

WOMEN AND ABORTION IN ENGLISH CANADA: PUBLIC DEBATES AND  
POLITICAL PARTICIPATION, 1959-70

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## ABSTRACT

This dissertation seeks to uncover women's voices on abortion and analyse their construction of authority over the issue in different sites – in the media, in a government initiated investigation, and in political activism. Each of these sites was within the public sphere, although they were public to different degrees and in different ways. I employ a broad definition of “political” to include the personal and to argue that women spoke out with relevance and authority on the issue of abortion between 1959 and 1970, contributing to this critical decade of abortion law reform.

I first look at women's engagement with print media through their letters to the editors of Chatelaine magazine, the Globe and Mail, and the United Church Observer. I then look at women's participation in a forum created by the government, the Royal Commission on the Status of Women in Canada, which was a uniquely female space because of its focus and largely female composition. Drawing primarily on their experiences – personal, familial, professional, educational, and political – women with diverse views outlined their ideas, through letters and briefs, of what an abortion law should look like. These forums were created by others for women's participation, whereas the final space, one of civic engagement, was a political space fashioned by the women themselves. Rather than viewing the Abortion Caravan as the beginning of women's political participation on the issue of abortion, it is seen here as a culmination of a decade of advocacy. In the eleven years before the Caravan, women made their voices heard on abortion and advocated, to varying degrees, for the place of women in the public abortion debates. While the women of the Caravan represent an important transition

from mainstream to radical protest, signalling their rejection of state (in)action on abortion, there are important continuities in terms of how they constructed authority over the issue. This dissertation, then, recovers women's voices, defines them as political even when they may not have been politically powerful in the conventional sense, and proves that women were active participants in the public debates on abortion during the long 1960s.

## DEDICATION

For every woman who has ever raised a pen, a placard, a fist, her voice in the fight for reproductive autonomy, thank you.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Finishing a dissertation is a solitary endeavour with long hours spent researching, writing, revising, revising some more, and then revising once again. And yet it is an undertaking that depends on the generosity of others.

My greatest professional debt is to my supervisory committee. Bettina Bradbury, a committee member since the beginning, became my advisor later in the process. Her support has been instrumental to my success. Bettina, I feel like you threw me a lifeline at the exact moment I needed it and it made all the difference. My gratitude is boundless. Marc Stein, I appreciate your perseverance even when I gave you little reason to believe an end would come. For the countless hours you invested into my prose, for your thoughtful, constructive, and challenging comments, I thank you. Kathryn McPherson was a late, but fitting, addition to my committee. Kate, I am grateful for your insights and encouragement, both far more important to me than you probably even realize.

My deepest regret is that my advisor, Georgina Feldberg is no longer here – not just to see this project completed, but because her absence makes the world a dimmer place. Gina lived the last four years of her life with tremendous courage and remarkable generosity and I am better for having known her.

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I don't think my family always understood what drove me to complete my PhD. They saw the frustration, loneliness, and the exhausting effort, but the rewards were a

little less obvious until the project was completed. Nevertheless, they remain, each in their own way, a part of my success. My Mom, Pamela, has long been the rock that anchors me. My Dad, Terrence, died many years ago, but some of the most important lessons I've ever learned came from him. My sister, Lesley, is central to my happiness in ways I can't even articulate. My brother, Ryan, is loved, mostly. The rest of my immediate family - Dwayne, Meghan, Joshua, Carly, Kadin, and Callie - bring happiness, humour, and comfort. I am proud of and at times exasperated by each - and ever so grateful that I get to share my life with them. I have, as well, a wonderful extended family that has been most entertaining and supportive in recent years.

Michelle Morris has been one of my closest friends forever. When I made the decision in early 2010 not to finish my dissertation, she immediately rejected that decision. I thank her for that and for her unwavering encouragement over the years. She has been my most constant support throughout this project. Thank you, Mimo, I am indebted.

Finally, to the boys in my small family who make home my favourite place to be. My sweet and mostly patient Shadow held long vigils by me as I worked for hours at the computer, certain to make me laugh out loud every single day. And Bob, for believing, for entertaining himself really well and without complaint, for laughing with and at me, and for being the easiest person in the world to be with (usually!), I thank you. I'm so lucky that you're around.

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## **Introduction: Locating Women in the Canadian Abortion Law Reform Narrative, 1959-1970**

I have five children and I violently do not want another. By this I mean I have become so desperate not to have more, I am in favour of legal abortions regardless of reason. This is not in keeping with my moral feelings or with my religious feelings on the matter but I truly feel my 'state of mind' is in jeopardy [sic]. Especially when I have to feel this way. Why in heavens [sic] name is it illegal for a woman to have a sterilization operation? I asked my doctor for an operation and he treated me like I had asked for an abortion! I did not! I was not pregnant when I asked him. I was hurt, insulted and terrified that I would have another baby. I only wanted to be sterilized. Why can't this be allowed if the woman herself wants it? Isn't that a better solution than the wish for an abortion and the pressure that comes with too many children. If I collapse with a mental breakdown, the five children and my husband suffer – not to mention myself. Who would care for them? I am needed here! I don't feel I am alone in this particular problem. There must be many many mothers who feel just as strongly as I do. Please please help me! Birth control does not work for everyone. There are many who's [sic] only form of birth control is to abstain. This is the end of a good marriage.<sup>1</sup>

This letter, submitted to the Royal Commission on the Status of Women in Canada (RCSW) in February 1968, was signed by “Desperate.” The writer chose not to use her real name. Her letter illustrates myriad concerns related to women's reproductive lives. In such letters to the Commission, women claimed to know better than anyone the risks associated with unplanned and unwanted pregnancies. As her letter exemplifies, women expressed their concern that unwanted pregnancies would harm their existing children by threatening the family's stability. Fears of pregnancy could make intimacy stressful,

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<sup>1</sup> Emphasis in the original. Vol.8, File Letters of Opinion – Alberta, RG 33/89, RCSW, LAC.

thereby endangering the marriage, and additional children meant fewer resources for the existing ones. Repeated pregnancies, women also knew, could jeopardize their mental and physical health. These fears demonstrate how unreliable birth control measures were – or, in the case of sterilization, how reliable measures were often unattainable – leading women to consider abortion even when obtaining (illegal) ones went against their moral or religious beliefs.

Building on sources such as the letter by “Desperate” and others like it, this dissertation demonstrates that women’s voices on abortion were not absent during the 1960s, as the dominant narrative of abortion law reform in Canada, which primarily focuses on male physicians, politicians, reformers, lawyers, and religious leaders, suggests.<sup>2</sup> Using letters to Chatelaine magazine, the Globe and Mail, the United Church Observer, and the RCSW, and offering an analysis of the planning and execution of the 1970 Abortion Caravan, this study locates women’s voices on abortion during the 1960s. From those voices, I draw out the foundations upon which women based their claims of knowledge and drew their authority to speak.

This dissertation focuses on the “long” 1960s, defined here as 1959-1970, because the existing scholarship suggests that women’s voices were overwhelmingly absent from public discussions on abortion law reform during that decade. Scholars accept, with little

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<sup>2</sup> See, for example, Angus McLaren and Arlene Tigar McLaren, The Bedroom and the State: The Changing Practices and Politics of Contraception and Abortion in Canada, 1880-1997 (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1986); Jane Jenson, “Getting to *Morgentaler*: From One Representation to Another” in The Politics of Abortion, by Janine Brodie, Shelley A. M. Gavigan, Jane Jenson (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1992). Some authors have allotted slightly more room to the actions or words of women in the decade. Brenda Margaret Appleby, for example, includes a short chapter outlining the participation of national women’s groups at hearings held by the House of Commons Standing Committee on Health and Welfare in 1966, but those hearings focused on birth control; the abortion hearings came later. See Brenda Margaret Appleby, Responsible Parenthood: Decriminalizing Contraception in Canada (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999), 53-61.

question, that women's voices can be heard *in response to* changes to the abortion law in 1969, but generally not before then save some rumblings in the closing years of the decade. This study contends instead that women made their voices heard throughout the decade in the media, in government-created sites, and in public protests. Women's voices on abortion can be found at least as early as 1959, in response to the article "Should Canada Change Its Abortion Law?" which appeared in Chatelaine magazine and is often taken as the beginning of the media campaign for a revised abortion law.<sup>3</sup> Following the Abortion Caravan in 1970, there is no question, either among scholars of the period or political actors from the time that women had stances on abortion and were willing to share their views. Yet in many ways, the Caravan represents the culmination of a decade of political participation and not simply the beginning of women's activism on abortion.

The women we hear from in this decade experienced profound change. They witnessed the advent of the birth control pill, first approved by prescription to married women in 1961. The "pill" was seen by some as a great liberator, a necessary element of the "sexual revolution" that freed women's sexuality from their reproductive capacity, and by others as the cause (or reflection) of the moral downfall of society.<sup>4</sup> This was also the decade during which many women participated in the "resurgence" of feminism, either in its liberal manifestations or in more radical ones such as the women's liberation

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<sup>3</sup> Joan Finnigan, "Should Canada Change Its Abortion Law?" Chatelaine, August 1959, 17, 103-105. See Alphonse de Valk, Morality and Law in Canadian Politics: The Abortion Controversy (Dorval: Palm Publishers, 1974), 9.

<sup>4</sup> See, for example, Christabelle Sethna, "The University of Toronto Health Service, Oral Contraception, and Student Demand for Birth Control, 1960-1970," Historical Studies in Education 17, no. 2 (2005): 265-292.

movement.<sup>5</sup> The impact of these developments must be contextualized within other post-World War II phenomena, including the baby boom and concerns over the “population explosion,” the development of the welfare state and the institution of universal health insurance, the emergence of a concern for universal human rights, the increasing secularization of Canadian society, the “expanding authority of biomedicine,” the Quiet Revolution and the Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism, and the proliferation of protest movements, especially the civil rights movement, the New Left, the student movement, and anti-war and peace movements.<sup>6</sup> All of these elements intersected to form the political and social context in which women interpreted their own experiences and ideas about reproduction in general and abortion in particular.

### **History of Abortion Law in Canada: The Dominant Reform Narrative**

What I am calling the dominant narrative of abortion law reform in Canada, as outlined here, allows little room for the thoughts, words, or actions of women on abortion in the 1960s. When scholars use this narrative in their work, the level of detail varies

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<sup>5</sup> Of the main “branches” of feminism, liberal, radical, and socialist, liberal feminism came to be the most dominant. See Nancy Adamson, Linda Briskin, and Margaret McPhail Feminist Organizing for Change: The Contemporary Women’s Movement in Canada (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1988), 61-71.

<sup>6</sup> On population explosion, see McLaren and McLaren, The Bedroom and the State, 134. On human rights, see Dominique Clément, “‘I Believe in Human Rights, Not Women’s Rights’: Women and the Human Rights State, 1969-1984,” Radical History Review 101 (Spring 2008): 107-29. On biomedicine, see Georgina Feldberg, Molly Ladd-Taylor, Alison Li, and Kathryn McPherson, “Comparative Perspectives on Canadian and American Women’s Health Care since 1945,” in Women, Health, and Nation: Canada and the United States Since 1945, eds. Georgina Feldberg et al. (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2003), 24. See also Barbara Ehrenreich and Deidre English, For Her Own Good: 150 Years of the Experts’ Advice to Women (New York: Doubleday, 1978); Lorraine Code, What Can She Know? Feminist Theory and the Construction of Knowledge (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1981), 206-214; Deborah Findlay, “The Medical Gaze: Medical Models, Power, and Women’s Health,” Atlantis 18, no. 1 & 2 (1992-1993): 104-124.

with each telling, but the key points are similar.<sup>7</sup> These include an emphasis on the role of the Canadian Medical Association in the push for a liberalized abortion law as well as its insistence on the place of doctors, overwhelming male at this point, in the abortion decision; the adoption of the attitude, under Pierre Elliott Trudeau, that the “state has no place in the bedrooms of the nation,” which allowed for the law to be liberalized; the support of the Canadian Bar Association, several Canadian churches, and Members of Parliament for legal changes; and the relative absence of women, excepting a few relatively “ineffectual” women’s groups, from the discussion. The broad narrative produced mostly by feminist legal scholars, political scientists, historians, and activists follows:

Prior to Confederation, several “provinces” had laws prohibiting abortion based on English common law. Early laws reflected England’s Lord Ellenborough’s Act, adopted in 1803, which prohibited abortion both before and after quickening, although with punishments theoretically more severe for abortions performed after quickening; this

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<sup>7</sup> The main scholars consulted to reproduce this narrative were: de Valk, Morality and Law in Canadian Politics; Larry Collins, “The Politics of Abortion: Trends in Canadian Fertility Policy,” Atlantis 7, no. 2 (Spring 1982): 2-20; McLaren and McLaren, The Bedroom and the State; Shelley A. M. Gavigan, “On ‘Brining on the Menses’: The Criminal Liability of Women and the Therapeutic Exception in Canadian Abortion Law,” Canadian Journal of Women and the Law 1, no. 2 (1986): 279-312; Constance Backhouse, Petticoats and Prejudice: Women and Law in Nineteenth-Century Canada (Toronto: Women’s Press, 1992); F. L. Morton, Morgentaler V. Borowski: Abortion, the Charter, and the Courts (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1992); Brodie, Gavigan, and Jenson, The Politics of Abortion; Constance B. Backhouse, “The Celebrated Abortion Trial of Dr. Emily Stowe,” Canadian Bulletin of Medical History,” 8, no. 2 (1991): 159-87; Anne A. McLellan, “Abortion Law in Canada,” in Abortion, Medicine and the Law, eds, J. Douglas Butler and David F. Walbert (New York: Facts on File, 1992), 333-336; Appleby, Responsible Parenthood; Melissa Haussman, Abortion Politics in North America (Boulder, Colo.: Lynne Rienner, 2005). For general maternity issues see: Cynthia R. Comacchio, Nations Are Built of Babies: Saving Ontario’s Mothers and Children, 1900-1940 (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1993); Wendy Mitchinson, Giving Birth in Canada, 1900-1950 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2002).

distinction was abolished in the 1840s in Upper Canada and New Brunswick.<sup>8</sup> The British North America Act of 1867 set out the powers of the federal and provincial governments in the newly formed country of Canada, making criminal law a federal power. This enabled the Canadian Parliament to prohibit abortion in 1869 throughout the existing provinces of Canada; punishment for those convicted of procuring (or performing) an abortion was life in prison. In 1892, when the first Criminal Code of Canada was enacted, the state criminalized abortion and the sale, distribution, or advertisement of contraception or abortifacients. This position was supported by “regular” physicians who used abortion, among other issues, as a tool to assert their authority over the practice of medicine. At the same time, nationalists similarly supported the anti-abortion stance, as they were invested in the proliferation of “superior” races in Canada.

In the early twentieth century, although there were no challenges to abortion and birth control laws, there is ample evidence that women used abortion (and contraception) to limit family size. Although there were no legal changes, a few particular episodes garnered public attention. In 1936, for example, Dorothea Palmer, a nurse who worked for industrialist and birth control advocate A. R. Kaufman, was tried (and acquitted) for offering birth control information. In 1938, in the United Kingdom, Dr. Alec Bourne was charged with performing an abortion on a fourteen year old girl who had been raped by British soldiers; he was acquitted. His trial was followed closely in Canada for the implications it could have here. Although no legal changes occurred, the case established

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<sup>8</sup> Prior to this law, abortion before quickening was generally accepted. Quickening refers to when the pregnant woman can feel the fetus move.

the right to perform abortions as a “medical necessity” when a woman’s life or health was endangered by a continued pregnancy. The other significant development on the legal front was another British import: in 1957, the British Wolfenden Report on homosexuality and prostitution, which argued that both should be decriminalized, was released. The Report was seen as a key moment in the movement away from state regulation of personal sexuality.

From the late nineteenth century and through much of the twentieth, the Canadian Medical Association (CMA) had a noteworthy influence on Canadian abortion law, with developments in the late 1950s and early 1960s generally viewed as bringing the issue to a head. In the 1950s, the CMA established a Maternal Welfare Committee to study issues of maternal health and mortality, along with its links to abortion. In August 1961, the British Columbia branch of the CMA was the first Canadian medical organization to publicly foster open discussion of the need for abortion law reform. In 1962, the CMA discussed the issue at its General Council meeting, and in early 1964, the Maternal Welfare Committee openly raised the issue of legal protection for physicians who performed abortions. Internal strife prevented agreement among members in discussions in the journal of the CMA or at its annual meetings. It is often noted that alongside discussions within the CMA, the Canadian Bar Association (CBA) began deliberations with its members on the issue. At the same time, several churches began discussing abortion. By 1966, both the CMA and CBA overcame internal divisions to adopt statements calling for the reform of the abortion law to allow for abortion under certain circumstances. During the first half of the 1960s, then, several influential organizations

not only began deliberating on abortion law reform openly, but were invested in having their stance deemed most relevant or correct. Doctors, as those who performed abortions and/or took care of women after illegal abortions had gone wrong, could make the most direct claim legitimizing their involvement, especially in the context of the medicalization of other aspects of women's reproductive lives.

Primarily in response to growing concerns from and for the medical profession and the need to clarify the law to protect doctors from persecution, there were a handful of private members' bills introduced into the House of Commons in the 1960s that attempted to amend the Criminal Code in relation to birth control and abortion. In January 1966, several private members bills were introduced into the House on the same day. All of these bills were referred to the House of Commons Standing Committee on Health and Welfare in February 1966. The Standing Committee, chaired by Liberal member Dr. Harry C. Harley, sat at different points in 1966, 1967, and 1968, dealing with contraception and abortion separately. In addition to hearing from the members who proposed the four bills, individuals and organizations on both sides of the issue presented briefs. Notable presenters included the CMA, the CBA, the Family Planning Federation of Canada, the Canadian Welfare Council, the Canadian Council of Churches, and, among others, the Anglican, United, Lutheran, and Catholic Churches. Individual doctors, including Henry Morgentaler, also spoke. Among the women's groups that presented were the Voice of Women, the National Council of Women, and the Young Women's Christian Association. Additionally, the Women's Liberation Group presented

to the committee.<sup>9</sup> Nevertheless, women presenters, when referenced in the dominant narrative, are not generally described as central speakers on the issue.

Britain's influence on Canadian law remained in effect throughout this period and it is therefore not surprising that Canadian abortion law reform followed closely the 1967 decriminalization of abortion in England. In 1967, Justice Minister Pierre Trudeau introduced amendments to the Criminal Code of Canada that included changes to the abortion laws. Trudeau famously stated that "the state has no place in the bedrooms of the nation." Legal changes were ultimately passed in May 1969 under Bill C-150 (the Omnibus Bills) after Trudeau was elected as prime minister. Under the new law, contraception was legalized, as was abortion under specific circumstances: when it was performed in an accredited hospital, by a licensed physician, after being approved by a therapeutic abortion committee comprised of at least three doctors who determined that the pregnancy endangered the life or health of the pregnant woman.

It is generally in response to this 1969 law that women are written into the reform (now a repeal) narrative, portrayed as reacting to the (inadequacies of the) law. Renditions of the reform narrative may reference women's positions on abortion as presented to the House of Commons Standing Committee on Health and Welfare or to the RCSW, but these interjections are taken as relatively ineffectual or not directly responsible for the law change. Rather, emphasis is generally placed on the Abortion Caravan as an example of women's rejection of the 1969 changes. By the time the new law takes effect, it is noted that many women, liberationists at least, had moved beyond

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<sup>9</sup> Some of these groups submitted the same briefs they prepared for the Standing Committee to the Royal Commission on the Status of Women in Canada.

advocating for legal abortion “under certain circumstances” to a position more in line with “free abortion on demand.” Women’s reaction to the 1969 omnibus bill – both through the Abortion Caravan as well as through the emergence and popularization of more formal pro-choice organizations such as the Canadian Abortion Rights Action League in 1974 – is said to demonstrate, unequivocally, that women’s voices on abortion were no longer “absent” from the debate.

This is the oft-told narrative of abortion law reform in 1960s Canada. It is a narrative that provides little room for women’s participation, or agency, an absence too easily explained by referencing the “failure” of any organized women’s groups to take up the issue in a sustained or effective manner. It is a narrative that portrays women primarily as victims. When women are introduced into the narrative, it is generally only in response to the 1969 abortion law changes despite their obvious investment in the law and legal discussions prior to 1969. Here it is important to remember legal scholar Shelley A. M. Gavigan’s caution that “the history of restrictive abortion legislation is also the history of women’s resistance to it.”<sup>10</sup> Contrary to what the dominant narrative suggests, individual female voices on abortion, instances of just such resistance in the form of women’s words, can be found if one looks for them.

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<sup>10</sup> Gavigan, “On ‘Bringing on the Menses’,” 284.

## **The Literature behind the Dominant Narrative of Abortion Law Reform**

Although there is good scholarship on the medical and legal aspects of abortion law reform in Canada, few scholars sought to include the voices of women in the push to liberalize the abortion law in the 1960s. The scholars whose works are addressed in this section have helped to shape, perpetuate, or provide openings to counter the dominant narrative of abortion law reform during that decade. Those that have helped shape the narrative generally highlight the medicalization of abortion and the concomitant focus on the medical profession as the primary actor advocating reform of the abortion law in the 1960s. Meanwhile, those works that argue for women's contributions to public abortion discussions or include criticisms of the existing narrative have not provided the evidence necessary to begin to revise the narrative to include women's voices and activism in the years leading up to the 1969 reform.

Two works that appeared in the early 1970s came from authors on opposite sides of the issue and have received uneven attention. Although abortion rights advocate and journalist Eleanor Wright Pelrine's Abortion in Canada (1971) appeared around the same time, it is not referenced as frequently as is Morality and Law in Canadian Politics (1974) by the Catholic priest Alphonse de Valk. One of the few histories written by a scholar with an anti-abortion perspective, de Valk's work provides a thorough detailing of events and actors in Canada leading up to the law change of 1969.<sup>11</sup> While Pelrine's work

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<sup>11</sup> De Valk leaves his personal views on abortion aside until the chapter titled "Postscript and Personal View." Eleanor Wright Pelrine, Abortion in Canada (Toronto: New Press, 1971), 115-128; de Valk, Morality and Law in Canadian Politics. For the other main work written by an anti-abortion scholar, see

covers much of the same ground as de Valk's, his discussion of the developments within the CMA and CBA are more extensive and he includes a discussion of the influence of the media on legislative changes. Pelrine, in contrast, incorporates women into her work more so than de Valk does, which makes the comparative lack of attention to her book all the more disappointing. She does not present women as a factor in the liberalization of the abortion law, but she includes in an appendix a survey she conducted with Canadian women in 1970, which outlines their abortion experiences and beliefs pertaining to its legality and availability.<sup>12</sup> There are obvious problems with Pelrine's survey, which was sent to "Canadian professional women from coast to coast."<sup>13</sup> Only 115 replies were received, some 21.9% of the total number of questionnaires sent out. She lists the results of the survey and includes comments that women wrote back, but provides no analysis of responses or clarification on how she selected the women to whom she sent surveys. Still, it is an early and unique example of an attempt to include women's voices. In contrast, the only references to women as actors in de Valk's analysis occurs when he mentions a few female journalists who wrote articles about abortion law reform for Chatelaine and the Globe and Mail during the 1960s.<sup>14</sup> Overall, the general contours of the abortion law reform narrative are apparent in these early works.

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Michael W. Cuneo, Catholics Against the Church: Anti-Abortion Protest in Toronto 1969-1985 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1989).

<sup>12</sup> Like Pelrine, other journalists have looked at abortion in Canada. See Kathleen McDonnell, Not An Easy Choice: A Feminist Re-examines Abortion (Toronto: Women's Press, 1984); Anne Collins The Big Evasion: Abortion, the Issue that Won't Go Away (Toronto: Lester & Orpen Dennys, 1985); Catherine Dunphy, Morgentaler: A Difficult Hero (Toronto: Random House, 1996).

<sup>13</sup> For the survey results, see Pelrine, Abortion in Canada, 115-128.

<sup>14</sup> De Valk, Morality and Law, 9, 40-41.

Published in 1982, Larry D. Collins's article, "The Politics of Abortion: Trends in Canadian Fertility Policy," argues that because the government had avoided taking a stance on abortion following its criminalization in the nineteenth century, abortion practices had been determined by physicians and, consequently, were designed to "serve the middle and upper classes and political elites."<sup>15</sup> Although Collins's focus is on post-1969 policies, he devotes some attention to the 1969 reform. He writes, "When political pressures in the 1960s forced the issue onto the national agenda, the state was forced to respond. Feminist and other activist reformers demanded open access to abortion. Pro-life groups...insisted that the government retain...the absolute ban."<sup>16</sup> Unfortunately, Collins does not identify any feminist (or even pro-life) groups that he claims pushed the physicians and government to act during the 1960s. Thus, although his work is an early nod to women contributing to the reform environment, his claim is not one that has had much traction, despite the continued relevance of his article on the issue of state inaction (or avoidance) of abortion law reform.

In 1986, the first historical, book-length study of reproductive issues, The Bedroom and the State: The Changing Practices and Politics of Contraception and Abortion in Canada, 1880-1980 by Angus McLaren and Arlene Tigar McLaren, was published. It sought to explain how Canadians had lowered their fertility from 1880 onward, with a strong emphasis on the role of competing bodies of thought (e.g. social and maternal feminism and Malthusianism). Despite the fact that the first and second editions of the book covered developments up to 1980 and 1997 respectively, the greater

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<sup>15</sup> Collins, "The Politics of Abortion," 2.

<sup>16</sup> Collins, "The Politics of Abortion," 3.

analytical focus of each edition is on the early half of the twentieth century.<sup>17</sup> Unlike many other works on abortion in Canada, the McLarens do a good job of getting at women's abortion experiences and include examples of women's words in their analysis. Looking at the letters by Canadian women written to Marie Stopes in the 1930s, for example, the McLarens conclude, "Birth control was portrayed in these letters as very much a woman's responsibility," capturing the extent to which women were deeply invested in reproductive concerns.<sup>18</sup> Yet the McLarens do not extend the analysis of women's words to later in the century, despite the fact that women in the 1950s and 1960s, like their counterparts in the 1930s, were responsible for and concerned about the role of abortion in their reproductive lives. Instead, they, too, cite abortion as a focus of second wave feminism and an apparent response to the 1969 legal changes.<sup>19</sup> Despite the subsequent publication of several scholarly articles and a handful of other books that deal with abortion, the McLarens' work remains a seminal one on birth control and abortion history in Canada.<sup>20</sup> This status makes it especially significant that they do not analyze women's voices in the critical years of the 1950s and 1960s.

