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## Creating the Litmus Test: Abortion, Mainline Protestants, and the Rise of the Religious Right

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# Creating the Litmus Test: Abortion, Mainline Protestants, and the Rise of the Religious Right

## Abstract

Scholars and laypeople have become concerned that American religion and politics has increasingly divided between conservatives and liberals, resulting in a "culture war" that leaves little common ground on salient social issues. Drawing on archival and periodical sources and a comparative-historical research design, I seek to understand the causes and consequences of the shifting relationship between religion and politics by examining how large, moderate and mainstream Protestant institutions have struggled to maintain cohesion and prestige throughout the increasingly contentious politics of abortion. In the early-1960s, no Mainline Protestant institutions supported expanding abortion access. Over 1966-1972, all the same institutions released official pronouncements in support of expanding abortion access. Since this time, particularly from 1987-1992, all these institutions faced increased internal debate over the issue and shifted in conservative directions to varying degrees. I find that the debate around abortion among Mainline Protestant institutions was not generally characterized by polarization around two sides but rather by much consensus, change over time, ambiguity, and often ambivalence toward the issue. These stances have often emerged not out of existing worldview and attitudes, but rather out of existing social networks, awareness of stances by others in the religious field, and institutional self-interest. Protestant clergy who put in significant time, energy and personal risk into expanding abortion access for women in the late-1960s and early-1970s were pulled into the movement through existing activist social networks, particularly from the Civil Rights Movement, and attitudes towards other issues such as civil rights, social injustice, and civil disobedience. During the 1960s and 1970s, Mainline Protestant institutions mobilized around support for expanding abortion rights as a way of challenging the political power of Catholic institutions, which were the primary opponent to expanding abortion access. Over the 1980s, as Evangelical Protestants became increasingly engaged in pro-life politics, Mainline Protestants began to see them as the primary opponent to expanding abortion access. Those denominations that sought to create greater ties with Evangelical Protestants backed away from their support of choice, while those denominations that sought to distinguish themselves from Evangelicals remained support of choice despite strong pro-life grassroots movements within them.

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Sabrina Danielsen

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## **ABSTRACT**

### CREATING THE LITMUS TEST: ABORTION, MAINLINE PROTESTANTS, AND THE RISE OF THE RELIGIOUS RIGHT

Sabrina Danielsen

Melissa Wilde

Scholars and laypeople have become concerned that American religion and politics has increasingly divided between conservatives and liberals, resulting in a “culture war” that leaves little common ground on salient social issues. Drawing on archival and periodical sources and a comparative-historical research design, I seek to understand the causes and consequences of the shifting relationship between religion and politics by examining how large, moderate and mainstream Protestant institutions have struggled to maintain cohesion and prestige throughout the increasingly contentious politics of abortion. In the early-1960s, no Mainline Protestant institutions supported expanding abortion access. Over 1966-1972, all the same institutions released official pronouncements in support of expanding abortion access. Since this time, particularly from 1987-1992, all these institutions faced increased internal debate over the issue and shifted in conservative directions to varying degrees. I find that the debate around abortion among Mainline Protestant institutions was not generally characterized by polarization around two sides but rather by much consensus, change over time, ambiguity, and often ambivalence toward the issue. These stances have often emerged not out of existing worldview and attitudes, but rather out of existing social networks,

awareness of stances by others in the religious field, and institutional self-interest.

Protestant clergy who put in significant time, energy and personal risk into expanding abortion access for women in the late-1960s and early-1970s were pulled into the movement through existing activist social networks, particularly from the Civil Rights Movement, and attitudes towards other issues such as civil rights, social injustice, and civil disobedience. During the 1960s and 1970s, Mainline Protestant institutions mobilized around support for expanding abortion rights as a way of challenging the political power of Catholic institutions, which were the primary opponent to expanding abortion access. Over the 1980s, as Evangelical Protestants became increasingly engaged in pro-life politics, Mainline Protestants began to see them as the primary opponent to expanding abortion access. Those denominations that sought to create greater ties with Evangelical Protestants backed away from their support of choice, while those denominations that sought to distinguish themselves from Evangelicals remained support of choice despite strong pro-life grassroots movements within them.



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## **INTRODUCTION**

### OVERVIEW

In recent decades, scholars and laypeople alike have become concerned that American religion and politics are increasingly divided between conservatives and liberals, resulting in a “culture war” that leaves little common ground on salient social issues. While religious affiliation, especially whether one was Protestant, Catholic, or Jewish, played a defining role in Americans’ public identities before the 1960s (Herberg 1955), after the 1960s salient boundaries increasingly cut across denominational lines and are defined by a growing divide between liberals and conservatives (Wuthnow 1988). With this religious “restructuring,” mainstream denominations have been less able to hold the middle ground that they historically maintained. As a result, mainstream denominations have become more internally polarized and have declined in political power and members. In this project, I seek to understand the causes and consequences of these shifting religious boundaries and how these large, moderate, mainstream Protestant institutions have struggled to maintain cohesion during the rise of contentious salient social issues

Abortion is arguably the most contentious issue that has divided American religious groups since the 1960s. As the battle lines in abortion politics have grown increasingly concretized over time and Evangelical Protestants have played an

increasingly prominent role in pro-life<sup>1</sup> politics, it is often assumed that Protestants in general are predominantly mobilized *against* abortion and that they always have been. Despite the multitude of research on the history of abortion politics in the United States, no study has examined how large mainstream religious institutions engaged with the abortion debate. Research has mostly looked at activists and institutions on the extremes of the debate, generally overlooking how the large, moderate institutions were being torn apart in the middle. When religious institutions are mentioned, it is brief and their views are assumed to be static. This project seeks to correct this neglect and the misunderstandings that it gives rise to by detailing the shifting among large, moderate Protestant institutions' views in the abortion debate and their dynamic struggles to maintain authority and internal cohesion despite the increasingly divisive politics of abortion.

Contentious issues, such as abortion, provide a key site for examining both how flexible religious boundaries are and how religious institutions continually renegotiate these boundaries. Although the underlying reasons for the religious realignment since the 1960s are structural changes in American public life (Wuthnow 1988), one key way that religious realignment occurred and became salient was through shifting institutional mobilization and alliances on abortion. In the 1960s and 1970s, Protestants allied themselves with Jewish groups over pro-choice politics against Catholics who were staunchly anti-abortion. Starting in the 1980s, realignment occurred as liberal

---

<sup>1</sup> Terminology in the abortion debate is deeply contested and politicized by both sides. I will refer to each movement by its chosen label even though each side contests the label of the other. After 1973, I will refer to the *pro-life* and *pro-choice* movements. Before 1973, these labels were not widely used and I will use the terms *anti-abortion* and *pro-abortion rights*.

Protestants, liberal Catholics, and liberal Jews teamed up over pro-choice politics and conservative Protestants, conservative Catholics, and conservative Jews teamed up over pro-life politics. I argue that the realignment occurred through a process of arguing over contentious and salient social issues. While abortion fights did not create the religious realignment, these fights did (1) allow these shifting boundaries to become salient to people and institutions and (2) provide the institutional connections and rationale for shifting the boundaries. Wuthnow (1988) has explained *why* religious realignment occurred, and this project provides a key explanation for *how* religious realignment occurred.

## RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This project's central question is how and why Mainline Protestant stances on abortion have shifted since 1960. In the following three chapters, I draw primarily on archival and periodical sources and a comparative-historical research design to address this overall question by exploring three related empirical questions. First, why did Protestants initially get involved in the contemporary abortion debate in the 1960s? By examining the key social movement organization that motivated Mainline Protestant leaders to become involved in the abortion rights movement, I found that existing activist social network relationships, especially from the Civil Rights Movement, led Protestant leaders into taking action on abortion issues. This first chapter is the most theoretically and empirically distinct of the dissertation chapters but provides the necessary context for the abortion debate discussed in the remaining chapters. It is also a critical chapter to

challenge popular assumptions of Protestant conservatism and stasis on abortion by describing a period in American history when Protestants were radically liberal and engaged in civil disobedience in support of greater abortion access.

Second, how did the debate around abortion rights shift for Mainline Protestant institutions over time? I look at official stances among a sample of eight denominations over time and demonstrate surprising homogeneity in timing and scope of statements among all denominations. The “legitimate” and normal stance on abortion among Mainline Protestant denominations shifted from leaning left to leaning right and these stances became increasingly internally controversial within the institutions.

Third, why did Mainline Protestant stances shift as they did over time? I examine why some denominations shifted more substantially than others. Using archival and periodical sources from a sample of eight Mainline Protestant denominations, as well as the leading interdenominational abortion rights social movement organization, I demonstrate that religious institutions shifted stances according to changes in the wider institutional field. I find that religious institutions use stances on controversial social issues as a way to navigate salient symbolic boundaries in the religious field. Today, those groups that have sought to build greater ecumenical ties with evangelicals have backed away from their support of choice on abortion while those groups that have sought to distinguish themselves from evangelicals have maintained their support of choice despite great controversy.



## RELIGIOUS RESTRUCTURING IN THE UNITED STATES

Scholars see the United States as having an especially entangled relationship between religion and politics. The most influential study of American religion and politics comes from Tocqueville, who came to the United States from France in the 1830s seeking to understand America, as the first truly modern state. He came to understand religion, democratic participation, and family as the key ways American citizens are educated to think beyond one's individual private world and engage with their community. He argues that religion not only has a strong direct effect on American law, but that "its indirect action seems to me much greater still, and it is just when it is not speaking of freedom at all that it best teaches the Americans the art of being free...[religion] does direct mores, and by regulating domestic life it helps to regulate the state" (Tocqueville 1969: 290-291).

Scholars have consistently shown that religion is a defining and unifying feature of American public life. While Americans continue to see the separation of church and state as central (Thomson 2010), religion is also a central way that Americans become involved in their community and their wider society, and it is seen as important and necessary in the public sphere (Bellah et al. 1985). An elaborate and well-institutionalized civil religion exists in America. This civil religion was initially shaped by the founding fathers and has cultural roots in Protestant Christianity and sacred symbols from national history, but remains a nonsectarian faith (Bellah 1970). Religious identity has been shown to be a crucial part of civic identity. Even in contemporary United States, as a growing number of Americans have no religious affiliation (Hout and Fischer 2002), atheists remain distrusted "others." Atheists are less likely to be accepted publicly and privately than any

other religious minority group, even Muslims in the post-September 11th world, and tolerance for atheists is not increasing as it is for other minority groups (Edgell et al. 2006).

While religion has a unifying role in American public life, it also has had a divisive role. Before the 1960s, denominational affiliation, especially whether one was Protestant, Catholic, or Jewish, played a defining role in American public identities due to the history of American immigration and the relationship between religion and ethnicity (Herberg 1955). Sociologists have long been interested in the “social sources of denominationalism” and divisions in the American religious field, pointing especially to inequality based in race and class (Niebuhr 1929; Herberg 1955; Roof and McKinney 1987; Darnell and Sherkat 1997; Sherkat 2001; Park and Reimer 2002; Smith and Faris 2005). Although these divides of denominationalism in inequality remain today, the salient symbolic boundaries in the religious field are no longer between denominations as they long have been.

The religious and political landscape has shifted greatly since Herberg’s time in the 1950s and salient divides in the religious field now cut within religious denominations between liberals and conservatives. Wuthnow (1988) argues that a religious realignment occurred after the social turmoil of the 1960s, in which the growth of the federal government, the differential expansion of higher education, changing technology, and the proliferation of religious “special purpose groups” have caused the middle to collapse to leave a growing divide between liberals and conservatives. Wuthnow argues that because of this liberal and conservative split, civil religion is no longer the unifying feature it was

once. In Wuthnow's conception, social structure in the United States has altered the symbolic boundaries within the religious field, which, in turn, impacts the wider political sphere.

With this religious "restructuring," denominations have been less able to hold the middle ground that they historically have maintained and have become less cohesive and more internally polarized. Over the past several decades, large mainstream and moderate Protestant denominations have declined in political power and membership. To their right, conservative Protestant denominations have grown in numbers (Iannaccone 1994; Hout et al. 2001; Finke and Stark 2005) and non-denominational mega-churches have gained membership and clout within religious and political spheres (Ellingson 2007). To their left, an increasing proportion of Americans identify as having no religious preference. This change is not due to demographic shifts or secularization. Rather, these religious "nones" are political moderates and liberals with weak religious affiliation who no longer identify with organized religion since it has become increasingly linked to the conservative agenda of the Religious Right (Hout and Fischer 2002; Putnam and Campbell 2010).

As the middle has collapsed and the religious field has grown increasingly polarized, some have argued that America is in the midst of a culture war that affects public policy and the lives of all Americans. Hunter (1991) argues that there is a culture war in America over how to define reality, America's past, and America's future that is created by divergent sources of moral authority. Conservatives depend upon an external, transcendent authority, while liberals find authority in a variety of sources that are

recontextualized to fit modern life. Hunter (1991) agrees with Wuthnow (1988) that there is a religious restructuring with liberals of all faith traditions joining up against conservatives of all faith traditions:

At the heart of the new cultural realignment are the pragmatic alliances being formed across faith traditions. Because of common points of vision and concern, the orthodox wings of Protestantism, Catholicism, and Judaism are forming associations with each other, as are the progressive wings of each faith community—and each set of alliances takes form in opposition to the influence the other seeks to exert in public culture. (Hunter 1991: 47)

This project argues that abortion politics, in particular, provided a critical rationale for creating these religious alliances across religious traditions and oppositions between liberals and conservatives.

There has been much debate in recent decades about the extent to which American religious institutions and American society more generally are polarized, with most research agreeing that Americans are less polarized on the individual-level and more polarized on the institutional-level. The majority of empirical work studying this polarization has focused on individual-level political beliefs from surveys, some finding support for greater polarization (Carroll and Marler 1995; Bolce and De Maio 1999; Layman 1999; Brooks 2000; Wellman 2008), but most finding that Americans are no more polarized than previously (Davis and Robinson 1996; DiMaggio et al. 1996; Hoffmann and Miller 1998; McConkey 2001; Baker 2005; Fiorina et al. 2011). However, while most theorists agree that the culture war does not primarily exist at the individual-level, they do generally believe it exists at the institutional level (Wuthnow 1988; Hunter 1991; Williams 1997; DiMaggio 2003). Hunter (1991) argues that it is important to “make a distinction between how these moral visions are institutionalized in different

organizations and in public rhetoric and how ordinary Americans relate to them,” since “the culture war is ultimately fought in political institutions, not in the attitudes found in surveys” (Hunter 1991: 43, 170). While there is agreement that great polarization exists at the institutional level, there is relatively little research looking at polarization among institutions. This project aims to fill both empirical and theoretical gaps in this literature by studying a divisive religious and political issue within institutions, rather than through surveys of political opinion, to better understand how and why there has been growing polarization within American religion and politics and how religious institutions deal with contentious social problems.

There has been growing polarization between religious denominations over political issues in general (Roof and McKinney 1987; Wuthnow 1988), but abortion has been especially polarizing *within* denominations, particularly since the 1980s, both at the individual and at the institutional levels (DiMaggio et al. 1996; Hoffmann and Miller 1998; McConkey 2001; Bolzendahl and Brooks 2005; Hoffmann and Johnson 2005). While research has examined how abortion has become a key social problem around which individuals have defined their political and religious identity, no one has studied how religious *institutions* have defined their identity around abortion, as this project does.

Sociologists of religion have long studied how religious groups have addressed controversial social and political issues. Scholars have written about why and how religious groups have dealt with issues such as temperance and abolition (Gusfield 1963; Young 2002; Young 2006); women’s ordination (Chaves 1996; Chaves 1997); birth control (Wilde and Danielsen 2013); and environmentalism (Danielsen 2013). Others

have studied how multiple social issues are institutionalized within a particular religious institution, such as the Southern Baptist Convention (Ammerman 1995) and the Roman Catholic Church (Wilde 2004; Wilde 2007), or within congregations and special-interest religious organizations (Becker 1999; Dillon 1999; Moon 2004; Edgell 2005). However, there remains no comprehensive study of how religious groups have addressed the issue of abortion over time.

#### ABORTION IN THE UNITED STATES

Abortion has grown increasingly controversial since 1960 within both political and religious institutions, shifting from an uncommonly discussed issue in the early-1960s to a core litmus test upon which millions of Americans base their voting patterns since the late-1980s (Fiorina et al. 2011). Although today the Religious Right, the Republican Party, and conservative stances on abortion are markers of Protestant involvement in politics—in fact, Protestant stances on abortion in the beginning of the modern abortion debate were liberal and subsequently defined by much ambiguity, ambivalence, and change.

Although abortion is a highly contentious issue in modern American politics, this has not always been the case. Abortion has risen and fallen as a social problem in the United States. Before the 1850s, abortion was not defined as a social problem and was widely tolerated. The issue grew in contention in the second half of the nineteenth century, especially from 1860-1880, when American physicians led a movement to restrict the availability of abortion to raise the prestige of their profession (Mohr 1978;

Luker 1984; Ginsburg 1989; Burns 2005) and in response to fears about differential birth rates and declining White Anglo-Saxon Protestant (WASP) power (Beisel and Kay 2004). American physicians successfully defined abortion as a public problem, which resulted in state legislatures criminalizing abortion. After this elite movement, there emerged a “century of silence” about abortion issues, during which there was very little discussion, except among Catholics, of what was seen as primarily a medical issue handled by physicians (Luker 1984).

Starting in the early-1960s, some legislators and physicians began to argue for abortion law reform (Luker 1984; Burns 2005). Moreover, the 1965 Supreme Court decision, *Griswold v. Connecticut*, which decriminalized birth control among married persons, sparked reformers to advocate for this decriminalization to extend to abortion. Physicians again began to define abortion as a public problem and again successfully lobbied state legislatures. However, this time the physicians and elite-led reformers sought to ease the very legislative restrictions around abortion that were put in place by the profession’s previous campaign. Interestingly, liberalization was especially likely in the South because there were fewer Catholics, the key anti-abortion constituency (Burns 2005). These reforms were largely seen as uncontroversial and sensible and were primarily focused on medical authority.

The contentiousness of abortion increased and state legislative reform completely stopped in 1970, as a broader feminist movement increasingly argued that abortion should not be decided by physicians, but rather by women themselves (Burns 2005). Since reproductive control is the “single most important factor in the material basis of women’s

emancipation in the course of the last century” (Gordon 1976), feminists recognized the important implications of shifting abortion laws. Feminist social movement organizations, including NARAL, which was created in 1969 as the National Association for the Repeal of Abortion Laws, argued that existing abortion law reform did not go far enough, but rather women had a *right* to abortions, unrestrained by physicians.

In 1973, the United States Supreme Court took the debate out of state legislatures and sought to resolve the issue at the federal level in their *Roe v. Wade* and *Doe v. Bolton* decisions, which decriminalized abortion in the first trimester. Immediately after the decision, anti-abortion social movement organizations mobilized, primarily composed of Catholic Democrats, and pro-abortion-rights social movement organizations professionalized (Staggenborg 1988; Staggenborg 1991). Although Catholics immediately mobilized in anti-abortion social movement organizations, Protestants did not mobilize en masse against abortion until the early-1980s (Luker 1984; Ginsburg 1989). While pundits often casually refer to Protestants mobilizing against abortion after 1973 (i.e. Brooks 2012), this project refutes that assertion by showing the extent of Protestant mobilization in *support* of abortion access after 1973. Protestants did not begin to mobilize against abortion until the late-1970s and early-1980s as Evangelical Protestants began mobilizing in the political sphere and this new Religious Right engaged in abortion politics in particular.

As Evangelical Protestants mobilized over abortion, abortion became increasingly central in partisan politics. In the 1970s, abortion was not a defining issue for either political party, especially because the anti-abortion Catholic activists that were mobilized



were predominantly Democrats (Ferree et al. 2002; Maxwell 2002), a political party that also received support from feminist groups. In the 1980s, as Protestants began to mobilize against abortion and as the Religious Right, a predominantly Protestant phenomenon, became an increasingly dominant wing within the Republican Party, they helped push the Republican Party in general to embrace a pro-life stance. President Ronald Reagan, in particular, did much to marry the Religious Right, Republicans, and an anti-abortion stance (Ferree et al. 2002). Over this same time, pro-choice social movement organizations increasingly aligned themselves with Democrats. As the two major political parties have coalesced around opposite stances on abortion, abortion politics have increasingly focused on partisan fights in Congress, state legislatures, and on presidential elections that can affect the composition of the Supreme Court (Burns 2005). Although many scholars have explored the increasing evangelical Protestant engagement with pro-life politics over this time, there is much less understanding of how the large, mainstream Protestant institutions that were long in support of choice on abortion dealt with this change.

There is extensive literature about how the frames around abortion issues have shifted through time, an important topic since, as Luker (1984) argues, the abortion debate is not about “fact,” but about how to weigh, measure and assess these facts. However, most scholarship has focused on activists at the extremes (Luker 1984; Ginsburg 1989; Staggenborg 1991; Maxwell 2002; Rohlinger 2006) rather than on more mainstream, long-standing institutions. Also, although scholars have noted the moral and religious undertones of the framing of abortion issues since *Roe v. Wade*, no one has

focused on abortion politics primarily within religious institutions over time, as I will do in this dissertation.

## RESEARCH DESIGN

This project's central question is how and why Mainline Protestant institutionalized stances on abortion have shifted since 1960 and it seeks to shed light on the causes and consequences of religious restructuring and the rise in salience of culture war issues in politics. I employ a historical-comparative approach by comparing the largest and most prominent Mainline Protestant denominations as well as their ties to other organizations such as religious and political special-interest groups from 1960 to today.

I examine the largest Mainline Protestant denominations: American Baptist Churches in the USA, Episcopal Church, Evangelical Lutheran Churches in America, Presbyterian Church (USA), United Church of Christ, and United Methodist Church. These are the denominations that scholars study when they focus on Mainline Protestants (see, for example, the edited volume Wuthnow and Evans 2002) and are all denominations with a large number of members and a long history within the United States. Two denominations were formed from mergers over this time period and so I also study their key predecessor groups. First, the Presbyterian Church (USA) was formed out of a 1983 merger through the United Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. and Presbyterian Church in the United States, both of which are in my sample. Second, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America was formed in 1988 and I study two key

predecessor groups, the American Lutheran Church and Lutheran Church in America.<sup>2</sup>

In sum, my sample includes eight Mainline Protestant denominations in 1960 that correspond to six groups today (See Table 1).

