

Finding a Voice: The Abortion Debate on a College Campus

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Senior Honors Thesis
April 2013
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Acknowledgments

Thank you to everyone who helped and supported me on this project. I would have not been able to complete it without you.

First, I must thank my advisors Erik Mueggler and Elizabeth Roberts. It is because of your guidance, advice, and suggestions that this project was able to become fully shaped. Your help has enabled this to become something far better than I ever imagined. Thank you for always being available when I needed help, for having faith in and encouraging me, and for sharing interest in this topic with me.

Secondly, I thank Edward Goldman. It is because of your Reproductive Justice seminar that I realized that abortion was not simply a topic of political debate. Your wisdom inspired me to take on this project, provided me with incredibly valuable background knowledge, and taught me how to examine every side an issue before judging it.

Next, thank you to the members of Students for Life and Students for Choice at the University of Michigan for welcoming me into your organizations. Without your help, stories, and willingness to be researched, this project would not have been able to happen. I deeply appreciate your openness and time spent talking to me. Getting to know all of you was my favorite part of this entire process.

Additionally, thank you to my fellow Anthropology thesis writers. It is also because of your encouragement and suggestions that this project was completed. Special thanks to German thesis writer Michael Budros for your ideas and support as well. Thank you all for working with me and for always offering your shoulders for me to lean on.

Lastly, I must my family and friends from Saginaw and Ann Arbor for their support throughout this entire process. Special thanks to my father Brian Harden for always trusting, supporting, and encouraging my studies. You are always my number one fan.

Introduction

The morning of October 2nd 2011 started out like any typical Monday. It was my junior year at the University of Michigan, and I was walking to class. As I approached the Diag, the open area at the center of the university's central campus, I saw signs that read "Warning: Graphic Image Display." Looking up towards the Diag, I could see that the majority of the space was taken up by a large display of tall posters arranged in a square with a short metal fence around it. Quickening my pace, I finally reached the display and was shocked by what it contained. Before my eyes were huge images of remains of aborted human fetuses, burned victims from the holocaust during World War Two, black slaves hung from trees, and fetuses at different developmental stages. I was immediately struck by these violent images, and had no idea whatsoever as to where they came from. As I walked around the display, I saw that the images were from the "Genocide Awareness Project." I realized immediately that this was a protest against abortion, but I had no idea what this organization was.

More thoughts of shock and awe filled my head as I walked around the display, taking in additional images such as bloody pieces of aborted fetuses along side coins for size comparison, a bleeding Jesus on the cross, and pictures of small children with black eyes. The point of these images was to compare and equate modern day abortion to examples of genocide and violence from the past. I had seen similar posters being held by protesters via various media outlets throughout my life, but this was the first time they were, literally, so close to me. Finally walking away from the display so as to not be late for

class, one thought dominated the rest of the ones flowing through my head: abortion was a topic of heated debate at the University of Michigan.

Why would this shock me? The debate around the legality and morality of the abortion procedure has existed for decades in the United States, far before the Supreme Court decision of *Roe v. Wade* in 1973 that made it legal nationwide. I have known many people who have strong feelings regarding the issue, both on the pro-life side that believes abortion should be illegal and on the pro-choice side that believes it should be legal. However, in coming to the University of Michigan in 2009, I was naïve in thinking that the debate would not occur much on campus. Having known that many perceive the university's town of Ann Arbor as being a "liberal", "left-wing" city, I thought that most people would be pro-choice. Therefore, if I even considered the debate at all, I thought any pro-life movements that might occur would be small due to lack of numbers. It was then surprising to see such a large, stand out protest against the legality of abortion at the very center of campus.

As I continued my walk to class, I also realized that the Genocide Awareness Project's (GAP) display would not be taken lightly among my campus's community. With its graphic nature, there was no way it could not. When I reached my first class, the display was the only thing my fellow students were talking about. "Did you see that disgusting thing on the Diag?" "How could the university allow that?" "I saw a few small children walk by it, they got scared." "I understand freedom of speech, but that thing on the Diag just goes too far." These were the most common things I heard that day, as well as the most common opinions. For the reasons I have mentioned above, these reactions did not altogether surprise me. I was also not surprised to see several articles reporting about the display the

following day in the *Michigan Daily*, one of the university's student written and published newspapers. What did surprise me however was something I learned while reading one of these articles; it was students that had brought this display to campus. I had assumed that the Genocide Awareness Project had just come here of its own accord and set the posters up. The article in the *Daily*, "Pro-life Group Displays Controversial Images on Diag" informed me that it was actually Students for Life (SFL) at the University of Michigan, the main student run pro-life group on campus, who had invited the organization to come (Rubenfire 2011). The Genocide Awareness Project travels to hold this display mainly at college campuses across the entire country. Further reading the article, the president of Students for Life (SFL) at the time explained the group's reasoning for inviting GAP

"I think that the University of Michigan is the subject of a lot of apathy on campus that we have labeled tolerance," [the president] said. "I think that abortion is an issue that has really fallen under that apathy. The only thing that can really shake up this campus is to see what's going on through the graphic images" (Rubenfire 2011)

Reading this, my first thought was, is this true? Had most people, like me, assumed that almost everyone in Ann Arbor and attending the university was pro-choice, and so did not feel the need to discuss the issues surrounding abortion? Frankly, I had no idea before this that Students for Life existed. I also had not known however that Students for Choice (SFC), the main student run pro-choice organization, existed either. As I finished the article, I answered these questions: the existence of Students for Life and Students for Choice

proved that there were a variety of opinions on campus regarding the abortion procedure, and some people felt very passionate about them.

As the weeks passed after the Genocide Awareness Project display, the controversy around it died down around campus. I heard less and less people mention it during class. After my realization that some students on campus were active in the debate around abortion, I admit I did not think much of it either. However, this changed as I entered the second semester of the year. I began to take a class that focused on sexual rights and reproductive justice law through the Women's Studies Department, and again found myself dealing with the legal and moral issues that surround the abortion procedure. At the same time, I was presented with the opportunity to write a senior year honors thesis. Majoring in Anthropology, I realized that I was free to research and write about almost anything. I decided therefore to combine these interests, and that I wanted to write about abortion in some way through an anthropological lens.

How was I to do this though? In thinking about the topic, I realized that the most intriguing aspect for me about abortion was the debate around it. Where does this debate come from, why is it that people are so divided in their opinions, and how is it that these feelings can cause so much controversy and hatred? These were the questions that I wanted to answer. In researching the anthropological work that existed about abortion, I came across *Contested Lives: The Abortion Debate in an American Community* by Faye Ginsburg. In this work, Ginsburg traveled to Fargo, Minnesota in the 1980's when the first abortion clinic was opened there. She interviewed and collected the "life narratives" of many of the women who opened the clinic as well as the women from a local church who protested against it. After reading the book, I was immediately inspired. The women she

interviewed were all over the age of forty, and mostly had children of their own. Additionally, some had previously undergone an abortion themselves or known someone to. From these narratives, she was able to decipher their inspirations for becoming activists, and how their views on motherhood, bodily agency, and what constitutes as “life” influenced their framing of the pro-choice and pro-life movements and theories. All of this was fascinating to me. I knew that for my senior year thesis, I wanted to do a similar study. From the Genocide Awareness Project display and my discovery of Students for Life and Students for Choice, I knew that I would have the perfect population to study right on campus. In studying my fellow students, I would be able to update Ginsburg’s work, and do so in a way that would focus on how young people are active in the debate. I felt that this would be highly intriguing, as college students are educated, and at an age in which dealing with an unintended pregnancy would most likely be very difficult, as they are for the most part not yet independent adults.

And so for the past year, I have followed and studied Students for Life and Students for Choice at the University of Michigan. I have attended their meetings, events, and interviewed many of their members. I have learned many things along the way that have been both logical and surprising. In doing so, I have sought to understand the reasons why these students became activists, how their organizations function on campus, what they focus on, and how the groups interact with each other. From this, the most important things I have learned are that college students are greatly capable of being strong activists, that they consider their activism as part of their identity as a student, and that they are the faces of the current abortion debate in the U.S. To explore these issues, I will first provide a brief history of the abortion debate in the United States. From there, the personal

narratives of members of Students for Life and Students for Choice regarding how they became abortion activists will be presented. The next chapter will discuss how the two groups actually function and operate on campus, and how their activities often work towards common goals. Finally, the last chapter will explore how the two groups clash on campus, and how this clashing can be understood under a common framework of struggle.

Chapter 1

The Development of Abortion in the United States

“The contemporary debate over abortion is part of a long history of changes in both its cultural meaning and social practice in America”

(Ginsburg 1989; 23)

In order to understand the debate surrounding abortion at the University of Michigan, it is important to place it within the larger context of the debate in the United States. Induced abortion is a medical procedure for pregnant women that terminate their pregnancy. There are two ways abortion procedures are practiced in the United States. One is through an in-clinic abortion, in which a trained healthcare professional will perform the abortion on a woman in a healthcare facility. There are two types of in-clinic abortion, the first being aspiration where a vacuum device is used to empty the woman’s uterus, and is generally done within the first trimester of pregnancy. The second is dilation and extraction, where the woman’s cervix is dilated and a healthcare provider removes the fetus using both instruments and vacuum devices. This is generally done during the second trimester of pregnancy. The second kind of abortion procedure is medication abortion, which can be done within the first nine weeks of pregnancy. In medication abortion, a woman takes medication that ends pregnancy and allows her to pass the fetus¹ in her home, or outside of a clinic setting (Planned Parenthood 2013).

Within about the last 50 years, abortion as a medical issue has become hugely politicized in the United States. During this time period, two discourses have developed

over the legality of the procedure, the “pro-life” and “pro-choice” movements. The pro-life movement believes that abortion should be illegal in the U.S., while the pro-choice movement takes the stance that abortion should be legal. Each side has its own reasons and values for taking its respective stance on the issue that deal with larger ideas of human rights and the production of human life. It is the very public clashing of these ideas through activism that has made abortion so politicized, and a central issue to any political candidate in the U.S today. Most literature on the abortion debate in the U.S. concerning activism has dealt with adults aged forty and above. However, the Millennial generation is also highly active in the debate, as seen in Students for Choice and Students for Life at the University of Michigan. These two organizations, and others like them at colleges across the U.S., are different from other types of student activist groups in that they are small-scale reflections of the larger cultural themes occurring in current the abortion debate.