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<sup>17</sup> The updated edition includes a new chapter covering events from 1980 to 1997, which reads much more like a chronological narrative of events than an analytical account.

<sup>18</sup> McLaren and McLaren, *The Bedroom and the State*, 27.

<sup>19</sup> McLaren and McLaren, *The Bedroom and the State*, 142.

<sup>20</sup> It is noteworthy that many of the published works focus on the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. For articles, see, for example, Constance Backhouse, "The Celebrated Abortion Trial of Dr. Emily Stowe, Toronto, 1879," *Canadian Bulletin of Medical History* 8 (1991): 159-187; Constance Backhouse, "Physicians, Abortions, and the Law in Early Twentieth-Century Ontario," *Canadian Bulletin of Medical History* 10 (1993): 229-249; Susanne Klausen, "Doctors and Dying Declarations: The Role of the State in Abortion Regulation in British Columbia, 1917-37," *Canadian Bulletin of Medical History* 13, 1 (1996): 53-81; Michael McCulloch, "'Dr. Tumblety, the Indian Herb Doctor': Politics, Professionalism, and Abortion in mid-Nineteenth-Century Montreal," *Canadian Bulletin of Medical History* 10 (1993): 49-66; Angus McLaren, "Illegal Operations: Women, Doctors and Abortion, 1886-1939," *Journal of Social History* 26, no. 4 (1993): 797-816.

Indeed, academic works on the subject of abortion in Canada are few in comparison to those analyzing the American and British experiences, and, as with The Bedroom and the State, most Canadian works include discussions of abortion within a larger reproductive or activist context or are in collections of articles covering various aspects of women's health.<sup>21</sup> What this means is that the history of abortion in Canada is unevenly told. The sporadic retelling of abortion results in an often uninterrogated reliance on the dominant narrative. The perseverance of the dominant narrative means that the emphasis remains on the legal changes, with little reference to women's positions on abortion, highlighting instead the themes of the medicalization of abortion and the liberalization of the abortion law. There have been few interjections by feminist scholars or social historians approaching abortion law history from the bottom up, but the most notable ones are unpublished or published by activists and activist organizations, which means they have not received the same attention as other published works.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Academic monographs solely on abortion include Brodie, Gavigan, and Jenson, The Politics of Abortion; Gail Kellough, Aborting Law: An Exploration of the Politics of Motherhood and Medicine (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996); Melissa Haussman, Abortion Politics in North America (Boulder, Colo.: Lynne Rienner, 2005). Collections include, for example, Maureen Fitzgerald, Connie Guberman and Margie Wolfe, eds., Still Ain't Satisfied: Canadian Feminism Today (Toronto: Women's Press, 1982); Sandra Burt, Lorraine Code and Lindsay Dorney, eds., Changing Patterns: Women in Canada (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1988); Adamson et al, Feminist Organizing for Change; Katherine Arnup, Andr e L vesque, and Ruth Roach Pierson, eds., Delivering Motherhood: Maternal Ideologies and Practices in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> Centuries (New York: Routledge, 1990); Georgina Feldberg, Molly Ladd-Taylor, Alison Li, and Kathryn McPherson, eds., Women, Health, and Nation: Canada and the United States Since 1945 (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2003).

<sup>22</sup> For unpublished works, see Frances Wasserlein, "'An Arrow Aimed at the Heart': The Vancouver Women's Caucus and the Abortion Campaign, 1969-1971" (master's thesis, Simon Fraser University, Vancouver, 1990); Tracy Penny, "'Getting Rid of my Trouble': A Social History of Abortion in Ontario, 1880-1929" (master's thesis, Laurentian University, Sudbury, 1995); Tracy Penny Light, "Shifting Interests: The Medical Discourse on Abortion in English Canada, 1850-1969" (PhD dissertation, University of Waterloo, Waterloo, 2003). The Childbirth by Choice Trust published a valuable collection of illegal abortion narratives, while activists like Myrna Kotash and Ann Thomson have chronicled their experiences in books. See Childbirth By Choice Trust, No Choice: Canadian Women Tell Their Stories of Illegal Abortions (Toronto: Childbirth by Choice Trust, 1998); Myrna Kostash, Long Way From Home: The Story

Given this failure to question the dominant narrative, many scholars have been content to accept the notion that women were not significant actors until the late 1960s, when they responded to the 1969 omnibus bill. Locating the beginning of women's involvement in the push for legal abortion at the end of the 1960s is clearly exemplified in Jane Jenson's influential chapter "Getting to *Morgentaler*: From One Representation to Another" in The Politics of Abortion (1992) by Janine Brodie, Shelley A. M. Gavigan, and Jenson, which, along with the McLaren's book, has rightfully been considered one of the most important monographs on abortion in Canada. In her chapter, Jenson argues that the medicalization of abortion effectively limited the efforts of women to gain control over the decision and her analysis instead focuses primarily on the CMA, CBA, and various politicians.<sup>23</sup> She contends, "All actors do not exercise the same power over the meaning systems which organize political debate.... Some actors manage to make their voices heard loudly within the universe of political discourse while others are silenced, *speaking among themselves in a language that only they can understand.*"<sup>24</sup> Elaborating more specifically on women's place in the abortion debate in the years leading up to the 1969 omnibus bill, Jenson argues:

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of the Sixties Generation in Canada (Toronto: James Lorimer, 1980); Ann Thomson, Winning Choice on Abortion: How British Columbian and Canadian Feminists Won the Battles of the 1970s and 1980s (Trafford: Victoria, 2004).

<sup>23</sup> She also argues that the medicalization framing limited the ability of abortion opponents to make the issue about either morality or fetal rights. Jane Jenson, "Getting to *Morgentaler*: From One Representation to Another," in The Politics of Abortion, Janine Brodie, Shelley A. M. Gavigan, and Jane Jenson (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1992), 17. Wendy Mitchinson notes that "medicine was part of culture and as such constrained by the norms of culture," which "restrained, defined, and limited women." See Wendy Mitchinson, "The Impact of Feminism on the Research and Writing of Medical History: A Personal View," Atlantis 25, no. 2 (Spring/Summer 2001), 93. Medicalization of abortion occurs elsewhere around the world at this time. See, for example, Annulla Linders, "Victory and Beyond: A Historical Comparative Analysis of the Outcomes of the Abortion Movements in Sweden and the United States," Sociological Forum 19, no. 3 (September 2004), 383-385.

<sup>24</sup> Emphasis added. Jenson, "Getting to *Morgentaler*," 19.

Women, organized as women demanding specific and particular gender rights, had as yet no status as political actors. Women in the mid-sixties did not have the political resources to press their positions or *even a language in which they could express them*. Second wave feminism did not yet occupy any significant space in the universe of political discourse.... Few as yet had a critique of the system of gender relations which subordinated women to men and silenced female voices in public debates.<sup>25</sup>

Here, Jenson speaks to women's relative absence as a political force during that decade of debate. Her emphasis on a missing language seems overstated, although she is correct that women's words and positions did not hold the same currency as did those of the males who participated in the debate. As the following analysis will argue, however, her assertion that women did not comprehend the "system of gender relations which subordinated" them to men is not universally applicable to women in the decade.

Jenson also argues that during the reform era "women's voices were diffused and weak" because "Women had not yet developed the powerful collective identity with which they could name themselves and act on a gender-based solidarity." For her, then, the absence of strong, woman-defined/organized groups means that women were ineffectual political actors. Jenson's interpretation remains important because new research has not overturned the dominant narrative of reform; the relative "absence" of women from the abortion debate is generally unquestioned.<sup>26</sup> And yet the allegedly

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<sup>25</sup> Emphasis added. Jenson, "Getting to *Morgentaler*," 25-26. Karen Dubinsky made a similar argument, although on a more limited scale. See Karen Dubinsky, Lament for a "Patriarchy Lost"? Anti-feminism, Anti-abortion, and R.E.A.L. Women in Canada? (Ottawa: Canadian Research Institute for the Advancement of Women, 1985), 8-9.

<sup>26</sup> Melissa Haussman's 2000 article on abortion law reform is a good example of the standard retelling of this narrative, citing Jenson's piece to explain the "absence" of women's voices. See Melissa Haussman, "'What Does Gender Have to Do with Abortion Law?' Canadian Women's Movement-Parliamentary Interactions on Reform Attempts, 1969-91," International Journal of Canadian Studies 21 (Spring 2000), 130.

“weak and diffuse” nature of women’s voices needs to be interrogated. By understanding “the personal as political” and accepting that individual voices heard across a range of sites can be powerful in shifting dominant understandings, we can suggest that women’s voices in this decade were central to placing the abortion debate in the public sphere and contributing to change.

Leslie Reagan’s work on the United States assists with the problematizing of Jenson’s contentions about women’s missing language. Of American women, Reagan suggests that “instead of visualizing women as gagged and silenced, it is more helpful to envision them talking about abortion as a ‘secret.’”<sup>27</sup> She continues, “Emphasizing the ‘silence’ surrounding abortion...ignores what women did say.... *Women talked about abortion often.*” Reagan suggests that women talked about it in “semiprivate, semipublic spaces.”<sup>28</sup> This study argues that not only were Canadian women talking about abortion in the manner Reagan suggests, but that they were doing so even more openly than Reagan allows for American women.

Cracks in the dominant narrative are beginning to show. In her 2003 dissertation, “Shifting Interests: The Medical Discourse on Abortion in English Canada, 1850-1969,” Tracy Penny Light looks at discussions within the Canadian Medical Association to map the medical discourse on abortion, which had implications outside of the medical field since the dialogue established by physicians spilled over into the dialogue of other interested parties.<sup>29</sup> This influence is also significant because the dominant narrative of

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<sup>27</sup> Leslie J. Reagan, When Abortion Was a Crime: Women, Medicine, and Law in the United States, 1867-1973 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 21.

<sup>28</sup> Emphasis added. Reagan, When Abortion Was a Crime, 21.

<sup>29</sup> Penny Light, “Shifting Discourses,” 211.

abortion law reform focuses on how professional organizations, especially the CMA, grappled with the questions raised by legalizing abortion. Of the debate in the 1960s, Light writes, “Most academics investigating abortion in this period suggest that it was the medical profession, first and foremost, who lobbied for change to the abortion laws in order to protect their own profession and not for any other reason.” She argues, however, that her “examination of the medical profession’s discussions of abortion suggests that the medical discourse in the postwar period was no different than in other periods.”<sup>30</sup> Light’s observation raises the issue of why change occurred when it did since, as she asserts, the medical discourse among doctors changed little. Instead, for her, the noteworthy change in the 1960s was “the extension of the medical profession’s power” to make abortion decisions for social considerations and not just for medical reasons.<sup>31</sup> In addition to a broadening of the reasons for which abortion became permissible, one wonders whether the surprisingly public discussions women were in fact having – the same ones that have generally been ignored in the literature – could account, at least in part, for the timing of the law change.

Light acknowledges the influence of women’s voices, although somewhat indirectly given her focus on the medical profession. Reacting to Jenson’s claim that women were silent, Light argues, “It must be made clear that women’s voices were present.” She further suggests that Jenson’s argument “neglects to take into account the position of some doctors that women’s welfare was a key issue in the revisions by assuming that the medical profession, indeed, the medicalization of abortion, is

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<sup>30</sup> Penny Light, “Shifting Interests,” 188.

<sup>31</sup> Penny Light, “Shifting Interests,” 194.

homogeneous and not feminist.”<sup>32</sup> In other words, some doctors advocated for abortion law reform out of concern for their female patients, undoubtedly influenced, in some cases, by the women’s thoughts and desires expressed during appointments. Light’s work importantly argues that Jenson overstates the absence of women’s voices and raises the issue of why change occurred when it did. Nevertheless because of her focus on physicians, her work necessarily allows room for women’s voices only as they were conveyed through the actions or words of their physicians. Thus, while her work hints at the need to reform the dominant narrative, it does not do so in the same ways as this dissertation does.

In Ten Thousand Roses: The Making of a Feminist Revolution (2005), Judy Rebick writes, “*In part because of women’s organizing*, the House of Commons passed an omnibus bill in 1969 that covered abortion, birth control and homosexuality. The new law...placed serious restrictions on abortion. Feminists continued to organize.”<sup>33</sup> Rebick’s book, a collection of oral history interviews with second wave feminist activists, is one of the few works that credit women with contributing to the liberalization of abortion in 1969. Because the interviews are in the foreground, however, Rebick does not elaborate on the nature of women’s contribution to the 1969 law change. While Rebick accepts that women contributed to the liberalization of the abortion law in 1969, the oral histories that touch on abortion focus on the post-1969 actions of women. Still,

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<sup>32</sup> Penny Light continues, “Doctors in the post-war period were keenly interested in protecting their patients’ welfare and, particularly in their discussions of abortion, were seeking ways in which to safeguard that well-being despite legal restrictions for doing so.” Penny Light, “Shifting Interests,” 195-196.

<sup>33</sup> Emphasis added. Judy Rebick, Ten Thousand Roses: The Making of a Feminist Revolution (Toronto: Penguin, 2005), 11.

the emphasis on women's voices and contributions is an important nod to the need to rethink the narrative.

There is considerable new scholarship addressing abortion, which is used contextually in the pages which follow, but these works either do not address the overriding narrative or do not overturn it. Still, the existing literature shows that there is a long tradition of women voicing their concerns around reproductive health issues. As noted earlier, McLaren and McLaren show that many Canadian women wrote letters to Marie Stopes about contraceptive concerns and other scholars exploring birth control in the early twentieth century have similarly made use of women's letters to newspapers on the same issue.<sup>34</sup> Additionally, Penny Light's earlier assertion that medical doctors expressed concerns on behalf of their female patients draws on the pioneering work of Wendy Mitchinson who looked for evidence of women's voices in patient case files. Mitchinson alerts us to the ways women's agency can be practiced through the circumvention and manipulation of medicine and physicians as well as how women could negotiate with their doctors, demonstrating "limited patient agency" within the unequal power relations that define the doctor-patient relationship.<sup>35</sup> In more recent years, Christabelle Sethna's impressive body of work has done much to uncover the experiences and activism of women around birth control and abortion during the 1960s. While her

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<sup>34</sup> McLaren and McLaren, *The Bedroom and the State*, 27. See, for example, Dianne Dodd, "Women's Involvement in the Canadian Birth Control Movement of the 1930s: The Hamilton Birth Control Clinic," in *Delivering Motherhood: Maternal Ideologies and Practices in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> Centuries*, eds. Katerine Arnup, Andrée Lévesque and Ruth Roach Pierson (New York: Routledge, 1990), 164-165.

<sup>35</sup> Wendy Mitchinson, "Agency, Diversity, and Constraints": Women and Their Physicians, Canada, 1850-1950," in *The Politics of Women's Health: Exploring Agency and Autonomy*, ed., Susan Sherwin (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1998), 123. See also Mitchinson, *The Nature of Their Bodies*; Mitchinson, *Giving Birth in Canada*.

work makes important use of women's voices, her aim has not been to revise the dominant narrative I identify here.<sup>36</sup>

### **Voice and Experience: Departing from the Dominant Narrative**

Locating women in the long Sixties who were engaged in public debates and political actions on abortion is only part of the focus of this dissertation. The other part entails listening to these women's voices. Doing so reveals greater vocality than the dominant abortion narrative assumes. Deborah P. Britzman writes, "Voice...suggests the individual's struggle to create and fashion meaning, assert standpoints, and negotiate with others. Voice permits participation in the social world."<sup>37</sup> Canadian women participated in their social worlds by engaging in conversations about abortion throughout the decade. They did so publicly – in Chatelaine magazine, in the Globe and Mail, in letters and briefs to the RCSW, in student and protest papers, and in political actions. Their contributions to the dialogue were important both for themselves and for the broader reform discussions. As Britzman argues, dialogue with others is crucial because "one can

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<sup>36</sup> Christabelle Sethna, "'We Want Facts, Not Moral!' Unwanted Pregnancy, the Toronto Women's Caucus, and Sex Education," in Ontario Since Confederation: A Reader, edited by Edgar-André Montigny and Lori Chambers (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000): 408-428; Sethna, "The University of Toronto Health Service," 265-292; Sethna, "The Evolution of the *Birth Control Handbook: From Student Peer-Education Manual to Feminist Self-empowerment Text, 1968-1975*," Canadian Bulletin of Medical History 23, no. 1 (2006): 89-118; Sethna, "All Aboard? Canadian Women's Abortion Tourism, 1960-1980," in Gender, Health, and Popular Culture: Historical Perspectives, ed. Cheryl Krasnich Warsh (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2011): 89-108.

<sup>37</sup> Britzman further writes: "The struggle for voice begins when a person attempts to communicate meaning to someone else. Finding the words, speaking for oneself and feeling heard by others, are all part of this struggle.... Voice suggests relationships: the individual's relationship to the meaning of her or his lived experience and hence to language, and the individual's relationship to the other, since understanding is social." Deborah P. Britzman, Practice Makes Practice: A Critical Study of Learning to Teach (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2003), 34, 44.

only know the self through relationships with others.”<sup>38</sup> Their contributions were political when we understand the political to include the personal. Bonnie J. Dow relates that the term “the personal is political” “derives from second-wave feminist consciousness-raising groups, which functioned to create awareness that what women perceived to be personal problems were, in fact, shared by other women and were the product of their positions as members of an oppressed political class.”<sup>39</sup> I believe that the term is applicable to many women’s authority claims in the early 1960s, predating the existence of traditionally defined consciousness-raising groups. Many women were educated in other ways, including through personal experiences, observing and sharing the experiences and traumas of family, friends, and neighbours, or through, for example, reading the informative articles in Chatelaine. Seen in this way, women’s involvement in public abortion discussions was a political intervention and was important to their development as political actors. Locating and listening to women’s voices in abortion debates reveals women’s thoughts on abortion, helps to illuminate how they became political actors on the issue, and suggests that their voices were relevant to the revision of the abortion law in the 1960s.

Scholars have long been interested in hearing women’s voices and have hotly debated how best to do so. Published in 1982, Carol Gilligan’s influential In a Different

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<sup>38</sup> Brtizman, Practice Makes Practice, 34. Anne Seller makes a similar point when she states, “As an isolated individual, I often do not know what my experiences are.” As quoted in Lorraine Code, What Can She Know? Feminist Theory and the Construction of Knowledge (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1981), 284. On language and experience see also Joy Parr “Gender History and Historical Practice,” in Joy Parr and Mark Rosenfeld, eds., Gender and History in Canada (Toronto: Copp Clark, 1996): 8-27.

<sup>39</sup> Bonnie J. Dow, “Politicizing Voice,” Western Journal of Communication 61, no. 2 (Spring 1997), 248. See also Nancy Adamson, Linda Briskin, and Margaret McPhail, Feminists Organizing For Change: The Contemporary Women’s Movement in Canada (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1988), 200.

Voice was an important step in the process of seeking out women's "missing" voices. She believes that her work as a psychologist revealed two different voices (men's and women's), with "two ways of speaking about moral problems."<sup>40</sup> Focusing on women's voices, she posits that "the difficulty women experience finding or speaking publicly in their own voices emerges repeatedly in the form of qualification and self-doubt" and that "deference," which is audible in women's voices, was "rooted not only in their social subordination but also in the substance of their moral concern." Moreover, it is women's "sensitivity to the needs of others and the assumption of responsibility for taking care" that leads "women to attend to voices other than their own and to include in their judgment other points of view." She continues, "Women not only define themselves in a context of human relationships but also judge themselves in terms of their ability to care."<sup>41</sup> Gilligan's work has been enthusiastically adopted by many. One pro-choice activist and scholar, for example, accepts Gilligan's "ethic of care" concept because it "resists the subordination of human needs and relationships to so-called 'universal' principles of right and wrong."<sup>42</sup> Many other more recent scholars, working with different approaches, have been critical. Many scholars share the concern of feminist philosopher Lorraine Code, who argues that the idea of "a different voice" essentializes

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<sup>40</sup> Carol Gilligan, In A Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women's Development (1982; repr., Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1993), 1.

<sup>41</sup> In a letter to her readers in the 1993 reprint, Gilligan defined voice: "By voice I mean something like what people mean when they speak of the core of the self. Voice is natural and also cultural. It is composed of breath and sound, words, rhythm, and language. And voice is a powerful psychological instrument and channel, connecting inner and outer worlds." Gilligan, In A Different Voice, xvi, 16-17.

<sup>42</sup> McDonnell, Not An Easy Choice, 49. See also Kellough, Abortion Law, 95-98.

women.<sup>43</sup> Kathy Davis, drawing on post-structuralist theories, writes of the women she has studied, “The feminine voice was hopelessly multiple.... Identities were ongoingly constructed, fluctuating and subject to revision at a moment’s notice,” suggesting the need for more nuanced, and layered interpretations of women’s voices.<sup>44</sup>

Whether they support the notion of a singular “different voice” or argue for multiple women’s voices, these scholars contend that complex power relations must be acknowledged when listening to women’s voices. Code observes, “In discussions of political differences, the dominant voice commonly counts as the norm, from which the muted voice is marked as different.”<sup>45</sup> Also, Code contends, “When and how the voice can be heard, then, is often not within the power of its possessors to decide.”<sup>46</sup> Linda Alcoff agrees, arguing, “Who is speaking, who is spoken of, and who listens is a result, as well as an act, of political struggle. Simply put, the discursive context is a political arena.”<sup>47</sup> These observations are relevant to this study because women’s voices in the 1960s are assumed to be either absent or marginal, subordinated to those of male physicians, politicians, lawyers, and clergymen. Gilligan’s work is valuable because it draws attention to the way women’s voices often convey concerns for others and are full of qualifications, both of which are apparent in the evidence considered in this

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<sup>43</sup> See Code, *What Can She Know*, 105-110. For an extended criticism of Gilligan’s work, see Judy Auerbach et al., “On Gilligan’s ‘In a Different Voice,’” *Feminist Studies* 11, no. 1 (Spring 1985): 149-161.

<sup>44</sup> Kathy Davis, “What’s in a Voice? Methods and Metaphors,” *Feminism Psychology* 4, no. 3 (1994), 353. See also Code, *What Can She Know?* 109. For an interesting dialogue on this, see Linda K. Kerber et al., “On In A Different Voice: *An Interdisciplinary Forum*,” in *Feminism in the Study of Religion*, edited by Darlene M. Juschka (New York: Continuum, 2001): 106-133.

<sup>45</sup> Code, *What Can She Know?*, 105 n. 73.

<sup>46</sup> Code, *What Can She Know?*, 107.

<sup>47</sup> Linda Alcoff, “The Problem of Speaking for Others,” *Cultural Critique* 20 (Winter, 1991-1992), 15. Looking at the apparent silence on abortion in public discussions in China, Nie Jing-Bao cautions that there are a multitude of possible reasons, personal and political, for individual silences. See Nie Jing-Bao, *Behind the Silence: Chinese Voices on Abortion* (Toronto: Rowman & Littlefield, 2005), 31.

dissertation. Yet Gilligan's critics remind us to look for the multiple meanings and political struggles behind those women's voices. In fact, the voices that are heard throughout the Sixties are engaged with the issue of abortion from both personal perspectives as well as from more political, less emotional ones, which suggests that while the "ethic of care" may well apply to some women in this dissertation it does not adequately define all of the voices that are audible. Many women engaged with the issue from other perspectives, including religious, political, and professional ones.

Even when women's voices are not politically dominant, it is important to hear them. Davis argues, "Women are active and knowledgeable subjects who give shape to their lives even when they do not come out on top in most everyday struggles for power."<sup>48</sup> When speaking publicly on abortion, women used a variety of techniques to underscore the authority behind their voices. Like "Desperate," whose letter opens this introduction, women who shared their thoughts about abortion throughout the 1960s did so by drawing from their personal experiences with unplanned and unwanted pregnancies.

Kathy Davis offers other useful ways of interpreting these voices and their authority claims in The Making of Our Bodies, Ourselves (2007). She explores how the popular health book was also an "epistemological project," by which she means one that "centers on knowledge and knowledge practices."<sup>49</sup> In its first incarnation, the health

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<sup>48</sup> Davis, "What's in a Voice?" 360. Bonnie Dow concurs that "'voice' is a political issue: that is, it is about power," which, she argues, stems from one's "social location" which "affects our understanding of knowledge, truth, and meaning." Bonnie J. Dow, "Politicizing Voice," Western Journal of Communication 61, no. 2 (Spring 1997), 245-247.

<sup>49</sup> Kathy Davis, The Making of Our Bodies, Ourselves (Durham: Duke University, 2007), 124. I am indebted to Jenny Ellison and her work for pointing me toward Davis's relevance for my own study. See

booklet, “Women and Their Bodies,” written by twelve Boston-area women, was intended to serve as a guide for a women’s health course. The surprise popularity of the booklet led, in 1973, to Our Bodies, Ourselves, a self-help guide to women’s bodies and women’s issues written by the Boston Women’s Health Book Collective. In subsequent years, the book has had several incarnations and appeared in many translations, shaped not only by the diversity of writers, but also by translations, cultural perceptions, and reader responses worldwide. Davis argues of Our Bodies, Ourselves that the female body is not only anatomical and physiological, but “experiential, which is lived and given meaning by the subject as she moves about in the world around her.”<sup>50</sup> She continues, “In *OBOS*, the act of becoming knowledgeable, of understanding one’s own experiences and using them to engage critically with dominant forms of knowledge, is treated as both individually and collectively empowering for women.”<sup>51</sup>

Davis’s work is particularly relevant in terms of her discussion of “experiential knowledge,” as such knowledge forms the primary basis of knowledge claims made by many of the women in this study who wrote about abortion in the 1960s. Feminist scholars have debated at great length the value of “experience” as an epistemological foundation.<sup>52</sup> Ruth Roach Pierson warns historians to balance the “valorisation of ‘the category of experience’” with “methodological caution” and “methodological

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Ellison, Jenny. “Large as Life: Self-Acceptance and the Fat Body in Canada, 1977-2000,” (PhD Diss. York University, Toronto, 2010), 22-24.

<sup>50</sup> She continues, “And, finally, it is a body that is embedded in a *culture* that, to a greater or lesser degree, devalues femininity.” Davis, Our Bodies, Ourselves, 124.

<sup>51</sup> Davis, Our Bodies, Ourselves, 125.