TABLE 1: SAMPLE DENOMINATIONS<sup>3</sup>

Denomination	Origin Date in the US	Membership	Membership
American Baptist Churches in the U.S.A.	1814	1.6 million	1.3 million
Episcopal Church	1789	3.2 million	2.0 million
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America			4.3 million
American Lutheran Church	1845	2.5 million	
Lutheran Church in America	1820	3.1 million	
Presbyterian Church (USA)			2.7 million
United Presbyterian Church in the	1789	3.0 million	
Presbyterian Church in the United	1861	0.9 million	
United Church of Christ	1620	1.9 million	1.1 million
United Methodist Church	1784	10.5 million	7.7 million

This project looks at these Mainline Protestant denominations through their official archives and their official periodicals. For each denomination, I look at internal institutional documents from the official denominational archives (see Table 2). Through correspondence, meeting minutes, and other official denominational documents, I examine who the key actors were on each side of the debate, what their interests might have been, and whether, how, and why the denomination has forged connections with other religious and political organizations on the issue. Archival analysis of each

<sup>2</sup> Evangelical Lutheran Church in America has three predecessor groups: American Lutheran Church, Lutheran Church in America, and Association of Evangelical Lutheran Churches. Whereas the first two Lutheran predecessor denominations each had over 2 million members at the time of the merger, the third had just 100,000 members. Whereas the first two Lutheran predecessor denominations each had prominent denominational periodicals, both had abortion stances, and both had prominent records in the current denominational archive, the latter was less institutionally robust. Thus, I study the American Lutheran Church and Lutheran Church in America, but not Association of Evangelical Lutheran Churches.

<sup>3</sup> All origin dates obtained from (Melton 2009) or (Atwood et al. 2005). Membership data obtained from (Jacquet 1973) and (Lindner 2012).

denomination was supplemented by analysis of articles about abortion in their official periodicals, looking especially at years around key shifts in denominational abortion stances.

This project also looks at larger ecumenical institutions of which the Mainline Protestant institutions were a part. I coded all articles on abortion in *Christian Century*, Mainline Protestantism's flagship journal. To better understand the Clergy Consultation Service on Abortion, the key ecumenical social movement organization that pulled Protestants into the abortion debate before 1973, I studied their archival materials as well as writing by leaders in the movement. To better understand the Religious Coalition for Abortion Rights, the key ecumenical pro-choice special interest group that Mainline Protestants were official members of from 1973 to today, I studied their official archives and official periodical, *Options*.

Table 2: Data Sources for Religious Institutions

Religious Institution	Archive	Periodicals
American Baptist Churches in the U.S.A.	American Baptist Historical Society (Atlanta, GA)	<i>Foundations</i> (1960-1982); <i>American Baptist Quarterly</i> (1982-Present); <i>Crusader</i> (1960-1970); <i>The American Baptist</i> (1970-1992); <i>American Baptists in Mission</i> (1992-2005)
Episcopal Church	Archives of the Episcopal Church (Austin, TX)	<i>The Living Church</i> (1960-Present); <i>Episcopalian</i> (1960-1990); <i>Episcopalian Life</i> (1990-Present)
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America; American Lutheran Church; and Lutheran Church in America	Evangelical Lutheran Church in America Archive (Elk Grove Village, IL)	American Lutheran Church: <i>The Lutheran Standard</i> (1960-1987); Lutheran Church in America: <i>The Lutheran</i> (1960-1987); Evangelical Lutheran Church in America: <i>Lutheran</i> (1988-Present)
Presbyterian Church (USA); United Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A.; Presbyterian Church in the United States	Presbyterian Historical Society (Philadelphia, PA)	United Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A.: <i>Presbyterian Life</i> (1960-1972); <i>A.D.</i> (1972-1995); Presbyterian Church in the United States: <i>Presbyterian Survey</i> (1960-1995); Presbyterian Church (USA): <i>Presbyterians Today</i> (1995-Present)
United Church of Christ	United Church of Christ Archives (Cleveland, OH)	<i>United Church Herald</i> (1960-1972), <i>A.D.</i> (1972-1985), <i>United Church News</i> (1985-Present)
United Methodist Church	United Methodist Archives and History Center (Madison, NJ)	<i>Christian Advocate</i> (1960-Present)
Clergy Consultation Service on Abortion	Charles Deering McCormick Library of Special Collections at Northwestern University (Evanston, IL) and University of Illinois at Chicago Special Collections (Chicago, IL)	
Religious Coalition for Abortion Rights	United Methodist Archives and History Center (Madison, NJ)	<i>Options</i> (1973-Present)
Ecumenical Mainline Protestant resources		<i>Christian Century</i> (1960-Present)

## ROADMAP

Chapter 1 seeks to understand why thousands of Mainline Protestant clergy invested time, energy and personal risk to engage in civil disobedience in support of expanding abortion access in the late-1960s and early-1970s. I find that Protestant leaders were pulled into taking action on abortion issues through existing activist social networks, especially from the Civil Rights Movement. I argue that existing social movements facilitate the creation of new social movements by providing existing frames about social problems, tactics to address those social problems, and social relationships to encourage and pressure potential participants into action on a new issue. Chapter 1 is the most empirically differentiated from the rest of the dissertation, but is an important precursor to the chapters that come after it. The clergy involved in the early abortion rights social movement were predominately Mainline Protestant and members of the same denominations that suddenly advocated for abortion access from 1966-1972, as I describe in Chapters 2 and 3. This chapter also challenges common assumptions that religious stances on abortion are static or naturally conservative by describing a time in which many in both religious and secular circles assumed that Protestants were generally *liberal* on abortion.

Chapter 2 asks how the debate around abortion transformed among Mainline Protestant institutions over time. I look at Mainline Protestant denominations' official stances on abortion from 1960 to today and find significant shifting in views on abortion over time. However, I also find much homogeneity in timing and scope of statements

among all Mainline Protestant institutions. Before the early-1960s, *none* of the Mainline Protestant denominations supported abortion access. From 1966-1972, *all* of the large Mainline Protestant institutions released pronouncements in favor of choice on abortion. From 1987-1992, *all* of these same denominations reexamined their abortion stances and shifted to varying degrees. I find that debate around abortion in Mainline Protestant institutions is not generally characterized by polarization on two sides, but rather is composed of much gray area, consensus, and change over time. However, I also find that consensus around the idea that Mainline Protestant denominations should engage in pro-choice politics has declined over the 1980s and conflict has arisen.

Chapter 3 seeks to understand why Mainline Protestant abortion stances shifted in tandem with one another as they did, with the shifts in 1966-1972 marked by consensus and the shifts from 1987-1992 marked by much controversy. Moreover, why did two Mainline Protestant denominations diverge from the general pattern of other denominations from 1987-1992 in no longer explicitly supporting choice on abortion? I find that abortion fights were sites where religious groups renegotiated boundaries between themselves and other groups. During the first wave of abortion pronouncements, from 1966-1972, Mainline Protestants used abortion as an issue to join with Jewish groups and challenge Catholic political power more broadly. During the second wave of abortion pronouncements, from 1987-1992, Mainline Protestants used abortion as an issue to distinguish or unite themselves with Evangelical Protestant institutions. I argue that institutionalized stances on controversial issues do not simply emerge out of worldview and sources of moral authority, as many culture war scholars would argue, but

rather are a key way that institutions construct boundaries around themselves and others. For Mainline Protestants, stances on abortion have provided the rationale and legitimacy for both institutional connections and institutional oppositions and are a key tool to facilitate religious restructuring. The salience of culture war issues is not simply an outcome of religious restructuring, but is a key way that religious restructuring occurred and became salient.

The Conclusion reflects again on the popular image of a polarizing and enduring culture war raging among Americans based on different worldviews, as described by scholars such as Hunter (1991) and by pundits. I argue against this traditional culture war thesis, pointing out the way that abortion debate among Mainline Protestant institutions is marked by much consensus, moderation, change over time, and that stances emerge instead out of existing social networks, awareness of stances by others in the religious field, and institutional self-interest. I argue for an understanding of the culture war as not being at the level of individual attitudes and worldviews, but rather at the level of institutions, social networks, and identities.



# **CHAPTER 1: MOBILIZING ON ABORTION: SOCIAL NETWORKS, CIVIL DISOBEDIENCE AND THE CLERGY CONSULTATION SERVICE ON ABORTION, 1960-1973**

## INTRODUCTION

Although today Protestants are often perceived as predominately politically conservative and mobilized in anti-abortion politics, this was not always the case. In the beginning of the contemporary abortion debates in the 1960s and early-1970s, Protestants saw the issue of abortion access as an important social problem, one that they thought religious institutions and leaders should address. Before the U.S. Supreme Court decriminalized abortion across the country in their 1973 *Roe v. Wade* decision, thousands of Protestant clergy helped connect over 100,000 women with doctors willing to provide often-illegal abortions. These clergy dedicated significant time and energy to developing the extensive social networks needed to achieve their goal: abortion access for women. In doing so, they also risked prosecution and faced challenges to their leadership within their own congregations. Why did Protestants get involved in the abortion debate and put significant time, energy and personal risk into expanding abortion access for women in the late-1960s and early-1970s? By examining the key social movement organization that got Mainline Protestant leaders involved in the abortion rights movement, I found that Protestant leaders were pulled into taking action on abortion issues through existing activist social networks, especially from the Civil Rights Movement.

*The Clergy Consultation Service on Abortion*

In May 1967, a group of New York City clergy, predominantly Mainline Protestants, joined together to create a network that provided information to women about licensed physicians who were willing to provide abortions. This network, the Clergy Consultation Service on Abortion (CCS), referred women to providers who would perform generally illegal abortions in the years before abortion was decriminalized in the United States. Clergy connecting women to licensed physicians provided a much safer alternative to the ways that most women were accessing abortions at that time: middlemen connecting them to unlicensed practitioners who often demanded exorbitant prices and sometimes sexual favors (Lader 1966; Reagan 1997; Gorney 1998).

After this first Clergy Consultation Service in New York City was formed, clergy in other locales around the country began to form networks in their own cities. In Chicago, the Clergy Consultation Service on Problem Pregnancy, formed in December 1968, quietly helped an estimated 500 women over the course of the next year (Rockey 1969). Initially, the organization, worked behind the scenes, not going public until December 1969, when it listed its number in the phone book and the *Chicago Sun-Times* published an exclusive full-page spread on the organization. Part of the delay was a concern about the legal ramifications of such an organization for the participating clergy. As E. Spencer Parsons, the founder of the Chicago CCS and an American Baptist pastor at the University of Chicago's Rockefeller Memorial Chapel, wrote in May 1969 about installing a telephone line for the network in the Chapel: "I would be less than candid with you if I didn't acknowledge that this information [about abortion providers] runs

either very close to or in direct violation of the law.”<sup>4</sup> However, the biggest reason that the Chicago CCS delayed going public was the sheer logistical obstacles of gearing up for such a wide network. The Chicago CCS had to be ready for thousands of women to call in and to meet with various trained clergy members who could provide contact information of licensed physicians in the United States and abroad who were willing to provide safe abortions to women, despite many local laws criminalizing abortions.

On October 6, 1969, twenty-seven predominantly Mainline Protestant members of the Chicago CCS gathered to discuss details about their new network that was about to go public. The consensus was that the group was not prepared to make a public announcement about their group in the newspaper although Rev. Parsons had been successful in setting up a telephone number for women to call. They discussed in this meeting how the group would not make any more referrals within Illinois, because “the legal risks are too high,” and instead they would send the women out-of-state so that prosecutorial confusion about jurisdiction might help them escape prosecution. They were particularly on edge because a thirty-year-old Presbyterian minister, Rev. Robert W. Hare, involved in the Cleveland CCS, was under indictment in Massachusetts for sending a woman there. The Chicago CCS struggled in this October 1969 meeting to find appropriate doctors to whom they should send women. They could not send women to New York for the time being because of a Grand Jury investigation into the New York City CCS, initiated after a Brooklyn District Attorney intercepted two girls in a doctor’s office. The Chicago CCS sent many women to Michigan, but discussed how they should

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<sup>4</sup> Letter from E. Spencer Parsons to Edward H. Levi, Office of the President, Rockefeller Memorial Chapel on May 2, 1969. The Charles Deering McCormick Library of Special Collections; Clergy Consultation Service Archive; Box 1, Folder 10.

not continue to use one particular physician there because of a “very inquisitive switchboard operator” who threatened to discover that they were sending pregnant women to him for abortions. They were not sending women to Mexico and Puerto Rico for the time being because it was illegal there and “the present ‘Operation Intercept’ for drugs is making this type of trip more difficult than usual.” They were still sending women to London for legal abortions, despite the high cost, because they appreciated the safety and care given to women by a particular doctor there. Certain cases of women could be referred to specific psychiatrists in various locations, especially “people over 40...children under 18, people with psychiatric history, real emotional trauma over continuing pregnancy, actual rape or incest, measles, rubella, cardiac, continual bleeding.” They ended the meeting with a discussion of the need for new recruits to the Chicago CCS and how they should properly train them about the medical procedure through an evening meeting with a gynecologist and how they should discuss with them frankly the liabilities of what they were doing.<sup>5</sup>

The people gathered at this Chicago Clergy Consultation Service meeting in October 1969 were struggling with the logistics of providing information about abortion access to local women because abortion was criminalized in Illinois. They struggled to navigate underground networks across the country and even internationally, seeking to bypass the sketchy underworld of expensive, often unsafe, and exploitative abortion providers and find licensed physicians who were willing to perform the procedure for women despite threats of indictment and professional marginalization. The clergy put

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<sup>5</sup> Minutes of October 6, 1969 meeting of Chicago Clergy Consultation Service. The Charles Deering McCormick Library of Special Collections; Clergy Consultation Service Archive; Box 1, Folder 3.

significant time and energy into this organization, despite heavy demands on their time by their own local congregations, fears that their local congregations or denominations might withdraw support from them over their actions, and concerns about prosecution. Why did these Protestant clergy put in this time, energy and personal risk to connect women to doctors who could perform abortions?

#### RELIGIOUS CONCERNS ABOUT SOCIAL JUSTICE AND TACTICS OF CIVIL DISOBEDIENCE

At the same time that abortion was emerging as a social problem, over the 1960s, churches and clergy were heavily involved in issues of social justice and tactics of civil disobedience. The abortion rights movement came during a wave of many social movements of the 1960s and early-1970s, such as the Civil Rights Movement, the Antipoverty Movement, the Women's Liberation Movement, the Environmental Movement and the Peace and Anti-Vietnam War Movements. During this period of turbulence, there was a "cycle of protest," with existing social movements leading to a wave of new social movements (Tarrow 1998). Many new social movements arise in the wake of larger social movements for a number of reasons, including the creation of political opportunities (Tarrow 1998), a general "repertoire of contention" in society during those times (Tilly 1995), and existing social movement social networks that can bring people into new movements (McAdam 1988). The social movements of the 1960s were "organizationally separate," but "tended to be mutually interactive, borrowing language, ideology, and political strategies from one another" (Davis 1973: 109).

The Protestant clergy involved in the abortion rights movement could be considered part of a "New Breed" of ministers that arose during the 1960s who were

“bent on moving the church toward a more direct role in supporting and inducing social change” (Cox 1967: 137) and who played a critical role in lending moral authority to the Civil Rights Movement, War on Poverty, and anti-Vietnam War peace movements (Guth et al. 1997). This New Breed of activist clergy emerged for a number of reasons, including the restructuring of power among religious groups as Catholics replaced Protestants in many cities and the bureaucratization of religious institutions (Cox 1967). During the late 1960s and early 1970s, there was a sense that clergy’s role in politics was progressive and sometimes even radical, documented in now-classic social science studies of pastoral politics (i.e. Hadden 1969; Quinley 1974; Stark et al. 1971).

The integral role of religion in these social movements of the 1960s was not unique. Religion often facilitates collective action, and has been shown to have many important effects on social movement activity. Religion can provide key resources to the social movement, such as people to participate and clerical leadership (Morris 1984). A common religious culture and set of beliefs can help create a common cultural “toolkit” to facilitate social movement and political activity (Swidler 1986; Pattillo-McCoy 1998; Wood 2002). Religious beliefs can also affect the cohesion or flexibility of social movement and political organizational structures, thus affecting their sense of urgency (Smith 1991; Young 2002; Nepstad 2004; Young 2006) or their efficacy in enacting change (Wood 1999; Stevens 2001; Wood 2002; Wilde 2004; Wilde 2007).

During the Civil Rights Movement, religious institutions and clergy played a particularly prominent role. Black Protestant churches provided by far the most support to the Civil Rights Movement including an institutional center, leadership and charisma from the clergy, an organized group of people, a connected social network to transmit

information, a common culture and ideological framework, an institutionalized financial base, and a meeting place (Morris 1984). White churches were largely absent early in the Civil Rights Movement immediately following the 1954 Supreme Court *Brown v. Board of Education* decision, apart from a handful of southern white clergy. However, as the Civil Rights Movement turned increasingly towards tactics of sit-ins and freedom rides in the 1960s, white non-southern clergy became prominent in the movement, especially due to widespread attention to their arrests and trials for civil disobedience (Friedland 1998). The Civil Rights Movement sought to highlight the contrast between American values and racial injustices and “clergy were well suited to serve as moral spokesmen on such matters and to participate in the symbolic acts of protest that became a major tactic of the movement” (Quinley 1974: 4).

This cycle of protest starting with the Civil Rights Movement provided “the most significant source of political opportunity for the abortion movement,” especially providing a social network of politically engaged clergy, women, and students and tactics of direct-action (Evans 1979; Staggenborg 1991: 148). The most important resource for creating the abortion rights movement is not simply the people from the Civil Rights Movement themselves, but the relationships between them. As the Civil Rights Movement was winding down, there was a network of clergy that had planned campaigns together, marched together, and gone to jail together. These activists often had quite close personal relationships with one another and could encourage, or even pressure, others to get involved in this new cause.

## THE CLERGY CONSULTATION SERVICE ON ABORTION

The most important factor that pulled Mainline Protestants into the abortion rights movement was the Clergy Consultation Service, which provided a new issue for activist clergy to get involved with. The founding of the Clergy Consultation Service on Abortion emerged out of the prominent role of religion in the Civil Rights Movement, the success of civil disobedience tactics employed by Mainline Protestant clergy, and continuing concerns about other forms of social injustice. Some Mainline Protestant clergy began considering civil disobedience tactics to address inequality in abortion access also, another perceived issue of social injustice. Drawing on archival materials, newspaper articles, writings of CCS leaders, and existing historical narratives, I demonstrate that existing activist social networks, frames about social injustice, and civil disobedience tactics, especially from the Civil Rights Movement, were critical to the successful founding and expansion of the Clergy Consultation Service on Abortion.

### *Origins of the Clergy Consultation Service on Abortion*

The initial spark of the idea for the Clergy Consultation Service emerged out of a meeting of existing activist friends at a September 1966 lunch between a New York journalist, Lawrence Lader, and three Mainline Protestant ministers. Lader had established himself as one of the most vocal critics of American abortion laws with his book *Abortion* (1966), which focused on abortion as the “dread secret of our society” and outlined the underground networks through which hundreds of thousands of American women were accessing illegal abortions every year (Lader 1966: 1). In response to his



1966 book and his 1965 *New York Times Magazine* article on “The Scandal of Abortion Laws”, he began receiving requests from pregnant women who wanted to know how they too could gain access to illegal abortions. Lader “almost accidentally” slipped into his role of referring women to contacts in this underground abortion network and into his role as campaigner for abortion law reform (qtd in Wolff 1998: 27). He saw this abortion referral work as a potential keystone of the abortion rights movement and likened it to the work of abolitionists and the Underground Railroad. He believed that abortion referral would save women from underground abortions, draw women into the movement, affirm to women that laws were wrong, increase public scrutiny on existing laws, and force authorities to confront failures of existing laws (Lader 1973).

The three Mainline Protestant ministers who had lunch with Lader in September 1966 when the idea for the CCS was conceived were Episcopalian Rev. John Krumm of New York, Episcopalian Rev. Lester Kinsolving of San Francisco, and American Baptist Rev. Howard Moody from Greenwich Village’s Judson Memorial Church (Lader 1973: 44). The three ministers were no strangers to liberal activism. For example, Rev. Howard Moody, who would play by far the most prominent role in founding and running the Clergy Consultation Service on Abortion, had by that time was integrated into liberal social networks and familiar with methods of civil disobedience. Moody had marched with Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. in Alabama and had gotten himself arrested in Brooklyn when he, along with hundreds of others, protested segregation in the construction industry by lying down in front of cement mixers (Gorney 1998). In 1957, Moody had led the Democratic reform movement to challenge the Tammany boss, Carmine De Sapio (Lader 1973). Neither Lader nor Moody could remember exactly how they met, but

Lader speculated later that it was probably through Democratic reform politics and that their “relationship [was] an inevitability, as though two such members of New York City’s elite circle of progressives would necessarily be acquainted” (Wolff 1998: 32). When the three ministers asked at the lunch how they could help Lader in his work on abortion law reform, Lader spontaneously responded that ministers would be the best referrers of women to abortion because prosecutors would be hesitant to arrest a minister tending to his flock (Lader 1973).

### *Organizing the Clergy*

Rev. Howard Moody spent considerable energy over the eight months after the meeting with Lader putting together a network of clergy to help refer women to abortion. Lader later described Moody as “the ideal candidate for such a project, combining a commitment to social responsibility with hardheaded realism” (Lader 1973: 44). Moody worked with Rev. Finley Schaef, a civil rights and anti-war activist at Washington Square Methodist Church, also in Greenwich Village, to bring together clergy into an abortion study group that also discussed other liberal clergy projects, such as civil rights and anti-war efforts (Wolff 1998). Some of these clergy already had previous experience with restrictive abortion laws. For example, Rev. Jesse Lyons of Riverside Church saw his niece denied an abortion after contracting German measles; the child she bore was institutionalized for life. Rev. Finley Schaef had struggled to help a pregnant fifteen-year-old girl who had been raped by her father (Lader 1973). Other clergy in the group, however, did not see abortion as a pervasive issue that women in their congregation dealt

with and some even worried that they would lose their posts in congregations if they persisted in discussing the issue (Lader 1973: 45). Most clergy were not already involved in abortion issues, but were activists in other causes. As Howard Moody and Arlene Carmen, his assistant at the church and for the Clergy Consultation Service, wrote:

It was apparent from the start that the clergy who would be most likely to become involved in a project of this kind would be the same ones who had been most active in the school integration battle in New York, in the civil rights battle both there and in the South, as well as in other areas of civil liberties. It was to those clergy whose liberal attitudes and commitments had been clearly established that we turned for help in developing the original nucleus of the Clergy Consultation Service on Abortion. (Carmen and Moody 1973: 21)

The group kept studying the issue of abortion and over time increasingly agreed that it was an issue affecting their congregations, but disagreed over whether they should engage in civil disobedience on the issue. The group ultimately decided to let the abortion reform Blumenthal bill in the New York State legislature determine the fate of their group: if the limited abortion reform bill passed then many of the minister's consciences would be put at ease, but if the bill failed then they would engage in civil disobedience (Wolff 1998). There was tremendous Roman Catholic leadership lobbying against the bill, including for the first time in history all eight New York Catholic bishops signing a joint statement against abortion reform. Shortly after this joint statement was read in most of the state's seventeen hundred Catholic Churches, the Blumenthal bill failed.

