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PUTTING ALL OUR EGGS IN ONE BASKET:
POLITICAL STRATEGIES OF PLANNED PARENTHOOD AND
THE NEED FOR MULTI-DIMENSIONAL ADVOCACY

by

Jennifer M. Tersigni

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A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of the

Department of Women's Studies

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This thesis is dedicated to activists and academics who struggle to secure liberation and reproductive freedom for women. It is also dedicated to women throughout the world who struggle to achieve agency in their own reproductive decisions. May our work continue to advocate for women's freedoms.

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ABSTRACT

This thesis both contributes to feminist scholarship that analyzes the roles of mainstream organizations to feminist reproductive freedom movement and attempts to broaden the scope of non-academic feminist political activism. In this endeavor, the thesis explores the directions of political advocacy that Planned Parenthood has utilized and analyzes the relationship of the organization's advocacy to feminist reproductive rights and reproductive freedom movements. This thesis does not intend to decipher whether or not the Federation is "feminist;" rather, it will assess and discuss the organization's historical trends of political identity and advocacy in relation to feminism. While Planned Parenthood has adopted the rhetoric of "reproductive freedom," the thesis suggests the need for Planned Parenthood to adopt a feminist politics for reproductive freedom in an effort to broaden political advocacy and secure rights for all women.

II. Introduction

The relationship between Planned Parenthood Federation of America and the feminist movement has been complex, paradoxical, and reciprocal. The Planned Parenthood Federation of America has not historically identified itself as a feminist organization, yet the organization can be understood as complexly related to feminism because it provided medical reproductive services to women and served as a reservoir for feminist activism during times when organized feminist reproductive rights movement was weak. Even though a relationship has existed between Planned Parenthood and feminism, the organization publicly avoided feminist philosophies and engagement in what it deemed “politics” until the late twentieth century.¹ While the leaders historically defined the organization as apolitical, Planned Parenthood engaged in top-down advocacy styles since its inception; the organization socialized with elites, lobbied, and initiated legislative reform to promote government and medical support for its programs.²

¹ Early leaders of Planned Parenthood made conscious decisions not to associate the organization with feminist agendas in an effort to gain legitimacy for the organization. After *Roe v. Wade*, the leaders of Planned Parenthood still did not wish to be involved in “politics.” As a result of internal compromises and the threatening scene against abortion providers, the organization decided to formally announce that it would begin to engage in “politics” in 1989. According to Planned Parenthood Board members, engaging in politics included securing “constitutional protections” through lawsuits, legislative battles, and entrance into electoral politics on a limited basis. See Ellen Chesler, Woman of Valor: Margaret Sanger and the Birth Control Movement In America, (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1992) 393-95.; Linda Gordon, Woman’s Body, Woman’s Right: A Social History of Birth Control In America, (New York: Grossman, 1976) 341-390.; Faye Wattleton, Life on the Line, (New York: Ballantine Books, 1996) 209.

² Chesler 225-26.; Gordon 297-98.

Although Planned Parenthood utilized top-down methods of advocacy, such action has been narrowly defined as “pro-choice.”³ As a result of “pro-choice” advocacy, Planned Parenthood’s political agenda negated women’s various needs and did not focus on securing reproductive freedom. To secure reproductive freedom for women, Planned Parenthood must adopt not only the rhetoric of “reproductive freedom,” but a broader political agenda which takes into account women’s many needs. In this effort, the organization could become involved in coalition building and empowering and organizing its patient base into a political constituency.

In efforts to promote a reproductive freedom movement, neither feminists nor Planned Parenthood should “put all of our eggs into one basket.” In other words, we should beware of a sole reliance upon a single type of ideology or course of action,

³ Planned Parenthood’s advocacy focused solely on keeping abortion legal based upon current legal philosophy which prohibits poor and young women the ability to receive abortions without popular consent. The organization has not focused political efforts on broadening the agenda to secure reproductive freedom for all women. For limitations of “pro-choice” advocacy, see “ACCESS: Keeping Abortion Legal Is Not Enough,” Off Our Backs, 25, 11 (1995): 5+.; Anita Allen, “The proposed equal protection fix for abortion law: reflections on citizenship, gender, and the Constitution,” Harvard Journal of Law & Public Policy, 18, 2 (1995). 419-455.; Susan Bordo, “Are Mothers Persons?” Unbearable Weight: Feminism, Western Culture, and the Body, (Berkeley: U of California P, 1993) 71-97.; Committee For Abortion Rights and Against Sterilization Abuse (CARASA), Women Under Attack: Victories, Backlash, and the Fight for Reproductive Freedom, Ed. Susan E. Davis. (Boston: South End, 1988).; Rhonda Copelon, “From Privacy to Autonomy: The Conditions for Sexual and Reproductive Freedom,” From Abortion to Reproductive Freedom: Transforming A Movement, Ed. Marlene Gerber Fried, (Boston: South End, 1990) 27-43.; Rhonda Copelon, “What’s Missing From the Abortion Debate,” Ms. 3, 2 (1992): 86-87.; Angela Davis, “Racism, Birth Control, and Reproductive Rights,” Women, Race & Class, (New York: Random House, 1981). Rpt in From Abortion to Reproductive Freedom: Transforming A Movement, ed. Marlene Gerber Fried, (Boston: South End, 1990) 15-26.; Manning Marable, “Rethinking the Abortion Debate,” Black Liberation in Conservative America, (Boston: South End Press, 1997) 67-70.; Rosalind Pollack Petchesky, Abortion and Women’s Choice: The State, Sexuality, & Reproductive Freedom, Rev. ed. (Boston: Northeastern U P, 1990) 89-95.; Katha Pollitt, Reasonable Creatures, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1994).; Dorothy E. Roberts, “The Future of Reproductive Choice for Poor Women and Women of Color,” Women’s Rights Law Reporter, 12, 2 (1990): 59-67.; Kathy Rudy, Beyond Pro-Life and Pro-Choice: Moral Diversity in the Abortion Debate, (Boston: Beacon, 1996).; Wendy Simonds, Abortion at Work: Ideology and Practice in a Feminist Clinic, (New Brunswick: Rutgers U P, 1996).; Ellen Willis, No More Nice Girls: Countercultural Essays, (Hanover: Wesleyan U P, 1992).

because goals can be difficult to attain if our view is limited or unbalanced, or if we rely solely upon one mechanism to achieve our ends. "Putting all of our eggs in one basket" is an inadequate strategy because it leaves little recourse if goals fail to be achieved. While feminists have struggled to be inclusive and to promote multiplicity in ideology and political action, we have, at times, utilized strategies for theory or political action that placed too much emphasis on one prevailing philosophy or style to achieve our goals. This is evident in both academic and non-academic feminism as it relates to the struggle for "reproductive rights" or "reproductive freedom."

In relation to "reproductive rights" or "reproductive freedom" issues, scholars have generally shifted away from studying the roles and interrelationships of organizations to feminism. Recent scholarship has critiqued and analyzed the impact of the use of fetal imagery to popular culture and reproductive rights movement. Through focusing heavily on the role of popular culture at the expense of studying the relation of both "feminist" and "non-feminist" organizations to movement, we have tended to put most, if not all, of our eggs in one basket. This is not to state that the current work on imagery and popular culture is not needed; it is a valuable and necessary component of our theorizing. Rather, as a result of embracing cultural studies analyses, scholarship has tended to alienate or eliminate analyses of the roles and relationships of institutions and organizations to "reproductive rights" or "reproductive freedom" movement. Scholarship that focuses on the roles of organizations in reproductive rights movement tends to evaluate those organizations that self-identify as "feminist," and negates the roles that more mainstream organizations play in sustaining the feminist movement.

Feminist theory should both consider the ways that mainstream organizations contribute to the feminist movement and include a multiplicity of interdisciplinary perspectives to best understand the predicaments of movement.⁴

There has been a similar tendency in non-academic reproductive rights activism to “put all our eggs in one basket.” As the largest organization that promotes “reproductive rights” advocacy, Planned Parenthood has utilized top-down, single-issue agendas at the expense of promoting more inclusive, multiple-issue, grass-roots, woman-centered, advocacy.⁵ While top-down, single-issue advocacy strategies are useful to activists at times, they have been unable to: provide a framework for advocacy that illustrates complexity; broaden the agenda to one of reproductive freedom; and create more inclusive, grass-roots, multiple-issue advocacy. In an effort to advance women’s reproductive freedom, “pro-choice” advocates, including Planned Parenthood, can engage in more useful strategies.

⁴ Recent scholarship has focused on the use of fetal imagery as it relates to abortion politics. This scholarship includes: Valerie Hartouni, Cultural Conceptions: On Reproductive Technologies and the Remaking of Life, (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1997).; Rosalind Pollack Petchesky, “Fetal Images: The Power of Visual Culture in the Politics of Reproduction,” Feminist Studies, 13, 2 (1987): 263-92.; Pollitt 12.; Barbara Katz Rothman, The Tentative Pregnancy: Prenatal Diagnosis and the Future of Motherhood, (New York: Viking, 1986). 113-114.; Simonds 82, 94-95. Scholarship that analyzes the role of feminist organizations to reproductive rights and the feminist movement include: Myra Marx Ferec and Patricia Yancey Martin, eds. Feminist Organizations, (Philadelphia: Temple U P, 1995).; Laura Kaplan, The Story of Jane. The Legendary Underground Feminist Abortion Service, (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1995).; Simonds (1996). Sources that illustrate complex, paradoxical, and reciprocal relationships between feminism and the roles of mainstream organizations to reproductive rights movement are scarce and include: Suzanne Staggenborg, The Pro-choice Movement: Organization and Activism in the Abortion Conflict, (New York: Oxford U P, 1991).; Wattleton (1996).

⁵ Wattleton 209.

This thesis both contributes to feminist scholarship that analyzes the roles of mainstream organizations in feminist reproductive freedom movement and attempts to broaden the scope of non-academic feminist political activism. In this endeavor, the thesis explores the directions of political advocacy that Planned Parenthood has utilized and analyzes the relationship of the organization's advocacy to feminist reproductive rights and reproductive freedom movements. This thesis does not intend to decipher whether or not the Federation is "feminist;" rather it will assess and discuss the organization's historical trends of political identity and advocacy in relation to feminism. The paper will also suggest the need for Planned Parenthood to adopt a feminist politics for reproductive freedom in an effort to broaden political advocacy and secure rights for all women.

The first portion of the thesis explores the historical political positioning of the organization and the tactics it has utilized in political advocacy. This portion illustrates that although the organization did not formally identify as feminist or as political, it did exist in relation to feminism in ways which scholarship has not shown thus far. The second portion illustrates the limits of the organization's "pro-choice" advocacy and suggests the adoption of a feminist reproductive freedom agenda. Utilizing my internship experience as a case study, the third portion illustrates some dynamics between federation and affiliate politics. This case study also illustrates challenges faced while completing a feminist political project for Planned Parenthood of Southern Arizona that was informed by a concept of reproductive freedom, and serves as a symbol of the struggles and pleasures that feminists confront through their work in mainstream

organizations.⁶ The analysis recommends a more woman-centered, multiple-issue approach to future advocacy and explains the theoretical bases for these suggestions as articulated by feminist theorists. It is my hope that this paper will contribute to a feminist analysis of the role of mainstream organizations to the feminist movement.

⁶ A copy of the study that I completed for Planned Parenthood of Southern Arizona, *Pro-choice 2000: A Foundation for Oppositional Campaigns in Southern Arizona*, is located in the Special Collections section of the University of Arizona library.

III. CHAPTER ONE:

Political Advocacy & The Planned Parenthood Federation of America

The Planned Parenthood Federation of America developed a complex, paradoxical, and reciprocal relationship to politics and feminism since its inception. Planned Parenthood's relationship to the feminist movement is complex because although the organization failed to consistently advocate a feminist agenda throughout the years, it maintained a relationship to the feminist movement. At first glance, the organization's relationship to feminism may have seemed, and continues to seem, non-existent due to its efforts to create an image as a non-political medical provider. However, a closer review of the organization's roles illustrates that Planned Parenthood's work, services, and organizational survival both helps to sustain and provides for an interrelationship to the feminist movement in spite of the entity's historical denial of the need for missions and philosophies founded upon feminist, woman-centered agendas.