<sup>52</sup> There are several good summaries of this debate, including Pierson, “Experience, Difference, Dominance and Voice,” 79-106; Louise M. Newman, “Critical Theory and the History of Women: What’s At Stake in Deconstructing Women’s History,” Journal of Women’s History 2, no. 3 (Winter 1991), 58-68; Joan Scott, “Invoking Evidence as Experience,” Canadian Historical Review 92, no. 1 (March 2011), 139-143.

humility.”<sup>53</sup> Also critical of accepting “experience” at face value, Joan Scott contends that “experience is a linguistic event.” Scott continues, “Experience is at once always already an interpretation and something that needs to be interpreted,” which means historians must “take as their project not the reproduction and transmission of knowledge said to be arrived at through experience, but the analysis of the production of that knowledge itself.”<sup>54</sup> Pierson’s and Scott’s cautions are valuable for this project, which relies on letters about abortion that were written not just to share experiences or express opinions, but to persuade the readers to adopt a particular viewpoint.

Still, there is value in Louise M. Newman’s reminder that “although feminism is a politics that is created by the desire to escape the female, escape is impossible, partly because *the physical female body is real and women must live in their bodies*, but also because without the social experience of living as a female there would be no need for feminism.”<sup>55</sup> As Davis argues, it is important not to discredit “women’s experiences altogether,” because doing so would make it difficult to understand “how individual women give meaning to their lived experiences and the cultural and institutionalized discourses in which they are embedded.” Rather, she argues, doing so would overlook “how women’s subjective accounts of their experiences can provide starting points for

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<sup>53</sup> The latter terms are attributed to Uma Narayan. Pierson, “Experience, Difference, Dominance and Voice,” 85-86.

<sup>54</sup> See Joan Scott, “The Evidence of Experience” *Critical Inquiry* 17, no. 4 (Summer 1991), 793, 797.

<sup>55</sup> Joan Scott, *Gender and the Politics of History* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), 5; Louise M. Newman, “Critical Theory and the History of Women: What’s At Stake in Deconstructing Women’s History,” *Journal of Women’s History* 2, no. 3 (Winter 1991), 66 [emphasis added]. Newman herself here draws from Linda Gordon, “What’s New in Women’s History,” in Teresa de Lauretis, ed., *Feminist Studies/Critical Studies* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986). On this point, see also Laura Lee Downs, “If ‘Woman’ is Just an Empty Category, Then Why Am I Afraid to Walk Alone at Night? Identity Politics Meets the Post-Modern Subject,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 35, no. 2 (April 1993), 414-437; Denise Riley, *Am I That Name? Feminism and the Category of Women in History* (Minneapolis : University of Minnesota, 1988).

the critical interrogation of the social, cultural, and political contexts in which these accounts are embedded and from which they derive their meaning.”<sup>56</sup>

Davis argues that the multiple versions of Our Bodies, Ourselves demonstrate the utility of recognizing women’s experiences: “Women’s perceptions, feelings, and understandings are validated as a useful resource in the ongoing, contradictory, and open-ended process of becoming knowledgeable about their bodies. *The epistemological use of sentient knowledge produces a kind of ‘theory in the flesh’...that explores the physical realities of women’s lives.*”<sup>57</sup> Importantly, Davis argues that Our Bodies, Ourselves “counteracts the exclusion of women in the production of knowledge and produces alternative, and often oppositional, interpretations of women’s health and health care needs.”<sup>58</sup> Her focus on these alternative and oppositional understandings of women’s health needs provides a good example of how to read women’s letters on their experiences with unplanned and unwanted pregnancies. For Davis, viewing Our Bodies, Ourselves in this manner allows for “a concept of epistemic agency that links women’s knowledge practices to their possibilities and opportunities for individual and collective empowerment.”<sup>59</sup> Similarly, women’s thoughts and actions on abortion throughout the 1960s, grounded in their personal experiences and motivated by their politics, convey instances when they were empowered to oppose the abortion law. An analysis of the experiential knowledge women used in their letters, which guided their activism,

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<sup>56</sup> Davis, Our Bodies, Ourselves, 132-33.

<sup>57</sup> Emphasis added. Davis, Our Bodies, Ourselves, 134.

<sup>58</sup> Davis, Our Bodies, Ourselves, 135.

<sup>59</sup> Davis, Our Bodies, Ourselves, 136-7.

provides an important first step to changing the dominant narrative on abortion law reform in Canada.

### **Raising a Pen, Raising a Fist: the Women of the (Revised) Abortion Law Reform Narrative**

In a recent article on Canadian working class feminism in the long 1960s, Joan Sangster writes, “The feminist movement associated with the sixties has...been popularly portrayed, particularly by more recent ‘third wave’ writing, as white and middle class, seemingly rather obtuse to race and class differences.” She continues, lamenting, “This image of ‘second wave’ feminism has been quite tenacious despite the evidence accrued against it.”<sup>60</sup> Although Sangster cites no authors guilty of forging this understanding, I draw on her criticism as the starting point for my discussion of the diversity of women found in my dissertation for two reasons.<sup>61</sup> First, since my work falls under the term “third wave” feminist writing, it is open to such criticisms. While I endeavoured to uncover a more diverse group of women in terms of race/ethnicity and class, the women I ultimately studied are fairly representative of the characterization Sangster opposes. That is, they were largely white and often middle class. Yet there are other forms of diversity

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<sup>60</sup> Joan Sangster, “Radical Ruptures: Feminism, Labor, and the Left in the Long Sixties in Canada,” *American Review of Canadian Studies* 40, no. 1 (March 2010), 2.

<sup>61</sup> Sangster cites only one work, Sara Evans’s foreword in *Feminist Coalitions* (2008), a book on second wave feminism in the United States, as evidence that such depictions of Canadian second wave feminism are unfounded. Evans’s forward specifically discusses American “feminists in the 1970s,” which is an important point because Sangster’s article focuses on 1965-1975, which is arguably a period during which the diversity of feminist activists who were focused on women’s issues grew tremendously. See Sara M. Evans, “Foreword,” in *Feminist Coalitions: Historical Perspectives on Second-Wave Feminisms in the United States*, ed. Stephanie Gilmore (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2008), xvii.

that will be highlighted, which are quite important. Second, her criticism draws attention to the need to be attentive to periodization in studies of feminism in post-World War Two Canada since the composition of the women's movement changed dramatically during the 1970s. My findings, specific to 1959-1970 Canada, were influenced by the sources I used, by women's unequal power to make their voices heard, orally or in written form, and by the conditions that determined the diversity of abortion rights advocates and opponents in that period. The following analysis explores issues of diversity during this period, outlining the characteristics of the women studied for this dissertation.

Feminist scholars have criticized the women's movement of this period for treating the white, heterosexual, middle-class female experience as universal.<sup>62</sup> Ruth Roach Pierson explains of the mainstream Canadian women's movement in the late 1960s and early 1970s that the spokeswomen were overwhelmingly "white, middle class, able bodied and college educated," and were urban dwellers who were "at least initially" heterosexual.<sup>63</sup> Including herself in this group, she contends that they "used the language of colonization uncritically," because "we did not distinguish between and among different kinds of colonization."<sup>64</sup> This led to the "marginalization and silencing of women belonging to those social groups colonized within our own country, i.e., poor,

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<sup>62</sup> See, for example, Ruth Roach Pierson, "Experience, Difference, Dominance and Voice in the Writing of Women's History," in *Writing Women's History: International Perspectives*, eds. Karen Offen et al. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991), 93-94.

<sup>63</sup> For a thoughtful article on black and white women in the American women's movement, see Wini Breines, "What's Love Got to Do with It? White Women, Black Women, and Feminism in the Movement Years," *Signs* 27, no. 4 (summer 2002): 1095-1133. See also Ruth Roach Pierson, "The Mainstream Women's Movement and the Politics of Difference," in Ruth Roach Pierson, Marjorie Griffen Cohen, Paula Bourne and Philinda Masters, eds. *Canadian Women's Issues. Volume I: Strong Voices* (Toronto: James Lorimer, 1993), 189.

<sup>64</sup> Pierson, "The Mainstream Women's Movement," 189.

aboriginal, disabled, Black, Asian and others.” Feminist scholars later reproduced this marginalization and silence in the early historiography of the period.<sup>65</sup>

Still, there are also structural and demographic explanations for the lack of attention paid to women of colour during the early years of second wave feminism and women’s liberation. In the Canadian census, only 2.5% of the population in 1961 and 2.4% in 1971 were identified as blacks, Native, or other non-Europeans. Meanwhile, the reported origins of 43.8% and 44.6% of Canada’s population came from the British Isles, with an additional 30.4% and 28.7% comprised of French or French Canadians, and 22.6% and 23% of other European descent.<sup>66</sup> In addition, in the late 1960s and early 1970s, the main racial or ethnic conflict in Canada was not between black and white persons, as it was in the United States, but between French and English Canadians. This tended to overshadow other conflicts, including the growing voices of dissent and protest among Aboriginals.<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> Pierson, “The Mainstream Women’s Movement,” 190. Other critical assessments of the absence of voices of women of colour include pieces in Linda Carty, ed., And Still We Rise: Feminist Political Mobilizing in Contemporary Canada (Toronto: Women’s Press, 1993). For recent research on Aboriginal women’s issues, see Kim Anderson and Bonita Lawrence, eds, Strong Women Stories: Native Vision and Community Survival (Toronto: Sumach, 2003); D. Memee Lavell-Harvard and Jeannette Corbiere Lavell, eds. “Until Our Hearts Are On the Ground”: Aboriginal Mothering, Oppression, Resistance and Rebirth (Toronto: Demeter, 2006); Patricia A. Monture and Patricia D. McGuire, eds. First Voices: An Aboriginal Women’s Reader (Toronto: Inanna, 2009).

<sup>66</sup> In 1961 and 1971, “Asian” persons comprised just 0.7% and 1.3% of the population. Madeline A. Kalbach and Warren E. Kalbach, “Demographic Overview of Ethnic Groups in Canada,” in Race and Ethnic Relations in Canada, Second Edition, ed. Peter S. Li (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 27.

<sup>67</sup> Roxanna Ng, “Sexism, Racism, Canadian Nationalism,” in Returning the Gaze: Essays on Racism, Feminism and Politics, ed. Himani Bannerji (Toronto: Sister Vision, 1993), 227. In the 1971 census, only 62,470 persons in Canada claimed African descent. Moreover, Peter Stamadianos notes that “of the 43,241 Afro-Caribbean immigrants who arrived in the 1960s, 29,059 entered in the three year period following 1967,” which helps to explain the timing of black activism in Canada. See Peter Stamadianos, “Afro-Canadian Activism in the 1960s” (master’s thesis, Concordia University, Montreal, 1994), 66, 77. Additionally, Meg Luxton argues that there were at least “three distinct women’s movements: the rest of Canada, the francophone movement in Québec, and the movements of First Nations women.” See Meg Luxton, “Feminism as a Class Act: Working-Class Feminism and the Women’s Movement in Canada,”

During this period, while blacks were organized, especially in Montreal, Halifax, and Toronto, the extent of black women's focus on women's issues over "black" issues is not clear. Scholarly research on black women's organizing in Canada tends to show black women focusing on issues that affected the entire black community and not becoming organized around specifically women's issues until after 1970, and especially from the mid-1970s onward.<sup>68</sup> In his study of political activism in 1960s Montreal, for example, Sean Mills relates that although black women were involved in the political actions of the black community, and that they only began speaking out about sexism and women's issues in public forums in the closing months of 1969.<sup>69</sup> And, while Aboriginal women were focused on women's issues, this did not mean that abortion rights were a central focus. Aboriginal women were fighting, for example, provisions in the *Indian Act* that stripped them of their Indian status when they married non-Indians.<sup>70</sup> In her collection of oral histories with Canadian second wave feminists, Judy Rebick argues that

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Labour/Le Travail 48e (Fall 2001), paragraph 7. <http://www.historycooperative.org/journals/lt/48/03luxton.html> (accessed July 2007).

<sup>68</sup> The focus on civil rights issues (equality, immigration), as opposed to "women's" issues like reproduction, is seen in Lawrence Hill, Women of Vision: The Story of the Canadian Negro Women's Association, 1951-1976 (Toronto: Umbrella Press, 1996), 58-67; David Austin, "All Roads Led to Montreal: Black Power, the Caribbean, and the Black Radical Tradition in Canada," Journal of African American History 92, no. 4 (Fall 2007), 516-539; Amy St. Amand, "'We, the Invisible': Women of the Civil Rights Movement in Canada," Journal of Undergraduate Studies at Trent 3, no. 1 (2010), 28-37. Another study points to a 1973 conference hosted by the Canadian Negro Women's Association as an important year for black women's organizing in Canada to focus on their double-discrimination. See Ken Alexander and Avis Glaze, Towards Freedom: The African-Canadian Experience (Toronto: Umbrella Press, 1996), 225. See also Anulla Linders, "Victory and Beyond: A Historical Comparative Analysis of the Outcomes of the Abortion Movements in Sweden and the United States," Sociological Forum 19, no. 3 (September 2004), 381.

<sup>69</sup> The examples he cites of women being critical of sexism within the black movement in Montreal are letters to the editors of UHURU, a black community newspaper, dated November and December 1969. See Sean Mills, The Empire Within: Postcolonial Thought and Political Activism in Sixties Montreal (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2010), 117-118, 244 fn. 131 and fn. 132.

<sup>70</sup> Sharon D. McIvor, "Aboriginal Women's Rights as 'Existing Rights,'" in First Voices: An Aboriginal Women's Reader, eds. Patricia A. Monture and Patricia D. McGuire (Toronto: Inanna, 2009), 374.

“the majority of women of colour did not feel welcome in white-dominated women’s groups” and consequently began organizing their own groups in the 1970s and 1980s.<sup>71</sup>

Yet even in Rebick’s collection, which is self-consciously diverse, all of the women of colour she interviewed either came to Canada or became active in 1970 or later. So while Rebick is correct that women of colour might not have related to organizations dominated by white women, their absence may also reflect demographic and structural issues at least as much as efforts, conscious or not, to exclude them. The politics of “difference” emerged as an issue for women’s groups in Canada during the 1970s and it was only then and later that the women’s groups that were dominated by white women began to explore the issue of systemic racism.<sup>72</sup>

Still, studies of black women in the United States raise questions about the reproductive experiences of women of colour in Canada, which have not received much attention from scholars and are not addressed in this dissertation. The main reasons for the limited discussion in this dissertation are the lack of evidence about the racial or ethnic identity of women writing letters to the media or the Royal Commission and the overwhelmingly white composition of the movement for abortion law reform in the 1960s. Research about American black women’s efforts around birth control reveals the complex and sometimes contradictory positions adopted within the black community

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<sup>71</sup> This is an observation supported by the work of Alice Echols, although the timing of the observation is not the same. See Alice Echols, Daring to Be Bad: Radical Feminism in America 1967-1975 (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minneapolis Press, 1989), 32; Judy Rebick, Ten Thousand Roses: The Making of a Feminist Revolution (Toronto: Penguin, 2005), 130.

<sup>72</sup> Adamson et al, Feminist Organizing for Change, 61; Ruth Roach Pierson, Marjorie Griffen Cohen, Paula Bourne and Philinda Masters, eds. Canadian Women’s Issues. Volume I: Strong Voices (Toronto: James Lorimer, 1993), 186-187; Sue Findlay, “Problematizing Privilege: Another Look at Representation,” in Linda Carty, ed., And Still We Rise: Feminist Political Mobilizing in Contemporary Canada (Toronto: Women’s Press, 1993): 207-224.

there. While black American women advocated for legal birth control and abortions, for example, they opposed sterilization because of its links to the eugenic movement and its use against “the weak, the oppressed, and the disenfranchised.”<sup>73</sup> Certainly forced sterilization has an ugly history among Canadian Aboriginals and poor women as women were often classified as “feeble-minded” to justify racist and classist policies.<sup>74</sup> Yet the recommendations made in the Report of the RCSW sought the clarification of sterilization laws to protect doctors from liability and to allow (presumably white) women to use it as a form of birth control, ignoring the experiences of non-white, middle-class women.<sup>75</sup>

On the subject of race and ethnicity in Canada during the long 1960s, it is telling that the Report of the Royal Commission on the Status of Women in Canada (1970) does not mention either. In her study of the media portrayal of women and women’s issues at the Commission’s public hearings, Barbara M. Freeman notes that the term “racism” did not appear in any of the media reports about the Commission and Aboriginal issues.<sup>76</sup> Moreover, while the report briefly discussed issues confronting Native women (identified as “Indian,” “Eskimo,” and “Métis”) in Canada, the closest it came to discussing other

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<sup>73</sup> Jessie M. Rodrique, “The Black Community and the Birth Control Movement,” in Passion and Power: Sexuality in History, eds. Kathy Peiss and Christina Simmons (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1989), 140, 142-143; Loretta J. Ross, “African-American Women and Abortion,” in Abortion Wars: A Half Century of Struggle, 1950-2000, ed. Rickie Solinger (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 177-178; Johanna Schoen, Choice and Coercion: Birth Control, Sterilization, and Abortion in Public Health and Welfare (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005).

<sup>74</sup> Report On the overrepresentation of Aboriginals in Alberta’s efforts to sterilize the “feeble-minded” see Angus McLaren, Our Own Master Race: Eugenics in Canada, 1885-1945 (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1990), 160; Jana Grekul, Harvey Krahn, and Dave Odynak, “Sterilizing the ‘Feeble-Minded’: Eugenics in Alberta, Canada, 1929-1972,” Journal of Historical Sociology 17, no. 4 (December 2004), 475. See also Alison Sawyer, “Women’s Bodies, Men’s Decisions,” Canadian Woman Studies 3, no. 2 (1981), 92-93.

<sup>75</sup> Report of the Royal Commission on the Status of Women in Canada (Ottawa, 1970), 280-81.

<sup>76</sup> Barbara M. Freeman, The Satellite Sex: The Media and Women’s Issues in English Canada, 1966-1971 (Waterloo: Wilfred Laurier University Press, 2001), 191.

women of colour was in the short chapter on women immigrants, who are not identified beyond that term.<sup>77</sup> Even in a chapter on women living in poverty, race and ethnicity were not specifically mentioned and the women identified as being especially at risk in Canadian society were single mothers, elderly, and Native women.<sup>78</sup> In her analysis of the hearings, Freeman identifies just one black female presenter (it is unclear how many other black women may have presented or attended hearings), which is significant because it raises the question of how black women in Canada did (or, more accurately, did not) relate to this state-sponsored exercise in equality.<sup>79</sup> Similarly, Freeman notes that even at hearings held in the North, Aboriginal women's relative absence was perceived by the media as “‘disappointing’ and somewhat puzzling,” indicating the limited extent to which Aboriginal women related to the RCSW as well.<sup>80</sup>

Because of these demographic and structural features of Canada and the Canadian women's movement and because of the sources used, this study makes claims primarily about white, often middle and sometimes working class, Anglophone women. While the letters to the RCSW studied here included some from women in Quebec, they were from Anglophone groups. In part, this focus on Anglophone women stems from my own limitations with the French language, but it also relates to the fact that women's organizing in Quebec in this period was inexorably linked to issues of independence and identity and deserves a more nuanced analysis than is possible here.

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<sup>77</sup> Report of the Royal Commission, 357-364. Canadian immigration policies worked against blacks and other people of colour until the 1960s. See Freda Hawkins, Canada and Immigration: Public Policy and Public Concern (Montreal and London: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1972), 76-77; Joseph Mensah, Black Canadians: History, Experience, Social Conditions. Second Edition (Halifax: Fernwood, 2010), 71.

<sup>78</sup> Report, 319-331.

<sup>79</sup> See Freeman, The Satellite Sex, 114.

<sup>80</sup> Freeman, The Satellite Sex, 202.

The focus on English Canada is also determined, in part, by the sources used in this dissertation. Maclean-Hunter acquired the French-Canadian magazine, Revue Moderne in 1960, and re-launched it as Châtelaine: La Revue Moderne in an effort to prevent American women's magazines from capturing the Canadian market. Yet while some content from the English language Chatelaine was translated and used in the French edition, the Montreal-based magazine employed its own editorial staff and, according to Valerie Korinek, "The different editor, editorials, fiction, and, in many cases, general-interest articles created a different tone."<sup>81</sup> Articles and readers' letters therein, consequently, may well warrant a separate analysis elsewhere. As a government-sponsored endeavour, the RCSW was officially bilingual with many bilingual staff members, including two Francophone commissioners, Jacques Henripin and Jeanne Lapointe. Yet for the most part, although the Commission received French-language briefs and held hearings in Quebec, the Report seldom differentiates between issues confronting English and Francophone women.<sup>82</sup> Barbara Freeman contends of the public hearings that Commission Chair Florence Bird made an effort to stay away from the controversial subject of English-French relations, just as she tried to downplay anything potentially controversial, since she did not want to adversely affect the commission's reputation and hinder its opportunity to advance women's status.<sup>83</sup> Finally, in terms of

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<sup>81</sup> Valerie Korinek, Roughing It in the Suburbs: Reading Chatelaine Magazine in the Fifties and Sixties (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000), 35.

<sup>82</sup> For example, in its recommendations about altering the pension, the Report is careful to specify both the Canada and Quebec pension plans, but otherwise little acknowledges possible differences between the women. See Report of the Royal Commission on the Status of Women in Canada (Ottawa, 1970), 395, 397.

<sup>83</sup> Freeman, The Satellite Sex, 35.

the Abortion Caravan, although some women from Montreal participated, the event was largely organized and attended by women from English Canada.

Methodologically, it is difficult to determine a woman's race or ethnicity from written sources unless she described it explicitly. In her study of Chatelaine magazine in the 1950s and 1960s, Valerie J. Korinek notes that it was unusual for women to identify their age or race in letters except in response to a specific article on race/ethnicity. Responses to abortion articles did not carry such identifying characteristics, although it is possible that responses came from women of varying ethnicities and races.<sup>84</sup> So, while this study may include letters from women of colour written to the editors of Chatelaine and the Globe and Mail or to the RCSW, they did not self-identify as such. Additionally, Doris Anderson and the women who were interviewed about their participation in the Abortion Caravan were all white, and most were of British or Northern European descent; no women of colour volunteered to be interviewed or were referred to this study by others.

Notwithstanding their shared characteristics, the white, often middle class women whose voices, words, and actions are analyzed in this dissertation were not homogeneous. They differed in their places of residence, marital status, educational attainment, religious beliefs, and, especially, age or generation. A brief look at a couple of characteristics of Chatelaine's readers demonstrates how they defy easy categorization, underscoring the difficulties of exploring their diversity. Readers who were identified in a 1955 reader

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<sup>84</sup> Korinek makes this assertion in relation to a 1959 article titled "Are Canadians really tolerant?" but does not report how many articles on race or ethnicity appeared during the two decades of her study. Korinek, Roughing It in the Suburbs, 288.

study differ in some ways from the readers who, in 1968, responded to a questionnaire in the magazine about women's equality (including abortion).<sup>85</sup> For example, of readers identified in the 1955 study, one third lived in rural areas versus just 16% who answered the 1968 questionnaire.<sup>86</sup> Whereas in both samples, the majority of respondents were married and, perhaps contrary to expectations, a slightly higher proportion in the latter sample was married: 67.9% in 1955 versus 84% in 1968.<sup>87</sup> While it is sometimes hard to make comparisons between groups since not all identifying statistics were included in printed articles or different measures were used, such differences between the two groups highlight how those responding specifically to articles and questionnaires on women's status or reproductive issues were not necessarily representative of the readership of the magazine as a whole, but self-selected because of their strong opinions on abortion. It highlights, as well, the diversity in the written sources beyond race and class.

Other important differences extend to all of the women studied in this project. While almost half of the women reading *Chatelaine* magazine in 1955 had finished high school, only a very small portion had gone on to university; this figure contrasts importantly with the women who participated in the Abortion Caravan, almost all of whom were attending or had attended some university and in some cases graduate school. Briefs to the RCSW, meanwhile, were written by students, professionals, and homemakers. These findings suggest the existence of very different educational experiences among the women in this study.

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<sup>85</sup> For the 1955 and 1968 statistics see Mollie Gillen, "Report: What You Think of Women's Status," *Chatelaine*, July 1968, 76; Valerie J. Korinek, *Roughing it in Suburbia: Reading Chatelaine Magazine, 1950-1969* (PhD dissertation, University of Toronto, Toronto, 1996), 58.

<sup>86</sup> Korinek, *Roughing it in the Suburbs*, 67; Gillen, "Report," 76. In 1955

<sup>87</sup> Korinek, *Roughing it in the Suburbs*, 66; Gillen, "Report," 76.

Unlike some studies of English Canada that focus on Ontario (or Toronto), this study includes women from across the country. Women readers wrote letters to Chatelaine from all provinces, from small towns, and from large cities. This diversity is similarly represented in the letters and briefs to the RCSW. While there were fewer letters from the Maritimes, British Columbia and the Prairie provinces are as well represented as is Ontario. Despite the diversity of the locations represented in the letters and briefs, women's positions on abortions did not vary significantly by region. Similarly, the women of the Abortion Caravan hailed from both big cities and small towns, although they were living in Vancouver, Toronto, and Ottawa at the time of the Caravan. Although there were a few American immigrants among the participants, most were Canadian born.

Religiously, women from a range of Protestant denominations as well as Catholics participated in abortion discussions in letters to the editors of Chatelaine and the Globe and Mail and to the RCSW; there were likely Jewish participants as well, but women seldom revealed their religious backgrounds except when making a specific point about religion. Religion was mentioned most often by women whose religious views influenced their anti-abortion stance or by women who resented the imposition of religion (often naming the Catholic Church specifically) on the abortion debate. While the Abortion Caravan did not include practicing adherents, the participants had backgrounds that included Protestantism, Catholicism, and Judaism. As the chapter on the Caravan women reveals, despite their claims to the contrary, religion seems to have affected them in important ways.

