[102] Cf. "Rainbow People," Vol. 3, in *Chronicles of American Indian Protest,* p. 317.

[103] Cathcart, p. 242.

[104] Steiner, p. 70.

[105] Andrew Ross and Stephen Most, "A.I.M. Seeking New Strength in Spiritual Roots of the Indians," *Kansas City Times,* 2 September 1976, p. 10C.

[106] Alvin Josephy, Jr., describes Indians as "the poorest of the poor," and details these problems in *Red Power: The American Indians' Fight for Freedom* (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Co., 1971), pp. 3, 159.

[107] *Voices From Wounded Knee,* p. 248.

The Contemporary American Abortion Controversy: Stages in the Argument

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Most Americans are tired of hearing about the painful and apparently irresolvable issue of abortion.[1] They feel that they have heard all the arguments, have seen all the ghastly pictures, and have been offered no happy answers. The current public debate about abortion seems to be stalemated, but this is a relatively recent stage in the controversy. A tracing of arguments about abortion during the crucial decades of the sixties and seventies shows major changes in the public arguments used to discuss the topic.[2] The controversy has evolved through seven identifiable stages, from emotional narrative to squabbling implementation and stalemate.

A close examination of these stages accomplishes several objectives.[3] It helps to explain how and why the current American assessments of abortion have come to be as they are. It also fills research gaps cited by Robert S. Cathcart, James R. Andrews, and Leland Griffin, because it provides a "social movement" study that is detailed, that focuses on language strategies rather than on events and actors, and that takes into account the interaction between "movement" and "counter-movement," rather than viewing a movement in isolation.[4] Finally, the study also provides more general hypotheses about patterns of rhetoric in the process of social change.

PRELUDE—PROFESSIONAL ARGUMENTS

When the argument over abortion became public in the early sixties, it was not the first time. In the 19th century, a similar violent and vigorous argument over abortion had raged.[5] This argument was settled when the various state legislatures outlawed almost all abortions. Gradually, a dominant ideology solidified which held that abortion constituted the taking of human life and was an assault on the primary social values of "family" and "motherhood." As described by Barbara Plant, however, that settlement did not provide a congenial solution for all, and it produced small-scale, but persistent resistance.[6] Advocates in the sixties made little reference to these earlier arguments. Indeed, most of them seemed oblivious to the existence of such argumentation.[7]

Of more direct importance to the eventual formulation of the public argument in the sixties were the abortion arguments in the professional fields that occurred in the fifties.[8] Professionals gave focus to the early public arguments and also recruited abortion reform advocates—many from the ranks of the physicians. Thus, the first stage of the contemporary American abortion controversy was the professional stage.

The professional debate appeared in scholarly forums.[9] The controversy involved psychiatrists, doctors, social workers, population analysts, and lawyers who were faced with ever-increasing tensions because their roles required them to provide assistance of various kinds to women who desired abortions and who often sought illegal abortions.[10] The issues of their arguments were narrow and related primarily to the specific concerns of the various professions. For example, one of the first "solutions" to the abortion "problem" was the decision among physicians to create hospital committees to decide which women could have "legal" abortions. This solution eased only the emotional burden felt by individual physicians.[11] The growing pressures that had led professionals to experience a "problem" with abortion, however, soon led nonprofessionals to similar experiences.[12] Once nonprofessionals became involved, the professionally oriented and limited issues were rapidly found to be inadequate; they did not cover the full range of concerns in vocabulary appropriate to the public.

THE EARLY SIXTIES

Public argument in the early sixties centered on legal reforms and consisted largely of the retelling of the tale of illegal abortion. The second stage of the argument, therefore, was dominated by a narrative form. The tale consisted of powerful descriptions of the traumas many women faced when having illegal abortions. In these mini-dramas, the rhetors described the agents, purposes, scenes, and agencies in "typical" illegal abortions.