While Planned Parenthood posed as apolitical until the late 1980's, the organization constantly engaged in some form of top-down political advocacy, which included: correspondence and socializing with elites, legislative reform, legal advocacy, and lobbying. Various factors, including internal disputes and power relations, have led to adoption of the organization's political advocacy styles and priorities. Through the years, the Federation made pragmatic decisions regarding political advocacy, educational programs, and medical services it provided. However, the leaders historically adopted pragmatic policies to advance the organization's goals at the expense of an agenda premised upon women's liberation as central to its mission and advocacy. While the

organization attempted to disassociate itself from feminist agendas, popular culture associated Planned Parenthood with feminism because it provided a service for women that was integrally connected to feminist goals. Planned Parenthood's complex relationship to feminism and politics enabled a host of paradoxes to emerge between the organization's work and the maintenance of the feminist movement.

For most of its history, Planned Parenthood did not premise its single issue political advocacy on the rights of women. The leaders of PPFA adopted liberal rhetoric to advocate for single-issue, birth control reform based on the principles of the United States legal system and historically separated these goals from structural social change.⁷ In the process of advocating for reform, the organization strayed from arguments based upon women's rights, social needs, and access to resources necessary for women to exercise their reproductive freedom while tending to favor arguments based on individual liberties and abstract "rights" of all citizens. As Linda Gordon argues, from its beginning "Planned Parenthood posed as apolitical, offering no over-all program for social change. But in confining itself to a single issue and in its interpretation of that issue, it functioned to preserve and strengthen the existing view of the success of U.S. capitalism in providing the potential for democracy, prosperity, and freedom for all."⁸

At the beginning of the birth control movement, advocates supported the idea of "birth control," which was a radical, and feminist, notion; the very meaning of the words

⁷ Marlene Gerber Fried, "Transforming the Reproductive Rights Movement: The Post-*Webster* Agenda," *From Abortion to Reproductive Freedom: Transforming A Movement*, ed. Marlene Gerber Fried (Boston: South End 1990) 8.; Gordon 341-390.

⁸ Gordon 341.

connotes a resistance to the control of one's birthing destiny to anyone but oneself. However, by the time the organization known today as Planned Parenthood emerged in 1942, the leaders of the organization rendered the focus on women and women's control over their reproductive destinies inappropriate philosophies for the future of the organization. The decision to alter the name of the organization from the Birth Control Federation of America (BCFA) to the Planned Parenthood Federation of America (PPFA) symbolized internal restructuring that emphasized family planning, dissociated the organization from more radical notions of birth control and feminism, and alienated women and those with feminist philosophies and agendas from powerful positions.⁹ The leaders of the organization coined the term "planned parenthood" to portray a gender-neutral, non-feminist goal which strayed from a focus on women's needs, rights, and freedoms. While the term "birth control" signified a rejection of the family, "planned parenthood" implied stability within the (heterosexual, nuclear) family; took the family unit, not the woman within it, as the unit for the application of reproductive control; and failed to acknowledge that the family itself could be a source of oppression of women's reproductive needs and desires.¹⁰ By the time the organization's official name was changed to Planned Parenthood Federation of America, leaders justified the need for

⁹ Carole R. McCann, Birth Control Politics in the United States 1912-1945, (New York: Cornell U P, 1994) 176-77.; Chesler 393-95.; Chesler states that in the 1940's and 1950's, Planned Parenthood's national director, D. Kenneth Rose, pushed for the adoption of a focus on the family rather than on women, especially during the post-war era. Margaret Sanger disliked the language in the name change of the organization because it implied that the family, not the woman, was the decision making unit which controlled women's reproduction, and hence, the reproduction of the family.

¹⁰ Gordon 341-42.

contraception as necessary to maintain family health, the symbolic integrity of the American family, and sound population policy, not to promote women's rights.¹¹

The leaders of Planned Parenthood professionalized the birth control movement as a tactic to gain legitimization, which further alienated a focus on women's rights. Through the rubric of "professionalism" and as a result of structuring birth control as a family issue as opposed to a woman's issue, leaders continued to erode a female workforce and agenda based upon women's liberation as the organization preferred "educated" men to be the appropriate individuals to deal with the new types of business in which the organization engaged.¹² Due to the decision to professionalize, Planned Parenthood devoted an increasing amount of energy into fund-raising among the rich; winning over the popularity of the upper-class became a political strategy that seemed to necessitate these fund-raising tactics. In the attempt to gain legitimacy by appealing to the elites, the organization became composed of predominantly WASP middle-class people.¹³

Political interactions with the elite and the state possessed risks which seemed to require the organization to adopt a certain type of language, political action, and rapport that would better insure the legitimization of both birth control and Planned Parenthood. Especially in eras of backlash against progressive politics, including feminism,

¹¹ McCann 1, 202.

¹² McCann 177, 194-200. By its inception, all of the leaders were men except for Margaret Sanger, who remained in honorary leadership.

¹³ Chesler 225-26.; Gordon 297-98.

organization activists have tended to present themselves and organization plans in moderate and universalistic terms through speaking the language of liberal individualism.¹⁴ In the case of Planned Parenthood, the organization accomplished this task by framing the debate in terms of an abstract “right” of people to receive medical services, but did not argue that such access was a basic right of women to reproductive freedom.¹⁵ While appeals to liberal ideology seemed beneficial in the stride toward legitimating birth control, such moves inevitably had costs. Through engaging with elites to promote legitimization, the mainstream birth control movement and the organization would make invisible the very populations that Planned Parenthood would serve: women, women of color, and the poor.

As a result of working with elites, Planned Parenthood received increased opportunities for financial support for services and programs. For example, the organization became the beneficiary of both private and public sector funding for family planning and population control initiatives in the 1950’s.¹⁶ Although private foundations

¹⁴ Roberta Spalter-Roth and Ronnee Schreiber, “Outsider Issues and Insider Tactics: Strategic Tensions in the Women’s Policy Network during the 1980’s,” Feminist Organizations, ed. Myra Marx Ferec and Patricia Yancey Martin, (Philadelphia: Temple U P, 1995) 115-17.

¹⁵ See Chesler 223-242, 269-286, 336-354.; Gordon (1976). 249-300.; Emily Taft Douglas, Margaret Sanger, (Canada: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1970) 171-189.; David M. Kennedy, Birth Control In America: The Career of Margaret Sanger, (New Haven: Yale U P, 1970) 108-126.; McCann 2.; Karen O’Connor, No Neutral Ground? Abortion Politics in an Age of Absolutes, (Boulder: Westview, 1996) 24.; Petchesky (1990) 89-95.

¹⁶ See Gordon 396-97.; Petchesky (1990) 117-118.; Mark V. Nadel, Federal Funds for Planned Parenthood, U.S. GAO, Official Correspondence, August 9, 1995.; Betsy Hartmann, Reproductive Rights and Wrongs: The Global Politics of Population Control, (Boston: South End, 1995) 93-130.; Throughout the twentieth century, the organization would rely on the membership, leadership and association with the elite, such as John Rockefeller III, Dwight D. Eisenhower, and the duPont family, in an effort to pursue its goals of dissemination of birth control in the United States and throughout the world. Foundations that have funded such programs included Rockefeller, Ford, Mellon, du Pont, Sloan, Standard Oil, and Shell, among others.

and government agencies have historically provided a financial base for the organization, affiliations with these institutions increased the pressure on the organization to constrain the language, styles of advocacy, and activities to those deemed suitable to contributors. Such pressures may have also increased the possibility of co-optation of the organization's goals as Planned Parenthood increasingly relied upon contributors to maintain the sustenance of the organization.¹⁷

While appeals to elites were pragmatic tactics, the alliances forged between Planned Parenthood, social elites, and the government "inevitably meant ideological and political compromises," one of which was the continued omission of women's liberation as a basis for the organization's advocacy and existence.¹⁸ As a result of continued government funding, a paradoxical situation emerged. Planned Parenthood secured funding for birth control dissemination through the use of popular eugenic, then population control, and later environmental arguments in an effort to subvert the "appropriate sexuality" paradigm through distributing birth control services to greater

The exception to U.S. government funding to PPFA and IPPF was during the Reagan and Bush administrations. An international gag rule on abortion had been implemented by both administrations which prohibited U.S. funding to national and international agencies that promoted and supported women's rights to abortion.

¹⁷ Pauline Bart, "Seizing the Means of Reproduction," *Qualitative Sociology* 10 (Winter 1987). Rpt in *Feminism & Community*, eds. Penny A. Weiss and Marilyn Freidman, (Philadelphia: Temple U P, 1995) 115.; Spalter-Roth and Schreiber 113-14.; These authors describe this behavior as it relates to the functioning of other organizations. I believe that a similar phenomenon occurred with Planned Parenthood.

¹⁸ Hartmann 114-15, 119. 303.; Petchesky (1990) 92.; For an example of such rhetoric see Planned Parenthood Federation of America, Public Policy Division, "International Family Planning: The Need For Services," Planned Parenthood Fact Sheet, Jan. 1997, [Planned Parenthood Federation of America Online](#), Online, Internet, 20 Sept. 1997.

populations, however, these efforts can be construed to promote woman blame.¹⁹ The programs suggest that at the heart of the world's problems are women's inability to produce high quality offspring in low quantities. Through this blame process, rationales of individual responsibility attempt to make women believe that "controlling" their bodies are their familial, national, international, and environmental duties while failing to critique imperialist agendas, structural adjustment, militarism, and production and consumption patterns.²⁰

Although Planned Parenthood excluded women and a women's liberation focus from its mission, the very existence of the organization created paradoxical relationships to the feminist movement. As Carole McCann illustrates, although its own rhetoric historically displaced women's subjective perspectives from the debates, Planned Parenthood has also ironically presented a challenge to gender conventions that professionalization and public relations could not completely eliminate with the name

¹⁹ There is a range of literature regarding Planned Parenthood's involvement in programs that linked popular eugenic, population control, and environmental arguments to their goals of birth control dissemination through the years. In recent years, the federation has attempted to disassociate its programs funded by US AID from imperialist agendas while simultaneously embracing US AID's rhetoric to safeguard future financial support. Although the organization may adopt such rhetoric to secure government funding and attempt to use such funding in a subversive manner, this scenario creates a precarious position for the organization. As Betsy Hartmann states, "as a result, its member associations have often played a double role: on the positive side, they have bravely introduced family planning programs into hostile environments; on the negative side, they have helped pave the way for population control interventions and programs that neglect women's overall health." In defending population control policies, Planned Parenthood has continued to blame women's reproductive decisions for the problems that developing nations face. See Chesler 240.; Davis 20-21.; Douglas 171-89.; John Elvin, "Did mother of free love urge selective breeding?" *Insight on the News* Dec. 16, 1996: 19-20.; Gordon 254-59, 391-92.; Hartmann 112, 146.; Kennedy 108-26.; O'Connor 24.; Petchesky (1990) 89-95.; Planned Parenthood Federation of America, Communications Division, "The Truth About Margaret Sanger" Planned Parenthood Fact Sheet, June 1994, [Planned Parenthood Federation of America Online](#), Online, Internet, 20 Sept. 1997.; Simonds 28.

²⁰ Hartmann 114-15, 119, 303.

change.²¹ Although the organization excluded a political focus on women or feminism for most of its history, it primarily served women whose medical need was birth control. Through the services the organization has provided, women have become educated about their abilities to decide whether and when to reproduce. As a result of the professionalization of birth control, Planned Parenthood was successful in leading the way to bring the medical, social-work, and mental health establishments to support the idea of female sexual fulfillment in marriage as normal, and thereby helped to change public opinion on the subject of the sexual rights of women.²² While these benefits may not necessarily have put greater power into the hands of women, and may have contributed to a “traffic in women” through an exchange of power between male medical professionals and husbands before contraception was legalized, these actions may have been the first steps in the acceptance of a broader definition of sexuality and women’s reproductive rights in the United States.²³

²¹ McCann 203.

²² Gordon 359.