When the New York state legislature failed to pass abortion law reform, Rev. Howard Moody and twenty-one other clergy, all but two of whom were Protestant, organized into a Clergy Consultation Service on Abortion in New York City. Clergy came from a variety of denominations, including United Methodist, United Presbyterian, United Church of Christ, Episcopalian, Unitarian Universalist and Reform Jewish

congregations (Fiske 1967b). On the first day after they went public in an exclusive *New York Times* cover story, the Clergymen's Consultation Service received more than 35 telephone calls for advice and the organization emphasized they came from both rich and poor women ("35 Call Clergymen for Aid on Abortion" 1967: 95).

### *Abortion as a Social Justice Issue Demanding Civil Disobedience*

The Clergy Consultation Service on Abortion framed the issue of abortion as one of social injustice. In their initial statement of purpose, the newly-formed group pointed out racism and classism in how abortion laws were applied, emphasized that the fetus was not a living child and abortion was not murder, provided support to the physicians that provided abortions, and argued that "there are higher laws and moral obligations transcending legal codes." The leaders of the CCS believed that "it is our pastoral responsibility and religious duty to give aid and assistance to all women with problem pregnancies" (qtd in Carmen and Moody 1973: 31). Elected the spokesman of the group, Rev. Moody, explained the mission of the group through an exclusive story given to the *New York Times*: "If legal therapeutic abortion is not possible, but an abortion is indicated, we will try to get the woman the best possible medical advice to take care of her problem pregnancy...In some instances it is possible we would attempt to facilitate her getting an abortion in a country where it is legal" (Fiske 1967b: 1).

From the beginning, the clergy involved in the network knew that they were taking a legal risk. The New York State penal code not only criminalized performing an illegal abortion, but also aiding, abetting or assisting in obtaining an illegal abortion. The

clergy in the network were required to make three commitments in an early draft of the organization's policy statement: "sharing of information, agreement on a set of standard operating procedures, and commitment to support each other in case of legal difficulties" due to the "possible illegal action of being accomplices in criminal proceedings" (qtd in Wolff 1998: 42). Legal guidance for the CCS came from Cyril Means of New York University Law School; Aryeh Neier, Executive Director of the New York Civil Liberties Union; and Ephraim London, a civil liberties attorney and member of the New York Civil Liberties Union Board of Directors, of which Moody was also a member (Wolff 1998: 44-45). Ephraim London had been a trusted partner of Moody and outlined several policies for the CCS for self-protection. First, the clergy were never supposed to admit that what they were doing was illegal, rather framing it as their being "bound to a higher moral law," and to be as public about what they were doing as possible so they would not look like they were running an underground operation (Carmen and Moody 1973: 26). Second, as mentioned above, the clergy were always to make referrals out-of-state because crimes involving multiple jurisdictions would be more difficult to prosecute. Third, they were never to accept money for their services.

The clergy decided they would focus primarily on helping women gain access to abortions rather than on changing the laws, despite advice to the contrary. For example, Dr. Robert Hall from Columbia Presbyterian Hospital counseled the forming Clergy Consultation Service that they should do nothing illegal, but instead should bring pressure upon hospitals to do more legal abortions by sending pregnant women for hospital abortions. The hope in this plan was that it would challenge anti-abortion biases among physicians by demonstrating to them the incredible variety and scale of the need.

The group ultimately decided that this could delay women from getting a timely and safe abortion, could force them to have unwanted children, and was using women for their own political aims (Carmen and Moody 1973: 24).

Facilitating women's access to abortion was such a core mission of the group that they wanted their name to reflect this central concern rather than bowing to polite convention. Many clergy wanted to name the service "Clergy Consultation Service on Problem Pregnancy," as "abortion" in 1967 was "a taboo word rarely used except in whispered conversations" (Carmen and Moody 1973: 27). They thought the euphemism would soften their appearance and gain more public support. However, the group decided they "didn't want to chicken out on it" and, after rigorous debate, decided they would embrace the term "abortion" (Lader 1973: 45). They called themselves the "Clergy Consultation Service on Abortion" so that it was clear to the women that they wanted to assist that they were there to help them get an abortion not persuade them to keep or give up for adoption their "problem pregnancy."

The New York City Clergy Consultation Service on Abortion focused their energy on efficiently connecting women to licensed doctors who could provide safe abortions and who would not exploit the women for money or sex, as was often the case for women who navigated the murky underworld networks of illegal abortions (Lader 1966). Women would call in to the listed number for the CCS and reach an answering machine that gave contact information for the clergy who were on call that week. On call clergy rotated generally one week on and then four off and, when they were on call, they often worked six or seven hours a day counseling women. The clergy would meet with the women in their office for generally about one hour, framing the meeting as confidential

pastoral counseling. The clergy would refer the pregnant women to licensed physicians practicing outside of New York State. They referred women around the country, especially to Pittsburgh, Washington DC, Chicago, New Jersey, and Puerto Rico, and internationally, especially Mexico, Japan and England. No money was given to the clergy for the meeting and women were solely responsible for paying for the abortion themselves. However, the price was negotiated between the CCS and the referred doctor and there was generally a limited number of discounted rate abortions available at clerical discretion for particularly poor women. The clergy realized over time that they could collectively bargain lower prices for the women, given the load of patients they were referring to particular doctors. To find doctors willing to provide safe abortions, Arlene Carmen, Reverend Moody's assistant, would pretend to be a pregnant woman, contact doctors, and investigate their credentials, care, cleanliness, and prices. She had a reputation for ruthlessness in these visits and once rejected five doctors in Philadelphia in one week (Carmen and Moody 1973; Lader 1973).

#### *Mobilization Spread Across the Country*

Clergymen around the country were so impressed by the model of New York City's Clergy Consultation Service on Abortion that similar groups in other states immediately began organizing ("More Clerics Plan Advice on Abortion" 1967). The clergy networks spread throughout the country, encompassing primarily Mainline Protestant clergy, but some Unitarian Universalists, Reform Jewish rabbis, and other denominations. These networks of clergy spread through existing activist social networks, especially those related to the Civil Rights movement, and the mobilization was facilitated

by existing concern about social justice and respect for civil disobedience as a critical tactic to address perceived injustices.

The best estimates suggest that these Clergy Consultation Services spread to include 1,400-2,000 clergy and helped over 100,000 women find doctors who could provide abortions (Wolff 1998: 110; Davis 2006). They referred a surprisingly large and diverse group of pregnant women over their tenure. The New York City Clergy Consultation Service referred eight hundred women in 1967, three thousand women in 1968, and ten thousand women in 1969 (Davis 2006: 131). Rev. E. Spencer Parson, chairman of the Chicago Clergy Consultation Service, reported that their network saw 10,000 women in Chicago from 1969 to 1973.<sup>6</sup> A 1970 sample of 6,455 of the women seen by the New York City Clergy Consultation Service shows that 66% of them were single, 84% were white, 50% were over the age of 25 and 13% were under the age of 18. Only 4% were pregnant for more than 3 months. While the clergy were predominantly Mainline Protestant, the women were quite diverse in their religious affiliations: 37% reported being Protestant, 36% were Catholic, and 25% were Jewish. CCS leaders particularly highlighted the large number of Catholic women being referred to abortions within their internal archival materials to further challenge Catholic leadership's opposition to abortion access. These numbers are remarkably similar to a 1970 survey of women referred by the Chicago CCS, although there were more Protestants relative to

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<sup>6</sup> Interview of E. Spencer Parsons by Paula Kamen on October 9, 1992. Paula Kamen Collection. Box 1, Folder 7. *The Charles Deering McCormick Library of Special Collections.*



Jewish women and a larger proportion (19%) were more than 3 months pregnant when seeking the abortion.<sup>7</sup>

### *Forming New Clergy Consultation Services*

A minority of local Clergy Consultation Services started up in response to women's demands. For example, in 1968 a small group of women approached several clergymen asking them to open a Philadelphia CCS. Two of the women spoke to Howard Moody and Arlene Carmen of the New York CCS and in November 1968 the group of women elected an American Baptist, Rev. Allen Hinand, to organize the first Philadelphia-area CCS. Like the New York CCS, it had an answering machine that directed women to clergy counselors. Later, Rev. Hinand and Rev. Moody encouraged Rev. Paul Gehris to start a Harrisburg CCS, as all three were American Baptist Convention ministers and involved in the civil rights movement (Carmen and Moody 1973; Wolff 1998). Many of the ministers that started these regional Clergy Consultation Services were college chaplains who were already helping students find abortion, such as Rev. J. Claude Evans of Southern Methodist University, who established a CCS in Dallas.

While some Clergy Consultation Services were sparked by women's demands, most appeared to have started due to Howard Moody actively encouraging ministers within his social network to start their own. Later interviews of key leaders of the Clergy Consultation Service on Abortion across the country demonstrate that those involved in

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<sup>7</sup> Charles Deering McCormick Library of Special Collections; Clergy Consultation Service; Box 1, Folder 2.

the early stages of the CCS had been involved in the civil rights movement and most believed that this is where they first met Moody (Wolff 1998: 118-119). As Gorney described, “Howard Moody was traveling to places like Cleveland and Chicago, working social webs laid out by the civil rights movement and Vietnam War protest, calling meetings together in church halls or ministers’ offices or bare-floored college rooms with folding chairs and Stop the Draft posters on the walls” (Gorney 1998: 34). Eleanor Yeo, a United Church of Christ minister at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee campus talked about what Moody told them:

Howard started telling us about the ravages of illegal abortion, and what was happening to women, and what the death rate was like...Maybe it was lucky it was during the Vietnam War, because I think a lot of people at that point were questioning authority in ways they never had before. People who ordinarily would not think of doing anything illegal were all of a sudden thinking of things they had to do. (qtd in Gorney 1998: 34-35)

Some of these ministers were already supporting Planned Parenthood, while some were actively involved in the civil rights movements and wanted to fight sexism in addition to racism (Davis 2006).

Howard Moody was not above pressuring his fellow activist clergy friends into getting involved in the abortion rights issue. For example, Rev. E. Spencer Parsons, who became the chairperson of the Chicago CCS, was pushed hard by Rev. Moody to create his own service in early 1968, but Parsons demurred. As a University of Chicago chaplain, Rev. Parsons was contacted by many women for abortion access and referred them to the New York City CCS. Rev. Moody and Rev. Parsons were already friends. Both were ministers in the American Baptist Convention; both were involved in the civil rights movement together; both were opposed to the Vietnam War; and both had worked

together on church policy and for changes in the national drug policy (Staggenborg 1991; Kaplan 1995). Together they also drafted a resolution, which passed at the American Baptist Convention Annual Meeting in June 1968, calling on ministers to counsel and assist women with family planning and abortion (American Baptist Convention 1968; Kaplan 1995). While in New York for an American Baptist Convention executive committee meeting, Moody told Parsons that they could not handle the added load of Parsons' Chicago referrals and once again urged Parsons to start a Clergy Consultation Service in Chicago. Parsons finally organized one in December 1968 and went public in December 1969. Later, in 1970, Parsons founded the Illinois Clergy Consultation Service, which reached out to women across the state.

#### *Spread of Clergy Consultation Services Across Country*

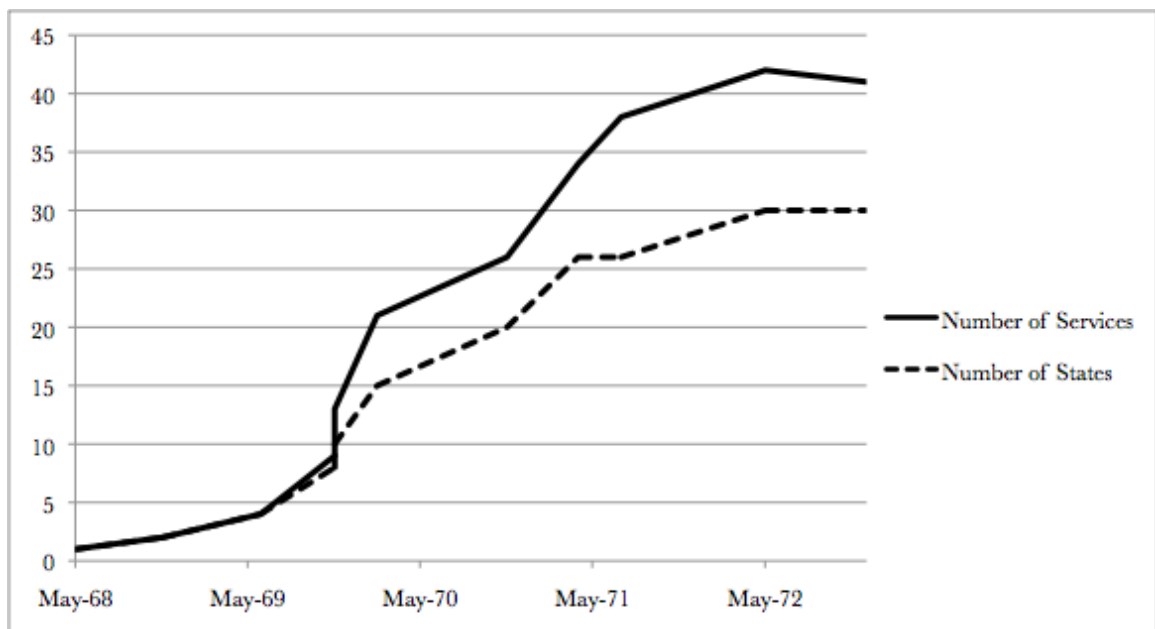
Clergy Consultation Services spread rapidly across the country from the time the first service started in May of 1967 until the services disbanded in January 1973 after the U.S. Supreme Court decriminalized abortion across the country in its *Roe v. Wade* decision. Over these years, most of the American population lived in a state with at least one local clergy consultation service network and others that could afford to could travel to a more distant network. By 1973 only ten states never created their own clergy consultation service.<sup>8</sup> Lists of local clergy consultation services distributed by the National

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<sup>8</sup> Based on archived lists of local clergy consultation services distributed by the National Clergy Consultation Service found in archives, the only states to never have their own services were Alaska, Arkansas, Delaware, Montana, New Mexico, North Dakota, Oklahoma, Oregon, West Virginia, and Wyoming. Some of these states were served by other state's services, such as Delaware, which had access to large networks of clergy in New Jersey and Pennsylvania. It is also possible that one of these states had a local service that was small or disconnected from the national network.

Clergy Consultation Service reveal that these services spread most quickly between 1970 and 1971 (See Figure 1). This figure underestimates the size of the network because as new states decriminalized abortion, the clergy networks there would technically disband although many still existed in a different form to help women access abortion. For example, the first Service in New York City, which formed in 1967, technically no longer existed in 1970 after the state passed abortion repeal, although it still helped other services and continued work helping women gain access to newly-legal abortions.

Figure 1: Expansion of Clergy Consultation Services Across the United States, May 1968-January 1973<sup>9</sup>



<sup>9</sup> List of Services found in Clergy Consultation Services Collection, Box 1, in the Charles Deering McCormick Library of Special Collections and the Chicago Clergy Consultation Service Records, Box 1 and 2, in the University of Illinois at Chicago Special Collections. Data was supplemented by Carmen and Moody 1973.

*Composition of National Clergy Consultation Service Chairmen*

The local Clergy Consultation Services across the country were generally organized by Mainline Protestants, but were quite diverse in their geography and their denominations. An April 1971 snapshot of the Clergy Consultation Service's spread across the country is shown in Table 3. By this time, twenty-five states had Services with numbers that women could call for help in seeking an abortion, with multiple cities represented in some states, such as Illinois and Ohio. Of the 34 chairs of local Services, two were women (and not clergy) and one clergymen's denomination was unidentifiable, due to a common name. Of the 31 clergymen that were identified, the denominations represented included: American Baptist Convention (7), United Church of Christ (6), United Methodist Church (6), Episcopal Church (5), Unitarian Universalist (3), United Presbyterian Church (2), Reform Judaism (1), and Presbyterian Church in the United States [southern] (1). Clergy Consultation Services were predominantly Mainline Protestant networks, with 87% of the clergy leading local services in April 1971 coming from Mainline Protestant denominations.

Table 3: National Clergy Consultation Service on Abortion, Chairmen of Local Services in April 1971<sup>10</sup>

<i>Clergy</i>	<i>Location</i>	<i>Denomination</i>
Rev. George Telford	Alabama (Auburn)	Presbyterian Church in the United States
Rev. Paul Gaston	Arizona (Tempe)	United Church of Christ
Rev. J. Hugh Anwyl	California (Los Angeles)	United Church of Christ
Rev. Jerry Kolb	Colorado (Denver)	Episcopal Church
Rev. C. Arthur Bradley	Connecticut (New Haven)	United Church of Christ
Rev. Chris Martin	Florida (Mandarin)	---
Rev. Lionel Miles	Illinois (Champaign)	United Church of Christ

<sup>10</sup> Clergy Consultation Services. Box 1, Folder 2. The Charles Deering McCormick Library of Special Collections.

<i>Clergy</i>	<i>Location</i>	<i>Denomination</i>
Rev. E. Spencer Parsons	Illinois (Chicago)	American Baptist Convention
Rev. Samuel Edwards	Illinois (Peoria)	---
Rev. Neil Sowards	Indiana (Fort Wayne)	American Baptist Convention
Rev. Robert Griffin	Iowa (Des Moines)	United Methodist Church
Rev. Robert Dodwell	Louisiana (New Orleans)	Episcopal Church
Rev. Garvey MacLean	Maine (Lewiston)	United Church of Christ
Rev. William Coleman	Massachusetts (Wellesley)	United Methodist Church
Rev. Alden Hathaway	Michigan (Bloomfield Hills)	Episcopal Church
Rev. Clinton Galloway	Michigan (Grand Rapids)	United Methodist Church
Rev. Robert Leas	Michigan (Lansing)	United Presbyterian Church
Rev. William Kirby	Missouri (Columbia)	United Methodist Church
Ms. Sharon Shaw	Nebraska (Omaha)	---
Rev. Robert Richards	Nevada (Henderson)	United Church of Christ
Rev. Orrin T. Hardgrove	New Jersey (Rahway)	American Baptist Convention
Rev. Howard Moody	New York (New York)	American Baptist Convention
Rev. James Riddle	North Carolina (Chapel Hill)	Unitarian Universalist
Rev. Dave Sammons	Ohio (Cincinnati)	Unitarian Universalist
Rabbi Frank Stern	Ohio (Cleveland)	Reform Judaism
Rev. George Whitney	Ohio (Columbus)	Unitarian Universalist
Ms. Jan Griesinger	Ohio (Dayton)	---
Rev. Allen Hinand	Pennsylvania (Wayne)	American Baptist Convention
Rev. H. Alan Elmore	South Carolina (Greenville)	United Presbyterian Church
Rev. J. Paschall Davis	Tennessee (Nashville)	Episcopal Church
Rev. Bob Breihan	Texas (Austin)	United Methodist Church
Rev. J. Claude Evans	Texas (Dallas)	United Methodist Church
Rev. Lowell Fewster	Wisconsin (Madison)	American Baptist Convention
Rev. James Dick	Wisconsin (Waukesha)	American Baptist Convention

These chairmen were also involved in activism before getting involved in the Clergy Consultation Services, some in the birth control movement and others involved in the Civil Rights movement. Rev. J. Hugh Anwyl, the United Church of Christ chairman of the Los Angeles CCS, was already involved in the birth control movement and was the Los Angeles Planned Parenthood director from 1971-1988 ("L.A. Planned Parenthood Director" 1988). United Methodist Rev. J. Claude Evans, the chairman of the Dallas CCS, had already gotten himself banned from preaching by a church board vote of 87 to 3 in Columbia, South Carolina, after preaching a sermon on racial justice in 1942 and he

had worked with youth in the Civil Rights Movement in the 1950s and 1960s (Houck and Dixon 2006: 515). Presbyterian Rev. George Telford, Chairman of the Auburn, Alabama, CCS, had created controversy in the Deep South by preaching about racial injustice since 1959 and he helped organize people to attend the 1965 Christian Action Conference where Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and others were speaking (Telford 2003). Rev. Bob Breihan of Austin's CCS had been involved in the Texas Methodist Student Movement and the Austin desegregation movement of the 1950s and was involved in the anti-Vietnam War protests (Rag Radio 2013). Rev. E. Spencer Parsons, the Baptist chairman of the Chicago CCS, had been involved in the birth control movement in Massachusetts,<sup>11</sup> and had been involved in the Civil Rights and Vietnam War movements with other clergy including Rev. Moody (Kaplan 1995). The clergy who headed local Services were already deeply embedded in activist social networks, especially in the Civil Rights movement.

#### CYCLE OF PROTEST, SOCIAL NETWORKS AND SOCIAL MOVEMENTS

The role of the Civil Rights Movement in the Abortion Rights Movement demonstrates the importance of existing social movements in the creation of a new social movement both in terms of cultural frames and in terms of networks of social movement actors. Existing social movements can provide frames about social problems and existing tactics to address those social problems. In this case, existing frames about the central problem of social injustice and existing respect and legitimacy for high-risk tactics of civil

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<sup>11</sup> Interview of E. Spencer Parsons by Paula Kamen on October 9, 1992. Paula Kamen Collection. Box 1, Folder 7. *The Charles Deering McCormick Library of Special Collections.*

disobedience from the Civil Rights Movement were applied to the Abortion Rights Movement. Existing social movements also provide participants, relationships, and infrastructure to new social movements. In this case, personal relationships among activists in the Civil Rights Movement helped mobilize new people on the abortion issue.

Social interaction and network relations have been found to affect both political participation (Kenny 1992; McClurg 2003) and social movement participation (Snow et al. 1980; McAdam 1986; Fernandez and McAdam 1988; McAdam 1988; Hirsch 1990; Chong 1991; Gould 1991). Many characteristics of social networks have been found to affect social movement mobilization and effectiveness, such as density and centralization of the network (Oliver et al. 1985; Oliver and Marwell 1988) and the position of individuals within networks (Gould 1993; Kim and Bearman 1997).