The women in these dramatic horror stories were depicted quite sympathetically. For example, Marguerite Clark referred to the "wan nervous girl [who] could see only one way out of her dilemma."[13] Later, Sherri Finkbine, who had unknowingly taken thalidomide and had gone to Sweden to abort a deformed fetus, was portrayed as "a healthy and happily married Arizona woman, mother of four" and host of *Romper Room*.[14]

The reasons cited for these abortions were also dramatic. The women were emotionally ill, they had been raped, they carried deformed fetuses, or they were young girls of fourteen or fifteen who had been seduced by older men (even their fathers) and had been deserted.[15] Even the stories that cited socio-economic reasons portrayed the most drastic possible cases of destitution—women who were "unwilling and unable to face a future with another mouth to feed."[16]

The portrayals of the means used in these illegal abortions were often ghastly. In contrast to references to "safe and simple" legal operations in which the doctor simply "scrapes the products of conception out of the uterus,"[17] the articles graphically detailed the instruments of illegal abortions. One author indicated that the "bizarre items doctors have found include turkey quills, knitting needles, hairpins, rattail combs, plastic bottles and even elastic bandages," as well as "the most favored 'instrument' of the amateur"—"a straightened out wire coat hanger inserted into a catheter" used for a "pack job."[18]

Recountings of these instruments were often accompanied by gory descriptions of the techniques of an entire abortion. One story of a young woman, who had an engineering student abort her, told that

> he bought an ordinary flashlight; removed the batteries and cut the bottom off with a can opener. He used the flashlight as a speculum. . . . through this "speculum" he pushed a catheter into which he had threaded a wire. He then forced air through the contraption, which unknown to him, had penetrated a blood vessel in the girl's womb. An air bubble entered the blood stream and in seconds reached her brain. Today this young woman is totally paralyzed.[19]

Other grisly methods—falling down stairs or injecting caustic soap solutions into the womb—were also frequently described, and the most shocking details possible were included. One such story told of an abortionist who thought he did not have all the fetal matter out and ended up pulling out a woman's intestines.[20] These horrific descriptions of the methods used in illegal abortions added great impact to the emotional rejection of illegal abortion sought by the Pro-reform authors.

As Kenneth Burke has noted, the container and the thing contained must suit each other, and in this case, the arguers generally provided a suitable scene for the grotesque operations.[21] The "back alley" became the common term for the illegal abortion scene, but detailed depictions of dirty kitchens (some even with photographs) or back car seats were also plentiful in this period.[22] In addition, the involvement of the "underworld" was related in stories of women who met strangers on street corners or in front of sleazy hotels, to be blindfolded and driven to temporary, hidden destinations. Direct references to other "rackets," such as prostitution and gambling, were also included.[23]

Restatements of such stories aroused strong emotion, but they did not present a case for the desirability of abortion, only for the undesirability of illegal abortion.[24] Moreover, the audience, as well as many of the advocates themselves, believed that abortion was murder and a challenge both to God and patriarchal authority.[25] Consequently, activists urged only that abortions be permitted in limited and extreme circumstances. When five states modified their laws in the mid-sixties, the reforms reflected these limitations: abortions were legalized in the special cases of rape, incest, fetal deformity, or threat to the pregnant woman's physical or mental health.[26]

Resistance to these changes can be discovered in anti-reform arguments, which were infrequent. In contrast to the Pro-reform argument, which would eventually go through several significant ideographic shifts, the anti-legalization argument remained focused on one ideograph throughout—"life." Pro-life advocates stated simply that abortion was the taking of life, and hence *all* abortions had to remain illegal.[27] Pro-life advocates also argued for positive alternatives to abortion, such as adoptions or more rigid sexual standards.[28] This strategy allowed the dominant ideology to maintain its key values intact, while still responding to the tale of illegal abortion.

Thus, in the early sixties, the argument about abortion did not present a direct challenge to the prevailing beliefs about abortion, family, and motherhood. Instead, through an emotionally powerful narrative, it argued for minor concessions for extreme circumstances. Advocates of the dominant ideology answered that such exceptions could not be made because they would amount to murder. Both sides gained many adherents, but the Pro-reform side gained ground, because, for the first time in roughly a century, legal abortions were sanctioned in situations beyond the protection of the pregnant woman's life.

THE LATE SIXTIES

It was unlikely that the abortion argument would rest at this point, however. Advocates of reform had, intentionally or not, made a forceful emotional claim against the horrors of all illegal abortions.[29] If knitting needles and back alleys were repugnant for "good women with good reasons," they were also gruesome for women with more "selfish" purposes. Moreover, the increased expectations of access to abortions outran the increased availability of abortions. Few additional abortions were performed under the new laws.[30] More central perhaps, the continued repetition of the tale of illegal abortion, and the Pro-life advocates' response to it, put a great deal of pressure on the narrative. If there were contradictions in the ideology and social conditions the tale bridged, the narrative would reveal them. The contradictions disclosed by the tale were many.[31]

