couldn't survive without her and so that kind of brings me back to, it has to come from her. She has the ability to bring life into the world or not.

Patty expresses an internal tension when she states that, at sixteen and twenty weeks, “you're almost there” and admonishes women for waiting too long to decide. Like the others, viability is also very important to Patty. Her internal conflict is clear when she



states, at the end of this passage, that “the fetus couldn’t survive” without the woman and therefore belongs to her.

While later abortions make up a small percentage of abortions performed both at the clinic and nationwide, the counselors all discussed their conflicted views on this controversial issue. Patients who delayed abortion decisions challenged the counselors’ perspectives on “choice” as it forced counselors to face the stigma that later abortions attach to abortion in general. In an effort to resist this stigma, the counselors distance themselves from women who seek later abortions by framing them as irresponsible. Counselors’ political identities often conflict with their personal feelings in that they are completely supportive of the clinic having a voluntary “cut-off,” but do not believe that such abortions should be restricted by law. In other words, the counselors support later abortions in the abstract, but would not be comfortable with them happening in their clinic. Timing is very important in their descriptions of an appropriate or inappropriate abortion. An abortion that takes places early in the pregnancy, before viability, is good—so “good” that the counselors volunteer their time and energy and potentially risk their lives to help women access these abortions. However, an abortion that takes place later in the pregnancy, after “viability,” as the fetus begins to look “like a baby,” is irresponsible. If a woman waits too long to decide, her indecisiveness becomes irresponsibility. Somewhat contradictorily, the counselors want patients to simultaneously take their decisions seriously—which may lead to indecisiveness—and decide as soon as possible.

Thus, the support of abortion in the clinic, as well as in the pro-choice movement in general, is time-sensitive.

By establishing the state's interest in fetal life after the second trimester in *Roe v. Wade*, the Supreme Court set a dangerous precedent for a legal conflict between the rights of women and the "right to life" of a fetus (e.g., Copelan, 1990, 30; Wilder 1998, 73-74). From the very beginning of legalized abortion, the life and rights of the fetus have been the "Achilles heel" of *Roe* and played a central role in the debate (Copelan 1990). Even for abortion rights supporters, there is uneasiness with later abortions. As a recent example, in a 2010 editorial on *Slate.com*, columnist William Saletan proposed a "deal" between the pro-life and pro-choice movements that would allow broad access to birth control in exchange for a ban on all abortions after the 12th week. In this way, he framed later abortion as morally questionable and offered it as a bargaining chip to find common ground between the movements. When pro-choice actors bargain and compromise with certain abortions, the legal status of all abortion access is affected.

### ***Multiple Abortions***

The counselors also expressed frustration and uneasiness with patients who returned to the clinic for multiple abortions. They felt that these patients reinforced negative stereotypes about women who misuse abortion as "birth control." Counselors felt that such patients gave "ammunition" to the pro-life movement and were easy targets for criticism of the clinic and abortion rights in general. While "repeat" abortions are not a matter of legislative debate like later abortions—there are no laws or proposed

legislation restricting how many abortions a woman can have in her lifetime—they are controversial even among pro-choice people because they seem to represent women’s “irresponsibility” in managing their own reproductive health and a disregard of the “sacredness” of abortion rights. Responsible birth control is at the very foundation of the pro-choice framework and women who return for multiple abortions are the embodied representation of “irresponsible” birth control use. However, since half of all abortions in the United States are performed on women who have already had an abortion, this is a substantial group of women (Weitz and Kimport 2011).

The counselors described struggling with how to relate to patients who have had several abortions. For example, Haley said that when she started working at the clinic, she was surprised to find that women had multiple abortions, claiming that they “use it as a form of birth control.”

One thing that is a facet of [this work] that I hadn’t really realized before is people who get multiple abortions. They’re kind of using it as a form of birth control. And it’s totally their prerogative to do that, but personally, I don’t believe that that’s...it’s probably not a good thing.

Haley signals her support of a woman’s right to get as many abortions as she wants, but at the same time, believes it is inappropriate to return to multiple abortions. Haley’s comments are representative of a larger theme about the inappropriateness of using abortion as a form of birth control. Kelly—a 19-year-old college student—also states that women who get multiple abortions are misusing abortion as birth control. She says that she wishes women would be “smarter” about protecting themselves from pregnancy. In this way, abortion is framed as a procedure that should only be reserved for those very rare instances where birth control has failed.

[Women who get multiple abortions] are irritating kind of, because it's like...why are you using abortion as your birth control method? ...It's like, I don't want to give any more fuel to the fire, to the right-wing side...Like, at least *say* that you're trying to not [get pregnant]. So, it's kind of frustrating...I wish they would be a little bit smarter about it. But, they make their own decisions.

When Kelly says that she wishes patients would “at least *say*...” that they’re not trying to get pregnant, she is expressing frustration with the fact that certain patients do not follow the guidelines for an acceptable abortion—one that results from a birth control failure, not a failure to use birth control. Kelly’s tension is clear when she reluctantly resigns herself to the fact that women can “make their own decisions.” To the counselors, “responsibility” requires controlling one’s own body beyond what is legally required.

Similarly, Darcy explained that women who get multiple abortions anger her, not only because it seems to lend support to anti-abortion arguments, but also because she believes it is irresponsible to have sex without effective birth control.

Patients that get multiple abortions...are really frustrating for me...because it's one of the arguments of the pro-life movement—that women just use it as birth control... It's just like, 'Come on!' I get so frustrated because I'm like, 'You've been here. You've had these talks and like nothing's obviously getting through to you, so...I don't know what to do with those people. Hopefully get an IUD in them or something! I just don't understand how they can't see the need to get on birth control, but obviously we can't like make people do anything...which is so frustrating...a waste of time...I've had two people who I've see twice, like they're back for their second one. She's like 'I had you before' and I'm like, 'Great.'

When Darcy expresses a desire to “get an IUD” in patients who return for multiple abortions, she is signaling a mistrust of certain patients’ ability to manage their own birth control. An IUD solves that problem because once it is inserted by a doctor, the patient has no control over it, and it can only be removed by a doctor. Darcy feels anger and frustration that such patients lend support to the pro-life framing of abortion patients as

“irresponsible,” but also acknowledges the futility of trying to control a woman’s reproductive choices. Brianna—a 27-year-old full-time paid counselor—said that women who get multiple abortions deserve to be supported, but she makes it clear that it is a frustration for her.

I think the culture [at the clinic] is that we’re not here to judge people, and I mean unfortunately, I think some of that is automatic no matter what... like ‘Oh my gosh. It’s their eighth abortion.’ Like, ‘Get some birth control.’ But I think it’s definitely our clinic culture to you know try really to treat that woman the same as if it was...her first procedure.

Her comment shows that clinic staff view women who have multiple abortions differently than women who are at the clinic for the first time, implying that a woman’s first procedure holds a significantly different symbolic meaning. Brianna’s comments reinforce the notion that abortion should be rare and that patients should only utilize it as a last resort. However, her conflict is clear when she says, “we’re not here to judge people.”

Similarly, Elise said that she wishes women would be more responsible with their use of birth control and expressed astonishment that one of her patients had seven abortions. However, she also said that she tries not to judge the women and that she hopes her true feelings do not show in her interactions with patients—a common sentiment expressed among the counselors.

One of the other things that I try not to let it get to me...if they come back for a lot of abortions and they’re not on birth control. And I try not to make judgments about that, but, like today, this woman was just trying out the NuvaRing for the first time--the first thing she’d ever tried! She just comes in and gets abortions. Seven abortions! I try not to judge...So I hope that doesn’t come out in my working with them. I hope that isn’t apparent... You really get both sides of the experience... at the clinic, because, you know, you see the women that come back time after time after time... And like ‘You’re using abortion as your birth control, and that is not ok with me.’...But I want you to still have the choice.

The common narrative about women who get multiple abortions works to separate the good abortion patients from the bad abortion patients. The good patients are those who *tried* to prevent pregnancy but failed, and those who have had very few abortions. By expressing frustration, they are also distancing themselves from these repeat abortion patients in a way that seems to help them legitimize their own beliefs. In other words, it is easier for them to support women's choices when they fall into the *morally acceptable* category of an accidental pregnancy caused by birth control failure, not the *morally suspect* category of women who "use abortion as birth control." Their uneasiness is also a response to the pro-life movement framing that holds women who obtain multiple abortions as especially immoral. Several counselors used the same framing of "abortion as birth control," clearly drawing on pre-existing stereotypes of abortion patients. They fear the repercussions of these women's "irresponsibility" tarnishing public support for abortion access.

In one of the first major studies of pro-choice activists, Luker found that, even in late 1970s and early 1980s, activists were making distinctions between acceptable and unacceptable abortions—mainly in the notion that women who returned for multiple abortions were acting irresponsibly. Simonds (1996) also found that some clinic counselors struggled to support women who had had several abortions because they saw them as irresponsible or "stupid." They projected their uneasy feelings about multiple abortions by their expectation that the woman *should* express guilt if she returned for multiple abortions (Simonds 1996). To claim that abortion should not be understood as a

form of birth control further narrows the list of acceptable justifications for seeking abortion. In a 2010 editorial on *Slate.com*, William Saletan argued that the pro-choice movement could improve their reputation if they targeted “repeaters,” stating, “One unintended pregnancy should be enough to warn you — and the doctor who vacuums out your uterus — not to risk another.” Saletan’s comments, despite being in support of abortion rights, are heavily loaded with judgment for women that have more than one abortion. Clearly, it is much more socially acceptable to have one abortion than to have multiple abortions, signifying that the pro-choice perspective is not only time sensitive, as in the case of later abortions, but also that abortion loses its “moral high ground” the more often it is utilized.

### ***Anti-Abortion Patients***

The counselors also described frustration with patients who expressed anti-abortion views while availing themselves of the right to an abortion. That a woman can be in the process of getting an abortion, and yet still believe it is immoral illustrates abortion’s deep stigmatization. While encountering expressly anti-abortion patients was not a daily occurrence, it was very disturbing for counselors when it did happen. The counselors brought up anti-abortion patients often without being asked about them—I was not even aware of this issue before the interviews. The counselors were frustrated with these patients because they suspected that they would not change their views after the abortion and would still advocate an anti-abortion perspective. While the counselors still wanted these women to have access to abortion like any other woman, they felt

disheartened that a woman would take advantage of a right that she wanted to restrict from others. Considering the fragility of abortion access in the current political context, the counselors viewed abortion as a “sacred” right that should be taken seriously. When patients expressed anti-abortion views, the counselors felt that they were not taking responsibility for their choices, which was perceived as an insult to the counselors’ personal commitment to abortion care, as well as abortion rights in general. Anti-abortion patients embodied the stigma that counselors were attempting to fight against with their work. When a patient explicitly states that she is anti-abortion, counselors must fight the urge to point out these patients’ hypocrisy.

Molly explained that anti-abortion patients often see their situations as unique and justifiable while still believing that abortions are immoral. She makes clear that they are not referring to “extreme” situations—like a pregnancy resulting from rape—but that they simply see their situation as worthy of special consideration.

You know, there are women who are “antis” who have abortions. [They say] ‘I’m against abortion, it’s murder.’ ...But they still come in for a procedure. And then I very often say after the procedure, ‘Do you feel any differently now?’ but they often say ‘No. My situation was a special situation.’ Um, whatever *that* was. And they’re not talking about rape or incest...or unwanted sex. They’re just saying that they are different in that instance. And when they leave, they’re still antis.

When Molly questions an anti-abortion patient if she feels differently after the abortion, she is attempting to get her to take responsibility for the choice she just made. Molly clearly resents that these women are utilizing this service without the “proper” appreciation of it. Similarly, Darcy says that she gets upset with patients who are anti-



abortion because it is “unfair” that these women are using abortion, but not supporting other women’s access to the same service.

I do get really upset with some of the patients. Like I had a patient once where... she said ‘I don’t believe in abortion.’...It just made me really upset because I was like, ‘That’s so unfair.’ I mean she can have her own opinion... It’s just so unfair because she probably would go and be super pro-life...and be against other women having [an abortion] and she’s having it.

Rachel—a 28-year-old volunteer counselor—also describes how patients come into the clinic with anti-abortion attitudes and despite obtaining an abortion, their views do not change.

You meet so many [patients] that have these judgments already in their head. They’re like, ‘I never thought that I would be the person that would ever be here and would have never approved of anybody...’ And that ‘*approved*’ is what bothers me. You know, it’s not really your place to put judgment on someone else.

Sally also brought up instances of anti-abortion women seeking abortions and remaining anti-abortion even after the experience. She sees a discontinuity between anti-abortion patients’ ideologies and the realities of their experiences.

Sadly I think [pro-life women] are women that don’t think for themselves...And then there is the whole guilt thing...They had sex and they shouldn’t have. And they got pregnant. And then they definitely had the abortion, but now that it’s over and they feel guilty, they have to pay for that for the rest of their lives. But, you know, they still had the abortion...And then afterwards, they’re the ones...protesting.

Sally is the most critical of the anti-abortion patients, arguing that they “don’t think for themselves.” She argues that religious, pro-life women feel guilty after having an abortion, and instead of changing their views, believe they have to pay for that sin for the rest of their lives. Sally, like the others, believes these women are deeply hypocritical. In their refusal to change their views on abortion, she believes the patients are not taking

responsibility for the choices they made, and further stigmatizing abortion. Patty also described a divide between anti-abortion ideologies and abortion decisions. Her comment reflects a sense of contempt for people who portray themselves as “holier than thou” but still obtain abortions.

You know, people that are ‘holier than thou,’ still...have abortions... We see the women like ‘I used to be against it and now here I am’... ‘I need to do it. I don’t feel good about it.’ Or they say ‘I don’t believe in abortion, but I have to do it. I don’t believe in it but I’m doing it anyway’ [laughs].

Patients who are anti-abortion challenged the counselor’s resolve to provide non-biased abortion care. Most of the counselors were volunteers and took great pride in their work, telling me that they greatly valued the times when patients made them feel appreciated. When they encountered patients who not only did not seem appreciative of their commitment to serve women, but were hostile and vocally anti-abortion, they felt conflicted. On the one hand, they wanted to provide the option of abortion to everyone in a supportive and non-judgmental way, but on the other hand, they felt that anti-abortion patients were hypocritical and did not deserve to take advantage of this right. These patients also brought the stigma of abortion into the clinic with them, forcing the counselors to try and negotiate the uncomfortable terrain of providing care to a woman who does not respect you or the work that you do.

Other researchers have written briefly about abortion clinic workers’ interactions with anti-abortion patients, finding that negotiating their emotions when patients expressly admit that they are anti-abortion is a major stressor for abortion providers (Simonds 1996; O’Donnell et al. 2011; Harris et al. 2011). Harris et al. (2011) found that

abortion clinic staff were infuriated that pro-life patients justified their own abortions, but judged all others. O'Donnell et al. (2011) also find that abortion clinic workers are challenged in their steadfast goal to provide abortion care when they encountered patients who are seeking abortion, but simultaneously judge the abortion providers. One social worker in this study expressed that when she encounters patients like that, her internal impulse was to ask them to leave the clinic—when patients made her feel devalued, she felt protective of herself and her work. Such patients make a mockery of the counselors' sense of pride in their jobs and challenge their desire to provide non-biased care.

In her controversial 1995 *New Republic* article “Our Bodies, Our Souls,” Naomi Wolf relays a story about an abortion doctor who would proudly ask patients “How long have you been pro-choice?” If the patient replied that she did not believe in abortion, the doctor would not perform the abortion because of their “refusal to take responsibility” for their decision. Wolf (1995) asks, “How is this ‘feminist’ ideological coercion any different from the worst of pro-life shaming and coercion?” While the counselors I spoke with did not have the power to turn patients away, and would surely not have done so even if they could, this example is illustrative of the potential consequences of separating abortion patients into “us vs. them” or “good vs. bad” categories. In their attempt to insulate themselves from stigma anti-abortion patients made them feel, counselors framed them as hypocritical, as prejudiced, and as weak. While the counselors were certainly responding rationally to what they perceived as hostility from anti-abortion patients, these encounters—as well as the examples above—work to separate “deserving” from “undeserving” abortion patients.

## **Discussion: Benefits And Risks Of A Moral Framework for Abortion Rights**

The pro-life movement has succeeded in framing abortion as immoral and framing women who abort as bad mothers, which has in turn influenced the way that women experience the abortion procedure and forced the pro-choice movement into a defensive position. Several abortion rights advocates have argued that, to combat this trend, the movement should focus more on the emotional side of abortion—an area that has been largely dominated by the pro-life movement—and develop a “moral framework” for abortion rights to replace a “pro-choice” framework (Borovoy 2011, Kissling 2004, Ludlow 2008, Wolf 1995). Many scholars have written about the weaknesses in the “choice” framework for the legal and moral justification of abortion. They argue that because of the unwavering focus on personal freedom and women’s autonomy, important elements of the abortion experience have been left out; for example, that many women who abort do so because they already have children at home to care for and that many women experience guilt, grief, and loss after an abortion procedure. Leaving these experiences out of the discussion on abortion rights has had the effect of alienating many women who do not identify closely with “choice.” Scholars advocating that the pro-choice movement distance itself from a strong “choice” framework also do so because the pro-life movement has had such significant success in utilizing emotional framing—personifying the fetus, emphasizing the relationship between mothers and babies, and claiming that women inevitably regret their abortions. The call for a moral framework is not without its potential benefits. Adopting a moral framework and a

greater focus on the emotional sides of abortion, as many advocates have proposed, is likely to initially result in increased support for the abortion rights movement from a variety of groups who have felt alienated by the “choice” framework. Additionally, those calling for a moral framework in abortion advocacy certainly have feminist goals in mind—specifically, taking seriously the varied and complex experiences of women who choose abortion.

However, while many abortion rights advocates have recently called for the pro-choice movement to incorporate the emotional sides of abortion into the debate, others have argued that understanding abortion as an “agonizing moral issue” allows the pro-life framework too much power (Willis 1990, 134). Case in point, under Wolf’s moral framework, abortion is a “necessary evil” and should be prevented at all costs, embarked on only under serious consideration, and properly mourned as a legitimate death. She claims that a selfless woman would put the baby’s life above her own, admonishing pro-choice women for having abortions for selfish reasons. She argues that the pro-choice movement has lost its “soul” and has cheapened the value of human life (Wolf 1995). Wolf is certainly not alone in her call for the pro-choice movement to engage with abortion from a moral framework, but in her shaming of women who choose abortion “for the wrong reasons” and her focus on the fetus, she lines up closely with the pro-life framework. Thus, both the moral framework exhibited by Wolf and the moral framework exhibited by the abortion counselors in this research result in certain women being excluded from the boundaries of acceptable abortion.

The mainstream pro-choice movement has received significant criticism by feminist scholars and reproductive rights activists for their lack of engagement with the controversial sides of abortion, which they argue has resulted in weakened abortion rights. Some scholars have argued that the pro-choice movement's response to this discomfort has essentially been to ignore, minimize, or distance themselves from "unpopular" abortions, however rare they continue to be (Esacove 2004, Ludlow 2008). Case in point, Harris and colleagues (2011) suggested that some abortion clinic workers keep quiet about their personal experiences with ambivalence because they feel that such stories are not welcome in the pro-choice movement. In this research, I find that while the counselors broadly support abortion rights and have a deep commitment to nonbiased care, they also express deeply conflicted feeling about certain abortion procedures and abortion patients. Many expressed uneasiness about later abortions, as the fetus developed and came closer to "viability," despite expressing their desire that women's options not be legally restricted. The counselors believed that women who delayed their abortion decisions were acting irresponsibly and supported the clinic's gestational "cut-off." They viewed women who return for multiple abortions as irresponsible in their use of birth control and held different symbolic meanings for a patient's first abortion compared to any subsequent abortions. For many of the counselors, returning for multiple abortions represents disrespect for what they perceive as the gravity of the right to an abortion—an option that should be used only as a last resort. Additionally, when the counselors encountered patients who expressed anti-abortion views, they felt offended by their duplicity—to take advantage of a service that they would restrict from others—and

felt that the patients were not taking responsibility for their choices. Significantly, their concerns were moral, not legal, as they did not wish to legally restrict women's access.

When faced with patients who wait “too long,” who have had “too many” abortions, or who are anti-abortion, counselors feel frustration and anger, but strive to hide their true feelings. These patients force the counselors to face the stigma of abortion in a way that others do not. Patients who are early in their pregnancy, who have very few abortions, and who act “appropriately” appreciative of the right to abortion make counselors feel good about themselves and their work and fall easily under the “moral framework.” For these “good” abortion situations, counselors feel allegiance with the patients in resisting anti-abortion stigma—they reassure them that they are making a good, moral choice and help them to feel better about themselves. However, providing the same supportive care to patients who they perceive as “irresponsible” was more difficult. In the case of women seeking later-term abortions, the counselors are responding to stigma coming from the anti-abortion movement, which portrays later abortions as the worst of the worst. The debate over later abortions also divides people who are pro-choice. In the counselors' hopes that women would act “more responsibly,” and thereby diminish the need for such abortions, they are attempting to insulate the right to abortion from this potentially powerful critique. In the case of women returning for multiple abortions, they are responding to the pro-life perception of abortion patients as heartless, but also to the stigma attached to irresponsible birth control use within the pro-choice movement. When the counselors position “repeat” abortion patients as distinct, they are attempting to protect their desired view of patients as women “in crisis” who are

making responsible decisions for their families. If a woman returns for several abortions, she is no longer perceived as a woman who needs help, but as a woman who is willfully making poor choices. In the case of anti-abortion women getting abortions, the counselors respond to stigma from the patients themselves who disdain abortion and the clinic staff. They must also contend with the conflicted feelings of wanting to provide care for these women, but also feeling like they do not “deserve” it. When a counselor expresses frustration with a patient who says she is anti-abortion, she is attempting to shield herself, the clinic, and abortion in general from stigma. These examples illustrate how “problematic” patients force abortion clinic counselors to face stigma in a way that challenges their commitment to nonjudgmental care, as well as the “choice” and “moral” frameworks.

It is clear that the abortion counselors involved in this research are aware of the controversies over “problematic” abortions and, consequently, they wish that patients would not perpetuate stereotypes of irresponsibility, indecisiveness, and immorality. This perspective could potentially lend support to the pro-life argument that abortion access should be restricted. To focus on the responsible and acceptable abortion stories is clearly a rational choice for the movement. The drawback to this approach is that those “irresponsible” or unpopular abortions will always be a moral concern with which the pro-choice movement will have to contend. Additionally, the boundaries of “responsibility” are unreliable when it comes to abortion. Case in point, to the counselors, if a patient takes her decision seriously, she is a responsible patient. However, if a patient takes the decision too seriously and delays her decision, she has then become an



irresponsible patient. If she makes that decision too many times, she is an irresponsible patient. If she makes the decision despite being uncomfortable with it, she is an irresponsible patient.

Unless the pro-choice movement is prepared to declare all abortions and all abortion patients, regardless of the situation, as *moral*, there will always be abortions that fall outside of acceptable boundaries. Additionally, in the attempts to expand the boundaries of morality to include abortion, motherhood acts as a stand-in for morality. To define morality by motherhood revisits a fundamental feminist critique—a woman’s value being associated solely or primarily with her capacity to mother. Focusing on women’s roles as mothers can also work to reinforce the notion that women can and should find value only in their mothering, excluding women who have no interest in motherhood from this moral framework. Similarly, to frame an abortion patient as a mother is to also frame a fetus as her child. A mother-centered framework for abortion potentially reinforces pro-life framing of abortion patients as “mothers” from the time of conception. In these ways, a moral framework for abortion rights may prove just as unstable as a “choice” framework. Seeking to be successful in terms used by institutional power holders will always carry costs in marginalizing certain frames and the real needs they express (Ferree 2003). Social movement organizations take certain risks by “playing it safe” with resonant frames and marginalizing certain constituencies whose needs or concerns do not fit into the resonant frames. In this case, framing abortion through the culturally resonant frame of “good mothering” marginalizes those women who do not fit into the “moral framework,” very often the same women who are already disadvantaged

when it comes to abortion access. The history of abortion politics has shown that the uncomfortable sides of abortion—unpopular procedures and patients perceived as “irresponsible”—have significant power to work against all abortion rights. The moral framework will always be weakened by the unpopular sides of abortion, and in their responses to controversial issues, abortion rights advocates can end up perpetuating abortion stigma (Norris et al. 2010). When pro-choice activists distance themselves from especially unpopular abortions, instead of attempting to normalize and justify all abortions, they draw a “moral line” in the pro-choice philosophy. The danger inherent in this dichotomization is that many abortion patients are not considered “good” choice makers. The lessons learned in the first decades after *Roe*—when the abortion rights of poor, young, and disenfranchised women were largely dismantled and used as bargaining chips in the abortion debate—caution that if access to abortion is dictated by the social acceptability of certain abortions and abortion patients, all abortion rights are theoretically at risk.

In the next part of this dissertation, I explore another illuminating example of a framing/counterframing dispute and the co-opting of opposing movement language in the abortion debate that has significant risks for movement success—pro-life activists attempting to resurrect and gain acceptance for framing abortion as “Black genocide.”

## Chapter 4

### CASE #2

#### Abortion as Black Genocide: Claiming Racism in the Pro-Life Movement

##### Introduction

##### **‘Abortion as Black Genocide’: Racialized Framing in the Pro-Life Movement**

In recent years, several politically conservative pro-life organizations and movement leaders have launched campaigns utilizing existing anxieties about racially motivated reproductive abuses and racial extinction, targeting Black women specifically. The ‘abortion as Black genocide’ framing argues that the African American population is targeted for extermination by population control organizations like Planned Parenthood, and by extension, the government. The organizations and movement leaders using this framing employ “rights” language as a strategy to reframe the pro-life movement as a defender of civil and human rights of people of color and frame the pro-choice movement as participating in genocide. They argue that abortion violates the civil rights of a baby in the womb, that abortion is the most fundamental civil rights issue today, and attempt to use the language and tactics of the Civil Rights Movement in their work. While this framework is not entirely new and has been used by some Black leaders since the 1920s, the framing strategies examined in this dissertation can be understood as a significant reinvigoration of this framing. In its current iteration, with the advent of online social media and 24-hour news cycles, this framework has received significant attention in the mainstream media.

The activists using these frames hope to mobilize Black Americans to join the pro-life movement by utilizing the narratives of racism and civil rights that are more likely to resonate with Black communities. In this way, they engage in the frame alignment processes of *frame bridging*, *frame amplification*, *frame extension*, and *frame transformation* as a strategic effort to link the interests of the social movement with potential supporters (Snow et al. 1986, Benford and Snow 2000). The pro-life activists hope to mobilize new supporters by strategically appealing to their interests and values (*frame bridging*, *frame amplification* *frame extension*), as well as fundamentally change the way that abortion is understood within and outside of the pro-life movement (*frame transformation*). Such a frame shift is a contested process that can be hazardous for movement success or can succeed in mobilizing new supporters. Framing decisions are negotiated processes, not always under the tight control of movement elites (Benford and Snow 2000). When movement activists are disillusioned with the lack of change, they are more likely to propose frame adjustments in order to attract new followers. However, a new frame may fail to resonate with target audiences or a frame designed to resonate with a particular group's cultural narrative may not resonate with another group's narrative (Snow and Benford 1988). Therefore, such frame shifts are not without risk, and can lead to intramovement disputes and weaken a movement. Framing contests within movements about how best to project a specific version of reality are referred to as "frame disputes" (Benford 1993). Research has shown that such disputes can both hurt and strengthen a social movement (Benford and Snow 2000). Threats created by countermovements may create new opportunities for movements to mobilize supporters

in opposition to these threats (McCaffrey and Keys 2000). As a movement attempts to successfully respond to a countermovement, it is likely to experience framing disputes, as members may disagree about the best way to respond to the counterframing and not all SMOs within a movement may be willing to modify their framing or demands (Meyer and Staggenborg 1996, 2008).