²³ I am borrowing Gayle Rubin’s argument to explain the political economic dimensions in the control over “women’s health” by men and the medical profession. Although Planned Parenthood may have been successful at influencing professionals to view women’s sexuality as normal, it was explained as normal through marriage. It was not until the 1960’s that Planned Parenthood began to counsel single women for contraceptive services, and until 1972 in *Eisenstadt v. Baird* that the Supreme Court declared it a right, based on privacy, for single people to have access to contraceptive services. Before this time, husbands legally had a right to control the use of birth control by their wives. The traffic in women occurs between the relationships of physicians and husbands (and maybe fathers) in defining the normalcy of (married) women’s sexuality. See *Eisenstadt v. Baird* 405 U.S. 438 (1972); Gordon Ch. 11-13.; Petchesky (1990) 290, 308.; Gayle Rubin, “The Traffic In Women: Notes on the ‘Political Economy’ of Sex,” 1975, Rpt in *Feminism & History*, Ed. Joan Wallach Scott, (Oxford: Oxford U P, 1996) 105-51.

Paradoxically, while Planned Parenthood engaged in political interactions with elites and government officials, the organization historically refused to acknowledge itself as a political agent. The organization did not consider the tactics it utilized throughout its existence, including fundraising, socializing, lobbying elites, to be “political.” The pragmatic reason that some leaders chose to identify the entity as apolitical was due to the organization’s status as a non-profit entity; as such, the organization’s tax status hinged on the inability of the federation to engage in “political activity.”²⁴ From shortly after its inception, Planned Parenthood attempted to pose as an apolitical medical service organization, and with this positioning, sought to avoid any moral or political stance on issues of reproductive freedom for women. In the quest to be recognized as a service provider devoid of political affiliations, the organization also strayed from identifying the act of providing reproductive medical services as political in and of itself.

The paradox of refusing to identify as political while engaging in actions that can be seen as political is partially a result of internal compromises that Planned Parenthood historically faced, for there has never been a consensus among the organization’s leaders regarding the ways in which the organization should achieve its mission. According to Faye Wattleton, former President of Planned Parenthood Federation of America, the organization was not comprised of a group of people who agreed on every principle, especially the liberation of women from sexual and reproductive bondage as a central

²⁴ Wattleton 209.; Wattleton explains that ambivalence to becoming “political” was partially the result of Planned Parenthood’s (501)(c)(3) status.

mission of the federation. Instead, the Planned Parenthood Federation of America has historically encompassed two major groups with distinctly different philosophies: those who view Planned Parenthood as part of a movement for the sexual and reproductive liberation of women and men, and those who view the organization as a business that has constantly been threatened with the danger of losing federal funding if it strayed from the goal of medical service. Moreover, some local affiliates have also strayed from the national federation's approaches to advocacy based on the political context of each region. The disjointed political stances between the national office and its affiliates, while necessary in some ways to serve each population based on their specific needs, has further contributed to the inability of the Federation to engage in overt political actions for fear that affiliates would rebel or refuse to comply with new initiatives.²⁵ The negotiations between the two dominant ideological camps have shaped the organization's policies and advocacy strategies since its inception, so that political action was undertaken as long as it was not too obvious or too radical.

Internal organizational power dynamics, as well as external pressure, shaped Planned Parenthood's position on issues related to birth control and abortion, which further illustrated paradoxes between the organization's advocacy and the feminist movement. Although the organization eventually supported reform and repeal, Planned Parenthood advocated for the right to abortion based on rights of individual privacy and physician autonomy and was careful to disassociate the right to abortion from feminism

²⁵ Wattleton 191, 379, 391.

or an agenda intermingled with women's liberation. Frequently, representatives of the organization would defend abortion rights as gender neutral civil liberties, claiming that abortion was not a feminist issue and did not have anything to do with women's rights.²⁶

Planned Parenthood had not been a forerunner in the campaign to repeal abortion laws; and even after the *Roe v. Wade* decision upheld the legality of abortion, most Planned Parenthood affiliates were not eager to become providers of abortion services. Instead, the federation continued to promote birth control domestically and abroad,²⁷ failing to acknowledge abortion as a method of birth control. Planned Parenthood continued to view women's liberation as separate from women's needs for birth control and abortion and organizational missions. Because the federation made this distinction, it spent a considerable amount of time refusing to be "political" or entangled within a moral controversy over abortion. According to Faye Wattleton, even after the Hyde Amendment was enacted Planned Parenthood was not in the forefront of abortion advocacy, although some of the more progressive affiliates were actively engaged. In fact, the lack of unity within the organization over the question of whether to support and advocate for women's right to abortion in the 1970's may have contributed to the perpetuation of the negative image of abortion. It was not until 1978 that Planned Parenthood recognized it could no longer avoid a stance on political issues and

²⁶ Betty Friedan, *It Changed My Life: Writings On The Women's Movement*, (New York: Dell, 1976) 121-22.; Kaplan 24, 117.

²⁷ Wattleton 152.

acknowledged that, in an effort to preserve reproductive rights, the organization “had no choice but to enter politics.”²⁸

Under the leadership of the first female president since Margaret Sanger and in a political context where the demand for abortion far outweighed the facilities available to women, Planned Parenthood reluctantly admitted its need to engage in political tactics to further its ability to provide medical services. This resolve was, once again, the product of internal compromise primarily between those who believed in the need for the organization to be a part of the movement for women’s liberation and those who were concerned about the business future of the organization. The organization had not previously identified the lobbying of elites or the services it provided as political acts due to the narrow definition of what is deemed “political” by both mainstream America and Planned Parenthood. To the leaders of the organization, engaging in politics was considered either formal, public, top-down advocacy or militant protesting, neither of which the entity arrived at a consensus about. According to Wattleton, as early as 1978, David Garth, a political strategist, advised Planned Parenthood that it must begin to play power politics through the use of multiple types of political advocacy including lobbying, manipulating electoral politics, and developing grass-roots efforts to challenge the broad conservative, anti-choice attack against reproductive rights and progressive social ideology. Instead, as a result of internal compromise, in 1979 Planned Parenthood’s Board of Directors decided to focus some efforts toward public relations and litigation in

²⁸ Wattleton 185, 207-8.

an attempt to keep from being too political. By the early 1980's, the organization decided to build a structure legally allowable for the non-profit to begin formal lobbying and public relations efforts as mechanisms to preserve reproductive rights. Finally in 1989, ten years after Garth's proposal, Planned Parenthood once again issued a policy that was the result of internal compromise in which it was decided not to pursue the more radical agenda of a "reproductive rights amendment" and, instead, to favor the adoption of the mission to secure "constitutional protections" through lawsuits, legislative battles, and entrance into electoral politics on a limited basis.²⁹

By the 1990's, Planned Parenthood was a substantial force in "pro-choice" politics, whether or not the organization preferred to be engaged in politics. Targeted as a radical entity whose sole purpose was providing abortions, a historically inaccurate view, the organization fought back to secure both its physical and financial survival as well as the physical survival of its employees and patients. Utilizing top-down advocacy tactics, Planned Parenthood in conjunction with other mainstream and feminist organizations fought to ensure women's right to abortion. Based upon individual rights premises, such advocacy denied women the full range of reproductive freedom and was devoid of a commitment to remedying the social conditions that render access to abortion and other services inaccessible to most women. By the late 1980's and early 1990's women from around the world at large, international conferences demanded a more

²⁹ Wattleton 209-11, 233-35, 374-81.

inclusive definition of reproductive freedom from the large, mainstream, U.S. population and family planning agencies including Planned Parenthood.

As a result of The United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women, Beijing (1995) and the International Conference on Population and Development, Cairo (1994), Planned Parenthood attempted to incorporate the needs of women around the world into its mission through adopting the language of reproductive freedom. The use of this language may illustrate that the organization recognizes that it must move beyond its narrowly defined focus on birth control and abortion; acknowledge an understanding of women's reproductive rights as integrally connected to economic, political, educational, social, and health rights; and promote the concept of rights as a part of a larger vision of social change. In an effort to achieve these goals, Planned Parenthood explained in its webpage that integral to the organization's agenda is the need to empower women as the key to improving the quality of life for everyone in the world. These conferences sent a clear directive for the need of family planning, and emphasized the need to improve quality of care, provide real options, and to integrate women much more in the development and management of voluntary programs.³⁰

It is important that Planned Parenthood supports these agreements that were negotiated and approved by women representatives from around the world.³¹ On the one

³⁰ Planned Parenthood Federation of America, "The United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women," PPFA Report, No date, [Planned Parenthood Federation of America Online](#), Online, Internet, 20 Sept. 1997.; Tracy Mickens, "The International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD)," PPFA Report, No date, [Planned Parenthood Federation of America Online](#), Online, Internet, 20 Sept. 1997.

³¹ In chapter 16, Hartmann explains that women at the Cairo Conference agreed to accept the population framework because some truly believed in the need for population control while others found it to be a

hand, this is a critical step for Planned Parenthood; these agreements symbolize a commitment to an international community of women, promise to empower women, and pledge not to engage in involuntary planning projects. By agreeing to the platforms produced in Cairo and Beijing, for one of a few times in its history, Planned Parenthood recognized the need to formally address women's rights, reproductive freedom, and human rights simultaneously. The agreement also symbolized a global commitment to addressing a needed change in social conditions that are necessary for women's freedoms, including those of reproduction, to be achieved. While this prospect is exciting, Planned Parenthood is attempting to address new goals without significantly altering its ideologies or current styles of top-down political advocacy. Planned Parenthood adopted the rhetoric of reproductive freedom without incorporating the politics which could most successfully achieve this goal. The organization has identified as its future role to continue to "improve our close relationship with US AID" as a crucial aspect of implementing the Cairo Plan and meeting the goals set by the conference in Beijing.³² Although the acceptance of pro-woman agendas is a beneficial step, Planned Parenthood has embraced a new agenda without significantly altering its ideology or advocacy styles. The organization's unwillingness to adopt broader defined political advocacy strategies may create further paradoxical situations in the future as it engages in

strategic choice in an effort for women to have greater access to decision makers or to be decision makers. Hartmann suggests that mainstream organizations adopted reproductive freedom rhetoric without embracing politics based on this idea. She also contends that the International Women's Health Movement did not have to accept this framework, rather it could have taken a feminist approach to reform not based on population control rhetoric.

³² PPFA "The United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women," (1997).; Mickens (1997).

similar tactics that could further disenfranchise women of color, the poor, and young women.

Moreover, while Planned Parenthood has not consistently promoted a gender sensitive agenda in a quest for social change, the organization has served as a reservoir for feminist activists, especially in stagnant periods of progressive political activity. This phenomenon may be due to the fact that many advocates for women's equality define the "political" more broadly and understand the "political" nature of the very existence of organizations that are in constant contact with large numbers of women. While feminist activists may not dominate mainstream organizations, they contribute to a contingency which continues to promote ideals of women's equality and provide for an enduring legacy of feminist activism within organizations. In other words, formalized institutions such as Planned Parenthood help in maintaining the continuity of movements during periods of less overt political mobilization.³³ Although administrative decisions at Planned Parenthood have not always reflected a women's liberation agenda, women who have worked at various affiliates throughout the country have been moved by the first-hand experiences with their patients, which has inspired many female employees to be part of women's movements.³⁴ Along with supplying a network of individuals for the movement, the work that Planned Parenthood accomplishes through engaging in mainstream political tactics, while far from radical, plays an important and distinct role

³³ Staggenborg 136.

³⁴ Staggenborg 27.

in the larger movement.³⁵ That is, feminist movements exists in a reciprocal relationship with organizations such as Planned Parenthood that allow for a space where the work of reproductive freedom movements can be sustained in times of immobilized mass based politics.³⁶ Planned Parenthood receives committed activists, broader purposes, and new agendas, while activists both learn and draw from organizational practices and resources, and exist in a context within which they can provide for their lives while struggling for change.³⁷

³⁵ Myra Marx Feree and Patricia Yancey Martin, "Doing the Work of the Movement: Feminist Organizations," Feminist Organizations, Ed. Myra Marx Feree and Patricia Yancey Martin, (Philadelphia: Temple U P, 1995) 7-11.; Staggenborg 149.

³⁶ Feree and Martin 7.

³⁷ Feree and Martin 7.