In particular, social networks can help bring new people into a social movement. Snow, Zurcher and Ekland-Olson's (1980) influential article led the way in focusing on network-based structure in social movement mobilization. They showed how social connections between members of Nichiren Shoshu of America were key in bringing new members into the organization (Snow et al. 1980). Others have shown that decisions to engage in collective action are made interdependently with others' decisions to act (Marwell et al. 1988; Opp 1989; Gamson 1990; Macy 1991a; Macy 1991b). In particular, scholars have demonstrated that the more participants, the more likely a new individual will decide it is in their best interest to participate also (Granovetter 1978; Marwell and Oliver 1993; Schelling 2006). For example, McAdam (1988) found that in the 1964 Mississippi Freedom Summer Project, during which predominately northern and white volunteers traveled to Mississippi to register African-Americans to vote, groups of friends



often decided to participate after a discussion of “I’ll go if you go.” Potential participants in the Freedom Summer were influenced by a feeling that participation would be effective if others were participating and that it would be uncomfortable to withdraw while one’s friends were committed (McAdam 1988). Similarly, participants in the Paris Commune of 1871 were pressured to join by neighbors (Gould 1991).

Social networks do not just affect one’s interest in participation (Gould 1993), but also one’s weighing of the costs and benefits of the collective action (McClurg 2003). The basic premise of Olson’s classic discussion of the free-rider problem assumes that rational actors’ contribution to the public good is not independent from the actions of other actors (Olson 1965). Gould (1993) emphasizes the role of two concerns in mediating collective action contributions: norms of fairness that encourage individuals to match others contributions and a desire to avoid making wasted contributions, in mediating collective action contributions (Gould 1993). Hirsch found evidence of these two concerns among participants in an anti-apartheid divestiture movement, who saw their own participation as a response to the perceived altruistic participation of others (Hirsch 1990). Relations with other activists have been shown to be particularly important for keeping people in movements that involve high-risk activism (McAdam 1986), which abortion referral mobilization was. Once involved in a social movement, participants are also likely to form *new* social relations while participating in collective protest. As Gould argues, “Mobilization does not just depend on social ties; it also creates them” (Gould 1991: 719). In this case, existing social movements, particularly the Civil Rights Movement, created ties among clergy that were then used to bring participants into the Clergy Consultation Service on Abortion around the country.

## CIVIL DISOBEDIENCE

What is remarkable in looking closely at the Clergy Consultation Services is just how focused these clergy were on providing abortion access to women. They put intense time, energy, and personal risk into building institutional infrastructure to connect women to abortion providers. The participants saw engaging in civil disobedience to help women gain access to abortion as a very legitimate and rational thing for clergy to do. In their meeting minutes and records, they are never debating whether or not they should continue their work, considering their motivations, or doubting the morality of their tactics, even when dealing with potential prosecution by local authorities. Instead, they are focused quite narrowly on how they can continue doing what they are doing and how to do it more effectively. They consider how they can reach out to new doctors in new states and countries to perform abortion, how to negotiate for lower prices for the abortions, how to better reach out to women with unwanted pregnancies, and how to connect with other organizations to support their work.

The ministers in these Clergy Consultation Services were putting themselves on the line, using civil disobedience to address the perceived inequalities and injustices in abortion laws. As discussed earlier, they knew that what they were doing was technically illegal, but had been advised to always speak openly about what they were doing and never to appear to be working in the shadows. However, in actuality they *were* often working in the shadows. For example, after Rev. Moody found out that his church's phone line had been tapped, the New York City CCS made all important calls from a pay phone a few blocks away and used cryptic code language on the church's own line

(Carmen and Moody 1973: 35). In another example, fifty clergy in the California CCS from around the state passed around a memo from an old manual typewriter dated August 16, 1968, which provided directions for women to get illegal abortions in Mexico.

The memo read:

Dr. Madrid is on again. He and his assistants moved all equipment from Juarez to Nogales, Sonora, since we last communicated with you. The new arrangement is as follows: Fly to Tucson, Ariz. Take bus to Nogales, Ariz., a 1 hr. 10 min. Ride. From the U.S. Side of Nogales call 21 70 5 on the Mexican side. Say 'this is Mary' and receive the reply 'this is Pete,' as before. An English-speaking man will be on duty from 9AM to 7PM daily. He will instruct the caller as to meeting place the driver will identify himself with the green card with our stamp on it, as usual. New prices: \$250 to 8 wks., \$350 8-13 wks. (qtd in Gorney 1998: 31-32)

Given that clergy passed out information about code-phrases women should use to obtain illegal Mexican abortions, it's hard to argue that they were actually working outside of the shadows.

Some clergy of the CCS indeed dealt with legal repercussions in helping women obtain illegal abortions. For example, United Presbyterian Rev. Robert Hare in Cleveland and Reform Jewish Rabbi Max Ticktin in Chicago both were arrested and charged by prosecutors for referring women to illegal abortions over state lines. American Baptist Rev. E. Spencer Parsons found himself called in front of two grand juries in Illinois by then-Congressman Henry Hyde. In front of the grand jury, Rev. Parsons responded to all questions by saying "I'm sorry, I can't give you that information because it would violate the confidential character of my pastoral ministry."<sup>12</sup> Although he knew the phrase lacked legal standing, he thought it would be enough to make politicians wary to challenge churches. The resulting news coverage had the unexpected result of simply

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<sup>12</sup> Interview of E. Spencer Parsons by Paula Kamen on October 9, 1992. Paula Kamen Collection. Box 1, Folder 7. *The Charles Deering McCormick Library of Special Collections.*

bolstering public opinion in favor of what the clergy were doing and no clergy were subsequently prosecuted. When Rabbi Max Ticktin of the Chicago Clergy Consultation Service on Problem Pregnancies was charged with conspiracy to commit abortion, *Christian Century* reported positively on these clergy counseling groups, saying that “the practical involvement of Christian and Jewish clergy in counseling...has become the critical frontier for the religious conscience on these issues” (“Abortion Counseling in Legal Trouble” 1970: 68). Interestingly, some of the Clergy Consultation Service’s interaction with the law was positive. For example, they were heartily thanked by the husband of a woman who received an abortion through the service and were surprised to find out afterward that he was a captain in the New York City Police Department (Carmen and Moody 1973: 36).

The clergy were constantly engaged in discussions about how to more efficiently allow women to gain access to abortions. As the New York City Clergy Consultation Service grew, they struggled to find enough doctors to handle the caseload and so they increasingly began thinking of ways to open their own clinic. In 1968, the New York City CCS began “fantasiz[ing] about setting up an ‘abortion ship’ just outside the three-mile limit under a foreign (Japanese) flag” and “envision[ed] a steady stream of women descending on New York’s Hudson River with oars slung over their shoulders, ready to row out to the ship” (Carmen and Moody 1973: 67). They got someone to investigate the maritime law implications of such action, which resulted in concerns that the U.S. Government might pressure Japan to stop allowing them to fly the flag. They began to raise funds for the ship, and finally dropped the idea when medical advisors became concerned about the safety of the women.

The New York City Clergy Consultation Service eventually succeeded in their quest to create their own abortion clinic. By the end of 1969, they started planning a “Reproductive Crisis Facility,” which would be a freestanding non-profit clinic where women could obtain legal abortions based on two physicians’ certifying they were suicidal, which they were simply going to say was the case for all women. By July 1970, after abortion laws were repealed by the New York state legislature, they no longer needed this deception, dropped the plans, and instead founded a “Women’s Services” clinic that provided legal and safe abortions to women. While Dr. Hale Harvey, an abortion provider, owned the clinic, the Clergy Consultation Service dictated its policies and provided almost all the referrals (Carmen and Moody 1973). The clinic was open sixteen hours a day, seven days a week, and performed 26,000 abortions in its first thirteen months of operation (Davis 2006: 135). In 1972, the CCS began helping to spread this model of a freestanding abortion clinic to other parts of the country (Carmen and Moody 1973).

The participants of the Clergy Consultation Service often referred to a higher calling when explaining why it was important for them to invest significant effort and engage in civil disobedience on this issue. They also believed their position of authority made their effort particularly effective. As E. Spencer Parsons, the chairperson of the Chicago CCS, said in a later interview:

There was that tradition that what you said to a clergyperson, short of a confession of murder, was confidential and we know that we had that protection and therefore felt we had some obligations...I knew the Illinois law was being

broken...I never said that I was doing something illegal. I said that I was doing something necessary.<sup>13</sup>

Participants in the Clergy Consultation Service were less concerned about the civil disobedience in part because they had gotten used to the idea in the Civil Rights Movement. As United Presbyterian Rev. Unsworth explained about the legal concern in a later interview, “we had in the civil rights movement...a lot of experience stepping across that kind of [legal] threshold, so this didn’t seem like a big deal [in the CCS]. Sure it was illegal and all that, but we’d done that. We knew how that felt and how to deal with that” (qtd in Wolff 1998: 120). Clergy civil disobedience was also clearly condoned by Protestant institutions that wanted to support clergy efforts in the Civil Rights Movement and Vietnam War Protests. For example, the National Council of Churches, an ecumenical body of Protestant denominations, passed a 1968 policy statement that encouraged civil disobedience in conditions of injustice. The United Presbyterian Church in the United States supported civil disobedience, such as in the Vietnam War protests, explaining that “going to jail may be a rather harsh penalty for the expression of one’s conscience, yet at the present time it is the only alternative for one who feels that a particular war is not in accord with the dictates of his conscience” (United Presbyterian Church in the United States of America 1966: 395). Understandings of the necessity and legitimacy of civil disobedience from existing movements made the clergy more comfortable and desensitized to the risk of the abortion referral movement.

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<sup>13</sup> Interview of E. Spencer Parsons by Paula Kamen on October 9, 1992. Paula Kamen Collection. Box 1, Folder 7. *The Charles Deering McCormick Library of Special Collections.*

## DISCUSSION

The Clergy Consultation Service on Abortion was the most significant factor in getting Protestants mobilized in action, not just debate, on abortion rights, and in transforming the discourse around abortion and religion. First, the Clergy Consultation Service mobilized Mainline Protestant activist social networks related to the Civil Rights Movement, the Vietnam War protests, and other liberal politics onto the issue of abortion also. Second, the Clergy Consultation Service used the prestige and respectability associated with clergy to make abortion a respectable issue to talk about and take action on. For the wider American society, the Clergy Consultation Service took abortion out of the shadows, made it a respectable issue to discuss, and framed it as an important issue of social injustice to mobilize on. Finally, the Clergy Consultation Service provided a counter-balance to the Roman Catholic Church by articulating a religious position in favor of decriminalizing abortion. It successfully framed abortion rights as a religious issue and not just for the anti-abortion side. The ecumenical nature of the Clergy Consultation Service, bringing together Mainline Protestants from many denominations, Reform Jews, and Unitarian Universalists, further increased the strength of its religious advocacy for abortion law change. This set up a situation for religious institutions in which it was respectable for Protestant denominations to speak about abortion on the pro-abortion-rights side. As will be discussed in the following chapter, in the late-1960s and early-1970s all the prominent Protestant denominations released official pronouncements in favor of relaxing abortion laws.

This chapter has sought to explain why abortion access came to be seen as such an important issue among Protestants that many put in significant time, energy, and personal risk to the cause. These Protestants saw abortion as another issue of social injustice, like civil rights, for which protest by civil disobedience was justified and necessary. While social movement scholars have long argued that there are “cycles of protest,” where a social movement is likely to breed new social movements, the formation of the abortion rights movement demonstrates that this is not just about a spirit of activism, although that’s certainly important, but also about pre-existing social activist networks, cultural frames, and tactics that can be mobilized onto a new social issue.

Protestant mobilization in the early abortion movement sheds light on the central role of existing social movements in the creation of new social movements. First, existing social movements can provide existing frames about social problems and tactics to address those social problems. In this case, existing frames from the Civil Rights movement about the important problem of social injustice and the legitimacy of high-risk tactics of civil disobedience to address injustice were applied to the abortion rights movement. Second, existing social movements create relationships that can draw in new participants to new movements. It is not just that an existing social movement provides potential participants, but that it creates close personal relationships that can encourage, or even pressure, people into action on a new issue. In this case, existing personal relationships among activists in the Civil Rights Movement helped push new people into action on the abortion issue.

This chapter also brings attention to the important role of religion in social movements and politics, especially in progressive politics in the mid-century United States



(Morris 1984; Smith 1991; Chaves 1997; Young 2002; Nepstad 2004; Davis 2006; Young 2006). After the growth of the Religious Right in the 1980s, much scholarship and popular press attention has been paid to the effect of Protestants, and religious groups more generally in conservative and Republican politics. We commonly think of the role of religion in abortion politics to be conservative, but Protestants were strongly engaged in abortion rights activism since before *Roe v. Wade*. These Protestants provided significant legitimacy to social activism on this controversial social problem.

## **CHAPTER 3: CONSENSUS AND CONFLICT: SHIFTS IN OFFICIAL MAINLINE PROTESTANT STANCES ON ABORTION**

### INTRODUCTION

How did the debate around abortion transform among Mainline Protestant institutions over time? I look at Mainline Protestant denominations' official stances on abortion over time as well as their discussion of the issue in their institutional documents and denominational periodicals and find significant shifting on the issue of abortion over time among these institutions. However, there is also surprising homogeneity in timing and scope of statements among all Mainline protestant institutions. Before the early-1960s, *none* of the most prominent Protestant institutions in the United States supported abortion access. From 1966-1972, *all* of the most prominent Protestant institutions released official statements in favor of decriminalizing abortion. Until the 1980s, there was much consensus among Mainline Protestant institutions about the "legitimate" stance on abortion, although the actual stance shifted. However, in the late-1980s, that consensus fell away and there has been a divergence in institutions' official abortion stances. From 1987-1992, *all* Mainline Protestant institutions reexamined their abortion stances and shifted to varying degrees, creating a new divide between those that continued to explicitly advocate for choice and those that backed away from that stance.

I find that much of the debate around abortion among Mainline Protestant institutions is not generally characterized by polarization on two sides, as many scholars and laypeople might assume (i.e. Hunter 1991; Luker 1984; Steinfels 2008; Douthat 2012; Edsall 2014), but rather is composed of much gray area, consensus, and change

over time. However, agreement about the “legitimate” stance on abortion has declined among Mainline Protestant denominations and stances have grown increasingly contested. Mainline Protestant denominations’ official stances on abortion have become less homogenous with one another and abortion stances have grown increasingly contentious *within* denominations since the 1980s. This chapter will be descriptive, particularly looking at the debate around abortion through the 1960s and 1970s, and will demonstrate much consensus rather than conflict on abortion. Other scholars have found polarization on abortion and argued that a worldview centered around God leads to pro-life politics (Luker 1984; Hunter 1991). In contrast, I find much consensus on abortion and that religious institutions that engaged in pro-choice politics. However this agreement that Mainline Protestant denominations should engage in pro-choice politics greatly declined over the 1980s and consensus gave way to conflict. This conflict and the diverging shifts among Mainline Protestant official stances will be explained further in Chapter 3. This chapter seeks to challenge assumptions about the basic trends on the relationship between religion, politics, and abortion beliefs by looking at large, mainstream Protestant institutions instead of activists as other scholars have done (Luker 1984; Ginsburg 1989; Staggenborg 1991; Maxwell 2002; Rohlinger 2006).

#### ASSUMPTIONS ABOUT PROTESTANT ABORTION STANCES

Existing literature generally portrays abortion stances and beliefs as the quintessential example of culture war politics with two radically differing and irreconcilable worldviews clashing together. Hunter (1991) argues, and many prominent

scholars and pundits have concurred, that American religion and politics more generally is divided between religious conservatives and liberals into a “culture war” based on different worldviews and sources of moral authority. However, studies of the culture war hypothesis have found that Americans are no more polarized than previously and that the culture war does not exist in the beliefs between individuals, but rather in the public rhetoric between political elites and institutions (DiMaggio et al. 1996; Williams 1997; Layman 1999; Baker 2005; Fiorina et al. 2011). In general, scholars have accepted that culture war politics are an effective myth framing how Americans understand what unites and divides them. This myth defines religious and political identity, and is a “campaign to construct new forms of political identity and define the terms of political engagement” (DiMaggio 2003: 94). While many have challenged the idea that most of America is embroiled in a culture war, the culture war idea persists with abortion, in particular, seen as uniquely polarizing and emerging out of radically different worldviews.

Most of the existing literature on abortion looks at activists on the extremes, leading one to assume that there is a great division on the issue of abortion and that the debate is composed primarily of true believers (Luker 1984; Ginsburg 1989; Staggenborg 1991; Maxwell 2002; Davis 2006; Rohlinger 2006). Because most research looking at abortion politics looks at activists at the edges rather than mainstream institutions, there is a poor sense of how institutions deal with this debate over time. There is no complete picture of mainstream Protestant institutions’ views of abortion over time that depicts both anti-abortion and pro-choice views. Research that looks at pro-choice activism over time, like Davis (2006), focuses just on pro-choice activism by religious organizations and

individuals. Research that looks at pro-life activism over time, like Maxwell (2002), focuses primarily on pro-life activism by religious organizations and individuals. Research that looks at both pro-life and pro-choice activists, like Luker (1984), hasn't focused significantly on religious institutions. By focusing on activism and only mentioning religious organizations in passing, this research misses the story of how the *same* institutions alternately engage sometimes in pro-life and sometimes in pro-choice activism.

The primary study that sociologists cite about abortion beliefs in the United States is Luker (1984) and scholars typically use her analysis of abortion politics in America to demonstrate that the abortion debate is necessarily controversial, polarized, and an example of culture war politics emerging out of different sources of moral authority as Hunter (1991) had described (i.e. Fischer and Mattson 2009; Putnam and Campbell 2010). Luker argues that abortion views come out of

two very different orientations to the world and that these orientations in turn revolve around two very different moral centers. The pro-life world view, is at the core one that centers around God...the pro-choice world view is not centered around a Divine Being, but rather around a belief in the highest abilities of human beings. For them, reason—the human capacity to use intelligence, rather than faith, to understand and alter the environment—is at the core of their world. (Luker 1984: 186, 188)

If views on abortion are polarized and come neatly out of larger worldviews, it seems a safe assumption that large religious institutions, which have extensively articulated worldviews, will also have more clarity and stasis in their abortion stances. If the pro-life worldview is centered around God and the pro-choice worldview is centered around secular humanism, those presumptions lead to an expectation that a religious

organization would be pro-life. However, as this chapter will show, there was much consensus for a long time among the largest and most mainstream Protestant institutions in the United States that the proper religious response to abortion was a pro-choice view. Among these institutions the debate was not polarized in black and white, but full of shades of gray, ambiguity, and significant change. Although it might be surprising given the nature of our current abortion debates, much of the debate around abortion within these large, moderate and mainstream institutions is characterized by consensus, although conflict has arisen since the 1980s.

## METHODS

How did Mainline Protestant institutions' official stances on abortion shift over time? As described in the introduction, I employ a historical-comparative approach by looking at official stances on abortion, from 1960 to today, of a sample of the six largest and most prominent Mainline Protestant denominations and their predecessor denominations: American Baptist Churches in the USA, Episcopal Church, Evangelical Lutheran Churches in America, Presbyterian Church (USA), United Church of Christ, and United Methodist Church. In sum, my sample includes eight Mainline Protestant denominations in 1960 that correspond to six groups today.

I read and coded all official statements related to abortion by all the Mainline Protestant institutions in my sample. They were categorized according to a 5-point scale (see Table 4), which I developed over time to standardize statements across time, despite large differences in stances before and after key changes in legality of abortion after *Roe v.*

*Wade* was decided in 1973. Denominations that had not yet made an official statement on abortion were coded as silent, a code that applied to no group after 1970, when Lutheran Church in America and Presbyterian Church in the United States became the last groups to release official statements on abortion. All coding is based upon the group's stance on abortion in the first trimester since very few stances explicitly discuss abortion in the second or third trimester. Within the statements, I look particularly at arguments about (1) the legality of abortion and (2) moral hesitations toward abortion. First, in considering what a denomination believes about the legality of abortion, I look particularly at discussion of support or disagreement toward laws at the state or federal level and personal circumstances when the group believes abortion should or should not be legally accessible. Second, in considering moral hesitation, I look at whether abortion is described as a moral choice in certain or all circumstances, not just whether it should be a legal choice. Some statements could not be coded because they were only tangentially related to their stance on abortion. For example, a statement against forced abortions and sterilization in China by the Episcopal Church in 1994 could not be coded to understand the denomination's stance on abortions by choice in the United States. In all, 86 official statements on abortion by Mainline Protestant institutions were coded and analyzed.

Table 4: Coding Scheme for Mainline Protestant Denominations

Code	Description
SILENT	No official stance about abortion yet.
ANTI-CHOICE	Criminalize abortion, although possible exception to prevent death of the mother.
DOES NOT ACTIVELY SUPPORT CHOICE	Does not actively support the legal right to choose abortion for any reason, but does not advocate for criminalization of abortion either. Either is not explicitly pro-choice or supports abortion access only under particular situations, such as health of mother, fetal deformity, rape or incest.
STRONGLY QUALIFIED SUPPORT OF CHOICE	Supports the choice of a woman to choose abortion, but strongly discourages it as a personal decision or focuses significant attention on the sanctity of human life. The support for choice might be explicitly advocating for legal freedom of choice or it might be more implicit in terms of support for freedom of personal moral choice or positively describing a woman “choosing” or “deciding” to have an abortion.
SLIGHTLY QUALIFIED SUPPORT OF CHOICE	Supports the legal right of a woman to choose abortion, but expresses some small moral hesitation toward abortion, such as through mentioning a desire to decrease the number of abortions or discussing some circumstances in which it might be a questionable choice.
UNQUALIFIED SUPPORT OF CHOICE	Supports the legal right of a woman to choose abortion and does not express moral hesitations about abortion.

I contextualize my analysis of the official abortion stances by also examining archival materials and periodical articles, as described in Table 2 in the introduction. For each denomination, I look at internal institutional documents from the official denominational archives to better understand the development, debate about, and reception of these statements within the institutions. I also look at discussion of abortion in official denominational periodicals, looking at all issues from 1960-1973 and in the years around key shifts in their denominations’ abortion stances. To better understand



the beginning of the abortion debate within these institutions, before many of the institutions made their first stances, I also read and coded all articles that include the word “abortion” from 1960-1973 within key Protestant periodicals, including: (1) *Christian Century*, mainline Protestantism’s flagship non-denominational periodical, (2) *Christianity and Crisis*, mainline Protestantism’s liberal social action periodical; and (3) religious periodicals on the keyword “abortion” found in the *Guide to Social Science and Religion in Periodical Literature*. This periodical indexes many Mainline Protestant denominational periodicals, such as *The Episcopalian*, *The Lutheran*, *Presbyterian Survey*, and *United Church Herald*, as well as evangelical, Catholic, and Jewish periodicals, such as *Christianity Today*, *Catholic World*, and *Jewish Spectator*, in addition to more academic journals related to religion, such as *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* and *Journal of Religion*. Finally, I also draw on articles related to both abortion and religion in the *New York Times*, a mainstream secular periodical that provides a more comprehensive historical record of key events.