### **Data & Methods**

This analysis focuses primarily on the following pro-life organizations and movement leaders: Ryan Bomberger of The Radiance Foundation, Pastor Stephen Broden of Life Always and the National Black Pro-Life Coalition, Mark Crutcher of Life Dynamics, Clenard Childress of L.E.A.R.N, and Alveda King of Priests for Life. To a lesser extent, I focus on Walter B. Hoye III of Issues4Life and Day Gardner of the National Black Pro-Life Union. I conducted a detailed analysis of the “black genocide” frame, using hundreds of documents and media produced by the organizations (e.g. official websites, videos, images, and billboards) and by the movement leaders (e.g., speeches, television interviews). I systematically collected articles and images from the following websites: [blackgenocide.org](http://blackgenocide.org) (Clenard Childress) [theradiancefoundation.org](http://theradiancefoundation.org), [toomanyaborted.com](http://toomanyaborted.com), and [lifenews.com](http://lifenews.com) (Ryan Bomberger); [lifedynamics.com](http://lifedynamics.com) and [klannedparenthood.com](http://klannedparenthood.com) (Mark Crutcher); [priestsforlife.org/africanamerican/blog](http://priestsforlife.org/africanamerican/blog) (Alveda King); [thisisabortion.com](http://thisisabortion.com) (no longer active) and [blackprolifecoalition.org](http://blackprolifecoalition.org) (Stephen Broden); [issues4life.org](http://issues4life.org) (Walter B. Hoye III); and [nationalblackprolifeunion.com](http://nationalblackprolifeunion.com) (Day Gardner). I coded and analyzed them using qualitative data analysis software Atlas.ti.

Using these documents, I conducted a frames analysis. Frame analysis is an analytical tool that uses viewpoints and stances as the objects of inquiry. In using this method, my focus is on the deployment of frames in the social world and my goal is to make sense of such frames (Creed et al. 2002). Social movement theorists extended Goffman's (1974) theories to focus more on how individuals and groups frame contentious social issues (e.g., Ryan 1991; Snow et al 1986). Frame analysis explores how social actors utilize lenses and metaphors to provoke collective action, encourage mobilization, or influence public policy.

This analysis that follows focuses on interviews I conducted with pro-life activists I identified as utilizing the 'abortion as Black genocide' framework most often and explains how the Black genocide framing is used. I conducted in person and phone interviews with these activists about their use of 'Black genocide' framing strategies and conducted a detailed analysis of their online written materials. I conducted interviews with Mark Crutcher of Life Dynamics, Pastor Stephen Broden of Life Always, Reverend Cleonard Childress of L.E.A.R.N, and Alveda King of Priests for Life, and examined the public statements and websites of Ryan Bomberger of The Radiance Foundation. I mainly focus my analysis on these five activists, but also reference other less influential leaders at times through the analysis. The pro-life movement leaders I examine draw on fears of racial extinction with the end goals of outlawing abortion. In the interviews, I asked the pro-life leaders to describe how they came to work in the pro-life movement and to explain their rationale for using a 'Black genocide' frame in their movement work.

In the second part of this analysis, I focus only on the Black pro-life leaders using these frames (Broden, Childress, King, and Bomberger) and examine their racial ideologies related to abortion and other social issues. For this analysis, I utilize both the interview data and the content analysis of their websites. The third part of this analysis is focused on both the interviews with the Black pro-life activists and interviews I conducted with Black reproductive justice movement leaders, as well as a detailed analysis of their written materials. I interviewed the current Director of the reproductive justice coalition SisterSong, Monica Simpson, as well as the founding Director of SisterSong and one of the “mothers” of the reproductive justice framework Loretta Ross. I chose reproductive justice leaders who have specifically worked in opposition to the ‘abortion as Black genocide’ framing strategy of the pro-life movement. With these interviews I sought to examine how Black women working for reproductive justice understand and make sense of Black pro-life leaders working in direct opposition to their goals.

In this section of the dissertation, I describe the ‘abortion as Black genocide’ framing strategy and examine the activists using this frame. First, I place this framing strategy in context by reviewing the history of ‘Black genocide’ framing. Next, I survey research on the racial ideologies of Black conservatives. Then, I describe my findings about the racial ideologies of pro-life activists using this frame. I conclude by analyzing the inconsistencies between the ‘Black genocide’ frame and the racial ideologies of Black conservatives. I argue that while the ‘Black genocide’ frame extension may appeal to Black Americans, as it is intended to, it also deeply conflicts with the values of political

conservatives generally—a main constituency of the pro-life movement. This inconsistency will likely lead to intramovement frame disputes, a fracturing of movement, or dissolution of the new framing.

### **Historical Context of the ‘Black Genocide’ Framing**

Women of color and poor women have a complicated relationship with reproductive ‘choice’—they have long experienced coercive attempts by the U.S. government to regulate their fertility and have been forced to fight not only for the right to prevent or end pregnancies, but also for the right to *have* children (Solinger 2000, Ross 1993, Rousseau 2009). Throughout the twentieth century, many poor women and women of color were denied the right to have children through government-sponsored sterilizations that were systematic and widespread (Roberts 1997, Davis 1983, Stern 2005) and have received limited access to basic services like prenatal care and contraception counseling to encourage positive childbearing experiences (Nelson 2003). For these women, the meaning of birth control and abortion is complicated by the U.S. government’s historical and current attempts regulate their reproduction in the name of solving social problems (Roberts 1997). Not surprisingly, many Black Americans are deeply suspicious of government sponsored family planning programs (Roberts 1997). In Margaret Sanger’s fight to give women sexual autonomy, she partnered with population control organizations and eugenicists (Reagan 1997). Based on theories of genetic and cultural inferiority, Sanger advocated birth control as the most practical method for



reducing the birthrate of ‘undesirable’ people—the poor, immigrants, and people of color (Ross 1993). Some Black leaders of Sanger’s time, including nationalist leader Marcus Garvey, argued that birth control was a tool of “race suicide.” On the other hand, some Black leaders like civil rights leader W.E.B. Du Bois publicly endorsed birth control for Black women’s health and denied that simply increasing the Black population would be enough to end discrimination (Roberts 2000). Roberts (1997) argues that while Sanger was motivated by a genuine concern for poor women’s health, she was guilty of perpetuating the idea that social problems are caused by poor women’s reproduction—a notion that persists today.

With the establishment of Medicaid in the 1960s, poor women were granted access to government-funded birth control. But, family planning programs were disproportionately directed at urban areas heavily populated by Black communities, again fueling charges of Black genocide (Ross 1993). Despite racist origins, population control programs did fulfill many women’s desires for birth control, but the focused and sometimes coercive tactics of the programs led some Black Americans to conclude that birth control and abortion were tools of genocide. Some nationalist groups encouraged Black women to have more babies, not less. They reasoned that Black people would never gain power against whites unless they increased their population substantially. Even some Black civil rights leaders—including Jesse Jackson who called abortion “Black genocide” in *Jet* magazine in 1972—argued that family planning programs were deliberate tools to deplete the Black population. Jackson argued that abortion was undeniably racist, comparing it to police brutality (Ziegler 2009). Some leaders in the

NAACP also endorsed the “strength in numbers” assumption. Surveys conducted in the 1970s found that many African Americans believed that birth control was a conspiratorial plot against them, especially if whites ran the programs (Turner and Darity 1973).

Before *Roe*, civil rights leaders like Jesse Jackson and Ted Kennedy were more likely to align with the anti-abortion movement because of concerns that abortion liberalization would target racial minorities and welfare recipients (Ziegler 2009). Anti-abortion groups utilized both right-to-life and anti-population control/Black genocide arguments for a short time in the early 1970s. However, as abortion began to be framed more as a matter of social justice and racial equality—as in the debate over the Hyde Amendment banning federal funding for poor women’s abortions—and less as a tool of population control, civil rights leaders were much more likely to support it (Ziegler 2009). Abortion was increasingly becoming an issue divided along political lines, with the political right opposing abortion access and the political left advocating for it. Case in point, after *Roe*, Jesse Jackson, who had once declared a “war against abortion,” changed his position as he prepared to run for the Democratic presidential nomination and described abortion as a civil right (Ziegler 2009).

Discourses of “Black genocide” reemerged in the early 1990s with the introduction of Norplant, and the government-sponsored program to get poor women to use it. Under this program, Norplant—a long-lasting contraceptive that can only be implanted and removed by a doctor—was the only contraceptive provided, and was only provided free of charge to women on welfare. As a result, rumors of “Black genocide” again began to circulate, claiming that Black women were being forced to have Norplant

implanted into their arms (Turner 1993, Roberts 1997). Initiatives such as Norplant provision are born from the stereotypical and eugenic beliefs that poor women of color cannot and should not control their own reproductive lives and that limiting the reproduction of a certain class of ‘undesirable’ women can solve the social problems of poverty and crime. For example, in his September 2005 broadcast of Bill Bennett's Morning in America, radio host and former Reagan administration Secretary of Education, Bill Bennett, declared that if “you wanted to reduce crime ... if that were your sole purpose, you could abort every Black baby in this country, and your crime rate would go down.” Bennett conceded that aborting all African-American babies “would be an impossible, ridiculous, and morally reprehensible thing to do,” then added again, “but the crime rate would go down.” Despite the rarity of this type of overt racism among politicians and pundits, this example illustrates the belief that social problems can be solved by regulating the fertility of women of color (Roberts 1997, Nelson 2003). Because of this historical legacy and contemporary reality, it is not difficult to see why a ‘Black genocide’ frame would be a politically effective frame.

### **‘Abortion as Black Genocide’: Racialized Framing in the Pro-Life Movement**

In the only significant previous examination the Black pro-life leaders, Louis Prisock (2003, 2007) found that the ‘abortion as Black genocide’ argument comprises three components: 1) the problematic racial history of the birth control movement, 2) the historical abuse of African Americans by the medical establishment, and 3) the social

disarray of contemporary Black communities. Because this argument utilizes historical truths of racism, victimization and conspiracy, it has potential to be a politically powerful framework. The “Black genocide” framing strategy utilizes fears of abortion as a violation of human rights against African Americans. The use of “Black genocide” frames are meant to incite fears of human rights abuses in population control programs and a contemporary state-led eugenics program aimed at ‘undesirable’ populations. The pro-life activists described below use “civil rights” and “human rights” language to invoke racial anxieties about the treatment and power of the Black population. They are very aware of the fact that civil rights language is effective today, both in the courts and in its ability to influence the public’s views on abortion, especially African Americans. They organize events on significant civil rights anniversaries, like Martin Luther King Jr. Day, the anniversary of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the anniversary of the “I Have a Dream” speech, and in Black History Month and often use phrases like “We Shall Overcome” to refer to abortion. The pro-life leaders also make allusions to and comparisons to slavery in their racialized framing strategies. They argue that abortion is similar to slavery in its discrimination against Black people and denial of the humanity of unborn.

The comparison of unborn babies to slaves is not new, and has been used previously in support of the Human Like Amendment and other “personhood” campaigns. The argument is that, like slaves, unborn children are not considered fully human beings under the law (Threedy 1994). Similarly, some activists in the pro-life movement have utilized the framing of abortion as genocide. For example, the Genocide Awareness

Project produced by the Center for Bioethical Reform travels to college campuses and displays photographs of aborted fetuses next to images of victims of the Nazi Holocaust and other genocides, as well as African-American lynching victims. The difference between these framing strategies and tactics and those examined in this dissertation is in the way the imagined victim/fetus is conceptualized. In the previous cases, the fetus is *compared* to these instances of racist mass murder, but is not necessarily racialized. In the ‘Black genocide’ framing, the fetus is Black and *is* a victim of the same racism as dehumanized slaves and Jim Crow-era African Americans.

The Radiance Foundation is one of the most prominent pro-life organizations framing abortion in terms of racial extinction and utilizing Black anxieties about slavery, civil rights and eugenics. In 2010, in coordination with Black History Month, The Radiance Foundation launched its highly controversial “Endangered Species” campaign with billboards reading: “Black Children are an Endangered Species,” “Black & Unwanted,” “Black Children are in Danger,” and simply “Endangered,” all with a Black and white image of an African American baby. By partnering with local pro-life organizations, The Radiance Foundation placed more than 170 billboards in Georgia, California, Texas, Arkansas, New Jersey and Virginia during that first campaign and gained a significant amount of media attention. Ryan Bomberger, the co-founder of the Radiance Foundation and the author of most of the content on the website, is biracial (Black and white) and was adopted at birth by deeply religious white parents. Bomberger

claims he was conceived when his mother was raped. Because of this he says that he “was once considered ‘Black and unwanted,’ but instead was adopted and loved.”<sup>3</sup> His history is fundamental to the way he frames himself and his organization. Another billboard campaign launched in Atlanta in June 2011 honors Juneteenth—a celebration of the abolition of slavery. The billboards read: “Abortion Makes Three-Fifths Human Seem Overly Generous”, “The 13<sup>th</sup> Amendment Freed Us. Abortion Enslaves Us”, and “The 14<sup>th</sup> Amendment Made Us Members. Abortion Dismembers.”<sup>4</sup> On the Radiance Foundation website, Bomberger associates fetuses with Black slaves when he writes, “Once upon a time, some of us were considered just a clump of cells that were bought, traded and sold as property. They were wrong then. And they are, 50 million lives later, wrong now.”<sup>5</sup> A graphic on the Radiance Foundation website pictures the iconic photograph of an enslaved African man with significant scars from being whipped, with the text reading “The Inhumanity of Slavery has been Replaced by the Inhumanity of Abortion.” Bomberger also makes comparisons between the Civil War and the pro-life movement’s fight to end abortion:

This year marks the 150th Anniversary of the Emancipation Proclamation, a triumph of fortitude and humanity. Lincoln would never have believed that the bloodstained institution of slavery would’ve been replaced by the blood-soaked industry of abortion. Over 600,000 died in America’s Civil War that led to the beginning of freedom for millions of slaves. Today over 55 million have died under the false pretense of ‘Reproductive Freedom’, a disproportionate 15 million of whom were black.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> [http://www.toomanyaborted.com/?page\\_id=379](http://www.toomanyaborted.com/?page_id=379)

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.toomanyaborted.com/?p=3784>

<sup>5</sup> [http://www.toomanyaborted.com/?page\\_id=644](http://www.toomanyaborted.com/?page_id=644)

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.lifenews.com/2013/02/12/on-lincolns-birthday-naacp-continues-promoting-abortion/>

Similarly, pointing out that *Roe v. Wade* decided that a woman has the right to privacy under the due process clause of the 14<sup>th</sup> Amendment, an amendment instrumental in granting rights to freed slaves. Bomberger argues that this is a “perversion” of the intent of the amendment:

In the majority opinion, Justice Blackmun repeatedly invoked and bizarrely contorted the 14th Amendment. This is the Republican-passed landmark legislation that finally ascribed personhood to black Americans (like me), but was perverted by 7 justices who stripped away humanity from another class of people—the unborn.<sup>7</sup>

Another organization utilizing a similar frame is the Texas-based Life Always. In March 2011, they sponsored a highly controversial billboard in New York that read, “The Most Dangerous Place for an African American is in the Womb” which pictured a young African American girl. Pastor Stephen Broden, who has been a guest on FOX News several times and was a board member of the now defunct organization Life Always, claims Planned Parenthood is participating in a modern-day eugenics movement. On the Life Always website, [thatsabortion.com](http://thatsabortion.com), Broden incites fears of the extinction of the African American community: “the staggering number of abortions within the African American community is threatening the sustainability of the African American race in the United States.”<sup>8</sup> Life Always also launched a campaign on the Southside of Chicago, putting up billboards which pictured an illustration of President Obama with the tagline: “Every 21 minutes, our next possible leader is aborted.” Ryan Bomberger of the

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<sup>7</sup> <http://www.toomanyaborted.com/abortion-and-the-negro-project-2-0/>

<sup>8</sup> <http://thatsabortion.com/About%20Life%20Always.htm>

Radiance Foundation echoes these sentiments of Black racial extinction when he says, “The truth screams loud and clear—we are killing our very future.”<sup>9</sup>

In 2009, Mark Crutcher, a white man and founder and president of Texas-based pro-life organization Life Dynamics, created an anti-abortion documentary film entitled *Maafa21: Black Genocide in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*. *Maafa* is a Swahili word meaning ‘tragedy’ or ‘disaster’ and “21” refers to the *maafa* of the 21st century—abortion among Black women. The film argues that the Black population has been targeted for extinction since slavery ended and that the program lives on today in the form of abortion. The film compares Black women who get abortions to “Jews walking to the gas chambers” and argues that Planned Parenthood’s goal is to convince Black Americans “to commit cultural suicide” through abortion and birth control. In the film, Crutcher says:

Planned Parenthood is the golden child...because they’re the ones who figured out...that the way to make eugenics work was not kill people, but to convince the targeted group to commit cultural suicide and the way you do that is with birth control and abortion.

One section of the film features an African American narrator who states:

As African Americans, we need to recognize that we are doing the same thing. We need to understand that terms like “pro-choice” and “reproductive rights” and “family planning” are nothing more than marketing slogans. They’re just code words that organizations like Planned Parenthood use to hide the fact that we are voluntarily submitting to the will of those who have been trying to exterminate us since the day slavery ended.<sup>10</sup>

Framing Planned Parenthood and pro-choice legislators as elitist eugenicists was also common among the organizations utilizing “Black genocide” framing. Ryan Bomberger of the Radiance Foundation and others repeatedly reference a quote from

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<sup>9</sup> [http://www.toomanyaborted.com/?page\\_id=2](http://www.toomanyaborted.com/?page_id=2)

<sup>10</sup> <http://www.maafa21.com/>



Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg from a 2009 *New York Times Magazine* article in which she stated, "...at the time Roe was decided, there was concern about population growth and particularly growth in populations that we don't want to have too many of." Ginsburg is referencing her confusion about 1980 legislation that banned federal funding for abortions for poor women. Bomberger frames this quote as proof that legalized abortion is intended for population control "of those who were less than desirable"<sup>11</sup> Also referencing the Ginsburg quote, Mark Crutcher, president of Life Dynamics, indicated an "elitist" eugenic conspiracy:

When it comes to exposing eugenics in modern America, that quote is the smoking gun...she let the cat out of the bag. She made it clear that abortion was legalized in order to eliminate people that she and other elitists just like her don't want there to be too many of. I think we all know who they're talking about.

Others have been similarly forceful with their claims that abortion in the Black community is tantamount to genocide. Walter B. Hoye II, a Black man and President of the Issues4Life Foundation—one of the organizations that helped sponsor the Radiance Foundation's billboards—declared, "The impact of abortion in the African-American community is the Darfur of America,"<sup>12</sup> citing 15 million African-American abortions since 1973. Rev. Cleonard H. Childress, founder of L.E.A.R.N. (Life Education and Resource Network) Northeast in New Jersey argues on his website *blackgenocide.org* that the "high rate of abortion has decimated the Black family and destroyed Black neighborhoods to the detriment of society at large."<sup>13</sup> Childress led protests at the 2008

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<sup>11</sup> [http://www.toomanyaborted.com/?page\\_id=563](http://www.toomanyaborted.com/?page_id=563)

<sup>12</sup> <http://www.toomanyaborted.com/?p=3225>

<sup>13</sup> <http://blackgenocide.org/home.html>

NAACP convention in Cincinnati, accusing the organization of practicing racism against Black children because of their pro-choice stance. Childress is also on the board of the Center for Bio-Ethical Reform that circulates the Genocide Awareness Project—presented at college campuses all over the country with pictures of aborted fetuses next to pictures of genocide victims.

Ryan Bomberger of the Radiance Foundation consistently refers to civil rights in his framing. On this website, he says, “True civil rights champions...value all life born and unborn” and that abortion is “our society’s most crucial civil rights issue.” In another allusion to the civil rights movement on the Life Dynamics website, Mark Crutcher equates a white woman who died after an abortion procedure to Emmett Till—a Black teen brutally murdered by a group of white men in Mississippi in 1955—in that Till’s mother insisted on an open casket to show the world what was done to her son and the mother of the woman “killed by abortion” shared her autopsy photos. Crutcher also compares Planned Parenthood to the KKK and runs a website called *KlannedParenthood.com*. The front page of the website reads: “Abortions! Because Lynching is for Amateurs” and “Lynching by the Ku Klux Klan isn’t as efficient at killing blacks as Planned Parenthood abortions.”<sup>14</sup>

Alveda King—niece of Martin Luther King Jr. and pro-life activist—utilizes a similar “genocide” frame in nearly all of her pro-life activism. She argues, “African American women and their children are victims...we have been targeted by genocide.” In a July 2009 interview with Glenn Beck, Alveda King claimed, “There’s a whole genocide

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<sup>14</sup> <http://www.klannedparenthood.com/the-brochure/>

movement today who's trying to sterilize or abort or eliminate certain members of the population.” In the same interview, she claimed that while she did not believe that anyone should be held responsible for reparations for slavery in the United States, she did believe that reparations were needed from the abortion industry. She frequently uses her connection to Martin Luther King, Jr. in her pro-life movement work, arguing that he would have been pro-life had he been alive today and consistently using his quote, “Injustice anywhere is threat to justice anywhere” to refer to abortion and versions of his “I Have a Dream” speech to encourage returning to “traditional Christian morality” in the United States. Alveda King explained that the movement’s goal must be to “convince our communities that abortion is a civil rights violation.” In 2010, the organization King works for, Priests for Life, held a “Pro-Life Freedom Ride.” On her website, King likens the protest to the Freedom Rides of the 1960s civil rights movement:

In the 20th century Freedom Rides, the ones whose rights were being denied had done nothing in order to be in the situation they were in. They were African Americans who were expressing the desire to be treated as equal human beings, not second class citizens...In the Pro-Life Freedom Rides, the ones whose rights are being denied also did nothing in order to be in the situation in which they found themselves in, which of course is the womb of their mothers with the threat of abortion and imminent death looming over them...this bus tour encompassed southern cities with the message that the Freedom Rides of the 20th Century Civil Rights Movement carry on in the 21st Century as we ride for the babies.<sup>15</sup>

A graphic on Alveda King’s blog on the Priests for Life website reads “Civil Rights Begin in the Womb,” “Women’s Rights Begin in the Womb,” and “Human Rights Begin in the Womb.” King refers abortion as a “civil wrong” and argues “life from conception until natural death is a civil right.” In an article on her blog on the Priests for

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<sup>15</sup> <http://www.priestsforlife.org/africanamerican/blog/index.php/flipping-the-freedom-rides-concept-on-its-head>

Life website, King draws connections between her own experiences growing up black in the midst of the Civil Rights movement with the discrimination inflicted on unborn babies:

When I was growing up, some of my schoolmates were killed by a bomb blast. Some white folk thought that people like me and my friends were somehow less than fully human. My house was firebombed because my daddy worked for the basic human rights that were denied to people because of the color of their skin...My uncle, the Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr. was assassinated because he refused to accept the dehumanization of African Americans...When you're treated as less than human, it's easy to appear that way in people's eyes...your mistreatment becomes, in a sense, the natural order of things...If the American public learns to accept everyone from natural conception or fertilization to natural death as brothers and sisters, the exploitation of all human beings would become much more difficult to justify...<sup>16</sup>

She again compares the Civil Rights Movement to the pro-life movement by arguing that if the public were fully aware of the realities of abortion, they would no longer support it:

One of the defining moments of the Civil Rights movement came when national newspapers and magazines showed pictures of peaceful demonstrators being clubbed and beaten. For the first time for many white people, racial discrimination and oppression were not just concepts. Americans in every part of the country saw segregation as the dehumanizing force that it was. They saw the faces of its victims...We cannot save the victims of abortion...without public awareness.<sup>17</sup>

In my interview with Alveda King, she argued that abolitionists of slavery were no different than the abolitionists of racial segregation who, in turn, are no different from the abolitionists of abortion:

There were always Christian people in every ethnic group, in every nationality...The abolitionist spirit...the humanitarian spirit that cares about all people and recognizes that there is only one race, the human race. And they will always be on the side of the downtrodden or the oppressed and that's gonna be always...a group called the abolitionists... fought against the slave trade...then of course you had a black liberator arise...that was my uncle Martin Luther King Jr. to fight against the tyranny and oppression of skin color racism. And then of course when *Roe v. Wade* passed you found that you had the abolitionist spirit

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<sup>16</sup> <http://www.priestsforlife.org/africanamerican/blog/index.php/alveda-king-speaks-on-human-trafficking>

<sup>17</sup> <http://www.priestsforlife.org/africanamerican/blog/index.php/redeem-america-restore-life>

arise again from every ethnic group...When *Roe v. Wade* became legal, you saw the oppression of the babies in the womb and the deception of the mother...

Day Gardner, a Black woman and leader of the National Black Pro-Life Union, associates anti-abortionists with civil rights leaders and slavery abolitionists when she says:

We must pick up the bloodstained banner of righteousness from that hotel balcony where Dr. King was slain. We are the underground railroad of our time - and it's up to us to make abortion a terrible thing of our historical past. If we stand united against this horrific practice ... *we shall overcome this, too!*<sup>18</sup>

Mark Crutcher of Life Dynamics made a similar point in our interview when he said, in the "...Dred Scott decision...it said [anyone of African descent] may be human but they cannot be citizens of the United States...they're not protected by the constitution. Just like the unborn can't be persons so they're not protected by the constitution. It's the same exact logic." In our interview, Mark Crutcher compares slavery abolitionists to the pro-life movement, arguing that abolitionists were largely hidden in our collective memory after the Civil War because they represented a dark history for the United States and that pro-life activists are similarly disregarded because they represent something that the nation is ashamed of today:

If you compare [abortion] to slavery...do you realize...we've made heroes out of far more people that owned slaves than people who fought against it? And our national capital is named after a guy who owned slaves, right? You have high schools all over this country that are named after people who owned slaves. What high school do you know of that was named after a favorite abolitionist? Name me one famous abolitionist...You can name slave owners: Thomas Jefferson or George Washington...So why didn't we make heroes as a nation out of the people who were fighting what we now agree was one of the darkest parts of American history? ...My theory is that...America could not afford to make heroes out of the abolitionists because in doing so, they would have to confront

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<sup>18</sup> <http://www.nationalblackprolifeunion.com/>

their own guilt over slavery. So, when it ended...the country said ok that's over, now let's move forward. Let's don't talk about it anymore...those people held up their guilt in front of them. The abolitionists basically rubbed the American public's noses in their own sin...And so let's says it's 150 years down the road, people are going to look back at [abortion] and they're gonna say how on God's green earth could those people have done it? So...because of the distance from the act, they're gonna have the ability to get mad at the people who did it...But right now they can't do that.