IV. CHAPTER TWO:

Pro-Choice Politics & Reproductive Freedom Agendas?: A Feminist Version of Advocacy

The issues that Planned Parenthood supports have been and continue to be narrowly defined as “pro-choice” in an effort to preserve those reproductive rights that have not been eroded. Historically, efforts to preserve rights guided the organization not to advocate for anything too innovative; decision makers within the federation and at its affiliates seemed concerned that pro-choice activists fight according to “the rules,” because the price of rolling back any reproductive rights that were won was too great to risk on experimenting with new arguments and strategies based on different philosophical principles.³⁸ As part of the effort to preserve reproductive rights, the organization has utilized advocacy styles that reinforce a dichotomous “pro-life” versus “pro-choice” stance on the issue of abortion and negate various other reproductive needs of many women. In utilizing abstract notions of “rights” and “choice” in strategies for political advocacy, Planned Parenthood has kept intact the current structure of the debates. Through such advocacy, women’s subordination is reinforced, either implicitly or explicitly, deliberately or unconsciously, through the organization’s advocacy styles that defend women’s rights to receive abortions in “special” circumstances such as rape, incest, and the health or life of the woman while maintaining general bans on such rights. Women’s subordination is also reinforced through Planned Parenthood’s use of language

³⁸ A recent exception to this statement may be Planned Parenthood’s advocacy to introduce a version of RU486 for testing trials.

in ways that succumb to “pro-life” rhetoric of the evil and immorality of abortion by attempting to “prevent” it.

The gender neutral, non-feminist agenda which informed the organization’s advocacy was not the type of style that everyone, or even all of the leaders, believed was most appropriate to frame either the debate or political strategies. The decision to engage in top-down, single-issue oriented political advocacy divorced from women’s liberation ideology was also a result of internal compromise, the history of the organization’s liberal philosophies, and fear of backlash during politically conservative eras in the United States. Those who supported a woman-centered agenda as part of a broader agenda of women’s liberation were outnumbered. According to Faye Wattleton, one of the proponents of a woman-centered agenda as part of a larger issue of women’s liberation and human sexual freedom, had Planned Parenthood committed to transforming the political landscape, the organization may have helped to change the direction of the abortion issue, women’s rights, and women’s status in the United States and abroad.³⁹ While we can not change the avenues of political activism that Planned Parenthood has taken in the past, we can reflect upon the limits of such strategies and pose new ideas for future advocacy in an attempt to change the political landscape on “reproductive freedom” issues both domestically and globally.

As a result of its commitment to the Cairo and Beijing agreements, the leaders of Planned Parenthood Federation of America (PPFA) currently promote the organization as

³⁹ Wattleton 212.

one that supports a mission which accepts and embraces diversity, reproductive freedom, and women's rights as integral to people's ability to exercise their "choices" regarding reproductive issues. Planned Parenthood has embraced the rhetoric of "reproductive freedom," to encompass "the right to privacy, especially in human relationships; the right to education and information that empowers individuals to make informed decisions about sexuality and reproduction; and the right to nondiscriminatory access to confidential, comprehensive reproductive health care services." In addressing the need for reproductive freedom, the organization states that not only is it "the fundamental right of each individual, throughout the world, to manage his or her own fertility, regardless of the individual's income, marital status, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, age, national origin, or residence," but that Planned Parenthood must "advocate for reproductive freedom as essential to women's rights. Planned Parenthood recognizes the interrelationship between reproductive freedom and social, economic, and political rights for women, and will cooperate with other organizations and agencies to achieve such rights."⁴⁰

Yet the organization still supports a gender-neutral "reproductive freedom for all" message in much of its public relations materials. The organization's aversion to

⁴⁰ Examples of rhetoric which includes women's rights as integral to the fight for reproductive rights, or reproductive freedom, by Planned Parenthood have been more pronounced in the 1990's. See: PPFA "The United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women"; Mickens (1997).; Planned Parenthood Federation of America, Personal Correspondence, New York, Feb. 1998.; Planned Parenthood Federation of America, "Twenty-five Years After *Roe v. Wade*, Planned Parenthood Gives New Meaning to 'Choice'," 1998, [Planned Parenthood Federation of America Online](#), Online, Internet, 28 Jan. 1998.; Planned Parenthood Federation of America, Inc., [Mission and Policy Statements](#), (New York: PPFA, 1995).; Planned Parenthood Federation of America, "Women's Rights," No Date, Adopted 1984, [Planned Parenthood Federation of America Policy Statements Online](#), Online, Internet, 20 Sept. 1997.

experimenting with new advocacy strategies is evident in its recent adoption of reproductive freedom rhetoric while keeping intact its narrowly defined “pro-choice” politics. In the quest to advocate for the preservation of abortion rights, Planned Parenthood has not reframed the issue to encompass a broader agenda of reproductive freedom for all women, rather the organization promotes the legality of abortion, reproductive services, and contraception for all people.⁴¹ Through the tactic to promote gender neutral reproductive rights, Planned Parenthood has depoliticized the fact that most contemporary debates are staged on women’s bodies and that at the core of reproductive issues is the larger issue of women’s liberation from oppression. Although the “reproductive freedom for all” message sounds ideal, it may allow for the continued disappearance and disembodiment of women in reproductive freedom issues. While the mission statement recognizes the interrelationship between women’s rights and reproductive freedom, the organization has not advocated for social equity as a prerequisite for reproductive freedom; rather, the Federation has advocated for reproductive freedom as if it is synonymous with an abstract notion of reproductive “choice.” In promoting a reproductive freedom agenda that is separated from an overall agenda for social change, the organization has committed to ensuring freedom once an individual accesses reproductive health care at any Planned Parenthood clinic, however, the mission statement does not advocate for ways to create access, at a macro level, to social conditions that would make the notion of reproductive freedom a reality for most

⁴¹ Planned Parenthood Federation of America, Inc., Mission, (1995).

women. As a result of this type of advocacy, Planned Parenthood once again asserts that the way to achieve the goal of reproductive freedom is through reform; as if the current systems work and that we just need to figure out how to “outsmart” the enemies and “fix” the system. As a result of embracing the ideal of reproductive freedom without altering political strategies, Planned Parenthood’s mission statement continues to avoid an acknowledgment of the need to engage in efforts of social change that would support the rights of every individual to healthcare, or to adequate housing, nutrition, food, and wages, all of which are necessary for an individual to make “choices” in regard to reproductive freedom which are not coerced in some way.

Planned Parenthood has continued to advocate for “reproductive freedom” by utilizing “pro-choice” ideals based on an abstract “right to choose,” yet framing the debates in this manner has not been successful at ensuring women the freedom to act as moral agents in deciding their reproductive destinies. Many feminists and scholars find the “pro-choice” framework inadequate for several reasons.⁴² Rights discourse based upon abstract notions of choice has proven to be inadequate because it perpetuates the myth that the right to choose is inherent in the individual; such claims are devoid from the cultural and material conditions which mediate “choices,” exempt the responsibility

⁴² “ACCESS” 5+.; Allen 419-455.; Bordo 71-97.; Committee For Abortion Rights and Against Sterilization Abuse (CARASA) 1988.; Copelon (1990) 27-43.; Copelon (1992) 86-87.; Davis 15-26.; Janet Hadley, Abortion: Between Freedom and Necessity, (Philadelphia: Temple U P, 1996).; Marable 67-70.; Petchesky (1990).; Pollitt.; Elisabeth Porter, “Abortion Ethics: Rights and Responsibilities,” Hypatia, 9, 3 (1994): 66-88.; Leslie Reagan, When Abortion Was a Crime: Women, Medicine, and the Law in the United States, 1867-1973, (Berkeley: U of California P, 1997).; Roberts 59-67.; Rudy 85-111.; Simonds (1996).; Lorna Weir, “Left Popular Politics in Canadian Feminist Abortion Organizing, 1982-1991,” Feminist Studies, 20, 2 (1994): 249-275.; Willis 1992.; Nira Yuval-Davis, “Women and the Biological Reproduction of ‘The Nation,’” Women’s Studies International Forum, 19, 1-2 (1996): 17-25.

of the state, and avoid the moral questions about when, under what circumstances, and for what purposes reproductive decisions ought to be made.⁴³ The decision to fight for choice rather than justice for women is in itself a decision to appeal to those who already have “choices.”⁴⁴ Because reproductive rights philosophy is structured as private rights for individuals, such discourse frequently fails to challenge the social structure and the social relations of reproduction. Framing issues in terms of abstract private rights, therefore, creates a situation whereby women with the inability to access services are the only individuals who must receive social approval to secure their rights. For example, rights discourse requires all women who do not fit into the categories of women *allowed* to have abortions, such as the young and the poor, to evoke public support to exercise their abstract rights while other women may not need public approval.⁴⁵

As a result of individual rights premises, the “pro-choice” framework fails to base a claim on women’s fundamental human need to control their bodies as a prerequisite for women’s freedom and as an indispensable prerequisite of human rights; instead, such advocacy relegates control of reproductive decisions to the state and medical authorities.⁴⁶ Further, the justifications posed for women’s reproductive rights framed in terms of personal privacy, state interests, and public health have failed to become a

⁴³ Copelon (1990) 38.; Hadley 86.; Petchesky (1990) 7, 117, 308, 371-78.; Porter 69.; Rudy 99, 108-110.; Simonds 92-93, 227-28.

⁴⁴ Fried 6.

⁴⁵ Fried 3.; Petchesky (1990) 7, 289.

⁴⁶ Petchesky (1990) 125, 382.

premise for political collective action. Rights discourse relies on institutionalized systems of power, and those within the systems, to create change rather than utilizing and mobilizing grass-roots efforts to promote social change and can not be substituted for the vision of a just and democratic society that is needed to evaluate such claims.⁴⁷

The narrow definition of reproductive rights has structured a debate solely based upon abortion and has rendered the debate “private.” The framing of abortion as a private matter has closeted abortion, which has rendered it off limits to public debate and has continued to justify the control of women by the medical establishment and the state.⁴⁸ In relegating the control of women’s decisions to the state and medical authorities, women have been constructed as victims who must be isolated and protected by patriarchal institutions from others, each other, and themselves. “Pro-choice” supporters have also reproduced this concept of women’s relationship to abortion. For example, the image of women as “victims” who resort to a “desperate” and “extreme” measure like abortion is an anti-choice construction that has been adopted by “pro-choice” advocates in their attempt to “prevent abortions.”⁴⁹ It is a message laden with moralistic overtones that denies the possibility of women as agents, in some way, in their own destinies.

⁴⁷ Fried 3.; Petchesky (1990) 395.; Simonds (1996) suggests the need for oppositional grass-roots attacks. For example, during the time when Louisiana was attempting to criminalize all abortions, a provision was to be established that allowed for abortions only in the case of rape or incest if it was reported within two weeks from when the crime occurred. Simonds suggested that 300 women should have organized and crowded the police stations of Louisiana to report that they had been raped by the sponsors of the legislation.

⁴⁸ Fried 3-6.; Hadley 187.; Rudy 101.; Simonds 94.

The “right to choose” framework has also proven to be inadequate for women who may have little agency to make a “free choice” or for whom abortion was not the most important issue at hand. Racist and imperialist agendas, premised on ideas of women of color as either promiscuous breeders or uncivilized, ignorant primitives, have forced sterilizations, cesareans, and other unwanted procedures on women whose options have been severely restricted due to cultural and material conditions. Through imperialist agendas and government programs, poor women and women of color have been denied their subjectivity by being forced to undergo unwanted procedures.⁵⁰ The “right to choose” framework has ignored the histories that women of color and poor women have faced, and has not adequately supported their rights to conceive.⁵¹

In the absence of situating the issue of “reproductive rights” in social, political, and cultural contexts, it has been framed as an abstract, dichotomously structured, debate centered around abortion. The “right” to abortion means only that a government shall not interfere with a woman’s decision through legal sanctions, but it fails to provide affirmative access which can make “free choice” a reality. The narrow and binary structure of the debate thus far, which has juxtaposed claims of fetal personhood against women’s rights to choose, has been misleading and is a distortion of reality.⁵² If the debate is to be reframed, then feminists and “pro-choice” activists must take a political

⁴⁹ Fried 14.; Hadley 186-89, 191.; Pollitt 12-14.

⁵⁰ Bordo 79-80.; Davis 17-24.; Fried 3.; Petchesky (1990) 395.

⁵¹ Bordo 79-80.; Davis 17-24.; Fried 3.; Hadley 186-89.; Petchesky (1990) 395.; Porter 69.; Rudy 98.