#### SILENT OR ANTI-ABORTION FOR ALL MAINLINE PROTESTANT INSTITUTIONS BEFORE 1962

Before the early-1960s, there was much silence on the issue of abortion among Mainline Protestant institutions. In the limited official discussion of abortion that did exist, these institutions were decidedly anti-abortion and linked it with infanticide. However, most denominations did not discuss abortion at all.

The first group to take a stance on abortion was the United Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. It became anti-abortion in 1869, during the physician-led movement to restrict the availability of abortion around 1860-1880 (Mohr 1978). The statement regarded “the destructing of parents of their offspring, before birth, with abhorrence, as a crime against God and against nature; and as the frequency of such murders can no longer be concealed, we hereby warn those that are guilty of this crime that, except they repent, they cannot inherit eternal life” (United Presbyterian Church in the United States of America 1869: 937). No other official statements on abortion were made by a Mainline protestant institution until 1960.

In the early 1960s, as birth control became an issue increasingly discussed in the United States with the advent of the “the Pill” and worries of a population explosion, the general American public and some Protestant institutions began to discuss abortion again, ending the “century of silence” on the issue (Luker 1984). The Mainline Protestant institutions that spoke out about the issue made it clear that, while they may support birth control usage, they absolutely did not approve abortion, which they grouped with infanticide.

Three key Mainline Protestant institutions took stances against abortion at this time, all supporting contraceptive usage but not abortion. The United Presbyterian Church in 1962 supported contraception to fight the social problem of overpopulation, but believed that “the fetus is a human life to be protected by the criminal law from the moment when the ovum is fertilized” (United Presbyterian Church in the United States of America 1962: 50). Top leaders in the Episcopal Church in 1960 endorsed birth

control as a method of family planning and for countries where population control was a concern, but also argued that “abortion and infanticide are to be condemned” (“Episcopal Group Backs Birth Curb” 1960: 42), a position the Episcopal Church formally resolved in 1961 (Dugan 1961: 37). The United Church of Christ, in its backing of aid for birth control in 1960, made it clear that they did not “condone the practice of abortion...Christian conscience cannot approve of abortion as a means of family planning, for it violates personality and involves the destruction of human life” (“Responsible Parenthood and the Population Problem: A statement adopted by the Council for Christian Social Action of the United Church of Christ” 1960: 26). The National Council of Churches of Christ in the U.S.A., an ecumenical partnership of many Christian denominations, in its 1961 statement on “responsible parenthood,” approved birth control, but said “Protestant Christians are agreed in condemning abortion or any method which destroys human life except when the health or life of the mother is at stake” (“Text of Birth-Control Statement by Church Group” 1961: 16). American Baptist Churches in the U.S.A., American Lutheran Church, Lutheran Church in America, Presbyterian Church in the United States, and United Methodist Church remained silent on this issue until after the early-1960s.

#### EMERGENCE OF THE MODERN ABORTION DEBATE

This consensus around silence or anti-abortion stances among Mainline Protestant denominations declined as a new public debate about abortion arose throughout the country and as abortion became a salient social problem over the 1960s,

especially among religious institutions and leaders. By 1972, all of these Mainline Protestant institutions shifted to supporting choice about abortion. Drawing particularly on content analysis of inter- and non-denominational periodicals, I find that Mainline Protestants shifted their opinion rapidly, and their common opponent—Catholics—helped unite them in lockstep with one another.

*Abortion Grows as an Issue, 1960-1965*

This general Protestant consensus that abortion was wrong and should be illegal except to save the life and possibly the health of the mother was disturbed when a story captured international attention. In 1962, Sherri Finkbine, a pregnant mother of four from Phoenix, took thalidomide, a drug used in Europe to minimize morning sickness that was starting to cause controversy because it caused severe fetal deformity. When she learned about the risk of fetal deformity, her obstetrician immediately scheduled her an abortion in a hospital. Finkbine told her story to a friend who was a newspaper reporter and, with the ensuing media coverage, the hospital withdrew its permission for the operation. The “Finkbine Case,” as it came to be known, attracted international attention and Sherri Finkbine eventually flew to Sweden to have an abortion of what was later reported to be a severely deformed fetus (Becker 1962; Hunter 1962). With this case, the lack of uniformity in application of state abortion laws grew to be seen as a social problem by some.

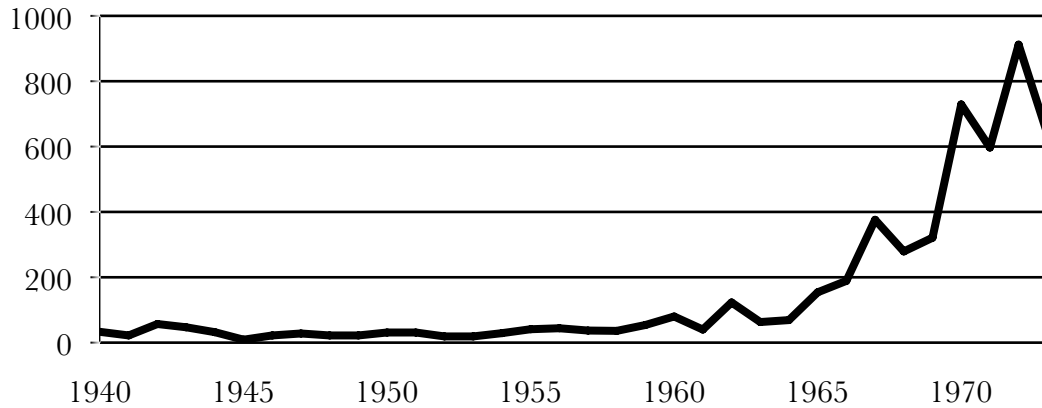
The Finkbine Case did not just stir up legal and medical debates, but also religious debates, primarily between Catholics on one hand and Protestants and Jewish leaders on

the other. As the *New York Times* reports, “clergymen pointed out that general Roman Catholic policy opposed the abortion, but Protestant and Jewish spokesmen appeared to condone it. The mother declined to give her religious affiliation until the operation has been performed” (Becker 1962: 22). Later, it came out that Sherri Finkbine was a Unitarian (Hunter 1962), and this liberal non-Protestant and nominally Christian denomination quickly became a leading religious voice in favor of legal abortion. During the story and its aftermath, Roman Catholic leaders were depicted as backward in their opposition to abortion rights. For example, a Unitarian minister in 1962 expressed hope that the Ecumenical Council could convince the Roman Catholic Church to “abandon its medieval resistance to family planning” (“Abortion is Backed by Unitarian Cleric” 1962: 33). The Unitarian Universalist Association officially supported abortion law reform in 1963, overwhelmingly passing a resolution for abortion to be legal under expanded circumstances, such as risk to the physical or mental health of the woman, fetal defect, pregnancy due to rape or incest, or any other compelling reason (“Unitarians Urge Legal Abortions” 1963).

Discussion of abortion in the public sphere increased rapidly starting around this time (see Figure 2), focusing especially on instances of fetal deformity sparked by thalidomide-caused fetal deformities in Europe, the 1962 Finkbine Case, and the 1962-1965 rubella outbreak. Before 1960, most articles in the *New York Times* discussing abortion were related to prosecuting abortionists or abortion policies in other countries. After 1960 and especially after 1965, discussion of abortion started greatly increasing, focusing on fights over abortion laws in state legislatures, religious discussions about the

morality of abortion, and experiences of the women and doctors who were practically impacted by these laws.

Figure 2: Articles that Mention "Abortion" in *New York Times*, 1940-1973<sup>14</sup>



#### *Abortion Law Reform, 1965-1970*

General Mainline Protestant stances in the mid-1960s increasingly favored abortion law reform, often advocating for widening circumstances under which a woman could legally obtain an abortion but generally not advocating for “abortion on demand” (i.e. "Abortion by Consent" 1967). The Finkbine Case, along with other similar stories about abortion, led to growing calls during the mid- to late-1960s for reform of abortion laws at the state level to allow for more circumstances under which women could legally have an abortion. This abortion reform was based on a model law proposed initially in 1959 by the American Law Institute (ALI), an independent organization composed of attorneys, judges, and law professors. This ALI model abortion reform law sought to clarify the reasons that a woman could legally obtain a therapeutic abortion to include a

<sup>14</sup> Accessed from ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

wide range of reasons including the physical and mental health of the woman, fetal deformity, and pregnancy due to rape or incest.

During this fight for abortion law reform, the debate was framed as a religious one primarily between anti-abortion Catholics and pro-abortion law reform Protestants and Jewish groups. The primary opposition to abortion law reform was from the Roman Catholic Church and the debate was framed as Catholics versus everybody else, especially Protestants and Jewish groups and leaders (Kinsolving 1964; Sibley 1966; Schanberg 1967b). As *Christian Century*, a Mainline Protestant periodical, reports, “the state legislature of New York has become a battleground between Catholic and Protestant groups in dispute over the issue of abortion reform” (“New York Religionists Embattled over Abortion Reform” 1969: 279). In particular, Episcopal leadership sparred with Catholic leadership on opposite sides of the abortion debate in state legislatures, from California (“Clerics on Coast in Abortion Clash” 1966) to New York (Mairoana 1967).

Mainline Protestant tactics in favor of abortion law reform often centered around portraying Catholic leadership as backward on this issue. For example, in one *Christian Century* article, Catholic views on abortion were portrayed as changing over centuries and full of contradictions. The article went on to portray Catholics as simply another religious minority that had strange views on medicine that should not be taken seriously:

Roman Catholics, Jehovah’s Witnesses and Christian Scientists are minority groups which espouse unique and varying medical ethics in regard to resort to medical care, to blood transfusions or to therapeutic abortion in hospitals. However, the majority of the citizens...who can in perfectly good conscience utilize any or all of these practices should not have to submit to the views of a minority, no matter how strong, at the cost of their lives or their health. (Kinsolving 1964: 635)

A *Christian Century* editorial reported on a papal statement that “abortion is always murder and that a community which legalizes abortion is barbarous” and called it “plain rubbish [that] ought to be rejected” (“Papal Fallibility” 1970: 1309). Another *Christian Century* editorial countered the Archbishop of Boston’s forty-minute sermon that linked abortion reform to deaths in the Vietnam War by calling it “one of the least helpful of all recent utterances on abortion.” This editorial provided statistics about women’s deaths due to illegal abortions and a discussion of the social injustice of poor and nonwhite women lacking access to safe abortions while privileged women typically do have access (“Abortion: Rhetoric and Reality” 1971: 871). Although ecumenicism between Protestants and Catholics was a goal that many were striving for at that time, abortion was described as having “quieted the ecumenical lullaby at least momentarily and aroused the fervor of deeply held convictions” (Green 1967: 109).

Another strategy to delegitimize Catholic opposition to abortion reform was to portray Catholic leadership as misrepresentative of the predominant attitudes of the Catholic laity on abortion. For example, after a 1966 National Opinion Research Center national survey found that lay Catholics were actually not that different from lay Protestants in their general support for abortion law reform (“Reform Favored” 1966), one strategy the Council of Churches used was to pressure prominent liberal Catholics to support abortion law reform. Protestants sought to “organize Catholic lay support through reaching out to Catholic politicians, editors, businessmen, professional men and civic leaders mostly belonging to liberal organizations” (Schanberg 1967c: 1). Liberal Catholics had helped pass divorce liberalization laws in New York by going against official Roman Catholic views and there was hope among Protestants that liberal



Catholics could provide the same support in the abortion fight. Liberal Catholics reported feeling pressured at this time to support abortion law reform, which one self-described liberal Catholic who was ambivalent on the issue referred to as “the newest liberal cause” (Novak 1967: 430). In March 1967, the tactic was deemed successful when forty Catholic laymen released a statement in favor of abortion law reform (Schanberg 1967a). Tactics such as these demonstrate the extent to which supporters of abortion liberalization were focused on countering Catholic leadership opposition and portraying them as distinct from mainstream views.

New York state legislature fights over abortion law reform provided a large stage for these religious fights to be carried out as local church councils organized in favor of abortion law reform in response to Catholic opposition. The New York State Council of Churches and the Protestant Council of Churches of NYC argued officially for abortion law reform in 1966 (Zion 1966). In 1967, Reform and Conservative Jewish organizations increasingly joined with the local New York Council of Churches in support of abortion law reform and in criticizing Catholic opposition (Fiske 1967a). While New York failed to pass abortion law reform, California passed abortion law reform in 1967, backed by the Northern and Southern California Councils of Churches and opposed by Catholics (“California's Senate Votes to Ease Abortion Law” 1967). From 1967-1970, twelve states passed ALI-type bills, reforming their state abortion laws. Colorado, North Carolina, and California reformed first, in 1967, with many other states following suit. Interestingly, these ALI-type abortion reform laws passed most easily in the typically conservative stronghold of the South because of the region’s lower percentage of Roman Catholics, who were the primary opponents of abortion reform (see Burns 2005).

*Abortion Law Repeal, 1968-1973*

General Mainline Protestant stances shifted from approving abortion law reform (widening circumstances a woman could legally obtain an abortion), to increasingly arguing for complete abortion law repeal (allowing women to decide with their doctors if an abortion was warranted, or “abortion on demand”). In late-1967, some voices in the public sphere began to turn from arguing for abortion under wider circumstances to just abolishing abortion laws and allowing women to decide as an elective medical procedure. In 1967, there was measured optimism for change when Colorado, North Carolina, and California became the first states to pass abortion law reform laws. At an international conference on abortion in Washington, D.C. in September 1967, there was a sense that the “logjam against abortion reform in this country had finally been breached,” but that even if abortion reform proceeds at a more accelerated pace, with twenty state legislatures expected to consider abortion reform in 1968, the changes would still be too minor (Graham 1967: 217). As Maryland, Georgia, Arkansas, New Mexico, Kansas, Oregon, Delaware, South Carolina, and Virginia passed abortion reform laws in 1968-1970, there were increasing stories about how abortion law reform still did not allow many women to procure abortion in states where abortion reform had already passed (e.g. Fiske 1969; Monroe 1968) and doctors were concerned that the wording of laws were so vague that they could be sent to prison (“Abortion Experts” 1968). Abortion reform activists became increasingly concerned that these modest reform laws were still not enough, that many

women could still not procure abortions, and so these activists began to discuss a need for an outright repeal of abortion laws rather than the more moderate abortion law reform.

New York had struggled and failed for a couple years to pass abortion law reform, and in 1968 leading voices in the state began arguing for outright repeal rather than continuing to fight for reform. Leading Protestant institutions in New York helped lead this new fight for repeal, providing a counterpoint to local Roman Catholic opposition. In February 1969, many New York synods of Protestant groups officially changed their position from supporting abortion law reform to supporting outright repeal, including the New York Council of Churches, the Council of Churches of the City of New York, the Presbytery of New York City, and the Protestant Episcopal Diocese of New York ("Presbytery Urges Abortion Repeal" 1969; "Protestants Urge Repeal on Abortion" 1969; "State Protestants Now Back Repeal of Abortion Statute" 1969). Moreover, in the same month, the National Association for Repeal of Abortion Laws (NARAL), headquartered in New York City, was founded during a national conference on abortion sponsored by the American Baptist Convention and the Unitarian Universalist Association ("New Group Will Seek Changes in Abortion Laws" 1969; Hunter 1969).

Throughout this early history of abortion access as a social problem, articles in Protestant periodicals as well as the articles sampled in the *New York Times* often framed the debate as religious in nature. Abortion rights was described as an important social problem and sympathies in both Protestant periodicals and the *New York Times* articles sampled generally fell with those arguing for expanding abortion access. The main opponent in the fight was seen as Catholic leadership and tactics focused on delegitimizing its opposition by discussing Catholic leadership as medieval, backward,

and distant from lay Catholic attitudes. In this context, Mainline Protestant groups and leaders saw taking a progressive stand on abortion as very reasonable and respectable. In doing so, they were not just taking a stand for abortion rights, but also against Catholic leadership.

#### MAINLINE PROTESTANTS ADVOCATE FOR EXPANDING ABORTION RIGHTS, 1966-1973

After these changes in the framing of abortion, *all* Mainline Protestant institutions began advocating for expanding abortion rights. Although this was a large and quick shift for these groups on this issue, there was surprising consensus and homogeneity in the timing and scope of these statements. The Protestant groups that either were silent or anti-abortion before 1962 began passing resolutions in favor of abortion law reform and repeal. Within a few years, by 1973, all groups advocated explicitly for choice on the issue of abortion.

Many Mainline Protestant denominations released initial statements arguing for abortion law reform: American Lutheran Church in 1966; American Baptist Convention and the Episcopal Church in 1967; the United Methodist Church in 1968; Lutheran Church in America and Presbyterian Church in the United States in 1970. These statements varied in their forcefulness on the issue. The American Lutheran Church, as part of their 1966 “Sexual Integrity in Modern Society” statement, argued vaguely that “there are times and circumstances when interruption of a pregnancy may be necessary for therapeutic reasons,” and advocated “adequate consultation with professional persons competent to give trustworthy and balanced counsel” (Larsen 1966: 491). The American

Baptist Convention was much more explicit in their 1967 statement, arguing that due to the “widespread practice of illegal abortion, with its attendant physical dangers and mental anguish,” “churches of the American Baptist Convention [should] support legislation in their states to make abortion legal in cases of rape, incest, mental incompetence, or where there is danger to the health of the mother” (American Baptist Convention 1967: 74).

Some denominations revised their previous reform statement to argue for outright repeal of abortion laws, whereas the United Church of Christ and the United Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. never released a reform statement and skipped right to a repeal statement. There were big differences between the abortion reform movement, which was composed of elite male professionals who wanted legal support for decisions they were already making for women, and the abortion repeal movement, which was composed of women seeking control of their bodies (Luker 1984). However, I find much continuity between reform and repeal stances within these Mainline Protestant institutions. While repeal positions put more emphasis on choice and decision making power than reform stances, both types of stances grappled with similar arguments, theological bases, and moral hesitations. Abortion law repeal statements were made by American Baptist Convention in 1968; American Lutheran Church and United Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. in 1970; United Church of Christ in 1971; and United

Methodist Church in 1972.<sup>15</sup> By 1973, *all* Mainline Protestant institutions argued explicitly for choice on the issue of abortion.

There is surprising homogeneity in the timing and scope of these final abortion stances before the U.S. Supreme Court decriminalized abortion in their 1973 *Roe v. Wade* decision, demonstrating how legitimate and rational it was seen at that time for Mainline Protestant institutions to take a stance in favor of expanding abortion access. The American Baptists in 1968 urged that “legislation be enacted to provide that the termination of a pregnancy prior to the 12th week (first trimester) be at the request of the individual(s) concerned and be regarded as an elective medical procedure governed by the laws regulating medical practice and licensure” (American Baptist Convention 1968: 125). The United Presbyterian Church in 1970 argued that “termination of pregnancy is a matter of the careful ethical decision of the patient...and therefore should not be restricted by law, except that it be performed...[by] a properly licensed physician” (United Presbyterian Church in the United States of America 1970: 891). The Episcopal Church in 1970 released a committee statement that argued that “statutory restrictions...with regard to abortion, be removed from criminal and penal codes” (Episcopal Church 1970: 463).<sup>16</sup> The American Lutheran Church in 1970 argued that the state should “confine its

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<sup>15</sup> A word of caution should be spoken in over-interpreting the exact years of these statements, as denominations vary in how often their general conferences meet to release resolutions. For example, the American Baptist Convention released a reform resolution in 1967 and then a repeal resolution in 1968, a quick change they were able to accomplish because they meet every year. In contrast, the United Methodist Church released a reform resolution in 1968 and then a repeal resolution in 1972, a slower change only because their general conference meets every four years.

<sup>16</sup> The Episcopal Church’s committee, the Joint Commission on the Church in Human Affairs, recommended the General Convention pass the abortion repeal stance as they passed the abortion reform stance. However, the Convention ran out of time to address many issues that year and so did not formally pass this resolution. There are no indications that they wouldn’t have as all the other Mainline Protestant denominations did.

statutory controls over induced abortion solely to the requirement that the operation be performed by a duly licensed physician in an appropriate medical setting” (Mickelson 1970: 906). The Lutheran Church in America in 1970 argued, “a woman or couple may decide responsibly to seek an abortion” (Lutheran Church in America 1970: 483). The Presbyterian Church in the United States in 1970 argued, “abortion should be available to all who desire and qualify for it” (Presbyterian Church in the United States 1970: 124-126). The United Church of Christ in 1971 argued for “the repeal of all legal prohibitions of physician-performed abortions” (United Church of Christ 1971: 132). Finally, in 1972, the United Methodist Church argued for “the removal of abortion from the criminal code, placing it instead under laws related to other procedures of standard medical practice” (United Methodist Church General Conference 1972: 1058).

Although there were massive and sudden shifts in abortion stances among these Mainline Protestant denominations, there was surprising consensus about those changes and within a few years all groups explicitly advocated for choice about abortion (See Table 5). In 1962, all Mainline Protestant denominations were either silent or explicitly anti-choice. By 1968, there were some groups that supported expanding abortion access, although only one group, American Baptists, supported unqualified choice on abortion. By 1973, all Mainline Protestant denominations supported choice on abortion, although they varied on how much they qualified their support for that choice. Although abortion was a highly controversial debate in American discourse over this time period, there was a surprising amount of consensus within and among Mainline Protestant denominations

that the legitimate stance for a religious group to take was anti-choice in 1962 and pro-choice by 1973.

Table 5: Official Denominational Stances on Abortion in 1962, 1968, and 1973

Stance	1962	1968	1973
Silent	American Baptist, American Lutheran, Lutheran Church in America, Presbyterian Church in the US, United Methodist Church	Lutheran Church in America, Presbyterian Church in the US,	—
Anti-choice	Episcopal Church, United Church of Christ, United Presbyterian	United Presbyterian, United Church of Christ,	—
Does not actively support choice	—	Episcopal Church, American Lutheran, United Methodist	—
Strongly qualified support of choice	—	—	Presbyterian Church in the US, United Methodist
Slightly qualified support of choice	—	—	American Lutheran, Lutheran Church in America
Unqualified support of choice	—	American Baptist,	American Baptist, Episcopal Church, United Presbyterian, United Church of Christ

This period of time in the late 1960s and early 1970s was a time in which Mainline Protestant institutions were playing a growing role in debates on social problems and activism, a focus that emerged out of the role of the churches in the cycle of protest during the Civil Rights Movement (Staggenborg 1991). The United Methodist Church,



for example, by the end of the 1960s had become a heavily urbanized and bureaucratized institution that was struggling to deal with the national and global conflicts that were arising at the time. During the late-1960s and early-1970s intellectual theological arguments were sidelined as social activism became the prime concern for the church (Norwood 1974). As the denomination was restructured in 1968, a new Statement of Social Principles was written to update previous denominational social creeds, mentioning support for conscientious objectors to war, remarriage of divorced people, gay rights, birth control, limits to population growth, and approval of abortion reform. Through examining these Mainline Protestant denominational internal documents, it is clear that all of these institutions became more bureaucratic and focused their growing staff and committees increasingly on social activism, especially liberal causes such as poverty, racial injustice, the Vietnam War, environmental degradation, and abortion.