In order to understand the current dispute over abortion, it is important to know its origins. Abortion has had a long history in the United States. In the 1700s, it was considered a form of birth control, and was not as controversial of a procedure as it is today (Collins 2009, 229). At the time, a fetus became a true person when “quickening” occurred, meaning when the woman could feel the baby moving inside of her (Collins 2009, 229-230). The quickening theory had changed however by the late 1800s, when American children began being taught, “that abortion at any stage was the same as murder” (Collins 2009, 230). The reasoning for this shift in thought is complicated, as Luker writes

Many cultural themes and social struggles lie behind the transition from an abortion climate that was remarkably open and unrestricted to one that

restricted abortions (at least in principle) to those necessary to save the life of the mother. The second half of the nineteenth century, when the bulk of American abortion laws were written saw profound changes in the social order, and these provided the foundation for dramatic changes in the status of abortion (1984, 14).

In 1860, Connecticut was the first state to make abortion illegal, starting a trend among other U.S. states. By the 1950s, most jurisdictions had banned the procedure (*Roe v. Wade* 1973). As Justice Blackmun writes in the decision for *Roe v. Wade*, it is important to note that most laws still held more lenient punishments for induced abortions that occurred early in pregnancy (1973). Also interesting to point out is that most laws at this time made exceptions for women whose lives were in danger by continuing her pregnancy (*Roe v. Wade* 1973). But as Gail Collins points out in her book *When Everything Changed*, “Women had been having illegal abortions for far more pedestrian reasons- because they were unmarried or because they could not afford to raise another child” for a very long time (2009, 230). About one in three women would have had an illegal abortion at some point in her life during 1950’s, and that rate has not changed very significantly over the past century; it is still the rate of abortion today (Guttmacher Institute 2013). These illegal abortions were often quite unsafe due to lack of medical resources such as access to trained providers, sanitation methods, medication, etc, and could be life threatening to women. With the second wave of the feminist movement during the 1960s, these unsafe procedures or “back-alley abortions” started to gain more attention by feminist activists (Collins 2009, 230). In 1970, Hawaii became the first state to make induced abortion legal for women, but

only those who were residents of the state. The debate over the legality of abortion became largely public however not long after when New York passed a bill that left abortion “up to doctors and their patients” for the first six months of pregnancy, and did not have a residency restriction (Collins 2009, 231). It was through the debates about the bill in the New York Senate that the pro-life and pro-choice stances started to take form in a large public and political setting.

In 1973, the Supreme Court took on the question of the legality of abortion in *Roe v. Wade*. In the case, Norma McCorvey (aka Jane Roe), represented by Sarah Weddington and Linda Coffee, went to court challenging the constitutionality of the abortion restriction law in Texas. The court ruled seven to two that, “any attempt to interfere with a woman’s right to abortion during the first three months of pregnancy was a violation of her constitutional right to privacy” (Collins 2009, 234). The courts also ruled that abortions during the second trimester were legal, but that states could ban the procedure during the third trimester, unless the health of the pregnant woman was, again, at risk (*Roe v. Wade* 1973). As Collins goes on to report, the announcement of the decision of *Roe v. Wade* brought the issue of induced abortion to many states and people that had never really considered it before. It was at this point when the pro-life and pro-choice opinions started to become inherently connected with certain political parties and organizations. “The sudden announcement that the Supreme Court was making abortion legal came as a shock, and the Americans that were most distressed turned against ‘activist judges’ and everything else they connected with *Roe*, including the women’s movement” (Collins 2009, 234). The Republican party, which before *Roe* had been conservative on economic issues and relatively liberal on social issues, was quickly changing its platform and becoming anti-abortion. (Collins 2009, 234).

On the other side, the National Organization for Women (NOW), became heavily involved in promoting abortion rights issues for women, when before it had been a relatively low priority issue for them. This move largely set up the discourse that the feminist movement would become inherently linked to movement for legal abortion (Collins 2009, 235). These stances, and the distinctions between them, are still the distinctions of the pro-life and pro-choice movements today.

Understanding the history of abortion² is critical to understanding how it has become a political issue with the United States, as well as to understanding how the pro-life and pro-choice movements developed. It is also important to understand the reasoning of each one as they stand in the U.S. today. The current pro-life movement is best summarized in the National Right to Life Committee (NRLC), one of the largest anti-abortion groups in America today. From their website, the basic argument of the pro-life discourse can be found; that human life begins at conception. This means that when a male's sperm fertilizes an ovum, a human life is instantly created inside of a woman's womb (NRLC 2013). Therefore, in following the basic belief that purposefully ending an innocent person's life is wrong, then purposefully ending the gestation of a fetus is murder. Believing that life begins at conception is largely dependent on if a person believes that this is the point at which biologically, life starts. This belief is also influenced by a person's social beliefs. In the U.S., a person's religious background can also play a large role in their stance on the issue. For example, Christian rule says that life begins at conception, and therefore abortion is strictly prohibited. The NRLC is not a religious organization, however there are many large religious organizations that support the pro-life movement, such as those considered a part of the Christian Right, which can have a large pull in U.S. politics with lobbying,

fundraising, and supporting pro-life candidates. Students for Life at the University of Michigan is also a secular organization, as is their larger parent organization Students for Life of America. However, many its members do consider themselves religious and attend church regularly.

Pro-Choice organizations are also highly influential in American politics however. One of the largest pro-choice organizations in the U.S. today is NOW, a group that works to expand the rights of women in this country in general. On their website, the “Reproductive Justice is Every Woman’s Right” page summarizes the ideas of the pro-choice discourse. The pro-choice movement takes the stance that gestation and pregnancy is ultimately a process that happens inside of a woman’s body, so women have the right to choose whether or not they want to go through it. More so, the government does not have the right to interfere in this decision (NOW 2013). NOW and other groups like it such as NARAL Pro-Choice America and Planned Parenthood work for expanding access to safe abortion procedures, as well as access to safe reproductive health services in general. The historical experience of women dying from unsafe illegal abortions is a large motivator for these groups. Additionally, many pro-choice feminist groups emphasize the fact that “Constitutional protections alone cannot ensure accessible and affordable reproductive services for all women” (NOW 2013). Due to high health care costs and lack of insurance, women in the U.S. who are of a low socioeconomic status, young, and/or minorities can often face many barriers to accessing safe abortion procedures. In general, the pro-choice movement largely emphasizes the medical autonomy of women and their right to express it above all else. Most of the members of Students for Choice at the University of Michigan referenced these ideas in their interviews as to the reason why they became activists in the

pro-choice movement. More so, most of them said that educating their fellow students on family planning methods was of high priority for them.

The debate around induced abortion is one that has greatly divided the U.S. on a political scale. With the development of the pro-life and pro-choice discourses, the issue has become greatly polarized where people in the U.S. are often forced to be in either one camp or the other, and being somewhere in the middle is often viewed as not acceptable. The difficulty with this however is that the debate brings up larger questions, such as those of the production of human life and when it begins, that science cannot fully answer. This means that personal beliefs and values have to come in when considering abortion as a medical procedure. Because of this, and because the abortion debate has become so mainstream within U.S. political culture, abortion activism is a subject that is interesting to investigate among students on a college campus, as they are at an age where they are trying to solidify these types of beliefs within themselves.

Chapter 2

How Young People Become Activists

Section 1: The Journey to Becoming a Lifer

“But then I thought, if that’s true, if abortion really is murder, why aren’t more people speaking up against it? And then eventually I found out that a lot of people do speak out against it.” (Interview 1/30/13)

“One of the reasons I was really willing to talk with you today is that I didn’t want you meeting with other people. Because I believe the pro-life argument is infallible and brilliant. And I believe the way [some] people argue it is fucking dumb.” (Interview 12/4/12)

“So I want to change like, this image of the nerdy Catholic with the Polo buttoned up to the top of his neck. I just want people to understand that like, yes, those people exist and they are well-intentioned beautiful people. But do I want them as the face of the movement I feel passionate about? No.”
(Interview 12/4/12)

Many stereotypes exist in the U.S. about the “type” of people who are involved in the pro-life and pro-choice movements. For the pro-life side, the common idea is that members are Catholic or highly religious in some way, republican, and conservative. On the pro-choice side, the idea is that they are highly liberal, bra-burning feminists who despise men.

I must admit that in going into my interviews with the members of Students for Life and Students for Choice, I had these pre-conceived notions as well. After speaking with them, I realize that these notions are left over remnants from the beginnings of the debate before *Roe v. Wade*. Each student had their own story as to why they became members of their respective groups, as well as how they reached their position regarding the abortion debate in the first place. While some the students did have some of the characteristics of their side's stereotypes, not one student fit the profile exactly. Their stories reveal how diverse the people involved in the current debate around abortion are.

When asked about how they came to join the organization, members of Students for Life all traced their interest in the topic of the legality of abortion back to before college. All of the members I interviewed said that they began thinking about the issue, or at least became aware of it general, around the time of middle school. The majority said that during this time, they had pro-life leanings, meaning that they thought abortion was wrong. However, it is important to point out that there were a few students who had pro-choice leanings when they were younger. The general consensus among the SFL members, despite these early feelings, was that they were not well informed enough yet to make a concrete decision, unlike today. This leads to the conclusion then that these early feelings can partly be attributed to the opinions of the households in which the students grew up. Members of SFL reported growing up in both socially liberal and conservative homes. Additionally, members grew up in homes of differing religious practices, including Catholic, Christian, and none at all. Some of the students attended private Catholic schools, while others attended public schools before coming to the University of Michigan. A few of the students' stories highlight this diversity. One student explained for example how he was raised in a

conservative and Christian family, with his parents being regular supporters and donators to their hometown's local chapter of Right to Life. This led to him always having a pro-life viewpoint. Another student from the club explained a different experience

I wasn't always involved in this. I didn't ever really contemplate it. Me six years ago, I never would've guessed I would have been here. My parents are not very involved in this issue at all, you know if they had to choose they mainly vote liberal on social issues (Interview 1/30/12)

Despite whatever their early feelings on abortion were during middle school, all of the members of Students for Life that I interviewed reported an increase in their awareness of the debate when they reached high school. For a few students, this is when they began their pro-life activism. This mainly occurred among the students that attended private Catholic high schools, in which pro-life clubs were fostered and encouraged. The majority of SFL students I interviewed however referenced their high school years as the time period in which they had a "moment" of realization regarding their passion for the abortion debate. These moments were the first times that they felt a strong pull and attraction towards the issue. The way in which these moments occurred can be placed in two main, but very broad categories: activities at school and discussions with someone else, normally a close friend or relative. These categories are not mutually exclusive, and it is important to clarify that these realization moments may not be the moment the student felt that they were pro-life. Rather, these are the moments when the members first felt drawn to exploring their feelings regarding the legality of abortion. Regarding the first

category, many students in SFL reported having an assignment or discussion about abortion during a class at some point during their high school career. Most of the members who experienced this cited reading stories or articles for class that brought up the legality of the procedure. It would then be a following class discussion that sparked their interest and inspired them to do more research into their own feelings. For example, one student told me his moment of realization occurred when he read a story in his high school English class.