The most obvious distinction among the women in this study is that of generational difference. While the focus of much of this analysis is on the words of individual women, many of these women belonged to generationally distinct groups or organizations that shared or helped form their ideas. To contextualize these generational differences, it helps to identify the emergence or formation of several women's groups in Canada. Some of these have long histories; the National Council of Women was founded in 1893, the Canadian Federation of University Women in 1919, and the Federation of Business and Professional Women's Clubs in 1930. These three, among others, contributed to the dialogue on women's reproduction in the 1960s by submitting briefs to government hearings as well as through their own group practices, policies, and resolutions. Women from other groups with shorter histories, like the Voice of Women (VOW), which formed in 1960, also made their voices heard. Although its primary focus was nuclear war, VOW engaged in activism on "social justice issues," including birth control, and it was an important group because it offered so many women a vehicle for political expression early in the decade.<sup>88</sup> Many other women's groups formed in the 1960s; notable ones include the Committee for the Equality of Women (1966), Fédération des femmes du Québec (1966), the Women's Caucus of the Student Union for Peace Action (1967), Students for a Democratic Society's Women's Caucus at Simon Fraser University (1968), Toronto Women's Liberation Movement (1968), New Feminists (1969), Montreal Women's Liberation (1969), the Women's Caucus of the

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<sup>88</sup> Frances Early, "Canadian Women and the International Arena in the Sixties: The Voice of Women/La voix des femmes and the Opposition to the Vietnam War," in Dimitry Anastakis, ed., The Sixties: Passion, Politics, and Style (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2008), 28.

Waffle (1969), and Regina Women's Liberation (1970).<sup>89</sup> This list is not exhaustive, but gives a sense of the chronology of emerging women's groups.

There were important distinctions in the focus and composition of these groups. The older groups as well as the first two formed in 1966 were mainstream in the sense that they believed in working with or through the state to seek change. Some of their members would have been the women reading and perhaps writing to Chatelaine; others would have been among the women who submitted briefs to the RCSW. The later liberation groups, in some instances, may have included their daughters. They were primarily young women who were not interested in state-oriented feminism and rejected – at least to some degree – the legitimacy of the state. Political scientist Jill Vickers identifies these positions as “integrative (or liberal) feminism and transformative (radical and socialist) feminisms.”<sup>90</sup> While some of the women in the liberation groups wrote to the RCSW, they felt (or came to feel) themselves at odds not only with the government, but with the women of the mainstream groups, as is seen in the planning and execution of the Abortion Caravan. For the most part, the women's liberationists who planned and executed the Caravan rejected Chatelaine as “hopelessly bourgeois” and out-of-touch with their lives.<sup>91</sup> They did not support the state-oriented or liberal feminism of women like Doris Anderson, Judy LaMarsh, or Laura Sabia. While Vickers argues that there was

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<sup>89</sup> For a select chronology of important events between 1867 and 1988, see Nancy Adamson, Linda Briskin and Margaret McPhail, Feminist Organizing for Change: The Contemporary Women's Movement in Canada (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1988), 298-302. Also important in this time period is the publication of the McGill Birth Control Handbook (1968). See Christabelle Sethna, “The Evolution of the Birth Control Handbook: From Student Peer-Education Manual to Feminist Self-empowerment Text, 1968-1975,” Canadian Bulletin of Medical History 23, no. 1 (2006), 89-118.

<sup>90</sup> On these two positions, see Jill Vickers, “The Intellectual Origins of the Women's Movements in Canada,” in Challenging Times: The Women's Movement in Canada and the United States, eds. Constance Backhouse and David H. Flaherty (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1992), 40.

<sup>91</sup> Peggy Morton, telephone interview, February 17, 2007.

cooperation among the different generations of Canadian feminists represented by these groupings, her evidence suggests that the groups learned to cooperate as their work progressed through the 1970s and beyond, downplaying the initial disdain some women's liberationists seem to have had for their more moderate counterparts.<sup>92</sup> These generational differences become most apparent in the analysis of the Abortion Caravan.

All of these findings, then, suggest that the women participating in public discussions on abortion law reform were diverse in important ways. While they were overwhelmingly white, often middle class, and occasionally working class, they were diverse in terms of their educational experiences, religious beliefs, places of origin, and age/generation. They were not a homogenous group despite their shared whiteness.

### **Reading and Hearing Women's Words: Methodology and Sources**

This dissertation relies on women's words. In the first two chapters, the evidence consists of their written words: letters to the editors of magazines and newspapers and letters and briefs to a government commission. The last two chapters use women's spoken words, captured as oral histories, in addition to written sources. There are important differences in how these sources were collected and used. This section outlines how the evidence for each chapter was approached methodologically.

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<sup>92</sup> See Jill Vickers, "The Intellectual Origins," 42, 51, 53. She suggests that sites of "intergenerational communication about feminism" include the activities of the Voice of Women and Leftist and Socialist organizing.

In Interpreting Abortion Rhetoric (1990), Celeste Michelle Condit defines “framing” as “the use of ambiguity and multiple interlocking themes to construct a simple, singular square that limits and controls the meaning of some significant object or event.”<sup>93</sup> Women’s letters to the editors of Chatelaine magazine and the Globe and Mail indicate how they responded to the particular “frames” employed by those two publications. But, as Stuart Hall cautions, although a text might be “encoded” with certain messages or meanings, when “decoded” by the reader, those messages and meanings need not be interpreted in the manner in which they were intended. Hall identified three types of “decoding”: (1) “preferred readings” refer to the reader who “takes the connoted meaning...full and straight” or decodes the message as it has been encoded; (2) “the negotiated code or position” refers to a reader whose decoding of the text “contains a mixture of adaptive and oppositional elements”; and (3) the “globally contrary” or “oppositional code” refers to the reader who “detotalizes the message in the preferred code in order to retotalize the message within some alternative framework of reference.”<sup>94</sup> In Roughing It in the Suburbs: Reading Chatelaine Magazine in the Fifties and Sixties (2000), Valerie Korinek emphasizes the importance of readers’ agency. She observes, “Readers noted that the letters page frequently inspired them to reread and re-evaluate contentious articles, stories, or editorials. Letters were useful for editorial

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<sup>93</sup> Celeste Michelle Condit, Interpreting Abortion Rhetoric: Communicating Social Change (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1990), 226.

<sup>94</sup> Stuart Hall, “Encoding/Decoding,” in The Cultural Studies Reader, ed., 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (New York: Routledge: 2007), 485-487. See also Joanne Meyerowitz and Amy Aronson on readers letters as a window into how readers reacted to magazine articles: Joanne Meyerowitz, “Beyond the Feminine Mystique: A Reassessment of Postwar Mass Culture, 1946-1958,” in Not June Cleaver: Women and Gender in Postwar America, 1945-1960 (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1994), 245-246; Amy Aronson, “Still Reading Women’s Magazines: Reconsidering the Tradition a Half Century After *The Feminine Mystique*,” American Journalism 27, no. 2 (2010): 31-61.

feedback, but they also taught other readers how to read the magazine critically.”<sup>95</sup> My analysis of letters from magazine and newspaper readers draws on Hall’s and Korinek’s ideas to examine how women responded to articles on abortion in myriad ways, reflecting their agency as active readers and what Kathy Davis terms their “hopelessly multiple” and “ongoingly negotiated” identities.<sup>96</sup> In addition to relying on the magazine and newspaper articles, the analysis in this chapter is supplemented by an interview with Doris Anderson, *Chatelaine*’s editor from 1957 to 1977.

The analysis of letters to the Royal Commission on the Status of Women in Canada also pays attention to the way women frame discussions of abortion, but does so with greater emphasis on their construction of authority over the issue. I first approached the letters in this manner in a conference paper entitled “‘Not vitally concerned’: Canadian Women’s Efforts to Construct Authority over Abortion during the 1960s,” delivered in May 2009 at the annual meeting at the Canadian Historical Association.<sup>97</sup> Building on the analysis first presented there, I use Deborah P. Britzman’s concept of voice to read these letters. As noted earlier, she writes, “Voice...suggests the individual’s struggle to create and fashion meaning, assert standpoints, and negotiate with others. Voice permits participation in the social world.”<sup>98</sup> Here I also rely on Davis’s idea that

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<sup>95</sup> Valerie Korinek, *Roughing It in the Suburbs: Reading Chatelaine Magazine in the Fifties and Sixties* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000), 8.

<sup>96</sup> Davis, “What’s in a Voice?” 353.

<sup>97</sup> Shannon Stettner, “‘Not vitally concerned’: Canadian Women’s Efforts to Construct Authority over Abortion during the 1960s.” Presented at the Canadian Historical Association Annual Meeting, Ottawa, May 2009.

<sup>98</sup> Britzman further writes: “The struggle for voice begins when a person attempts to communicate meaning to someone else. Finding the words, speaking for oneself and feeling heard by others, are all part of this struggle.... Voice suggests relationships: the individual’s relationship to the meaning of her or his lived experience and hence to language, and the individual’s relationship to the other, since understanding is social.” Britzman, *Practice Makes Practice*, 34, 44.

women's use of personal experiences creates a "theory in the flesh" to explore the "physical realities" of their lives and how these affected their positions on abortion.<sup>99</sup>

Moreover, Christine Burr's use of letters written to Prime Minister Lester B. Pearson in relation to divorce reform is instructive. Her article, "Letters to Mike: Divorce Reform in Canada in the 1960s," points to how letter writers constructed narratives designed to promote their particular stance on the issue of reform, based on their specific "life experiences."<sup>100</sup>

For A Generation Divided: the New Left, the New Right, and the 1960s (1999), Rebecca Klatch interviewed American activists from the sixties with the aim of focusing on "the formation of identity and the construction of meaning in individual lives," paying attention to both the individual catalysts and the "larger social forces" that motivated political activism.<sup>101</sup> In addition to using traditional primary and secondary sources, the analysis in the last two chapters of this study relies on oral narratives from interviews with fifteen Caravan participants.<sup>102</sup> Material from these interviews is used to identify the characteristics of the women who participated in the Abortion Caravan and explore

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<sup>99</sup> Davis, Our Bodies, Ourselves, 134.

<sup>100</sup> Christina Burr, "Letters to Mike: Personal Narratives and Divorce Reform in Canada in the 1960s," in Family Matters: Papers in Post-Confederation Canadian Family History, eds. Lori Chambers and Edgar-Andre Montigny (Toronto: Canadian Scholars' Press, 1998), 396.

<sup>101</sup> Rebecca E. Klatch. A Generation Divided: the New Left, the New Right, and the 1960s (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 13.

<sup>102</sup> "Oral narratives" is the term used to denote "the material gathered in the oral history process," as opposed to "oral history," which "refers to the whole enterprise: recording, transcribing, editing, and making public the result," a distinction defined by Sherna Berger Gluck and Daphne Patai, eds., Women's Words: The Feminist Practice of Oral History (New York: Routledge, 1991), 4, endnote 1. This choice is further informed by the work of Faye Ginsburg, who chose not to use the term "life histories," opting instead for "life stories" in recognition of the "narrative devices used by [pro-life and pro-choice] activists to frame their lives." See Faye Ginsburg, "Dissonance and Harmony: The Symbolic Function of Abortion in Activists' Life Stories," in Interpreting Women's Lives: Feminist Theory and Personal Narratives, eds., The Personal Narratives Group (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989): 59-84.

their remembrances of events. The lists of women interviewed by Frances Wasserlein and Ann Thomson were helpful in identifying women who were involved in the Caravan from its inception, and some of these women were interviewed.<sup>103</sup>

In contrast to Wasserlein's and Thomson's focus on women from the Vancouver Women's Caucus, I also interviewed women who joined the protest in Toronto and Ottawa. In addition to using the internet to search for many of these participants, I placed notices on electronic listservs and discussion boards. In some instances, my involvement with the Ontario Coalition for Abortion Clinics led me to other interviewees. The greatest success I experienced in locating participants was through the snowball technique; most women I interviewed suggested the names of people they thought I should interview and often provided me with contact information. Very few women turned down the opportunity to be interviewed. Still, the interviews reflect the opinions of women who have remained, even peripherally, involved in activist work. These women are activists and understanding their identities as such is important to interpreting the narratives they construct. The demographic characteristics of the women in these interviews correspond to those identified in other studies that have sought to describe women's liberationists in North America. Together with the demographic characteristics identified by Wasserlein and Thomson, they provide a collective biography of the Caravan participants.

Oral historians have long ceded the notion of objectivity, both in the process of collecting narratives and in the interpretation of them. The narrator's and the

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<sup>103</sup> Wasserlein, "'An Arrow Aimed at the Heart,' 132-133; Thomson, Winning Choice on Abortion, 42-43.

interviewer's subjectivity feed the interview process and power differentials are also at play.<sup>104</sup> In her seminal piece "Interviewing Women: A Contradiction in Terms" (1981), Ann Oakley argues that the best interview results are obtained when "the relationship of interviewer and interviewee is non-hierarchical and when the interviewer is prepared to invest his or her own personal identity in the relationship."<sup>105</sup> Yet even under such circumstances, unless the interviewer is willing to collaborate with the narrator on the end product scholars note that power differentials remain in the interpretation stage.<sup>106</sup>

In terms of my interviews, I believe that any privilege I may have had as a scholar was tempered by a number of factors. When I began the interview process, I was excited to meet these women I so admired for their participation in the Caravan. The first interview I conducted, however, had a somewhat demoralizing effect because the interviewee was both fairly ambivalent about abortion politics and remembered the Caravan as "just another" of many such protests. I soon realized that the interviews were not going to be the big pro-choice love-in I had imagined. Seeing the individuality and diverse experiences and beliefs of my narrators, however, helped me to be critical of my

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<sup>104</sup> See, for example, The Personal Narratives Group, *Interpreting Women's Lives*; Paul Thompson, *The Voice of the Past: Oral History* (London: Oxford University Press, 1978, 2000); Gluck and Daphne, eds, *Women's Words*; Geiger, "What's so Feminist about Women's Oral History?", 169-182; Alessandro Portelli, "What Makes Oral History Different," in *The Oral History Reader*, eds. Robert Perks and Alistair Thomson (New York: Routledge, 1998, 2006): 32-42; Susan H. Armitage and Sherna Berger Gluck, "Reflections on Women's Oral History: An Exchange," in *The Oral History Reader*, eds. Robert Perks and Alistair Thomson (New York: Routledge, 1998, 2006): 73-82.

<sup>105</sup> Ann Oakley, "Interviewing Women: A Contradiction in Terms," in *Turning Points in Qualitative Research: Tying Knots in a Handkerchief*, eds. Yvonna S. Lincoln and Norman K. Denzin (Walnut Creek, California: AltaMira, 2003), 258. For a recent contribution on the topic, see Steven High, "Sharing Authority: An Introduction," *Journal of Canadian Studies* 43, no. 1 (Winter 2009): 12-34.

<sup>106</sup> See, for example, Gluck and Patai, eds, *Women's Words*, 2; Portelli, "What Makes Oral History Different," 34; Joan Sangster, "Telling Our Stories: Feminist Debates and the Use of Oral History," in *Rethinking Canada: The Promise of Women's History*, 4<sup>th</sup> edition, eds Veronica Strong-Boag, Mona Gleason, and Adele Perry (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 225-226.

subjects when it came time to interpret their remembrances – a task that had initially seemed contrary to the goal of capturing their words.

Privilege or power in the interview process was also affected by the various efforts, conscious or not, that my narrators made to assert authority over the interview.<sup>107</sup> Strategies varied: one narrator began our meeting by laughingly correcting a typo on my permission form; another told me she was relieved, when she opened her door, to see that I was not “one of those skinny, red-headed TVO feminists”; a few others told me what my study should include, often beginning sentences with comments like “well of course you know about...”; a few sent email “corrections” to thoughts they had shared during our interview, sometimes cancelling out unscripted responses that were more powerful than the considered substitutions; and one asked me to remove all “ums” so that she would sound more articulate than she had felt during the interview. Perhaps because I was at least thirty years younger than most of my subjects, because of our respective personalities, or because of my admiration for their political participation, none of the women I interviewed seemed intimidated by what has been theorized as a power differential.<sup>108</sup> This is not surprising, as these women are not typical of the “everyday”

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<sup>107</sup> Acknowledging my admiration of these women and the fact that that may have affected the interview process is influenced by similar acknowledgments made by other oral historians. See, for example, Pamela Sugiman, “Passing Time, Moving Memories: Interpreting Wartime Narratives of Japanese Canadian Women,” *Histoire sociale/Social History* 36 (73) (2004), 58; Valerie Yow, “Do I Like Them Too Much: Effects of the Oral History Interview on the Interviewer and Vice-versa,” in *The Oral History Reader*, eds. Robert Perks and Alistair Thomson (New York: Routledge, 1998, 2006): 54-72. Also, on shifting power relations in interviews, see Brigid Limerick, Tracey Burgess-Limerick, and Margaret Grace, “The Politics of Interviewing: Power Relations and Accepting the Gift,” *Qualitative Studies in Education* 9, no. 4 (1996): 449-460.

<sup>108</sup> For the effect age differentials can have on oral histories see, for example, Yow, “Do I Like Them Too Much,” 64 ; Sangster, “Telling Our Stories,” 226, 230.

women that much of the literature about the challenges of conducting oral histories addresses. Rather, these were mostly well-educated, outspoken, and confident activists.

My subjects were likely also fairly comfortable in the interviews because I had shared my political position as a pro-choice scholar and activist when I initially contacted them, which I believed was important to securing the interviews.<sup>109</sup> I have been pro-choice for as long as I can remember, with my earliest memories of the issue dating back to when I was around ten years old.<sup>110</sup> Like most people who are pro-choice, I think in an ideal world abortion would be unnecessary, but that it should remain safe, legal, and available given that neither birth control nor human behavior are infallible. I have been an activist for reproductive rights for more than ten years, driven by the stories, images, and statistics that show what happens when safe abortions are unavailable.

Like the women I interviewed, I am white. I was raised with middle class comforts, but on a working-class income. I am the only one of my immediate family members to have attended university, and my educational accomplishments and the income I now earn locate me in the middle class, although years of graduate studies mean that I have not acquired wealth comparable to my peers outside of academia. I was raised

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<sup>109</sup> For the importance of the interviewer's politics on oral history, see, for example, Sherna Berger Gluck, "Advocacy Oral History: Palestinian Women in Resistance" in *Women's Words*: 205-219. For a recent, sensitive rendering of the issue of reflexivity see Alan Wong, "Conversations for the Real World: Shared Authority, Self-Reflexivity, and the Process in the Oral History Interview," *Journal of Canadian Studies* 43, no. 1 (Winter 2009), 239-258.

<sup>110</sup> My earliest memory of abortion arising as an issue was when my sister, who was in high school, came home with a copy of a short narrative or poem that a classmate had given her. It was written from the perspective of a fetus and each line talked about fetal development (At fourteen days I..., At four weeks I...). The piece ends abruptly when the fetus is aborted. My sister said something to the effect that while it was sad, she was nevertheless supportive of a woman's right to choose. Given that I would have been only around ten years old, I would not have comprehended the full meaning of her words, but her compassion for the fetus coupled with her certainty of the value of the woman's life over that of the fetus has remained with me for more than twenty-five years.

in the United Church, and while I seldom attend services, I maintain my Christian beliefs. Although questions about my personal life did not arise in the interviews, I was single at the time the interviews were conducted and I have not yet chosen to have children. I differed most from the women I interviewed by my age, given that I was born a few years after the Abortion Caravan. While the women I interviewed seldom asked questions of me, my characteristics nevertheless factor into the construction of this dissertation.

Since one of my larger aims was to locate the voices of women who are absent from the existing narrative, my interviews were feminist, which sat well with this group of narrators.<sup>111</sup> These women are political activists, keen to educate and share, and generally not intimidated by the interviewing process. When they were uncertain about my motivation in asking specific questions (usually those related to their reproductive experiences), they asked for explanations. One narrator asked that I stop the tape when I began asking demographic questions, read through my list of questions, and then asked me to explain several of the questions on my list before resuming the interview. That interview was the most difficult one I conducted and the least revealing; it was also the only interview I conducted with a male participant. Oakley's warning that "interviewees are people with considerable potential for sabotaging the attempt to research them" is well heeded.<sup>112</sup> To clarify, while I do not feel as though my narrators were "sabotaging" the interviews at all, indeed most were exceptionally helpful and excited about my project, there were nevertheless ongoing efforts by some to openly negotiate and exert control over the interview process or the terms of our relationship.

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<sup>111</sup> Geiger, "What's so Feminist bout Women's Oral History?" 170.

<sup>112</sup> Oakley, "Interviewing Women," 258.

The interviews were semi-structured and they were conducted both over the phone and in person. In two cases, women opted to fill out my interview questionnaire on their own, supplementing their answers with follow-up email responses.<sup>113</sup> I began the interviews by asking basic background information, including questions on place of birth, religious background, and social class, to help identify shared characteristics as well as any important differences among the participants. Many scholars speak to the importance of identifying the narrator's subjectivity. Elizabeth Lapovsky Kennedy and Madeline D. Davis in Boots of Leather, Slippers of Gold: The History of a Lesbian Community (1993), for example, describe treating each interview transcript as "an historical document," in relation to which they consider "each narrator's particular social position and how that might affect her memories."<sup>114</sup> Following such basic background questions, I asked women to talk about their formal and informal involvement in political or protest activities. I also asked about their reproductive histories to help determine how their own reproductive experiences might have influenced their stance on, and involvement in, the issue. After those questions, the interviews were opened up so that the women could talk more freely about their remembrances of the Caravan in whatever form or order they chose. When certain events or issues were not brought up or elaborated on, I asked questions to prod memories and to ensure that key issues were covered. Sometimes the prodding worked and the women elaborated; at other times, they did not.

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<sup>113</sup> In the footnotes, these interviews with Myrna Wood and Dawn Carrell Hemingway will be referred to as "Written Interviews."

<sup>114</sup> Elizabeth Lapovsky Kennedy and Madeline D. Davis, Boots of Leather, Slippers of Gold: The History of a Lesbian Community (New York: Penguin, 1993), 21.

At various points over the weekend of the Abortion Caravan, media accounts placed the number of participants at between 150 and 500. For this project, fifteen people (fourteen women and one man) were interviewed.<sup>115</sup> This group is in no way intended to comprise a representative sample.<sup>116</sup> Still, Kennedy and Davis argue that “between five and ten narrators’ stories need to be juxtaposed in order to help develop an analysis that is not changed dramatically by each new story,” and their finding supports my experience with my interviewees’ stories.<sup>117</sup> The general contours of the stories told by the participants are similar; the main differences related to the level of detail recalled. The women interviewed included both women identified by some participants as “leaders” and self-identified “worker bees.”<sup>118</sup> Geographically, they include women from British Columbia, Ontario (Toronto and Ottawa), and Manitoba, and one from the United States.<sup>119</sup> Occupationally, the women now work in professional, government, artistic,

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<sup>115</sup> Several interviews were conducted over the telephone with women who lived in Vancouver, Ottawa, Edmonton, and Regina. Women living in Toronto were interviewed in person. Most interviews lasted between 40 and 90 minutes.

<sup>116</sup> The sole male interviewee is not intended to be representative of the few men who participated in the Caravan, but was chosen because he was identified as one of the men who bought the chains the women used to fasten themselves to their seats in the House of Commons protest.

<sup>117</sup> Once the interviews were transcribed, the interviewees who requested to review them did so. Answers were then ordered in a table so that all responses to each question could be viewed at one time. Kennedy and Davis describe a similar technique by which they “juxtaposed all interviews with one another to identify patterns and contradictions.” See Kennedy and Davis, *Boots of Leather*, 21, 23. For instruction on how a small number of narratives can be revealing, see Isabelle Bertaux-Wiame, “The Life History Approach to the Study of Internal Migration,” *Oral History* 7, no. 1 (Spring 1979), 29-30. Daniel Bertaux and Martin Kohli also suggest a small number of interviews can be instructive when not looking for “generalizations based on theoretical plausibility.” See Daniel Bertaux and Martin Kohli, “The Life Story Approach: A continental View,” *Annual Review of Sociology* 10 (1984), 218.

<sup>118</sup> Of the 20 women Wasserlein interviewed, she notes that while they may not have represented the “general membership” of the Vancouver Women’s Caucus (and, importantly, they did not all participate in the Abortion Caravan), they were representative of the “core” that undertook the bulk of the Caucus’s actions. See Wasserlein, “An Arrow Aimed at the Heart,” 25.

<sup>119</sup> Dawn Carroll Hemingway, Marcy Cohen, Cathy Walker, and Betsy Wood were a part of the Vancouver contingent. Women (and the lone male) who joined the protest in Toronto included P.A., Heather Bishop, Dante Nardone, Charnie Guettel, Susan Kennedy, Peggy Morton, Judy Pocock, N.T.R., and Myrna Wood. The women who joined the Caravan in Ottawa were Joan Eliesen and Jackie Larkin.

and academic fields. Their current political activities range from being involved in unions and other activist groups, running as a Marxist candidate in federal elections, serving as a picket captain in a strike, engaging in social-justice academic research, and more passively maintaining political sympathies while not engaging actively in public protests.

The recollections of my interviewees varied at least in part because almost 40 years had passed since the Abortion Caravan moved across the country. In contrast, Wasserlein's interviews were conducted in 1986 and Thomson's between 1994 and 1996, leaving only 16 years or 25 years between the event and their interviews. There are obvious differences in the amount of detail provided in the earlier interviews and those conducted in 2006 and 2007 for this project. There are also important differences in relation to the political context – or “historical moments” – in which the interviews were conducted.<sup>120</sup> This distinction is perhaps most important in relation to Wasserlein's interviews in 1986, as they were conducted two years before the Supreme Court of Canada declared Canada's abortion law in violation of the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*. In other words, the battle for legal abortion was still very much being fought. Thomson's interviews followed a few years after the Mulroney government's failed attempt to introduce new legislation to limit women's access to abortion in 1990.<sup>121</sup> They also occurred around the time of the first violent attack on a Canadian abortion

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<sup>120</sup> For the importance of recognizing the context of “different historical moments” or “political contexts,” see, for example, Armitage and Gluck, “Reflections on Women's Oral History,” 76-7; Carl Wilmsen, “For the Record: Editing and the Production of Meaning in Oral History,” *Oral History Review* 21, no. 1 (Winter/Spring 2001): 65-85.

<sup>121</sup> On this bill see James Farney, “The Personal Is Not Political: The Progressive Conservative Response to Social Issues,” *American Review of Canadian Studies* 39, no. 3 (September 2009): 242-252.

provider by anti-abortion actors. So while there were no restrictions on abortion, the very political nature of the issue was likely still paramount in the minds of abortion rights activists. Finally, my interviews in 2006 and 2007 occurred almost two decades after the historic court victory. They also, arguably, occurred within a political context in which the majority of Canadians were passively pro-choice and in which “the Right” under the minority government of Stephen Harper was (and currently as a majority government is) moving incrementally (and quietly for now) toward restricting women’s reproductive freedom.