⁵² Bordo 72.; Petchesky (1990) 333.

and moral stand that refuses the terms of an abortion “dilemma” in the ways that it has been previously constructed and adopt a broader approach premised upon the need for reproductive freedom that is situated in the broader context of women’s liberation and human freedom.⁵³

If reproductive freedom is the goal, then it is necessary to address and advocate for this mission as a social need for human freedom that encompasses women’s many demands and needs. As many scholars and activists have suggested, reproductive freedom encompasses social change in all aspects of life. To exercise reproductive freedom, a woman must be free to decide for herself, whether or not she will have children, and women of all classes, races, ages, abilities and sexual identities must be granted the full range of social, economic, cultural and political conditions and choices so that each can make and act upon informed decisions about her sexuality, reproductive capacity, and every other aspect of her life. The decision to become pregnant through “natural” or “artificial” means, to become sterilized, to abort, to contracept, or to make any other determination regarding one’s reproductive future needs to be considered in a private setting, but we must acknowledge that this resolution is made within a social context. The prerequisites necessary for reproductive freedom to exist must include: freedom from sterilization abuse and stereotyped gender roles; sexuality freedom; access to reliable, safe contraception and quality sex education; the reduction of infant and maternal mortality rates; access to prenatal care; funded, safe, legal, accessible abortion

⁵³ Bordo 71.; Petchesky (1990) xxiv, 360.

for all women; access to reproductive technologies; and social supports that allow people to raise children, such as equitable and sustainable employment, quality medical care, childcare, education, and housing.⁵⁴ In other words, the path to securing reproductive freedom will not be realized through the legalization or repeal of abortion, rather, an entire host of freedoms must be attained to liberate women from oppression to make any reproductive decision a “free choice.”

Reproductive freedom can have a social justification without discarding individual autonomous decision making. As Petchesky suggests, a feminist concept of reproductive freedom should associate with and assert a woman’s right to and need for bodily self-determination as a social need and a prerequisite for humanness. Therefore, while reproductive freedom is a central, human, social need, women must be the individuals who are the moral agents responsible for making decisions regarding their reproductive freedom. Justifications for women’s bodily autonomy need to be defined by a social principle which asserts that control over decisions ought to be exercised by those whose work and concern have been most consistently involved in the activity in question. This philosophy would be founded on both individual and social principles that enable women to both control their own bodies and procreative capacities on an individual basis and demand such freedom based on social need and responsibility; since women carry the burden of pregnancy and childrearing, it is women who must decide their fates. This reasoning allows for a validation of men’s potential roles in parenting, but men’s roles

⁵⁴ ACCESS 1-2.; CARASA 3-6.; Copelon (1992). 87.; Fried 13.; Petchesky (1990) xx.; Porter 69-72.; Reagan 249.; Roberts 59-65.; Simonds 219.; Weir 271-72.; Yuval-Davis 22-23.

would not equal women's roles so long as women are the primary individuals both physically and emotionally involved in pregnancy. While men may be active participants in parenting, issues regarding women's bodies must be controlled and decided by women, not by the state, medical authorities, or men. Women's "choice" and control over reproduction is the central issue but not in terms of the private individual, rather of women as a collectivity whose needs, consciousness, and positions are organized around reproduction. It is for these reasons that a reproductive freedom movement would benefit by talking less about "choice" and more about how to transform the social conditions of choosing, working and reproducing to make access to "free choice" a reality for all women. In this effort, activists need to understand the interconnectedness reproductive freedom to social change and advocate for a broad array of freedoms to secure "choice."⁵⁵

As Susan Bordo states, the current battles over reproductive control emerge as an assault on the personhood of women. The historical influence of the construction of a "right to one's person" is a fundamental principle in western societies, yet in contrast to ideas regarding men's bodies, women's reproductive bodies have received a causal and moral approach which has allowed for moral and legal interventions.⁵⁶ As long as the debate over reproductive control is conceptualized solely in terms of the abortion debate, we are fooled into thinking that the fetus is the only being with ethical and legal status at

⁵⁵ Petchesky (1990) xxii-xxvi, 2, 8, 11-13, 16, 381-83, 396-400.

⁵⁶ Bordo 72-75, 85.

issue, however, whether a woman can be forced to reproduce is also a moral issue.⁵⁷ To deprive any woman, pregnant or potentially pregnant, control over her reproductive decision making is to mount an assault on her personal integrity and autonomy.⁵⁸

As Bordo suggests, when the terms of our advocacy are framed solely as abortion rights which are abstracted from issues of forced medical treatment and access to services, women's status as subjects is challenged in a system in which the protection of the subject remains a central value. Feminists and champions of "choice" should assert the need for women, based on their subjectivity as human agents, to be considered the moral agents in decisions regarding their reproductive lives, and this reclamation can be engaged without devaluing the worth of other humans or the fetus.⁵⁹ Feminists and advocates of reproductive freedom must make a moral claim that the self and body are inseparable, and that if things can be done to a woman's body without her control, it undermines her sense of integrity as a human being and her ability to act responsibly in regard to others.⁶⁰ Therefore, it is women who must be morally responsible for decisions regarding their reproductive lives; arbitrary timelines and control mechanisms

⁵⁷ Bordo 93.; Petchesky (1990) 331.; Willis 77.

⁵⁸ Bordo 94.

⁵⁹ For arguments which justify the mutual value of both women's freedom and fetal rights, see Bordo 77-93.; Petchesky (1990) 348-51, 383. As Rosalind Pollack Petchesky explains, a feminist concept of reproductive freedom claims that what makes us human is the ability for social relationships with others. The fetus can not be a being "in and of itself" without consciousness, awareness of others, or the ability to communicate its needs; the value of the fetus occurs in a context of relationships with others, defined by their subjectivity. Therefore, the humanization process is based upon the subjectivity of the pregnant woman, since she is the only individual who can define her relationship to the fetus.

⁶⁰ Petchesky (1990) 348-51, 383.; Willis 76.

constructed by the state and the medical establishment do not allow women the freedom to engage in their own moral agency.

The shift from a “pro-choice” to a “reproductive freedom” agenda is important for another reason; opponents of reproductive freedom already understand the interconnectedness of progressive politics, women’s liberation, reproductive freedom, and social change. While proponents of the “right to choose” have refrained from linking the issue of abortion to a larger array of social needs, opponents of a woman’s right to reproductive freedom have recognized this interconnection and have utilized a broad social and moral agenda to engage in action and state their claims against the notion of reproductive freedom. As feminists have suggested, the interconnected nature of this issue can be seen through the example of abortion politics. The abortion debate has invoked conflicting values and symbolic meanings defining the intersections between sexuality, race, gender and the state, and has acquired political volatility in periods when women’s social position is under siege. The anti-abortion struggle is a fight for moral hegemony; it is a scapegoat issue that the Right has used to attack an array of social issues and programs. Assaults on abortion for poor women, young women, and women with “selfish” reasons, are part of a larger conservative agenda that is responsible for attacks on welfare, healthcare, education, sex education, and gay and lesbian rights and accountable for the promotion of agendas such as the defense of marriage, school prayer and constitutional amendments for life and against flag burning. The recent attacks on abortion occur as part of a broader ideological struggle in which the very meanings of the family, the state, and young women’s sexuality are contested so that the issue of

contention is not abortion itself but the restoration of patriarchal domination over a wife and over a romanticized family norm which is construed to be antithetical to liberated sex, sex outside of marriage, or sex for pleasure.⁶¹ In the effort to restore patriarchal power in both the public and private spheres, the Right has attacked every issue which symbolizes women's liberation.

Some feminists have suggested that the challenge to the abstract rhetoric of choice should focus on exposing the contradictions of the legal tradition regarding bodily integrity and insist that women's equal protection under the law requires that it be resolved.⁶² However, not only did the Supreme Court illustrate or validate for feminists that the anti-abortion movement is integrally tied to economic and social conservatism and institutionalized sexism and racism, but the court has undermined the legal standing of women as a category with distinct needs that must be recognized and has proven that sole reliance on the law is an ineffective avenue for social change.⁶³ This is, above all, the reason why single-issue, top-down political advocacy, such as that utilized by Planned Parenthood, is somewhat outdated in the struggle for reproductive freedom. While this type of political advocacy may be important and useful at times, it can not be the only way to advocate reproductive freedom. Instead, methods of advocacy should be employed that attempt to broaden the agenda, reframe debates, and illustrate an

⁶¹ Fried 9, 12.; Kristen Luker, Abortion & the Politics of Motherhood, (Berkeley: U of California P, 1984) 108-120.; Petchesky (1990) ix-xxii, 263-64, 335.; Reagan 248-49.; Simonds 219.; Willis 75.

⁶² Allen 443-448.; Bordo 94.

⁶³ Petchesky (1990) 295, 321.

understanding of the interconnectedness of reproductive freedom to women's liberation and social change. Because institutions tend to reflect the ideologies of the majority, as activists we must find methods to transmit our messages in ways that begin to effect the popular cultural understanding from a feminist perspective.

Conservatives have been quite successful at captivating a popular audience to attack women's rights and freedoms. While the philosophical foundations of the "pro-life" movement may seem quite unsound, the movement has capitalized on the use of a broad-based, multi-issue oriented politics through grass-roots political mobilization. Anti-choice advocates have framed the abortion debate and put the "pro-choice" contingent on the defensive by appealing to popular culture through its use of rhetoric and manipulation of imagery.⁶⁴ Their use of such tactics has rendered women invisible in the debates and their rhetoric, focusing exclusively on the fetus as an autonomous being, has reduced women's bodies to a stage upon which the drama of fetal life and death takes place.⁶⁵ While "pro-choice" advocates need not necessarily distort reality, we also must appeal to the popular culture in an effort to reframe these debates. If feminist and "pro-choice" advocates broaden our understandings of the interconnectedness of social needs and issues and expand the types of mechanisms employed for political action, we, too, can create a grass-roots effort that appeals to the popular culture.

⁶⁴ See Hartouni 51-67.; Petchesky (1987): 263-92.; Pollitt 12.; Rothman 113-114.; Simonds 82, 94-95.

⁶⁵ Rothman 113-114.; Reagan 248-50.; Willis 75.

The conservative United States political climate makes “pro-choice” supporters believe that the most important task is to defend the rights that have already been won because our risk of losing them is too great. However, defending abortion rights in such narrow ways has not advanced the cause for reproductive freedom.⁶⁶ Strategies to protect rights already won or which make compromises to keep some rights both trade away the principle that abortion and other reproductive decisions are fundamentally women’s judgments and create barriers that virtually render access to abortion and reproductive freedom illegal for most women. Through concessions to “keep what we can,” pro-choice advocates have helped to validate the notion that there are morally acceptable and unacceptable abortions and that those decisions are best made by someone other than the pregnant woman. Defending abortion rights based on current legal criteria force “pro-choice” advocates to rely on the police, courts, and the medical establishment and makes us complicit with an oppressive system, a system that should be challenged, not relied upon.⁶⁷ The conservative statutory decisions which have been attacks upon women’s “right to choose” illustrate that the interpretation of laws sway as a result of the politics of judicial appointments and reactions to public opinion. Because the *Webster* decision illustrated that the court reacts to trends in public opinion, the feminist movement must find a stronger voice in popular culture and consciousness before our messages can have a lasting impact on state power.⁶⁸ Although rights based upon “privacy” in matters of

⁶⁶ Simonds 230-31.

⁶⁷ Fried 7-12.; Hadley 191.; Reagan 251.

⁶⁸ Petchesky 297, 322.; Webster v. Reproductive Health Services 492 U.S. 490 (1989).

sexuality and procreation now seem outdated, they were won through public debate, political organizing, coalition building, and collective action, and so must the fight for reproductive freedom.⁶⁹

If the movement is to push beyond the limits of the current debates, then it must put women back into the center of the debates and attacks on reproductive freedom.⁷⁰ People now lack both an understanding of reproductive rights history and a woman-centered political perspective on abortion and reproductive rights,⁷¹ therefore, a reproductive freedom movement must engage in the re-politicization of women-centered popular discourse on procreative issues while providing a knowledge base to counter popular anti-choice rhetoric. The deconstruction of the concepts of subjectivity, authority, or identity when discussing issues of reproductive freedom are not particularly useful because such concepts are embedded in the social contexts that women face and can not be separated from women's lived experiences.⁷² Through grassroots mobilization, a reproductive freedom movement should engage in challenging the cultural conception of women as fetal containers and claim pregnancy, abortion, and other reproductive issues as experientially profound events; situations in which private decisions must be made but which are also open to discussion in a public forum.⁷³

⁶⁹ Reagan 254.