I found myself being morally pro-life, but I didn't know if I was okay with saying if everyone should be pro-life or not. But, I think I truly became pro-life for everything when in high school, they were doing a short story in English class about how everyone in an apartment complex watched a murder and rape occur, and there were all eyewitnesses and they all saw the whole thing. And the police officer asked, "well then why didn't you try to stop it?" And so then it kind of occurred to me, if I consider abortion to be murder, by me just being pro-life but not caring if others do, that's kind of the same thing as saying I'm not willing to try to stop it. And it was then I decided that if I was going to be pro-life, it would be contradictory to myself to not be pro-life all the way (Interview 2/1/13)

With this example, we see how the student took a moral lesson from his school work that did not deal with abortion directly and still applied it to his feelings about the procedure. This connection by the student seems to have been inspired by the themes of violence,

murder, and sexuality within the story. The rape of a woman in the story also brings about the idea of victimization based on sex and gender. For pro-lifers, abortion is a procedure that also encompasses these ideas, especially with the murder of the unborn and the common idea among many that pregnant women can never fully consent to the procedure and are therefore victims of it. It is also important to note how reading the story not only inspired the student to be active in trying to prevent the procedure from occurring, but to also encourage other people to be pro-life and active as well. In order to be pro-life “all the way,” he felt the need to try to convince others to be pro-life as well.

Another student’s story highlights how classes in high school can directly discuss abortion, and how these more directly cause “moments of realization”. During his senior year of high school, this student’s political science class did an activity where the class simulated the House of Representatives. Each student had to create a fake bill that would then be presented to and voted on by the rest of the class. The bill this student created was “basically a bill banning abortions, even though *Roe v. Wade* would not allow that” (Interview 12/4/12). Another student in the class wrote a bill that concerned the deregulation of the abortion procedure, eliminating restrictions such as parental consent. As the student explained to me, the discussion of their two bills created a heated debate within the classroom

We were like polar opposites. And most of the bills we would discuss, there were some crazy bills just like, asinine stuff. Like, don't let gay people around children. So we would talk about it for like five minutes, and then vote it down. So like that kind of stuff. They would last about ten minutes. And mine

and [the female student's bill] lasted three days, three class periods. And it was so fascinating. So what she said was, I got to see her little supporting speech on it, and there were a lot of flaws that I will never forget. It was "even if is a kid, it doesn't matter." And I was just like, why? Like what does this about our culture? What does this mean about our values? (Interview 12/4/12)

In this example, we see how the direct discussion of abortion caused the student to ask more questions regarding the United States' policies regarding abortion, and the "culture" surrounding them. This student grew up in a conservative household and had already had pro-life leanings, but in doing this activity in school, he realized that others feel drastically different. Additionally, and perhaps more important to this moment of realization, he started to see these opposing opinions as being problematic. The rest of this student's story also shows the other category of "the realization moment"; that of talking about the debate with someone else. As the student explained

So we had this incredible discussion, our class did, for days. And one kid who started off, who was in the democratic caucus that started off in the pro-choice side was like, "it's a woman's right, it's her body." He came back the third day, and he was like, "So we've been talking about this for two days. I went back and I talked to my mom about it," and he got kind of quiet, and was like, "and she told me about how she's had three abortions. And I can't but help but to think how different my life would be if I had my siblings". And

like, I had goose bumps. And just, like that's insane. So that just was a really moving experience for me (Interview 12/4/12)

With this example, another person's story initiated passionate feelings in the student toward the idea of abortion. To him, the idea that his fellow student did not have the chance to grow up with siblings was an injustice. While the student never explicitly said he thought his fellow student's life would have been better with siblings, it is clear that he felt that the act of abortion took away something potentially positively life changing. From this example, we also see how the two categories of these realization moments, those that happen in school and those that occur in conversation with another person, can overlap. Most of the other members I interviewed of Students for Life described similar stories to me, with the addition of having discussions around the legality and morality of abortion with close family members. As one female SFL student told me

I kind of knew I was pro-life, well I guess I knew. Growing up I wasn't so much, like in middle school or whatever my friends and I would talk about it and we'd say, "Well, it's a woman's right, you know yeah that sounds good." But then I mentioned it to my mom once and she said, "Well, it's a life." And then I said, "What about if she's raped?" And she goes, "It's a life" (Interview 11/30/12)

Other students described having similar talks with their parents, as well as other older adult relatives such as aunts and uncles. It is interesting to note here again how the student

had inclinations toward the opposite pro-choice side, but was then encouraged to look more into the pro-life movement after this moment. This same pattern occurred with other members of Students for Life, and it also occurred the other way as in the first student's story, with their pro-life inclinations being enforced by a discussion they had with another person.

The male members of Students for Life, who make up about one third of the group's population, reported to me another type realization moment; the moment they realized men could be affected by abortion as well. As one of them explained

Before I wasn't truly passionate about it until I started seeing how it can affect men just as much as women. Like there's some things that occurred in my family... not too long ago recently. My other male cousin that I'm really close to... broke up with his girlfriend. But then [she] found out shortly after they broke up that she was pregnant, and she didn't think he wanted anything to do with it, so went a long and got an abortion, without ever even telling him she was pregnant. So then kind of from there, it inspired me that, men should have more of a say because they don't have a say at all whether or the child gets to, whether or not the woman wants. I mean there's argument on both sides that woman should be the only one to decide, but I don't know. The way I see it there's still child that a man should have equal say to. And then I always get fired up when people tell me I don't deserve an opinion or not. It gets me going too (Interview 2/1/2013)

From this story, we can see several of the common inspirations that were reported to me by the male members of SFL. First, that they did not feel it right or fair that the common expectation is that women are solely the ones who decide whether or not to keep a fetus to term. This is because they view the fetus as something that the father also created and contains some of his genetic material as well. Therefore, they feel the male also partially “owns” the fetus, and has a right to say whether or not it should be allowed to develop. What is interesting to note here is that from this line of reasoning, the male members of SFL that I interviewed became pro-life. This is significant because they assumed fathers having the right to control a woman’s pregnancy meant to be pro-life and keep the fetus developing, and not the other way around in terminating a pregnancy when the father does not wish the fetus to continue growing. I did not interview any male members of Students for Choice, of which there are a total of two, so I cannot compare these opinions to those of males who are pro-choice. Secondly, male members of Students for Life did not like the idea that they do not “deserve an opinion” in the abortion debate because they are males. Each of them reported having at least one incident in which another person expressed distaste in their stating an opinion on abortion. This mostly occurred during college and from other students their age. Again, because I was unable to gain a pro-choice male perspective on this, I cannot say whether this is a common occurrence in abortion activism in general. Nor can I say if this is a common occurrence among most pro-life men. What is certain however is that these kind of realization moments are interesting in that they can only exclusively occur among male activists.

For all the students in SFL who were able to trace their path to becoming a dedicated pro-life activist to having “realization moments,” they reported that they then

followed these by doing more research into the abortion procedure and the arguments for and against the legality of it. This research would often include Internet resources, hearing a speaker, and discussing it with others. For the students, this research enabled them to validate their stance and feelings with more concrete and “scientific” backing, and therefore officially declare themselves as “Lifers.” When they came to the University of Michigan after high school, most of these students actively sought out and found Students for Life on campus, and thus began their role as activists.

However, I must emphasize that not all of the members of Students for Life that I interviewed were able to trace their passion back to these moments. As I stated previously, members of the group who grew up in religious households reported that they had always been pro-life, and were unable to pick out a specific time that felt a first pull towards the debate. They most often expressed that they felt being pro-life is something that was “deep inside them,” and that they were “just born that way.” However out of these students, only a small number reported being an activist or a part of pro-life group before college. In this, those pro-life students had their own moment of realization in feeling a pull towards actually participating in the debate. These moments mainly occurred when they came here to the University of Michigan. As one female student told me

One day I was walking to class in the Diag, and I saw these signs that were like “WARNING: GRAPHIC IMAGE DISPLAY.” And I was like, what, is this radical abortion people? And it was. But it was students and so I walked past it as I was on my way to class and I kind of did a once around. I went to class, I came back after class. And I looked, and the images stayed with me. I talked

with a couple people that were at the display and I found out later it was called the Genocide Awareness Project. So I talked to be people at the display, and then I left. And I told my roommate about it and I came back with her, and she spent like five minutes, but I stayed. So I came back three or four times because it really stuck with me. And it was really at the point where I said, okay I should check this out, I should do something. It was like kind of like a sign: literally these big billboards (Interview 11/30/12)

For this student, it was seeing this display at the university sponsored by Students for Life that drew her to become an activist. Though she had pro-life leanings before, this was one of the first times she had seen people her age taking a stand against the legality of abortion. Not having an easily accessible group of young, pro-life activists to join may have prevented her from becoming an activist before. Other students reported their similar realization moments also occurring because of SFL activities. As another member told me

I met [a member of Students for Life] going to mass at St. Thomas, and he mentioned, "Oh, we're having our first meeting. Are you pro-life? You can come join." And I was like oh my gosh yeah! So I came and realized that they do so much for just all the resources on campus, for any of the pro-life things, for unplanned pregnancies, that I was like "Oh my gosh I have to help, there's so much to do!" So I was really excited to meet them... I guess I never really became like, doing some activist things until I joined SFL here, because there was nothing really at my school and high school. I did do some stuff in church

when I was younger, but it wasn't until I came here that like, it's so organized and there's so much going on that I can help which is great (Interview 2/26/13)

Again, in this student's story we can see how Students for Life at the University of Michigan gave previously pro-life students a platform on which they could become activists and share their feelings in an organized way. She was drawn to the large amount of activity done by the club that she could participate in that would give her something significant "to do," unlike her previous pro-life involvement. Along with this, SFL also provided a similar platform for those who found their passion for the pro-life side for the first time during high school, and who were looking for a place in which to express this shift.

After becoming members of Students for Life at Michigan, all of the members reported to me that they increased their education on the pro-life stance, and what Students for Life of America stands for. In doing so, many of the students told me that they then found personal connections to the debate. These connections are not a part of the moments of realization I have been discussing, but rather occurrences that once fully seen through the SFL lens, allowed the students to form a greater personal connection with the general pro-life movement. For example, as the first female student from above told me later in her interview

Another thing, it's not the primary reason, but my mother when she was pregnant with me [got a test] that said it was positive, or that I was going to have down syndrome. So the doctor said, "you need to think about what you

want to do, if you want to terminate.” And my parents said no. And after joining the club, and it wasn’t like an egotistical thing, it was just in my back pocket thinking about it, I learned that 9 out of 10 children diagnosed with downs before birth get aborted. So, I was the one that survived. And I don’t even have down syndrome, sometimes it’s a negative test. So to kind of realize how lucky you are, it helped me resonate with the other who aren’t so lucky (Interview 11/30/12).