The most blatant inconsistencies appear in the depictions of the agents involved—both the women having abortions and the men (frequently) performing the abortions. On the one hand, the women so vividly and fully characterized as aborters were generally young, single "victims." On the other hand, the Pro-reform advocates noted in passing that illegal abortion really affected married women more frequently: "not the wanton teenager . . . not the naive girl in the big city . . . but the young (between 21 and 25 years) married woman is most likely to undergo an abortion," they warned.[32] A Pro-reform article might describe two or three "typical cases" of young victims, often having already declared that such cases were not typical at all.[33]

This contradiction arose because of the need to appeal to two ideological components. In the first instance, the tale worked best to generate sympathy within the "old" ideology if it told of the unfortunates who, through no fault of their own, were forced into an abortion. The entrenched ideology held that the only women who should have sex were those who were married, and if sex in marriage resulted in pregnancy, then every wife would want to carry through that pregnancy to enact or reenact the joys of motherhood.[34] Women were held generally responsible for their pregnancies and only youth, rape, or catastrophe could excuse them.

Despite the rhetorical strength of this tale of illegal abortion, the motivating forces that led to many illegal abortions were quite different—the desire or economic need to control one's family, life style, and status through abortion.[35] Yet, because the women's liberation ideology had not been fully and publicly articulated, there were no salient arguments readily available to express the need or desire for abortion as a demand, and no advocates expressed the political "rights" of women.[36] Therefore, until the late sixties, the reality remained incongruously juxtaposed against the tale built by the arguers.[37]

A contradiction also existed in the descriptions of the abortionists. On the one hand, abortionists were described as "hacks" and "incompetents." They were men who

> lead disorganized lives—numerous divorces, alcoholism, drifting from job to job and place to place. Police sometimes find pornographic literature in their possession. Sometimes abortionists have sexual relations with their patients before aborting them.[38]

However, the reformers emphasized that, in fact, "90% of all the illegal abortions are performed by physicians using sterile procedures."[39] Sympathetic portraits described "a genial, graying family doctor who had served them (the community) for thirty years . . . founder of the Grove Public Library, former city councilman and the PTA's choice for Father of the Year in 1960."[40]

This contradiction arose from two sources. At the surface level, two different arguments for liberalizing abortion laws conflicted. The fear of disease and death from illegal abortion was a major impetus for reform, and painting a dirty and incompetent abortionist was necessary to generate that fear. Simultaneously, however, to placate the reigning ideology, advocates wished to argue that changing abortion laws would not bring about a change in the moral climate, and would not lead to more abortions. Therefore, they argued that legal changes would only legalize existing practices; illegal operations already conducted by physicians would merely become legal.

More importantly, there was a dramatic difference between the types of abortionists available to different classes. Upper middle class women were often able to get safe abortions from competent physicians. They had long been travelling to Cuba, Mexico, and Puerto Rico for abortions that might not have been completely legal, but that were fairly routine.[41] More frequently, perhaps, their close contact with a private physician allowed them to get abortions at home as well. Poorer women turned to the abortionist quack.

Again, however, the ideological structure that would allow the clear expression of this discrepancy was not firmly in place in the early sixties. It was not until the later sixties that the term "discrimination" became general enough to be applied to abortion and the third stage of the argument, the ideographic stage, occurred.

By the late sixties, the Civil Rights movement's key terms—"freedom," "equality" (or "discrimination"), and "rights"—had gained strong salience.[42] The broad exposure and general acceptance of these terms provided a way to explain publicly the contradictions in the tale of illegal abortion.[43] The ideographs sorted out the confusion between tales of married and single women, competent physicians and incompetent hacks, by arguing that illegal abortion resulted from "discrimination." Affluent, married women were able to flaunt the poorly enforced law and gain safe abortions from well-qualified doctors. Their abortions constituted the statistics. The horror stories were created by the poor, single women who received "hatchet jobs" from untrained criminals.[44] The poor were being treated "unequally" and their "rights" violated. The heightened salience of the ideographs thus allowed advocates to do more than lament the sad stories of illegal abortion; the ideographs allowed the expression of a legal and social demand.

This shift from narrative toward ideographic argument also required that a new policy be offered. If existing laws were objectionable because they caused discrimination, the inequity could not be remedied by changes in laws to allow a few of the more pitiable abortions, but only by elimination of the entire discriminatory system. Instead of arguing for reform laws, the new demand was for repeal of virtually all abortion laws.