Later in our interview, Crutcher takes this comparison to slavery further to argue that abortion is not only “*similar*” to slavery, but is actually a “*continuation*” of slavery and eugenics:

I'd heard this all my life, in the pro-life movement, that the battle over abortion is like the battle over slavery...that's been a standard thing for years...But I eventually over the years, came to the view that...the battle over abortion and the battle over slavery are not *similar*. They're the same battle...the battle over abortion was a continuation of the battle over slavery...slavery was ending at the same time the eugenics movement was being created. And you think, ok, was that a coincidence? It sure seems weird to me that all these people, the early eugenicists, were all either slave owners or pro-slavery people...then all of a sudden they say well...we don't need these blacks anymore. They gotta go...Eugenics started. And eugenics is what continued forward until we get to legalization of abortion...And so...it's just one battle from beginning to end...And you know when you tell people that, they think you're nuts. But when you show it to them in a video and say where's the break? We connected all the dots...

### ***Using Race and Civil Rights Strategically***

The pro-life leaders who made frequent use of the ‘Black genocide’ frame were clear about the benefits of using such a frame to reach the African American community and were open about the fact that ‘Black genocide’ is a strategic frame. For example, in our interview, Mark Crutcher, a white pro-life activist and creator of the film *Maafa21: Black Genocide in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, explained in our interview, “We're trying to expand

our message by bringing more Blacks in with the Maafa [film].” In our interview, Reverend Childress also explained how the use of ‘Black genocide’ is intentional. He is clear about the fact that using the controversial term gets attention and starts a dialogue. Childress—who says he was the first to use the phrase, “The most dangerous place for an African American is in the womb” that eventually ended up on a highly controversial billboard in New York City—describes the importance of specifically framing abortion as racism against African Americans and as a civil rights issue because these frames are especially salient in the African American community.

The most dangerous place for an African American baby is in the womb of their...I would say *African American* mother because that’s where you have to go in order to get a knee jerk, a response from media and...once again the race...if it would have been Hispanic, it would not work. But when you say this is civil rights, this is racism...if you can push those buttons...You’re gonna also have the attention of African Americans...

While all the leaders were clearly aware of the fact that civil rights language is powerful and persuasive in United States and with Black Americans specifically, Reverend Childress was very candid about why it is essential that abortion be framed in that way and explained this reasoning in detail. In the first passage from our interview, he ridicules the LGBT movement for using civil rights language, but acknowledges that it is effective:

Why is the LGBT successful? Because they have taken the civil rights language. It’s a ‘civil right,’ they’re ‘victims.’ They garner the civil rights leadership that they bought, like the NAACP. They try to use as many terms from the civil rights movement as they can, applicable to their plight...but the fact of the matter is, you do not give civil rights to sexual orientation...Until you can come up with a gene, and you won’t, then therefore this is an orientation...when I was born, I was Black. I’ll die Black...So, it was wrong for a nation to penalize and disenfranchise and even at one point in 1857 call me 3/5 human...I had no control over that...So...I should have the same rights as everybody else...some of my friends that are now activists for [traditional] marriage...were once

homosexual...So, my point is, [the LGBT movement] has mastered that language...

Later in our interview, he goes on to explain why using civil rights language is especially important to reach the Black community. He argues that the pro-life movement has a bad reputation for being “radicals,” but should instead use the “proper” framework of the Civil Rights Movement. He compares the oppressed Black population of the Jim Crow era to unborn babies in that they are disenfranchised from the American Dream. It is very clear that the ‘Black genocide’ framing is strategic for Childress.

In your presentation, in your legislation...it’s obvious that I’m going to get traction on my movement if I can truly project this as a civil right and have the segment of society that has now become the iconic figures of civil rights, then I’ll be able to communicate my position far better...what are [pro-life activists] known as? Radicals, abortion doctor killers...That should not be our picture. It should be that we are the continuation of the civil rights movement because there’s still a segment of our society who’s being disenfranchised...from the access to the American dream...So...we haven’t addressed our marketing, our ability to carry our message to the community that is affected by it most. That’s not good...we attempted to use the proper template, which is the civil rights platform. I’ve studied Dr. Martin Luther King and his words. It’s basically his words that really begin to resonate with people as I speak...Are you gonna resist what Dr. King said?...That’s why Black genocide has impacted...Also the African American community believes in conspiracy theories more so than any other sector of our community, because of the lack of trust of the nation. So, Tuskegee...[and] sterilization laws, a disproportionate number of those sterilized were African American...So, if I know that, that’s the way I have to approach.

In our interview, Childress said that the sole purpose of his website *blackgenocide.org* is to target African American women with the message that abortion is genocide. He points out that white pro-life activists often have a difficult time communicating with the Black women they approach outside of abortion clinics, and therefore use the website as a way to attempt to reach them:

The sole purpose for that site is so we could point African Americans, primarily, to that site, glean that information and rethink their position...Other



organizations use the website when trying to communicate with African American women because if you go to the clinics in most of our cities, a disproportionate amount of African American women are there and they're sometimes lost in communicating.

In a confidential report to Priests for Life members that King shared with me, she explains that her organization deliberately aligns abortion with civil rights imagery and language:

Among our strongest efforts are the success of our “Prolife Freedom Rides” and our “Beloved Community and the Unborn” strategies...Many of our campaigns and outreach are timed to coincide with civil rights calendar dates and anniversaries. Black History Month, Martin Luther King Holiday activities, anniversaries such as the I HAVE A DREAM SPEECH, the Civil Rights Act, Juneteenth and other occasions are excellent opportunities to advance the message of civil rights for human babies, born and unborn.

Those pro-life activists using the ‘Black genocide’ framing utilize themes of racism, slavery, eugenics, civil rights, and genocide with the stated goal of mobilizing Black Americans to join to pro-life movement. They are engaging in the frame alignment processes with the hopes of fundamentally changing the meaning of abortion and recruiting new supporters. In the next section, I focus specifically on motivations and ideologies of the Black pro-life activists who are leading this proposed framing shift.

### **Black Pro-Life Leaders, Black Conservatives, and Racial Ideologies**

While Black pro-life leaders are few and far between in the mainstream pro-life movement, they are increasingly spotlighted and recruited as the pro-life movement seeks to mobilize communities of color. By and large, these Black pro-life leaders utilize the “abortion as Black genocide” framework, arguing that Planned Parenthood specifically

targets the Black population for abortion. In this way, they make a provocative claim that the United States government is covertly funding the genocide of the Black population, implying that anyone who supports abortion rights is actively racist or ignorantly complicit in racism. They believe that Black women are targeted by abortion clinics and deceived by the pro-choice movement to think that abortion is their only option. They claim that Black children are targeted because they are devalued and seen as a burden to society. They call attention to past reproductive injustices faced by Black men and women in this country—slavery, eugenics programs, sterilization abuses, and coercive birth control policies—and align abortion with these state-sanctioned abuses.

In many ways, as I explain below, these critiques align with those of politically liberal racial and reproductive justice activists. However, Black pro-life leaders all identify as politically conservative and associate themselves with Republican Party. Prisoek (2003) points out that the Black pro-life movement conflicts deeply with the conservative ideologies of race and racism, which are more likely to deny that institutional racism is a problem today. Racism is central to Black pro-life activists efforts to mobilize supporters, setting them apart from mainstream conservative racial ideology that implores Black Americans to stop focusing on race. White and Black conservatives generally argue that racism is no longer a roadblock for people of color in the United States, while Black pro-life activists argue that Black children are systematically murdered on the daily basis in abortion clinics. Additionally, Black pro-life activists frame Black Americans as the ultimate victims—victims of genocide—while the Republican Party to which they are very often members despises the notion of Black

victimhood (Tate and Randolph 2002). Prisoek (2007) argues that the ‘abortion as Black genocide’ framing is not only the major framework of Black pro-life leaders, it is the *raison d’etre* of the African American anti-abortion movement. Their racialized anti-abortion framing is a significant contradiction to Black conservative thought today.

To provide context for the following discussion of Black pro-life leaders racial ideologies, I first review research on the racial ideologies of African American conservatives, specifically those involved in national politics.

### ***Racial Ideologies of Black Conservatives***

In this section, I survey research on the ideologies and political positions of Black conservatives; since I am particularly interested Black conservatives’ beliefs about the Black community, I limit my discussion to research on their racial ideologies—the “racially-based frameworks used by actors to explain and justify or challenge the racial status quo” (Bonilla-Silva 2014, 9).

Black conservatives like Clarence Thomas, Colin Powell, Condoleezza Rice, Allen West, Mia Love, Dr. Ben Carson, Herman Cain, and Michael Steele are seen as an anomaly. There is a strong perception among Americans that conservative politics are of no interest to Black Americans or at odds with their interests, making “Black Republican” an oxymoron of sorts. Black Republicans are mocked in liberal-leaning popular culture, not necessarily for their politics, but for the very idea that a Black person could be a Republican (Fields 2012). Black Republicans are often viewed “with a mixture of suspicion and contempt” by other African Americans, citing the manner in which

many Republicans have utilized negative racial stereotypes in campaign strategies (Prisock 2007, 183). Black conservatives' motives are often called into question by their Black peers, and as Prisock points out, "It is commonly assumed that misguidedness, opportunism, or a misplaced nostalgia are the motivating factors behind the allegiance of some African Americans to the Republican party" (186). However, as Bracey (2008) points out, like all Americans, Black Americans' desire for a self-directed life and the temptation to view oneself as the "architect of your own destiny," rather than a victim of a racist society, is strong.

Cornell West (1993) has argued that the rise of Black conservatives results from the lack of strong political leaders in the Black community since the Civil Rights Movement. Black conservatives hope to fill this void and believe that they can provide innovative solutions based in the conservative worldview. As Toler (1993) shows, Black conservatives differ greatly from the majority of Black Americans on many social issues that liberals understand as *racial* issues:

Unlike the majority of African Americans, Black conservatives generally oppose affirmative action and government minority business set-aside programs, oppose minimum wage laws and rent control laws, oppose any increase in social welfare spending, and oppose vigorous enforcement of voting rights and desegregation regulations. Black conservatives favor the death penalty, privatization of government services, deregulation of business, and voucher systems for public housing and for education.

Black conservatives fervently deny claims that these policy positions are racist. Like conservatives historically and today, most Black conservatives believe that government assistance is a dangerous crutch that has stunted the collective development of the Black community. Black conservatives are deeply resentful of liberal politicians

and believe that liberal social policies have failed the Black community (Lewis 2005). They believe that African Americans can and must succeed through their hard work and participation in the free-market economy. Thus, Black conservatives have full faith in the ability of capitalism to both provide equal opportunities to all and solve any problems of the Black community. As Lewis (2005) points out, “In short, Black conservatives are optimistic” about race relations in the United States, the accomplishments of Black Americans historically and the ability of the Black population to continue to advance (5). In his book about Black conservatives aptly titled *Saviors or Sellouts*, Christopher Bracey (2008) argues that Black conservatives have embraced an “accommodationist” role in which they advocate “playing by the rules” in exchange for “greater acceptance and inclusion in American society.” Black conservatives do so “in good faith” because they sincerely believe that any racial stereotypes “will collapse under the weight of their proven worthiness of inclusion.” They believe in the ideal of America democracy and trust in the “virtues of capitalism” (Bracey 2008, xxi).

While Black conservatives are a mystery to many, they are certainly not a new phenomenon, and have deep roots in American conservative politics. Lewis (2005) points out “Black conservatism cannot be understood as an isolated movement in the Black community,” but “must be understood within the context of conservatism in America” (3). Black conservative thought can be traced by over two hundred years (Tate & Randolph 2002). The first Black conservatives were elite Black men of the post-slavery era who encouraged the poor Black community to assimilate to white norms—to make themselves *deserving* of the same rights granted to the white population—instead of

demanding rights. Booker T. Washington, for example, argued that the development of the Black community was dependent on creating “a new Negro” (Toler 1993) and “emphasized wealth, property, and education over civil and political rights” for Black Americans (Dillard 2001, 35). Today, Dillard (2001) argues, the updated version of conservative “racial uplift” ideologies still seek to “civilize” poor African Americans, but has lost any focus on the structural barriers for enhancement and instead glorifies “self help, personal responsibility, moral fiber, and, of course, good old-fashioned hard work” (33).

Black conservatives’ economic beliefs are centered in the values of “self-help” capitalism. This perspective is deeply rooted in the Black conservative history in that those who can be considered the first Black conservatives focused much of their attention on the economic development of the Black community through hard work and entrepreneurship—as a way to ‘make our own way’ without the help of the white government. Black conservatives generally reject the understanding of Black Americans as victims—claiming Black liberals suffer from a “victimhood mentality.” Black conservatives are highly critical of civil rights leaders and others in the African American community for clinging to this “victim status” (Smith 2002). This perspective lines up well with the highly valued individualist and “bootstrap” approach of conservative Republican ideology. These ideologies also position most Black conservatives today in direct opposition to affirmative action policies, instead advocating only merit-based college admissions and employment (Toler 1993; West 1986). For example, Thomas Sowell, one of the most cited Black intellectuals, argues against affirmative action

programs because they violate the constitutional rights of whites, especially white males, and because they harm the self-esteem of Black beneficiaries who never know if their achievements were earned (Toler 1993). Black conservatives like Sowell believe that Black Americans should compete on merit and merit alone. Prisock (2007) points out the irony in the fact that conservative leaders are often steadfastly against affirmative action, but actively sought out African American conservative leaders to join their movement.

The concept of “self-help” is integral to Black conservative thought, but as Smith (2002) points out, it is not unique to Black conservatives—“self-help has been an essential element of the African American community for centuries,” from both liberal and conservative leaders (120). She argues that it is “individualism” that actually sets Black conservatives apart from other Black leaders. Black conservatives resist the notion of the Black community as a collective, arguing that such a framework emphasizes collective oppression and a victim status and ignores the heterogeneity of the African American community (Smith 2002, 122). While “racial uplift” in practice has encouraged positive racial solidarity, Black identity, and collective self-help within communities, Dillard (2001) argues that “racial uplift” has always been a problematic concept in its privileging of Black middle-class norms and values and its pathologizing of the poor (34). Historically, Black elites of both liberal and conservative persuasions have made similar commands of poor Blacks. As Toler (1993) argues, the difference between the liberal and conservative Black bourgeois is that Black liberals also recognized the structural constraints standing in the way of Black progress. Today, the most well-known Black conservatives argue that a lack of “personal responsibility,” as opposed to

structural racism, is to blame for the challenges facing the urban Black community. Toler (1993) makes a strong link between historical Black conservatism and Black conservatism today in the enduring ideology of a superior Black middle class. The “Black bourgeois mythology” is like the “Horatio Alger myth” in its assertion that “values and behavior determine economic success” and that the Black middle-class is qualified and expected to elevate their race (Toler 1993).

Black conservatives hold traditional views of family values and morality—views that are very often utilized in critique of the Black urban community. For example, one of the most famous Black conservatives, economist Glenn Loury, has argued that the problem of the Black poor is a moral one—evidenced by high crime rates and unwed pregnancy. He believes that liberal Black leaders ignore the “pathological culture” of the Black poor (cited in Barker, Jones, and Tate 1999). The “family values” focus of modern conservatism is appealing to many African Americans who identify with traditional religious doctrines (Bracey 2008). Given the strong connection between the Black church and Black conservatism historically, this is not surprising. Traditionally, Black Americans have been liberal on political issues and conservative on social issues, such as abortion and gay marriage (Toler 1993). Bracey (2008) argues that drugs, crime, sexual promiscuity, unwed motherhood, and other “illnesses associated with urban Black communities” are especially disturbing to middle-class African Americans because they are portrayed in mainstream media as representative of “Black society as a whole” (190-191). Toler (1993) also makes this point, arguing that when Black conservatives blame the Black poor for their problems, or when they fight against affirmative action, their



underlying motives are to distinguish themselves and other middle class Black Americans from the negative stereotypes of poor Blacks.

Black conservatives differ greatly from many Black liberals in their denial of the effects of racism on Black American's life chances. They argue that problems of poor Black Americans can no longer be attributed to white racism (Smith 2002). Instead, they find fault within the morals, values, and practices of the community itself—utilizing rhetoric similar to “culture of poverty” arguments popularized by Daniel Patrick Moynihan to explain Black poverty. The “culture of poverty” argument is not utilized only by expressly conservative Black Americans. Bonilla-Silva (2014) found that Blacks of all political persuasions utilized such a frame, indicating the cultural dominance of this racial ideology (220). Like white conservatives, Black conservatives blame the “culture” of female-headed households for the problems in the urban Black community (Toler 1993). In Black conservative thought, males should hold the dominant role in families and therefore, a female-headed household is, by its very nature, a dysfunctional one (Stewart 2002).

Tate and Randolph (2002) argue that Black conservatives appeal to whites by absolving them of any guilt for their superior social position. By denying that racism, sexism, and impoverishment are responsible for African Americans' economic and political plight, Black conservatives strengthen their alliances with the American conservative movement. Black conservatives believe that the key to upward mobility for African Americans lies in the marketplace (Tate and Randolph 2002). Like all conservatives, Black conservatives are philosophically against government aid to the

poor, arguing that poor African Americans will benefit more by working hard for their livelihood. In this insistence, they appeal to widespread stereotypes of lazy and ungrateful welfare families held by many white Americans (Tate and Randolph 2002). According to Angela Dillard (2002), the central message of Black conservatives is: “the time for African Americans to demand redress and justice from the government is now past, that those who have failed to walk through the doors of opportunity have only themselves and their dysfunctional communities to blame” (52). Black conservatives believe that liberal social policies and generations of government assistance discourage self-reliance and hard work among urban Black communities, leading to a breakdown in morality and family structure (Lewis 2005). They argue that traditional family values have the power to fix inner city communities by encouraging morality and hard work (Tate and Randolph 2002). In 2004, comedian Bill Cosby made headlines by expressing similar conservative criticisms of the Black community. He argued that poor and working class Black Americans were not “holding up their end of the deal,” referring to the success of the Civil Rights Movement, and criticized young Black men especially for the high rates of crime, high school dropouts, and single-motherhood. He followed other conservative critics in his rejection of Black victimhood and denial that white racism was responsible for the problems of poor Black Americans, arguing that the only Blacks themselves can fix these problems (Bracey 2008, 176).

While Black conservatives deny the significance of racism in today’s society, Dillard (2001) points out that this does not mean they believe racial discrimination is completely gone. Instead, Black conservatives would argue that racism is not a sufficient

explanation for the problems of poor urban communities, laying the lion's share of the blame on liberal social policies and the "culture of poverty" (Dillard 2001). Similarly, Bracey (2008) argues that although Black conservatives sometimes acknowledge white racism, they are principally concerned with a critique directed at Blacks—"the failure of Blacks to take full advantage of their opportunities, often blaming Blacks for their laziness, parochialism, and fetish for panaceas" (xxii). In other words, white racism is simply an "irritant" (Bracey 2008, xxiii). In order to claim that racism no longer holds minorities back, Black conservatives must also declare that every American, regardless of race, has equal opportunities for success. As Smith (2002) points out, Black conservative leaders often use their own life stories as proof that race no longer makes a significant difference in one's opportunities. Many use a metaphor of slaves remaining on the plantation, claiming that "a slave-like mentality" causes African Americans to be blind to their "new freedoms" (Smith 2002, 128). Smith argues that the association of Black leaders with a slave mentality is a rhetorical feat and "works well rhetorically for Black conservatives because traditionally they are the ones who are viewed as 'identifying their fortunes with those of their masters.'"(129).

Black conservatives are often criticized for their comments about race and their own racial identities. As Smith (2002) points out, many believe that Black conservatives "deny, forget, or are ashamed of the fact that they are Black" (123). However, Black conservatives counter that it is not that they are ashamed or in denial about their race, but that they are not defined by it (Smith 2002). They argue that their ability to "transcend" race allows them to think for themselves and see the problems of the Black community

more clearly. They pride themselves on their ability to speak “the truth” and claim that other African American leaders do not have the “courage to tell their constituents that it is their own lifestyles, their own street culture, and their own lack of ‘human capital’ that perpetuate poverty” (Smith 2002, 126). Thus, they argue, racism is not to blame for poverty or social problems of the Black community, but African Americans’ own destructive behaviors. Black conservatives believe that Black leaders are trapped in a “collective” mindset, making it impossible for them to see the truth, and resulting in the blind support of certain norms simply because they are practiced by African Americans (Smith 2002). Black conservatives view a strong racial-consciousness as barriers to assimilation for African Americans (Dillard 2001).

With the increased fame and popularity of Black Republicans, is the number of Black Republican voters increasing? While Black Democrats are as conservative as Republicans on some moral issues—Black Democrats are much more religious than non-Black Democrats—the majority of African Americans who self-identify as conservative still vote for Democratic candidates.<sup>19</sup> While 76% of Black Americans identified as Democrat in 2008, 95% voted for Democratic President Obama.<sup>20</sup> The last time a Republican presidential candidate received more than 15% of the Black vote was in the 1960 election between Nixon and Kennedy. This significant shift in voting patterns coincided with Nixon’s infamous “Southern Strategy,” which resulted in the all-time lowest levels of Republican votes by Black Americans—until Obama’s 2008 election (Fields 2012). In 1986, Cornel West argued that the majority of Black Americans had

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<sup>19</sup> <http://www.gallup.com/poll/118937/republican-base-heavily-white-conservative-religious.aspx>

<sup>20</sup> <http://www.pewforum.org/2009/01/30/a-religious-portrait-of-african-americans/>

rejected the appeals from Black conservatives because, while most African Americans conclude that racism is not the only source of their problems, they believe it certainly is one reason. Thus, he argues, most Black Americans view “the new Black conservative assault on the Black liberal leadership as a step backward rather than forward” (West 1986).

For Black conservatives, individualism goes hand in hand with the ideals of “colorblindness.” As Bracey (2008) discusses, to maintain this ideal, Black conservatives must minimize or reject a strong racial identity “in favor of a more generic American one” (193). For many Black Americans, race is central to their personal and collective identities. The strong, color-blind individualism of Black conservatives deeply conflicts with these identities. Bracey (2008) argues that this color-blind individualism departs from the tradition of Black conservatives. Black conservative thinkers of all stripes—from Booker T. Washington to Stokely Carmichael—encouraged Black Americans to take pride in their racial traditions and customs, even while they were critiquing the Black community (Bracey 2008, 195). This new breed of Black conservatives may be rejected, not only by Black liberals, but also by more traditional Black conservatives who see Black identity as a source of power. Most famous Black conservatives today reject a strong racial identity in favor of “colorblindness,” but paradoxically, their popularity within conservative circles is very often a result of their membership in the Black community.

The term “colorblind” was originally used by liberals during the Civil Rights Movement to argue for the elimination of legalized racial segregation and discrimination

(Prisock 2007). Today, the term has become utilized more often by the New Right to claim that any legislation specifically aimed at addressing *racial* inequality—such as affirmative action—is illegitimate and violates the colorblind ideal (Prisock 2007). Americans of all political stripes express a genuine desire for a “colorblind” society. For example, as Meghan Burke’s (2012) research shows, both race-conscious white liberals and white Tea Party organizers in Illinois expressed nearly identical colorblind ideals of fairness and diversity. When conservatives utilize colorblind ideologies, they go hand in hand with ideologies of individualism and hard work. The ideals of colorblindness line up perfectly with the American mythology of the “melting pot” and American values of equal opportunity. However, as many scholars have pointed out, while those who extol the virtues of colorblindness and claim not to “see” race can have good intentions, a colorblind ideology has potential to be much more dangerous than transformative—when race is intentionally “ignored,” the significant racial inequality in the United States is also ignored (Bonilla-Silva 2014; Burke 2012). In *Racism Without Racists*, Bonilla-Silva (2014) asks: How is it possible to have this tremendous degree of racial inequality in a country where most whites claim that race is no longer relevant? (2). He finds the answer in *colorblind racism*—“a new powerful ideology has emerged to defend the contemporary racial order” (73). He finds that whites use colorblind rhetoric to justify racial inequalities and criticize racial minorities for their “obsession” with race.

In his research on Black Republican activists, Corey Fields (2012)<sup>21</sup> asks the question that is often asked of white people, but not Black people: How do one's ideas about Black people influence their politics? He finds that Black Republican activists generally take one of two approaches to addressing race and racial identity in their political work and identities—a “raceblind” approach or a “racial uplift” approach. In the “raceblind” approach, Black republicans fall in line with the ideals of colorblindness—encouraging Black Americans to stop focusing on race, racism, and victimhood. They argue that racism is not responsible for racial inequalities in the United States, and instead blame “personal choices and pathological values.” Black Republican activists who align with the “racial uplift” approach are more likely to acknowledge structural constraints on the success of the Black community. However, they depart from a Black liberal perspective in that they support conservative economic policies that they believe will ultimately help Black communities more than will liberal social policies (Fields 2012). While these groups support the same policies and generally hold the same values, they differ in their understanding of the centrality of race and racism in the lives of Black Americans. This finding shows that grassroots Black Republican activists' racial ideologies can be much different than the colorblind ideologies of Black Republicans in the highest levels of the GOP. Fields points out that the “racial uplift” Black Republicans are much more common than people think, but they are more “on the fringe.” It is the “raceblind” Republicans who are closer to power, because, as he argues, powerful white Republicans—who are more likely to express the “pathological” view of racial

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<sup>21</sup> <http://thesocietypages.org/papers/the-paradoxes-of-Black-republicans/>

inequality—are the gatekeepers to resources and fame. He argues that white Republicans and major media outlets like FOX News will be more likely to reach out to Black Republicans who will confirm their views on Black people rather than challenge them.<sup>22</sup>

In the following section, I explore the racial ideologies of the Black pro-life leaders using the ‘Black genocide’ framing and compare these ideologies with those of Black conservatives more generally.

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<sup>22</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=If3VIVG-U8U>



## **THE CONFLICTING RACIAL IDEOLOGIES OF THE BLACK PRO-LIFE LEADERS: VICTIMHOOD, PATHOLOGY, AND COLORBLINDNESS**

Based on interviews with Black pro-life leaders and an analysis of their written material and speeches, I find three major narratives used when discussing racism and race relations. First, their most prevalent racial narrative focuses on “Black victimhood.” This narrative is the basis of how they frame their pro-life activism. They argue that Planned Parenthood is involved in a racist and conspiratorial plot to control the population of Black Americans who are framed as the ultimate victims—victims of racial genocide. Next, I observe a less common, but still consistent narrative of “Black pathology,” in which they describe the Black community as lacking in traditional values and morality. This framing was most often used when the Black pro-life leaders were discussing the “problems” of the Black urban community. Like conservatives in general and the Black conservatives detailed above, the Black pro-life leaders utilized “culture of poverty” rhetoric, blaming inner-city Black communities for social problems—specifically fatherlessness. A narrative that locates blame in the immorality of urban Black families contradicts their claim that Black Americans are innocent victims of genocide. Lastly, I observe that Black pro-life leaders express a “colorblind” narrative, used when they are discussing other racial issues besides abortion that lines up closely with the conservative ideals of a colorblind society and individualism. Their “colorblind” ideology criticizes liberals for paying too much attention to race and stirring up a “race war.” This narrative conflicts deeply with the Black victimhood framing. For the Black pro-life leaders, claims of racism against Black Americans are only truly legitimate when they are focused

on abortion and population control policies. Other claims of racism made by liberals are seen as “race-baiting.”

### **Abortion as Black Genocide: The “Black Victimhood” Narrative**

The first narrative, the Black victimhood narrative, is by far the most common. While Black pro-life leaders do not exclusively use racialized rhetoric—they certainly also utilize race-neutral, traditional pro-life framing of Christian morality and the personified fetus in much of their work—the ‘abortion is Black genocide’ framework was their most common anti-abortion narrative. Because many of the pro-life leaders I focus on in this paper were hired by mainstream pro-life organizations (or are frequently featured on conservative media outlets) with the intent purpose of popularizing this framework, the frequency is not surprising.