Ruth Roach Pierson claims, “We have valorized oral history because it validates women’s lives.” When interpreting events, however, she argues that women’s words must be carefully contextualized and “we cannot accept a woman’s recollection uncritically.”<sup>122</sup> Joan Sangster agrees, cautioning that “the narrative form and the construction of...women’s identities must still be related to evidence from other historical sources.”<sup>123</sup> The potential problems that attend oral histories can manifest in different ways. One area of concern is the issue of language, because “language can never fit perfectly with individual experience,” especially when words and their meanings have been defined by male experiences.<sup>124</sup> This relates to sociologist Marjorie Devault’s

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<sup>122</sup> Pierson, “Experience, Difference, Dominance and Voice,” 91.

<sup>123</sup> Sangster, “Telling Our Stories,” 230.

<sup>124</sup> Marjorie L. Devault, “Talking and Listening from Women’s Standpoint: Feminist Struggles for Interviewing and Analysis,” *Social Problems* 37, no. 1 (Feb. 1990), 97, 107.

caution that “we must choose words carefully and creatively, with attention to the consequences of naming experience.”<sup>125</sup>

These warnings also point to the “fallibility” or malleability of memory. Since most of the former Vancouver Women’s Caucus women I interviewed are familiar with Wasserlein’s and Thomson’s works on the Abortion Caravan as well as Judy Rebick’s book, some of their “memories” may have been influenced by those works, as is suggested by the almost verbatim repetition of certain details from those accounts. Because a mythology or collective script about certain aspects of the Abortion Caravan exists, separating the women’s memories from those prompted by the reading of these narratives is difficult. Additionally, women in my interviews sometimes refuted memories or interpretations that appear in Wasserlein’s, Thomson’s, or Rebick’s works. In all three books, for example, Margo Dunn is quoted as saying that the women were fed chili at every stop across the country, since they had suggested, in advance of leaving, that the women housing them provide a simple meal like chili.<sup>126</sup> It is not so much that this detail alters the narrative of the Caravan, but it speaks to the way that repetitive storytelling incorporates specific details that may or may not be accurate. In my interview with Betsy Wood, for example, she mentions that this detail bothers her because she feels the Caravaners were always well provided for on their stops. Her desire to point out that the women were well fed not only speaks to the effort of some women to “correct” the dominant narrative, but demonstrates how narrators can revise

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<sup>125</sup> Devault, “Talking and Listening,” 110. On language, also see Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, “The Body Politic,” in *Coming to Terms: Feminism, Theory, Politics*, ed. Elizabeth Weed (New York: Routledge, 1989): 101-121.

<sup>126</sup> See Wasserlein, “An arrow Aimed at the Heart,” 89; Thomson, *Winning Choice on Abortion*, 43; Rebick, *Ten Thousand Roses*, 39.

details to produce the stories they want told, highlighting the need to be aware of the interviewees' agendas and how their memories are not empirically objective accounts of past events.<sup>127</sup>

## **Chapter Outline**

This dissertation uncovers women's voices in different sites – in the media, in governmental debates, and in political activism. While all are within the public sphere, they are public to different degrees and in different ways. The first chapter focuses on women's engagement with print media – both women's and mainstream. The second chapter looks at women's participation in a forum created by the government, which was uniquely female, despite its political connections, because of its focus on women's issue and the fact that it was staffed primarily by women. Both of these spaces were created by others for the women's participation. The final space, one of civic engagement, was a political space fashioned by women themselves. While different voices come across in each of these spaces, there is notable continuity in the positions and strategies found in all three.

Chapter one, “‘I read your grubby article on abortion’: Abortion in Print Media and Reader Responses, 1959-1970,” looks at the publication of and reader responses to articles on abortion in Chatelaine, the Globe and Mail, and the United Church Observer over the course of the 1960s. The bulk of the analysis in this chapter focuses on

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<sup>127</sup> On this, see Alessandro Portelli, “What Makes Oral History Different,” in The Oral History Reader, eds. Robert Perks and Alistair Thomson (New York: Routledge, 1998, 2006): 32-42.

Chatelaine, in large part because it created a unique forum for its readers to comment on articles, share ideas and experiences, and engage with one another, and also because the articles were “educational pieces” for women new to public debates. The magazine’s coverage evolved from a position that supported abortion “under certain circumstances” to one that ultimately saw abortion as a woman’s “choice” alone or with the assistance of her doctor. Women responded to the articles with letters detailing personal experiences, religious beliefs, and ideas on morality. They also replied, en masse, to questionnaires published by Chatelaine. To offer comparison, articles and reader responses to articles in the Globe and Mail and the United Church Observer are also explored largely because these publications were identified by anti-abortion scholar Alphonse de Valk as key in calling for abortion law reform in the 1960s.<sup>128</sup>

Examination of the Globe and Mail reveals the publication of many articles about or related to abortion throughout the decade as well as the publication of many reader letters commenting on that coverage. Additionally, the letters and responses in the advice column *Elizabeth Thompson Advises* are explored in some depth, as they offered women the opportunity to carve out a space for dialogue and to do so anonymously. The implication of their place within this mainstream medium versus within the largely female forum offered by Chatelaine suggests the need to reconsider the role of women in the abortion law reform discussions of the 1960s. Finally, a brief examination of the coverage of abortion in the Observer refutes de Valk’s contention of its importance – at least as a place to find female thoughts or letters.

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<sup>128</sup> De Valk, Morality and Law in Canadian Politics, 9-10.

Chapter two “‘The woman’s body, her problem, her decision, her life’: Hearing Women’s Voices (Reading Women’s Words) Through the Royal Commission on the Status of Women in Canada,” explores what the women who wrote to the commission said about abortion and how they constructed authority over the issue to make their voices heard and appear “legitimate.” The expansive archival collection of the RCSW files forms the basis of this analysis, alongside media coverage of the commission hearings. Barbara Freeman rightly argues, in her analysis of the media coverage of the RCSW and specifically about the treatment of abortion at public hearings, that “few women, including journalists, were willing to personalize their stories by speaking openly about such intimate matters.”<sup>129</sup> Her assessment of the media coverage of the public hearings, however, does not extend to the letters of opinion and some of the briefs written to the Commissioners by women from across the country, in which women were generally more candid and emotional.<sup>130</sup> If we view the RCSW as a site of knowledge construction, even as a sort of consciousness-raising exercise that engendered reflection, discussion, and sharing, then reading the letters (and briefs) submitted to the commission provides the opportunity to hear women’s voices on personal and political issues - in this case, abortion.<sup>131</sup> For some women, participating in the RCSW was their first act of an overtly political nature in that in many cases they were voicing dissatisfaction with the

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<sup>129</sup> Freeman, *The Satellite Sex*, 166.

<sup>130</sup> Women have a long history as letter writers and the intimacy and political potential of such letters are well documented. See, for example, Olga Kenyon, *800 Years of Women’s Letters* (Winchester, MA: Faber and Faber, 1992).

<sup>131</sup> Penny Kome argues that the release of the report marks the beginning of the modern women’s movement in Canada, calling it a consciousness-raising exercise, but the whole process, and not simply the report, was a consciousness-raising experience. See Penny Kome, *Women of Influence: Canadian Women and Politics* (Toronto: Doubleday, 1985), 85.

status quo. For them, it was the “catalyst for their involvement” in second wave feminism.<sup>132</sup> Reading letters reveals that for others, however, the RCSW provided the opportunity to share already strongly held positions. This analysis reveals that women constructed their authority over abortion in varied ways, often relying on personal experiences and those of women around them. Since the House of Commons Standing Committee on Health and Welfare held its abortion hearings soon before the Royal Commission’s public hearings, and since there were many more female contributors there, some of whom overlapped with women who were presenting to the Standing Committee, I decided to focus exclusively on the Royal Commission.

Chapters three, “‘I had a history’: The Women of the Abortion Caravan,” and four, “‘They won’t listen to us. We are forced to declare war’: The Abortion Caravan,” focus on the first national protest for abortion rights in Canada. The Caravan represents an important departure from previous forms of protest that primarily took the form of letters to the editor of magazines or letters and briefs to the RCSW. It is not a matter of simply “progressing” from a more muted to a more brazenly public protest since generally the women participating in the Caravan were not the same women who wrote to the Commission (although some did) or who read *Chatelaine* (although they may have grown up in homes where the magazine was read). Rather, the Caravan marks an important departure from more mainstream to more radical protest, arguably a sign of generational discontent. And yet there are important similarities, especially in the ways in which women articulated the bases on which they spoke authoritatively about abortion.

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<sup>132</sup> Bronwyn Bragg, “A Methodological Exploration of the Role of Oral History in Documenting the History of Second Wave Feminism in Canada,” *Oral History Forum* 29 (2009), 4.

Supplementing existing oral histories with interviews undertaken for this dissertation, chapter three looks closely at the women who participated in the Caravan. Specifically, it explores their demographic profiles, their educational and protest backgrounds, and their political and personal motivations for engaging in an abortion rights protest. Chapter four looks more closely at the Abortion Caravan, its progression from Vancouver to Ottawa, events in the national capital, and reactions to the Caravan both in the media and from the women themselves.

In the following pages, I endeavour to share the wide range of different voices and viewpoints that were expressed in the sources consulted. The women who wrote letters to the editors of newspapers and magazines and letters and briefs to the Royal Commission did so with admirable compassion and vulnerability. They were motivated to write because they cared deeply about the issue. This is not to say that all of the women had clear and firm positions. While some women's voices come across very strongly and endorse certain positions, others reveal women struggling with the morality – religious, sexual, philosophical, and social – of abortion. It is hard to hear their voices and imagine – as the dominant narrative would have us believe – that they were not a factor in the abortion law reform or that they would have been so easy to ignore in all of the public discussions about abortion during the 1960s.

## Chapter One

### **“I read your grubby article on abortion”: Abortion in Print Media and Reader Responses, 1959-1970**

In Morality and Law in Canadian Politics (1974), Alphonse de Valk, an anti-abortion scholar and Catholic priest, reports that in 1959 Chatelaine “published what was probably the first article in a popular Canadian periodical to call for legalized abortion.” De Valk relates that while Chatelaine “was to remain alone among popular magazines for half a dozen years,” it “did receive support from two other important publications, the United Church Observer and the Toronto Globe and Mail.”<sup>1</sup> Using de Valk’s observation as a starting point, this chapter looks at the coverage of abortion by these publications in terms of the space they created for or offered to women. In the following analysis I focus on Chatelaine for a few reasons: (1) while more articles about abortion were published in the Globe and Mail, the depth of coverage in Chatelaine was greater; and (2) while there was extensive reader engagement in the Globe and Mail, Chatelaine created a truly unique space for women to share their thoughts about and experiences of abortion. If, as Lorraine Code argues, the dominant voice constitutes the norm, then part of Chatelaine’s importance as a forum for women is derived from the fact that it was the only one of the

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<sup>1</sup> See Alphonse de Valk, Morality and Law in Canadian Politics: The Abortion Controversy (Palm: Montreal, 1974), 9-10. He reports that Maclean’s did not publish an article on abortion until 1967.

three publications in which women's voices were dominant.<sup>2</sup> Chatelaine is also a valuable source for hearing women's voices because for much of the time period it was the only Canadian women's magazine and it highlighted female authors and issues.

This chapter assesses how these publications informed, influenced, and reflected Canadian women's attitudes toward and understandings of abortion. The analysis argues against the dominant perspective that women were silent during this period. Evidence from this chapter abundantly demonstrates that not only were women talking about abortion, they did so from a variety of personal and political positions and were not reluctant to do so very publicly even as early as 1959. Although their voices were indeed diffuse, given that they wrote letters from across Canada, they were also powerful as many women signaled their willingness to be publicly connected to the issue by signing their names to their letters. In that way, their letters are political; these women clearly wanted to be heard.

### **Doris Anderson's Chatelaine**

The August 1970 issue of Chatelaine published an excerpt from a letter by reader Mrs. Gerald B. Shaw of Hartland, New Brunswick, who wrote of the magazine's overall stance on abortion: "I have read your magazine for years, and I do like it. I have always thought it a family-oriented publication. This is why I do not understand your apparent stand on abortion as a desirable thing. Why not call it what it is? Murder of unborn

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<sup>2</sup> Lorraine Code, What Can She Know? Feminist Theory and the Construction of Knowledge (Ithaca:

children?”<sup>3</sup> The publication of Shaw’s letter speaks to Chatelaine’s role as a valuable site for women to share their opinions and suggests that editor Doris Anderson encouraged such dialogue. During her editorship (1957 – 1977), Anderson was committed to using the magazine to advance a feminist perspective (even before she could comfortably use the term); this involved tackling many issues, including abortion. Kristin Luker’s seminal study of the movement to change California’s abortion law, Abortion and the Politics of Motherhood (1984), identifies two key eras in efforts to change the abortion law: reform and repeal:

Those who wanted the *reform* of the abortion laws wanted something narrow and clear-cut.... They advocated a more “rational” regulation of the problem of abortion. Those who wanted total *repeal* of abortion laws, however, wanted something else. They wanted to redefine how abortion decisions should be made and who should make them; they wanted, in fact, to redefine the ground rules on abortion that had held sway for a century.<sup>4</sup>

Chatelaine’s coverage of abortion generally conforms to this division. From 1959 until 1968, Chatelaine tended to present abortion reform as a “solution” to social (not women’s) problems and advocated for its legality “under certain circumstances” (rape, poverty, youthful ignorance, and fetal deformity). Beginning in 1968, Chatelaine increasingly presented abortion as a woman’s right within the context of women’s growing liberation and the increasingly visible feminist movement. Although Chatelaine published several articles on abortion during the remainder of Anderson’s editorship, only those published up to 1970 are examined here, as the coverage shifted significantly

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Cornell University Press, 1981), 105, fn 73.

<sup>3</sup> Mrs. Gerald B. Shaw, ‘The Last Word Is Yours,’ Chatelaine, August 1970, 68.

<sup>4</sup> Kristin Luker, Abortion and the Politics of Motherhood (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 95.

after 1970 when the dichotomy of “pro-choice” versus “pro-life” interests became the central organizing narrative.

Chatelaine functioned as a vehicle for educating and engaging Canadian women on a wide range of issues, including abortion. Along with Anderson’s editorials on abortion and the readers’ letters, these articles demonstrate how Anderson, the magazine’s writers, and the readers together established the boundaries of the magazine’s abortion coverage. The main articles guided the discussion and introduced new ideas and “evidence,” often in the form of scientific or expert studies, while readers’ letters signaled their acceptance or rejection of these ideas. Readers also provided their own analyses of the issue, in a few cases by sharing their personal experiences of unplanned pregnancies. The readers were not passive, but demonstrated their agency by voicing their opinions in letters to the editor and by responding to the magazine’s polls. Their letters were also records of their agency, as women reported such diverse actions as having written letters of protest to MPs or having obtained illegal abortions.

Chatelaine is an important and unique source because it provided a safe forum in which women were encouraged to share their ideas about abortion. The magazine format allowed women to participate in the abortion debate informally and, if they wished, anonymously, although most signed their names. The letters to the editor page afforded them a place from which to speak out; they could voice their opinions and even share their experiences in a distinctly female forum. For some, letters to the editor may have functioned as a feminist apprenticeship; the publication of their letters validated (or invalidated) their opinions and ideas, as readers sometimes responded to one another with

the same passion with which they responded to the main articles. The readers' responses to questionnaires signaled not only their willingness to be engaged, but their desire to be heard. For other women who did not require any sort of apprenticeship, the magazine offered a space where their ideas held currency that was not always recognized in non-female venues. The following analysis looks at the manner in which articles in Chatelaine framed abortion, as well as how those frames were "decoded" by readers in ways that did or did not conform to the intended messaging. This approach recognizes the readers' agency and their "hopelessly multiple" and "ongoingly negotiated" identities.<sup>5</sup>

One important factor setting Chatelaine apart from the other publications was its editor, Doris Anderson.<sup>6</sup> In her study of the magazine, Valerie Korinek argues that the "Canadian feminist movement during the sixties...had an unofficial leader in Doris Anderson. Through her monthly editorials, readers across the country were given an education on all the key issues of second-wave feminism."<sup>7</sup> Barbara Freeman suggests Chatelaine, under Anderson, "pushed the ethical understanding of 'objectivity,' even for

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<sup>5</sup> See Stuart Hall, "Encoding/Decoding," in The Cultural Studies Reader, ed., 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (New York: Routledge: 2007), 485-487; Celeste Michelle Condit, Interpreting Abortion Rhetoric: Communicating Social Change (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1990), 226; Kathy Davis, "What's in a Voice? Methods and Metaphors," Feminism Psychology 4, no. 3 (1994), 353; Valerie Korinek, Roughing It in the Suburbs: Reading Chatelaine Magazine in the Fifties and Sixties (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000), 8.

<sup>6</sup> Although it is not discussed here, Chatelaine also provided a space for female journalists to make names for themselves as leading feminists of the Canadian women's movement. These women include June Callwood, Michele Landsberg, and Mollie Gillen, among many others.

<sup>7</sup> Korinek, Roughing It in the Suburbs, 309. There is much consensus on Anderson's importance to Canadian feminism. See, for example, one journal's special issue devoted to her: Sally Armstrong, Sherrill Cheda, Michele Landsberg, and Shelagh Wilkinson, eds., "Celebrating Doris Anderson" Canadian Woman Studies 26, no. 2 (Summer/Fall 2007).

a magazine.”<sup>8</sup> While Anderson’s influence on the magazine and her readers reached well beyond the issue of abortion, she was committed to tackling the issue persistently throughout her tenure. Under her direction, Chatelaine published its first article on abortion in 1959 and followed that one with a dozen more over the next eighteen years. Behind the scenes, Anderson determined how often to publish articles related to abortion and which perspectives to present. Publicly, she had the opportunity to influence her readers through her editorials. In them, she challenged her readers to broaden their outlooks, examine their beliefs, and actively participate in the events and movements shaping their lives. She believed her job as editor was to “expect the readers and encourage them to write in.” She explained, “I think the editor has to be this friendly person and you don’t want to get too many people angry at you.... You don’t want to get their backs up, you want to amuse them, make them think.” Her perception of the letters that Chatelaine received is revealing: “There were women that wrote a lot to magazines, but there were...a variety of women that wrote. They wrote when an issue mattered to them. They considered it their magazine.”<sup>9</sup>

Anderson’s connection to the abortion question was personal. She was born “illegitimately” and placed in a home for unwanted babies for several months, before her mother, who continued to visit her, took her home. Knowing that her mother had difficulty coping as a single parent of an “illegitimate” child clearly contributed to Anderson’s ideas about contraception, abortion, illegitimacy, and child welfare. In her

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<sup>8</sup> Barbara M. Freeman, The Satellite Sex: The Media and Women’s Issues in English Canada, 1966-1971 (Waterloo: Wilfred Laurier University Press, 2001), 58.

<sup>9</sup> Doris Anderson, personal interview, August 24, 2006.

autobiography Rebel Daughter (1996), she recalls:

Although I have been an ardent and outspoken supporter of the right of every woman to make her own decision about whether to carry a pregnancy to term, I have always known that had my own mother been given the option, I would not have been born. It's a piece of information that has never bothered me. From my earliest years, I saw far too many women forced to have children they didn't want and couldn't properly care for. A demeaning and uncharitable lack of choice often blighted not only their own lives but the lives of their children as well.<sup>10</sup>

While there is always the potential to project later political philosophies onto past events, her commitment to a woman's reproductive autonomy was long and unwavering. In our interview Anderson emphasized this commitment, recalling, "I can't remember when I didn't think a woman should be able to decide when she's going to have a baby.... I had no question on that at all."<sup>11</sup>

When Anderson became Chatelaine's editor in 1957, six years after joining the magazine, she made several format changes, including reintroducing the editorial and renaming the readers' letters page as *The Last Word Is Yours*. These adjustments were more than cosmetic for the evolution of the magazine because it opened a dialogue between Anderson and the readers. Korinek suggests that the editorials "functioned as the gateway into the periodical."<sup>12</sup> Anderson used this forum to introduce her readers to new ideas and social issues. She recalls of the editorials, "I saw it as a direct link to my readers, a platform to set the tone of the magazine and explore contemporary, and often controversial, issues.... Gradually, my editorials took a more emphatic position as

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<sup>10</sup> Doris Anderson, Rebel Daughter: An Autobiography (Toronto: Key Porter, 1996), 9.

<sup>11</sup> Doris Anderson, personal interview, August 24, 2006.

<sup>12</sup> Korinek, Roughing It in the Suburbs, 258.

Chatelaine became outspokenly feminist.”<sup>13</sup> Anderson also made changes in the magazine’s content. To make the magazine viable in a market dominated by American products, Anderson decided to include as much Canadian content as possible and “do what no American magazine dared – give my readers something serious to think about, something to shake them up a little.”<sup>14</sup> At a time when most North American magazines focused on more conventional topics, Chatelaine not only addressed abortion, but other serious issues, including child abuse, divorce, birth control, and working mothers.

Under Anderson, the circulation numbers grew, but it is important to remember that generally there were multiple readers for each issue, meaning that the magazine’s reach was even wider than the circulation figures suggest. In 1955, a study of 7,500 households receiving Chatelaine found that there were 2.78 readers per issue, giving Chatelaine a total of 1,133,231 readers (904,954 females and 228,277 males).<sup>15</sup> In 1958, Chatelaine’s circulation climbed from 464,451 to 779,174 between June and September, when the Canadian Home Journal folded.<sup>16</sup> By 1966, there were an estimated 2,492,000 readers (1,851,000 females and 641,000 males); approximately 37% of all Canadian

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<sup>13</sup> Anderson, Rebel Daughter, 151

<sup>14</sup> Anderson, Rebel Daughter, 150.

<sup>15</sup> This study puts the actual circulation rate at a little over 400,000. The population of Canada in 1956 was sixteen million. Approximately 84% of the female readers and 87% of the male readers were married. The occupation for 36.2% of the heads of the household was skilled or unskilled. The next three occupational categories were each comprised of 12% of household heads: (1) professional, semi-professionals, and executives; (2) farmers; and (3) retired. Of the non-farm families, about 48% earned between \$3,000 and \$4,900 per year, while 31% earned less than \$3,000 per year. Thus, Korinek notes, at mid-century, a substantial portion of the readers were working-class or rural and consequently less affluent than often assumed. In terms of education, of the female readers, 91% had finished grade school, 45.3% had finished high school, and 5.8% had attended or finished university. By comparison, 91% of male readers had finished grade school, 43.7% had finished high school and 13.7% had attended or finished university. See Valerie J. Korinek, Roughing it in Suburbia: Reading *Chatelaine* Magazine, 1950-1969 (PhD dissertation, University of Toronto, Toronto, 1996), 58.

<sup>16</sup> Royal Commission on Publications, Appendices (Ottawa, 1960), 9. Korinek puts the 1959 circulation slightly lower at 745,589. See Korinek, Roughing in the Suburbs, 35.

households were touched by Chatelaine.<sup>17</sup> Korinek reports that in 1968, 23.2% of English-speaking Canadian adults read Chatelaine, while 24.6% read Maclean's and 37.2% read Reader's Digest.<sup>18</sup>

While the climbing subscription rates are a testament to the magazine's success, there is some disagreement as to why Chatelaine flourished. In his study of Canadian magazines, Fraser Sutherland contends that Anderson succeeded because she "did not lose sight of the vast majority of her readers, who were far from being doctrinaire feminists."<sup>19</sup> In contrast, Anderson argues, "Chatelaine succeeded because I was willing to take on tough, controversial subjects - abortion, divorce, wife battering, and family-law reform. These topics had caught the attention of readers and built circulation."<sup>20</sup>

Anderson's explanation expects more from the readers than does Sutherland's. Korinek weighs in, "Together, the incendiary, the traditional, and the commercial intrigued, infuriated, and inspired nearly two million readers to pick up *Chatelaine* each month."<sup>21</sup> Supporting this interpretation is the work of David Gudelunas, who studies the discussion of sexually taboo subjects in newspaper advice columns. He argues that the mixing of controversial with mundane topics "helps to both normalize controversial subjects as well as maintain an audience not attracted to taboo topics in particular."<sup>22</sup> Anderson was

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<sup>17</sup> See Korinek, Roughing It in Suburbia, 290.

<sup>18</sup> Korinek, Roughing It in the Suburbs, 66.

<sup>19</sup> Fraser Sutherland, The Monthly Epic: A History of Canadian Magazines, 1789-1989 (Markham, Ontario: Fitzhenry & Whiteside, 1989), 253.

<sup>20</sup> Anderson, Rebel Daughter, 191. Readers' letters support Anderson's contention. See, for example, Mrs. Doreen Elliott, Letter, 'The Last Word Is Yours,' Chatelaine, August 1964, 62.

<sup>21</sup> Korinek, Roughing It in the Suburbs, 3.

<sup>22</sup> David Gudelunas, "Talking Taboo: Newspaper Advice Columns and Sexual Discourse," Sexuality and Culture 9, no. 1 (Winter 2005), 73. For a compelling analysis of the treatment of lesbians by Chatelaine magazine see Barbara M. Freeman, "From No Go to No Logo: Lesbian Lives and Rights in Chatelaine," Canadian Journal of Communication 31 (2006): 815-841.

aware of the fine balance, recalling:

You can get into an awful lot of trouble – and I did – by advocating something the public really wasn't ready for. It was a very conventional magazine and I didn't want too many articles where women said I took your magazine into the backyard and burned it in front of my teenagers – then I knew I was going too far. So I had to address my audience where I thought they were.

In reference to the abortion coverage, and specifically the call for abortion “under certain circumstances,” Anderson acknowledges, “It was a strategic position. I knew that we were going to be better off if we went as far as we thought we could go rather than say abortion under any condition, which is where I was.”<sup>23</sup> The magazine's success, then, seems to stem from a fine balance between engaging the readers and avoiding alienating them, as well as providing them with a space for dialogue about their opinions, feelings, and experiences.<sup>24</sup>

Within the context of walking that line, it is important not to downplay Anderson's individual impact on the magazine, especially in comparison to American women's magazines. In a study of seven American women's magazines that had female editors at some point during the period 1965-1985, Lee Joliffe and Terri Catlett find that although there were some positive changes in the portrayal of women, the “transactional tone towards readers” of these magazines was “strongly reminiscent of the tone adults use speaking to children – either helping or giving directions and orders.”<sup>25</sup> In contrast,

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<sup>23</sup> Doris Anderson, personal interview, August 24, 2006.