⁷⁰ Willis 77.

⁷¹ Simonds 221.

⁷² Bordo 96.

⁷³ Bordo 94.; Fried x.

If new movement is to break beyond old boundaries, then it should also challenge the construction of abortion or any reproductive decision as a necessary evil; a fabrication that both “pro-choice” and “pro-life” advocates have posited. To the contrary, the ability to make decisions regarding reproductive issues and to access the resources necessary to make “choice” a reality is a social need, and a benefit for many women who may not wish to solely be identified by their capacity to reproduce.⁷⁴ Further, if the movement is to advance beyond its current limitations, it must advocate for a broad array of reproductive needs, including the social and cultural means necessary to secure “free choice” for all women.⁷⁵ In this effort, the movement must be mindful of the diversity of women’s experiences and needs and formulate agendas based upon the standpoint from which various women speak. A reproductive freedom movement that engages in a public feminist discourse on pregnancy and birth is indispensable in the effort to move beyond the boundaries of “pro-choice” advocacy; it is important to engage in this discussion rather than leaving issues of reproductive freedom to “pro-lifers” to define.⁷⁶

The lessons that feminists and organizations engaging in political activity should have learned from the history of abortion advocacy is that a reproductive freedom movement must be more inclusive than movements have been in the past, allowing for

⁷⁴ Petchesky (1990). 131.

⁷⁵ Examples of organizations which have advocated in this manner are ACCESS and CARASA.

⁷⁶ Bordo 94-95.

women of diverse backgrounds to both define debates and partake in action.⁷⁷ In this effort, the tasks of both advocating for reproductive freedom and creating social change can be immense when issues are broad and interconnected, and no one agency or organization can or should be responsible for being “the movement.” Organizations that support the notion of reproductive freedom must work together in this struggle. Because human and financial resources may be scarce, and the amount of work a bit overwhelming, organizations that promote reproductive freedom may need to coalition build, working together and supporting one another to achieve similar goals.⁷⁸ If a reproductive freedom movement is to be successful, then it needs to utilize strategies which empower women to view themselves as political agents while simultaneously educating women about the interconnectedness of social issues to reproductive freedom.⁷⁹ As part of a grass-roots “movement,” women must feel as if they have been transformed as agents who determine decisions in regard to their reproductive capacities and their lives. These are some of the first steps needed to create an amicable climate for reproductive freedom philosophy to pervade popular culture.

⁷⁷ Fried ix.

⁷⁸ Fried 13.

⁷⁹ An example of ways to empower women in an effort to create political agency was exhibited by the actions of the “Jane” collective. See Kaplan (1996).

V. CHAPTER THREE:

Bridging Theory & Practice: Reproductive Freedom Advocacy Within Planned Parenthood

My interest in reproductive issues generated my need to both study such topics as they related to women and to become active in the fight for reproductive freedom. Personal experiences and feminist academic training have impassioned me to work toward the amelioration of conditions that restrict women's "choices" in an effort to make reproductive freedom a reality for all women. Through my studies, I realized that a need for feminist reproductive freedom advocacy existed and I became further convinced that I must attempt to transform theory into action. I wanted to begin to bridge the gap between feminist reproductive freedom theory and pro-choice activism in a political internship experience for an organization committed to similar goals. I sought an internship at Planned Parenthood of Southern Arizona because I was interested in actively engaging in political work related to reproductive freedom issues and because, due to economic reasons, my options were restricted to the Tucson area. In the spring of 1997, I contacted Planned Parenthood of Southern Arizona and expressed my interest in an internship experience that either was related to grass-roots mobilization efforts or public policy.

The internship was to be a learning experience for me; one that I welcomed and embraced because I wanted to be involved in "the movement." I was eager to start an internship, for this was an opportunity to put my academic feminist theoretical training into practice. I envisioned a space in which I could personally bridge divides between

theory and practice. I expected most employees to have a firm understanding of the political dynamics of reproductive issues. I also assumed that the organization would function from a feminist perspective that the organization's political efforts would illustrate ways to engage in political activism which would radicalize "the movement." I was told that Planned Parenthood realized the need to conduct more public advocacy and grass-roots efforts and that new endeavors were being undertaken to address these needs. I was immediately excited at this prospect. I was assigned to work on public policy initiatives. Soon after the commencement of the internship, I realized that grass-roots efforts were not being coordinated at this affiliate.

While Planned Parenthood affiliates are established like franchises and make decisions independent from the national organization, each must follow the mission statement of the Federation. Therefore, while the Southern Arizona affiliate could and does make decisions based upon the political context of each region, it must adhere to the basic principles that the Federation promotes. This type of relationship permits a diversity of political ideologies between and among various affiliates and allows each entity to be unique in methods of advocacy employed and services provided. However, this relationship also ensures that affiliates will adopt political ideologies and strategies similar to the Federation to achieve organizational goals.

Planned Parenthood of Southern Arizona emphasizes a focus on public policy over grass-roots initiatives, and these priorities generally parallel strategic preferences within the Federation as well. The affiliate engages in fundraising, initiates public relations, lobbies legislators, and pursues litigation against the state. Similar to the

national office, this affiliate funnels its energy into single-issue, top-down political efforts at the expense of multi-issue and grass-roots endeavors. As one of only three organizations in Arizona that advocates for reproductive rights,⁸⁰ PPSA is frequently the lone organization in southern Arizona that lobbies for any aspect of reproductive freedom. In this venture, most of the organization's advocacy has and continues to support and defend the right to abortion. In Arizona, the right to abortion is challenged every legislative session by continued efforts to constitutionally protect life at conception, to attempt to require informed, parental, and spousal consent, and to ban what pro-lifers termed "partial-birth abortion." The leaders of Planned Parenthood of Southern Arizona believe that the organization must continue to utilize top-down political strategies to effect legislative voting outcomes and gain support for their goals and programs.

While Planned Parenthood of Southern Arizona shares similar political advocacy styles with the Federation, the organization is quite cautious with the methods and types of political activity it invokes. In fact, the debate regarding the extent to which Planned Parenthood of Southern Arizona should be involved in politics is one of the issues interrelated to the methods of political advocacy in which the organization engages. Similar to administration at the national organization, decisions regarding the methods of political activism utilized by the Southern Arizona affiliate are products of internal negotiations primarily between those who support a mission informed by principles of

⁸⁰ The other two organizations that advocate in support of "choice" in Arizona are Planned Parenthood of Central & Northern Arizona and Arizona Right to Choose, an affiliate of NARAL.

women's liberation and those who believe that the primary goal of the organization is to provide medical services and to fiscally sustain the entity. The question of the "political" status of the organization is one that directly informed my experiences as an intern.

When I began my internship, Planned Parenthood of Southern Arizona was devising a vision for the future of public policy and advocacy in Arizona. I was assigned to one of the new projects associated with that vision and had assumed that my work was welcomed. Some employees, most of whom held top administrative positions, were aware of the work that I was performing. However, not long after I arrived I noticed a division between employees that emerged as the product of debates over the primary goals of the organization: one group tended to promote the goal of providing medical services, while another group believed that the affiliate needed a vision, and an essential prerequisite to achieve the vision was to define political goals, strengthen public advocacy and grass roots organizing, as well as to provide medical services.

Essentially, the affiliate was debating how and whether or not the organization should be "political," that is, engage in political action. Similar to the national organization, Planned Parenthood of Southern Arizona defined being political as engaging in top-down advocacy; the entity did not identify as political its work as one of the few abortion providers in Arizona or its potential to mobilize a client base into a political constituency. At the time of my entrance I did not realize that such a divide existed either in the federation or at this affiliate; I had assumed that my position as an intern reflected organizational priorities for political advocacy, public policy initiatives, and grass-roots strategies. I began to realize this separation when an unknown supervisor

reprimanded and warned me by stating, “I don’t know if you understand our purpose here. We are here to provide a service. We are not political or radical here.”⁸¹ I quickly learned that although the organization had recently designed a vision and strengthened political action prior to the commencement of my internship, everyone did not support this decision. Because I was a new employee assigned a task that advanced a political vision, my very presence made me subject to the center of the controversy over whether PPSA should engage in political action. In this space, I was directly involved in a debate that challenged the historical stance of the organization; I was engaging in actions known to be political in an organization that had not historically admitted its political presence.

Due to a lack of consensus over the political goals of the organization, the conservative political climate in Arizona, and its existence as a non-profit agency, Planned Parenthood of Southern Arizona does not identify as “political.” Thus, not all of the employees are required to exhibit either an understanding of reproductive issues or a vision for the future of the organization. Jobs are designated “mission driven” or “task driven,” and one does not need to support the mission to be a qualified candidate for a task driven position. People who are not committed to a mission or vision can work at Planned Parenthood as long as they have the skills necessary to be qualified for a specific position. Employees hired into a “mission driven” position are expected to support the

⁸¹ This supervisor also reprimanded me that it was not my position to disseminate medical knowledge and that I could lose my position if my volunteer behavior continued. Her comment came as the result of a talk I had with a colleague at the lunch table regarding the reasons that I would never use Depo-Provera due to the harmful side effects. This is another example of the hierarchical dissemination of knowledge, authority, and advocacy at PPSA. Both statements occurred in the same “discussion,” which I viewed as a lecture on the “rules” at Planned Parenthood.

organization's mission during the work day, but all employees do not support the mission equally.⁸² This scenario creates divisions between employees regarding both the organization's political positions with respect to reproductive issues and the approaches taken when interacting with clients. Such divisions between employees erode at every level a commitment to a woman-centered approach to care and advocacy and generate less cohesion as an entity in the fight for reproductive freedom.

The inability of the organization to broadly identify as a "political" agent in various methods of advocacy hinders it in another way. Because both the national and the Southern Arizona affiliate refuse to acknowledge themselves as political entities, even though they engage in top-down advocacy, they have ignored their largest resources. In the time that I spent working in the Southern Arizona affiliate, most of the public policy work focused on short term, retaliation strategies and the location of a political base, a constituency that could be counted on to support "pro-choice" stances, as defined by Planned Parenthood. These efforts may be needed in some circumstances, yet this paradigm operates in a way which attempts to find "something out there" instead of utilizing the resources already available to the organization. In efforts to find and target a constituency, the organization has overlooked the ways it could be utilized as a political base to both empower women to become political agents and promote grass roots mobilization efforts as defined by groups of empowered women. If the affiliate, and for that matter the Planned Parenthood Federation, were designed to empower people and

⁸² It seemed that administrators in higher positions of power were more highly regarded as those individuals who were responsible for upholding the mission.

educate them about political issues during their visits, therapies, or waiting time, then a political constituency could be established. If the entire federation engaged in the mobilization of a political base through their affiliates, it would have the ability to reach more than four million people in the United States each year.⁸³

Located in one of the most conservative and regressive states in the country for welfare, social services, and reproductive freedom, Planned Parenthood of Southern Arizona attempts to engage in political activity in ways that appeal to legislators while striving to prevent the erosion of rights granted to women. In this endeavor, the organization has neutralized language and postulated arguments in moderate, liberal terms that promote policies that are not always woman-centric. By promoting gender-neutral analyses, the organization has been able to dissociate from feminist claims or gender specific arguments to promote its goals, yet gender-neutral strategies negate the fact that reproductive issues are gendered. The affiliate promotes the organization as one that cares for the family; men, women, and children. While educational programs may be targeted toward different populations, most of the clinical work that Planned Parenthood of Southern Arizona provides is designed for women. Furthermore, most of the laws or initiatives that Planned Parenthood of Southern Arizona supports and promotes are related to contraception and abortion, which are highly female gendered services.