The use of “Black genocide” frames are meant to incite fears of human rights abuses in population control programs and a contemporary state-led eugenics program aimed at ‘undesirable’ populations. Movement leaders using these framing strategies attempt to shore up support for outlawing abortion by recalling and inciting fears of reproductive rights violations of women of color. These pro-life framing strategies utilize discourses of human and civil rights, drawing their rhetoric closely from past movements led by Black men and women against racial discrimination. Those using the Black genocide frame refer to the pro-life movement as a “civil rights” movement, to Black people as “endangered species,” and allude to a threatened future of powerful Black leaders. The most common manifestation of this framing strategy is the claim that

Planned Parenthood is involved in a conspiratorial plot to reduce the population of the African American community through targeted birth control and abortion provision. The pro-life organizations I examine in this research argue that the government sponsors this eugenic program through tax dollars and that it represents the most insidious form of racism—killing Black babies before they are born. Ryan Bomberger, who is the voice of The Radiance Foundation, is one of the most prominent Black pro-life leaders utilizing this type of frame today, exemplified by the “Endangered Species” billboard campaign. The Radiance Foundation frames their TooManyAborted campaign as an effort to “expose Planned Parenthood's history of eugenic racism and its present unaltered course.”<sup>23</sup>

The framing of population control policies as coercive and racist is widely repeated among Black pro-life leaders and Planned Parenthood specifically is framed as the major perpetrator. For example, the Radiance Foundation claims that *Roe v. Wade* was passed “to ensure population control of Blacks, the poor and other minorities.”<sup>24</sup> Bomberger draws strong ties between Margaret Sanger (the founder of The American Birth Control League, which would later be renamed Planned Parenthood), the American Eugenics Society, and the contemporary Planned Parenthood organization. He makes the claim that Planned Parenthood has a secret agenda to control the population of African Americans. As evidence, he points to data showing that Black women have a disproportionately high rate of abortion compared to white women and that Planned

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<sup>23</sup> <http://www.toomanyaborted.com/>

<sup>24</sup> [http://www.toomanyaborted.com/?page\\_id=563](http://www.toomanyaborted.com/?page_id=563)

Parenthood clinics are more likely to operate in urban areas with higher minority populations.

Bomberger claims that Planned Parenthood is carrying on Margaret Sanger's original eugenic goals in the "Negro Project"<sup>25</sup> by attempting to prevent Black women from reproducing and "using influential Black public figures to convince poorer Blacks that birth control was their freedom and would reduce poverty in their community." Another graphic on the main page of the website reads, "The Negro Project 2.0: Different Negroes, Different Century, Same Lies." Bomberger calls Planned Parenthood "the number one killer of Black people" and offers as proof of their genocidal plot that "Planned Parenthood celebrates their founder...Planned Parenthood loves its history. It's why they will never repudiate it, but instead, repeat it over and over again." On the Radiance Foundation website, he writes, "Here is the simple truth. The intent of Sanger's Negro Project is firmly intact. Nearly 40% of all African-American pregnancies end in induced abortion. This is by design."<sup>26</sup> Bomberger argues that what started with birth control has been continued through population control policies, welfare and legalized abortion—programs "purporting to be benevolent, but clearly showing a nature of destruction."<sup>27</sup> He implores the Black community to "Challenge the status quo! Don't be fooled by the nation's largest abortion chain that has done nothing to elevate the condition of the Black community. Search their history, and you will understand their unaltered present course."

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<sup>25</sup> [http://www.toomanyaborted.com/?page\\_id=688](http://www.toomanyaborted.com/?page_id=688)

<sup>26</sup> [http://www.toomanyaborted.com/?page\\_id=13](http://www.toomanyaborted.com/?page_id=13)

<sup>27</sup> [http://www.toomanyaborted.com/?page\\_id=642](http://www.toomanyaborted.com/?page_id=642)

Another organization utilizing a similar frame is the Texas-based Life Always, led by Pastor Stephen Broden. In our interview, Broden stated that the majority of the pro-life movement is generally in agreement about the accusation that Planned Parenthood specifically targets Black women for abortion: “Much of the messaging that Planned Parenthood is doing is targeted to Black girls and Black women in our community... They are targeting us. And they’re being every effective with it... most of the pro-life movement... recognizes that something must happen to stop it.” In our interview, Pastor Broden explained that he became involved in the pro-life movement when he learned about the history of Margaret Sanger and Planned Parenthood. He described his mission as educating the Black community about Planned Parenthood’s participation in a modern-day eugenics movement.

Margaret Sanger, reading about her, what she’s had to say about the Black community: ‘Negroes are like weeds, we need to get rid of them.’ What? And so this woman also had a program designed to convince Black pastors to sell abortion in our community and she was successful in getting that done... And knowing that activated me to another level to resist her and resist what she stood for... We comprise about 13% of the population but almost 40% of the abortions take place in our community. That’s not by accident. We believe it’s by design... I began to recognize that there was a need to get information out... in the Black community... And our community... needed to understand that there was a deliberate attempt on the part of the abortion industry to seduce women into using abortion...

As is clear in this passage, Broden grants a significant amount of power to Margaret Sanger—he speaks of needing to “resist her,” *in present tense*. This rhetorical “reincarnation” of Sanger and other eugenicists of her time is very common among the pro-life leaders. While Sanger did partner with eugenicists to create and distribute birth control, she was certainly not the mastermind of twentieth century eugenics and

population control programs, as she is portrayed under this narrative. This framing of Sanger should not be understood, however, as a case of historical misunderstanding. The direct link that can be drawn between Sanger and Planned Parenthood today clearly motivates this framing. Sanger's link to the founding of Planned Parenthood is a powerful way to discredit the modern day organization.

Alveda King—niece of Martin Luther King Jr. and pro-life activist—utilizes a similar “genocide” frame in nearly all of her pro-life activism. King had two abortions in her youth that she deeply regrets and describes these experiences as her motivation for joining the pro-life movement to prevent other women from making the same mistake. She argues, “African American women and their children are victims...we have been targeted by genocide.” King appeared in the anti-abortion film *Maafa 21* and in it she says, “When we said we would no longer sit at the back of the bus, a place was being reserved for us in the abortion clinic.” In 2005, King was hired by Catholic pro-life organization Priests for Life to lead the African American Outreach wing of the organization. In a confidential report for Priests For Life members about African American Outreach that King sent to me after our interview, she argues that Planned Parenthood is targeting Black Americans for abortion and that Sanger's eugenic goals are still being fulfilled today:

Did you know that the founder of Planned Parenthood, Margaret Sanger, was a devout racist who created the Negro Project designed to sterilize unknowing Black women and others she deemed as undesirables of society? The founder of Planned Parenthood said, “Colored people are like human weeds and are to be exterminated.” How is her vision being fulfilled today?

King also holds up Sanger as the sole “creator” of the Negro Project, which supports her contention that Sanger and Planned Parenthood should be understood as an all-powerful villain. This narrative strengthens a simplified “us” vs. “them” framework and extends Sanger’s influence to *today*, despite the fact that she has been dead for fifty years. In this narrative, Black women are also portrayed as “unknowing” victims of sterilization. While coercive sterilizations were certainly happening then, and are still happening among the most disenfranchised women, The Negro Project was about distributing birth control to the poor Black women with the help of Black ministers.

Also in the Priests for Life report, King argues that her goal is to convince the Black community of the genocide taking place in abortion clinics. She believes that African Americans are dangerously uninformed about the realities of abortion.

When the Priests for Life African American Outreach Initiative (AAO) was launched in the spring of 2005, the African American community was grossly uninformed regarding the nature of and the existence of a covert eugenics effort to use genocide to...limit the growth of the African American community...sanctioned by laws and governmental funding...One issue unites African American Pro-life leaders – past and present – is the need to articulate and convince our communities that eugenics and genocide are real...Our communities keep falling for the lies of Planned Parenthood and indeed the entire abortion industry...it would appear that many abortions in the African American community occur because the mothers are heavily influenced to abort by manipulation and coercion from third parties.

In this passage, King frames the African American population and specifically women who abort as dupes of the abortion industry—they are “grossly uninformed,” they are “falling for” lies, and they are “heavily manipulated.” Black women are framed as uninformed and easily manipulated, lacking any real agency to choose abortion. Tellingly, King and the other leaders are not calling for improvement in informed consent laws or

better abortion counseling; their solution is to make all abortion illegal. Their contention is that if Black women were adequately informed about the realities of abortion, they would not choose it. To King and the other leaders, an informed decision to abort is unfathomable.

Led by Reverend Stephen Broden, Life Always launched a campaign on the Southside of Chicago, putting up billboards which pictured an illustration of President Obama with the tagline: “Every 21 minutes, our next possible leader is aborted.” In a press conference at the unveiling of one of these billboards, Broden appeals to the anxieties about the future of the Black community: “The potential of a community lies in its children...If we aren’t having them, our potential is lost.”<sup>28</sup> Life Always board member Reverend Derek McCoy also drew attention to famous African Americans in order to lend support for the billboard: “These are babies who could grow up to be the future presidents of the United States, or the next Oprah Winfrey, Denzel Washington or Maya Angelou.”<sup>29</sup> Rev. McCoy stated that the use of Obama on the billboards was intentional because he is a “major leader in the African-American community, America and the world” and that Obama “could have easily been snuffed out” if his single mother didn’t have the resources to care for him.<sup>30</sup> On the Life Always website, *thatsabortion.com*—which has since been taken down—Broden called attention to fears of the extinction of the African American community: “the staggering number of abortions within the African American community is threatening the sustainability of the

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<sup>28</sup> [http://thatsabortion.com/in\\_the\\_media/this-time-in-chicago/](http://thatsabortion.com/in_the_media/this-time-in-chicago/)

<sup>29</sup> [http://thatsabortion.com/in\\_the\\_media/this-time-in-chicago/](http://thatsabortion.com/in_the_media/this-time-in-chicago/)

<sup>30</sup> [http://thatsabortion.com/in\\_the\\_media/anti-abortion-group-features-president-obama-on-chicago-billboards/](http://thatsabortion.com/in_the_media/anti-abortion-group-features-president-obama-on-chicago-billboards/)



African American race in the United States.”<sup>31</sup>

Bomberger also references the possibility of the first Black president being aborted and compares himself to Obama, arguing that they were both conceived in situations where they might have been aborted, but were “saved” from abortion, and went on to accomplish great things. In the following passage, his comment that he is “as Black as Obama” is meant to imply that Obama does not speak for the Black community.

As one who is as Black as Obama, and the same tangible realization of Possibility (in that both of our early circumstances in life are prime excuses for a child be aborted), I will be relentless in exposing Planned Parenthood...and why they continue to target those they consider “unfit” to reproduce.<sup>32</sup>

Bomberger argues that Planned Parenthood targets Black women and considers them “unfit to reproduce,” but considering that both he and Obama were born to white mothers, is the reader to conclude that it was their Black fathers that made their mothers targets of Planned Parenthood or the abortion industry?

Bomberger also calls attention to other Black heroes in order to elicit anxieties about the future of the Black community, arguing that if elitist abortion supporters had their way, many heroes of the Black community would not have been born:

The perpetuation of the lie of ‘Reproductive Freedom’ has been championed, in particular, by America’s elite (of any race). It was an elitist mentality that forged the pseudoscience of eugenics, that drove America’s race-based segregationist Jim Crow laws, discriminatory immigration policy (i.e. Immigration Act of 1924) and was the bedrock of the Birth Control now-turned Abortion Industry. Planned Parenthood’s founder, Margaret Sanger...Her eugenic Birth Control philosophy, to prevent the ‘unfit’, ‘feeble-minded’, ‘poor’ or ‘unwanted’, would have eliminated Abraham Lincoln, George Washington Carver, Rosa Parks, Ben Carson, and Oprah Winfrey...just to name a few.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> <http://thatsabortion.com/About%20Life%20Always.htm>

<sup>32</sup> <http://www.theradiancefoundation.org/833/>

<sup>33</sup> <http://www.toomanyaborted.com/truth-in-black-and-white/>

Bomberger connects eugenics, Jim Crow laws, and discriminatory immigration laws to abortion in order to make the case that abortion is simply the continuation of racial discrimination. He argues that these policies were perpetuated by “elites of any race” which implies that elite racial minorities have conspired in the oppression of their own racial group. In this way, he is attempting to explain the participation of Black men and women in birth control and abortion provision then and now while still maintaining the framing of Black men and women as victims.

King also utilizes rhetoric of racial extinction by referencing the declining “Black vote” and the portion of the Black population that has “gone missing” because of abortion:

Planned Parenthood is the largest abortion provider in America. 78% of their clinics are in minority communities. Blacks make up 12% of the population, but 35% of the abortions in America. Are we being targeted? Isn't that genocide? We are the only minority in America that is on the decline in population. If the current trend continues, by 2038 the Black vote will be insignificant.”  
“...abortion has led to the decimation of the African American community. Fully one-fourth of the Black population of the United States has gone missing because abortion took their lives before they could enjoy liberty or pursue happiness.<sup>34</sup>

King grants no agency to Black women to choose abortion. For King, the fact that Black women have a disproportionately high rate of abortion *proves* that the Black population is targeted for genocide, ignoring any other potential explanations for this trend—specifically the fact that Black women have more abortion because they have more unintended pregnancies.<sup>35</sup> She utilizes anxieties about a politically weak Black

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<sup>34</sup> <http://www.priestsforlife.org/africanamerican/alveda-black-caucus-09-26-08.htm>

<sup>35</sup> <http://www.guttmacher.org/media/blogposts/CollectiveVoice-Summer2011.pdf>

population when she references the Black vote and what she considers the inevitable and extreme decline of the Black population.

The argument that abortion clinics are located in majority Black neighborhoods is false. About six in 10 abortion providers are located in neighborhoods where more than half of residents are white and fewer than one in 10 abortion providers are located in neighborhoods where more than half of residents are Black.<sup>36</sup> Additionally, King argues that the Black population is declining, but in fact, recent projections show that the Black proportion of the population will stay steady or grow slightly in the next decades.<sup>37</sup>

Clenard H. Childress, founder of L.E.A.R.N. (Life Education and Resource Network) Northeast argues on his website *Blackgenocide.org* that Planned Parenthood is carrying on Margaret Sanger's eugenic goals today and that Margaret Sanger "tutored the Third Reich." In my interview with Childress, he compared abortion to Nazi policies and racist laws in United States history: "Everything Hitler did in Germany was legal. A lot of the injustices African Americans experienced were legal," arguing that just because abortion is legal doesn't make it acceptable. Later in our interview, Childress argues that eugenics did not end after WWII but lives on today in the United States:

Carnegie Mellon, Rockefeller foundation, all these big eugenicists as far as I'm concerned, are very supportive of abortion...these are so called foundations that are concerned about the urban community. So, when we protested {laughs} the Gates foundation in Seattle, many years ago...we wanted to ask why they continued to pour money into pro-abortion groups.

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<sup>36</sup> <https://www.gutmacher.org/media/evidencecheck/provider-location.html>

<sup>37</sup> <http://www.pewsocialtrends.org/2012/11/07/a-milestone-en-route-to-a-majority-minority-nation/>

Childress makes the claim that foundations like Carnegie Mellon and Rockefeller are the modern-day eugenicists, funding the genocide of African Americans. In our interview, King also argues that eugenicists target the Black community by offering funding: “What happens is...the opposition has money and they have slick marketing and so they say let us help you and your community, let’s give you a grant.” Their actual aim, she argues, is to control the population of Black Americans.

In March 2011, the organization Life Always, led by Pastor Stephen Broden, sponsored a highly controversial billboard in New York that read, “The Most Dangerous Place for an African American is in the Womb.” Reverend Childress, who credits himself with first using this phrase, discussed the billboard in our interview: “I don’t like people thinking it’s hyperbole or just some type of radical rant from a reverend. It is a sociological fact. The most dangerous place for an African American baby is in the womb of their... mother.” The claim that abortion is the “#1 killer” of African Americans is very common among the Black pro-life leaders. To support this argument, the leaders will call attention to CDC statistics showing that, in 2008, Black women had 363,705 abortions and compare that to all other causes of death among the Black population, which amounted to 285,522 deaths.<sup>38</sup> Thus, they argue that abortion far outnumbers any other cause of death of Black Americans, and therefore, by this logic, a Black person is more likely to die in the womb of their mother than by any other cause. This framework is meant to call attention to the relatively high rate of abortion among Black women and incite fears of Black children being in danger.

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<sup>38</sup> <http://www.toomanyaborted.com/numberonekiller/>

The Radiance Foundation also utilizes the brutal history of the enslavement of Africans in the United States to argue that “abortionists” have replaced slave-owners as the worst perpetrators of racial violence and oppression. Comparing the enslavement of Africans to abortion is an attempt to provoke the nation’s most shameful collective memory in service of their anti-abortion cause. In Atlanta in June 2011 in honor of Juneteenth—a celebration of the abolition of slavery—the Radian Foundation put up billboards reading: “Abortion Makes Three-Fifths Human Seem Overly Generous,” “The 13<sup>th</sup> Amendment Freed Us. Abortion Enslaves Us,” and “The 14<sup>th</sup> Amendment Made Us Members. Abortion Dismembers.”<sup>39</sup>

Day Gardner, the President of the National Black Pro-Life Union argues that abortion is the *worst* and most important form of racism. On her website, she argues that the majority of Black Americans are misinformed about this fact and invokes Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., implying that he would be ashamed of the Black community for not standing up against abortion. At once, she trivializes all other claims of racism made by Black people and shames the Black community for their ignorance of the racism of abortion:

I wonder what Dr. King would say? It seems [Blacks] are very quick as a people to recognize racism everywhere else except the one place that truly affects all of us. Most Blacks will agree that racism is still very much alive -- yet say nothing when abortion facilities are placed purposefully in minority and poor communities...Abortion is a billion dollar business *and they need us to make their blood money*. If we as Black people say "NO" to abortion -- the industry will cease to exist.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> <http://www.toomanyaborted.com/?p=3784>

<sup>40</sup> <http://www.nationalblackprolifeunion.com/>

Black women's abortions make up about one-third of abortions annually,<sup>41</sup> but Gardner claims that without them, the abortion industry would “cease to exist.” She also makes the common claim that abortion clinics are placed in minority and poor communities in order to target Black women and convince them to abort. Bomberger makes a similar argument that abortion is the worst form of racism in the United States:

Nowhere in American life is racism more concentrated, more documented, and more tangible than inside the doors of abortion facilities. Death, which is the ultimate natural consequence of racism unabated, occurs up to 5.8 times more among Black babies than children of any other race. But this racial disparity is celebrated as ‘reproductive justice...’<sup>42</sup>

Like Gardner, Bomberger delegitimizes all other potential claims of racism made by Black men and women and incites fears of Black children in mortal danger. He also takes specific aim at the reproductive justice movement—which is led by women of color and supportive of abortion rights—claiming that they “celebrate” the deaths of Black children.

In the aftermath of the Ferguson riots and nation-wide protests against police violence, Bomberger published an article on the Radiance Foundation website comparing the number of unarmed people killed by police officers to the number of abortions that Black women have each year:

The NAACP Legal Defense Fund has tweeted about a list of 76 Black individuals, from 1999 to the present, who have been shot by cops while unarmed...amounts to 5 lost lives every year due to this “massive epidemic” of police brutality. Compare that to 363,705 Black lives violently slaughtered, every year, in the name of “reproductive justice”. Abortion, not cop-caused deaths, is the number one killer of Black lives...Hands up! Don't Shoot? Don't worry. The millions of unarmed Black lives, who have been aborted in the womb, won't

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<sup>41</sup> <http://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/preview/mmwrhtml/ss6311a1.htm>

<sup>42</sup> <http://www.lifenews.com/2012/03/02/abortion-and-food-stamps-dont-elevate-the-black-community/>

have to face that grossly over-exaggerated racial injustice of excessive police force. They've already faced the ultimate racial violence.<sup>43</sup>

Bomberger disdains any claims of racial violence except abortion, calling racist police brutality “grossly over-exaggerated.” In his comparison of the numbers of abortions each year and the number of unarmed people killed by the police, he attempts to make the latter seem insignificant, calling abortion the “ultimate racial violence.” His sarcastic claim that children killed by abortion will not have to be subject to excessive police attempts to further delegitimizes any form of racism besides abortion.

Speaking with other Black pro-life leaders in May of 2013 in a press conference on Kermit Gosnell—the Black abortion doctor convicted of murdering three babies born alive during abortions—Day Gardner, the president of the National Black Pro-Life Union, claims that Gosnell was able to continue his practices for so long because of society's racism against Black children:

Kermit Gosnell is a racist of the worst kind because he preyed on women and young girls of his own race. For more than 30 years, Kermit Gosnell participated in and perpetuated the epidemic of Black on Black crime...Gosnell ran his bloody clinic in the Black neighborhood where he made millions of dollars killing Black children. He got away with it simply because he could. After all, no one really cares about poor, Black babies, do they? Gosnell knew he could kill Black children and no one would blink an eye...there has been very little reported about the Gosnell case...Why?...I can't help but wonder if Gosnell's victims were white children, would we see a very different media coverage? America has been trying for decades to bury the race card, but the truth is we're playing with a stacked deck. The mainstream media continues to prove that they see Black children as having very different value, of lesser worth than their white counterparts.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> <http://www.theradiancefoundation.org/alllivesmatter/>

<sup>44</sup> [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OvBrS1cy\\_wA](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OvBrS1cy_wA)

Gardner's comments show that while the narrative of Black victimhood is based in a claim of white racism against the Black population, the perpetrators of racist abortion need not be white. She calls Gosnell a "racist of the worst kind" and a perpetrator of "Black on Black crime" for performing abortions on Black women. In Gardner's estimation, the media and the culture in general are also racist in their disregard of the deaths of Black babies. Gardner calls attention to a cultural devaluation of Black children. Like many of the quotes outlined in this section, Gardner's comments align much more closely with the sentiments of Black liberals than with Black conservatives. While she focuses these claims on racism almost exclusively on abortion, these comments nonetheless set her and the other Black pro-life leaders apart from other Black conservatives in their focus on racism.

The "Black victimhood" narrative argues that Black Americans, and specifically Black women, are targeted for genocide by racists and elite eugenicists because they are understood as "undesirable," framing the Black community as the ultimate victims. This narrative understands abortion as the worst kind of racism, far more serious than any other racial injustice today or at any time in history. The pro-life leaders utilize anxieties about the future of the Black community, warning of a coming Black extinction. They draw a direct connection between abortion and racism, arguing that abortion *is* racist, compared to more common pro-life utilization of slavery and Jim Crow rhetoric, which argued that abortion was *similar* to racism. The Black pro-life activists argue that Black children are aborted specifically because they are Black—discrimination in its worst form.



In examining this narrative of victimhood, what stands out most is the lack of agency conferred upon the Black community. By the logic of this narrative, Black Americans have been deceived by white eugenicists for the past century and convinced to participate in their own genocide. According to this framing, Black women cannot freely choose abortion because they are wholly uninformed about the realities of that choice. However, at the same time, Black women are perceived as having complete power to take down the “abortion industry” by simply refusing to abort their children. Thus, Black women are simultaneously powerless to the eugenic goals of Planned Parenthood and blamed for their complicity in genocide.

### **Black Community in Crisis: The Conflicting “Black Pathology” Narrative**

The Black pro-life leaders heavily rely on themes of Black victimhood in their anti-abortion work. However, I also find a less common narrative centered on pathologies in the Black community and Black family. The pro-life leaders claim that legalized abortion has hurt the Black community, framing Black Americans as victims. However, at times, they also seem to be arguing that the Black community has lost its moral compass, framing Black Americans as responsible for the social problems of the inner-city. This narrative lines up closely with the common conservative framing of a pathological urban Black community held responsible for various social problems. Black pro-life leaders frequently connect the problem of fatherlessness to the problem of

abortion, arguing that single-parent families in the Black community are both a cause and consequence of legalized abortion.

Fatherlessness is a consistent theme for Bomberger, who addresses the evils associated with fatherlessness in nearly every article he writes for The Radiance Foundation website and speech he gives. He argues that fatherlessness is an “epidemic” and will lead to the demise of the Black community. He claims that the Black community is in “decay” because fathers have been “pushed” out of the home.

In the Black community, 72.3% of all children are born in homes without fathers (compared to 35.7% of white children). Fatherlessness is epidemic in our culture...” “...The same pro-abortion forces that fight against every common-sense pro-life legislation, also support every form of welfare targeted at minority communities—programs infamous for pushing the male out of the family equation...No community can survive with such rampant fatherlessness, exponentially high STD/AIDS/HIV rates, and disproportionately high abortion rates...” “...Abortion does nothing to strengthen women, but causes devastation to the single-most important foundation in any community—family...the deterioration of two-parent married homes significantly adds to the decay of the Black community, which is hit hardest with fatherlessness.”<sup>45</sup>

In the following passage, he again refers to the “decay” of the Black community, blaming “rampant” sexual promiscuity, poverty, and fatherlessness. He argues that these problems have worsened the problems caused by legalized abortion.

The Black community is in a crisis...[T]he disproportionate impact of abortion on the Black community is glaringly evident and statistically irrefutable. Since the legalization of *Roe v. Wade*, the Black community has been hit hardest with its aftermath. Urban decay has been accelerated due to rampant sexual irresponsibility, increasing single-parent poverty, fatherlessness that exceeds 70%, and the continuing deterioration of stable (two-parent) Black families.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> <http://www.toomanyaborted.com/california/>

<sup>46</sup> <http://www.toomanyaborted.com/truth-in-black-and-white/>

Pastor Broden also argues that single-parent families have weakened the community and led to a “lessening of resistance” to the pro-choice forces, and because of this, the Black community has lost its once strong pro-life views. In our interview, he frames single-parent families as the cause of abortion rates in the Black community.

Heise: Why is the Black community *less* pro-life? What do you think changed?

Broden: Well, a number of things I think contributed to it. One of them...was some issues in the community relative to single parent homes, the devastation that it had on the community, the burden that it had on women...contributed I think to a kind of lessening of resistance in a community.

Bomberger argues that single-parent families have resulted in the moral decimation of the community, which in turn results in greater rates of abortion. It is not clear in this formulation whether abortion is a cause or consequence of the problems he sees in the Black community. He goes on to blame “personal responsibility” as one major cause of the rate of abortions in the Black community:

The dissolution of the two-parent family (father/mother) has decimated the Black community economically, morally, and psychologically...This disintegration of the foundation of any society allows predators like Planned Parenthood to seize on the vulnerability. The destructive behaviors that fill the vacuum shackle the Black community in exponentially high STD/HIV infection rates, ever-increasing “unintended” pregnancy rates, and epidemic levels of abortion...” “Black babies are aborted at 5x the rate of the majority population; personal responsibility, massive indoctrination, and failed leadership is to blame.<sup>47</sup>

Star Parker, a Republican activist and columnist and founder of C.U.R.E. (Center for Urban Renewal Education) is quoted on TooManyAborted.com (one of Ryan Bomberger’s websites), along with several Black conservatives, supporting Bomberger’s mission. She claims that the Black community’s problems are a result of immorality and

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<sup>47</sup> <http://www.toomanyaborted.com/juneteenth-campaign/>

lack of personal responsibility: “The challenge facing Black America today is moral, not political. Abortion, AIDS, crime, poor education, family breakdown. These reflect poor personal decisions, not politics.” Clenard H. Childress, founder of L.E.A.R.N. (Life Education and Resource Network) Northeast argues on his website *Blackgenocide.org* that the “high rate of abortion has decimated the Black family and destroyed Black neighborhoods to the detriment of society at large.”<sup>48</sup>

In these passages from African-American Outreach (AAO) report for Priests for Life members, Alveda King argues for the Black community’s return to Biblical principles. She argues that liberal Black leaders led the Black community away from their moral foundation and implies that the problems in the Black community are a result of their “sin.”