<sup>24</sup> Despite her personal commitment to the issue, she only wrote three editorials on abortion and did not do so until 1970. See September 1970's “Change The Abortion Law Now,” June 1973's “‘Right to What?’” and January 1977's “Abortion: Let the Silent Majority Prevail.”

<sup>25</sup> They studied Good Housekeeping, Family Circle, Woman's Day, Redbook, McCall's, Ladies' Home Journal, and Better Homes and Gardens. Lee Joliffe and Terri Catlett, “Women Editors at the ‘Seven

Anderson treated her readers like equals; she perceived them as intelligent and desirous of substantive articles. This respect for her readers was central to Chatelaine's importance and success, especially when addressing an issue as polarizing as abortion could be.

*"Articles like this make me sick": Feature Articles and Reader Responses on Abortion Law Reform, 1959-1968*

From 1959 to 1968, all of the articles on abortion in Chatelaine sought amendments to the existing law that would allow abortion *under certain circumstances*. Abortion was presented as a "solution" to various social or medical problems. While some Chatelaine readers responded with dismay to the changing nature of Canadian society and the call for abortion reform within that context, many supported these changes. The following examination of three clusters of articles highlights how the frames evolved over the course of the decade. The first article published on abortion is explored separately and in some depth, because it began Chatelaine's campaign for changes to the abortion law, introduced readers to the topic, and used themes or frames that would recur throughout much of the decade. It also garnered a massive response from the readers, indicating that it touched many women strongly enough to compel a written response. The subsequent three articles are analyzed collectively because they approached abortion within the context of the broader changes in Canadian society and

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Sisters' Magazines, 1965-1985: Did They Make a Difference?" Journalism Quarterly 71, no. 4 (Winter

were written from the perspective of “experts,” who offered insider knowledge on the best “solutions” to social problems. Finally, the last two articles are analyzed together because they represent the transition in the message from abortion law reform to abortion law repeal and began to approach abortion as a woman’s (as opposed to a social) issue.<sup>26</sup>

In 1959, Chatelaine published “Should Canada Change Its Abortion Law?” by freelance journalist Joan Finnigan.<sup>27</sup> Following the article’s title, in large print, were the words: “It’s among the world’s harshest – and, critics charge, most backward. By recognizing only one reason for abortion, it forces desperate women to seek help from a vicious back-room racket that often deals in death.”<sup>28</sup> This statement unequivocally established Finnigan’s and the magazine’s response to the question posed in the title. If the article was to be viewed not only as an informative piece, but as a vehicle of change, Finnigan had to substantiate her claims both in terms of the evidence she presented and the strategies she employed. Her article was broken down into four sections: “What changes are needed?”; “Wives seek most abortions”; “Forced to pass on the disease”; and “A stern moral choice.” Before these sections, however, Finnigan began the piece with an abortion narrative.

Abortion narratives became a mainstay of the “pro-choice” movement. Michelle Celeste Condit argues that such narratives “as change-bearing discourse...could not

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1994), 807.

<sup>26</sup> The last two articles are not on abortion alone, but address abortion within the context of topics covered by the Royal Commission on the Status of Women in Canada.

<sup>27</sup> Finnigan’s motivation for writing the piece is unclear. Anderson could not recall whose idea the article was, but thought it was “probably” Finnigan’s. At the time Finnigan authored it, she was married, in her early thirties, and mother to a young family. See Doris Anderson, personal interview, August 24, 2006; Noreen Shanahan, “Chronicler of the Ottawa Valley sought ‘not from books but from life,’” Globe and Mail, November 5, 2007, S8.

simply be *expressive*; they had to be *persuasive*, capable of social change.”<sup>29</sup> Condit emphasizes that in order to elicit personal identification with or sympathy for the woman, the narrative typically portrayed an “ordinary” woman (like a Chatelaine reader) vulnerable to the injustice of seeking unsafe abortions under often dirty, dangerous conditions. For the narrative to be effective, the pregnant woman had to be perceived as a “good” woman unable to control her own destiny, like an innocent victim of rape or seduction. Her goodness and innocence justified the abortion because, Condit argues, she “was making a choice not against motherhood but *against* situations which themselves violated the idealized image of motherhood.”<sup>30</sup> Such narratives portrayed abortion as a solution to that injustice; in them, women were not transgressing or challenging their traditional gender roles. In Finnigan’s opening narrative, four teenage boys abducted and raped a fourteen-year-old girl who was on her way home from a church recital; her ordeal lasted for two hours and resulted in a pregnancy that she wished to terminate, a course of action supported by her doctor. Finnigan reported that despite his “deep conviction as a physician and as a compassionate, mature human being,” he “could do nothing for her without risking criminal prosecution and disgrace.”

Finnigan’s narrative of the church girl introduced several issues surrounding the legal status of abortion: (1) it framed abortion as a matter between doctors, as experts, and their patients; (2) it framed abortion as a solution for a woman who was blameless for her unplanned (and unwanted) pregnancy; (3) it highlighted how the legal restrictions on

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<sup>28</sup> Joan Finnigan, “Should Canada Change Its Abortion Law?” Chatelaine, August 1959, 104.

<sup>29</sup> Condit, Interpreting Abortion Rhetoric, 25.

<sup>30</sup> Condit Interpreting Abortion Rhetoric, 25-26.

abortion denied compassionate solutions even when abortion was deemed to be in the patient's best interest; (4) it depicted a liberalized abortion law as both humane and rational; and (5) it portrayed the failures of the current abortion law.<sup>31</sup> Finnigan did not inform the reader of what happened to the young girl in the story; her doctor (and/or another physician) might have made the decision to perform an abortion quietly. It is likely that the emphasis on the physician's approval of abortion, alongside his inability to legally perform one, was a strategic focus, both because physicians were generally highly esteemed and because an emerging theme in the public abortion debates throughout the 1960s was the legal protection of physicians from prosecution.<sup>32</sup> Their involvement in the decision to abort would have been seen by many as a guarantee that abortion would not be "abused" as a solution to unwanted pregnancies.

Following the introductory narrative, was the first section of the article, "What changes are needed?" In it Finnigan outlined more liberal laws in other countries, including Sweden, Iceland, and Denmark, among others. She presented the positions of medical practitioners on the subject, highlighting the reasons they believed abortion should be available. She also outlined statistics on prosecutions of illegal abortion in Canada, comparing the frequency of the practice here to that in other countries with more

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<sup>31</sup> Some Canadian doctors quietly performed abortions despite the legal restrictions. See Childbirth By Choice Trust, *No Choice: Canadian Women Tell Their Stories of Illegal Abortions* (Toronto: Childbirth by Choice Trust, 1998), 112-122.

<sup>32</sup> This esteem, historian John C. Burnham argues, increasingly came under attack in the 1960s and 1970s as patients began demanding a greater role in the medical decisions affecting them. Yet Fiona McDonald argues that the nature of Canada's healthcare system has lessened the degree of trust lost in physicians as opposed to other western countries. See John C. Burnham, "American Medicine's Golden Age: What Happened to It?" in *Sickness & Health in America: Readings in the History of Medicine and Public Health* eds. Judith Walzer Leavitt and Ronald L. Numbers, 284-294 (1978; repr., Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1997): 284-294; Fiona McDonald, "The Criminalization of Medical Mistakes in Canada: A Review," *Health Law Journal* 16 (2008), 22.

permissive abortion laws. She also discussed the loophole in Canada's law that allowed for "therapeutic abortions," noting how the interpretation of that term varied across hospitals and doctors.

Finnigan began the second section, "Wives seek most abortions," with the story of Dr. Alex Bourne, who had deliberately challenged Britain's abortion laws in 1938-1939 by performing an abortion (without fee) on a fourteen-year-old rape victim.<sup>33</sup> In this case, the doctor was acquitted for performing the abortion. While the Bourne case emphasized that changes were possible and were occurring even in "traditionally conservative" Britain, it was also noteworthy, according to de Valk, because it "provided the foundation for a new interpretation of the phrase 'preserving life,' namely one that included mental health, thereby allowing a much broader range of 'therapeutic' abortions than had been acceptable until then."<sup>34</sup> Finnigan used this expanded definition of health to draw attention to the disparity between abortion laws and practices. Here Finnigan quoted the *Kinsey Report on Pregnancy, Birth and Abortion*, which found that abortions were more often sought by married than by single women. For her, "The gap between law and religious dictates and what we secretly think and actually do is as wide in relation to abortion as to most aspects of sexual behavior."

In the third section, "Forced to pass on the disease," Finnigan addressed hereditary conditions that women were forced to pass along to children because of

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<sup>33</sup> Dr. Bourne's case was also used as an example by Reverend Ray Goodall in "Is Abortion Ever Right?" *Chatelaine* (March 1963), 43. For more on the Bourne case, see Stephen Brooke, "'A New World for Women'? Abortion Law Reform in Britain during the 1930s," *American Historical Review* 106, no. 2 (2001): 431-59.

Canada's restrictive abortion law. Reflecting lingering eugenic sentiments from the earlier birth control movement, she argued for abortion in relation to hereditary conditions (like hemophilia, schizophrenia, Huntington's chorea); elsewhere in the article she also suggested abortion for social problems (like alcoholism and unemployment), as well as for incest, rape, fetal deformity, maternal age. Oddly, it was here that she began to address religious objections to abortion, although this argument continued into the last section. She perceived religion to be the greatest barrier to the revision of Canada's abortion law. She anticipated that religious adherents would be most strongly opposed to changing the country's abortion law and argued that "no religion...has the right to impose its beliefs about any moral issue upon society as a whole." She further contended, "Those who hold religious views opposed to therapeutic abortion simply need not apply. Doctors who consider abortion morally wrong have simply to refer requests for abortion." In retrospect it is easy to see that Finnigan's assertions about religion, while perhaps reflecting the growing secularism of Canadian society, demonstrate either naiveté or wishful thinking and certainly underestimated the response of religious opponents to any liberalization of the abortion law.

In the fourth section, "A stern moral choice," Finnigan argued that the choice between the life of the fetus and that of the mother had moral implications. For her, the fetus was "an unknown quantity" whereas the mother was "a grown experienced member of human society, her value increased by each child she has at home dependent on her."

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<sup>34</sup> "Therapeutic" abortions were those performed out of medical necessity (to save the mother's life), in contrast to "elective" abortions which were undertaken for socio-economic reasons. de Valk, Morality and Law, 3 note 10; Finnigan, "Should Canada Change Its Abortion Law?" 104.

This moral choice was compounded by the idea that the abortion law failed to take into account “an important new social principle – the welfare, not merely survival, of the child.”<sup>35</sup> Finnigan’s focus on quality of life, or humane treatment, may well reflect the increasing attention to human rights in the post-World War Two western world.

Finnigan’s piece was fairly disorganized in terms of the structure, evidence, strategies, and positions presented. She relied heavily on the words and research of others, which allowed her to maintain distance from the issue and also set the magazine up as less of an advocate and more of an educator. Finnigan presented several different expert positions on abortion that ranged in permissiveness, allowing the readers to assess which of those they agreed with, but this also enabled her to suggest fairly liberal grounds for abortion while retaining the safety of standing behind another’s words. Ultimately, Finnigan provided the readers with a lot of material to digest, sufficiently broad enough to encourage reactions on a variety of issues.

Of Finnigan’s article, Anderson claims, “We took what I considered an extremely cautious position on such an explosive subject.”<sup>36</sup> Yet the piece sparked more than two years of reader responses, and Anderson recalls being inundated with phone calls threatening to cancel subscriptions, have her fired, and even have the magazine put out of business.<sup>37</sup> Readers’ reactions suggest that Finnigan’s arguments were not decoded as presented and provide insight into how women (and men) approached this early article on abortion and how it interacted with their own feelings on the topic. While Chatelaine

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<sup>35</sup> Finnigan, “Should Canada Change Its Abortion Law?”, 105.

<sup>36</sup> Anderson, Rebel Daughter, 153.

<sup>37</sup> Anderson, Rebel Daughter, 154.

received hundreds of responses, it could print only a small sample. Anderson speaks generally to the process behind choosing which letters would be published: “Between the managing editor and me, we would go through, and we tried to keep it fair. If we got a lot of letters on one article, we’d run as many as we could. But we also made a real effort to run the other side, and certainly if somebody made a really good point we’d try to include that.”<sup>38</sup> Korinek’s case study of letters written to Chatelaine in 1962, the only year for which such letters are preserved, found that the letters published were indeed representative of those received both in terms of geographical representation as well as in terms of the viewpoints expressed therein.<sup>39</sup> Anderson indicates fairness as a motive for publishing views contrary to her own, but she also knew that printing the most virulent or oppositional letters would prompt further reader interest and response.<sup>40</sup> Moreover, because she was careful not to openly alienate readers, rather than disagree with the letter writers herself, she could let other readers reply to those opinions she did not herself agree with.

Although there was no organized “pro-life” movement in 1959, anti-abortion sentiments obviously existed.<sup>41</sup> In two different issues (October and November 1959), excerpts from just eleven readers’ letters were printed in response to Finnigan’s article. Four were against abortion, while the other seven were not. Of those eleven letters, three

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<sup>38</sup> Doris Anderson, personal interview, August 24, 2006.

<sup>39</sup> Valerie J. Korinek, “‘Mrs. Chatelaine’ vs. ‘Mrs. Slob’: Contestants, Correspondents and the Chatelaine Community in Action, 1961-1969,” Journal of the Canadian Historical Association 7, no. 1 (1996): 216-263.

<sup>40</sup> Korinek also makes this point. See Korinek, “‘Mrs. Chatelaine’ vs. ‘Mrs. Slob,’” 263.

<sup>41</sup> For the emergence of the organized pro-life movement in Canada, see Michael W. Cuneo, Catholics Against the Church: Anti-Abortion Protest in Toronto, 1969-1985 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1989), *passim*.

specifically equated abortion with murder. Mrs. R. S. Riccotti from Wallaceburg, Quebec, was most succinct when she wrote: “Your article should have been titled Should Canada Legalize Murder?”<sup>42</sup> Similarly, Mary Louise Hack from Wingham, Ontario, asked, “What is to be gained by helping a mother murder her own child?”<sup>43</sup> L. M. Sullivan from Kitchener, Ontario, wrote, “If, as she [Finnigan] suggests, the abortion laws should be changed, why not the...laws against mercy killing?” She continued, “Rape and incest are detestable crimes, but adding murder to the score doesn’t make the crime any more palatable.”<sup>44</sup> The notion that abortion was equivalent to murder indicates that these readers adopted an “oppositional” stance and did not “decode” the article as desired. It is unlikely that any framing of abortion that did not view it as murder would have been acceptable to them. Hack’s letter is also noteworthy because of her use of the terms “mother” and “child”; for her, the mother-child relationship was immediate and unquestionable after conception. L.M. Sullivan also referred to the “child” when discussing the unborn fetus: “There is no such thing as an unwanted child; there are thousands of couples who are longingly waiting for a child to adopt.”<sup>45</sup> In contrast, other readers offered different definitions of motherhood. Mrs. Brenda Smith from Toronto wrote: “I firmly believe that no woman should be compelled to bear a child she does not want or cannot afford,” indicating that she perceived a connection between the choice to be a mother and the quality of motherhood and did not automatically equate conception

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<sup>42</sup> Mrs. R. S. Riccotti, ‘The Last Word Is Yours,’ *Chatelaine*, November 1959, 134.

<sup>43</sup> Mary Louise Hack, ‘The Last Word Is Yours,’ *Chatelaine*, October 1959, 156.

<sup>44</sup> L.M. Sullivan, ‘The Last Word Is Yours,’ *Chatelaine*, October 1959, 156.

<sup>45</sup> L.M. Sullivan, ‘The Last Word Is Yours,’ *Chatelaine*, October 1959, 156.

with inevitable parenthood.<sup>46</sup>

Readers wrote letters expressing their concern for the humane treatment of women and the pregnant woman's well being. Mrs. K. Kirkpatrick from Duncan, British Columbia, identified herself as "one of those 'worn-out' mothers, having had seven children in less than nine years." She continued, "We need help - the Swedish way," calling to mind Finnigan's discussion of more lenient abortion laws in other countries.<sup>47</sup> D. Elliott from Edmonton, Alberta, drew this comparison: "The anguish and permanent damage inflicted [on pregnant women] is disgraceful to a society which constantly campaigns for more humane treatment for animals, criminals."<sup>48</sup> Mrs. Dorothy Morris from Hillsburg, Ontario, called the denial of legalized abortion "a revolting cruelty that is unworthy of any civilized country."<sup>49</sup> These letters suggest that some readers either adopted or already shared Finnigan's framing of abortion laws in a way that valued "humanity" and the "humane" treatment of women. This position had long been advanced by birth control advocates who saw legal, accessible birth control as in the best interests of women as mothers.<sup>50</sup>

Readers reacted strongly to Finnigan's discussion of religion. Mrs. M. Phillips from Toronto wrote: "God alone gives life and He takes it away. Articles like this make

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<sup>46</sup> Brenda Smith, 'The Last Word Is Yours,' *Chatelaine*, November 1959, 134.

<sup>47</sup> Mrs. K. Kirkpatrick, 'The Last Word Is Yours,' *Chatelaine*, November 1959, 134.

<sup>48</sup> D. Elliott, Letter, 'The Last Word Is Yours,' *Chatelaine*, November 1959, 134.

<sup>49</sup> Mrs. Dorothy Morris, 'The Last Word Is Yours,' *Chatelaine*, October 1959, 156.

<sup>50</sup> See, for example, Angus McLaren and Arlene Tigar McLaren, *The Bedroom and the State: The Changing Practices and Politics of Contraception and Abortion in Canada* (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1997), 54-70; Dianne Dodd, "Women's Involvement in the Canadian Birth Control Movement of the 1930s: The Hamilton Birth Control Clinic," in *Delivering Motherhood: Maternal Ideologies and Practices in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> Centuries*, eds. Katherine Arnup et al. (New York: Routledge, 1990), 150-172.

me sick.”<sup>51</sup> Perceptions of religion, however, varied widely. Readers like Mrs. Dorothy Morris concurred with Finnigan’s stance on religion by commenting, “Religious groups have no right to impose their beliefs upon non-members.”<sup>52</sup> V. Leclair from Ottawa wrote that the laws should be changed or “let us stop pretending that we have religious freedom.”<sup>53</sup> These letters support de Valk’s contention that from the early 1960s onward religious institutions were increasingly critiqued for “imposing” their views of abortion.<sup>54</sup> What the published responses show is that, as with the broader public debate, no consensus existed.

Not surprisingly, the responses to Finnigan’s article reveal that women were as divided as men were on the question of legalizing abortion. The responses also reveal that for some women, Finnigan’s article was a beacon heralding activism. Leclair wrote of the need to change existing abortion laws, arguing “Since the medical profession seems disinclined to help, it is up to women’s groups to act.”<sup>55</sup> Leclair’s comments speak to the presence of “feminist” ideas in 1959 and the need to reconsider the agency of women during this period; although they have not been considered the primary public actors responsible for the 1969 reform of the abortion law, women were nevertheless conscious of the importance of the issue and active in the public sphere; their contributions need to be taken into consideration. Finnigan’s article also encouraged women to discuss and share their experiences with one another. Mrs. H. C. Walshaw

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<sup>51</sup> Mrs. M. Phillips, ‘The Last Word Is Yours,’ *Chatelaine*, November 1956, 134.

<sup>52</sup> Mrs. Dorothy Morris, ‘The Last Word Is Yours,’ *Chatelaine*, October 1959, 156.

<sup>53</sup> V. Leclair, ‘The Last Word Is Yours,’ *Chatelaine*, October 1959, 156.

<sup>54</sup> Alphonse de Valk, “Abortion Politics: Canadian Style” in *Abortion: Readings and Research*, ed. Paul Sachdev (Toronto: Buttersworth, 1981), 10.

<sup>55</sup> V. Leclair, ‘The Last Word Is Yours,’ *Chatelaine*, October 1959, 156.

from Calgary wrote: “Your article...has occasioned some thoughtful discussion among my own friends and acquaintances. We feel, too, that the law is due for an overhauling.”<sup>56</sup> This letter demonstrates that women were interested, as Anderson suspected, in substantive articles and discussions. Chatelaine’s role in providing both the material on abortion and a discussion forum (safe from ridicule or censure) should be recognized as an important element in the evolution of women’s thinking and activism, arguably a precursor of the consciousness raising groups that emerged in the later 1960s and early 1970s. Korinek argues that Chatelaine functioned to produce “a national community of women readers, writers, and editors,” even if it was one that was “a ‘community of discourse’ or an ‘imagined community’”<sup>57</sup> Communities like this were integral to the formation and transformation of many women’s ideas about abortion and other issues that would emerge as key for feminists and women’s liberationists later in the decade.

Letters came from small and large towns across Canada. Of those from small towns especially, it is worth remembering that while the writer may have been acting as an individual, she was also making a public declaration – in a magazine to be read by people who knew her – about her stance on abortion. Perceiving the submission of letters in this way illuminates the politically powerful nature of women’s letter writing in the long 1960s. While women’s voices through these letters can be perceived as diffused, I would argue that they were not weak, but would have had an impact within the

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<sup>56</sup> Mrs. H. C. Walshaw, ‘The Last Word Is Yours,’ Chatelaine, October 1959, 156.

<sup>57</sup> Korinek, Roughing It in the Suburbs, 8. Dawn Currie and Joseph J. Moran concur with this argument about the function of magazines and newspapers advice columns. See Joseph J. Moran, “Newspaper

communities from which the voices originated. In addition to the letter writer making her political stance known, like-minded women in her community would have recognized themselves in such letters. Such visibility is crucial to developing communities and networks of change.<sup>58</sup>

Chatelaine's 1959 article is often referenced in histories of abortion law reform because it was the first piece of its kind in Canada. Beyond being first, however, little is made of its efficacy. Political scientist Jane Jenson argues that it would have had little influence because arguments for abortion law reform that focused on social and economic justice were not politically powerful in Canada. She notes that "the prevailing postwar discourse of Keynesianism and state welfare, in which societal well-being and development depended on state provision of economic and social conditions benefitting all citizens," was not strong in Canada and thus "abortion reform as a means of achieving social justice for mothers and families was a theme present in debate but without much power to shape the representation of the abortion issue."<sup>59</sup> Jenson's contention that a social welfare argument had less currency in Canada than in other countries may be true for the male-dominated political debate on abortion, but the readers' responses to this argument and Chatelaine's next few articles on abortion law reform suggest that such arguments did have relevance for some Canadian women. Political scientist Sandra Burt argues, "The welfare State is not just a set of services, it is also a set of ideas about

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Psychology: Advice and Therapy," Journal of Popular Culture 22, no. 4 (Spring 1989), 123; Dawn Currie, "Dear Abby: Advice pages as a site for the operation of power," Feminist Theory 2, no. 3 (2001), 264.

<sup>58</sup> On the importance of making a movement visible see Joan Scott, "The Evidence of Experience" Critical Inquiry 17, no. 4 (Summer 1991), 774-776.

society, about the family, and - not least important - about women, who have a centrally important role within the family, as its linchpin.”<sup>60</sup> Moreover, in her study of supermarket tabloids, S. Elizabeth Bird argues “The socialization of women tends to produce an attitude that values interpersonal relationships and places most importance on how events affect people,” echoing Carol Gilligan’s work as discussed in the introduction.<sup>61</sup> In these contexts, Chatelaine achieved a tone relevant to its readers’ divergent ideas about pregnancy, motherhood, and abortion. The very breadth of issues Finnigan addressed demonstrates this effort to reach readers – and their responses, demonstrate that she succeeded. Moreover, it is doubtful that the 1959 article was intended to effect immediate political change. Rather, it was an education piece that opened up multiple avenues of discussion and provided material upon which women could base or support their own arguments or positions; it also granted them permission – if needed – to engage publicly with the issue.

Chatelaine did not publish another piece on abortion until March 1963.<sup>62</sup> Three articles then appeared over a two-year period: “Is Abortion Ever Right?” by “Canadian

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<sup>59</sup> Emphasis added. Jane Jenson, “Getting to *Morgentaler*: From One Representation to Another,” in The Politics of Abortion, eds. Janine Brodie, A. M. Gavigan, and Jane Jenson (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1992), 23.

<sup>60</sup> Sandra Burt, “Changing Patterns in Public Policy,” in Changing Patterns: Women in Canada, eds. Sandra Burt et al. (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1988), 219.

<sup>61</sup> S. Elizabeth Bird, For Enquiring Minds: A Cultural Study of Supermarket Tabloids (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1992), 138.

<sup>62</sup> In the intervening years (1959-1963), however, the magazine published articles related to abortion, including an article and editorial on the Thalidomide Crisis, which began in November 1961 when reports that the West German sedative thalidomide (marketed as Kevadon and Talimal) caused birth defects (primarily the absence or “deformity” of limbs). In June and November 1962, following the crisis, Anderson wrote an editorial “Why did it Take Four Months to Stop a Tragedy” and the magazine featured a full length article “What Future for Thalidomide Babies?” by Catherine Sinclair. For more on the crisis, see Barbara Clow, “‘An Illness of Nine Months’ Duration’: Pregnancy and Thalidomide Use in Canada and the United States,” in Women, Health, and Nation: Canada and the United States Since 1945, eds. Georgina

Clergyman” Ray Goodall, published in March 1963; “A Judge Looks at Our Laws on Delinquency/ Divorce/ Abortion/ Sterilization/ Credit/ Censorship” by Judge Kenneth M. Langdon, published in June 1964; and Bessie Touzel’s “Canada’s 7 Most Urgent Social Problems” published in May 1965.<sup>63</sup> In each of these articles, legal abortion was presented by an expert as a solution to a social problem “under certain circumstances.” Goodall shared his experiences with parishioners. Langdon shared his observations from having overseen many cases where people had been adversely affected by Canada’s strict abortion law. Touzel reported briefly on her experiences as a social worker often called in on cases of child neglect or abuse.

Several elements link these articles. In each, the author’s authority was carefully established, which helped legitimize their positions. Head shots and bylines presented mature persons and outlined their professional and, in Langdon’s article, personal qualifications. Like Finnigan, all three referenced the opinions of other experts or scholarly studies to support their own stances. Each referred to abortion laws in other countries to highlight the inequities and unresponsiveness of Canada’s laws. Finally, both Langdon and Goodall used personal narratives to highlight the injustices of illegal abortion and frame legal abortion as a moral choice. Their narratives, which were also used to elicit an emotional reaction from the readers, deserve a full accounting here as the most memorable aspects of the articles.