⁸³ Planned Parenthood Federation of America, Inc., Mission, (1995). Planned Parenthood projects this number as the actual amount of individuals it services in the United States of America each year. I believe that this number is a conservative estimate of people that the organization could mobilize as a political base, for it does not include people who have interacted with the organization internationally or through

Mostly women receive contraceptive services offered at PPSA and only women have abortions, yet much of the language that I was encouraged to use in my work, and that the organization frequently uses when discussing reproductive issues, creates scenarios that make the concept of reproductive freedom look androgynous. Frequently, I encountered arguments and was encouraged to write in a fashion that promoted Planned Parenthood's commitment to reproductive freedom for all people. For example, at one point in time I wrote the following phrase in regard to a local senator who consistently votes to restrict abortion: "His blatant disregard for women and their ability to make decisions is misogynistic and should be exposed to the voters of his district." My boss encouraged me to cross it out and replace it with, "his stance is offensive to any American who supports reproductive freedom for all." Such a response has the potential to, at its worst, make women invisible in the abortion debate and, at its best, create a scenario that situates men and women as beings with equal decision making capabilities in regard to issues like abortion; issues that are located on a specific gendered type body. While I was encouraged to write in such a fashion, I refused to participate in erasing women or creating a scenario that placed men's decision making rights as equal to those of women's on matters regarding women's bodies. While I could tolerate many organizational tensions and paradoxes, I refused to partake in rendering women invisible in the context of abortion or reproductive freedom. Although the use of gender neutral language is seen as a pragmatic political tactic in this conservative political climate, the

organizational correspondence, volunteering, escorting patients, protecting clinics, accompanying patients, or accessing the organization's website.

danger of such strategies is that predicaments are created in negotiations that run the risk of negating the fundamental principle that women's sexual freedom is the underlying issue of contention.

In a climate where reproductive rights are constantly challenged, when Planned Parenthood of Southern Arizona has engaged in politics it has focused all of its political energies on attempting to secure abortion rights through the use of liberal philosophies and rhetoric. A recent example of such advocacy was illustrated by the arguments in the 1997 litigation that Planned Parenthood of Southern Arizona filed against the state of Arizona on the "partial-birth abortion" law passed by the Arizona legislature earlier that year.⁸⁴ The arguments that PPSA used in court privileged the right to abortion as a private decision that women should make in consultation with their physicians, and that the state should not regulate second and third trimester abortion when the life or the health of the woman is at risk throughout pregnancy. Planned Parenthood utilized these arguments in a way that maintained the jurisdiction of the state and medical establishment over women's decisions in "unnecessary" late term abortions. As a result of advocating to "keep the rights we have," the affiliate has concentrated on reforming or defending current statutes and the philosophical foundations of those laws, even if such enactments privilege the control of women's bodies to the medical establishment and the

⁸⁴ While I praise the efforts that Planned Parenthood has made in the past two years fighting right-wing attacks on parental consent and "partial-birth," late term, abortions, many of the arguments, such as those used in the Arizona case in 1997, are still based on the premise that the state can not intervene in physician autonomy. The arguments advocate that it is the right of the patient, in consultation with her physician, to make an appropriate medical decision and that the state does not have the right to intervene. I observed the arguments in this case. *Planned Parenthood of Southern Arizona v. Woods* 982 F. Supp. 1369 (1997).

state. In defending the “right to choose” in this manner, Planned Parenthood of Southern Arizona has not broadened its political agenda to advocate for reproductive freedom. While the decision to defend abortion may be pragmatic, this advocacy has not challenged social conditions that inhibit women from making free choices, adequately addressed women’s needs, focused on women as central to issues of procreation, or attempted to empower women to become political agents in the quest for reproductive freedom.

The legal logic that Planned Parenthood of Southern Arizona used in the “partial-birth abortion” case was successful in the sense that such arguments proved the Arizona legislation to be unconstitutional in Federal District Court. While this is a “win” for pro-choice advocates because it did not criminalize late term abortion for women based on life and health reasons, the win did not expand the justifications for this “right.” Though legal challenges have been partially successful, Planned Parenthood of Southern Arizona has not broadened agendas for advocacy, built coalitions, or contributed to the building of grass-roots political efforts to expand reproductive freedom in Arizona. Instead, the organization has focused its other energies on attempting to maintain a positive public relations image and to secure state funding. In these endeavors, Planned Parenthood of Southern Arizona sanctions mainstream moral demonization of certain types of abortions, portrays women as victims of abortion, stereotypes abortion as a necessary evil, and attempts to secure funding for abstinence-only education programs that are

antithetical to an understanding and an acceptance of a variety of sexualities as normal.⁸⁵

Although these decisions have also seemed pragmatic, they have compromised images of women and ideals of appropriate sexuality to the point that conservative ideals of moral purity pervade organizational philosophies, periodically rendering women and non-marital sex as deviant and abnormal.

While it seems practical that PPSA would focus most of its time and energy on defending abortion rights to “win” in court in a state that is so regressive in regard to social and reproductive rights, this creates quite a predicament for “choice” advocacy. The dilemma constructed is that in a state where the only organizations fighting for “choice” are Planned Parenthood and NARAL affiliates, it becomes even more essential that these organizations adopt a broad, multi-issue agenda for reproductive freedom that places the social rights of women as central to the debates. Through talking with some employees at PPSA, I found that some individuals believed that expanded advocacy efforts were needed, but were at a loss for where to begin or what to do given the immense nature of the issues. Some employees also realized that broad based advocacy was a much larger feat than one affiliate could effectively handle. As a feminist who supports the idea of reproductive freedom, I found it necessary to attempt to create a space within the organization where this type of advocacy could be shaped. I decided to

⁸⁵ In my office, an old poster hung which claimed that Planned Parenthood “prevented” more abortions than any other organization in the United States – a clear example of Planned Parenthood’s attempt to co-opt anti-choice rhetoric in an effort to attract political moderates to a pro-choice stance. In 1997, PPSA attempted to find ways to apply for the new federal welfare funds for abstinence-only education. The organization eventually conceded to not apply for such assistance because it could not teach an abstinence-based program which would have promoted educational efforts that articulate abstinence to be the best decision, but that also teach sexuality education if and when people choose not to abstain.

complete my work in a way that broadened both an understanding of the issues and the scope of political advocacy while providing suggestions for future political efforts.

During my internship, I completed a study for Planned Parenthood of Southern Arizona that was to be used as a foundation for oppositional campaigns in the 1998 Southern Arizona elections.⁸⁶ Planned Parenthood of Southern Arizona assigned me this project. I was asked to determine those Senators or Representatives who may be in danger of losing their positions in the next election by matching voter records from previous elections to the results of the anti-abortion 1992 Proposition 110. While I understood the motivations behind the need to compare this data, it could not predict the conditions under which certain incumbents would be vulnerable in the coming elections, nor did it provide me with enough information to assess the incumbent's stance on reproductive freedom issues. I realized the need to assess voter records in conjunction with evidence of the political stance each legislator occupied regarding reproductive freedom issues. My supervisor provided me with an incomplete legislative vote on the most-recent "partial-birth abortion" bill, but he did not have complete information on any specific legislative initiative. While this information was somewhat helpful, it was inadequate for my study and it only limited the focus of the study to the narrowly defined issue of abortion. In my commitment to reproductive freedom advocacy, I realized that the study had to include more information than the organization had stipulated, that I had

⁸⁶ A copy of the study that I completed for Planned Parenthood of Southern Arizona, *Pro-choice 2000: A Foundation for Oppositional Campaigns in Southern Arizona*, is located in the Special Collections section of the University of Arizona library.

to insist on creating a feminist project that would both complete the requirements that PPSA expected and frame the study in a manner useful for future political action after an oppositional campaign was launched. I felt compelled to complete the project in a manner which reframed and broadened issues and advocacy efforts to encompass reproductive freedom.

To complete the study, the report assessed the political partisan composition of each Legislative District in Southern Arizona and compared constituency views on abortion in each Legislative District to the voting trends of their respective legislators on reproductive issues. In an effort to broaden the analyses, four factors were evaluated: 1992 and 1996 Presidential election results, 1996 Arizona Senate and House of Representative election results, 1992 Proposition 110 results, and legislative voting records on reproductive related, single-issue legislation since 1995. The first three components were the “hard” data that the organization had wanted, while the legislative records provided a perspective from which to evaluate the data. Of the five pieces of single issue legislation included in the study, three of the initiatives were abortion related, one regarded perinatal substance abuse and one supported the creation of a teenage pregnancy prevention task force assigned to implement an abstinence-only educational campaign.

Through the use of legislative voting records, I attempted to combine social issue legislation with reproductive related initiatives to provide a perspective on legislative voting records that was broader than just abortion views; I sought to construct a multi-issue political perspective to inform the organization’s future advocacy. I selected 1995

as a cut off date for including legislative voting data for various reasons: while abortion regulation constituted most of the initiatives considered in relation to reproductive issues, the state had not voted on abortion related issues prior to that date for many years;⁸⁷ it allowed for the most effective way to receive incumbent's records; and it was a manageable task to complete in the time frame of my internship. I attempted to select the broadest based social issues possible to illustrate voting patterns in relation to creating mechanisms to access services, but I found that many issues integral to a reproductive freedom agenda that would expand access, such as initiatives for improving education, welfare, transportation, or healthcare, were either absent or presented as omnibus legislation, which made it extremely difficult to evaluate the stances of each legislator in regard to specific issues. I then attempted to find the broadest array of single-issue legislation related to women's specific reproductive situations. The five initiatives restricted women's abilities to make choices and illustrated that Arizona aggressively restricts people's access to education and services for sexuality and reproductive issues. The message was clear to me: the state of Arizona is not serious about solving any pregnancy or abortion "problems;" policy makers would rather demonize behavior, criminalize actions, or act as if these issues were non-existent. The inability to find legislation that did not restrict women's freedom reinforced the feminist

⁸⁷ Some Arizona legislators in positions of power agreed to a silent moratorium on abortion related issues prior to 1995. Recently, I was told that Jane Hull, the Governor of Arizona, prevented all legislation that restricted access to abortion from getting through the committee she chaired while serving in the Legislature even though she positioned herself as a pro-life candidate at that time. With the shift in positions of power in the state legislature in 1995, a flood of initiatives attacked a woman's "right to choose," symbolizing an end to the agreement.

viewpoint that the attack on abortion is related to an entire conservative agenda aimed at both regulating women's bodies and judgments and reinstating patriarchal power within the public and private spheres.

I attempted to utilize an analysis based on reproductive freedom principles, but, this task was complicated. Although many of the "pro-choice" legislators voted against anti-choice legislation, I found that few of the leaders voted in ways which would support an agenda that promotes reproductive freedom and creates access for people to exercise their rights. For example, while some legislators supported "choice" in regard to abortion, many also endorsed the construction of an advisory board on perinatal substance abuse and abstinence-only efforts to reduce teen pregnancy, both of which were used to further regulate women's bodies and decisions. Most legislators who supported a "right to choose" did so in a liberal fashion, which promoted the legality of abortion while simultaneously attempting to restrict women's options for "choice" or promulgate laws that favor an "appropriate" feminine sexuality. Originally, my analysis discussed the conservative tendencies of these legislators and cautioned Planned Parenthood about the political stances of these individuals. I was told, however, that I was not allowed to express the view that certain legislators who have been "friends" of Planned Parenthood had conservative political tendencies, and that these legislators would have supported other legislation if Planned Parenthood had taken a public political stance on a given issue and advocated for such support.⁸⁸ Supervisors also suggested that

⁸⁸ It is reasonable that Planned Parenthood accepted responsibility for choosing not to lobby legislators. However, the conscious decision not to lobby legislators regarding certain bills was another example of

I not include any information in my analysis in regard to legislation that PPSA chose not to lobby. This request created a predicament for me because if I did not include this information, then my analysis would be narrowly focused on abortion related votes and legislation; exactly the type of situation that I attempted to avoid throughout my study. One the other hand, if I included the information and my views of the legislators, the organization would not view my work as credible and, consequentially, the work would probably not be used by the organization. This entire scenario illustrated that the organization has not significantly altered its advocacy styles; PPSA continues to be primarily concerned with appealing to the elite and persists in the support of narrowly defined, single-issue, abortion related, legislation at the expense of expanding the issues to advocate for reproductive freedom and social justice for women. Due to my relative powerlessness as an intern and my need to complete the project, I compromised and agreed to include only the abortion related legislation into the analyses of the legislator's stances, while incorporating all of the information into my report to provide the organization with a broader perspective of the attitudes of each legislator in relation to reproductive issues.

To supplement the analysis, I situated the constituent and legislative voting tendencies into a context that described trends in abortion views nation-wide, since few, if any studies were conducted with a broader perspective in mind. Situating my work in a national context was a mechanism to illustrate voting tendencies and aspects of the

the refusal of PPSA to broaden political advocacy.

abortion issue as not specific to Arizona, though this contextualization did not negate the fact that advocacy techniques employed must be specific to Arizona's political climate.