This example greatly highlights this personal connection phenomenon. It was not until after she joined Students for Life that she was able to understand her own background in relation to the movement. This, in turn, made her more passionate for the pro-life side. It is important to highlight that she specifically points out that this is not “the primary reason” for her become a member of SFL. Rather, she united her own story to her activism after gaining experience.

What the stories of how the members of Students for Life came to become pro-life and activists show is that the current pro-life movement is a somewhat diverse group. Though it is out of the scope of this project to analyze the university membership in the movement in terms of social class, race, sex, etc, these inspiration stories indicate that some of the stereotypes regarding pro-life advocates are not true. No longer is it only highly religious older adults who are participating and feel passionate about this debate. On the contrary, there is a large population of young people, from a variety of social backgrounds who are finding connections and enthusiasm within the pro-life movement. As the last two quotes from the beginning of this chapter show, these young people are concerned with

and are breaking down the stereotypes regarding the identities of pro-life activist. In doing so, many believe that they will help strengthen their cause, as they are attracting other people, especially young people, to the movement.

Section 2: The Journey to Becoming Pro-Choice

“I don't remember talking to my parents specifically about abortion, [being pro-choice] is something that just made sense to me always.” (Interview 2/25/2013)

“I feel like [being pro-choice] has just kind of been symptomatic of being a very liberal person. Cause, this fetus is dependent on the woman. And another person doesn't have the right to my body. So when I hear these male legislators that are rich and white saying that I can have my baby, but if I'm a single mom that makes me a bad person. But if I have an abortion that makes me a bad person. That doesn't make sense to me.” (Interview 2/22/2013)

“I'm really against people trying to force their ideas on other people. And so I think that's one of my biggest reasons why I'm so passionate. I'm just really against the whole 'people using force on me and on other people.' It just really bothers me.” (Interview 2/20/2013)

As I have written previously, many stereotypes exist regarding the “type” of people who are activists in the pro-life and pro-choice movements. As the previous section demonstrated with stories from members of Students for Life at the University of Michigan however, these current movements are actually made up of people from various backgrounds. In comparing this with the members I spoke with in Students for Choice at the University of Michigan, I found many similarities. Mainly, the reported reasons for why they were pro-choice had similar origins in being related to home environment, activities in school, and interactions with other people. Their stories as to how they became pro-choice activists show that like SFL, the members of SFC do not always follow their group’s stereotypes in their inspirations for being pro-choice.

Similarly to members of Students for Life, when I asked members of Students for Choice how they came to be pro-choice, most of them traced their feelings to back to before high school, around middle school. Many of them had pro-choice leanings, but were too uninformed about what abortion was or what being pro-choice meant to actually develop their opinions. As one anecdote from a student explains

I remember the first time, I think the first time I ever heard the word abortion I was just like, “What is that?” I was reading some article in the newspaper, I was little, and I asked my dad and he was like, “Well it's when somebody doesn't want a baby anymore”. And I was like what the hell? Because I was like eight and was just like, “Why would anybody want to do that?” ...So I started thinking about it from a relatively young age (Interview 2/22/13)

This quote shows at what age some of the members were first exposed to the idea of abortion and the moral debate around it. It also begins to show the range of home environments that the members grew up in, and how, similarly to members of Students for Life, these influenced the members' early feelings concerning abortion. This student for example grew up in Ann Arbor, with a family who she reported had always been liberal leaning politically. This can be seen in the quote by the manner in which her father explains what abortion is to her; it is not murder, but rather "when somebody doesn't want a baby." For obvious reasons, this would be difficult for an eight-year-old child to wrap her head around, as this student explained to me with the question, "Why would anybody want to do that?" She went further to explain to me that as she was more exposed to abortion over the next few years, it felt natural to her that she would be pro-choice, and she accredited this to her family. Many of the other members of Students for Choice also attributed their early pro-choice leanings to their family, and growing up in "liberal" hometowns.

However, like with Students for Life, many members of Students for Choice grew up in what they described as conservative homes and towns. In describing these "conservative" environments, students said most often that they were highly religious and used phrases such as "right wing" and "the bible belt of the state of Michigan" (Interview 2/20/13). Most of the students that grew up in such homes reported that once they learned more about the debate, they came to favor the legality of abortion despite the feelings of those around them such as close family and friends. This situation of growing up in household that held the perceived "opposite" views regarding abortion that members of Students for Choice hold currently also occurred among members of Students for Life who

reported growing up in more secular, “liberal” households. The reason for such a switch in ideologies was something that most of the students found difficult to trace, but mentioned it occurring when they learned more about feminism and the ideas of female bodily control. One student shared an anecdote however in which she offered becoming pro-choice as a form of rebellion.

I'm not someone who has this big like story of like, "and this is how it happened." I come from a really small town that's really pro-life, really anti-choice. My mom is really anti-choice, which makes things interesting. So I feel like I may have become interested just to be a defiant 14-year-old. But then I decided it was actually something that, it did mean something to me and that it was important (Interview 2/20/13)

While this student was the first and only that I interviewed to say that the origins on her opinions regarding the abortion procedure were a form of rebellion against her family, it is not out of the question that this would be relevant for other students on either side as well. But it is important to note how the student points out that this defiant nature no longer exists, and that being a pro-choice activist is “actually something” that has a deeper meaning for her. For this student, finding this deeper meaning occurred during her high school years.

As was the pattern in Students for Life, most of the members of Students for Choice reported becoming officially pro-choice when they reached high school. As was also the case with SFL, some of the students reported having a “defining moment” in which they

realized they had a strong passion for fighting for the legality of abortion. However, as is the case in the quote above, some students did not have such moments. As another student who said she grew up “conservatively” said

I don't really know because I grew up pretty conservatively. Like I'm probably the only person in my family who is pro-choice. Or at least in like a big part of my family. So I don't really have sort of like a defining moment, but I think it just sort of came out of moving toward feminism and becoming friends with activists and like learning more about it. You know it's really hard to pin point, I think, why. And now that I am, and am sort of more a part of the pro-choice community, it just seems like really natural and like organic. So I don't know. I used to be anti-choice. So it's kind of weird
(Interview 11/29/12)

Here, the student reports that it was gaining more knowledge of feminism and influence from friends that led to her becoming pro-choice. It is interesting to note that she uses the terms “natural and organic” in describing her current activism. This is unique in that she is actually breaking away from what she believes would have been the “natural” progression for her. It is “kind of weird” to her that her opinions regarding abortion do not fall in line with those of her family and home community. Later in the interview, she told me that all of these feelings finally culminated in college, when she became an activist during her senior of undergraduate school.

For many other members of Students for Choice however, just as in Students for Life, they had “moments of realization” that they were able to trace back easily for me. As with my previous chapter, I define these moments as being an occurrence in which the student felt a pull towards the abortion debate in some way. This moment may not be when they decided to become activists, but rather when the student felt an inkling of interest towards the pro-choice movement. Again like in the stories from members of Students for Life, these moments of realization can be put into the large categories of those that came from their school in some way and those that came from interactions with family and friends. One student’s story highlights well how these two categories are capable of crossing over and combining. She said that she first became interested in the debate during her junior year of high school when doing an activity in one of her classes

We read an essay called “We Do Abortions Here...” And at the time I was not like super invested in the issue, but it definitely kind of, it hit something more than like the average essay you read. So after reading that, it’s main thesis was like... this isn’t pretty work, but it needs to be done. And, I’d kind of been leaning towards the left, so it wasn’t a hard jump to make for me. Not that it was much of jump. But you know, an extension of my beliefs really

(Interview 11/20/12)

Unlike with the previous stories from those students who grew up in perceived “conservative” homes, the article that this student read served as the first time she found an interest in the ideas of the pro-choice movement. For her, having this discussion at

school was a turning point for her, similarly to the school activity related realization moments that I heard from members of Students for Life. She cemented her beliefs by then discussing the issue with a friend of hers who happened to be a member of her high school's Students for Life group.

And so... the founder of Students for Life called me. And she was just like, why do you believe this? And it wasn't rude; she's such a sweet person. I mean we had known each other previous to this. So we just had this conversation, and I remember like it was late at night, and my mom was yelling at me to get off the phone. And I was like no, you don't understand, it's important. But at that point, there really wasn't any animosity. Not that there is. So we had this conversation and, she's very religious. And so that was a lot of her, the impetus for her viewpoint. Which I'm not so religious. And basically what it came down to, at that point when I was 16 or 17, I was like, this is an individual decision... And then a few weeks later, she gave me, a little pin that had like a babies foot on it at like eight weeks or something. And I still have it, it's in my drawer. And I don't really know why I keep it because... it's just a token of how I've gotten to where I am I guess (Interview 11/20/2012)

In speaking with this friend, this student's story builds up to culminate in her fully realizing her pro-choice stance and passion. She spoke with her friend "late at night," and would not get off the phone even when her mother told her to. Also of interest is the fact that she

spoke with a friend that was adamantly pro-life, giving the student an example to which she could say she was the opposite of. As she points out, her pro-life friend was “very religious” while she was and is not currently. Keeping the pin that this colleague gave her additionally can be interpreted as being an actual object that serves as a physical reminder of the views regarding the legality of abortion that she does not agree with. For this student, this interaction with someone else she knew provided her with something specific that she disagreed with, and helped her realize her stance on abortion.

This narrative theme of having a friend or fellow student influence in some way how they came to be pro-choice was one that was often came up in my interviews with members of Students for Choice. Unlike the story above however, other students reported knowing other females who had directly been affected by unintended pregnancies in some way. For example, one student told me

I don't have any like, personal experiences. Like I've never had an abortion or thought I might need one. I've never had a pregnancy scare... I had one friend in high school, she grew up, her mom was addicted to drugs. But before living with her great aunt, she lived with a foster family. When her foster mom passed away, her foster father became extremely abusive, raped her, and she became pregnant. So she went to Canada to get an abortion. She miscarried so she didn't actually end up getting an abortion. But her life story is like, insane. And she, I mean she's surprisingly intact. Like she went to Ferris State last year. And I'm just like, I would be so fucked up. And I'm sure if she'd decided to have a baby, she'd still be thriving, but I don't think that would be

fair. To expect someone to just be like, okay. Obviously this is a horrific instance and not the norm for an abortion, but like, it happens. (Interview 2/22/13)

Several things are worthy of note from this story. First, this member of Students for Choice points out how she herself has never had the experience of dealing with an unexpected pregnancy. This was the case for all the students that I interviewed for this project. None of them, including members of Students for Life, had actually had any experiences being pregnant, giving birth, or having an abortion. Whenever the students mentioned having personal connections with issues of childbearing, it was always through another person. This is an important point of distinction for this project in general. Other anthropological and ethnographic works examining the people who are activists in the abortion debate all point to having experienced childbirth or having an abortion as being large reasons as to why these people become activists in the first place³. Such works however also only interview pro-life and pro-choice activists who are older adults aged 40 and above. The undergraduate college students that I interviewed however were all in their late teens or early twenties. Though they may have been capable of becoming pregnant, their young age, sexual education, and fact that they are studying in a higher education environment are probable influencing factors as to why they had not yet had children. Without having the experience of pregnancy or of the abortion procedure themselves, it then becomes interesting to investigate why young people, particularly university students, feel so passionately and dedicated to their stance on the morality and legality of abortion.