There was a sense among some of these Mainline Protestant denominations that the legitimate stance on abortion was the most liberal stance on abortion. For example, within the United Church of Christ, the legitimacy of liberal stances on abortion was so taken for granted that two committees competed for greater legitimacy in releasing social statements for the denomination by issuing competing liberal stances on abortion. At that time in the United Church of Christ, two different committees, the Council of Christian Social Action (CCSA) and the much larger and more powerful Board of Homeland Ministries (BHM), both made social statements and, with questions of overlapping and competitive missions, both fought to maintain their position. CCSA minutes and correspondence demonstrate that they felt vulnerable about maintaining their committee

relative to the larger organization. The CCSA believed that it could “only justify its existence if it is a sharp cutting edge of the church” and “fulfill[s] a prophetic role at the forefront of social change with the courage to speak fearlessly and forthrightly,” generally in favor of social liberalism.<sup>17</sup> In 1967, the Sixth General Synod of the United Church of Christ referred both committees to study the moral and legal aspects of abortion and sterilization (United Church of Christ 1967: 98). As the CCSA developed their statement, they continually looked to the BHM attempts at statements and believed that their own statement should be more liberal and forceful to be the one to be accepted by the United Church of Christ.<sup>18</sup> When the CCSA’s statement appeared to be going forward to the General Synod of the United Church of Christ, the BHM argued that it was insufficiently concerned with racial injustice and challenged it with the Synod.<sup>19</sup> Within a few months, it was clear to the CCSA that the Synod preferred the BHM statement on abortion<sup>20</sup> and the CCSA endorsed the BHM statement that was eventually passed, with some amendment, by the United Church of Christ General Synod (Bock 1971). Throughout this lead up to a denominational official statement on abortion, the premise that the most liberal statement possible should be passed was largely unquestioned by both committees.

These shifting abortion stances were relatively uncontroversial within the Mainline Protestant denominations at the time. The final abortion repeal statement by

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<sup>17</sup> See United Church of Christ Archives. United Church of Christ 90-9 Council for Christian Social Action Collection. Box 2, Folder 8 “CCSA Minutes February 1973”

<sup>18</sup> See United Church of Christ Archives. United Church of Christ 90-9 Council for Christian Social Action Collection. Box 2, Folder 3 “CCSA Minutes, September 1970.”

<sup>19</sup> See United Church of Christ Archives. United Church of Christ 90-9 Council for Christian Social Action Collection. Box 2, Folder 4 “CCSA Minutes, February 1971.” Twenty-Ninth Meeting of the Council for Christian Social Action of the United Church of Christ, February 6-7 1971.

<sup>20</sup> See United Church of Christ Archives. United Church of Christ 90-9 Council for Christian Social Action Collection. Box 2, Folder 5, “CCSA minutes, September 1971.” Report of the Executive Director.

the United Church of Christ was supported by 58% of surveyed UCC churches and 82% of Synod delegates and passed with an overwhelming 523 to 51 vote (United Church of Christ 1971: 132). After American Baptists passed their statement advocating unqualified support of choice in 1968, the first Mainline Protestant denomination to pass a repeal stance, they mentioned it rather low and tepidly in their official press release. They portrayed it as uncontroversial and positive relative to other denominational statements about abortion at the time: “Delegates approved a resolution on abortion which was described by a resolutions committee spokesman as the most direct and far reaching statement by any denomination on this subject to date.”<sup>21</sup> The Lutheran Church in America debated many aspects of their 1970 “Sex, Marriage, and Family” statement, including the meaning of marriage, premarital sex, interracial marriage, and homosexuality, before approving the statement. However, there was no debate on the relatively less controversial topic of abortion repeal within that statement, which argued that “a woman or couple may decide responsibly to seek an abortion” and the only amendment was simply to insert the word “therapeutic” before the word “abortion” in the last paragraph (Lutheran Church in America 1970: 483, 654).

The American Lutheran Church had by far the most controversy about its abortion statement. In their very long statement on “Abortion, Christian Counsel, and the Law,” they acknowledged much disagreement on the issue and that “abortion is a loaded word” (Mickelson 1970: 904). Their discussion of abortion in 1974 sheds light on the way that the debate disturbed their ecumenical relations with other anti-abortion

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<sup>21</sup> See American Baptist Historical Library. American Baptist News Service Group Collection. Folder 3, “A.B. News Service 1968 (2).” June 6, 1968 “ABC Ends 61st Annual Meeting.”

groups. They called abortion “a deeply divisive issue among the churches, threatening the achievements in ecumenical relations of The ALC with other churches, especially Catholics and Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod” (The American Lutheran Church 1974: 654). No other group expressed concerns during their convention debates that their abortion statements might disturb ecumenical relationships with Catholics, the key institutional opponent of abortion rights in the United States at that time.

Shortly after these Mainline Protestant denominations explicitly advocated for choice on abortion, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled in *Roe v. Wade* and *Doe v. Bolton* to decriminalize abortion. Although these decisions acted as moral shocks for many to mobilize in pro-life activism (Luker 1984; Ginsburg 1989), there was more continuity than change after 1973 within these large, moderate and mainstream Mainline Protestant institutions in their abortion stances. These institutions largely felt as though they had won, celebrated the decision, and continued to express their official approval of choice in abortion through the 1970s, although moral hesitations were often reiterated. The United Church of Christ “affirm[ed]” the Supreme Court decision, “commend[ed]” their own denomination instrumentalities “that have influenced abortion reform” and “urge[d] pastors, members, local churches, Conferences and Instrumentalities to resist attempts to erode or negate the recent Supreme Court decision as well as to strengthen state and local efforts in this regard” (United Church of Christ 1973: 78). The United Church of Christ again praised the Supreme Court decision in 1977 and 1979. In 1976, the Episcopal Church reaffirmed its position in support of choice and “its unequivocal opposition to any

legislation on the part of the national or state governments which would abridge or deny the rights of individuals to reach informed decisions in this matter and to act upon them,” though at the same time it did not advocate for “abortions for convenience” (Episcopal Church 1977: C-3). The United Presbyterian Church in 1978 “reaffirm[ed] the right of personal choice in regard to termination of pregnancy, while deploring the necessity for and frequency of such choices; and affirms the right of each woman to competent medical care in connection with this choice” (United Presbyterian Church in the United States of America 1978: 67). Although there was much agitation against abortion among pro-life activists, Mainline Protestant institutions appear relatively uninterested in reconsidering their support of choice on abortion during the 1970s.

#### CONSENSUS DECLINES AND BELIEFS DIVERGE

The early debate around abortion within Mainline Protestant institutions was not marked by polarization and controversy, but by consensus and moderation. After the rapid liberalization on abortion from 1966-1972, Mainline Protestant denominations generally concurred with one another that there should be a legal right to choose on abortion, although that decision should be considered with hesitation and sensitivity to the particular circumstances of the abortion. Although some individuals experienced a moral shock after *Roe v. Wade* was decided in 1973 and entered pro-life activism, Mainline Protestant institutions passed official pronouncements in support of the decision and individuals within denominational leadership saw the decision as a win. Some individuals

in denominational conventions spoke out against the decision, but overall the larger institutions ignored these pro-life voices.

This consensus around support for choice within Mainline Protestant institutions increasingly broke down over the 1980s, particularly around 1988, for many institutions. From 1987-1992, four of the Mainline Protestant institutions added new stipulations and greater moral hesitations in their support of abortion rights, but maintained their historic support of choice. However two of the Mainline Protestant institutions backed off from their previous stance and no longer explicitly advocated for a woman's right to choose.

I will describe and explain these shifts from 1987-1992 within these denominations in much greater detail in the next chapter, but first the overall trend among all denominations over time needs to be understood. The polarization and controversy of abortion stances within Protestant denominations was not prominent in the early debate around abortion in the 1960s and 1970s, but emerged in the late 1980s. My coding of 86 official denominational statements on abortion made it clear that in the late 1980s the consensus and moderation around the right to choose on abortion broke down and Mainline Protestant institutions polarized. From 1987-1992, all six Mainline Protestant denominations added greater moral hesitation to their statements on abortion, but two denominations backed away from explicit support of choice for the first time since 1972 (See Figure 3).

Figure 3: Coding of Abortion Stances of Mainline Protestant Denominations, 1960-2012<sup>22</sup>

Unqualified  
Support of choice

Slightly qualified  
support of choice

Strongly qualified  
support of choice

Does not actively  
support choice

Anti-choice

While there was great shifting in abortion stances from 1960-1975, denominations all conformed to a similar pattern and settled rapidly on agreement of support for choice on abortion, although they differed in how much moral hesitation they described in their support. From 1972-1987, all Mainline Protestant denominations agreed that a woman should have the legal right to choose to have an abortion and the focus in statements remained on how denominations could help advise women in this choice. It was not until the period from 1987-1992 when all denominations reconsidered their abortion stances that suddenly there arose disagreement between denominations about whether women should legally and morally be able to choose an abortion. No Mainline Protestant denomination has become anti-choice like Catholic and some Evangelical Protestant denominations are. However, the support of choice on abortion that Mainline Protestants

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<sup>22</sup> Due to mergers, while there are 8 Mainline Protestant denominations whose abortion stances are coded starting in 1960, there are 6 Mainline Protestant denominations at the end of the time period. To ease interpretation of this already complicated figure, predecessor denominations and merged denominations are colored similarly. This figure should be interpreted to understand the broad trends in abortion stances among all Mainline Protestant institutions through time rather than seeking to follow a single Mainline Protestant institution through time.

rallied around in opposition of Catholic leaders from 1966-1972 no longer united these denominations by the early 1990s.

The divide between these denominations on choice on abortion that arose from 1987-1992 persists until today (see Table 6). From 1992-today, four denominations concretized their stance of explicit support of choice on abortion with some qualifications. None of the denominations that continue to explicitly support choice voice the significant qualifications that some denominations did in earlier time periods. From 1992-today, two denominations continue not to explicitly support choice, but they did not become explicitly anti-choice. These denominations sought to remove themselves from the debate and sit on the fence, a balance that they maintain today.



Table 6: Official Denominational Stances on Abortion in 1973, 1980, 1992, and 2012

Stance	1973	1980	1992	2012
Silent	—	—	—	—
Anti-choice	—	—	—	—
Does not actively support choice	—	—	American Baptist, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America	American Baptist, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
Strongly qualified support of choice	Presbyterian Church in the US, United Methodist	American Lutheran,	—	—
Slightly qualified support of choice	American Lutheran, Lutheran Church in America	Episcopal Church, Lutheran Church in America, Presbyterian Church in the US, United Methodist	Episcopal Church, Presbyterian Church (USA), United Church of Christ, United Methodist Church	Episcopal Church, Presbyterian Church (USA), United Church of Christ, United Methodist Church
Unqualified support of choice	American Baptist, Episcopal Church, United Presbyterian, United Church of Christ	American Baptist, United Presbyterian, United Church of Christ	—	—

## DISCUSSION

Although the politics of abortion access are described as the quintessential culture war issue, in fact there is much about the debate that does not conform to expectations of a culture war. Conflicts around culture war issues, particularly abortion, are seen as

emerging out of fundamentally different worldviews and sources of moral authority. According to Luker (1984), pro-life views come out of a worldview centered around God and pro-choice views come out of a worldview centered on humans. However, among Mainline Protestant institutions the same worldview centered around God is drawn on to justify both pro-life and pro-choice stances at different points in time. There is remarkable change over time in beliefs about abortion among Mainline Protestant institutions, demonstrating that the relationship between beliefs on abortion and worldview is not straightforward or static in the way scholars have described.

Abortion politics have remained controversial in the wider society since the 1960s, but among Mainline Protestant institutions the debate was marked by much consensus and moderation until the late 1980s. Even as all denominations rapidly shifted their stance on abortion from 1966-1972, moving from silent and anti-choice to explicitly pro-choice, the denominations moved in tandem with one another. There was also much similarity among all denominations from 1987-1992 as all reconsidered their abortion stances and added greater moral hesitation around the morality of abortion. However, whereas the shifts from 1966-1972 were marked by consensus, the shifts from 1987-1992 were marked by great conflict and polarization. Whereas explicit support for choice on abortion was something that all Mainline Protestant denominations had upheld since 1972, two denominations diverged from this long-held consensus and no longer explicitly supported a right to choice. Why did this consensus about the appropriate stance on abortion decline over time and why did some Mainline Protestant denominations back away from their support of choice? This question will be taken up in the next chapter.

## **CHAPTER 4: SHIFTING ALLIANCES AND OPPONENTS: ABORTION AND RELIGIOUS RESTRUCTURING SINCE 1960**

### INTRODUCTION

The shifting abortion stances among Mainline Protestant institutions over time, as described in Chapter 2, demonstrate surprising homogeneity and consensus. In the early-1960s, *no* Mainline Protestant institutions supported expanding abortion access. Over 1966-1972, *all* the most prominent Mainline Protestant institutions released official pronouncements in favor of relaxing abortion laws. Since this time, especially from 1987-1992, *all* the most prominent Mainline Protestant institutions faced greater internal debate over the issue and *all* shifted in a more conservative direction. However, while most denominations just added new moral hesitations and continued their support of choice on abortion, two of the denominations diverged from the others and no longer explicitly supported choice. While the 1960s and 1970s politics of abortion among Mainline Protestant institutions was marked by consensus around the appropriate Protestant stance on abortion, over the 1980s conflict and polarization arose. Why did institutionalized Mainline Protestant abortion stances shift in tandem with one another as they did? Why were the shifts in 1966-1972 marked by consensus whereas the shifts from 1987-1992 were marked by such controversy? Why did some Mainline Protestant denominations diverge from the general pattern from 1987-1992 and no longer explicitly support choice on abortion?

Using archival materials and periodical articles of a sample of Mainline Protestant denominations, as described in Table 2 in the Introduction, I compare both two different time periods (1966-1972 vs. 1987-1992) and different sets of Mainline Protestant denominations (those that continued to explicitly support choice vs. those that did not). One interdenominational social movement organization proved to be the key site where Mainline Protestants engaged in discourse and advocacy on the issue of abortion and is given particular attention in this chapter. This pro-choice organization, the Religious Coalition for Abortion Rights (RCAR), was examined through an analysis of its key periodical, *Options*, from 1973-today, and through its official archive located at the United Methodist Archives and History Center in Madison, NJ.

I argue that abortion fights have provided fertile ground upon which religious groups negotiated understandings of themselves, the role of religion in American public life, and boundaries with other religious groups. As described in Chapter 2, during the first wave of abortion pronouncements, from 1966-1972, Mainline Protestants used abortion as a key issue to challenge Catholic political power more broadly. After the decriminalization of abortion in 1973, Mainline Protestant and Jewish groups organized together to challenge Catholic leadership attempts to overturn the decision, using abortion as a key issue to challenge Catholics. However, as Evangelical Protestants became increasingly politically engaged on the pro-life side of the debate, the “opponent” for these pro-choice religious social movement organizations shifted from Catholics to Evangelicals. This rising mobilization of evangelicals did not just come from outside the Mainline Protestant denominations, but increasingly from *within* them. Fights over

abortion within denominations proved to be important sites for larger fights over the role of religious groups in politics and for contesting the symbolic boundary between Evangelical Protestants and Mainline Protestants. In the second wave of abortion pronouncements, from 1987-1992, Mainline Protestants used abortion as a key issue, either to create greater ties with or to better distinguish themselves from Evangelical Protestants.

These shifts in stances on abortion occurred within the context of religious restructuring, as the salient divide in the religious field shifted from being between denominations, to being increasingly between liberals and conservatives of all denominations. Religious institutions used abortion stances as a way to navigate changing salient symbolic boundaries in the religious field. Realignment occurs through arguing over contentious and salient social issues. The underlying reasons for the religious realignment since the 1960s are described by Wuthnow (1988) and include the expansion of the federal government, the growth of special-interest groups, and the expansion but unequal access to education. I argue that fights over stances on abortion allowed these shifting boundaries to become salient to people and provided the institutional connections and rationale for shifting the boundaries. As institutionalized stances on abortion shifted, so did salient boundaries within and between religious institutions.

#### DENOMINATIONALISM AND RELIGIOUS RESTRUCTURING

While denominational affiliation, especially whether one was a Protestant, a Catholic, or a Jew, played a defining role in American's public identities before the 1960's

(Herberg 1955), after the 1960's salient boundaries increasingly cut across denominational lines. Wuthnow (1988) argues that a religious realignment occurred after the social turmoil of the 1960s, in which the differential expansion of higher education and the proliferation of religious "special purpose groups" have caused the middle to collapse, leaving a growing divide between liberals and conservatives. With this religious "restructuring," denominations have been less able to hold the middle ground that they long had and have become less cohesive and more internally polarized.

At the same time that religious restructuring has occurred, particular social issues, especially focused on sexuality, have become increasingly salient and controversial. Scholars have consistently demonstrated that the United States has a common set of core values, such as individualism, that both liberals and conservatives share (Bellah 1970; Bellah et al. 1985; Baker 2005; Thomson 2010). However, American political discourse has long remained divided on a basket of particular salient social issues. Today the issues of abortion and gay marriage are particularly salient and distinguish American political parties (Fiorina et al. 2011), while in the nineteenth century prohibition and abolition were the defining salient polarizing issues (Young 2006). In addition to salient social issues, particular moral issues have always arisen as wedge issues between political interests in the United States (Morone 2003). Beliefs about these moral issues dominate political debates and political alignments (Brooks 2000; Legee et al. 2002; Brint and Abrutyn 2009; Fiorina et al. 2011). Religious institutions have long been asked to be key leaders in these moral issues and have been pushed to take stances on controversial moral issues, even though these debates often alienate certain members and foster conflict

within the institutions (Ammerman 1995; Chaves 1997; Dillon 1999; Young 2002; Moon 2004; Young 2006; Wilde 2007; Wilde and Danielsen 2013)

## WHAT DETERMINES HOW RELIGIOUS INSTITUTIONS DEAL WITH CONTENTIOUS SOCIAL ISSUES?

How do religious institutions determine the appropriate stance on a salient controversial social issue? Some might have an immediate reaction that religious institutions simply base their stances on controversial social issues upon their religious beliefs or in reference to their religious text. However, even for issues in which there is a clear statement in a religious text, religious groups can have deeply divisive debates about how to interpret those statements. For example, “Thou shalt not kill” of the Ten Commandments is a quite clear statement, but has been used on both sides of the capital punishment debate. In the case of abortion, there is no explicit statement in the Bible, the key religious text of Christian churches, that specifies circumstances under which an abortion is or is not permitted. Yet Christian churches have long been making these sorts of statements and religious institutions selectively quote different parts of religious texts to make their own points. Religious stances on controversial social issues do not emerge neatly out of religious beliefs or in reference to religious text, but rather are collectively constructed drawing from a wide range of beliefs and social relationships. Scholars have put forward multiple theories that could help explain how religious institutions deal with contentious social issues.

Social movement theories would suggest that religious institutions shift their stances about contentious issues in response to successful social movement activity on those issues. There are many theories about what makes a social movement successful, including mobilizing resources (McCarthy and Zald 1977), the opening of political opportunities (McAdam 1982), the innovation of social movement tactics (McAdam 1983), and whether a social movement's frame resonates with the general public (Snow et al. 1986). These theories would suggest that Mainline Protestant denominations shifted in response to successful social movement activity on these issues.

Within the sociology of religion, increasing attention in recent decades has been paid to the interactions between religious institutions and competition among them for potential members, what qualities make a religious institution more competitive, and how this competition corresponds to changes within the wider religious field. With the rise of the "new paradigm," also commonly referred to as "supply-side" theories, many scholars have argued that religious diversity increases overall religious participation in a society and that religious institutions compete for potential constituents (Warner 1993; Finke and Stark 1998; Finke and Stark 2005), although very few have directly looked at how this competition occurs (Wilde 2007). This theory would suggest that these mainstream denominations assess what their constituents believe about a contentious issue and take that stance as a way "market" to their members and other potential members. Moreover, supply-siders argue that stricter religious institutions are more competitive in retaining members and encouraging religious switching (Iannaccone 1994; Sherkat and Wilson 1995; Sherkat 2001), although many have questioned the basic assumptions underlying this "strict churches are strong" thesis (Demerath III 1995; Hout et al. 2001). This theory



would suggest that constituents or potential constituents were perceived by the Mainline Protestant denominations as concerned about access to abortion and that institutions shaped their abortion stance to best market to these people.

Neoinstitutional theory argues that organizations compete within an “organizational field,” or all the other organizations that offer similar products or services, which influences their behavior (DiMaggio and Powell 1983). They compete amongst one another not just for resources and members, but also for legitimacy in the eyes of the other institutions in the field. Thus, unlike supply-side theory, neoinstitutional theory would predict that religious institutions compete with other religious institutions not for members, but for legitimacy and prestige within the organizational field. When an organization field becomes “structured,” or well-defined, as the religious field is, the field becomes very powerful in influencing organizations within that field and organizations become increasingly homogenous in their structure and actions (“institutional isomorphism”). Neoinstitutional theory would predict that religious institutions would change their structure and behavior to fit the norm within the field and to appear rational to other religious institutions, a prediction that has held up within studies of religious change (Chaves 1996; Wilde 2007). This theory would suggest that Mainline Protestant institutions are taking a particular stance on abortion with an awareness of what other institutions are doing on the issue and seeking to take the most “legitimate” stance and that they are not responding primarily to social movement or member pressure, but primarily to organizational pressure. It would suggest that Mainline Protestant denominations saw abortion liberalization as necessary to appear legitimate in the eyes of other Mainline Protestant denominations and that, in the well-

defined religious field, institutions would take very similar action on the issue of abortion out of this powerful organizational pressure.