The final portion of the report was the conclusions of the analyses. Because it is impossible to accurately determine the most vulnerable candidate for re-election over a year in advance, the report offered recommendations for future political strategies for PPSA. In an effort to advocate for reproductive freedom, I wrote the conclusions in two parts. The first portion focused on short term political advocacy, discussed the results of the study, and revealed those incumbents who should be targeted and actively opposed based on their anti-choice records and their likelihood of success in future elections. In effect, this portion presented the types of "hard" data that the organization had expected me to gather. The second part of the conclusion illustrated the need for the organization to engage in long term political action driven by a vision for social change. This segment was an implicit call to the organization to broaden the scope of its advocacy framework from a sole focus on abortion to a more multi-issue oriented agenda of reproductive freedom. This portion called for PPSA to situate women and their decisions as central to political activist efforts, and to establish the goal of the emancipation of women as a foundation for such advocacy; it encouraged the organization to validate the need for reproductive freedom as a social need and right of all women. Finally, the conclusion discussed the need for PPSA to broaden advocacy efforts from those which focused on single-issue oriented, top-down political approaches to those which also support multi-issue, bottom-up approaches and to engage in grass roots political action efforts as a

mechanism to change cultural attitudes and to stabilize a “pro-choice,” pro-reproductive freedom environment.

Working at Planned Parenthood of Southern Arizona was quite a challenging task. I often felt disheartened to learn that the organization did not premise its mission or political agendas on women’s liberation from sexual oppression. Although I understood that this goal was not a founding principle per se, I had expected the organization to understand this interconnection by now, and to have modified their missions, policies, and political advocacy to be more woman-centered. While working at the Southern Arizona affiliate, I realized that Planned Parenthood supported the ideological concept of the interconnectedness of a variety of factors as related to reproductive freedom, but was not actively engaged in fundamentally challenging social foundations as a mechanism to achieve women’s rights and freedoms. I believe this behavior is the result of the fact that the organization has not distinguished between the concepts of reproductive choice, reproductive rights, and reproductive freedom. In the absence of this clarification, the organization has been able to continue to justify its historical methods of advocacy.

As a self-proclaimed feminist with a commitment to reproductive freedom, I felt out of place working at the affiliate. So much time and energy was spent politicking within the organization; trying to figure out the ideological convictions of my bosses and colleagues to please the organization in the work that I was completing while attempting to maintain a progressive feminist agenda and analysis was quite difficult in an environment which still, for the most part, supported a dichotomous “pro-choice” verses “pro-life” abortion advocacy. In some respects I felt silenced and alienated in a role that

I never expected to induce such feelings, and it was difficult to come to terms with the fact that women-centered policies are not usually the top priority within the organization that my generation commonly and almost instinctively (as well as mistakenly, in some cases) associates with the reproductive rights movement in the United States. This realization was frustrating to me because it illustrated the general lack of political advocacy that is woman-centered and the desperate need for broader, multi-issue political work. In my work role, I felt like one of the few people advocating for women. That feeling was estranging and made me understand the burnout and the frustration that other feminists have felt working in such an environment.

On the other hand, the experience provided me with a dose of my future, an example of what it will be like to advocate for the principles that I champion. Rarely will I be in a position where most of the people will have a common vision for the future of women's liberation, and if such a situation would occur, a multiplicity of ideas will be expressed about the mechanisms used to achieve that goal. The experience also illustrated to me the complex relationship that Planned Parenthood has with feminism. Although I was frustrated and was the minority in ideology at times, my experience further illustrated that Planned Parenthood exists in a reciprocal relationship to the feminist movement. In the absence of mass based movement the organization did provide a space for me to complete work that I hope will advance reproductive freedom advocacy. Further, it was rewarding and rejuvenating to meet some employees who supported issues that many feminists believe need to be central to the creation of reproductive freedom advocacy and action. Such individuals will be integral agents in

both the advancement of feminist principles within the organization and the roles in which Planned Parenthood must engage as part of a reproductive freedom movement.

VI. CONCLUSIONS:

The Road Forward: Organizing For Freedom

This paper has aspired to advance feminist scholarship through analyses of the ways that mainstream organizations contribute to the feminist movement. In particular, this work illustrated ways that Planned Parenthood has both strayed from overtly promoting feminist political goals and shaped the feminist movement for reproductive rights and reproductive freedom. In this endeavor, a feminist analysis of Planned Parenthood's political advocacy has illustrated the need to adopt a broader agenda to promote the philosophy of reproductive freedom for women. My internship experience was included to provide an example of a way that activists engaged in political work within organizations could begin to restructure political advocacy to mobilize reproductive freedom movement.

The struggle to advance feminist goals is circumscribed by the social, political, cultural, and economic environments that may undermine these very goals.⁸⁹ While it is virtually impossible for organizations such as Planned Parenthood to defy all aspects of social culture and avoid replication of current "systems," this is not an excuse to abandon a feminist political agenda defined by a vision for social change. Although it is unfair to expect that Planned Parenthood should attempt unattainable goals, it is possible to expect the organization to create a more feminist, woman-centered, multi-dimensional approach to political advocacy for reproductive freedom.

⁸⁹ Simonds 232.

Commenting on Planned Parenthood's unwillingness to support of a feminist agenda, Linda Gordon suggests that in the early years the organization could not be blamed for the fact that no the feminist movement remained to give a context to their work.⁹⁰ While the organization can not be held responsible for the lack of organized the feminist movement, the leaders did make conscious decisions to disassociate with feminist agendas. Remnants of these policies, and continued initiatives, have historically distanced the organization from promoting programs designed to support social change and have not been effective at securing reproductive freedom for women. Yet, while Planned Parenthood has not formally associated itself as a feminist organization, its top-down political agenda to legitimize birth control and abortion contributed to a type of feminist activism. Planned Parenthood has also provided feminist activists a place to complete movement work, and, in this way, the organization functioned in a reciprocal relationship to the feminist movement. However, "pro-choice" strategies have limited women's freedoms and have necessitated new avenues of advocacy. The time has come for Planned Parenthood to support, embrace, and advocate for a woman-centered, reproductive freedom movement based upon principles of social change.

Reframing debates and organizing for reproductive freedom requires that Planned Parenthood promote principles that situate women and their social rights as central to multi-issue advocacy. The organization's pledge to support the decisions made in Cairo and Beijing are steps in this direction, but Planned Parenthood must venture beyond

⁹⁰ Gordon 390.

these commitments. It needs to adopt both the rhetoric and politics that make reproductive freedom a reality for all women. The organization can no longer rely on the idea that solutions to issues that impact reproductive freedom are based within the individual, because “choices,” in Rosalind Petchesky’s words, “are not merely the product of desires but depend on conditions existing in the society.”⁹¹

To transform advocacy for reproductive freedom, Planned Parenthood must recognize itself as a political entity, educate and empower women, and advocate for changes in existing systems that would create the means necessary for all women to make “free choices” in regard to reproductive freedom. That is, Planned Parenthood would have to take seriously political action which attempts to mediate cultural, social, political, and economic factors that confine and determine women’s “choices.” As stated previously, it is important that such action not occur independently, but rather through coalition building and grass-roots mobilization efforts. It is not feasible for Planned Parenthood to not wait until mass political movement revives and then jump on the bandwagon, rather it needs to be integral in the creation of a reproductive freedom movement without dominating such a movement. While these efforts will necessitate shifts in political strategies and re-evaluation of priorities within the organization; reproductive freedom, women’s freedom, and social change may hinge on the willingness of mainstream organizations such as Planned Parenthood to publicly engage in feminist activism.

⁹¹ Petchesky (1990). 388.

VII. Works Cited

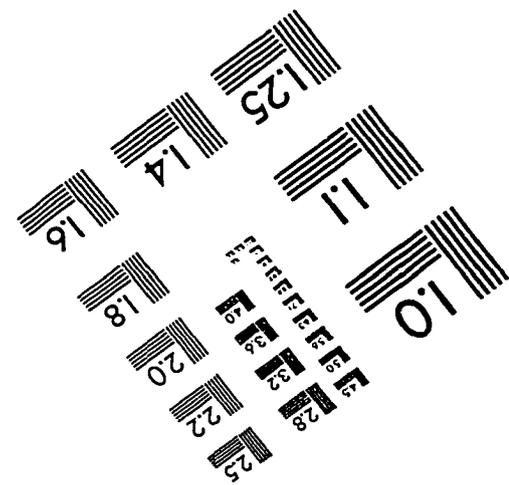
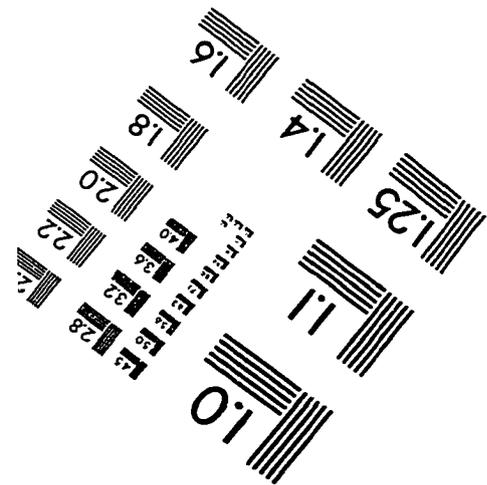
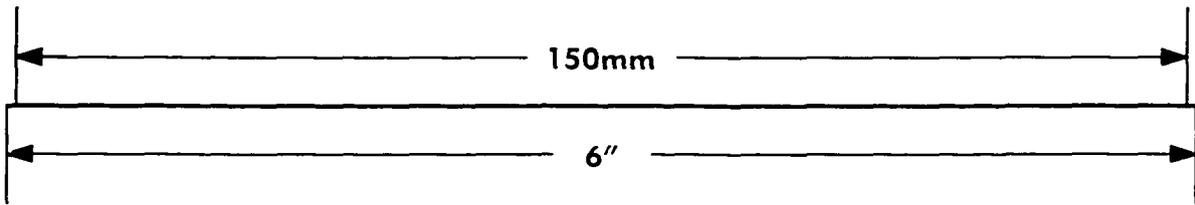
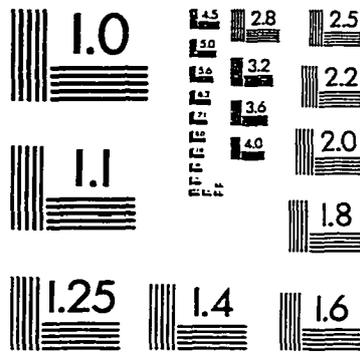
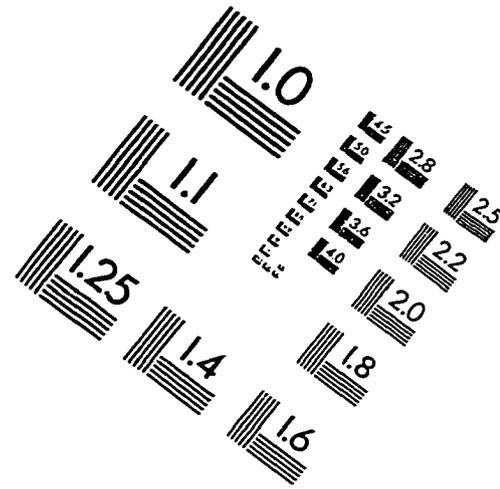
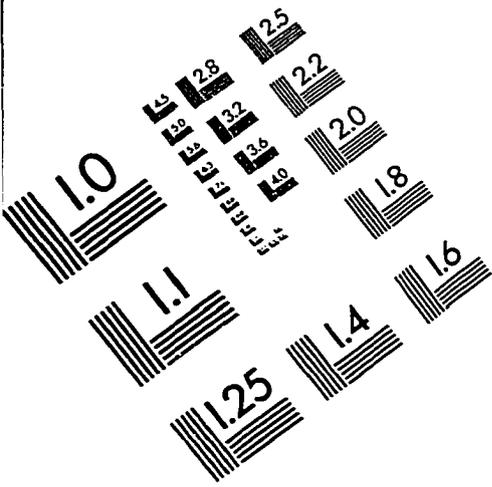
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