In the case of this student quoted above, seeing the difficult situation of a friend who was a victim of abuse and rape served in part as inspiration to become a pro-choice activist. Other members of Students for Choice reported similar forms of inspiration as well, including those involving fellow family members. Another student for example told me

I'm very passionate about this issue, because some of my relatives in India are, well a lot of them like in the olden days had arranged marriages. So they would sometimes have up to like 11 children because they didn't have any access to birth control. And some of them did end up having abortions. I know that one of them really bitterly regretted it because she wasn't able to have children later. But the other two, they really needed them you know, because they couldn't handle having more than 11 children. Their bodies just could not handle it. So like, their husbands would just have to breathe on them and they would get pregnant was the kind of a situation. So you know, it's just when you have no control, when women have no control over the circumstances in which they get pregnant, they're inherently incapacitated and demeaned in society. So I believe abortion has to be safe and legal and available as means to control your reproduction in addition to birth control and sex education (Interview 12/5/2012)

For this student, seeing the reproductive situation of her fellow female family members gave her a relatively constant reminder of what happens when “women have no control” in regards to childbearing. For her, it is a large injustice that her some members of her family

do not have access to birth control and sexual education resources. Her story is unique in this way because she relates it to cultural differences. As an Indian-American, she has access to reproductive resources when others she knows in India do not. Her passion therefore arises from trying to increase education and awareness so as to decrease the situation of her family's circumstances.

In talking about family influences as sources of inspiration in becoming pro-choice, the other large main theme that came up in the student's narratives was learning about the debate through other pro-choice family members. As one student explained

What got me involved is that I've always been surrounded by, I've always been in a very woman-positive environment. When I was growing up, I have two older sisters who are very feminist and very influential. One's an OB-GYN now, she's an abortion provider. So yeah, they just passed down all of this feminist literature to me, and I was just like wow. This is great. This is awesome. So that's why I am in it now. (Interview 2/6/13)

Here, the student uses the term "woman-positive" to describe the environment in which she grew up. To her, this means supporting a female's choice to have an abortion. She also has an older sibling that performs abortions, and so it is not surprising that this would also influence the student's feelings toward the morality of abortion. For this student, like many of her fellow members of Students for Choice, she also described her coming to be pro-choice as being "natural," meaning she always felt that she held the opinion her entire life.

This is different than having a strong, singular defining moment of realization as described by some of her fellow members above.

For these students, and most of the others from Students for Choice that I interviewed, they joined the organization not long after they came to the University of Michigan. This occurred mainly by either the student actively seeking out the organization or by meeting and becoming friends with other members of the group. This, along with the other themes described from their narratives above, reveal a large number of similarities between the members of Students for Choice and Students for Life. Members from both groups grew up in a variety of home environments, both in households and communities that agree with their current stance on the legality of abortion and ones that do not. Both traced their inspirations from becoming active in the debate to sources such as the experiences of family and friends and school learning. Others in both organizations had a difficult time pinpointing where their inspiration came from, and felt that they had held these opinions for most of their life. The only major difference between the two groups is that several members of Students for Life referenced their religion as being part of their starting point in pro-life, while no members of Students for Choice related their religion to opinion on abortion. With many of these aspects being similar however, it is intriguing then that these students formed their opposing opinions. What is definite however is that the past experiences of the members of both Students for Choice and Students for Life continually have an impact on their pro-choice and pro-life activism.

Chapter 3

The Activism of Students for Life and Students for Choice on Campus

“They’re not as negative as people think they are. I think some of the work they do is really great... If they’re going to promote adoption, then I think that’s great as long as they aren’t putting down abortion or women who have had abortions” (Students for Choice Interview 11/15/12)

“We genuinely believe that pro-choice people want to help with it. But from our perspective, we think that they’re misguided in it, or they haven’t really gotten into the research end of the work” (Students for Life Interview 11/30/2012)

“I think the abortion debate is one of the most polarizing issues in America. So there’s not a ton of common ground I guess”
(Students for Life Interview 12/8/2012)

Students for Choice and Students for Life are both two highly active student organizations at the University of Michigan. Each has roughly twenty five to thirty regular members who attend the clubs’ weekly meetings and help execute their events. The quotes above, taken from members of each group, reveal that the majority of members believe that there is not a large amount of commonality between themselves as organizations. However, both groups have similar leadership structures, types of events, and educational aims. Each

organization even makes it clear that their most important mission is to support women in their reproduction decisions. Regarding these aspects, the only difference between the groups is their stance on the legality of the abortion procedure.

Students for Choice (SFC) is the only specifically pro-choice group at the University of Michigan. The group's main goal is to promote reproductive justice on campus and on a national level. The Reproductive Justice framework holds that women have the right to choose whether or not to have children, and to raise their children in safe and healthy environments (SisterSong 2013). On Maize Pages, the University's directory of student organizations, SFC makes it clear that they support reproductive justice, stating that

Our purpose is to organize University of Michigan students and campus community to educate about state and federal legislation and to encourage voter efficacy by utilizing social media, providing accurate information about candidates, increasing visibility by advertising, tabling, and making our presence known to state and national legislators [SIC]. We believe that women are smart enough to make decisions about their bodies (Maize Pages 2013)

The club also works closely with Ann Arbor's chapter of Planned Parenthood, located a few miles away from campus. Students for choice volunteers at Planned Parenthood somewhat regularly, and are sponsored by the clinic in receiving educational materials such as posters, flyers, and pamphlets that cover a wide variety of female sexual health topics. These are passed out regularly around campus during SFC events and meetings.

As a group, Students for Choice is organized and performs like many other student organizations on campus. The leadership consists of a president, vice president, and then a group of five students known as the "Choice Board." These students are committee heads that help to take lead on the group's events. Aside from the regular meetings held every Monday evening where group members discuss a variety of reproductive justice and legislative topics, SFC holds many events on campus with the hope of promoting dialogue around abortion. One of these events is the "One in the Three Campaign," a nation wide program aimed at destigmatizing abortion. The title of the program makes reference to the statistic that one in three women will have an abortion at some point in their lifetime, and as a campaign it works to end the social persecution of women that have undergone the procedure (1in3Campaign 2013). Students for Choice participates in the campaign in several ways. First, by holding focus groups, in which a group of eight to ten students from campus are gathered and shown a film of five women of various life backgrounds telling their abortion stories. Afterwards, a member of SFC facilitates a discussion among the students about what they have just watched. The goal of this is to spread education on what the experience of having an abortion is like, and to encourage students to support the women around them that have had the procedure done. As one student said "They've already had the abortions. So let's support them. Let's give them resources on campus and you know, nationally, to support them through like their experiences." Students for Choice has also participated in the One in Three Campaign by putting up flyers and banners promoting the campaign around campus, and holding an "Abortion Stigma Panel." This panel, consisting of a physician from Planned Parenthood, a representative from the office of the One in Three Campaign, and a student from the University of Michigan Law School

discussed where they thought negative stigma around abortion originated from and what they believed the best strategies are to eliminate it⁴.

Students for Choice will also encourage dialogue around abortion through screening films and bringing in other guest speakers. For the past two years for example they have shown the documentary *Twelfth and Delaware*, which is about a clinic that provides abortion and an anti-abortion pregnancy care center that are located directly across from each other on the same road in the state of Florida. The club also holds “Diag Days,” where they will set up some sort of protest display in the central area of the University of Michigan’s campus. For example, in the winter semester of 2012 they set out six-hundred dollars worth of Ramen Noodles to show how much money the average woman spends on contraception in America every year.

Aside from holding large events, SFC also sets up informational tables on a regular basis around the university’s campus. The goal of this is to provide students, both female and male, with practical education and resources regarding reproduction. This includes contraception, female health tips and guides, as well as information on getting an abortion. It is clear that abortion is not the only issue that Students for choice takes a stand on. As one student said

We’re not a group solely focused on abortion and abortion access, though it is you know, it is a big part of it. But we fight for contraception, we fight for sex education, and fight for adoption rights, we fight when women are pregnant and want to keep their children (Interview 11/15/12)

The commonly held belief of members of Students for Choice is that if they as a group are not there to provide this type of information, then students will not receive it. Worse yet, if SFC is not present on campus, then Students for Life and the pro-life side will be the only presence on campus, and female students will only receive biased information.

The work that Students for Choice does and the inspiration behind it becomes especially interesting when compared to the work of their opposing group, Students for Life. Examining the two groups' activities shows how both sides of the abortion debate can find a good amount of common ground. Students for Life (SFL) at the University of Michigan also holds weekly meetings where members discuss different topics such as adoption and bioethics. The leadership is a bit more extensive, but still very similar. There is a president, vice president, treasurer, and secretary, and then a board consisting of seven students. These students however are each a chair of a committee that perform different tasks for the club such as fundraising, events, and publicity. What sets SFL apart from Students for Choice is that Students for Life is actually a part of a nationwide organization called Students for Life of America (SFLA) that has chapters at universities around the U.S. Students for Life at the University of Michigan therefore receives resources from the SFLA national office such as educational materials, event ideas, and the opportunity to attend a pro-life conference in Washington D.C. Students for Choice on the other hand is an independent organization at the University of Michigan. Similar to SFC however in their partnership with Ann Arbor's Planned Parenthood, Students for Life partners with Arbor Vitae, an anti-abortion pregnancy crisis center located across the street from campus. Arbor Vitae also provides the club with educational materials resources for girls who come to the group with unexpected pregnancies.