I argue that all three of these factors, social movement, religious marketing, and organizational pressure, play a role to some degree in understanding shifting abortion stances among religious institutions. First, there has been tremendous and sustained social movement mobilization on the issue of abortion since 1960. Religious institutions have been involved both as actors and as targets of these social movement organizations. Moreover, different framing of the abortion debate has resonated at different times with different institutions. Second, there has been some awareness and concern about the abortion beliefs of members in the pews. Religious institutions have expressed concern about how best to counsel their members who are considering abortion to deal with their problem pregnancies. However, I argue that institutional concerns about legitimacy and boundaries between other religious institutions are much more important in explaining religious institutions' stances on abortion over time.

While all Mainline Protestant denominations faced concerns about pro-life members and pro-life social movement mobilization, the factor that distinguishes those groups that backed away from explicitly supporting choice and those that maintained support of choice was institutional concern about boundaries with Evangelical Protestant denominations. Those groups that sought to encourage connections with Evangelical Protestants over the 1980s backed away from choice on abortion. Those groups that sought to remain firmly Mainline Protestant in orientation and fought Evangelical Protestant forces within them took a stand on choice on abortion. These denominations

were willing to add greater moral hesitations to their statements on abortion but remained firm that they should remain explicitly supportive of choice on abortion and remain part of social movement organization efforts to defend a legal right to choice. I argue that institutionalized stances on controversial issues do not simply emerge out of worldview and sources of moral authority, as many culture war scholars would argue, but rather are a key way that institutions construct boundaries between themselves and others. For Mainline Protestants, stances on abortion have provided the rationale and legitimacy for both institutional connections and institutional oppositions and are a key tool to facilitate religious restructuring. The salience of culture war issues is not simply an outcome of religious restructuring, but is a key way that religious restructuring occurred and became salient.

#### MAINLINE PROTESTANTS ORGANIZE IN SUPPORT OF ROE V. WADE

Throughout the 1970s, there remained remarkable consensus in support of choice on abortion among Mainline Protestant institutions and Protestants joined together against Catholic anti-abortion advocacy. As described in chapters 1 and 2, during the 1960s and early 1970s changes in the discourse of abortion, the rise of Mainline Protestant clergy involved in the abortion rights movement after their involvement in the civil rights movement, and fears of Catholic political power led Mainline Protestants to support abortion law reform and repeal. There is surprising homogeneity in the timing and scope of these abortion stances, demonstrating how Mainline Protestant institutions

saw taking a stance in favor of expanding abortion access to be a legitimate and rational step.

Shortly after the first wave of Protestant pronouncements in favor of abortion law reform or repeal from 1966-1972, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled in *Roe v. Wade* and *Doe v. Bolton* to decriminalize abortion. Immediately, the National Conference of Catholic Bishops sought to overturn the 1973 U.S. Supreme Court decision through a constitutional amendment. In response, national leaders of Mainline Protestant, Reform and Conservative Judaism, as well as other religious organizations joined together to try to counter this Catholic leadership mobilization, in the form of the Religious Coalition for Abortion Rights (RCAR). The sixteen religious organizations that founded the Coalition had many areas of difference and had adopted often quite differing positions on abortion rights. Nevertheless, they felt it necessary to create a common front to oppose the National Conference of Catholic Bishops. RCAR was the national ecumenical organization that would join together these 16 religious groups to counteract Catholic leadership on the issue of abortion. More Mainline Protestant, Jewish and other religious organizations would join RCAR over the next several years (see Table 7).

Table 7: Religious Coalition for Abortion Rights Membership, 1978

Organization	Date Joined
<i>Founding Members</i>	
American Baptist Churches, Division of Social Ministries	1973 (withdrew 1985)
United Church of Christ, Board of Homeland Ministries	1973
United Church of Christ, Council of Christian Social Action	1973
United Methodist Church, Board of Church and Society	1973
United Methodist Church, Women’s Division of the Board of Global Ministries	1973
United Presbyterian Church USA, Church and Society Unit	1973
United Presbyterian Church USA, Washington Offices	1973
United Presbyterian Church USA, Women’s Program Unit	1973
B’nai B’rith Women	1973
Church of the Brethren, Washington Office	1973 (withdrew 1975)
Catholics for a Free Choice	1973
National Council of Jewish Women	1973
National Federation of Temple Sisterhoods	1973
Union of American Hebrew Congregations	1973
Unitarian Universalist Association	1973
Unitarian Universalist Women’s Federation	1973
<i>Joining Members</i>	
American Ethical Union	1974
American Ethical Union, National Women’s Conference	1974
Presbyterian Church in the US, General Executive Board	1974
Presbyterian Church in the US, Committee on Women’s Concerns	1974
Young Women’s Christian Association	1974
Women’s League for Conservative Judaism	1974
American Jewish Congress, National Women’s Division	1974
Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), Division of Homeland Ministries	1976
Lutheran Church in America, Division for Mission in North America	1977 (withdrew 1978)
United Synagogue of America	1978
Episcopal Women’s Caucus	1978

RCAR initially emerged out of existing religious lobbying networks and institutions in Washington, D.C., which were constrained by their Catholic ecumenicism

in lobbying about abortion. All major Mainline Protestant denominations have long had offices in Washington, D.C., which “function as interest groups by representing the political interest of the denominations and coordinating their national advocacy efforts” (Olson 2002: 55). These offices lobby Congress, file amicus briefs on key judicial cases, and connect with social movement organizations (SMOs) to mobilize on key social issues. An organizational forum in which religious groups could discuss politics and social issues already existed in Washington, D.C.: the Washington Inter-Religious Staff Council (WISC). Because WISC included Catholic groups, an agreement was made not to discuss the abortion issue, thus the other groups decided there was a need to form a separate organization to focus on abortion policy (Staggenborg 1991: 195). Informal meetings by staff members of different religious groups’ Washington offices led key D.C.-based denominational leaders, especially in the United Methodist General Board of Church and Society, to coordinate with other pro-choice groups such as Planned Parenthood, NARAL, the Women’s Political Caucus, the ACLU to institutionalize support for the new *Roe v. Wade* decision (Mills 1991: 569). Anticipating pressure from Right-to-Life groups on Congress and hoping to even out the pressure, they sought to get involved with this informal coalition and created an “Abortion Rights Project” to coordinate their religious institutional efforts. They saw the coalition as only temporary, lasting probably 12 months, not anticipating the continued politics around abortion.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> RCAR was formed underneath the umbrella of the United Methodist General Board of Church and Society, primarily due to avoidance of the bureaucracy involved in setting up a separate organization and because RCAR organizers thought it would be a temporary organization (Staggenborg 1991: 195). RCAR eventually became incorporated and autonomous organization, no longer underneath the wing of the United Methodist Church in 1981, after concerns from a 1977 IRS review cast doubt on the tax-deductible nature of RCAR contributions and the degree to which they were or were not controlled by the UMC (See

RCAR's main goal from the beginning was to demonstrate the wide diversity of religious opinions on the issue of abortion to counteract the arguments by Catholic leaders at the time that religious groups agreed that life began at conception. In June 1973, the Project explained the rationale for action in terms of Protestants and Jews creating a moral argument for abortion rights to counteract the Catholic anti-abortion effort:

The campaign to nullify the recent Supreme Court decision is massive, emotional, well-financed, multipronged, and growing in momentum...The intensity and high visibility of such activities has created a climate in which policy-makers and office holders are extremely hesitant to take actions which will threaten them with defeat at the next election if they take the 'wrong' stance...The most vital response must clearly come from those religious bodies who have declared themselves in favor of the right to abortion, a group that includes most major Protestant and Jewish churches.<sup>24</sup>

They wanted to show that religious groups had no consensus on when life began and the morality of abortion. Further, they argued that any outlawing of abortion in a constitutional amendment would upset the boundary between Church and State and would be putting Catholic understandings of abortion and fetal life into law. Most of their mobilization at this time focused on countering efforts by the National Conference of Catholic Bishops, trying to meet with the same politicians that the Catholic leadership was meeting with, and trying to challenge Catholic framing of the abortion issue. While they cared about the issue of abortion, certainly, a large part of their rationale, as recorded in meeting minutes, correspondence, and periodicals in the 1970s, was clearly

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United Methodist Archive, Administrative Records of the Division of General Welfare of the General Board of Church and Society, RCAR Executive Committee 1974-1980, 1439-1-3:06).

<sup>24</sup> See United Methodist Archives, Administrative Records of the Division of World Peace of the General Board of Church and Society, Abortion Project 1973, 1441-7-8:03

focused on preventing Catholic leadership from exerting too strong of a force on politics, drawing a line in the sand that Catholics should not be able to enshrine their view of fetal life and abortion into United States law, and preserving religious mobilization in politics on the progressive side.

The view that the “opponents” for the Religious Coalition for Abortion Rights were Catholics both provided energy to the movement from those that sought to oppose Catholic political power and constrained institutions and leaders that were seeking to build ecumenical ties with Catholics. A May 5, 1975 RCAR Executive Committee meeting discussed that the main problem in mobilizing religious groups was that “religious organizations...are placing abortion rights low on their list of priorities...because of ecumenical motivations--they don’t want to confront the Catholic Church on this issue.”<sup>25</sup>

Catholic opposition to abortion was particularly salient both to RCAR and to religious leaders during a campaign beginning in January 1974 to find clergy and religious leaders to officially lend their name to sponsor RCAR. Some religious leaders responded with great enthusiasm toward the cause, while others expressed deep moral concerns. Many who expressed deep moral concerns towards abortion nonetheless lent their name as sponsors because they believed that Catholic leadership should not define American law. In response to one United Methodist bishop with this stance, an RCAR leader wrote, “I assure you that your lack of enthusiasm at this point is no disqualification to your sponsorship of this cause. The focus is on the legal right.” In contrast, others were

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<sup>25</sup> See United Methodist Archive, Administrative Records of the Division of General Welfare of the General Board of Church and Society, RCAR Executive Committee 1974-1980, 1439-1-3:06.



unable to lend their name despite their strong support for abortion rights because of ecumenical concerns. One United Methodist Bishop apologized for not being able to sponsor, saying “it is unfortunate that we have such a sticky and potentially abrasive subject before us at a time when we are working more and more with Roman Catholic leadership.”<sup>26</sup> By 1981, thousands of individuals had lent their name to sponsor RCAR’s message, hailing from many religious organizations, but most prominently from Mainline Protestant denominations (See Table 8).

Table 8: Individual Sponsors of Religious Coalition for Abortion Rights in 1981<sup>27</sup>

Religious Institution	Number of Sponsors (N=2786)
United Presbyterian Church, USA	643
United Methodist Church	475
United Church of Christ	420
Unitarian Universalist Association	219
Central Conference of American Rabbis/Union of American Hebrew Congregations	192
United Synagogue of America/The Rabbinical Assembly	133
Episcopal Church	130
Presbyterian Church in the U.S. (and Union Congregations)	97
Lutheran Church in America	93
Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)	84
American Baptist Churches, USA	82
National Federation of Temple Sisterhood	37
National Council of Jewish Women	34
American Jewish Congress	22
American Ethical Union	21
Reformed Church in America	14
Young Women’s Christian Association	9
Additional Sponsors	81

<sup>26</sup> See United Methodist Archive, Administrative Records of the Division of General Welfare of the General Board of Church and Society, RCAR-United Methodist Bishops’ Involvement 1973-1974, 1439-1-3:08

<sup>27</sup> See United Methodist Church Archive. Religious Coalition on Abortion Rights 1976-1989. 1224-5-3:27

Despite Mainline Protestants silence or condemnation toward abortion in the early-1960s, by the mid-1960s they provided key legitimacy and mobilization to the abortion rights movement and counterbalanced predominantly Catholic leadership opposition. During the 1960s and 1970s, the religious field was separated between pro-abortion reform Protestants and Jews versus anti-abortion reform Catholics. Throughout the 1970s and into the early-1980s, the Religious Coalition for Abortion Rights remained the primary vehicle for religious mobilization on abortion rights. The network remained primarily Mainline Protestant and Jewish and Catholics remained their primary “opponent.” These divides in the religious field were predominantly denominational. As Herberg (1955) found, whether one was a Protestant, a Catholic, or a Jew played a defining role in American’s public identities until the mid-century. As the history of abortion rights demonstrates, whether an institution or individual was Protestant, Catholic, or Jewish also played a defining role in their abortion stance in the 1960s through the 1970s. These denominational divides, however, would break down over the course of the 1980s as the religious field restructured.

#### OPPONENT ON ABORTION RIGHTS SHIFTS TO EVANGELICAL PROTESTANTS

The nature of the debate about abortion changed for both RCAR and Mainline Protestant denominations as Evangelical Protestants joined Catholics on the anti-abortion side. Before the late 1970s, evangelical Protestants, while more opposed to abortion than most groups, were largely uninvolved in politics. In the late 1970s, however, evangelical Protestant groups and denominations became increasingly involved in American politics,

generally over social and moral issues (Wuthnow 1988). Opposition to abortion, in particular, became a primary rallying cry for Evangelical Protestant leaders and they used the issue to mobilize people at the grassroots (Bruce 1990; Diamond 1998). In part due to the efforts of key Evangelical leaders such as Jerry Falwell of the Moral Majority, by the mid-1980s most Evangelical Protestants believed that a pro-life view was supported by God and was the traditional Christian stance (Harding 2000). While previously the religious fight around abortion was divided between pro-abortion-reform Mainline Protestants and Jews vs. anti-abortion Catholics, in the period starting in the late-1970s the religious fight around abortion increasingly cut within denominations between pro-choice liberals and pro-life conservatives.

This mobilization of evangelicals represents a large shift for RCAR in who their primary opponent was in the abortion debate. In addition to predominantly Catholic right-to-life opponents, increasing numbers of evangelical Protestants entered the debate. Instead of conflict across the “strong boundary” between Mainline Protestants and Catholics, the conflict shifted over a more permeable boundary within Protestantism, a group that shares similar “cultural narrations” and social networks (Evans 1997: 464-465). As Evans points out, these differing opponents altered the frames that were used by RCAR: “Unlike the more abstract arguments about the definition of human life used by the RCAR’s Roman Catholic adversaries of the 1970s, the frames of the evangelicals were focused on what most persons considered immoral abortion decisions by women: abortion for ‘convenience,’ gender selection, and ‘birth control,’ and abortion performed during the third trimester” (Evans 1997: 465).

Many of these pro-life evangelicals came from traditionally evangelical denominations that had shifted. For example, Southern Baptist Convention passed an abortion reform stance in 1971, along with many other Mainline Protestant denominations at the time, arguing for abortion access “under such conditions as rape, incest, clear evidence of severe fetal deformity, and carefully ascertained evidence of the likelihood of damage to the emotional, mental, and physical health of the mother” (Southern Baptist Convention 1971). A Southern Baptist Convention D.C. representative even helped in the early days of RCAR formation in 1973.<sup>28</sup> By 1980, however, the moderate leaders in the Southern Baptist Convention failed to maintain control against grassroots anti-abortion conservative forces within it, and passed a resolution calling for a constitutional amendment to ban abortion, with the only exception being to “save the life of the mother.”

Many of these newly politically mobilized Evangelical Protestants were part of existing Evangelical denominations, such as Southern Baptist Convention or Assemblies of God, or nondenominational churches. However, scholars have so far inadequately acknowledged how many of these newly politically mobilized and pro-life Evangelical Protestants came from *within* Mainline Protestant denominations.

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<sup>28</sup> See July 3, 1973 memorandum, United Methodist Archives, Minutes and General Administrative Records of the General Board of Church and Society of the United Methodist Church. Work on Abortion 1973-1975, 1478-5-6:11.

## RISE OF INTERNAL SOCIAL MOVEMENT ORGANIZATIONS

All Mainline Protestant denominations faced unofficial evangelical or pro-life organizations emerging internally, which sought to shift these pro-choice denominations to the right (See Table 9).

Table 9: Evangelical Pro-Life Movements within Mainline Protestant Denominations

Denomination	Evangelical Pro-Life Movement
American Baptist Churches in the U.S.A.	Baptists for Life; American Baptist Friends of Life;
Episcopal Church	National Organization of Episcopalians for Life
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America	Lutherans for Life
Presbyterian Church (USA)	Presbyterian Lay Committee; Presbyterians Pro-Life
United Church of Christ	United Church People for Biblical Witness; United Church of Christ Friends for Life
United Methodist Church	Good News Movement; Methodist Task Force on Abortion and Sexuality

All of the Mainline Protestant denominations experienced increasing tension and controversy as internal grassroots evangelical social movements argued that the denominational leadership was overly liberal and didn't represent the beliefs of average denominational members. In particular, abortion was seen as the key issue that symbolized the ideological and political differences between denominational leadership and membership. Mainline Protestant general conferences and national meetings became much more contentious with votes during the 1980s and 1990s, challenging their pro-choice positions and their RCAR membership, concern about these trends was discussed in a 1985 issue of *Options*, the RCAR's main newsletter:

While RCAR is seeking to expand the base of support among groups not traditionally active on the issue, we must also work to network within our member denominations... [due to] efforts by anti-choice factions in their denominations to erode support for traditional pro-choice positions. ("Conference Highlights Role of Women as Moral Decision Makers" 1985: 4-5)

*United Methodist Church and the Good News Movement*

The tension between the United Methodist Church and the Good News Movement, the key evangelical social movement organization within the United Methodist Church, provides a good illustration of the more general tension between liberal Mainline Protestant institutions and leadership and grassroots evangelical social movement organizations.

The Good News Movement began in 1967 and by the 1980s was credited with pushing liberal United Methodist bureaucracy to shift to the right on key issues. The movement was founded by Rev. Charles W. Keysor, who was agnostic until a 1959 Billy Graham crusade converted him and caused him to leave his public relations position and enter divinity school. He reported that he felt at odds with Methodism, feeling that "the Methodist Church needed to renew its historical Biblical beliefs" and that Methodism was dominated by humanists. He argued that the UMC emphasized "social issues ahead of worship" and was too lax about abortion (Vecsey 1979). In particular he had problems with the role of the women's movement in the denomination. In 1974 he reportedly argued that high-level Methodist leaders have been worried about "pagan women's libbers' exerting influence in the 10-million-member denomination" and charged that "the church is a victim of a quota system under which women are appointed to leadership

positions solely because they are women,” although he refused to specify his sources for the claim (*Religious News Service Bulletin*, 11/11/74).

Abortion was a particular issue of concern for Rev. Keysor and the Good News Movement. He argued that, “The Church has taken a permissive position which allows abortion on demand... There is a deep feeling that the whole abortion thing is a deep issue and needs to be examined.”<sup>29</sup> In a 1977 Good News pamphlet entitled “What About Abortion?” with the drawing of a fetus on the cover, they provided guidance for readers who wanted to get involved by referring them to one’s “local chapter of Right to Life or the National Right to Life Committee.” In the pamphlet they characterized Ms. Theresa Hoover, Associate General Secretary of Women’s Division Board of Global Ministries in UMC and a national sponsor of RCAR, as “a widely known pro-abortionist and denominational leader [who is allowed] to express the official position of the United Methodist Church.”<sup>30</sup>

The Good News movement argued that denominational leadership was too liberal and did not represent the beliefs of most in the denomination. For example, in one campaign the movement argued that the United Methodist Women’s group did not represent the needs and beliefs of most women in the denomination. It asserted that there was a divide between urban, liberal denominational leadership, which “officially speaks a language that is foreign to many women at the grassroots,” and women in congregations

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<sup>29</sup> See United Methodist Archive, Good News Debate 1974-1977, 2595-2-1:01.

<sup>30</sup> See United Methodist Archive, Good News Debate 1974-1977, 2595-2-1:01.

who felt “deeply dissatisfied because the official program emphasis of UM Women lacks practical, spiritual help.”<sup>31</sup>

In response, the denominational leadership characterized the constituency of the Good News movement as a very small but very vocal minority. The leadership disagreed forcefully with a Good News questionnaire that found widespread dissatisfaction with denominational leadership, pointing out that it only sampled from the Good News mailing list, which was seen as a severely biased sample. One letter between denominational leaders describing a “Good News” Kansas East Conference Rally mentioned: “I’m sure they were very disappointed at the attendance--under 40--and most of these were on the program in one way or another.”<sup>32</sup> They were seen as using questionable tactics to push their agenda. For example when a task force of Good News called for the resignation of the entire staff of the Women’s Division of the UMC’s Board of Global Ministries for holding “Marxist views” and committing “spiritual treason” in regard to their China policies, they were called out by Methodist periodicals for a lack of evidence, resulting in their “repenting” for the statement while still calling for “dramatic changes” in the Women’s Division.<sup>33</sup>

Despite denominational leadership disdain and a lack of general support by mainstream Methodist periodicals, the Good News movement was credited in periodical articles with making United Methodist liberal stances on issues such as abortion more

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<sup>31</sup> See United Methodist Archive. Good News Abortion Debate Survey Folder 1, 2595-2-1:04 and Good News Abortion Debate Survey Folder 2, 2595-2-1:05.

<sup>32</sup> See United Methodist Archive, Good News Debate 1974-1977, 2595-2-1:01.

<sup>33</sup> See newspaper clipping in United Methodist Archive. Good News Abortion Debate Survey Folder 1. 2595-2-1:04.



controversial and agitating for more conservative shifts. The Good News organization was credited with successfully pressing the General Conference to drop references to theological pluralism in 1988 from their *Book of Discipline*, which they had had since 1972 (Guth et al. 1997: 37). A *New York Times* article reported that “the Good News evangelical movement...is shaking the United Methodist Church. The Good News emphasis on ‘orthodox’ beliefs and spiritual renewal has become a major political force within the Methodist Church...and the same evangelical zeal is being expressed by groups within other Protestant denominations.” Rev. George McLain of New York, however, argued that this was more a political than a religious movement: “they claim they are just being religious, but their political and social views are typical of the ‘new right’” (Vecsey 1979).

While the United Methodist Church’s stance on abortion has not been as significantly altered as some other Mainline Protestant denominations’ stances, it has notably picked up the evangelical framing of abortion as convenience or birth control. In 1988, the United Methodist Church added to its official stance: “We cannot affirm abortion as an acceptable means of birth control, and we unconditionally reject it as a means of gender selection.” More recently, in May 2012, the church added to this sentence that abortion was also not acceptable as a means of eugenics. Both the United Methodist Church’s General Board of Church and Society and their Women’s Division remain members of RCAR, although not without controversy and through quite narrow voting margins. In 1992, the General Conference defeated by 37 votes a motion that called for the withdrawal of the denomination’s Boards from RCAR. In 1996, they stayed in RCAR by a margin of 98 votes (497-399). In 2008, a much narrower margin of 32

votes (416-384) maintained the relationship. As Rev. Tracy Smith Malone, a delegate from Northern Illinois and a Board of Church and Society member said in justification, “it is important to stay at the interfaith table so our Social Principles can inform other denominations” (Gilbert 2008).