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Feldberg, Molly Ladd-Taylor, Alison Li, and Kathryn McPherson (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2003): 45-66.

<sup>63</sup> Reverend Ray Goodall, “Is Abortion Ever Right?” *Chatelaine*, March 1963, 43, 48; Kenneth M. Langdon, “A Judge Looks at Our Laws on Delinquency/ Divorce/ Abortion/ Sterilization/ Credit/ Censorship” by Judge Kenneth M. Langdon, *Chatelaine*, June 1964, 25, 75-76; Bessie Touzel as told to Mollie Gillen, Canada’s Seven Most Urgent Social Problems, *Chatelaine*, May 1965, 29, 69-70, 72.

Goodall's piece began with that the story of a parishioner who told him of the "unspeakably sordid" way she got pregnant: her drunken husband held her down while his drunken friend raped her. He argued, "What she wanted more than anything was for me to tell her that it would be morally right for her to seek an abortion," and he confirmed this for her because he "knew well enough that what is illegal is nevertheless morally right."<sup>64</sup> He continued, "There is surely something grossly immoral about a law that fails so miserably to meet human need." In a second tale, Goodall shared the story of "Susie," who was, "blond and beautiful," explaining "I don't know whether it was chiefly her fault or the boy's that she became pregnant at the tender age of fifteen." He continued, "Broken home lives on both sides, ignorance and curiosity, time and place and opportunity" led to her pregnancy. Despite his and others' efforts to help the girl, he relates that, "While we were searching for the best thing to do, conscious all the time of the forbidding frown of the law, Susie precipitately took things into her own hands, and in spite of the best efforts the surgeon made, he was unable to save her." Both of Goodall's narratives involve extreme conditions – rape and death. His message was clear: legalizing abortion under certain circumstances would alleviate unnecessary suffering.

Yet circumstances did not need to be so dire to argue in favour of legalizing abortion on a limited basis. Langdon's narrative, another tale of warning, shared what happened to a young girl who was forced to marry the father of her unborn child. After two tumultuous years of marriage, the now seventeen year old girl was in court seeking a

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<sup>64</sup> Reverend Ray Goodall, "Is Abortion Ever Right?" *Chatelaine*, March 1963, 40.

legal separation from her now twenty-one year old husband. Langdon's analysis of her future was bleak: "Now this young girl has a two-year-old child to look after; she has no husband, no education. Such cases are truly pathetic and in my opinion such marriages should be discouraged."<sup>65</sup> Langdon's condemnation of "shot gun" marriages shows that traditional solutions to long-standing social problems increasingly were thought to have little relevance to a modernizing Canadian society. At a time when many birth control advocates were advocating an ideal of "responsible parenthood," forced marriages that would result in unstable home lives had limited desirability or utility. Both Goodall and Langdon chose to recount narratives in which neither man, in their professional capacities, was able to help the women in question, despite their expressed desire to so do. Hence they presented the abortion law as unfair to women, but also unfair to trained professionals who, in their expert opinion, saw abortion as a valid solution. Notably, they represented the legal and clerical professions, as opposed to the more commonly portrayed medical stance on the issue.

Published reader responses to the three articles varied in tone and content. In the three years covered by these three articles, twenty-four responses were printed. Of those, fifteen can be said to support a position favouring the liberalization of the abortion law, while nine were against abortion. While several letters congratulated the three authors for speaking out on abortion, none appeared reverential or swayed by the professional

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<sup>65</sup> Kenneth M. Langdon, "A Judge Looks at Our Laws on Delinquency/ Divorce/ Abortion/ Sterilization/ Credit/ Censorship" by Judge Kenneth M. Langdon, *Chatelaine*, June 1964, 76.

credentials of the authors.<sup>66</sup> Goodall's profession seemed to work against him in the minds of readers like Miss Anita Mannen from Brantford, Ontario, who found it "revolting" that "a minister of God" would support abortion.<sup>67</sup> Mrs. Sheila Healy of Calgary agreed, arguing, "Mr. Goodall's solution does nothing for God and is on the contrary a mockery of faith."<sup>68</sup> Reverend Carol B. Roberts from Alexander, Manitoba, felt the need to voice her opinion "on two counts: first, I am a United Church minister; second, I am a mother." She denounced legal abortion for fear that it would "devalue human life in the prenatal stage."<sup>69</sup> Given that both she and Goodall were United Church ministers, their divergent positions demonstrate the lack of consensus in that church (as with others) on abortion, despite the ongoing liberalization of attitudes therein.<sup>70</sup> It also demonstrates Robert's effort to construct her authority over the issue by introducing her professional credentials, placing her stance on par with Goodall's.

While the authors' professional credentials may not have swayed opinion, the narrative devices garnered some attention from readers. Healy commented on the narrative of the raped parishioner who sought abortion: "The child's life is sacred. The violence has nothing to do with his right to live."<sup>71</sup> As witnessed in responses to Finnigan's piece, some readers linked abortion to the value or respect afforded life more generally. This indicates that the narratives could not elicit sympathy or sway the

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<sup>66</sup> See for example 'The Last Word Is Yours,' Chatelaine, May 1963, 106; Isobel Ripley, 'The Last Word Is Yours,' Chatelaine, August 1964, 62; Mrs. Pearle Hain, 'The Last Word Is Yours,' Chatelaine, August 1964, 62.

<sup>67</sup> Miss Anita Mannen, 'The Last Word Is Yours,' Chatelaine, May 1963, 106.

<sup>68</sup> Mrs. Sheila Healy, 'The Last Word Is Yours,' Chatelaine, May 1963, 106.

<sup>69</sup> Reverend Carol B. Roberts, Letter, 'The Last Word Is Yours,' Chatelaine, May 1963, 106.

opinions of those with strong objections to abortion. Mrs. Jean Flannery responded to the rape rather than the abortion: "An operation is the answer, quite true. But not abortion. Any man who would assist his pal to rape his wife deserves an operation on his reproductive organs."<sup>72</sup> Prior to 1983, when rape laws were reformed, marital rape was not recognized in Canada, but Flannery's response indicates that women nevertheless held and expressed opinions on its (im)morality.<sup>73</sup>

Responses also addressed the issue of sexual morality. Reverend Roberts, for example, was against abortion because she believed it "would increase the irresponsible attitude toward premarital sexual experiences."<sup>74</sup> Similarly, Miss L. Mouque from Edmonton disagreed with Langdon's labelling of the changes in society as a "New Social Order" based on a "shifting of moral values," and queried, "Why does he not squarely state that the society of today is the New Immoral Order, based on the complete disregard for the laws of God and society?"<sup>75</sup> This attitude is also reflected in the letter by self-identified seventeen-year-old Diane Hameluck from Regina:

I read your grubby article on abortion.... If a woman does not intend to bear children, she has no business indulging in the sacred act of sexual

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<sup>70</sup> Valerie J. Korinek outlines the difficulty women faced in their efforts to become United Church ministers up until the early 1960s. See Valerie Korinek, "No Women Need Apply: The Ordination of Women in the United Church, 1918-65," *Canadian Historical Review* 84, no. 4 (1993): 473-509.

<sup>71</sup> Mrs. Sheila Healy, 'The Last Word Is Yours,' *Chatelaine*, May 1963, 106.

<sup>72</sup> Mrs. Jean Flannery, 'The Last Word Is Yours,' *Chatelaine*, May 1963, 106.

<sup>73</sup> See Barbara James, "Breaking the Hold: Women Against Rape" in *Still Ain't Satisfied: Canadian Feminism Today*, eds Maureen Fitzgerald, Connie Guberman, and Margie Wolfe (Toronto: Women's Press, 1982), 70; Kwong-leung Tang, "Rape Law Reform in Canada: The Success and Limits of Legislation," *International Journal of Offender Therapy and Comparative Criminology* 42, no. 3 (1998), 259. Constance Backhouse argues that sexual assault was widespread throughout Canadian history and argues that perhaps the most representative rape cases are those that are unreported. See Constance Backhouse, *Carnal Crimes: Sexual Assault Law in Canada, 1900-1975* (Toronto: Osgoode Society for Legal History, 2008), 5-8.

<sup>74</sup> Reverend Roberts, 'The Last Word Is Yours,' *Chatelaine*, May 1963, 106.

<sup>75</sup> Miss L. Mouque, 'The Last Word Is Yours,' *Chatelaine*, September 1964, 130

intercourse. In doing so, she is only satisfying her animal lust. You tell the big sob story of broken homes, etc., and then to escape the girl gets pregnant. Hogwash! It's all in the will power. If they ask God for help, He'll surely never refuse an honest plea for help. Your little Susie deserves all the punishments she gets [she died] because of her "foolishness, curiosity and ignorance."<sup>76</sup>

This letter reflects the attitude that intercourse was for procreation and should be enjoyed only within the confines of marriage; in this context, Susie's pregnancy (and death) was a punishment (sanctioned by God) for premarital sex. Responses like these also indicate that readers were reacting not only to specific details, but also to the increased secularization of society and changing social mores. This is reflected in the letter by Mrs. W. C. Haughton of Penticton, British Columbia, who wrote, "Mr. Goodall suggests women should band together to secure legal changes regarding abortion. I feel we should band together to do away with such articles preaching immorality."<sup>77</sup> These four letters unequivocally rejected any place for abortion in Canadian society as well as the attempt to portray it as a moral choice, while published letters favouring a liberalized abortion law did not similarly address sexual morality.

Women's reactions to the narratives also prompted them to use the forum provided by *The Last Word Is Yours* to share their personal experiences. One reader, whose name was withheld, wrote: "My sister had three children.... Since she felt crushed emotionally with the responsibility..., they [she and her husband] visited doctors for years to have either one of them sterilized, but were always refused. Finally, upon

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<sup>76</sup> This letter is quoted in the title to this chapter. Diane Hameluck, 'The Last Word Is Yours,' *Chatelaine*, June 1963, 96.

<sup>77</sup> Mrs. W. C. Haughton, 'The Last Word Is Yours,' *Chatelaine*, May 1963, 196.

learning she was expecting another child, she killed herself.”<sup>78</sup> Another reader, whose name was withheld, wrote:

I felt I should air my views...It is very personal, but I am 68 years old and it is all in the past...I was the mother of four before I was 24½ years old, with a husband who maintained ‘They are your children, you look after them.’...Too, I had been neglected in care after each was born and my insides felt three sizes too big for my frame...I fell pregnant again within two months after the last birth and my doctor performed an abortion. In all I had three.<sup>79</sup>

This letter supports several significant points. First, it reinforces the idea that before contraception was legal or effective, some women, especially married ones seeking to limit their family sizes, considered abortion an acceptable alternative.<sup>80</sup> Second, it speaks to the fact that doctors performed abortions, despite legal consequences, supporting the Canadian Medical Association’s position that there was a need to harmonize law and practice. Third, it demonstrates that women who shared their opinions in a public forum like Chatelaine, were often motivated to do so by personal experience, which served as the basis of their authority to speak to the issue. Fourth, it suggests that the letters pages allowed women to share stories that they might not have been prepared to share with their friends and relatives, but that they could share anonymously with the editor and with strangers as confidants. The letters page liberated some women to speak openly about their pain and the difficulties they suffered while abortion remained illegal. The willingness of readers to share their experiences stemmed, at least in part, from a shared history of birth control failures, fears, and ignorance. Women wanted to solve the

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<sup>78</sup> See “The Last Word Is Yours,” Chatelaine, August 1964, 62.

<sup>79</sup> Name Withheld, “The Last Word Is Yours,” Chatelaine, June 1963, 96.

<sup>80</sup> McLaren and McLaren, The Bedroom and the State, 51.

problem of unwanted pregnancy and were intimately invested in finding or developing solutions.

Moving away from expert opinions, Chatelaine published an article by Earl Damude, “The Medical Discovery that Could Legalize Abortion,” in May 1965. This piece looked at what amniocentesis could tell about a fetus and how it could be used “judiciously” to allow for the termination of pregnancies when fetal deformity was expected. It is not analyzed in depth here primarily because it was a largely technical piece. Additionally, only two letters from readers were published in response to the article. Following Damude’s 1965 piece, the next article that focused on abortion was not published until 1969, but in 1968 Chatelaine published two articles about the Royal Commission on the Status of Women in Canada. They represent a transitional period in Chatelaine’s coverage of abortion because they began to relate abortion to women’s status, but did not yet define it primarily as a woman’s right.

In January 1968 Chatelaine published Mollie Gillen’s article “The Royal Commission on the Status of Women: What Will it Do for You?” which was accompanied by a questionnaire on a variety of social issues, including abortion.<sup>81</sup> As evident in its title, and unlike any of its predecessors, this article focused on women. Likely responding to considerable negative public reaction when the Commission was announced, Gillen set the article up as an educational piece for readers who may have been unfamiliar with the need for a study of women’s status. Her article was broken into a number of subject areas, including: education and training, equal pay, taxation, married

women, working mothers, and wider issues. In each section she described restrictive laws and circumstances confronting Canadian women. She argued that public criticism of the RCSW indicated a misunderstanding of gender equality: “Far too many people (including a lot of women) think it means a total reversal of today’s sex roles.... Others insist...that equality already exists, ignoring the dreary and unarguable statistics” that demonstrate otherwise.<sup>82</sup> She then lauded the commission as an opportunity to present the “discrepancies, injustices and inequalities” that women faced as “*human* problems, not merely women’s alone.”<sup>83</sup> This definition of social inequality as “human problems” is indicative of the transitional nature of this article; within the abortion law reform era, abortion was seen as a social or “human” concern, not a women’s rights issue. Yet by overtly focusing on women’s equality, Gillen’s piece was different from those that preceded it.

More than eleven thousand readers responded to the questionnaire. The analysis of the results, also by Mollie Gillen, was published in the July 1968 issue as “Report: What You Think of Women’s Status.”<sup>84</sup> Gillen used percentages when reporting the questionnaire results, possibly to make the study appear more scientific and, therefore, authoritative. She reported that the majority of women who responded were married (84.09%), about half (48%) worked outside the home and half were housekeepers (50.04%), and most (54.09%) were between the ages of 30 and 50. A substantial number

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<sup>81</sup> A similar questionnaire appeared in the French version of *Chatelaine* and those responses are included in the analysis.

<sup>82</sup> Mollie Gillen, “The Royal Commission: What Will it Do For You?” *Chatelaine*, January 1968, 60.

<sup>83</sup> Gillen, “The Royal Commission,” 62.

<sup>84</sup> Although the questionnaire contained 76 questions in areas such as marriage and family, working wives, education and training, and women in public life, only those answers pertaining to abortion are discussed.

(29.08%) were between 18 and 29, and a fair number (14.08%) were over 50 years.<sup>85</sup> On the initial questionnaire, women were allowed to check one of three options in response to a question about what should be done with the abortion law: (1) “Be left as is (only to save the mother’s life); (2) “Copy Britain’s new law (includes dangers to mental or physical health of the mother, rape, incest, damaged fetus, larger family)””; or (3) “At the request of the woman.”<sup>86</sup> Only a small minority responded that Canada’s abortion law should remain as it was (9% of English readers and 22% of Quebec readers). The majority (56.44% of English readers and 54.64% of Quebec readers) felt the law should be broadened like Britain’s law to allow abortion for a wider range of reasons. Some 32.22% of English readers supported abortion on request. The article also noted that this third option was supported by 40% of urban dwellers and 40% of single women aged 30 to 50.<sup>87</sup>

These findings are important for what they reveal about the readers’ ideas about abortion. Those with strong feelings on the subject were more likely to reply and, therefore, these results cannot be assumed to be representative of Chatelaine readers’ opinions as a whole or of Canadian women in general. Still, the results were viewed as valuable. The official Report of the Royal Commission on the Status of Women in Canada (September 1970) referred to this survey, noting that “more than three-quarters of Chatelaine’s respondents, both English and French, favoured abortion on request or close

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<sup>85</sup> Mollie Gillen, “Report: What You Think of Women’s Status,” Chatelaine, July 1968, 76. Most respondents were also urban dwellers with household incomes between \$5,000 and \$7,999 (32.08%) or over \$10,000 (29.01%).

<sup>86</sup> Gillen, “The Royal Commission,” 23.

<sup>87</sup> The article did not state provide French figures for the third option or other statistics than are noted here. Gillen, “Report,” 80.

to it.”<sup>88</sup> The responses indicate a strong showing of support for changes to the abortion law. For Anderson, “It was just interesting to see where women stood,” especially given the increasingly vocal presence of second wave feminism in Canada.<sup>89</sup> With its focus on women and the changes women wanted to see happen to the abortion law, the first introductory article and the subsequent poll results indicate a movement in the magazine’s coverage away from viewing abortion as a social problem and toward an understanding of it as a women’s issue.

*“Now we know where women stand”: Feature Articles and Reader Responses on Abortion Law Repeal, Post-1968*

In May 1969, the House of Commons passed Bill C-150, the omnibus bill that changed the Criminal Code to make abortion legal when a hospital therapeutic abortion committee (TAC), comprised of at least three physicians, deemed that a woman’s request for abortion was warranted. The law pleased few outside the medical profession and won virtually no support from interested women. Chatelaine responded quickly to the legal changes with “Our New Abortion Law: Already Outdated?” by Mollie Gillen, published in November 1969. Under the new law, abortions were only permissible if the “life or health” of the mother was endangered; Gillen observed that while the vague meaning of “health” might expand the reasons for which women could obtain abortions, the same ambiguity meant that their fate resided with individual TACs that would, she warned

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<sup>88</sup> Report of the Royal Commission on the Status of Women in Canada (Ottawa, 1970), 285.

readers, “satisfy its own conscience without regard for yours.”<sup>90</sup> The new legislation provided the safety valve doctors had campaigned for with little consideration of the effects on women, perpetuating their dependence on the medical profession.<sup>91</sup> Speaking to this, Gillen argued that women should be able to determine what response to an unplanned pregnancy best suited their lives:

Like the laws that permit the drinking of alcohol but don't force abstainers to imbibe, and the laws that permit divorce, but don't drive happily married couples to the courts, the only fair and democratic law is one that would make abortion legally available and medically protected to those who, *assessing their own needs and capabilities*, have decided on abortion as the best solution to an admittedly tragic situation.<sup>92</sup>

Gillen's position was tantamount to “abortion on request.” Her support of the woman as the sole decision maker represents a clear departure from the stance taken in previous articles. Instead of calling for legal abortion under certain circumstances, she argued that the new law was inadequate and advocated a repeal of that law.

Gillen furthered the focus on women by arguing that they were victims of their biology, unfairly “caught in a trap of nature by an act in which both sexes are equally involved, but of which only one is required to bear the consequences.”<sup>93</sup> She observed that despite their obvious investment, women had been largely absent from the public hearings on the abortion law changes, which were effectively “a symposium of national

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<sup>89</sup> Doris Anderson, personal interview, August 24, 2006.

<sup>90</sup> Mollie Gillen, “Our New Abortion Law: Already Outdated?” *Chatelaine*, November 1969, 102. The 1977 Bagdley Report validated this criticism when it noted inequities in access to abortion across Canada because of the autonomy (and therefore arbitrary nature) of the individual TACs; see R.F. Bagdley et al, *Report of the Royal Commission on the Operation of the Abortion Law* (Ottawa: Supply and Services Canada, 1977).

<sup>91</sup> Reference to Jenson

<sup>92</sup> Emphasis as printed. Gillen, “Our New Abortion Law,” 107.

opinion...often reflecting theological, moral and emotional judgments.”<sup>94</sup> She was concerned by the absent female voices and bristled at the punitive opinions of men, “who will never themselves have the privilege of this wonderful opportunity to suffer, learn and purify themselves.”<sup>95</sup> For her, the uneven burden of unplanned pregnancies justified making abortion the private, personal decision of each individual woman, a position consistent with growing feminist emphasis on women’s equality and liberty.

In the three printed responses to Gillen’s article, awareness of and frustration at the male bias in the abortion debate became more visible. Mrs. Margery Cowley from Uxbridge, Ontario, stated: “Your article made my blood boil...How can these pompous men sit on high deciding the fate of women and their unborn?”<sup>96</sup> One male reader commented on the injustice of the prevalence of men in the abortion debate, but reached a very different conclusion. Dr. Colin P. Harrison from Vancouver, who was against legalizing abortion, wrote: “The problems of sex do fall unfairly upon the female and abortion is a very convenient solution - for the male.”<sup>97</sup> Three letters are too few to use as a basis for conclusions, but sentiments like those expressed by Crowley, which recognized the uneven burden of fertility, were necessary for the emergence, popularization, and expansion of the abortion repeal movement. When women (and men) not only accepted that they were the experts on their own lives, but engaged in action against the existing law, they became a part of the movement for abortion law repeal.

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<sup>93</sup> Gillen, “Our New Abortion Law,” 102.

<sup>94</sup> Gillen, “Our New Abortion Law,” 102.

<sup>95</sup> Gillen, “Our New Abortion Law,” 106.

<sup>96</sup> Punctuation in the original. Mrs. Margery Cowley, ‘The Last Word Is Yours,’ *Chatelaine*, January 1970, 76. Although only three responses were printed, they were quoted in greater depth than many previous ones.

This new emphasis on abortion as a woman's decision – one that was linked to her equality, autonomy, and liberty – continued in subsequent articles and editorials throughout Anderson's tenure.

The content of the message was not the only important factor in the magazine's push for legal abortion; Chatelaine's articles on abortion were also timely. Anderson's September 1970 editorial "Change the Abortion Law Now" was also a response to the 1969 law changes. It followed closely on the heels of the May 1970 Abortion Caravan, coincided with the September 1970 submission of the Report of the RCSW to the Governor General (made public in December of that year), and arguably can be viewed as a response to letters from readers published in the same issue (see below).<sup>98</sup> By 1970, Anderson felt confident about addressing abortion personally, which she did in this first editorial on the subject. She explains the timing: "I think by that time, over ten years we'd been hammering away on that subject, and we had made some progress and government had said a woman could appear before a committee of three physicians and if she got their permission she could have an abortion. So...I think that it was okay for me as the editor to write."<sup>99</sup>

In her editorial, she declared the new abortion law defective and decried the fact that "the legislators settled back complacently, convinced that a nasty subject had been taken care of in a typically cautious, Canadian way for, say, twenty years." But, she argued, "The problem for women is too real for it to go away. We can't wait the

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<sup>97</sup> Dr. Colin P. Harrison, 'The Last Word Is Yours,' Chatelaine, January 1970, 76.

<sup>98</sup> Doris Anderson, "Change the Abortion Law Now," Chatelaine, September 1970, 1; Report of the Royal Commission on the Status of Women in Canada (Ottawa, 1970), 286.

<sup>99</sup> Doris Anderson, personal interview, August 24, 2006.

customary Canadian twenty, ten, or even five, years for this reform. We need it now.”<sup>100</sup> Like Gillen, Anderson positioned abortion as a woman’s concern. In response, Mrs. J. Townson of Burlington, Ontario, wrote in agreement: “That almost all-male parliament in Ottawa needs to...remember that we women *do* have the vote.”<sup>101</sup> Anderson also argued that those who opposed abortion “should not be able to force their beliefs on others – any more than vegetarians should be able to stop other people from eating meat.” Jean E. M. Read’s response picked up the issue of “imposing” beliefs. She began, “Though you paid lip service to the right of people like me who regard abortion as child murder, I still feel you don’t understand our position. To me, a person is a potential human being from the moment of conception..., not six weeks, three months or any other later time.”<sup>102</sup> She continued, “I resent your statement that those of us who regard abortion as murder have no right to impose our views on others.” Although Read supported demands for birth control information and voluntary sterilization, she argued “When a woman becomes pregnant, not just her body is involved but also the body of her unborn child.... I shall continue to press for the rights of the weak and helpless.” These letters demonstrate how readers perceived themselves to be in an intimate dialogue with Anderson and felt able to openly refute Anderson’s attempts to frame legal abortion as something desirable, decoding the issues in ways that conformed to their own moral positions.

In the same issue as Anderson’s editorial Chatelaine published two letters responding to a brief July 1970 column about women’s liberation. Antoinette O’Boyle

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<sup>100</sup> Anderson, “Change The Abortion Law Now,” 1.

<sup>101</sup> Mrs. J. Townson, ‘The Last Word Is Yours,’ Chatelaine, November 1970, 104.

<sup>102</sup> Jean E. M. Read, ‘The Last Word Is Yours,’ Chatelaine, November 1970, 104.

from The Pas, Manitoba, wrote, “On the question of abortion, Women’s liberation...continues to regard the matter in the most superficial manner.... The taking of human life is murder.... Feminists should aim their campaign at educating society into accepting the unmarried mothers as they have accepted unmarried fathers.” O’Boyle’s letter was a thoughtful critique, expressing her frustration at the politics of women’s liberation. Less considerate missives, however, continued to appear in the magazine. Mrs. E. B. Brown of Victoria, British Columbia, wrote, for example: “I wonder if we are still in the Dark Ages! You’d think there was no solution for unwanted pregnancies but ABORTION. Therapeutic abortions are necessary and approved by everyone, almost. On-demand ones are necessary only for the following types of females: 1. the pathetically uninformed (this we can cure): 2. the lazy (what a hope!); 3. the promiscuous (the only thing available to them should be compulsory sterilization).”<sup>103</sup> These letters demonstrate that even the women who were against abortion and who are sometimes depicted as conservative and timid did not shy away from forcefully expressing their views.

In October 1970, just one month after Anderson’s editorial, Mollie Gillen wrote again, continuing the criticism of the 1969 law changes. Like the RCSW article preceding it, “Why Women Are Still Angry About Abortion” was accompanied by a questionnaire on abortion.<sup>104</sup> Gillen’s article reiterated points made in her earlier article. To highlight the inequities of the law that she had predicted in the first article, she included examples of the struggles of women to procure abortions, utilizing the familiar

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<sup>103</sup> Mrs. E. Brown, ‘The Last Word Is Yours,’ *Chatelaine*, November 1970, 104.