The events and other work that Students for Life does regularly is quite similar to that of Students for Choice, in that the main objective is to spread awareness, education, and dialogue around abortion. They also hold “Diag days,” table in university halls, and flyer regularly. The difference however is that while SFC promotes the idea that women have the right to make whatever decisions regarding their reproduction they chose, SFL promotes a “culture of life” on campus. A phrase used commonly by all members, a “culture of life” is defined by the group as a general acknowledgement and support for the sanctity of life by Michigan students. This means supporting a person from the moment they are conceived to the moment they die. Aside from abortion, SFL is also opposed to euthanasia and the death penalty in the U.S.

In promoting a “culture of life,” the members of SFL also believe strongly in supporting female students on campus facing unexpected pregnancies, as well as students who already have children. Many of the group’s events are centered on this issue. As one member explained

The other half of what we do is actually reaching out to women who are facing unplanned pregnancies. Because we don't think it's very fair to say abortion should be illegal and then leave them. Because everyone in the pro-life movement is very compassionate and very full and I've never met anybody whose heart doesn't break for women in that situation. So yeah, we really want to be there for them and give them a support system to them. And Students for Life tries to emulate that in reaching out (11/30/12)

Last year, the group started a “Pregnant on Campus Campaign.” This is part of an initiative started by Students for Life of America to enable SFL chapters at universities around the country to provide resources for other students on campus who are or become pregnant. The main goal of the project is to make it easier for students to raise children while still attending school, so that they do not have to choose between the two. SFLA provides chapters with ideas and educational resources to start small campaigns at their school. Students for Life at the University of Michigan has implemented several of these ideas, from clothing drives to offering free babysitting nights. They also started a confidential email account, pregnantinfo@umich.edu, that pregnant students or students who believe they might be pregnant, can contact to seek advice.

It is interesting to note that this idea of supporting pregnant women is not very different than the idea expressed by the member of Student for Choice above. Both groups feel that it is their mission and duty to be a resource for female students, especially those who become unexpectedly pregnant. The difference however is that SFC holds that abortion is an acceptable option for women in this situation, while SFL does not.

Students for Life’s stance on the legality of the abortion debate is best seen by their participation in the March for Life and the Students for Life of America’s National Conference. Cited by many of the members as one of the most memorable and deeply impacting experiences of being in SFL, these events are held annually in Washington D.C. The SFLA National Conference is the largest pro-life conference in the world, with over 2,000 people in attendance in 2012 and 2013. It is an all day event that features pro-life speakers covering topics addressing “adoption, Planned Parenthood, birth control, [and] necessary steps the pro-life movement must take after Roe v.Wade/Doe v. Bolton are

overturned” (sflalive.org 2013). Additionally, the conference also gives advice to students about how to better spread pro-life messages on campus, prevent abortion, and how to find jobs and internships in the pro-life movement. For many of the students interviewed, the conference is a source of inspiration as well as solidarity. As one student said, “It’s just so interesting to see, there’s like 1,000 to 2,000 pro-lifers there. And it’s really encouraging because you start to think you’re the only ones” (Interview 1/30/13). This year (2013), the University of Michigan Chapter of Students for Life was named “Group of Year” by SFLA for the achievements they made in Pregnant on Campus Campaign. The March for Life is a separate, but related event that takes place the day before the SFLA national conference. Held for the first time on the one-year anniversary of Roe v. Wade in 1974, the march has been an annual protest on the steps of the capital building against abortion. Most members of Students for Life at the University of Michigan have participated in this march at least once during their membership. As one student explained, it is an avenue in which students in SFL can connect with the larger pro-life movement in America

So to hear from all of those experts was really cool, and then to actually be a part of it... Statistics show that more and more of the younger generation are pro-life. And there are 500,000 people there and it’s just really cool to be a part of not only this tradition but part of this movement that’s growing and that’s making progress (Interview 11/30/12)

Students for Life events can also be very similar to those of Students for Choice, however. They also bring in guest speakers to talk about pro-life issues, such as Catelynn

and Tyler from MTV's *Teen Mom*, hold film screenings, and hold educational events like the Genocide Awareness Project as described in the introduction. Many members of SFL believe that the GAP event was an overall success, as it forced the issue of abortion to the front of many students' minds and created dialogue around it. Dialogue is another common word used by members of SFL, and another large goal cited by members of the club is to constantly have it at their events.

We want talk about what we believe. If you have questions about what we believe, we're all for it. We don't hide anything. We try very hard to interact with people, especially the people that don't agree with us. Like even if we're just tabling, like at festifall at something, and people will walk by and we'll say like, "do you want to join the pro-life club?" And they'll say, "Oh I'm not pro-life, I'm pro-choice". And we'll say, "Why?" You know, just to get people to talking. Like you can disagree with us, we just want to talk (Interview 11/30/12)

In creating dialogue, Students for Life also brings in women who have had abortions in the past. For example, the group has brought in post-abortive women from the "Silence No More" campaign to talk about their experience in getting the procedure. The goal of this for SFL is to teach students what it is like to have an abortion. What is interesting here yet again is how similar this event is to Student for Choice's "One in Three" campaign, which also aims to share the experiences of post-abortive women. It is intriguing that both groups value the concept of learning about abortion from women who have had the procedure,

and believe that such events will convince people of their stance. The stories the women present will be similar, though perhaps biased given the speaker's stance on the legality of abortion, and yet both Students for Life and Students for Choice hold that such stories will contribute to their opposing arguments.

Looking at the activities of Students for Choice and Students for Life operates as a good point of comparison between the two. In comparing the activities of the two groups, it becomes clear that they are similar in several ways. For one, both organizations make it a priority to promote dialogue around campus about abortion. Their main objective in this is to get people around campus thinking about how they feel about the legality of the procedure, so that they may codify a position and decide whether they are pro-life or pro-choice. Members from both SFC and SFL said that their main target in providing education materials other than women on campus facing unexpected pregnancies are students who are in the "middle ground" in their feelings toward abortion. By this, they mean people who have not taken a side in the debate either way. One student from SFC summed up this fight for the middle by telling a story about her mother.

[My Mother] was like why are you fighting for this? Like if you want an abortion you can just go get one. And that was just really really hard for me to hear. Because that's not the case and people don't know that's not the case. But, she's a person who doesn't understand that in those, you know, so you have these people who are very immersed in the pro-choice or the pro-life, and they know what's going on. But you have a huge middle ground that's just kind of on the edges of everything taking things in, but not fully

understanding what's at stake. And like of course that's the case with any issue, like you can't ask everyone to be experts. But I mean just hearing that was like really, I mean upsetting because she's my mother and doesn't really understand what I'm doing, on a personal level. In a larger sense, just like, what's going on? People don't know (Interview 11/20/12)

In trying to reach out to this middle ground through educational events, both Students for Choice and Students for Life hope to get them passionate about the abortion debate so that they may find more students to join their causes.

In addition to trying to appeal to the middle ground, the activities of SFC and SFL are also similar in that they both work to support women in their reproductive choices. When interviewed, all of the members of the two groups said that women should not be coerced or forced into making a decision regarding their reproduction that they do not wish to do. It is regarding abortion however where the differing ideological frameworks of each group surrounding female reproductive choice becomes apparent. For Students for Choice, most of their main work revolves around comprehensive sexual education, highlighting contraception. As a group, their main goal is to prevent unintended pregnancies from happening in the first place. As one of the leaders of SFC said

People are arguing about if we should have access to abortion or not. But if you want to decrease the abortion rate then let's give proper education in the way of contraception, in the way of just sex education. Because you know, as an activist group for women's reproductive rights, of course we believe

women should have safe and affordable abortions, but I don't want the abortion rate to go up any more than anyone else wants the abortion rate to go up. I want the abortion rate to go down because women aren't having unintended pregnancies (Interview 11/15/12)

From this, it becomes clear that Students for Choice emphasizes a woman's agency by promoting their fully bodily control. Specifically, they are promoting the right women have in controlling their sexual activities, and their resulting reproductive activities. In doing so, members of Students for Choice believe that they are empowering women.

Students for Life also promotes female bodily agency, but in a different way. In endorsing a "culture of life" around campus, SFL concentrates more on providing resources for pregnant students on campus. The group's goal is create a comfortable environment for pregnant students, so that they are not forced to give up attending the university. They work to create this environment for both women who want to keep and raise their child and who wish to give it up for adoption, so that these women are not forced into getting an abortion. As one SFL member explained

I think women deserve better than abortion. Even if they do choose it, a lot of women still feel forced into it, so [our support] helps them out. This allows them to be parents as well. So by giving them resources as well, they don't have to feel pressured, like they don't have any other option. We can help them out, it is possible to be a parent and a student at the same time... It's a

good thing for society, it costs a little bit from us, but we manage, we have enough resources as a club (Interview 12/8/2012)

Here, it is clear that Students for Life are working to protect both pregnant women as well as their unborn children. In their framework, female students increase their bodily agency by taking control of their pregnancy, and not letting it get in the way of their career as a college student. Members of Students for Life believe that women become empowered when they become mothers, and even more so when they have a college education.

The quotes from the beginning of this chapter show that members of both Students for Choice and Students for Life do not see the pro-choice and pro-life movements as having much in the way of common ground. However, in examining and analyzing the activities they do as groups on campus, it is clear that they do in fact share many ideas and even a general framework of supporting women in their reproductive decisions. They do however have differences in the ways they approach this framework, and in their reasoning behind these approaches. The ideas expressed by SFC and SFL are very much reflections of the general pro-choice and pro-life ideology in the greater United States.

Chapter 4

Two Groups in Conflict

The previous chapter focused on the specific activities Students for Life (SFL) and Students for Choice (SFC) perform at the University of Michigan as student organizations. It discussed how their actions are often quite similar and work towards reducing the abortion rate in the United States, though through different strategies and ideologies. While it is important to examine how the groups function separately on campus, it is equally as relevant to examine how they interact and clash as well. Students for Life and Students for Choice are interesting organizations in that, essentially, each exists because the other group exists. Unlike other activist groups on campus, the stances they take on abortion are both legitimate within the political sphere. For example, take another activist group like United Students Against Sweatshops, a student organization at the University of Michigan that promotes labor equality around the world. Their stance is that all workers deserve to work in safe conditions and be compensated fairly (Maizepages 2013). Generally, most people in the United States would agree with such a position, and not argue that laborers should work in unsafe conditions. If someone were to argue this, they would probably be looked down upon by most others in the U.S. Abortion activism however is different. It is equally legitimate within the American sphere to say both that the abortion procedure should be legal or illegal. The pro-life and pro-choice sides each have standpoints that resonate within the U.S. population, and therefore within the University of Michigan community. Given these separate yet acceptable stances, it is then intriguing to see how the two sides interact with each other. The relationship of Students for Life and Students for Choice is

additionally distinct in that they are forced to clash more often than other pro-life and pro-choice organizations because they have to share and operate on the limited space of the university's campus.