#### EXPLAINING VARIATION IN LATER SHIFTS

Over the 1980s and early 1990s, there were strikingly similar situations for all Mainline Protestant institutions. All had internal evangelical social movements that sought to delegitimize the institution through arguing over the institution's abortion stance and sought to push the institution in a more pro-life direction. All experienced great internal controversy and challenge as the perceived “opponent” on the issue shifted from predominately Catholic to predominately Evangelical. In response, all Mainline Protestant denominations reexamined their stances to some degree from 1987-1992.

However, the institutions did vary in how much they moderated their stances on abortion and two groups crossed the line in the sand that had long stood between pro-choice and pro-life camps: explicit support for choice or abortion on demand. Four of the Mainline Protestant institutions have added new stipulations or moral hesitations in their stances of abortion, but have maintained their historic support of choice on abortion. The Episcopal Church in 1988 added language that human life is sacred and that “all abortions [have] a tragic dimension,” but continues to “express its unequivocal opposition to any legislation...that abridges the right of a woman to reach an informed decision about the termination of pregnancy” (Episcopal Church 1989: 683). Presbyterian Church

(USA) in 1992, added greater moral hesitation, but “do not wish to seek laws enacted that would attach criminal penalties to” women who seek or doctors who perform abortions (Presbyterian Church (USA) 1992). United Church of Christ in 1987, added language about “the sacredness of all life,” but continues to affirm “a woman’s right to choose with respect to abortion” (United Church of Christ 1987: 82-83). The United Methodist Church in 1988, added that they “cannot affirm abortion as an acceptable means of birth control, and we unconditionally reject it as a means of gender selection,” but continue to “support the legal option of abortion under proper medical procedures by certified medical providers.” Two of the Mainline Protestant institutions backed off from their previous stance and no longer explicitly advocate for a woman’s right to choose. American Baptist Churches in the U.S.A. in 1988 became officially conflicted on abortion, saying that “we are divided as to the proper witness of the church to the state regarding abortion.”<sup>34</sup> Evangelical Lutheran Church in America “neither supports nor opposes laws prohibiting abortion” (Evangelical Lutheran Church in America 1991) For the first time since 1972, two solidly Mainline Protestant denominations no longer explicitly supported choice on abortion and instead became explicitly conflicted.

Differences in how institutions sought to navigate the boundary between themselves and Evangelical Protestants explain the variation in stances on abortion since the mid-1980s. These two institutions that shifted much more dramatically do not differ from the other denominations in the size or intensity of their internal social movement organizations or in their members’ abortion beliefs. There is one unique feature of the

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<sup>34</sup> See American Baptist Historical Society. Mary Mild’s Files, Women in the Church. Folder “Abortion Task Force.”

two Mainline Protestant institutions that moderated significantly that is not true of the four institutions that moderated only slightly. The denominations varied in how concerned they were about working with and building connections with Evangelical institutions, who increasingly replaced Catholics as the primary abortion rights opponent. The two institutions that no longer explicitly support choice on abortion are also the two institutions that have been building ecumenical ties that could lead to mergers and greater cooperation with large evangelical and pro-life institutions within their denominational family.

#### *Evangelical Lutheran Church in America*

One of the institutions that shifted most dramatically on the issue of abortion is the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA), in part due to its desire to ease conflict with Evangelicals in American Lutheranism, with whom they wanted to work for a united Lutheran church. American Lutheranism had dozens of Lutheran denominations in 1900 speaking many different languages, because Lutherans were primarily immigrants coming from different countries and going to different regions of the United States. After a series of mergers from 1917-1930 and again in the early 1960s, 95% of Lutherans were part of just three different denominations, which all had roughly the same number of members.<sup>35</sup> Two of the groups were Mainline Protestant denominations (American Lutheran Church and Lutheran Church in America), and,

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<sup>35</sup> In 1971, American Lutheran Church had 2.5 million members, Lutheran Church in America had 3.1 million, and Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod had 2.8 million (Jacquet 1973).

along with all other Mainline Protestant denominations, both supported choice on the issue of abortion in 1970. The third, Lutheran Church--Missouri Synod (LC-MS), is generally considered an Evangelical Protestant denomination and has been anti-abortion since 1971 (Lutheran Church--Missouri Synod Commission on Theology and Church Relations 1971) and passed statements condemning abortion at every synodical conference from 1975 to 1989 (Wilke 1990). As Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod became increasingly politicized in conservative and Republican politics (Burkee 2013), abortion rose as the *primary* issue that Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod actively encouraged social action on by members (Wilke 1990). After the 1988 merger between American Lutheran Church and Lutheran Church in America, there remain two primary Lutheran churches in the United States: the Mainline Protestant ELCA and the Evangelical Protestant LC-MS.

Throughout the twentieth century, there was an “urge to merge” within American Lutheranism and most believed “that a single, unified Lutheran church in North America would be a glorious thing” (Granquist 2013: 20). Franklin Clark Fry, a president of the United Lutheran Church from 1944-1962 and named “Mr. Protestant” by *Time* magazine when he was featured on their cover in 1958, argued forcefully for American Lutheran unity. He argued that they already largely agreed with one another and that:

A unified Lutheran Church in America would honor and glorify its Savior with immensely increased effectiveness through a united testimony. The impact of the true Gospel upon Protestant life and thought in this pivotal western world would be strengthened mightily...Keeping American Lutheranism frozen in its *present*

divisions in these explosive, fermenting days for Christian faith cannot be in accordance with the divine will. (Fry 1949)

John Tietjen, a prominent leader and voice in the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, also saw Lutheran union as an imperative and that “a divided Lutheranism, like a divided Christendom, is an offense that weakens our missionary message, contradicts our witness to the Christ as one who reconciles and unites, and bars some from entering the Kingdom of God” (Tietjen 1966: 154). Starting in 1967, the three primary Lutheran denominations institutionalized their cooperative efforts through the Lutheran Council in the United States of America. All three denominations saw Lutheran unity as important, overdue, and inevitable despite some opposition primarily from Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod conservatives (Nelson 1975).

Abortion proved to be an important wedge issue affecting Lutheran mergers. American Lutheran Church, one of the Mainline groups, increasingly stepped a little to the right on abortion over the 1970s. During this time, the American Lutheran Church was also working with Lutheran Church--Missouri Synod, the pro-life Lutheran group, to create greater ties and a potential merger. In fact, the president of the American Lutheran Church from 1973-1988, David Preus, was even a cousin of the president of the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, Jack Preus. Although they did not agree with one another on many issues, they maintained a close relationship (Preus 2011). However, conservatives in the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod provided strong opposition to attempts at greater union and merging, with the strong opposition to abortion in LC-MS and the moderate pro-choice stance in the American Lutheran Church proving a point of

discord. In contrast, the more liberal Lutheran Church in America did not work as hard to create ties with Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod and did not moderate their abortion stance over the 1970s and early 1980s as the American Lutheran Church did. The relationship between the two Mainline Protestant and pro-choice Lutheran groups, the more moderate American Lutheran Church and the more liberal Lutheran Church in America, proved easier.

Finally, in 1988, these two Mainline Protestant denominations merged to form the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. When Evangelical Lutheran Church in America merged in 1983, they also tried to bring Lutheran Church--Missouri Synod into it, but the negotiations fell through. However, a small splinter group did come off the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod and join the merger: the Association of Evangelical Lutheran Churches. The Lutheran groups retained hope that eventually all Lutheran groups would come together, although there was a sense that “the gulf between [the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod] and the others appears to widen with the merger” (Lyles 1987: 462).

By 1991, the newly-merged Evangelical Lutheran Church in America came out with a conflicted stance on abortion, supporting abortion access under extreme circumstances, as was typical in pre-*Roe v. Wade* abortion law reform stances (Evangelical Lutheran Church in America 1991). However, they neither supported nor opposed laws that sought to prohibit abortion on demand. For the first time since 1972, a Mainline Protestant denomination had an explicitly abortion reform stance, supporting access to abortion in cases of rape, incest, and fetal deformity but not opposing laws that sought to

prohibit all other abortions. Today, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America maintains this 1991 stance and is no longer an explicit supporter of a woman's right to choose, unlike most Mainline Protestant groups.

### *American Baptist Churches*

The other Mainline Protestant group that no longer explicitly supports choice and shifted even further than Evangelical Lutheran Church in America on abortion is the American Baptist Churches. The American Baptist Churches in the USA was perhaps the strongest abortion rights movement denomination before *Roe v. Wade*. American Baptists were the most prominent denomination represented in the Clergy Consultation Service on Abortion, helping connect women to abortion providers before 1973, and was the first among Mainline Protestants to come out with an abortion repeal statement in 1968. The American Baptist Churches then went on to become founding members of RCAR in 1973. However, by 1985 the denomination ended its membership with RCAR, citing constituent pressure (Jenks 1988). In 1988, the denomination voted by a wide margin (161-9-2) to become officially conflicted on the issue of abortion, neither pro-life nor pro-choice, a conflicted stance they have maintained since.

Today, American Baptist Churches is leaning even more in the pro-life direction than Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. They are also even more concerned with evangelical connections. Unlike all other Mainline Protestant groups, American Baptists face a much larger evangelical and pro-life denomination within their denominational family, the Southern Baptist Convention, which is the largest denomination in the United



States after Catholics.<sup>36</sup> American Baptists and Southern Baptists actually had split into Northern and Southern wings around the time of the Civil War. Other religious institutions also split into northern and southern wings during the Civil War, such as Presbyterians and Methodists, but both of those groups re-merged together during the late twentieth century. The Baptists had not re-merged, but there remains hope among many that they still might. Like Mainline Protestants, Southern Baptists supported abortion law reform in 1971, but became increasingly conservative during the rise of the religious right and by 1981 became explicitly pro-life, advocating for the criminalization of abortion except to prevent the death of the woman. Mainline Protestant American Baptists, as they have sought to merge and create greater institutional connections with the Evangelical Southern Baptist Convention, have also sought to be a “bridge denomination” between Mainline and Evangelical Protestants. This ecumenism with evangelicals was a key mover of the American Baptist abortion stance:

On ecumenical relations, a special commission concluded a four-year scrutiny of the National and World Councils of Churches by recommending to the board that the ABC stay in both councils but also take the novel step of becoming an official observer at the National Association of Evangelicals--a move that, according to commission chairman William Keucher, would enable the ABC to be a ‘bridge denomination’ between the conciliar movement and the evangelical world. A decision on the proposal is not due until December, but the board’s initial response was highly favorable. Like the abortion statement, the plan struck many as a creative way for the ABC to heal its divisions and acknowledge its diversity. (Heim 1988: 660)

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<sup>36</sup> In 1971, American Baptist Churches had 1.6 million members and Southern Baptist Convention had 11.8 million members (Jacquet 1973). In 2010, American Baptist Churches had 1.3 million members and 16 million members (Lindner 2012).

Their shift on abortion from pro-choice to officially conflicted was seen as an important step in this move to being a bridge denomination. For example, the American Baptist Convention's newly elected general secretary in 1988, the year they shifted, welcomed the change, saying that it demonstrated that the institution: "believes in ecumenical cooperation in all directions" and that they were "serious about both influencing the [Mainline] and reaching out to evangelicals." This plan to remain in the middle ground of increasingly polarized Protestantism was seen as potentially dangerous by some American Baptists:

Being a 'bridge denomination,' like being a diverse denomination, has its risky aspects, as American Baptists well know. What happens, in this case, if the two poles of American Protestantism that they are trying to link move further apart? In the upbeat mood of this meeting, however, such concerns were not prominent. American Baptists seemed satisfied that for the time being they were finding ways to affirm both their diversity and their identity, perhaps even to thrive, not just survive, in the embattled middle ground of American Protestantism. (Heim 1988: 661-662)

### *Less Evangelical Ecumenicism, Less Shifting*

All the other Mainline Protestant institutions also moderated their abortion stances from 1987-1992, adding new stipulations and moral hesitation to their stances. They all experienced great internal controversy and internal social movement pressure as evangelicals mobilized within them and challenged their institutional legitimacy through the issue of abortion. However, despite these pressures, they have maintained their support of choice on the issue of abortion. None had a large evangelical institution within their denominational families that could provide competition or that they sought to merge with. Those Mainline Protestant institutions that did not seek to build greater

connections with Evangelical institutions moderated only slightly, but remained firm in supporting choice on abortion, despite great controversy over the decision. They instead sought to remain solidly Mainline, despite Evangelicals within the denomination that threatened their legitimacy.

*Homogeneity in Shifting, Variety in Degree*

All of the Mainline Protestant institutions reexamined their stances in a short period of time from 1987-1992 and all moderated their stance to some degree. The striking homogeneity of timing of these shifts demonstrates significant pressure within the organizational field to reexamine the issue of abortion and that the legitimate and rational stance for mainstream Protestant institutions in 1987-1992 was slightly more conservative than it was in the earlier time period.

All Mainline Protestant institutions experienced great controversy over abortion as the key “opponent” on the issue shifted from predominately Catholic to predominately Evangelical Protestant. Instead of conflict over the clear boundary between Protestants and Catholics, the conflict was over a more flexible boundary within Protestantism, between Evangelical and Mainline Protestants. All Mainline Protestant institutions had evangelicals challenge their legitimacy and seek to shift them conservatively on the issue of abortion.

However, the Mainline Protestant institutions that also sought to build greater connections with Evangelical institutions shifted more dramatically in their abortion

stance and backed away from supporting choice. Those Mainline Protestant institutions that did not seek to build greater connections with Evangelical institutions moderated only slightly, but remained firm in supporting choice on abortion, despite great controversy over the decision. They instead sought to remain solidly Mainline, despite Evangelicals within the denomination that threatened their legitimacy.

## DISCUSSION

Prominent scholars have argued that the American religious shifted from salient boundaries primarily between different religious groups (Protestants, Catholics and Jewish) to having increasingly salient boundaries between religious conservatives and liberals (commonly thought of as the “culture war”). This religious realignment occurred for a number of reasons, especially the differential expansion of higher education, the growth of the federal government and the proliferation of religious “special purpose groups” (Wuthnow 1988). With this religious restructuring, the middle has collapsed, leading to a growing divide between liberals and conservatives and large denominations have grown more internally polarized. Indeed the history of abortion rights bears out these trends. Whether an institution was Protestant, Catholic or Jewish played a defining role in their abortion stance in the 1960s through the 1970s. Over the 1980s, abortion proved increasingly contentious, Mainline Protestant institutions struggled to maintain internal cohesion, and the salient divide was between conservatives and liberals within denominations.

I argue that the issue of abortion has provided fertile ground upon which religious groups have negotiated understandings of the boundaries between themselves and others and debated about the role of religion in American public life, becoming a key site where religious restructuring has occurred. In the late-1960s and 1970s, Mainline Protestants drew a boundary between themselves and Catholics by emphasizing their liberal abortion stances and Catholic conservative stances. They fought over abortion laws as a way of fighting Catholic political power more broadly. With Evangelical Protestants increasingly embracing pro-life activism in the 1980s, differences in abortion beliefs increasingly split Mainline Protestant denominations, with some arguing for a continued commitment to abortion rights and others arguing for new pro-life stances. Evangelical Protestants fought over abortion as a way of fighting more broadly to push the role of religion in politics from progressive to conservative. Mainline Protestant denominational leadership fought to maintain the historic liberal influence of their denominations by fighting to maintain their abortion stances.

Contentious issues, especially abortion, have provided the key site for religious institutions to renegotiate religious boundaries. In the 1960s and 1970s, Protestants allied themselves with Jewish groups over pro-choice politics against Catholics who were mobilized over pro-life politics. Starting in the 1980s, liberal Protestants, liberal Catholics, and liberal Jews teamed up over pro-choice politics and conservative Protestants, conservative Catholics, and conservative Jews teamed up over pro-life politics. Religious boundaries shifted through arguments over contentious and salient social issues. Abortion fights did not cause the religious realignment, but rather Wuthnow (1988) explains the

key underlying structural forces that contributed to this shift. Rather, these abortion fights allowed the shifting boundaries to become salient to people and provided the institutional connections and rationale for shifting the boundaries. Wuthnow (1988) has explained *why* religious realignment occurred, and this chapter provides a key explanation for *how* religious realignment occurred.

## **CONCLUSION: RETHINKING THE CULTURE WARS**

There has been large attention paid by sociologists, political scientists, pundits and laypeople alike to the relationship between religion and politics and concern that there are widening divides in beliefs between liberals and conservatives. This divide has been termed the “culture war” ever since James Davison Hunter declared “that America is in the midst of a culture war that has had and will continue to have reverberations not only within public policy but within the lives of ordinary Americans everywhere” (Hunter 1991: 34). Although Hunter coined the idea, Pat Buchanan popularized this frame at the 1992 Republican National Convention. Buchanan spoke forcefully of division in his prime-time convention speech, arguing that “there is a religious war going on in our country for the soul of America. It is a cultural war, as critical to the kind of nation we will one day be as was the Cold War itself” (qtd in Edidin 2004: 4). Many pundits today portray abortion as the quintessential culture war issue, describing the debate as polarizing and enduring and Protestants, in particular, as culture warriors in pro-life politics (i.e. Steinfels 2008; Douthat 2012; Edsall 2014). Pundits and scholars alike have argued that divergent views on abortion emerge out of fundamental differences in worldview and sources of moral authority, with those whose worldview centers around God supporting pro-life politics (Luker 1984; Hunter 1991).

This dissertation challenges some of these popular assumptions about the politics of abortion and sheds light on culture war issues and religious restructuring in the United States over time. By examining large, mainstream, and moderate Protestant institutions

rather than activists in the debate, I find much consensus, change over time, ambiguity, and often ambivalence toward abortion. I find that these stances have often emerged not out of existing worldview and attitudes, but rather out of existing social networks, awareness of stances by others in the religious field, and institutional self-interest.

In Chapter 1, I examined Protestant clergy mobilization in the early abortion rights movement, before *Roe v. Wade* decriminalized the procedure. I sought to understand why Protestants were willing to put significant time, energy, and personal risk into expanding abortion access for women in the late-1960s and early-1970. I found that Protestant clergy were pulled into mobilization in abortion rights movements through existing activist social networks, particularly from the Civil Rights Movement. Many of these clergy were pulled in not by their existing attitudes toward abortion, but rather by their social networks and attitudes towards other issues such as civil rights, social injustice, and civil disobedience. This chapter challenges common assumptions that Protestant stances on abortion are naturally conservative or static.

Chapter 2 shifts focus from the Protestant clergy to the Protestant denominations that they were a part of. I find that official Mainline Protestant denominational stances on abortion have shifted much over time. However, I also find significant homogeneity and consensus among all the Mainline Protestant institutions. In the early-1960s, no Mainline Protestant institutions supported expanding abortion access. Over 1966-1972, all the same institutions released official pronouncements in support of expanding abortion access. Since this time, particularly from 1987-1992, all these institutions faced increased internal debate over the issue and shifted in conservative directions. I find that debate



around abortion among Mainline Protestant institutions was not characterized by polarization around two sides. Rather the debate was characterized by gray area, consensus, and shifts in beliefs. However, I also find that consensus around abortion politics declined over the 1980s and conflict arose within and among the denominations.

Chapter 3 explores this conflict that arose in the 1980s in greater detail. I argue that stances on abortion within denominations are determined with an awareness of stances of other religious denominations and institutional self-interest. During the early abortion rights movement, Mainline Protestant institutions mobilized around support for expanding abortion rights as a way of challenging Catholic institutions, who were the primary opponent to expanding abortion access. Over the 1980s, as Evangelical Protestants became increasingly engaged in pro-life politics, Mainline Protestants began to see them as the primary opponent to expanding abortion access. Those denominations that sought to create greater ties with Evangelical Protestant institutions within their denominational families backed away from their support of choice on abortion. Those denominations that were not concerned with large Evangelical institutions within their denominational families remained supportive of choice on abortion despite strong grassroots movements within them to withdraw that support.

This dissertation supports scholars who challenge popular conceptions of a culture war in the United States (Williams 1997; Wolfe 1998; DiMaggio 2003). Although this idea of a culture war polarizing Americans is a popular one, the majority of empirical research finds that Americans are not deeply polarized at the individual-level (Davis and Robinson 1996; DiMaggio et al. 1996; Hoffmann and Miller 1998; McConkey 2001).

The stronger case appears to be that the United States is not as polarized as many assume, but rather much more moderate on the whole. DiMaggio (2003) finds that on every important between-group dimension, except for party identification, Americans have become more unified in their individual-level social attitudes at the same time that public politics have become increasingly polarized. Of this paradox, DiMaggio (2003) concludes:

If by *culture war* we mean polarization of attitudes, then the culture war is a myth. But if we understand it as a campaign to construct new forms of political identity and define the terms of political engagement, then it warrants our close attention. In fact, the culture war is both of these things, an effective myth that has shaped the public's understanding of the issues that divide it, making some identities more salient and others less accessible, and connecting the former to a galvanizing trope. (DiMaggio 2003: 94)

Williams (1997: 291) has a similar understanding of the culture war: "This is where conflict is happening: not between abstract world views, but between an 'us' and a 'them' constructed through a host of cues such as race, life-style, education, and other identity markers. The dynamic of conflict is located between 'us' and 'them,' because we are 'us' and they are 'them.'" Instead of investigating the culture war at the level of individual beliefs and worldview, more scholarship should focus on the culture war at this level of institutions, social networks, and identities, as this dissertation does.

I have sought to highlight the culture war and polarization over abortion as not fixed or inevitable, but rather as a continually renegotiated process. Stances on abortion have not emerged simply out of religious beliefs, but have changed over time along with changes in religious boundaries. Whereas before the 1960s salient religious identities were

based on whether one was Protestant, Catholic, or Jewish, after the 1960s salient religious boundaries increasingly cut across denominational lines and were defined by whether one was politically liberal or conservative. This religious restructuring has occurred through an active process of arguing over contentious and salient social issues, including abortion. In the 1960s and 1970s, Protestants created alliances with Jewish groups in support of abortion rights in opposition to Catholics who were staunchly anti-abortion. The salient religious divides between Protestants, Catholics, and Jews were salient and rationalized by religious leaders and institutions by pointing to the salient divisions in the abortion debate. Increasingly over the 1980s, liberal Protestants, liberal Catholics, and liberal Jews allied over pro-choice politics and conservative Protestants, conservative Catholics, and conservative Jews allied over pro-life politics. This new primary divide between liberals and conservative occurred because abortion debates provided the rationale and connections between new institutions and made this new politically-based religious divide increasingly salient to people and institutions. Abortion debates among large, mainstream religious institutions provided a key platform for the processes of religious realignment and the creation of the modern culture war.

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