In the 20th Century, Jesse Jackson and others led the African American community away from their values of the ages...Social problems such as the high rate of school drop outs, failing school systems, the fallout from the sexual revolution, teen pregnancy, abortion/abstinence, the breakdown of the family, unjust justice systems, links to poverty and crime are all connected...Poverty does not cause sin, sin causes poverty.

She goes on to say that following God’s word and promoting a “culture of life” rather than a “culture of death” can solve the social problems of the Black community—again, implying that the problems are caused by the moral failings of Black Americans.

“AAO was initially formed for the purpose of informing, educating, activating and transforming the culture of death decimating the African American community to a culture of life...” “...We will promote traditional family values, from a Biblical worldview...we will restore Life, Family and Hope in the Black

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<sup>48</sup> <http://Blackgenocide.org/home.html>

community.” “Many social issues that impact the Black Community can be solved and resolved by following God’s Word for life...”

In the following passage on his website, Bomberger also blames the Black community for social problems, arguing that their resistance to break away from their allegiances to Democrats contributes to their own “destruction.” He is arguing that most of the Black community follows Democratic politicians blindly simply because of their racial identification.

And that is the central issue when it comes to the urban community’s unwillingness to break out of the harmful group think that allows social policies to continue despite their destruction. There is too much emphasis on race and not on what’s right. Abortion is decimating the Black community...My belief is simply this: our pigmentation should never dictate conviction.<sup>49</sup>

In his response to the Ferguson protests and the young Black men killed by police, Bomberger also uses narratives of Black pathology on his website.

My heart is broken. Another young man, because of poor decisions, has died prematurely. And it never had to happen. What has followed has turned a tragic death into an absurd circus of rioting, racial rhetoric, and redirection...But let’s not kid ourselves. It’s not 1965. And these Black teenage boys are not dying in the act of marching for equality and justice. We have a culture that increasingly devalues life, and nowhere is that increase more evident than in urban America...And all the while, mainstream media, liberal politicians, and bubble-encased academic elites blame racism and inequality. The “HandsUp” crowd wants to declare an epidemic of police force brutality...They ignore the most glaring injustice that is at the root of so much of the violence in the Black community: fatherlessness. Michael Brown’s *divorced parents*, for instance... One is hard pressed to find any mainstream media outlet suggest that a young Black man’s behavior could possibly be responsible for a fatal outcome. Family disintegration couldn’t possibly be the reason communities are far more vulnerable to poorer educational outcomes, fewer economic opportunities, higher youth delinquency and violent crime rates...<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> <http://www.theradiancefoundation.org/768/>

<sup>50</sup> <http://www.theradiancefoundation.org/ferguson-fate-and-fatherlessness/>

The “Black pathology” narrative blames the problems of inner-city families on Black community itself. Throughout history, both liberals and conservatives have blamed Black women’s reproduction for various societal problems (Roberts 1997), and this rhetoric lives on in the worldview of some Black pro-life activists. This narrative frames the “urban” Black community as sorely lacking in the traditional values that hold middle-class families and communities together. The Black community’s “sin” is portrayed as both a cause and consequence of legalized abortion. At times, the pro-life leaders argue that legalized abortion has caused the problems in the Black community by encouraging fatherlessness and promoting a “culture of death.” At other times, they argue that the problems already present in the Black community are responsible for the disproportionate rate and a lack of resistance from the community. The “sins” of the Black community include fatherlessness, broken families, and sexual promiscuity leading to high rates of abortion, sexually transmitted diseases, and teen pregnancy.

When they discuss these social problems, they frame their dissent in terms of conservative Christian values and only discuss them in relation to the Black community, ignoring structural explanations in favor of moral ones. This narrative conflicts with their more common narrative of Black victimhood. It shows that the Black pro-life activists also blame the [poor] Black community for the incidence of abortion, not only the white “abortionists.”

## **Race-Baiting Liberals: The Conflicting “Colorblind” Narrative**

The third type of framing I identified is a “colorblind” narrative that blames liberals for constantly focusing on race and dividing the nation. Instead, they believe that racial differences should not factor into someone’s allegiances or perspectives. They call liberals “race-baiters,” “racialists,” “race hucksters,” and claim that they are “playing the race card” and “crying racism.” This narrative lines up well with the “colorblind” ideologies of the mainstream Republican Party. However, I observe a hesitation to express completely “colorblind” perspectives. For example, speaking at the 2012 Values Voters Summit—a conservative political conference that Ryan Bomberger was invited to speak at in 2012 and 2014—Bomberger begins his speech by discussing race relations in the United States. He first describes himself in a “colorblind” way—to the great delight of the nearly all white audience—then emphasizes that we *should* embrace racial differences, but then concludes that we should not be so “fixated” on race.

I’m as Black as Obama. That means I’m half white...half Black. That doesn’t make me an African-American. Just...simply...American,” (loud applause). Yes sir. Now I just want to get the uncomfortability of talking about race out of the way because I know that sometimes there are those who say we should just live in a colorblind society and just not see the color. No way! Let’s see it, let’s love it, let’s embrace it (applause). But it’s important that we’re not fooled by it. My pigmentation...says nothing about who I am. Pigmentation does not denote moral conviction (applause). So, when you look at our society and we see how we are just a race-fixated society, we’re fixated on all the wrong things.

In this same speech, he shows a comedic, animated anti-Obama video he made in which he criticizes the president for pandering to the African-American community and in turn criticizes the Black community for voting for him simply because of race. In the film, he sings, “You’re biracial and I am too. Racial profiling’s ok if it’s a vote for you?”

while an image of a ballot reading “I’m Black. Vote for me. I’m white. Vote for me.” shows on the screen. He expresses similar racial ideologies in his 2014 speech in which he starts with what can be understood as a “colorblind” statement, then argues against “colorblindness,” and finally describes his distaste with the “racial division” of liberal Black leaders.

Abortion does not advance colored people. And let’s get to the whole thing about colored people because we’re all colored people. Amen (rolls his eyes) (applause). Unless some of you are clear, are you transparent?... “I’m half white half Black and I feel like it’s given me in life an interesting perspective on the issue of race. I feel like my life has to be dedicated to seeing and helping promote racial harmony. It’s amazing to me how we are so fixated with the outer shell. I’m not saying ignore it. I’m not saying being colorblind. I love all these colors. They’re beautiful. Embrace them. But there’s so many things that we share in common...the same blood running through our veins...when it comes to issues of race, I’m so tired of the racial division that is spewed by mainstream media... We need healing and constructive dialogue. We don’t need Al Sharpton, Jesse Jackson out there trying to make a buck...<sup>51</sup>

Alveda King has also made statements about slavery that reflect a “colorblind” ideal. In the Priests for Life report, King argues that slavery and the Civil War was not about race and should instead be understood as a battle between good and evil.

President Abraham Lincoln and the Civil War championed the abolitionists’ movement in America to end slavery. 300,000 “white” soldiers died fighting in the Civil War to end slavery. Blacks sold Blacks to white slave traders. Some Blacks even owned slaves. There were cruel white masters. There were white abolitionists. The battle was not white against Black but good against evil.

In a 2008 speech, she also addresses this point, arguing that understanding this conflict as “Black vs. white” is misleading. She uses this framework to argue against reparations based on race:

It is important that we have a historical context to the issue of slavery and understand that the battle against oppression and segregation was not white

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<sup>51</sup> <http://www.theradiancefoundation.org/naacp/>



versus Black, but right versus wrong. There are no separate races divided by skin color. It was not whites who did this to Blacks, it was Southern racists...A political party based on abolition was formed by whites to free the slaves. If we discuss reparations without discussing the history there will never be a healing because the root cause of slavery will not have been identified and redeemed.

In a 2010 interview on Glenn Beck's FOX News program where she appeared with Pastor Stephen Broden, King also addresses reparations, stating that she does not believe that anyone today should be held responsible for reparations for slavery in the United States, but that "reparations" *are* owed from the abortion industry.

And the Founding Fathers, people say, well, they had slaves. Some of them did. All of them did not. There were Black Founding Fathers as well...There's a whole genocide movement today who's trying to sterilize, or abort, or eliminate certain members of the population. [Planned Parenthood]...that's who owes the reparations.

Reverend Childress also expresses opinions that line up closely with colorblind ideologies. In one example from our interview, he criticizes what he sees as the oversensitivity that Black Americans have towards racial slurs, arguing that every racial group has slurs for each other. He references a popular news story at the time about a Florida city commissioner who was being harshly criticized for using a racial slur:

To give an example, so... one word can get you fired...What is that word? The N-word! You're gone. Why? ...Listen. We used to have so many derogatory terms for white people...we used to argue in school. We had it for the Irish, the Italians. We got along back in my day, but these words were still used...You gotta ask yourself why? This guy down in Florida, some lady cut him off, he yelled...will probably lose his job. Now, I'm gonna be honest with you...that's me. I can't say this amongst my [Black peers]...but there had been just as angry words, wrong words, hurtful words, used by both races.

At another point in the conversation, Childress pointed out that he believes Civil Rights Act was unnecessary because the constitution already mandated that all men were created equal, and creating a second document to include African Americans would

actually further exclude them in the minds of Americans, focusing too much on race. He argued that Dr. King was not anti-American and did not want a “new constitution.” He added, “I’m trying to tell you...why Martin was so important...Martin would say he loved the country. He loved the ideals and the constitution and declaration and what this country could be. He said he loved America despite its egregious sin against the African Americans.”

In an appearance on FOX News, Alveda King discussed the Ferguson protests with commentator Neil Cavuto, describing the protests in a way that was sympathetic to young African American men targeted by police, but ultimately concludes with a conservative “colorblind” perspective that blames the racial inequality in the justice system on arrest quotas and a poor economy—specifically referencing immigrants taking “all the jobs”—and not on racism. She criticizes liberal Black leaders for “agitating” the Black community. At one point, she acknowledges the “white privilege” of Neil Cavuto after he brings it up, but does not seem to apply that same argument to the events in Ferguson.

King: Reverend Sharpton is very good at going into a community and agitating it and stirring it up...Some people think that the violence and agitation is necessary, but we accomplished so much with peaceful demonstrations in the 20<sup>th</sup> century...I always am an advocate of the nonviolent tactics rather than the “Burn, Baby, Burn” or the “No Justice, No Peace.” ...

Cavuto: ...[MLK] never went after law enforcement officers...today it’s just the opposite...Sharpton and others draw that divide, encourage African American kids to be suspicious of officers...

King: I have talked to officers and lawmakers and many are now admitting that they have a quota system, revenue driven, and they have to go after what they call the low hanging fruit. Very often that is African Americans...

Cavuto: ...in other words, there is racial profiling going on.

King: Some profiling, but not only Black skin or Brown skin but Latinos and even maybe poor people. An officer may look at you and say, I’ve got a quota, I’ve got to write more tickets...it’s money!

Cavuto: I was out at a dinner with an African American executive...I had no trouble getting a cab, he had a devil of a time...so quite aware that racism is alive and well...

King: And you have white privilege! ... I do agree that the deaths need to stop. This is systemic. We need to get to the bottom of it. We need to have solutions for those who are dreamless and hopeless and jobless. We need to have programs rather than bringing the immigrants in and giving them all of the jobs and everything like that...we need to fix the system rather than turn the young people who need the protection of the law enforcement... against law enforcement... Sharpton is not helping...Farrakhan...not helpful...we need to actually pray for opportunities, programs, and solutions that are going to give our people jobs, hope, freedom and liberty...If Michael [Brown] had money in his pocket, he wouldn't steal cigarettes, if Eric [Garner] had had money in his pockets, he wouldn't have to be selling loose cigarettes...There's something wrong with that system where our young people are not able to work and to have dignity..."

Similarly, in a 2012 FOX News interview about the shooting of Trayvon Martin, King is sympathetic to Trayvon Martin and his family, but criticizes Black leaders Jesse Jackson and Al Sharpton for "playing the race-card" and "race-baiting." In this and the former examples, King's comments convey a sense of connection with the Black community, but also a desire for "colorblindness" and, most significantly, distaste for liberal Black leaders.

Trayvon Martin, a young man, cut down in his prime...I would say, because of my ministry, aborted late, a late abortion. Now his dreams are dead. But also with Mr. Zimmerman, his life is turned upside down...we must answer this nonviolently, not with rage, and not with anger, not by playing the race card...And so I'm asking Rev. Jackson, Rev. Sharpton...Trayvon Martin's family is grieving. They don't need all this anger and race-baiting right now.

Ryan Bomberger also addresses the "Black Lives Matter" protests in several articles on his anti-abortion website. In general, he takes a far less sympathetic position, blaming the ills of the Black community for the young men's deaths, as I show above. His major motivation, however, is to criticize liberal Black leaders, journalists, and the mainstream media for creating a "race-war." In this first passage, he argues that the

liberal media falsely portrayed Trayvon Martin's death as white-on-Black crime in order to encourage violence:

Trayvon's exploited and tragic death is not about race but about bolstering a false ideology and justifying misdirected violent behavior...The death of Black men, according to racialsists like [Tavis] Smiley, [Jesse] Jackson, and [Al] Sharpton is due to racism. Calling Zimmerman a "white Hispanic" enables perpetuating the false narrative that Black males mostly die at the hands of white men. As someone who is as Black as Obama (does that make me a "white Black"?), my heart is to see a nation engaged in healthy conversation about race and constructive action. This is not it...Who is mourning this Black-on-Black violence?<sup>52</sup>

In another article, Bomberger compares the reaction to the Trayvon Martin shooting to the death of a Black woman resulting from complications from an abortion. He claims her death and other Black women "killed" in abortion clinics are ignored by liberals and mainstream media, invalidating their claim to care about racial justice:

She wasn't wearing a hoodie, but was killed in the 'hood...Planned Parenthood. A Black woman was left to bleed to death for 5.5 hours. 911 was never called. Her unborn child, mutilated. Both intentionally killed by the world's largest abortion chain. Where are those who demanded "Justice for Trayvon"? .... Trayvon's tragic death brought out the racialsists, the Civil Wrong activists and other liberals in droves. A Black woman is killed by Planned Parenthood...the "I AM TRAYVON MARTIN" crowd is silent. Tonya, her unborn child, her 1 year old son and her family deserve justice. Defund Planned Parenthood.<sup>53</sup>

Bomberger also addressed the Ferguson protests, arguing that liberal Black leaders use race as a scapegoat for their problems and exploit the deaths of young Black men to encourage a "race war." He says that the claims of racial injustice in the United States are extremely exaggerated in order to stoke "racial fires." Interestingly, he draws a distinction between Michael Brown and Eric Garner—who was killed by a Staten Island police officer's chokehold—claiming that when the protesters "cry wolf," these

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<sup>52</sup> <http://www.theradiancefoundation.org/trayvons-death-and-the-blaxploitation-of-the-right-to-life/>

<sup>53</sup> <http://www.toomanyaborted.com/justice-4-tonya/>

legitimate stories get ignored. He concludes by pointing out what he sees as hypocrisy in the “Black Lives Matter” slogan, arguing that liberals do not value all Black lives, specifically unborn Black lives.

Liberals are always touting their anti-war credentials...But in Ferguson, there is one war they can't seem to promote enough—race war...Attorney General Eric Holder and President Obama (both of mixed racial lineage) have complained that they themselves are victims of white-on-Black racism. Criticism against this administration could only *possibly* be because they're (partially) Black. It couldn't possibly be because of sheer incompetence...But race is the easy scapegoat. And it creates great visuals for mainstream media who likes to pretend that we're still in the early 1960s and nothing's changed for Black people. It's as if they want to incite riots...Michael Brown didn't need to die. But like Trayvon Martin, his death is being exploited for a bigger agenda of division...Liberals, Black and white...are stoking racial fires in the form of resentment and riots that do nothing but steal hope and possibility from the Black community.” “...There *is* racial injustice, but not nearly to the extent that the leading race hucksters would like us to believe. When so many are crying wolf so many times, the real instances get lost in the noise (see the tragic video of this husband and father, Eric Garner, who was killed as a result of an NYC police officer's chokehold).<sup>54</sup>

#BlackLivesMatter. Well it depends... Racialists don't care about context, don't care about evidence, don't care about truth. They see an opportunity to exploit and divide so they fuel racial fires. Of course Black lives matter. All lives matter. But you can't pick and choose *when* they matter.<sup>55</sup>

The “colorblind narrative” of Black pro-life activists argues that as a society, we focus far too much on race and racism. The Black pro-life leaders criticize liberals of all racial groups for inciting “race-war” and playing the “race-card.” They argue that while white racism does exist, it is not nearly as prevalent or important as liberals and mainstream media purport. The only place they believe racism to be a significant factor is abortion, singling it out at the only racial issue that matters, while simultaneously

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<sup>54</sup> <http://www.theradiancefoundation.org/ferguson/>

<sup>55</sup> <http://www.theradiancefoundation.org/alllivesmatter/>

ridiculing liberal Black leaders for “crying racism.” In other words, the Black pro-life leaders despised liberals who claimed that racism was responsible for the perceived ills of the Black community, while claiming that racism was responsible for abortion, and therefore for the “problems” in the Black community. Their “colorblind” ideologies were the least common of the three narratives, but were highly conspicuous when they discussed other issues related to race relations in the United States. The colorblind narrative clearly conflicts with both the Black victimhood and the Black pathology narratives in that both narratives discuss Black Americans in racialized terms, as a collective whole, and the “colorblind” narrative avoids mentioning race whenever possible.

### **Discussion: Inconsistent Ideologies and Frame Resonance**

I find three major narratives Black pro-life leaders used when discussing racism and race relations. First, their most prevalent racial narrative focuses on “Black victimhood.” This narrative is the basis of how they frame their pro-life activism. They argue that Planned Parenthood is involved in a racist and conspiratorial plot to control the population of Black Americans. The Black community is framed as the ultimate victims—victims of racial genocide. Next, I observe a less common, but still consistent narrative of “Black pathology,” in which they describe the Black community as lacking in traditional values and morality, blaming inner-city Black communities for social problems. Lastly, I observe that Black pro-life leaders express a “colorblind” narrative,

used when they are discussing other racial issues besides abortion, that criticizes liberals for paying too much attention to race and stirring up a “race war.”

While Black conservatives are certainly diverse, certain racial ideologies are common among them. The Black pro-life leaders I examine in this paper are political conservatives and they share many ideologies in common with dominant conservative thought historically and today. However, while their anti-abortion stance is certainly common among conservatives, their framing of abortion as Black genocide departs significantly from the colorblind and anti-victimhood ideologies of the Right. In the following discussion, I explore how Black pro-life leaders are similar to and different from Black political conservatives in terms of their racial ideologies.

Black pro-life leaders fall in line with Black conservative thought in many ways—most notably in their discussions of colorblind ideology and the Black poor. When discussing issues related to race apart from abortion, Black pro-life leaders make the same kind of colorblind arguments as Black conservatives generally, claiming that racism—*besides* racist abortion—no longer holds Black Americans back from success, that liberals purposely stir up racial anxieties to provoke turmoil, and that the society is too fixated with race. They also align themselves with Black conservative thought in their criticisms of single-parenthood and “immorality” in the urban Black community. Black pro-life leaders’ racial ideologies differ from Black conservatives’ in one significant way—their claim that abortion is Black genocide and that Black men, women, and children are victims of racism by Planned Parenthood, and by association, the United States government. While Black conservatives generally reject and despise what they call

the “victimhood mentality,” the very foundation of the Black pro-life leaders’ work is a claim of Black victimhood. Their success depends on their audience accepting the framing of Black women and children as unsuspecting and undeserving targets of racism. Additionally, the Black pro-life leaders consistently reference past injustices faced by African Americans—slavery, eugenics programs, and Jim Crow segregation—and argue that their repercussions persist today in the form of population control. In many ways, these arguments resemble more closely those made by far-left liberals than by conservatives, especially since they draw on true histories of racial and reproductive abuses so rarely referenced by either liberals or conservatives. They also grant significant power to Margaret Sanger and eugenicists of her time, claiming that her goals are still being carried out today. These arguments significantly challenge the Black conservative impulse to “forget the past” and the common criticism that Black liberals vastly overestimate the power of white racism, keeping Black Americans trapped in the past. Case in point, Black pro-life leaders claim that Black Americans are victims of a conspiratorial plot to control their population through abortion while simultaneously criticizing anti-police brutality protesters for “crying wolf” and “race-baiting.”

How does a political party that has staked its claim in colorblindness and equal opportunity admit to a vast, targeted, and conspiratorial racism against Black people in modern day America? How can Republicans rectify this framing of abortion as a civil rights abuse while they reject new and old civil rights legislation as unnecessary or even racist? Will framing abortion as Black genocide attract more African Americans to the



Republican Party? Will the presence of more African American pro-life leaders attract more African Americans into the pro-life movement? One significant barrier is the conflicting racial ideologies described above. Many African Americans believe in conspiracy theories about the extermination of the Black community—theories founded in historical realities of reproductive abuses. In some ways, the argument that abortion is today's version of Black genocide is not so far-fetched. However, the condescending tone that many Republicans, both Black and white, use to describe poor African Americans may prevent some would-be converts from joining the pro-life ranks.

Additionally, as Prisock (2007) points out, the Republican Party's success over the last 50 years has depended on keeping a "safe" distance from African Americans and problems that are considered racial (185). With the success of the "southern strategy," Republicans learned that they could win national elections without the help of African Americans. If Republicans embrace the "abortion as Black genocide" framework and push for legislation like Prenatal Non Discrimination Act—that would outlaw abortions that were performed because of the race of baby—on a large scale in order to outlaw abortion, do they run the risk of alienating that segment of white voters who feel threatened by racialized legislation and claims of racism?

As Benford and Snow (2000) argue, credibility depends on three factors: *frame consistency, empirical credibility, and credibility of the frame articulators or claimsmakers*. First, a frame is inconsistent if there are apparent contradictions between a social movement organization's beliefs, claims, and actions. In the case of 'Black

genocide' framing, I argue that this framing is fundamentally inconsistent with both mainstream conservative ideologies and liberal civil rights ideologies. Therefore, it is unlikely that this frame extension will be fully accepted by either the mainstream pro-life movement or Black Americans generally because it conflicts so deeply with dominant ideologies in both identity groups. *Frame extension* is a process in which movement organizations seek to gain potential supporters by strategically appealing the perceived values of those potential supporters (Snow et al. 1986). Such radical frame extensions can lead to inconsistent framing that does not strongly appeal to anyone (Mika 2006; Snow et al., 1986; Youngman 2003).

In the next section, I further explore the 'Black genocide' framing strategy by examining the way that Black pro-life leaders and Black reproductive justice leaders understand and make sense of the Black men and women in the opposing movements. I specifically examine how the credibility of each group is questioned and what this means for the potential success of the 'Black genocide' frame extension. When both groups are claiming to fight against racism, the boundaries between progressive and conservative movements are blurred.

## Narratives of Racial Authenticity and Betrayal in the 'Black Genocide' Framing

### Dispute

#### *Frame Extension and Frame Resonance*

The pro-life activists using the 'Black genocide' framing hope to mobilize African Americans by aligning the pro-life cause with the potential supporters' values. Such a significant frame extension has the potential to mobilize new supporters from many different identity groups, but also carries the risk of a strong counter-mobilization. In the case of the emerging 'abortion as Black genocide' framing, especially in response to the billboard campaigns in recent years, reproductive justice activists have taken a leading role in attempting to discredit the pro-life activists making these claims. Because this frame extension is so highly racialized and targeted towards Black women, Black women's rights activists were compelled to respond. This interaction created a framing/counterframing dispute between Black pro-life activists and Black reproductive justice activists. As I show below, because both of these groups claim to support the health and safety of Black women and the Black community, in order to maintain credibility, they must attempt to discredit the others' claims to speak for the Black community. Resonance depends on the credibility of a frame and credibility depends in part on the *credibility of the frame articulators or claimsmakers* (Benford and Snow 2000). A social movement's claims are hypothetically most effective if they come from speakers who are perceived as credible (Benford and Snow 2000). In a framing contest,

the social movement with the greatest credibility is likely to succeed. The presence of a strong countermovement can be both a threat to movement successes and an opportunity to mobilize supporters (as in the case of RJ supporters) (McCaffrey and Keys 2000).

Threats created by countermovements may create new opportunities for movements to mobilize supporters in opposition to these threats (McCaffrey and Keys 2000).

In the next sections, I will introduce the reproductive justice framework, detail the historical context of the reproductive justice movement, and explain how and why these activists have rejected the ‘Black genocide’ framing in its previous iterations. Then, I survey the research on Black conservatives’ contested claim to racial authenticity in the Black community. This review sets the stage for a discussion of my findings on perceptions of racial authenticity in the debate over the ‘Black genocide’ framing strategy.

### ***Women of Color, the Pro-Choice Movement and the Reproductive Justice Framework***

As many women of color activists and scholars have pointed out, framing Black women as simply victims of reproductive abuses is a wholly inaccurate portrayal (Roberts 1997). Black women have long advocated for reproductive control over their own bodies and combined their opposition to reproductive abuses—like forced and coerced sterilizations—with their support for abortion and birth control. As Silliman, Fried, Ross, and Gutierrez (2004) point out, “Women of color have had no trouble distinguishing between population control...and voluntary birth control...” (7). In this way, Black women have historically distanced themselves both from those white

feminists who prioritized abortion rights and those Black men who declared all abortion and birth control as genocidal (Silliman et al. 2004, 55; Ziegler 2009). For example, Congresswoman Shirley Chisholm in 1970 wrote that Black genocide arguments were “male rhetoric for male ears.” Chisholm served as NARAL’s honorary president for years after *Roe v. Wade* (Ziegler 2009). African American women’s rights advocates argued that reliable access to contraception and abortion would protect Black women’s health.