In order to understand the deeper implications of the relationship between Students for Life and Students for Choice, it is first necessary to examine the specific ways in which they interact. To begin, it is important to note that the two groups do encounter each other regularly on campus. All of the students that I interviewed were aware that the other group existed, and had thought about and considered them in some way. The extent to which these members were concerned about the opposite group in this fashion varied by the individual. In general however, SFL and SFC relate to each other on campus in two ways: face-to-face interactions and non-face to face interactions. By face-to-face interactions, I mean the times in which the two groups actually confront each other on campus and share the same physical space. The first way in which this occurs is when members of one group attend an event, display, or meeting of the other group. Many of the members that I talked with had reported going to or seeing at least one of these types of activities from the other group. For example, many of the members of Students for Choice attended the "Teen Mom" event where Students for Life in partnership with Bethany-Christian Adoption Agency hosted Catlyenn and Tyler, a couple who starred in MTV's *16 and Pregnant* and *Teen Mom*. As one student told me, members of SFC went to the event looking to see what the two would speak about regarding adoption, as on the television show this is what the couple chose to do with their baby. Overall, the students in SFC enjoyed the event, but were unhappy with that fact that it was not an open forum in which the audience could ask questions directly to Catelynn and Tyler, and were unhappy that they did not speak about

sexual education or contraception. Another example of this type of face-to-face interaction was when members of Students for Life attended Students for Choice's screening of *Twelfth and Delaware*. As one student from SFL explained about the experience

When we have gone to some of their things, like they screened a documentary called *Twelfth and Delaware*, we went to that. And we were you know, asking questions and raising our hands and that sort of thing, and you could just tell from their body language that they weren't happy that we were there. Like they'd stopped calling on us, or they'd cut us short and that type of thing (Interview 11/30/2012)

With this account and the experience of Students for Choice described above, a pattern emerges in which both groups are highly critical of each other when attending each other's events. Overall, this is the attitude that I received from the majority of students I interviewed from both organizations, whether or not they had actually attended such events. This is not altogether surprising. The events held by SFC and SFL promote their fundamental ideas regarding the legality of abortion, and so it makes logical sense that because the groups disagree with each other, they would disagree with the way in which their events are run. For members of the groups, criticizing these events is an outlet and way of delegitimizing the entire opposing organization and ideology.

Another type of face-to-face interaction occurs when the two groups "table," meaning have an informational table set up on campus. These tables will usually have informational handouts, such as pamphlets from their partner organizations Planned

Parenthood or Arbor Vitae. They could also contain practical items, such as condoms as provided by Students for Choice and pregnancy tests as provided by Students for Life. The organizations also use “tabling” to sell items to create revenue, such as the “condom flowers” sold by Students for Choice on Valentine’s Day this year, and the t-shirts sold by Students for Life at the beginning of this school year. Anyone walking by can approach these tables, which are staffed by members of the group. Part of member responsibility in working these tables is to be able to be a source of accurate information about the organization and its tenants to the general public. Face-to-face interactions happen then when members of one group attend a table and speak to the staff of the other group. As one girl from Students for Choice explained to me

I mean we definitely have some interactions with them when we're doing tabling and stuff and at some of our events... like you can tell when people are from Students for Life or pro-life, because they'll come up to you and ask weird questions (Interview 2/25/2013)

A later interview that I conducted with a member of Students for Life confirmed this type of story. As she explained to me

And I've noticed too that I'll go up to the table, and I'll be like “Hi!” And they say “Oh hi, would you like a blah blah blah thing?” And I'll say “Oh no thanks, I just wanted to ask you like, what do you think about this?” And they're like,

“Oh, I didn’t know about that...” And they don't want to talk... And you know they're very, they get really uncomfortable (Interview 11/30/2012)

What this account shows, like with the previous type of face-to-face interaction, is that both groups find different ways in which to be critical of each other. In the account from a student in SFC, she calls the questions the pro-life people ask her while tabling “weird,” rather than something fostering productive discussion. From the student from SFL, she critiques the pro-choice students for not being able to answer her question regarding a reproductive policy. There is no certain answer as to what side is more “right” or “correct” in this case, but what is shown is that both sides use the actions of the other organization to legitimize what they are doing as a group. The pro-choice student calling the pro-life students’ questions “weird,” and the pro-life student’s account show how the groups will evaluate each other and use the negative findings to promote their own work in a positive light.

Though the groups use face-to-face interactions to find faults in the other, there was also another reason why students reported contact with the other groups as valuable: dialogue. Overall, members of both groups said they value the idea of going to each other’s events to keep dialogue open. Both groups believe that hearing the other side is important to their own activism. As some students said:

But I do like to kind of know what they're doing and what they think. Like I want to know, we don't do activism in a bubble. They're doing stuff too. So it's good to know what they're doing.

I mean it's definitely something we want to keep, like they can totally come to our events, and we want them to be there to have a conversation about these issues. And we want to be able to go to their events if they have events... So yeah I mean it's like, the topic is very interesting and there's a lot of different things to talk about.

We don't communicate with them really, but it's not out of like, I don't want to communicate with them, we just don't. We know what, we keep track of their events and stuff like that, because we want to go. We are into dialogue and that sort of thing. We have invited them to our events in the past and they haven't come. So that was kind of like disappointing, because how are we going to have dialogue if we don't talk.

With these quotes, I have purposely left out if they are from members of either Students for Choice and Students for Life. Both are represented here, and I have done so in order to emphasize the similarity in which both groups feel about having open discussion. They both feel it is important, because they do not "do activism in a bubble." This point relates back to the idea discussed in the opening of this chapter, that the clubs exist and perform their events because the opposite side exists. In wanting dialogue and discussions, the groups are responding to this fact. What members of SFC and SFL hope to gain from such dialogue is a better understanding of the arguments and fundamental ideas of the other group. However, though no student explicitly told me this, from my interviews I received

the impression that the groups also hope that through discussions with the other, members would become more confident in their stance. A debate between the two groups for example would give the members an organized platform in which they could express their beliefs to people who blatantly disagree with them. In trying to convince these people from the opposite side that their stance on abortion is the “right” one (which would be the goal of such a debate) they would repeatedly point out the strongest arguments of their standpoint on abortion, reassuring the correctness of the stance within themselves. I conclude that this would occur rather than members suddenly changing their stance on abortion after hearing the arguments of the other side. The reason for this is that none of the students ever expressed large critiques of their organization. Every person said they were fully confident in their arguments either for or against abortion, and were happy with the way in which their organization expressed these arguments on campus.

In addition to face-to-face interactions between Students for Life and Students for Choice, non-face to face interactions happen as well. By non-face to face interactions, I mean instances in which members of one group discuss and critique the other group, without anyone from that other organization present. While the groups do not speak or dialogue with each other very often, they still are able to have many opinions of each other. This is a type of interaction, because though the other group is not there, they are comparing their actions as activists to them. In comparing, some of the opinions they hold of each other are the same. For example, the large majority of students I interviewed said that while they do not agree with the ideologies and the strategies of the other group, they do respect them as people and activists fighting for a cause. As one student from Students for Life told me

They definitely enter my mind. Because I think it's interesting in a way to like, think of like, you know, these two groups that are so passionate about a single issue, just on different sides. I bare no ill will towards them... You know sometimes I get frustrated with specific instances but I realize they are students just like me (Interview 1/20/2013)

For this student, she was able to find common ground with Students for Choice in recognizing that they are all students of the same university. Additionally, she points out they are both fight over the same "single issue," of abortion but "just on different sides." Like several of the other students I interviewed, she was able to pin point these commonalities despite the fact that she "gets frustrated," and does not agree with some of the things, like events, that Students for Choice does. Another common occurrence between members of both groups is that many do not actively keep up with the activities of the other group, but become conscious of them when they see an event advertised. For example, as another member of Students for Choice told me

Well okay, this kind of goes back to my only being a part of Students for Choice, that's in "competition" with Students for Life. Yes, we have differing opinions that contest each other, but to be honest I do my best to not pay attention to what they're doing. When I see their posters advertising teen mom, or whatever they're doing, I am disheartened because it says Students for Life. But I don't overly concern myself with what they're doing, because at

the end of the day, I don't care about persuading them. Because they're done.

They're not in the pool of people that are going to make a difference

(Interview 11/20/2012)

This student's reasoning for not actively keeping up with Students for Life echoes the reasoning most students told me when discussing this issue. First, that they do not keep up with the opposite group because they do not like what their activities surrounding abortion, they find them "disheartening." Second, like this student, many recognized that members of an opposing abortion activist group are already decided in their stance on abortion, they are "done." Instead, many students reported that they think it be more productive to target those that I described earlier as being in the "middle ground" regarding abortion. The members believe that they are more likely to convince undecided people of their side's arguments on abortion rather than people who already have already decided their opinions on the issue. This undecided population is "in the pool of people that are going to make a difference."

While some students seemed to understand and sympathize with their opposing group, most of the opinions expressed by those I interviewed of the other group were highly critical. For example, members of Students for Choice commonly feel overall that they cover more issues, such as sexual education and contraception, and that Students for Life only concentrates on abortion. As one female student from SFC told me

[Students for Life] say that they fight for the sanctity of life in all capacities;

ethanasia, the death penalty, abortion. I've never seen them once do an

event geared toward euthanasia or the death penalty. I don't know what that's all about. They've also never advocated for comprehensive sexual education, or contraception. Which I know some of the members probably don't believe in... So if they want to prevent abortion and protect the sanctity of life, and they don't want abortion to happen, then wouldn't they be promoting contraception so that women wouldn't get pregnant? Because if not, you have to kind of come to the conclusion that [they think] no one's going to have sex until they're married, and when they want to have children is when they'll get pregnant. For some people that's not the case. Not everyone wants to get married. Not everyone can get married. So you know, I just think that if, you know, so I just don't understand what their goals are
(Interview 11/15/2013)

This quote summarizes most of the critiques of Students for Life that I heard from members of Students for Choice. The subject of contraception was the most common thing members of SFC criticized SFL for. Most of them however were unaware of that fact that SFL takes no official stance on contraception. While I was not told specifically why this was the group's policy, I assume that it is due the varying religious beliefs of the club's membership. For members of Students for Choice, they feel that contraception and access to it is one of the most major tools in helping to combat abortion. This is one of the biggest ideas in the pro-choice movement in the U.S. in general. It is therefore not surprising then that they would critique Students for Life, a group that also fights to reduce abortion rates, for not employing it as a tool as well.

On the other hand, many members of Students for Life told me they feel that people in Students for Choice are not as willing to discuss abortion and specific pro-choice arguments. Students for Life feel that they are better versed in their side's pro-life arguments, as well as other arguments as well.

But like I said I feel like they only know how to dialogue what they know. They don't know how to answer questions or take it from the other side. So yeah, so it's kind of unfortunate because every time we try and do that we can't. So it's like... Well and it's an emotional issue and I can understand a lot of times, people from the pro-choice side are more emotional about it because they see it as um, they see abortion as a right. So when they see somebody who wants to limit abortion or access, they see it as you're taking away my right. Which is very, you know, you put up your defense. And I understand (Interview 11/30/2012)

This SFL member feels that in her and her fellow members ability to “take it from the other side” and not be as “defensive” as members of Students for Choice in discussing their opinions on abortion, SFL presents their arguments more effectively than SFC. It is out of my capacity as researcher to try to determine or say which group is “better educated” or more affective debaters. What is important to take away form this critique of Students for Choice is that members of SFL feel that their argument is more legitimate and concrete than the pro-choice side the because of their perceived greater education in abortion issues.

In examining the ways in which Students for Choice and Students for Life interact and clash on campus, several questions arise. What do these interactions between SFL and SFC mean? How are we to understand their struggle? It has been difficult finding an anthropological framework under which to try and answer these questions, as the clash between SFC and SFL at the University of Michigan is not a violent one nor one among two highly divided populations. Instead, it is a conflict about beliefs between two activist groups within the same population of University of Michigan students. William Roseberry's concept however of the "language of contention" between groups in struggle is one that can be used as a way to understand how Students for Life and Students for Choice operate against each other on campus. Roseberry contends that a language of contention is developed through a hegemonic process. A hegemonic process occurs when social groups conflict and try to find domination over each other. The groups do this so that they may be the ruling group whose ideas and beliefs are those that are the cultural norm of the society they are in. This idea of cultural norms being controlled by a ruling class is known as hegemony, which as Roseberry writes was first developed by Marxist thinker Antonio Gramsci (1994; 359). However, as Clark points out in "The Language of Contention in Liberal Ecuador," Roseberry strays away from the classic notions of hegemony as an "ideological consensus" (2002; 150). Instead, he uses the concept of the hegemonic process

Not to understand consent but to understand struggle, the ways in which the words, images, symbols, forms, organizations, institutions, and movements used by subordinate populations to talk about, understand, confront, accommodate themselves to, or resist their domination are shaped by the

process of domination itself. What hegemony constructs, then, is not a shared ideology but a common material and meaningful framework for living through, talking about, and acting upon social orders characterized by domination. That common material and meaningful framework is, in part, discursive, a common language or way of talking about social relationships that sets out the central terms around which and in terms of which contestation and struggle can occur (Clark 2002: 151)

So, a language of contention is developed through a hegemonic process, and is the “common material and framework” that conflicting groups use to operate under. In case of Students for Life and Students for Choice, my research reveals that their conflicts operate under a common framework like this; they share an accepted language of contention. This language of contention is on one level, a literal shared vocabulary. During my interviews, there were many common phrases used by all students on both sides of the debate. These included phrases such as “dialogue,” meaning intra-group discussion and “culture of life” that I defined in Chapter Two. The phrase “anti-choice” was the term most often used by members of Students for Choice when describing members of Students For Life or pro-life people in general. In counterpart to this, the term “pro-abortion” was used just as often by members of Students for Life to describe members of Students for Choice or pro-choice people in general. These two terms, “anti-choice” and “pro-abortion” are interesting in that in they were each other’s equal corresponding item expression and plays off the words “pro-choice” and “pro-life” in the same way.

However, a language of contention is more than just a literal shared language, as explained by Clark. In her the essay, she talks about the clashing and coming together of the largest liberal and conservative political groups in Ecuador over a large railroad construction project. This is a good parallel to Students for Choice and Students for Life at the University of Michigan, as they are two politically related groups from the same society fighting over a single issue as well. Clark explains, "The emphasis on language does not imply a focus on mere words: rather, it involves the analysis of a discursive formation constituted through material practices, including forms of communication and well defined-almost ritualized- ways of addressing the state" (2002; 150). By this, she means that groups also express their struggle through material actions, not just in what they say to each other. We also see this in the tensions between SFC and SFL, with the events that I have written above. Clark also writes, "By analyzing these political and cultural processes in terms of hegemonic projects rather than achievements, our attention is directed both to their successes, always temporary, and to their points of frailty and rupture" (2002;150). This is very true of both Students for Choice and Students for life. The debate over abortion is a struggle in which there is no "right answer." Yet, these two groups constantly seek domination of the other in trying to prove that their opinions on abortion are the "right" ones. Additionally, their clashing over abortion itself creates a "hegemonic project" or "common framework" in talking about abortion in a way that constantly focuses on individuals. For the members of Students for Choice, their standpoint concentrates on females as individuals who have the right to completely control their body. As one member said, "in order for women to be truly independent, they need to have control over every part of their body" (Interview 2/20/2013). For members of Students for Life, their

arguments focus on fetuses as individuals. As a member told me, “When I think about people making decisions about my life before I could do anything about it, and that that happens over 3,000 times everyday... that [is] another reason why I felt really passionate is because I was given a voice. I want to lend it to those who can’t” (Interview 11/30/2012). From both of these quotes, it is clear that both groups focus on both women and fetuses in a way that constructs them as things that are always unique and individual beings. Within their framework of the abortion debate then, the cultural norm and hegemonic ideal is that every woman, pregnancy, and fetus is distinct and special, and the ability to terminate a pregnancy highlights this. Recognizing this idea, it is important to point out that this does not have to be the way in which pro-choice and pro-life groups construct their opinions on abortion. As Meredith Michaels writes in “Fetal Galaxies”

In response to the abridgement of women’s autonomy that results from this semiotic collusion of medicine and the law, Duden asks us precisely to reject the “medial definitions of the developing young,” to revert to a conception of pregnancy centered on the epistemic privilege of women. I am arguing that we cannot reject such definitions, that they indeed define the terms of our culture’s procreative economy. Our inability to reject them, however, does not entail that we must accept the position of “life’s passive instrument.” To terminate a pregnancy is to exercise a freedom the curtailment of which undermines the very possibility of being a “conscious and free individual” (1991;131).

Michaels is saying that because debating the legality of abortion is a “semiotic collusion of medicine and law,” the focus is often on who’s rights are more important or legitimate, the woman’s in choosing to carry out a pregnancy, or the fetus’ in being able to fully develop. This however, does not necessarily have to be the case. In focusing on the rights of women versus the rights of fetuses, Students for Life and Students for Choice are creating, like the larger pro-choice and pro-life movements in the U.S., a distinction in which there is only two possible ways to feel about the legality and morality abortion. As Michaels points out, it is not out of the realm of possibility to expand the way the debate around abortion is framed, and to challenge these hegemonic norms.

Conclusion

Discussions over the morality and legality of abortion have existed within the United States for decades, starting in the late 1800s when the procedure was first made illegal by law. Since that time, a huge debate has developed between those that believe purposefully terminating a pregnancy is morally wrong and those that think it is in the realm of human rights. With this, the U.S. has seen the development of the pro-choice and pro-life platforms, and the progression of abortion in becoming a political issue. While development of pro-choice and pro-life activist groups over the past fifty years has largely been the work of adults, young people are more and more finding their way into abortion activism. Specifically, the development of college students as abortion activists has become increasingly relevant in current abortion debate movements. On a surface level, this movement of young adult college students into abortion activism could be interpreted as students “jumping on a political bandwagon” without fully understanding the implications and arguments of the pro-choice and pro-life movements. My hope however is that this project has shown that this is not the case. Instead, I hope this research has shown that college students feel deeply connected to their stances on abortion, and consider it as a part of their identity.

In examining how the members of Students for Life and Students for Choice at the University of Michigan came to their opinions regarding abortion, it is clear that none of them decided how they felt over night. Rather, becoming pro-life or pro-choice was something that developed as they grew up and became young adults. Students connected their stance to their family and home environment backgrounds, and reported that these

factors heavily influenced their feelings on abortions, as well as to their identities today. Additionally, they also cited coming to college as an event which helped solidify their opinions on abortion, and also helped solidify their feelings on other political issues as well. For the students, these kinds of opinions are essential to their identity, as well as to people's identities in general. In the minds of these students, to not have an official stance, or at least some opinion, on abortion would be to not have a fully formed personal identity.

The students that I interviewed at the University of Michigan also considered part of their identity as being a part of the cultures of the pro-life and pro-choice movements as well. In the United States, to be an activist in these groups is to also be a part of a cultural movement. For a student, or anyone, to say that they are pro-choice or pro-life does not just indicate how they feel about the legality of abortion. Because of the way in which the two sides have become associated with different political parties, declaring a stance on abortion comes with positive and negative connotations regarding identity no matter what stance is chosen. Many of the students that I talked with for example said they sometimes do not reveal their membership in their organization, especially in professional settings, for fear of being stereotyped. However, all of the students pushed that they were proud of their stance on abortion, and were proud of it as a part of their personal identity. More so, they were happy that they were able to be activists for their cause and students at the same time.

It is because of these close personal ties to opinions on abortion then that heated debate can occur amongst pro-life and pro-choice group. For Students for Life and Students for Choice at the University of Michigan, this is no different. Members of the groups are highly critical of the other, and do not agree with each other's overall arguments. What my

research shows however is that though this is the case, both organizations are essentially working towards the same cause: to support women and reduce abortion rates. For Students for Life, members believe this is best done through creating resources for pregnant students. For Students for Choice, the group contends that preventing unintended pregnancies is the best way to work towards this goal. It is my hope then that in the future, the groups will recognize and focus on these similarities, rather than on their differences. In this, it is possible that these student organizations would be better equipped to work towards their common goals. This would set an example for other pro-life and pro-choice groups across the country. To do this however, it is necessary for members of Students for Life and Students for Choice, as well as abortion activists in the U. S. in general, to explore the boundaries of traditional stances on abortion and think outside of them. As the end of the previous chapter pointed out, this is in fact possible. Overall, recognizing the differences and similarities between pro-life and pro-choice groups and examining the specific ways in which they clash reveals that abortion has deeper cultural significance than merely being a personal opinion on reproductive policy.

¹ For the purposes of this thesis, I use the term “fetus” as defined by Meredith Michaels in *Fetal Galaxies*, as a “radically ambiguous” term that signifies “whatever is ‘in there’ [the uterus] from the proverbial moment of conception onward” (1999, 114)

² For more on the history of abortion in the United States see Ginsburg 1989, Luker 1984, Mohr 1978, Petchesky 1984, Tatalovich and Daynes 1981, and Tribe 1992.

³ See Ginsburg 1989 and Luker 1984

⁴ For more on abortion stigma, see Harris 2012

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