This historical precedent led to the “reproductive justice” framework of today, which was developed by women of color who felt that the “choice” framework of the abortion rights movement was too narrow and did not address the reproductive concerns of poor women and women of color (Silliman et al. 2004). Many women of color organizations rejected the “pro-choice” label in the years after *Roe* because of its singular focus on abortion, opting instead for the broader terms “reproductive rights,” “reproductive freedom,” and “reproductive health” (Silliman et al. 2004). The term “reproductive justice” emerged from a Black women’s caucus at a 1994 national pro-choice conference in Chicago (Oaks 2009). The Black women gathered there sought a framework that would encompass both reproductive rights and social justice. A reproductive justice analysis addresses not only the right to abortion, but also the right to have children and to parent with dignity (Luna and Luker 2013). While more affluent white women have focused mainly on the right not to have children, many poor women, women with disabilities, and women of color must fight for the right to have children and parent the children they have. Solinger (2001) makes the case that “choice” is unsuitable

for a strong abortion rights movement because of its individualistic and market-based connotations. Additionally, RJ advocates argue that the notion of “choice” ignores the many women—poor women, young women, women of color—who do not have a full range of reproductive choices (Solinger 2001, Luna and Luker 2013, Silliman et al. 2004). “Choice,” then, is dependent in many ways on class and race privilege, as well as sexuality, and nationality, and deems some women good choice makers and others bad choice makers. The concept of “choice” implies that all women have the ability to make choices about what happens to their bodies, but when a woman choose abortion because she cannot afford to have a baby, she certainly does not experience her decision as a “choice” (Silliman et al. 2004). The significant curtailing of access to abortion since *Roe*—in the form of restrictions on public funding, gestational limits, waiting periods, parental consent laws, etc.—have had the most significant impact on low-income women, poor women, and women of color. Luna and Luker (2013) also point out that the Supreme Court decisions that allow abortion restrictions as long as they do not create an ‘undue burden’ for the woman seeking an abortion assume that every woman’s access is equal. They ask, what does ‘undue burden’ mean in a society with vast economic, racial, and geographic disparities in access to abortion services (Luna and Luker 2013)? The human rights/social justice framework is attractive in this sense because “it bridges the gap between having legal rights and lacking the economic resources to access those rights” (Silliman et al. 2004, 17).

The white women leading the mainstream pro-choice movement failed to address racism and classism in abortion politics as well as within the movement, most

significantly when they advocated for policies that would ultimately hurt poor women and women of color—e.g., sterilization guidelines, coercive birth control policies, safety of hormonal birth control, etc. (Silliman et al. 2004, 11; Davis 1983). The mainstream pro-choice movement has historically supported coercive population control policies that make the claim of ‘Black genocide’ seem reasonable (Davis 1983). Additionally, since many middle-class white feminists were easily able to access and pay for abortions in the years following *Roe v. Wade*, they did not continue to fight for disadvantaged women’s right to an abortion—signified by the passage of the Hyde Amendment in 1976 banning federal funding for poor women’s access to abortion (Silliman et al. 2004). In 1983, Angela Davis argued that because the abortion rights campaign had failed to take seriously Black people’s suspicions about birth control policies, the movement was fundamentally flawed from the beginning (1983). Even a cursory look at the history of the birth control movement shows eugenic motivations and reproductive abuses of poor women and women of color, and disregarding these fears alienated many women from the pro-choice movement who would otherwise support the right to an abortion. Additionally, early in the fight for abortion rights, advocates argued that abortion rights would help to alleviate poverty, “as if having fewer children could create more jobs, higher wages, better school, etc.” (Davis 1983, 205). The assumption that reducing the number of poor children would solve poverty is based on the same eugenic principles of the past. Thus, as Davis skillfully shows, “What was demanded as a ‘right’ for the privileged came to be interpreted as a ‘duty’ for the poor” (1983, 210). If the abortion rights movement of the 1970s had conducted a self-evaluation and taken seriously the

concerns of Black women at the time, the movement would look significantly different today. Thus, the reproductive justice framework compels the analysis of the intersecting issues of race and reproductive politics that are brought to light with the “abortion as Black genocide” framing.

### **Black Conservatives, Racial Authenticity, and the Contested Claim to Black Heroes**

Conservative principles are generally believed to be at odds with the interests of African Americans and most liberals dismiss Black conservatives as “fabricated and inauthentic voices that simply are not committed to racial justice and empowerment” (Bracey 2008, xi). In general, the Black community has been very skeptical of Black conservatives—largely because of the negative portrayals of the Black poor and “Black culture” often offered by Black conservatives (Tate and Randolph 2002). On the other hand, Black conservatives are heavily critical of Black liberals for what they argue is a “victimhood mentality.” They believe that this perspective denies Black Americans agency and absolves them of any responsibility for their own choices (Prisock 2007). This anti-victimhood narrative makes up a large part of their ideologies. However, when discussing their position in the African American community as Black conservatives, they are quick to portray themselves as victims of unfair treatment and marginalization—a rhetoric that conservatives of all kinds have adopted in recent years (Prisock 2007, 236). Black conservative Thomas Sowell has suggested that Black conservatives are



victims of “the new McCarthyism” and believes that white and Black liberal elites are working together to destroy them (Smith 2002, 135). As Smith points out, they frequently refer to each other as “warriors in a battle against liberalism and the media” (Smith 2002, 135).

Both Black liberals and conservatives utilize the rhetoric of “race traitors,” “sellouts,” and “Uncle Toms” to criticize other African Americans who they believe are acting against the interests of Black Americans as a collective. Black conservatives believe that their views are “often misconstrued, maligned, or not given a fair hearing” and that liberals attempt to silence them (Prisock 2007, 234). According to Shelby Steele, one of the most famous Black conservative intellectuals, Black conservatives are “marginalized,” “humiliated,” and “too often disregarded rather than debated” (Smith 2002, 124). Black conservatives believe that they are silenced because they are the only ones who will tell the “truth” about the plight of African Americans today—in contrast to liberals, who they argue “have a vested interest in maintaining a reality where African Americans are perpetually victimized,” so that white liberals can preserve their power over the Black community (Prisock 2007, 235). In other words, Black conservatives believe that government aid programs and affirmative action benefit the white elite by keeping Black Americans under control. Black conservatives argue that they are “outsiders because they emphasize individuality over collectivism” and are forced out by other Blacks—this notion of a “punishing Black community that resents individuality” is a powerful rhetorical image (Smith 2002, 124).

Prisock argues, however, that Black conservatives' perspectives are clearly not marginalized in the mainstream media, considering the significant media exposure they have received. Tate and Randolph (2002) point to what they consider another "contradiction" of Black conservatives: one of the major foundations of Black conservative thought is "self-reliance" but, they argue, Black conservatives today rely heavily on the monetary support of the white-dominated Republican Party and conservative think-tanks. Black conservatives clearly despise the fact that they are perceived as being "bought off" by white conservatives (Smith 2002). Tate and Randolph (2002) also argue that their fight against affirmative action is somewhat hypocritical because many Black conservatives today have personally benefitted from affirmative action. Black conservatives claim to be "individuals" and to "transcend race," but their critics argue that their success in political circles is largely due to the fact that they follow closely to a pre-established white conservative worldview and that their political success in conservative circles is largely due to their race. Despite their appeal to white conservatives, their support from the Republican Party, and their media exposure, Black conservatives have not convinced a large percentage of the Black population to join to ranks of the Republican Party (Tate and Randolph 2002).

Critics of Black conservatives claim that they have "no organic relationship to the African American past and no real political, cultural, or emotional ties to African Americans in the present" (Dillard 2001, 27). Instead, critics argue that Black conservatives simply utilize the predetermined conservative rhetoric on race, and are rewarded for doing so by white conservative powerbrokers—"nothing more than the

black face of the white Right” (Dillard 2001, 27). Dillard (2001) shows that Black conservatives respond to such critiques by attempting to connect themselves and their philosophies to important Black figures of the past, like Booker T. Washington, Frederick Douglass, Marcus Garvey, Martin Luther King Jr., and Malcolm X, and reject Black liberals’ claims to these figures. For example, in 1991, Clarence Thomas said, “I don’t see how the civil rights people today can claim Malcolm X as one of their own. Where does he say black people should be begging the Labor Department for jobs?” (Dillard 2001, 24). Following this comment, Black liberals harshly denounced Thomas for misappropriating Malcolm X’s words. Claiming Black heroes as their own is one strategy in which Black conservatives attempt to gain authenticity and legitimacy in African American communities (Dillard 2001, 52), and, I would argue, among left-leaning whites. Both Black liberals and conservatives strategically utilize the words of Black historic figures to legitimate their perspective and position themselves in the collective history of Black Americans, but Black conservatives are viewed by many as inauthentic in their claims to speak for the Black community. However, as Bracey (2008) notes, this perspective ignores the legacy of Black conservatism in the United States, tracing its roots back to the nation’s founding. Despite its deep roots in African American history, Bracey argues that in contrast to traditional Black conservatism, modern Black conservatives do not have widespread support of the Black community and are mainly supported by political actors outside the Black community (2008, xiii). When examining claims of misappropriation by Black conservatives, Dillard points out that that the larger question of “what it means to misappropriate the past as well as how one adjudicates a

proper from improper solicitation” is often pushed to the background of this debate (28). The contestation over Black heroes is indicative of a larger debate over what it means to be a Black American.

### **Narratives Of Racial Authenticity And Betrayal**

This research explores how Black pro-life leaders and Black reproductive rights supporters understand and make sense of each other. As a part of their movement framing, each group must discredit the other’s claim to speak for the Black community. Based on my analysis of Black pro-life leaders, I find that they frame Black men and women who support abortion rights as traitors to the Black community, who were either duped or bribed by the powerful white pro-choice movement into supporting abortion. Black pro-life leaders claim that the Black community has historically been anti-birth control and abortion, and that white eugenicists—specifically Margaret Sanger—bribed Black community leaders to support abortion. Similarly, they argue that Black leaders of the Civil Rights Movement were anti-abortion, but changed their positions in order to gain political power. Based on my analysis of Black reproductive justice leaders, I find that they also frame Black pro-life leaders as misguided in very similar ways and argue that they actively ignore the true needs of Black women in favor of political power. The following sections shows how Black men and women on both sides of the abortion debate understand and make sense of their opponents when those opponents are also Black. Both groups’ claims to be fighting racism are complicated by the fact that their direct opponents are also claiming to be fighting racism.

This interaction is an example of competitive framing between social movements. They engage in the three responses to ideological challenges by opponents identified by McCaffrey and Keys (2000): *polarization-vilification*, *frame saving*, and *frame debunking*. *Polarization* defines “us versus them.” *Vilification* frames an opponent as corrupt or evil. *Frame debunking* is an attempt to discredit competing ideologies, and *frame saving* is an attempt to save or restore a frame that has been criticized.

***“The Spell of Margaret Sanger’s Scheme”: Black Pro-Life Narratives of Racial Betrayal***

Black pro-life leaders frame abortion as inherently racist. To make such a strong, racialized claim—that abortion is the most significant form of racism and is tantamount to genocide—Black pro-life leaders must contend with the fact that many Black leaders are supportive of abortion rights. My focus in this section is on how Black pro-life leaders make sense of Black men and women who support abortion rights. To the Black pro-life leaders, the connection between abortion and eugenics is crystal clear. They express disbelief and anger that many Black leaders support abortion rights despite what they consider damning evidence of a government conspiracy to control the Black population. All the pro-life leaders tell a story of bribery and betrayal when discussing Black leaders who are pro-choice. Beginning with Margaret Sanger and continuing today, they argue that Black leaders have been enticed by funding from the abortion industry to turn their backs on the Black community. In our interview, Pastor Stephen Broden claims that the Black community was once vehemently against abortion:

Our community's attitude...concerning abortion...we were dead set against it. Any cursory examination of the attitude of Blacks during the 60s and the 70s, we believed it was a deliberate attempt to try and control the Black population. Black Panthers [and]...many of our elected officials...were very up in arms at the time and very actively pushing back against Planned Parenthood. Not the case today.

In this passage, Broden positions himself as an authority on what the Black community as a whole felt and believed, disregarding the now well-documented history of the groups of Black women who fought for reproductive control throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century. This use of a collective “we” and “us”—and the notion that the Black community was once united in their anti-birth control and anti-abortion stance—was a common rhetorical device among the pro-life leaders. Reverend Clenard Childress makes a similar point in our interview, arguing that all the Black civil rights leaders were pro-life:

By the way, the Black Panther Party was pro-life. All of the advocates of the early civil rights movement, every faction, was pro-life. They recognized abortion for what it was...We (Black Americans) were more conservative...in the 70s. And we had far more leadership. Stokely Carmichael...Not saying you had to agree with his politics. He was pro-life.

Childress also uses “we” to refer to all Black Americans, implying that his statement is a taken for granted fact about the entire population. He acknowledges political differences among Black Americans (“not saying you had to agree with his politics”), but seems to believe that abortion was not a contentious subject. He also compares Black leadership then to now, arguing that “we had far more leadership” then. One Black leader today who is the Black pro-life leaders consistently point to as an example of poor leadership is Jesse Jackson. Every pro-life leader included in this research tells a story of Jesse Jackson as proof that Black leaders have been bribed by the

abortion industry. In my conversation with Alveda King, she argues that he was once pro-life and then switched his position:

There were African American pro-life leaders who were very strong in the 20th century. Jesse Jackson who now is a pro-abortion advocate initially had one of the strongest pro-life speeches that was ever done because his mother was encouraged to abort him and she didn't.

In our interview, Reverend Childress also argues that when Jesse Jackson wanted to be president, he changed his position on abortion in order to gain political power:

So Jesse Jackson...[said] 'What happens to mind of a person, the moral fabric of a nation that can abort a baby without a pang of conscience? Where will be two years from now?' Then, when he wants to be president, what's the most important thing? I'll never forget it...he says, 'A woman's right to choose...the most important civil rights issue today.' And he was a person who was saved from an abortion...so, you had this shift.

Jesse Jackson is framed as a traitor and as an opportunist who turned his back on Black Americans in exchange for political power. They blame Jesse Jackson's "shift" in perspective, along with other Black leaders, as being partly responsible for the larger shift away from moral pro-life beliefs within the Black community. Their argument that these Black leaders led the community astray affords significant power to a few men to change the hearts and minds of millions of Black Americans—as well as very little agency to individual Black Americans.

The pro-life leaders' story of Black deception and betrayal extends as far back as Margaret Sanger, the founder of the organization now called Planned Parenthood. Each Black pro-life leader told a story about Margaret Sanger and American eugenicists bribing Black preachers to bring birth control to their communities. Rev. Childress argues that Margaret Sanger and the birth control advocates of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century

intentionally used Black preachers to encourage contraceptive use—because, he argues, they knew that the Black community did not trust the government, but would trust their religious leaders. Childress goes on to claim that most Black leaders today have been persuaded to betray the Black community on the issue on abortion in exchange for funding, just like the leaders of Margaret Sanger’s time:

Because of our inception...we did not come waving at the statue of liberty saying thank God we’re here...That community came here enslaved. They came here disenfranchised. So it is very skeptical of government and...the perceived ruling powers. So...Margaret Sanger said we need to get some colored ministers who can be the face of this. And she bribed them. Which is the same problem [today]—NAACP, totally bribed. Jesse Jackson, totally bribed. Al Sharpton, totally bribed. The major perceived African American leadership has fallen under the spell of Margaret Sanger’s scheme...

In their understanding of this history, Margaret Sanger is awarded a significant amount of power in dictating the actions of Black preachers and the Black community in general.

Pastor Broden makes the same point about Sanger convincing Black preachers to comply with her eugenic plans. In Broden’s description in our interview, the preachers were “duped and deceived” rather than bribed, framing them as tools of Sanger’s plan rather than simply opportunists:

[Black preachers] were sold a bill of goods...[Sanger] convinced them. And W.E.B. Du Bois, through his degrees and his training, was able to convince them that to control the poverty level in our community...you had to control the population...through birth control...I think they were duped and deceived into believing that.

However, in the 2009 anti-abortion film *Maaafa 21*, Pastor Broden uses the betrayal narrative when he says, “There’s never been a shortage of Black leaders willing to sell us down the river.” In this case, he is framing the Black leaders as culpable and cruel rather than “duped.” Similarly, Day Gardner, a Black woman and President of the National



Black Pro-Life Union, describes the Black politicians, ministers, and community organizers who worked with Sanger in Harlem in much more malicious terms—as Judases who “sold their souls for 30 pieces of silver” when they participated in “ethnic cleansing”,<sup>56</sup>

The Black pro-life leaders call themselves civil rights leaders, associate themselves with the civil rights movement of the 1960s and consistently utilize Martin Luther King Jr. and his words in their framing. Dr. King is a highly contested figure between the pro-life and pro-choice movements because both claim him as one of their own. Dr. King never took a firm position on the abortion issue, but he did openly support Planned Parenthood. His wife, Coretta Scott King, accepted an award from Planned Parenthood on his behalf and she supported abortion rights throughout her life. However the Black pro-life leaders disregard her as a traitor to her husband’s legacy. The uncertainty about Dr. King’s stance on abortion does not deter them from claiming him as a pro-life leader and using his words as a part of their framing. Alveda King—niece of Dr. King—claims unequivocally her uncle was pro-life. She frequently uses her connection to Dr. King in her pro-life movement work, using his quote, “Injustice anywhere is threat to justice anywhere” and versions of his “I Have a Dream” speech. On the Radiance Foundation website, Bomberger bemoans Dr. King’s “mistake” of not actively rejecting Planned Parenthood when he was alive. He claims that abortion is a *greater* injustice than the civil rights fought for by King:

Sadly, [Dr. King’s] lack of awareness of Planned Parenthood spurred on an even more insidious injustice than that which he challenged with such spiritual fervor.

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<sup>56</sup> [http://www.sistersong.net/documents/CollectiveVoices\\_Summer2011\\_rf2.pdf](http://www.sistersong.net/documents/CollectiveVoices_Summer2011_rf2.pdf)

We honor a great man while acknowledging he wasn't always right. Abortion is now epidemic in the Black community...This certainly isn't the "dream" MLK spoke of, but a nightmare reality...When the nation's largest abortion chain invokes King's name, to justify the slaughter of over 1.21 million innocent lives each year, it mocks the sacrifice of one who fought, and died, for human dignity...Martin Luther King Jr. was...enamored with the façade of Planned Parenthood and its glossy cover of family planning and the false assurance of eliminating poverty...Instead, the divide that King fought so passionately to mend became a chasm filled with communities ravaged by out-of-wedlock births, exponentially high STD/HIV rates, and rampant fatherlessness.<sup>57</sup>

Bomberger is arguing that Dr. King was misled by the "façade of Planned Parenthood" and that he was "not always right" while elsewhere in his writings framing King's words as infallible. This narrative frames Dr. King as a victim of deceit, deserving of sympathy, but lacking the essential information to make an informed decision. In her written report to Priests for Life supporters, Alveda King also frames Black leaders who are pro-choice today as "victims," falling prey to the abortion industry. In her estimation, Margaret Sanger is still exerting control over Black leaders, nearly fifty years after her death:

[M]any of the iconic African American heroes today are victims of the lies of the abortion industry. So many have fallen for the lies that abortion and free contraceptives are women's health care...President Nelson Mandela and Poet Laureate Maya Angelou are two such examples...fell as victims to the lies of Margaret Sanger, Founder of Planned Parenthood and the eugenics abortion gang...

The NAACP is also a very common target for Black pro-life leaders because of the pro-choice stance of most of its leaders. Childress and King have both picketed NAACP conferences and events. Childress led protests at the 2008 NAACP convention in Cincinnati, accusing the organization of practicing racism against Black children because of their pro-choice stance. King told me that she is still a member of the NAACP despite disagreeing with their policies: "...Even today and I go sometimes and carry

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<sup>57</sup> <http://www.lifenews.com/2012/01/16/planned-parenthood-uses-martin-luther-king-to-promote-abortion/>

signs and protest...sometimes I go inside and raise pertinent questions because I don't believe in letting anybody highjack truth or take something away from us...even though it's been infiltrated, we take it back. That's my way of doing that.”

In much of his writing, Bomberger takes specific aim at the NAACP arguing that they fail in their mission to uplift the Black community and violate Black Americans' civil rights by supporting abortion access. On his website, he argues that the organization has betrayed the unborn in exchange for political power.

Groups such as the NAACP (which has become The National Association for the Abortion of Colored People) and the Congressional Black Caucus aid and abet this mass destruction of beautiful potential in the Black community... The NAACP refuses to defend the most vulnerable and disenfranchised among us...stands by as our future is being killed... Why should anyone care about those Black lives that the NAACP is so willing to throw away in exchange for political prominence?<sup>58</sup>

Ryan Bomberger and others using these types of racialized framing strategies have received significant criticism from pro-choice groups, civil rights groups, and Black leaders. On his website, he responds by claiming that any support for abortion is racist:

The Radiance Foundation has been attacked by the NAACP, the ACLU, Planned Parenthood and other radical pro-abortion groups for being racist. Yes, because declaring that Black children are beautiful and too many are aborted is terribly racist while killing Black babies, disproportionately, is something these organizations celebrate as progress and “reproductive justice”...Sanger...is somehow not racist. But Black civil rights leaders who decry the alarming rate of abortion in the Black community...are the racists in the bizarre inverted world of ‘prochoice’.<sup>59</sup>

To further criticize the NAACP, Bomberger reports a story about Planned Parenthood abortion doctor Ron Virmani who was caught on camera referring to the abortions he performed as being on “ugly Black babies” that he did not want “to be born

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<sup>58</sup> <http://www.toomanyaborted.com/abortion-and-the-negro-project-2-0/>

<sup>59</sup> <http://www.theradiancefoundation.org/radiance-foundation-illuminated-cbn/>

and brought up” with the “taxpayer’s money.” Bomberger complains that since the NAACP did not denounce Planned Parenthood after this comment, their complicity in the genocide of Black children is clear. He positions himself as one of those “ugly Black babies” because he was adopted. He goes on to describe other situations in which he claims the NAACP ignored the racism happening in abortion clinics:

The NAACP was silent. Well, I was one of those “ugly Black babies.” And my life wasn’t worth defending by the nation’s oldest civil rights group. And today, that same organization is trying to silence me because I’m simply telling the truth. They enable the destruction of Black lives...<sup>60</sup> When abortionist Kermit Gosnell’s “House of Horrors” on 3801 Lancaster Ave in Philly was exposed, butchering women and children (specifically minorities), the NAACP was silent. When a young Black Chicago woman, Tonya Reaves, was left to bleed to death for over 5 hours in a Planned Parenthood abortion clinic, the NAACP was silent...The National Association for the Abortion of Colored People has no moral ground to stand upon, just quick sand oozing with the blood of those most discriminated against.<sup>61</sup>

Bomberger takes frequent aim at Reproductive Justice leaders and organizations as well. In this passage, he specifically references Loretta Ross, one of the founders of SisterSong, claiming that her organization and several other groups betray their own people in exchange for money. He frames the Black pro-life movement as the true civil rights leaders:

[Loretta] Ross, whose duplicity rivals that of Margaret Sanger, frequently acknowledges eugenics and population control...yet fails to place the blame on the obvious perpetrator of these destructive and racist efforts. Funding can cause all kinds of deliberate blindness. Planned Parenthood, SisterSong, Asian Communities for Reproductive Justice, Black Women for Reproductive Justice, the NAACP, and the Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice, all heavily funded by the Ford Foundation, have all denounced the Black prolife movement ...They’ve held numerous national conferences...to re-strategize lies, to revise history, and to present a perverted sense of “justice” and “freedom” while true civil rights

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<sup>60</sup> <http://www.lifenews.com/2013/02/12/on-lincolns-birthday-naacp-continues-promoting-abortion/>

<sup>61</sup> <http://www.lifenews.com/2013/02/12/on-lincolns-birthday-naacp-continues-promoting-abortion/>

champions, who value all life born and unborn, continue to fight regardless of the odds.<sup>62</sup>

Bomberger refers to the pro-life movement as the “true civil rights champions” and as a politically oppressed group—a common rhetorical strategy of the anti-abortion activists both Black and white. He frames RJ organizations, and any Black leader, as being “blinded” by funding, but certainly not as “victims” like Alveda King. They are portrayed as intentionally betraying Black women for self-interested goals.

The Black pro-life leaders generally despise liberals. Jesse Jackson and Al Sharpton are their most common targets, but they often criticize the Democratic Party in general. In our interview, Reverend Childress makes the argument that African Americans generally only vote Democrat because they’ve been convinced that the Democratic Party represents their interests, which he argues is a fallacy:

Al Sharpton, Jesse Jackson...just makes me upset. All of these preachers...are solely Democratic... If I stopped 20 people out there (in his predominantly Black neighborhood) and asked them their affiliation, they would say Democratic. And if you asked them why they would say well that’s the party that’s really going to look out for my best interests. And that is... nothing further from the truth. ...The perceived leadership has unquestionably betrayed the African American community, solely for a dollar... You really have to sell yourself to the devil to be part of that party. So, and I’m not calling Republicans the answer, but it’s better than what you’ve got... [Democrats] are expecting you to go with [them], no matter what the issues are. You cannot do that. No one does it more than African Americans.

Childress claims that Black Americans blindly vote Democratic and have been duped into believing that the Democrats have their best interests in mind. This is a common argument for Black conservatives, who see themselves as bravely breaking away from the pack, as emerging from a fog of deception. Again, this paternalistic

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<sup>62</sup> <http://www.theradiancefoundation.org/david-versus-goliath-were-a-threat-to-the-abortion-industry/>

perspective gives very little agency to Black Americans. Similarly, Broden frames his organization as an alternative “voice” for women and families in the Black community, implying a lack of political options for Black men and women’s affiliation: “The National Black Pro-Life Coalition came together in order to counter the voice of Planned Parenthood and to provide an alternative voice in the community for women and for families within the community.”

Broden believes that being a Black pro-life leader is significant because the grand majority of the Black community votes Democrat and therefore pro-choice. In our interview, he said believes it is important “to demonstrate that the community is not walking lock step behind the pied piper of the abortion industry Planned Parenthood with this message into our community...” He argues that Planned Parenthood uses “sophisticated marketing and messaging” to convince “our women that the only answer to an unintended pregnancy is abortion.” The Black pro-life leaders clearly associated themselves with the Republican Party and bemoaned the fact that most Black Americans would not consider voting for a Republican. For example, in our interview, Broden argues: “Today I think the issue of abortion is such a political issue that most Black pastors who are Democrats believe that it is a Republican issue. And that there is an attempt on the part of the Republicans to manipulate the reality of abortion...force Blacks to not vote for Democrats, which I think is absolutely crazy. But that’s the thinking as I understand it.” Similarly, in our interview, Childress argues that the Democratic Party demonizes him and other pro-life Black pastors: “I’m an enemy. I’m not their, I can’t be their bosom friend because I’m gonna support a Republican agenda.”

Like the others, Ryan Bomberger of the Radiance Foundation holds “liberals” in very low regard and argues on his website that they willfully ignore the racism of Planned Parenthood while complaining about racism in “every institution in America.”

Liberals will claim racism exists in every institution in America, but when it comes to Planned Parenthood, an organization that kills for a living, racism couldn't possibly be the explanation despite indisputable and voluminous documented evidence.<sup>63</sup>

Bomberger also consistently criticizes liberal social policies, like welfare benefits for poor families, which he believes are part of the conspiratorial plot to decimate the Black community. In an article on his website entitled, “Abortion and Food Stamps Don't Elevate the Black Community, he quotes Ludwig Gaines of Planned Parenthood who is arguing that the pro-life movement does not care about Black children after they are born. Bomberger claims that Ludwig Gaines, a Black man, is betraying the Black community by working with Planned Parenthood.

Trotting out yet another black individual to shill for the number one killer of black people, one begins to see how desperate the world's largest population control chain is to keep its stranglehold on the black community. Ludwig Gaines, African American Leadership and Engagement Director for Planned Parenthood...In typical prochoice fashion...spewed the pathetic mantra of mass distraction: “Suddenly, they're concerned about black children quite frankly prior to birth, but could care less once they arrive...they are the very same people who will not support after-school care, or food stamps, or other programs meant to elevate communities of color.”...Food stamps elevate the black community? For a people that have endured some of the most heinous treatment in human history, who've defied all odds, and who have risen above impossible circumstances in hostile environments—all he has to offer is governmental dependency?...[Planned Parenthood] spends more than a million dollars per year lobbying Congress, not just for unfettered access to abortion, but to perpetuate poverty in the urban community by supporting every welfare program. Dissolved families and government dependency give the abortion chain far easier access to the vulnerable...How much has Planned Parenthood poured into the lives of black children, Mr. Gaines? When's the last time they spent millions on educational

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<sup>63</sup> <http://www.toomanyaborted.com/abortion-and-the-negro-project-2-0/>

initiatives, housing renovations or after-school programs? They don't, and they won't.<sup>64</sup>

Bomberger responds that “governmental dependency” hurts the Black community, and argues that Planned Parenthood supports “every welfare program” in order to make the Black community more vulnerable to their eugenic goals. The level of conspiracy in which Bomberger claims Planned Parenthood is involved is staggering.

Black pro-life leaders claim that the Black community was anti-birth control and anti-abortion until Black leaders were bribed by white eugenicists to turn their back on their community and advocate population control. They argue that Black leaders today are still being bribed with political power and funding in exchange for their support for abortion rights. This type of explanation is necessary for them to justify their argument that abortion is inherently racist, despite the fact that the majority of Black Americans support abortion rights.<sup>65</sup> In order for them to claim that abortion is racist, then, they must frame Black leaders and Black women who chose to abort as dupes or victims. Black pro-life leaders exhibit an authoritative tone when discussing what they believe were once the values of the Black community as a whole. Their interpretation of Black American's relationship to reproduction is one of constant victimization by powerful white eugenicists. Margaret Sanger specifically is awarded a significant amount of power under this narrative—then and now. There is no room in this story for the Black women who have fought for reproductive control over their bodies for centuries. Thus, to make sense of the pro-choice Black leaders today, they tell a story of bribery and deceit. According to

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<sup>64</sup> <http://www.theradiancefoundation.org/abortion-and-food-stamps-dont-elevate-the-black-community/>

<sup>65</sup> <http://blog.ansirh.org/2013/02/african-americans-and-abortion/>



this narrative, Black leaders are simultaneously the unwitting tools of the white elite and traitors who turn their backs on their community in search of money and power. Black liberals, especially Al Sharpton and Jesse Jackson, are held up the quintessential examples of racial betrayal.

***“A Black Fish in a Very Large Pond”: Framing Black Pro-Life leaders as Inauthentic***

In this section, I describe how Black Reproductive Justice (RJ) leaders understand and make sense of Black pro-life leaders who they perceive as acting in direct opposition to their work. I interviewed two RJ activists—Monica Simpson and Loretta Ross working at SisterSong in Atlanta, Georgia—and conducted a content analysis of recent written materials by other RJ activists, focusing this review specifically on their comments about Black pro-life leaders. Black RJ leaders are frustrated and angered by the increasing presence of Black men and women in the anti-abortion movement. While they do point out that some Black men have historically been against abortion and birth control for Black women—and so this type of framing is not without historical precedence—they argue this overt targeting of Black women is new. Both Monica Simpson and Loretta Ross described being shocked when the “Endangered Species” billboards went up in Atlanta. While Ross reports that she was very surprised by the billboards, she points out that the tactic is not new, and has been used before by Black men hoping to increase the Black population. Ross groups the Black men and women responsible for the billboards in with Black men of the 1920s and 1960s who fought against Black women’s rights to use birth control.

We did not see [the billboards] coming. Even though, let's put this in context, there have been racialized attacks on abortion rights for decades, so this is not absolutely new. Starting in the 1920s...there were elements in the African American community led by Marcus Garvey who felt that the best way to fight...white supremacy was to "outbreed" white people. Never asked women what we thought about that plan (laughs)...and there was resistance by the Black women's movement of that day...so when the billboards appeared, this was just the latest attempt...The Black panthers... some of them where opposed to us using birth control...There was always a small...Black conservative movement that was against it, so it wasn't unheard of, but it was unprecedented on the scale that the billboard attacks took place. That was totally new and different ... We felt that the billboards were a not so subtle attack on Black women because who's choosing to have abortions? Black women. So, if Black children are endangered, you're basically saying that Black women are the enemies of Black children...[they say] that Black women are...being duped into aborting our children. Or, we're just selfish bitches. Either way, it's a diss on Black women.

When Simpson found out that the main person behind the billboards was a Black man, she reports feeling like it was "a whole different ballgame" than it would be if they were responding to a white pro-life organization. The fact that a Black man was responsible for the billboards changed how they managed their response. She describes how they attempted to use it to their advantage because they knew it would affect Black communities in a different way:

Oh, I was super surprised [that Black men and women were behind the billboards]. I was like are you kidding me? I just thought we were going to be dealing with...some white Christian folks lost they damn mind (laughs) and decided to put some Black babies on billboards in Georgia. I thought it was gonna be shitstorm...and then we were like "Oh, that's not the case. Now, this is a whole different ballgame that we're running here..." [But] we used it to talk about the race dynamics...when we're talking to Black pastors and Black folks, we're like "Yo, this is a Black person...in leadership of this." ...I think that when people saw that...it was actually fuel for us...in having conversations with people...because [Black] people are used to feeling attacks from white folks in the south, like...it's not new, it's something that happens, right. So, I think people were expecting that. But then to get the opposite of that, like...I think it just created more...energy around the situation...

Simpson's comments are telling of her perceptions of authenticity and the racial dynamics in the abortion debate. When she believed that the billboards were put up by a white pro-life organization, her anger was centered on her belief that white people are not at liberty to use such portrayals of Black children for their political advantage. When she found out that it was a Black man behind the billboards, she was forced her to rethink her response and approach her dissent in a different way. In her outreach to the Black community, she likely would have framed a white pro-life organization using this tactic as racist, but instead she framed Bomberger's actions as a betrayal, which as she reports, was potentially more effective in discrediting the billboards.

The reproductive justice activists expressed anger and frustration that these Black men and women would turn their backs on Black women's needs. For example, Monica Simpson says she would like to sit down and talk with Ryan Bomberger to try and understand him and his actions. Her comment makes it clear that the racial betrayal she felt from Bomberger is challenging and unexpected.

I really want to have a one-on-one conversation with [Ryan Bomberger]... about "How did you get here? Like, talk to me, Black woman, Black dude, like seriously...Because I don't understand what your issue is?" I really want to have a conversation with him...

Simpson's comments clearly show how the fact that Bomberger is an African American is a great source of frustration for her. She is clearly not accustomed to positioning other Black men and women as her direct opponents.

In the same way that Black pro-life leaders claim that most Black leaders have been bribed or deceived by the powerful white pro-choice movement, Ross believes that the white-led pro-life movement utilizes Black pro-life leaders strategically:

The anti-abortion movement...was more adept and in many ways culturally competent than even our allies because they were smart enough to hire people like Alveda King and Ryan Bomberger and give them the money and the resources to launch an effective campaign, which we never got from our side (laughs)...So, you know, I have to give them credit for knowing how to be strategic...

When she says “our side,” Ross is referring to the mainstream pro-choice movement and their resistance to include Reproductive Justice organizations in their major decision-making. Also significantly, in this quote, she portrays Black pro-life leaders Alveda King and Ryan Bomberger as being hired by the anti-abortion movement for “strategic” purposes—framing them not as leaders in their own right, but as employees of white-led pro-life organizations. The RJ leaders perceived the Black pro-life leaders mainly as “misguided.” While they acknowledged that the pro-life leaders had every right to their own opinion, they also believed that there were other temptations luring them into the mainstream pro-life movement. Both Simpson and Ross described what they saw as the quick rise to political prominence offered by a white-dominated pro-life movement in desperate need of diverse leaders and support from the Black community. This framing is nearly identical to the Black pro-life framing of Black pro-choice leaders as tools of elite eugenicists and Planned Parenthood, exemplified by Ross’s comment that the Black pro-life leaders are likely motivated by power and the promise of celebrity:

I’d like to think they’re sincere, but in my heart I think they’re just bought off. I actually think it’s lucrative to be those spokespeople. They’re getting paid, you got jobs, you get security, you get to be a Black fish in a very large pond, standing out. You get celebrity for it. You get accolades for it. So I think it’s a combination of sincerity and greed.

It is clear that Ross is somewhat conflicted in her understanding of Black pro-life leaders as completely “bought off” by the white pro-life movement. She wants to believe their

intentions and motivations are at least partly sincere. The Black pro-life leaders do not make a similar acknowledgement about Black abortion rights supporters.

Simpson's perspective on Black pro-life leaders is more sympathetic, framing them as further casualties of white supremacy and racism. She makes a compelling point that the willingness of Black pro-life leaders to work for mainstream pro-life organizations results in part from a desire to gain power in a society that still discriminates against African Americans.

I think that Black folks really want to find a place where they can have power...and they can really get their own voices out there. And those spaces are far and few between...for Black folks. And so here is a movement that is all about...lifting up their leadership and putting them in videos and getting them exposure and I think that that feeds them in some ways. Which goes back to these deeper conversations of how...white supremacy, racism, has just really made communities of color just feel like they are so burdened down but they can't really rise up...so again, if this is an opportunity for you to do that, you're going to take it...They just make me sad, they really, really do. And they just don't understand how problematic they are to the overall health and well being of our communities...and I think they're just searching for something they feel like they couldn't have had anywhere else. And they found it in this movement.

While she expresses that Black pro-life leaders make her "sad," she is steadfast in her belief that their messaging is hurting the Black community. Paris Hatcher of another RJ organization, SPARK Reproductive Justice Now, makes a similar point in a SisterSong publication: "I think what you have here is tokenized leaders within a white movement floating an agenda. You see white organizations capitalizing off of Black bodies and the shaming and blaming of Black women."<sup>66</sup> She is also somewhat sympathetic to the Black pro-life leaders, framing them as "tokens" rather than "traitors." The blame, in Hatcher's estimation, is more appropriately laid on the white pro-life organizations that are

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<sup>66</sup> [http://www.sistersong.net/documents/CollectiveVoices\\_Summer2011\\_rf2.pdf](http://www.sistersong.net/documents/CollectiveVoices_Summer2011_rf2.pdf)

financing the use of these racialized frames. In a SisterSong publication, Ross argues that Black pro-life activists are hired by large pro-life organizations because they are better able to reach the Black community and successfully make the claim that abortion is racist:

They are particularly adept at using Black surrogates as spokespeople for a racialized attack to make the whites for whom they work feel more comfortable in ignoring the structural racism that actually is central to their movement. Like other opponents of human rights and justice, they place highly visible people of color up front in defending ideas and programs that undermine racial justice.<sup>67</sup>

In Ross' description, the white pro-life leaders are the true architects of the racialized anti-abortion tactics and Black men and women are hired simply as the "face" of this campaign.

Ross, Simpson and Hatcher each attempt to absolve Black pro-life leaders of some of the responsibility for their work in the pro-life movement by portraying them as misguided or deceived. This understanding helps the Black RJ leaders to make sense of the Black men and women whose goals are in direct opposition to their own, but it also portrays the Black-pro-life activists as lacking meaningful agency.

Ross also addresses specifically some of the tactics used by Black pro-life leaders to align themselves with racial justice and the Civil Rights Movement. In our interview, Ross makes clear that she understands this as a "theft" of civil rights imagery:

One of the things that they've been using their African American spokespeople to do is an attempt to hijack the civil rights legacy and to legitimize their theft of the civil rights imagery...And, so you find many leaders of the actual civil rights movement denouncing these people trying to take over...historical revisionism...[they] can claim that they know more about civil rights than Martin Luther King did...And the babies are the new slaves...They call each other

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<sup>67</sup> [http://www.sistersong.net/documents/CollectiveVoices\\_Summer2011\\_rf2.pdf](http://www.sistersong.net/documents/CollectiveVoices_Summer2011_rf2.pdf)

abolitionists...And it's all distortions and perversions...But, we who know the real history of civil rights, we can't give up that fight.

Ross makes distinctions between the “actual” civil rights movement and the pro-life movement who claim to be fighting for civil rights, and positions herself and the Reproductive Justice movement as those who know the “real” civil rights. She argues that the pro-life allusions to unborn babies as “the new slaves” and pro-life leaders as “abolitionists” are a “perversion” of this history. Ross’ comments show how her perceptions of authenticity dictate who can and who cannot utilize civil rights language and the words of Dr. King. She does not see the Black pro-life leaders as authentic spokespeople of the Black community. In the following passage, she describes a pro-life event that attempted to draw comparisons between civil rights and the “right to life.” Ross specifically points out that most of the participants were white. As with Simpson’s comments above, Ross would likely understand and respond to this event much differently if the majority of the participants were Black. For Ross and her organization, to position themselves in opposition to a largely white crowd “appropriating” civil rights rhetoric with a few “token” Black leaders is much less complicated than it would likely be if it were a large group of Black men and women using this framework. Notions of authenticity are important for understanding this interaction.

Priests for Life came to Atlanta in July 2010 with a so-called Pro-Life Freedom Bus that imitated the legendary Freedom Buses for voting rights in the 1960s. They staged a prayer service for the “unborn” at the tomb of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. This is a perverse strategy by the largely white anti-abortion movement that attempts to appropriate the moral mantle of the civil rights movement. What they really do is distort Dr. King’s history because he and his wife Coretta Scott King were strong supporters of women’s rights...When the mostly white bus riders showed up in

Atlanta, they were met by determined Black and brown activists challenging their hypocrisy in claiming to save us from ourselves.<sup>68</sup>

RJ activists also argue that pro-life leaders are inauthentic in their concern for Black children because they do not support social programs that would provide aid to Black children. In a SisterSong publication, the RJ leaders argue:

The groups behind the racist and sexist billboards—Life Always, Heroic Media, the Radiance Foundation—are the same groups who oppose government safety net programs and healthcare reform that would directly benefit Black women, their families, and communities...These billboards—and the money spent to fund them—do nothing to address these health disparities.<sup>69</sup>

In our interview, Ross also addressed this concern that the anti-abortion movement does not actually care about Black children and argued that the fight against abortion rights is really about “the wombs of white women.”

I’ve never been convinced that it’s about saving Black babies. Let’s just put it that way (laughs). I think it’s about using a racialized attack on abortion...Because these same racists who oppose every program for children whether it’s breakfast programs, education programs, stopping the school to prison pipeline...I mean, they oppose everything for the child once they’re here. Yet, you want to save Black babies? Your legislative record doesn’t support that concept...Show me one study where white men in power want more brown and Black babies and maybe I would be dissuaded (laughs) from believing it’s about the wombs of white women... Because I’m sorry, I may be a cynic, but I do not believe they want more Black and brown babies born. If so, why don’t you take care of the ones we already got? You know, four out of five hard to adopt children are African American. So if you really cared about saving Black babies, how many of those babies have you adopted?

Black pro-life leaders base their credibility in presenting themselves as the saviors of Black children. However, Black RJ leaders argue that the pro-life movement’s concern for children stops at birth, based on the fact that they are often politically aligned with the Republican Party and against government aid to poor families. Ross makes this case and

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<sup>68</sup> [http://www.sistersong.net/documents/CollectiveVoices\\_Summer2011\\_rf2.pdf](http://www.sistersong.net/documents/CollectiveVoices_Summer2011_rf2.pdf)

<sup>69</sup> [http://www.sistersong.net/documents/CollectiveVoices\\_Summer2011\\_rf2.pdf](http://www.sistersong.net/documents/CollectiveVoices_Summer2011_rf2.pdf)



also implies that the concern for Black children is simply misdirection with the ultimate goal being to increase the white population by preventing all women from having abortions. In our interview, Ross also argues that the racially-charged billboard campaign is intended to make white pro-choice people feel guilty about supporting abortion for Black women:

I believe that they're trying to drive a racial wedge in the pro-choice community. So that they can make white women who support abortion rights feel guilty for supporting abortion rights for Black women by saying that if you support abortion rights for Black women, you're a racist. And you know, what white person wants to be called a racist? Even the Klan doesn't want to be called racist...They're trying to drive a wedge, just like they tried to drive...a gender wedge in the Black community. Because when they first came to Georgia, they had Black men falling all over themselves to support the billboard campaign...

A very common argument made by the pro-life movement is that Planned Parenthood is continuing Margaret Sanger's original eugenic goals to reduce the population of people of color in the United States. One might expect the RJ leaders to acknowledge this history, but disregard claims that it continues to this day. However, Ross argues that to read the history of Margaret Sanger and Planned Parenthood as one of racist victimization of Black women ignores Black women's agency in controlling their fertility. She argues that it is not eugenics that continues today, but the desire to control women's fertility:

After slavery...Black women were choosing to have fewer children...So this was long before Margaret Sanger, long before Planned Parenthood. We were taking control of our fertility...as part of the racial uplift strategy...how do you lift yourself out of poverty? Well, you have smaller families...that's what works for every community...We even asked Margaret Sanger to place birth control clinics in the Black community...so this whole thing about Margaret Sanger starting birth control clinics as part of the eradication of the Black community, it's just bullshit. I mean, she was a nurse...who saw women die from too many unintended pregnancies... people who are opposed to abortion and birth control totally distort that entire

history as if we were just puppets...couldn't self-determine, make decisions for ourselves...this white woman just leading us through the nose to our own genocide...the agency of Black women and the Black community as a whole is totally obliterated...that's such an insulting way of reading our own history.

RJ leaders express frustration that Black pro-life activists are acting in what they consider to be direct opposition to Black women's health and well being. They frame Black pro-life leaders as misguided and as motivated by the political power and celebrity they receive among white conservatives. They argue that white pro-life organizations hire and utilize Black pro-life leaders strategically in order to more effectively frame abortion as a civil rights issue—a politically powerful framework. They also argue that Black pro-life activists are hypocritical in their expressed concern for Black children on the one hand, but their opposition to social welfare programs that help Black children on the other. While both groups express concerns about racism and the devaluation of Black life, they differ significantly in solutions offered to this problem. Perhaps the most important difference lies in the fact that, to Black RJ activists, the Black pro-life movement portrays itself in a paternalistic way as protector of Black women's wombs and Black unborn children, portraying Black women as victims, and ignoring the history of Black women's reproductive rights activism (Prisock 2003; Roberts 1997). Notions of authenticity are very important for the ways that Black RJ leaders understand Black pro-life leaders. According to the Black RJ leaders, Black pro-life leaders and the white-led organizations in which they work are inauthentic spokespeople for the Black community.

## **DISCUSSION: Credibility and Inauthentic Claimsmakers**

A social movement's claims are most effective if they come from speakers who are perceived as credible (Benford and Snow 2000). The 'Black genocide' frame extension has the potential to mobilize new supporters, but also comes with cost of mobilizing Black abortion rights activists who can most effectively discredit their claim to racial authenticity. The pro-life leaders using a Black genocide framing are taking a significant risk by making themselves vulnerable to criticism of this kind. This interaction draws the abortion debate into a racial debate over who speaks for the Black community. As Black men and women gain prominence in the anti-abortion movement and frame abortion as racist, all sides of the abortion debate must engage with racial issues more than ever before. Black pro-life leaders must explain why many Black leaders do not share their views, despite their strong claims that abortion is Black genocide. Black abortion rights supporters must explain why they believe the Black pro-life activists do not represent the Black community and why their claims are false or insincere. Based on interviews and an analysis of activists' written materials, I find that both groups attempt to discredit their opponents in terms of racial betrayal—by framing the other as dupes to the white-led pro-life or pro-choice movements and by claiming to represent and speak for the true needs of Black women while framing the other as traitors. For Black pro-life leaders, this type of explanation is necessary for them to justify their argument that abortion is inherently racist, despite the fact that the majority

of the Black community supports abortion rights.<sup>70</sup> In order for them to claim that abortion is racist, then, they must frame Black leaders and Black women who chose to abort as dupes or victims. For Black RJ leaders, they must make sense of the pro-life men and women who they believe are turning their backs on the Black community. This interplay forces all sides of the abortion debate to engage with race and racism, whether or not that is their main goal. What, then, does this mean for the larger abortion debate?

There are several dimensions of the abortion debate that may be significantly affected by this framing strategy. The ‘Black genocide’ framing has possible ramifications for the mainstream pro-choice movement as it decides how to respond to such framing. In our interview, Loretta Ross argued that the purpose of the ‘Black genocide’ frame is to drive a wedge in the pro-choice community by making white women feel uncomfortable with supporting abortion rights for Black women. As I pointed out above, women of color have long criticized the pro-choice movement for not addressing racism both within their own ranks and in reproductive policies. This framing strategy may encourage the pro-choice movement to address and evaluate the validity of the ‘Black genocide’ claim and the reasons why such a claim has potential political power in order to respond effectively—a process that will only be successful with the leadership of women of color. Thus, this framing strategy offers an opportunity for the white-dominated abortion rights community to defer to the knowledge and experience of women of color—who, as described above, have been forced to address claims of ‘Black genocide’ several times over the last century.

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<sup>70</sup> <http://blog.ansirh.org/2013/02/african-americans-and-abortion/>

Additionally, the ‘Black genocide’ framework may encourage the pro-choice and pro-life movements to engage more thoroughly with the real history of reproductive abuses against poor women and women of color and the history of Black women’s activism. In some ways, the Black pro-life leaders and the RJ leaders align in their attention to racial injustices and their concern for Black lives, both born and unborn. And, based on my observations, it would be a misrepresentation to portray the Black pro-life leaders as insincere in their concern for the Black community. However, while Black pro-life leaders believe that abortion represents a continuation of reproductive abuses against women of color, a reproductive justice framework argues that restricting abortion would be an additional abuse. As Silliman, Fried, Ross, and Gutierrez (2004) point out, “Women of color have had no trouble distinguishing between population control—externally imposed fertility control policies—and voluntary birth control—women making their own decisions about fertility” (7). Under a reproductive justice framework, safe access to abortion would be one among several reproductive rights that allow all women not only control of their own bodies, but also allow for the ability to become mothers and parent their children with dignity (Luna and Luker 2013). The ‘Black genocide’ framework forces Black men and women active in the abortion debate to respond to their opponents in racial terms, which in turn may compel the mainstream pro-life and pro-choice movements to engage more thoroughly with the significant, but often ignored, racial dimensions of reproductive politics.

## CONCLUSION

### **The Risks of Blurred Boundaries: Exploiting Weakness, Filling the Gaps, Using the Language of the Opposition**

In this dissertation, I examine the interactive framing dynamics of the pro-life and pro-choice movements. Over time, each movement has attempted to exploit and expose the weaknesses of the opposing movement. Movements are forced to reframe or clarify their framing when faced with successful counterframing from the opposition, and this process can be advantageous or hazardous to a movement's success (Benford and Snow 2000). To examine and evaluate the risks of such interactive and reactive counterframing, I have identified two "cases" that exemplify this interactive framing process and the subsequent blurring of ideologies boundaries between the pro-life and pro-choice movements—1) pro-choice activists framing abortion as "good mothering" and 2) pro-life activists framing abortion as "Black genocide." I have identified these cases as illustrative of interactive framing processes and how reactive framing that utilizes the language of the opposition can conflict with the larger movement's ideologies, values, and goals. I explore how pro-choice movement activists attempt to respond to countermovement attacks by reframing abortion using the language of "good mothers" and "morality" traditionally used by the politically conservative pro-life movement. In the case of framing abortion as "Black genocide," I explore how pro-life movement activists attempt to reframe abortion using the language of racism and inequality traditionally associated with politically liberal civil rights activists. I argue that as each movement responds to countermovement threats by borrowing and co-opting language

and imagery from the opposing movement, the ideological boundaries between the pro-life and pro-choice movements are blurred. Blurred boundaries threaten the stability of each movement by weakening collective identity ties and risk marginalizing and alienating certain movement adherents.

In the first case, I argue that the framing of abortion as “good mothering” is a response to the success of the pro-life rhetoric that frames women who abort as bad mothers. By attempting to frame women who abort as good mothers making moral choices, the pro-choice actors utilize the *culturally resonant* values of good motherhood and child-centered choices that have been central to pro-life framing over the years. Those advocating the “moral framework” are hoping to fill the “emotional gap” in the pro-choice movement. In other words, they abandon sole reliance on the “choice” framework and attempt to use the language and imagery that has been successful for the pro-life movement to gain support from new constituents, destigmatize abortion, and attempt to gain the “moral high ground.” However, framing abortion as moral and women who chose abortion as responsible comes with certain costs, most significantly in how it marginalizes the many women who fall outside of the realm of “good mothers making responsible choices for their children.” When certain women and certain abortion situations are left out of the moral framework, this leaves gaps in the framework for what is acceptable and what is unacceptable. Those gaps weaken the movement’s framing and foundation, leaving space for the opposition to exploit those weaknesses. I argue that, while framing abortion as good mothering acknowledges women’s emotional connections to their fetuses and responds to a feminist call for destigmatizing abortion

through a “moral framework,” it poses a significant risk to the larger movement. This case study contributes to our understanding of the framing/counterframing process by exploring the risks of responding to countermovement attacks “on their terms” (Benford and Snow 2000). While such reframing can also provide an opportunity to mobilize new supporters, it runs the risk of alienating constituents if it conflicts too deeply with their values and ideologies, as well as marginalizing certain groups if it relies too heavily on cultural resonance (Ferree 2003). Because movement activists under attack are seeking to restore their movement’s moral status, they are likely to reframe their movement using culturally resonant language that has proven successful for a countermovement. In doing so, they may contradict or challenge their movement’s core ideologies and divide the movement.

In the second case, I show that by framing abortion as “Black genocide,” pro-life activists are attempting to mobilize greater support among African Americans by using the language and imagery of civil rights and reproductive justice activists. Such discourses of racism, genocide, and conspiracy are hypothetically likely to appeal to African Americans. In order for a frame to have resonance, it must be credible, and credibility depends on three factors: *frame consistency*, *empirical credibility*, and *credibility of the frame articulators or claimsmakers* (Benford and Snow 2000). I suggest that the ‘Black genocide’ frame lacks consistency as well as credibility with both conservative Republicans—the pro-life movement’s main constituents—and civil rights activists because it deeply conflicts with the racial ideologies of both groups. In their focus on race and racism, this pro-life framing attempts to transform the pro-life



movement, but it is unlikely to succeed in the fact that it conflicts so deeply with the conservative Republican ideology that institutionalized racism no longer exists. While this framework appears like it would be effective in the African American community because of the attempts at *frame bridging* and *frame amplification* for this population, I argue that the Black pro-life leaders' racial ideologies of 'Black pathology' and 'race-baiting' conflict deeply with those of the civil rights leaders. Additionally, because this framing targets Black women specifically and engages directly with race and racism, it also risks a significant countermobilization from Black reproductive justice activists who are in the position to question the credibility of both the claims and claimsmakers. This interaction results in an emerging conflict over who represents the Black community in the debate over reproductive rights. Because this framing draws attention to racist reproductive abuses historically and today, in a way that has been largely absent from both the mainstream pro-choice and pro-life movements, it also draws attention to the marginalization of African American voices in both movements. This framing can be understood as an attempt to "fill a gap" left by the pro-choice movement. Reproductive justice activists have long argued that the pro-choice movement is resistant to embracing the leadership of women of color and the needs of disadvantaged women in their singular focus on abortion rights and the "choice" framework. These pro-life movement activists draw on the same history and utilize many of the same arguments that women of color have used to criticize the white-dominated birth control and abortion rights movements historically and today.

This research contributes to our understanding of the framing/counterframing process by exploring the risks of frame extensions that tactically utilize the language of the opposition and risk blurring the boundaries between the opposing movements and alienating certain key constituents. I extend social movement theories of interactive framing processes and boundary demarcation by contributing an analysis of instances where activists blur ideological boundaries between movements and risk weakening the collective identification of movement adherents.

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## Appendix A

### METHODOLOGICAL APPENDIX

#### Insider/Outsider: Positionality, Trust and Guilt in Interviews with Pro-Choice and Pro-Life Activists

##### **Case #1: Interviews with Abortion Counselors**

When conducting interviews with abortion counselors, I was an “insider” in almost every way. My interviews with abortion counselors were conducted while I was a volunteer counselor at the same abortion clinic. I decided to begin volunteering at the clinic in order to gain familiarity with the clinic staff and the clinic culture before requesting interviews. My first point of contact with the clinic was through a pro-choice organization where I had volunteered and had been the focus of my undergraduate thesis. That organization requested that all its volunteers spend a day at this specific abortion clinic observing the procedure and learning from clinic staff. So much about that day fascinated me—from the way clinic staff talked about fetuses to the interactions between counselors and medical staff. I was also surprised and somewhat uncomfortable with the fact that I was allowed to observe a woman’s abortion procedure without much input from her. About a year after this observation day, I reached out to the counselor that I had shadowed and requested an informational interview about the clinic. After this interview, she urged me to become a volunteer counselor, citing the perpetual need for new volunteers at the clinic. A few months later, I began volunteering as an abortion

counselor with the goal of interviewing the other abortions counselors. Because of the highly controversial nature of the work, I wanted to be an “insider” at the clinic before I reached out to request these interviews. I wanted to understand the clinic culture and be able to speak about the procedure using the language of the staff.

This process of acclimating to the clinic culture was both emotionally and physically draining. While I was ideologically pro-choice before beginning to volunteer, actually *witnessing* an abortion procedure and being forced to interact with protestors who perceive you as an abortion patient tests these beliefs in a unique way. What does an abortion counselor do? Abortion counselors at the clinic have several roles throughout a shift. When a shift starts—I usually worked early on Saturday mornings—counselors will be assigned patients in the order that they arrive at the clinic. Patients were required to arrive at the clinic hours before their procedure actually takes place. First, they need a vaginal ultrasound to confirm the exact gestational age of their pregnancy. Then, the patients are sent back to the waiting room to wait for a counselor to call them. Patients’ names are written on a white board along with their pregnancy’s “age” in weeks and days (e.g., “11.4” would mean eleven weeks and four days). Counselors were supposed to take the patients in order, but there was often some juggling of the schedule or switching of patients between counselors. For example, if a patient was farther along in her pregnancy, she might be moved up in the queue because her procedure took longer and required more steps. Or if a patient’s case was emotionally complicated in some way—if she was unsure about her decision, had mentioned rape or abuse, or was known by counselors to be a difficult patient—she may be handed off to a more experienced counselor. Once a

counselor had a patient's file, she would review the patient's initial paperwork to get a bit of background on her—for example, if the patient had had abortions at the clinic before. Also included in this initial paperwork was what counselors called the “feelings sheet” that patients were required to fill out which asked them to rate their feelings about the abortion and give a reason for why they had chosen to abort. Counselors were able to see how “sure” a woman was about her procedure and, depending on how much information a patient was willing to share, a little bit about why they were choosing the procedure. Then, counselors would call the patients back one by one and complete a medical history. I was initially surprised that the clinic allowed volunteers with no medical training to complete these patient medical histories. The counselor director explained to me that, in the past, nurses would conduct these histories, but it simply became too expensive to pay nurses for this time, and the clinic added this role to the counselors' responsibilities. Medical histories were completed in one of two rooms that were decorated and designed to make patients feel a bit more comfortable. Once the counselors had introduced themselves and their role in the patient's day, they would confirm that the patient was prepared to go through with the procedure and that the decision was her own. In my experience, responses to this question ranged from extremely brief and somewhat annoyed affirmative responses to long, emotional justifications for why the woman had chosen abortion. But they were inevitably awkward. I got the sense that some patients felt I was evaluating their responses or prying into their personal business. In general, patients were very upset about being at the clinic and some directed that anger at me. Others were somewhat upset but mainly relieved to be so close to “not being pregnant

anymore” and expressed appreciation for my help. Once the patients explained her decision or assured the counselor that she was confident in her decision, the counselor would move on the medical side of the “counseling” session. She would take the patient’s temperature and blood pressure and would read off a list of medical questions, including how many pregnancies and abortions the patient had, and mark down the answers. One question that always felt out of place was “Have you ever experienced physical or sexual abuse?” I dreaded the rare instances when I patient would say “yes” and I would have to ask her for more details and write it down on the tiny line provided after this question. I had not been trained to deal with the answers to this question.

Once the medical history was complete, the counselor would explain what was going to happen in the procedure and show the patients the medical tools that would be use (speculum, dilating rod, cannula). For patients whom had had an abortion previously, this was a much faster explanation, but for those who had never had abortion, this explanation could lead to several additional questions—some of which I did not have the medical knowledge to be able to answer. Some patients looked more afraid after the explanation, and I could tell that they would rather not know what was going to happen or see the tools. After the meeting with the abortion counselor, the patient returns to the waiting room to await her turn to see the doctor. This is often the longest wait for patients. The doctor arrives at this time and sees the patients one by one for 2-4 hours, depending on how many patients are waiting that day. The counselors will call their patients back (counselors go through the procedure with the same patients that they conducted medical histories with in order to help patients and counselors feel more



comfortable). Once in the room, the counselor instructs the patient to undress from the waist down and wait for the doctor, answering any last minute questions. Once the doctor is ready, the counselor follows the doctor into the procedure room and stands by the patient's bed during the procedure. Counselors attempt to distract patients from the pain of the procedure by making small talk. If the patient is holding her breath, the counselor will try and get them to breath normally. Most abortion procedures take about five minutes from start to finish, but can be very painful for patients for about one minute. During this time, the counsels try and soothe the patient and assure her that it is "almost over" and that she's "doing great." On rare occasions, a counselor will be instructed by the doctor to hold a patient's hips down if she is moving too much in response to the pain. When the procedure is complete, the doctor will leave the room, usually telling the patient that everything went fine and that she "did great." The counselor will stay with the patient and begin to clean up and prep the room for the next patient while the patient recovers from the cramping induced by the abortion. Because the room is needed for the next patient, the counselors are instructed to get the patient up, dressed, out of the procedure room, and into the recovery room as fast as they can. Some patients had a difficult time standing up after the procedure, but others got up right away and got dressed on their own. The amount of pain experienced during and after a procedure seemed to be incredibly variable from patient to patient. Once the patient is in the recovery room, the nurses take over and a counselor's job with that patient is complete. She then goes back and cleans the rest of the room, which sometimes include cleaning spatters of blood from the examination table and the floor. Then, the counselor gets her

next patient and preps her for the procedure. This entire process is repeated with about 3 to 6 patients per shift. After the procedure is complete the medical tech who assists the doctor examines the contents to make sure that all of the pieces of the fetus have been removed from the uterus. The counselor usually does not see the contents of the uterus from their perspective at the patient's side. However, throughout my time volunteering at the clinic, I observed a few aborted fetuses close up. My reactions were somewhere between revulsion and fascination and awe.

After a few months of volunteering, I approached the volunteer coordinator, explained my desire to conduct interviews with the counselors and asked for her permission to email the counselors. She agreed and asked me to draft an email that she would forward to the rest of the counselors. Some of the counselors replied directly to this email agreeing to participate and others agreed after I followed up by emailing them individually. All seventeen of the counselors who were working during my time at the clinic agreed to interviewed. Clearly, my insider status at the clinic made a significant difference in my ability to interview the counselors. I was seen as "one of them." This connection and my relatively young age in relation to most of the counselors (I was 23 and 24 at the time of most of the interviews) likely made the prospect of these interviews seem less threatening to my fellow counselors. For many of the counselors, my sense was that they felt they were "doing me a favor" or helping out a student.

In addition to my insider status, my gender, race, age, educational status, and apparent class status clearly mattered in my ability to feel at ease and make interviewees feel at ease. I never worried too much about what I was wearing during the interviews. I

did not censor my words in any significant way. Because all other counselors were women (per the clinic's policy), I did not have to worry about a gender barrier. With the exception of one counselor, who was Asian American, all other counselors were white. Most of the counselors were under the age of 30 when I interviewed them and almost all were either in college, in graduate school, or had completed graduate school. Only two interviews—both full-time employees who were over 50 years old—had not completed a college degree. While they were not all intimately familiar with the field of sociology, most had a relatively clear understanding about the goals of academic research. While some—especially the younger counselors—seemed somewhat uncomfortable being the subject of an interview, none were confused or unsure about my intentions with the project or my desire to interview them.

Because I was also a volunteer counselor at the clinic, they could take for granted that I was supportive of abortion rights. I did not sense that they felt the need to censor their words or only discuss abortion only in a positive light. They did not seem suspicious that I would use their words against them or against the abortion rights cause. Knowing the language and culture of the clinic was extremely helpful in conducting the interviews. I was able to ask about specific scenarios that I had observed, talk about specific people working at the clinic, and use the clinic-specific language when asking questions.

I was interested in how they understood their experiences of working in such a stigmatized field, why they started working or volunteering at the clinic, where they saw themselves fitting in the larger abortion debate, and how they interacted with patients. Since counselors work alone with patients, the only time a counselor would see another

counselor work is during her very short “training period” where she might observe two or three counseling sessions. Other than that, each counselor works somewhat in isolation. Thus, even though I was also working as an abortion counselor, the types of questions I was interested in exploring with the counselors would be unique to each of them.

When I started these interviews, I had every intention of sharing my paper with the abortion counselors I interviewed. But as the paper developed, I became more uncomfortable with this idea. I was concerned that they would think my analysis would do nothing to help the pro-choice cause, and could actually lend support to the anti-abortion crowd by showing both their doubts and the weaknesses in their framing. While I am confident in my analysis of the data, I personally struggle the feeling that I am negatively portraying them. Being such an insider in this group is a double-edged sword. I was able to gain invaluable trust and access to them, but I also feel guilty about critiquing them, and also about the sense that I am not contributing anything valuable to the clinic or the abortion rights movement with this research.

## **Case #2: Interviews with Pro-Life Leaders**

If I was a complete “insider” in my interviews with abortion counselors, I was a complete “outsider” in my interviews with pro-life leaders. I was always unsure about how they perceived me, and was very aware of how I looked and what I said while interviewing them. I wanted to convey with my appearance that I took the interviews seriously, but did not want to seem like I was taking myself too seriously. I was also

extremely uncertain when beginning these interviews in how I should portray my research and myself politically. I did not want to be misleading in any major way, but I also felt it was essential to restrict the amount of information the interviewees knew about me. Had they known that my other research involved volunteering in an abortion clinic or that I was supportive of abortion rights, I was concerned that they would not agree to talk to me. While I had no intention of misrepresenting or “tricking” them in any way, they would be completely rational to be suspicious of me.

Akin to my reactions to the pro-choice interviews, I feel somewhat guilty about the trust I was afforded by most of the pro-life leaders. While I had and have no intention of misrepresenting their words or slandering them unfairly, I suspect that they would not agree with the findings of my dissertation. At worst, they might feel like I am portraying them negatively. At best, they may feel like the interview was a waste of their time and will contribute nothing to the pro-life cause.

I first reached out to the pro-life leaders I had selected to interview by sending a letter to their organizations on University of Minnesota letterhead with a short introduction, explanation of the proposed research, and a note that I would follow up with an email (see Appendix C). I said I was PhD student in sociology and that my dissertation focuses on the “new wave” of the pro-life movement. I stated that since they are a leader in this new wave of the pro-life movement, I am very interested in hearing about their experiences and perspectives. After the follow-up email, all but one of the six pro-life leaders responded. Ryan Bomberger of the Radiance Foundation did not respond to this email or the second follow-up email I sent to a different email address on his site. One of

the leaders, Walter B. Hoye III who declined to be interviewed responded simply with the question: “Kia- Are you pro-life?” In the email exchange that followed, it was clear that he was highly suspicious of my intentions. While I explained that, in this research project, I was not taking a political position on abortion rights and was approaching these interviews as a non-biased researcher, this response did not seem to assuage his suspicions. He agreed to answer a few questions over email and gave mainly short, cursory answers. In response to the question of how he thinks the pro-life movement has changed over time in its operational structure, he responded that he would not feel comfortable answering a question like that to an outsider. The other leaders I reached out to—Clenard Childress, Stephen Broden, Alveda King, and Mark Crutcher—all agreed to be interviewed.

My first interview was with Clenard Childress, a Black reverend who started L.E.A.R.N. Northeast, a chapter of the pro-life advocacy organization L.E.A.R.N. (co-founded by Black pro-life activist Johnny Hunter). When I sent Childress an email requesting the interview, he responded quickly and with enthusiasm, saying that he’d be honored to help me out with my dissertation. Before and after the interview, he sent me additional articles he had written. I was somewhat surprised by this considering the suspicious response I had received from Hoye. I flew to New Jersey to interview Childress and met him at his small “no-frills” church in a predominantly Black neighborhood. Childress was exceedingly friendly and warm during our interview. I got the sense that he perceived me as a sympathetic audience—not necessarily as an ‘insider’

or pro-life activist, but certainly as trustworthy. He seemed very comfortable with me and we talked for over two hours.

More than any of the others, he was very candid and, at times, highly critical of the mainstream pro-life movement for not working together. He claimed that because no one “owned him”—meaning that he did not work for any mainstream pro-life organization—he could say whatever he wanted. At one point, he pointed out his skepticism with the movement and his ability to make a difference, and said resignedly that he just does whatever he can, day by day, and included “this interview” as something that he could do. In this comment he seemed to understand our interview as something that would ultimately help the pro-life movement.

As a young, white woman from outside of his community, my age, gender, and race certainly influenced how he interacted with me. While he may have perceived me as a supporter of the pro-life movement, he certainly saw me as an outsider, different from him in many other ways. I feel that this distance resulted in him treating me as student of sorts that he was *teaching* about the pro-life movement and the Black community historically and today.

My interview with Pastor Stephen Broden was far more uncomfortable. Broden responded to my follow-up email and kindly agreed to meet with me. I traveled to Dallas, Texas and met him at his church called Fair Park Bible Fellowship. His demeanor was aloof and somewhat mistrusting. His answers were relatively short, and our interview lasted only about one hour. Considering the fact that he certainly does not shy away from

the spotlight—he is the senior pastor of his church, has led rallies and has appeared on FOX News several times—I can be relatively sure that he was uncomfortable with *me* specifically, not simply the interview situation. While he did not refuse to answer any of my questions, he did not elaborate too much on any point. He seemed guarded and uncomfortable, but not hostile. He seemed to want the interview to be over as soon as possible. At one point in the interview, he said that academia has been totally taken over by liberals, and said “especially sociology” and paused as if looking for a response. I laughed awkwardly and responded that there are certainly conservative sociologists, but the answer felt shallow and strange. I can only assume that he did not see me as an “insider” in the pro-life movement and was unsure if I was to be trusted.

I flew to Atlanta, Georgia to interview Alveda King, but she canceled our interview only hours before the scheduled time. Her assistant explained that she was very sorry, but that she was too tired from traveling to do the interview. I rescheduled it for the next week and we talked over the phone instead. She was very kind and apologized for missing the interview. At one point she thanked me for doing this work, clearly perceiving me as somewhat of an ‘insider’ in the pro-life movement whose research might contribute to her cause. King was by far the most rehearsed of the three interviewees. Nearly all of her answers seemed like practiced sound bytes. Certainly this had something to do with the impersonal nature of a phone conversation versus an in-person meeting, but can also be attributed to the fact that she is by far the most famous of the four leaders I interviewed with the most practice being interviewed and in the



spotlight (from 1979 to 1981, King served in the Georgia House of Representatives and she has appeared on FOX News and other media outlets several times). During the interview, King sent me a confidential report for distribution only to Priests for Life supporters. While there was nothing too “secret” or “confidential” in this report, clearly she perceived me as someone to be trusted and to not misuse the information.

My interview with Mark Crutcher was by far the longest and most involved. I was at the Life Dynamics office for nearly eight hours. Crutcher, the only white pro-life leader I interviewed, founded Life Dynamics and created the *Maafa 21* ‘black genocide’ film. He kindly responded to my follow-up email and asked me to call his secretary to make an appointment. She invited me to come observe a taping of LifeTalk TV, Life Dynamics’ monthly online “roundtable-style” talk show. I arrived at Life Dynamics in Denton, Texas early in the morning. The organization was housed in two stand-alone buildings with a large gate surrounding the property. When I pulled up to the gate, I had to state my name and my reason for being there and was buzzed in. I entered the building and was greeted by an employee who walked me to another building where they would be filming the episode. There I was introduced to Crutcher and everyone else involved in the filming—the men operating the camera and sound, the other hosts of the show, Crutcher’s daughter who works for him in the studio, as well as a few other employees doing other tasks. Crutcher and everyone I met seemed very comfortable with having me there and everyone was very kind and warm. Crutcher seems to trust me immediately, or

was at least not suspicious of me in any way. He sat me near the stage and jokingly threatened me that if my phone went off during the filming, I was going to “lose it.”

After the taping was complete, he invited me to a conference room for a conversation with him and the woman he is “grooming” to take his place someday, Renee Hobbs. After about twenty minutes, my voice recorder ran out of space and I panicked trying to figure out what files to delete. Renee offered to let me use her iPhone to record the conversation, which made me realize that I could use my phone instead, which I did. The crisis was averted, but that kindness has really stuck with me. The Life Dynamics office was large and “homey” with a large, 1950’s diner themed break room and Crutcher’s two small dogs running free. He explained to me that having the dogs there was intentional because working in the pro-life movement can be extremely depressing because you know that no matter how hard you try, thousands of babies will still die each day, and the dogs provided some emotional therapy to the staff and lifted their spirits.

Crutcher was extremely comfortable talking to me. Our “interview” was more like a series of lectures on God, the history of the pro-life movement, U.S. history (with a strong focus on the Civil War and WWII), immigration policies, the evils of Planned Parenthood, the conflicts within the pro-life movement, and the success of Life Dynamics. While I cannot know for sure, it was my impression that my race almost certainly played a role in his level of comfort with me in discussing racial issues. He may have been more suspicious of a young Black graduate student wanting to talk with him about his pro-life campaigns directed at African Americans. Additionally, being a young woman certainly influenced his comfort level and the way he interacted with me. He

spoke to me more like a mentee, rather than a researcher, took me out to lunch, and invited me to stay in his family's home (which I declined). I don't suspect he would have made the same offer to an older researcher or to a man.

During a tour of the office building, he introduced me to the recently hired employee in charge of African American outreach—he was the only African American I saw at the building. I was also introduced to a young female intern who was searching the internet collecting pictures of “crazy” pro-choice people for Life Dynamics new website [peopleofchoice.com](http://peopleofchoice.com). The name is taken from the People of Wal-Mart website, a website where people post pictures of outlandish and strangely dressed people in the store with negative comments. Crutcher stopped and looked through the pictures she had found, rejecting most of them and accepting a few. Later, he spent about thirty minutes showing me each page of the website, commenting on each of the pictures with distaste and disgust. At this point, I really felt like he saw me as a pro-life ‘insider.’ He was openly hostile to the “pro-choice” people in the images or videos on the site and he didn't seem to censor his words in any way.

## **Case #2: Interviews with Reproductive Justice Leaders**

In my interviews with Reproductive Justice leaders, I was both an insider and an outsider. When I reached out to Loretta Ross and Monica Simpson of Sistersong to request an interview, I simply said that I was a graduate student writing my dissertation on the ‘abortion as Black genocide’ framing strategy and was hoping to learn more about how their organization had fought back against this framing. While it was never explicitly

stated, it was clear to them that I was “on their side.” I believe they both perceived me as simply a student that needed some questions answered and were not suspicious of me in the least. I met them both at the Sistersong house in Atlanta, Georgia and interviewed them separately. The interviews lasted about two hours each. They seemed completely comfortable with me. Because both women, and especially Loretta Ross, had been speaking publically about these issues for years, this did not surprise me.

While I certainly think the reproductive justice movement leaders would generally agree with my characterization of the Black pro-life leaders, I’m not sure how they would feel about how I write about them. While I have confidence in my analysis, I am still troubled by guilty feelings about not using my findings “for the good of the cause.” I also struggle with the idea of writing about a community that is not my own, with findings that may seem critical to an outside observer.

In the Sistersong house, I was very aware of my whiteness. Ross and Simpson are both Black women and the three employees I met were also Black. The Reproductive Justice movement was created and is led by women of color, so I expected to be the only white woman in that space, but my purpose for being there made me feel self-conscious. I was far more dressed up than other women working at the house and couldn’t help but feel like I was getting the way of the important work they were doing. Because I wanted Ross and Simpson to tell me as much as possible about their interactions with Black pro-life leaders and the mainstream pro-choice movement, I intentionally portrayed myself as an outsider who wanted to “learn more.” And while I certainly *was* an outsider in many ways in this space, I couldn’t help but feel like “just another white woman who’s not

paying attention.” Both women were exceedingly kind to me and responded to follow-up questions I sent them over email.

As social researchers, our subjectivities always influence what we decide to research and how we understand and analyze the information we collect. Certainly my biases influenced my work, but I’m not quite sure how. Did my awareness of my own pro-choice politics lead me to be more critical of the pro-choice movement than the pro-life movement activists? Or is it the opposite? Of course I was aware of all these emotional and ethical land mines before starting the project, and maybe that is exactly what drew me to it. The experience of recognizing people in all their complexity, of being both an insider and an outsider, of being trusted when I expected to be mistrusted, and of feeling both guilt and gratitude simultaneously has been both terrifying and fascinating.

## Appendix B

### SAMPLE INTERVIEW GUIDE (Abortion Counselors)

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#### **Getting here**

- 1) How long have you been volunteering the clinic?
  - 2) How did you begin volunteering at the clinic?
  - 3) Why did you choose to do this? Does volunteering at the clinic align with your personal beliefs and values? Did your personal values lead you to begin volunteering here?
  - 4) What experiences or personal connections led you to begin volunteering here?
  - 5) Do you/have you volunteered at other places? Where? When?
- 

#### **Experience at the clinic**

- 6) Tell me about your first experiences volunteering.
  - 7) Did you know what you would be doing as a patient advocate? Or was it a complete surprise?
  - 8) Was it similar to what you expected? In what ways did you first experiences differ from your expectations?
  - 9) Was it difficult in the beginning? Emotionally draining? Complicated? Fun?
  - 10) What aspects of volunteering at the clinic have been most challenging for you? Specifically?
  - 11) What aspects have been most meaningful? Rewarding?
  - 12) Do you feel qualified to do what you do at the clinic? Were you at all surprised of the role you're expected to take in the clinic?
  - 13) Why do you think that the clinic uses volunteers for this role? Do you ever feel exploited?
  - 14) How do you imagine that the patients see you? Feel about your role in their abortion?
  - 15) What do you see your role as? How do you think the patient's experience would be different if there were no patient advocates?
- 

#### **Background**

- 16) Can you tell me a little bit about your life outside of volunteering?
  - 17) Where are you from?
  - 18) What are your school and work experiences?
  - 19) What do you do now? Work? Go to school? Where?
- 

#### **Family**

- 20) Can you tell me a little bit about your family?
- 21) Are you married? Do you have children?
- 22) (If no,) Can you tell me about your parents/siblings?
- 23) Does your family know about your work here at the clinic? How much do they

know about what you do here? How do they feel about it?  
(if no, How do you think they might feel about it?)

- 24) Are you open to your friends and family about your volunteer work at the clinic?  
How much do you tell people about what you do here?
- 25) Do you ever feel the need to conceal your volunteer work around certain people?
- 26) Do you ever feel stigmatized because of your work here?
- 

**Activism**

- 27) Some people might consider you a Pro-Choice activist. Do you think of yourself as an activist? Why or why not?
- 28) What are your thoughts on the Pro-Choice movement as a whole? What are the main threats to the Pro-Choice ideals that you observe?

**Identity**

- 29) Gender, Race, Sexual Orientation, Class, Religion, Age, Family Status, Education

## Appendix C

### SAMPLE LETTER (Pro-life Leaders)

Rev. Dr. Clenard H Childress Jr.  
L.E.A.R.N Northeast

Pastor Childress,

I am a doctoral student at the University of Minnesota and my dissertation research focuses on how the Pro-Life Movement has changed over the years. Since you are one of the key leaders in the new wave of Pro-Life Movement, I am writing to request a short in-person interview with you. I would very much like to meet you and learn more about L.E.A.R.N. and your extensive work in the Pro-Life Movement in general. I am able to travel to New Jersey during the last two weeks of June and can meet you at your convenience for a short interview.

Thank you for considering an interview. I'm happy to provide any additional information about my project if you have any questions. I will follow up this letter with an email in a few days.

Kia Heise  
PhD Candidate  
University of Minnesota  
Department of Sociology



## Appendix D

### SAMPLE INTERVIEW GUIDE (Pro-life Leaders)

#### Rev Clenard Childress

1. How long have you been involved in the pro-life movement? What got you started?
2. You are very much a leader in the Pro-Life movement (speaking at several national events & interviewed on many national TV and radio programs). What has this experience been like?
3. Tell me about blackgenocide.org and how that website got started.
4. What has your experience been like leading this website and organization?
  - a. Billboard in New York (The Most Dangerous Place...) What has the reaction been like (from media and others)? Your reaction to this?
5. Major social and legal changes you advocate?
6. Most important goals for the movement?
  - a. Achieved through direct action or through legislative change or other avenues?
  - b. Have you worked more in direct action or legislative change?
7. Who are your allies? Who are your main opponents?
  
8. Do you think the Pro-Life movement has changed since you have been a part of it (its structure, its goals, etc.)?
9. What other Pro-Life organizations, leaders, or politicians do you work closely with? Have you felt supported by mainstream Republican politicians?
10. What organizations are the “mainstream” pro-life movement? Would you call yourself part of the mainstream?
11. Difference in how the Protestant and Catholic Pro-Life movements operate?
12. What other social issues do you focus on?
  - a. Other social issues connected to the abortion issue?
  - b. Especially in the black community?
13. How successful do you think the Pro-Life movement has been in achieving its goals? What would you say are the movement’s biggest successes?
  - a. Biggest barriers to success?
14. What should the future of the Pro-Life movement look like, in your opinion?

## **Appendix E**

### **SAMPLE INTERVIEW GUIDE (RJ Leaders)**

#### **Monica Simpson (reproductive justice leader)**

1. How Sistersong got started and how you got involved?
2. How do you understand the mainstream pro-choice movement? How do you understand your role in relation of the mainstream pro-choice movement?
3. The billboards here in Atlanta? What is Sistersong doing to combat these types of framing?
  - a. Legislation—PreNDA
4. What do you think of the pro-life leaders using Civil Rights framing?
5. How do you understand the mainstream pro-life movement? How do you understand your role in relation of the mainstream pro-life movement?
6. What was the reaction from the African American community when the billboards went up in Atlanta, from what you observed?
7. What do you make of the (mostly men and some women) that are behind these framing strategies that focus on black women?
8. Women and men that work at Sistersong? How do people get involved?
9. Have men in the community been receptive to Sistersong's message?
10. Do you think the media generally falls on the side of abortion rights or against them?
11. What changes would you like to see? In the Pro-Choice movement?  
Among activists? Academics?