<sup>104</sup> The questionnaire was divided into three sections: “Your Views on the Law,” “Canadian Abortion Experience,” and “Background Data.” It was designed so that a computer could tally the results.

narrative format. She related, for example, that although “Judy’s” doctor had advised her against having a third child for health reasons, when she got pregnant he said: ““It’s nice to have three children, you know.””<sup>105</sup> The example of Judy’s struggle may have also garnered sympathy from some readers because Judy, a responsible, mature teacher, might have resembled any number of teachers in the schools attended by the children of readers. Thus, the article can be read as an attempt to both normalize abortion and gain sympathy for those seeking abortion in the face of an unresponsive and inadequate law. Gillen also shared Judy’s doctor’s reaction when he discovered she was no longer pregnant: “He came round from behind his desk and sat down with me, and confessed how deeply he had had to search his conscience for these matters (*his* conscience for *my* decisions!), and then he told me – *then* he told me! – that he had on occasion referred patients to clinics in Japan.” Judy’s story illuminated the extent to which women were at the mercy of their doctors, not fully in control of their bodies or lives; in this respect it continued with the theme used in other articles about the unfair control men exercised in women’s lives. In closing, Gillen noted that the law would not change unless MPs were forced to vote on the issue with the knowledge that opposing legalized abortion would cost them their seats. In this way, her article can be seen as an attempt to incite the women who would answer the questionnaire to send a message to politicians. More than 6,000 readers completed the questionnaire, indicating their agency and desire to be heard.

Gillen’s analysis of the poll results, titled “Your Replies to the Abortion Quiz,” was published in March 1971. Chatelaine’s use of a reader poll might suggest that

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<sup>105</sup> Gillen, “Why Women are Still Angry,” 80.

Anderson was fairly certain of obtaining a favourably “pro-choice” response, but she admits that she was not at all certain “because there were anti-abortion groups that were very well organized.”<sup>106</sup> Still, she likely was encouraged by the precedent set in the 1968 RCSW poll, in which the majority of readers had favoured liberalizing the abortion laws.<sup>107</sup> The responses to the poll were from readers primarily in their childbearing years (21-30 year olds comprised 41% of respondents and 31-40 year olds accounted for 29.5%), most of whom were married (79.0%), and living in cities of more than 100,000 people (45.9%) or in areas with populations of 10,000 to 100,000 (26.2%).<sup>108</sup> More than half of the respondents were not employed outside of the home (55.8%, compared to 42.6% who were). The largest religious segments responding to the questionnaire were Protestants (58.6%) followed by Roman Catholics (20.8%).<sup>109</sup>

The subtitle for Gillen’s article reported that readers were “overwhelmingly for abortion on demand,” indicating how Chatelaine chose to interpret replies that were more complex.<sup>110</sup> She reported that 73.9% of readers felt that abortion should be a decision involving a woman and her doctor, 21.7% felt the law should be changed to include additional reasons for permitting abortion, and just 4.2% felt the law should be left in the Criminal Code.<sup>111</sup> In a separate question, readers were asked the reasons for which they felt abortion should be legal and were given a list of circumstances that included rape,

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<sup>106</sup> Doris Anderson, personal interview, August 24, 2006.

<sup>107</sup> Mollie Gillen, “Your Replies to the Abortion Quiz,” Chatelaine, March 1971, 23.

<sup>108</sup> The age breakdown was reported as: under 20 (4%), 41-50 (17.8%), and over 50 (7.3%). Regarding marital status, 13.7% were single, 3.8% were divorced, and 2.1% were widowed. A smaller number of women (26.1%) reported living in areas populated by fewer than 10,000 people.

<sup>109</sup> Of the remaining number, 1.2% were Jewish, 13.5% reported no religion, and 5% were listed as “other.” Gillen, “Abortion Quiz,” 23, 62-63.

incest, fetal damage, economics, mother's health, mother's age (too young), and marital status. Readers replied that abortion should be available because of rape or incest (50.6%), possible damage to fetus (49.5%), economic reasons (41.8%), mother's health inadequate to raise child (46.1%), too young (42.9%), unmarried, widowed, or divorced (37.5%), and partners planning to separate (33.9%).<sup>112</sup> Women were also able to include other circumstances that they felt should justify access to legal abortion, and responses indicated pregnancies that occurred at a late age or in the context of menopause.<sup>113</sup>

Of the women responding to the questionnaire, many had had an abortion, which may well account for the fairly tolerant or accepting attitudes in the results. Here Chatelaine provided whole numbers instead of percentages listing the following findings alongside the number of abortions readers had had: one (1,304), two (274), three (90), more than three (71). Of the women who had had abortions, 745 were married at the time of the abortion, while 940 were single, and the remainder were either divorced (74) or widowed (15). Of women who had more than one abortion, 298 were married, 162 were single, and the remainder were either divorced (31) or widowed (5). Some 1,068 readers had no children after their last abortion, which is consistent with the use of abortion by married women seeking to limit their family size.<sup>114</sup> Of the Chatelaine readers who had abortions, 1,141 reported no physical consequences, 337 indicated "some (mild)," 226 indicated "some (serious)," 24 said they were sterile following the

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<sup>110</sup> Of the 6,030 responses, 5,368 were from English readers and 662 were from French readers. Gillen, "Abortion Quiz," 23.

<sup>111</sup> Gillen, "Abortion Quiz," 23.

<sup>112</sup> Gillen, "Abortion Quiz," 23.

<sup>113</sup> Gillen, "Abortion Quiz," 23.

abortion, and 35 indicated “other long-term damage.” Of “psychological consequences following their abortion, 384 said there were none, 953 indicated feeling “relief and elation,” 385 reported mild depression, and 57 indicated serious depression. It may well be problematic to link “relief” and “elation” in the emotional responses to abortion, because doing so masks other feelings (like grief, remorse, or indifference) that readers might have felt along with their relief. Nevertheless, the majority stated that they did not regret the abortion (1,653 versus 108 who did) and an almost equal number claimed that they would have another abortion if it were necessary (1,574 versus 159 who would not). These responses also indicate a substantial number of women in Canada had personal experiences with abortion and, as such, they were invested in the legal status and availability of the procedure.

Interestingly, Gillen noted that support for abortion on demand increased significantly with the respondents’ ages (support was 65% for those under twenty years, but 83% for those over 50 years).<sup>115</sup> In response, Gillen queried, “Are our young people more idealistic, our older people more realistic, about life?”<sup>116</sup> The difference probably had more to do with experience; older women would have likely experienced several more pregnancies than the younger women (who were unlikely to have been pregnant at all by the time they responded to the poll) and could better understand the desire to limit fertility, especially having lived through an era with less effective birth control methods

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<sup>114</sup> Following the last abortion, some 281 had one child, 219 had two children, 125 had three children, and 68 had more than three children. Gillen, “Abortion Quiz,” 62.

<sup>115</sup> Scholarly studies support this interpretation of generational differences in abortion attitudes. See, for example, Elizabeth Adell Cook et al, “Generational Differences in Attitudes Toward Abortion,” *American Politics Quarterly* 21, no.1 (January 1993), 41.

<sup>116</sup> Gillen, “Abortion Quiz,” 23.

than were available in 1970.<sup>117</sup>

Also of interest is where these Chatelaine readers had procured their abortions and who performed them. Most women who had an abortion (1,278) obtained it illegally in Canada. A small number (201) had obtained legal abortions in Canada, while a slightly larger number (262) had obtained legal abortions outside of Canada that would have been illegal in Canada. Of those women who had an illegal abortion in Canada, they responded in the following way when asked who performed the abortion: themselves (233), family member (10), male partner (37), friend (13), paramedical person (194), and nonmedical person (276). The number of women who claimed to have been aided by a doctor in Canada is significant because it echoes historian Carol Joffee's finding in the United States that "physicians of conscience" performed about one third of illegal abortions at mid-century.<sup>118</sup>

Although the questionnaire provided no space for women to share personal experiences, many women wrote in their own stories, thoughts, and opinions anyway, suggesting both the importance of the issue and the comfort these women felt with the forum offered by the magazine. Some offered criticisms, including the point that sexual intercourse was for reproduction only, unwanted pregnancies should not happen given the available birth control, women should exert self-control, and unplanned pregnancies were just punishment for immoral behaviour. Other readers felt that if they could adapt to an

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<sup>117</sup> As well, although the pill was not legalized until 1969, it was prescribed for "menstrual irregularities" throughout the 1960s. This prescription would have been too late for the older respondents, but possibly beneficial for younger ones.

<sup>118</sup> Carole Joffee, "Portraits of Three 'Physicians of Conscience': Abortion before Legalization in the United States," Journal of the History of Sexuality 2, no. 1 (1991), 47. Joffee's study includes Canada's

unwanted pregnancy, so could the women seeking abortions.<sup>119</sup> All of these criticisms represent attitudes suggesting that the pregnant woman was accountable for the unwanted pregnancy, but the male partner was not similarly blamed or even mentioned, a position Gillen had specifically criticized in the introduction to the questionnaire.

Criticisms of abortion were also included in letters to the editor. M. Wilson of San Josef, British Columbia, wrote that Gillen's article "makes me wonder just where we as human beings have gone awry." She continued, "We demand abortion, we demand to be on equal basis with men. We demand, we demand. Just what will we as women demand next? I realize the dignity of womanhood has long gone down the drain, but let us at least retain the dignity of human beings before we revert to the primitive man in the cave man age."<sup>120</sup> Her letter echoes laments from earlier in the decade that decried the perceived increase in immorality accompanying the "New Morality." Rose M. Marcy of Stratford, Ontario, was similarly critical: "You obtained exactly the results you wanted...due to the one-sided nature of the questions asked and the comments about those people who make antiabortion statements."<sup>121</sup> Readers also wanted solutions other than abortion, a common theme throughout the decade. Sylvia J. White of Nobleton, Ontario, wrote against abortion in that she did not want it to be seen as the sole solution to the "population explosion...problem" and asked that the magazine publish "in depth" articles designed to help women "prevent pregnancy" for those "readers who don't want

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Dr. Henry Morgentaler. Narratives in No Choice: Canadian Women Tell Their Stories of Illegal Abortions also support this finding.

<sup>119</sup> Gillen, "Abortion Quiz," 62.

<sup>120</sup> M. Wilson, 'The Last Word Is Yours,' Chatelaine, December 1970, 76.

<sup>121</sup> Rose M. Marcy, 'The Last Word Is Yours,' Chatelaine, June 1971, 76.

to bother with all this difficult abortion business!!”<sup>122</sup>

Other readers were motivated by the poll (and the accompanying articles) to take action on the issue. Mrs. B. R. Stocks of St. Boniface, Manitoba, reported sending the questionnaire results to her M.P. to impress upon him her desire for change.<sup>123</sup> Mrs. Douglas Wilson from Owen Sound, Ontario, demonstrated a similar attitude when she stated, “Now we know where women stand, only one problem remains, how do we go about getting this through the thick skulls of our government?”<sup>124</sup> Gauging abortion attitudes much closer to home, Josephine Brodie from Orleans, Ontario, reported, “Having completed your questionnaire on abortion I asked my husband if he agreed with my replies, and he said, ‘Yes, I do, but I’m not really qualified to judge, since I am a man, and never likely to be personally or physically involved.’”<sup>125</sup> She continued, “Wouldn’t it be so much better for all concerned if this attitude prevailed among the members of parliament who have the power, but not apparently the inclination, to remove the abortion law from the Criminal Code?” These readers appear to share Gillen’s frustration with the place of males in the abortion debate. Whether pro or con, the results of the abortion poll indicate that women felt the freedom and safety to voice their opinions and share their experiences in Chatelaine. Although there was the promise of anonymity, the questionnaire offered women an opportunity to participate in a larger community of women. Those who shared intimate details of their own experiences by recording their stories, even in a “disposable” forum like a magazine, were bearing

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<sup>122</sup> Sylvia J. White, ‘The Last Word Is Yours,’ Chatelaine, December 1970, 76.

<sup>123</sup> Mrs. B. R. Stocks, ‘The Last Word Is Yours,’ Chatelaine, June 1971, 76.

<sup>124</sup> Mrs. Douglas Wilson, ‘The Last Word Is Yours,’ Chatelaine, June 1971, 76.

<sup>125</sup> Josephine Brodie, ‘The Last Word Is Yours,’ Chatelaine, January 1971, 64.

witness to their own lives as well as demonstrating their expertise which underscored their authority to speak on the issue.

In her study of Chatelaine, Korinek devotes little attention to the magazine's coverage of abortion. Still, she claims that "although reproductive rights were clearly a part of the 'feminist agenda,' the magazine structured the articles – their content, tone, and purpose – as medical articles, thereby linking reproductive rights to women's health, the population crisis, and new medical trends."<sup>126</sup> The analysis in this chapter, however, has shown that, in the abortion articles, Chatelaine's coverage was not structured solely as a medical issue. Rather, the articles were more likely to position abortion first as a social problem and then as a woman's issue. This is not to say that the medical profession or medical discoveries were not a factor, but that the magazine's coverage was more diverse than Korinek's comment suggests. This diversity comes across in the many subjects its readers addressed in their letters. Their letters, moreover, in addition to exemplifying many different facets of women's thought on abortion throughout the decade, are also important examples of women's agency. Women were neither silent nor reluctant to offer opinions, challenge opinions they opposed, and share their ideas and experiences with one another in a largely female space. Instead, they thoughtfully and forcefully argued both for and against abortion, speaking from a variety of perspectives, laying various claims to authority over the issue.

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<sup>126</sup> Korinek, Roughing It in the Suburbs, 336.

### **“The most formidable protagonist”: The Globe and Mail, 1959-1970**

As de Valk argues, the Globe and Mail was an important source for media coverage of abortion throughout the 1960s; he even argues that it became “the most formidable protagonist of the legalization of abortion among the general public.”<sup>127</sup> It, however, differs from Chatelaine in one very important respect: it was not targeted specifically at women, but was a “mainstream” medium.<sup>128</sup> This analysis focuses on where and when the voices of female readers are discernable and what their presence means for the place of women in the public dialogue on abortion through the decade. While there were only five Globe and Mail articles published in 1959 with “abortion” in the title and nine that mentioned abortion, by 1970 there were 123 articles with “abortion” in the title and 253 that referenced abortion.<sup>129</sup> The publication of these articles ebbed and flowed in line with related political and social events. In 1962, for example, the Thalidomide crisis and the case of Sherri Finkbine attracted a lot of media attention, as did the passage of new abortion laws worldwide (such as the 1967 U.K. reform) and the reforms to the Criminal Code of Canada in relation to the 1968 Canadian federal election.<sup>130</sup> The number of articles published is significant, but of more interest is

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<sup>127</sup> de Valk, Morality and Law, 11.

<sup>128</sup> Through much of the period in question there was a women’s section in the Globe and Mail. While abortion articles sometimes appeared there, they were more frequently published in the other sections.

<sup>129</sup> The Globe and Mail’s electronic database was created by scanning microfilmed copies of the paper. This format allows for an optical character recognition (OCR) search using the word “abortion” as the keyword. Given this format, the search results sometimes included words similar to “abortion” and it is possible that articles pertaining to abortion were also missed in the returned search results. Thus, the number of articles discussed in this chapter can only be approximate.

<sup>130</sup> While abortion alone was not necessarily a key issue, the reformation of the Criminal Code in relation to abortion, divorce, homosexuality, and birth control attracted significant attention.

the newspaper's stance: the Globe and Mail demonstrated obvious support for the liberalization of the abortion laws throughout the decade.

Despite peaks and lulls in the coverage of abortion over the decade, certain topics remained of consistent interest. Investigations, arrests, and trials related to illegal abortions and deaths stemming from abortions were popular throughout the decade, but especially in the early 1960s. The question of morality and abortion loomed large, with supporters and opponents of a liberalized abortion law both claiming moral ground. There were increasing calls to clarify the abortion law, often linked to the Canadian Medical Association's calls for abortion law reform. Many articles focused on such reform within the context of revising the Criminal Code; coverage of pending legal changes and House debates increased in 1966-68 with the creation of the Health and Welfare Standing Committee. Throughout the decade, but especially in the latter half, there was substantial coverage of the legality of abortion in the United States and the United Kingdom, as well as particular interest in developments in Japan, India, and the Soviet Union. Articles also addressed the issue of abortion for Canadian churches – both in the context of those resisting liberalization and those supporting it – as they endeavoured to make their churches responsive to an increasingly secular and modernizing society. Women as actors in the abortion discussion are most apparent in articles about the National Council of Women, which made notable calls to liberalize the abortion law from 1963 to 1966. Beginning in 1967, however, more women's organizations became involved in the public call for legal abortion and women's liberationists attracted more of the Globe and Mail's attention thereafter, as did groups

specifically dedicated to abortion law reform such as the Association for the Modernization of Canadian Abortion Laws.

In addition to its steady and growing coverage of abortion over the decade, two aspects in particular stand out in relation to this analysis. First, the letters to the editor offer some insight into readers' reactions to the articles published and issues raised by the newspaper. Letters from women and the topics they address are of particular interest. A former publisher and editor-in-chief of the paper, Norman Webster, writes of readers' letters in general: "Shocked and appalled they may be; reticent they are not, and the wise paper sets aside prime editorial real estate for this correspondence."<sup>131</sup> The following analysis considers the letters by women that the Globe and Mail felt worthy of publication. The second compelling component of the newspaper's coverage of abortion related issues is found in the advice column, *Elizabeth Thompson Advises*. During the decade she approached the issue of unplanned pregnancy on a few occasions and the advice she gave and the letters written by readers in response to that advice provide some insight into female Globe and Mail readers' perspectives on abortion.

### *Letters to the Editor*

During the period in question, the Globe and Mail published 140 letters that referenced abortion. Almost half of these, or 68, were written by women, while men

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<sup>131</sup> Norman Webster, "Foreword," Shocked and Appalled: A Century of Letters to *The Globe and Mail*, ed. Jack Kapica (Toronto: Lester and Orpen, 1985), ix.

wrote 45. It is unclear who wrote the remaining number as only initials were used.<sup>132</sup>

The number of letters published ebbed and flowed, peaking first in 1961 when the paper ran its “Murder or Mercy?” series. Analysis of the readers’ letters throughout the decade illuminates certain themes that recurred in women’s letters, including the place of women on the issue (both as subjects and actors); women’s responses to one another; abortion as a solution to social problems; abortion in the larger religious context, and women’s personal experiences with abortion.

In October 1961, the Globe and Mail ran seven articles on abortion. In a text box in the middle of the articles, the paper asked, “Are Canada’s laws on abortion confusing, harsh and out-of-date? Are they forcing women to risk their lives at the hands of quacks and criminals? Should they be relaxed, discarded or clarified?”<sup>133</sup> It was then noted that divergent ideas would follow in the coming articles, written by “religious leaders, a doctor and a social scientist.”<sup>134</sup> Norman Borins, a lawyer, wrote the first piece which was entitled, “The Laws on Abortion: Are They Inconsistent or Too Difficult to Enforce?” The next article, by Anglican Bishop, F. H. Wilkinson, was titled “The Moral Arguments About Legalizing Therapeutic Abortion.” Another religious figure, Gordon

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<sup>132</sup> Included in the “unknown” category are a few that were written by authors with unisexual names.

<sup>133</sup> Norman Borins, “The Laws on Abortion: Are they Inconsistent or too Difficult to Enforce?” Globe and Mail, October 2, 1961, 7.

<sup>134</sup> After the first article, all subsequent articles had “Murder or Mercy?” at the beginning of their titles. The seven articles were: Borins, “The Laws on Abortion,” 7; F. H. Wilkinson, “Murder or Mercy? The Moral Arguments About Legalizing Therapeutic Abortion,” Globe and Mail, October 3, 1961, 7; Gordon George, “Murder or Mercy?- III - Can Moral Principles Survive if the Law Permits Abortion?” Globe and Mail, October 4, 1961, 7; Ben Schlesinger, “Murder or Mercy? – IV – Do Laws Against Abortion Make Hypocrites of Us All?” Globe and Mail, October 5, 1961, 7; Abraham L. Feinberg, “Murder or Mercy?-V – Will Abortion Be Upheld as a Safeguard Against Overpopulation?” Globe and Mail, October 6, 1961, 7; John L. Harkins, “Murder or Mercy?-VI – Would Abortion Be Practical After Conviction in Rape Cases?” Globe and Mail, October 7, 1961, 7; G. P. Gilmour, “Murder or Mercy? – VII – ‘No, Even Though-’ vs. Yes, but-’ on the Abortion Question,” Globe and Mail, October 10, 1961, 7.

George, Superior of the Jesuit province of Upper Canada, followed with “Can Moral Principles Survive if the Law Permits Abortion?” “Laws Against Abortion Make Hypocrites of Us All?” by Ben Schlesinger, Professor of Social Work, came next. The paper then returned to religious interpretation when it printed, “Will Abortion Be Upheld as a Safeguard Against Overpopulation?” by Rabbi Abraham L. Feinberg. The final two pieces were by medical experts: “Would Abortion Be Practical After Conviction in Rape Cases?” by John L. Harkins, an obstetrician-gynaecologist, and “‘No, Even Though-’ vs. Yes, but-’ on the Abortion Question” by G. P. Gilmour, former president of McMaster University. While there was an obvious attempt to provide opinions from a range of professionals, all seven authors were male.<sup>135</sup>

Only Gordon George, a Roman Catholic, came out as wholly against abortion, expressing concern for the unborn, although others (Wilkinson, Feinberg, and Harkins) supported legal reform with strict limitations. Schlesinger had the most liberal position, supporting legal abortion for medical and mental health concerns, when fetal deformities were expected, or in the case of rape. For him, the safety of women was paramount and he ended his article by quoting Dr. Guttmacher: “The law makes hypocrites of us all, we abandon women in their greatest need to the criminal abortionist.” This utilized the spectre of the back alley abortionist, which was increasingly common in pro-choice narratives. Borins’s piece was the second most liberal, arguing that “the legal norm may be brought into conformity with the social conduct which is undoubtedly the proper position to take.” This echoed Finnigan’s article in Chatelaine, which highlighted the

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<sup>135</sup> Women increasingly wrote articles on abortion in the latter half of the decade, with certain reporters

disparity between practice and prescription. Both Harkins and Gilmour raised medical arguments, with Harkins welcoming “clarification...in view of its implications for current medical practice” and Gilmour arguing that “responsibility for the termination of any pregnancy should rest on appointed committees and not alone on the afflicted woman or the doctor,” because the woman, at least, would be affected by “unbearable guilt feelings.” Their emphasis on the role of the physician makes sense given their professions.

The Globe and Mail published seven letters in response to these articles, four of which were written by women. The first was from Marilyn Peringer, who reported that she wrote from her hospital room, having just given birth. The bulk of her letter refuted the arguments made by Schlesinger. She also addressed the “social stigma” attached to unwed motherhood, believed that it was “gradually disappearing,” and suggested, “The truly harmful ‘unconscious prejudices’ are not those held against abortion, but those which cause unfortunate girls to seek abortion.”<sup>136</sup> Hers was the only published letter by a woman that was resolutely against abortion. Mrs. M. V. Warner’s short letter questioned why there were “no infallible methods of contraception” and decried that amidst a “mounting world population” women were denied voluntary sterilization, a lament later voiced by women in other forums like the RCSW. Dorothy Morris assailed Gordon George as a representative of the Catholic Church and wondered how he reconciled opposing abortion when the Church “has always given its blessing to war.”<sup>137</sup>

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like Joan Hollobon writing frequently.

<sup>136</sup> Marilyn Peringer, Letter to the Editor, Globe and Mail, October 11, 1961, 6.

<sup>137</sup> Dorothy Morris, Letter to the Editor, Globe and Mail, October 13, 1961, 6.

She argued, “To deny abortion under any circumstances is barbarous cruelty,” and further wrote, “If women are to be more than irresponsible automations they must be free to decide when to give birth and when not to.” Morris’s 1961 letter seems to contain the awareness of women’s condition that Jenson argued was absent from women’s language through much of the 1960s. The final letter by a woman came from Elsa Pamminger, who was resolutely in favour of women deciding for themselves what was best for them. She related that although she loved being a mother, “I would never expect all women to have the same feelings or to react in the same manner even under the same circumstances. I feel very strongly that basically it should remain a matter of every woman’s conscience how she feels about children.”<sup>138</sup> She also criticized some of the commentary on abortion, noting, “No matter how cleverly any man may talk on the subject, it will only be abstract philosophizing.”<sup>139</sup> In addition to demonstrating as diverse opinions as those presented in Chatelaine, these letters are also noteworthy because they were written by women who obviously had no qualms about sharing their opinions publicly, and, presumably, using their real names to do so. Perring even took the time to write despite (or perhaps because of) having just given birth.

As has and will be seen in other forums throughout the decade and even as early as 1961, in letters to the Globe and Mail like Pamminger’s letter cited above, women adopted positions that were women-focused. Brenda Smith’s letter from September 1961 reads: “Only one person is involved- the unfortunate female.... No one

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<sup>138</sup> Elsa Pamminger, Letter to the Editor, Globe and Mail, October 20, 1961, 6.

<sup>139</sup> The three letters by men that were published all offered anti-abortion arguments. See Matthew J. Lynch, Letter to the Editor, Globe and Mail, October 13, 1961, 6; Philip L. Cooper, Letter to the Editor, Globe and Mail, October 18, 1961, 6; S. Somerville, Letter to the Editor, Globe and Mail, October 18, 1961, 6.

else is involved, only she and her family, not you or I, sitting unsullied and smug, only she.... In my opinion no woman should be compelled to bear any child she does not want.”<sup>140</sup> The emphasis on women’s rights grew over the decade with the popularization of second wave feminism and women’s liberation. In 1967, Hazel Goldstein, who also wrote to the RCSW, beseeched the Government and Church to recognize that it was not single or “abnormal” women who had the most abortions, that unplanned pregnancies were generally unwanted, and that “if a woman is determined not to have another child she will go to almost any length to prevent it.”<sup>141</sup>

In 1967, Nora Adams directed her displeasure at habitual anti-abortion letter writer Philip L. Cooper (who wrote nine published letters during the study period) when she wrote: “Mr. Cooper speaks so knowingly of the state of mind induced by pregnancy one can only conclude that he must have been pregnant at one time.”<sup>142</sup> She lamented, “How can all men, clergy, priests, parliamentarians, moralizing know-it-alls, understand so well the effects of pregnancy if they haven’t experienced it?” In that same year, responding to another letter by Cooper, Mrs. W. J. Makowry wrote that his letter was “written with the smug and self-satisfied assurance that he will never be pregnant, raped, or suffer the mind-shattering experience of being the mother of an unwanted child.” She continued, “Were it not so tragic, we should laugh smugly, knowing that were men suddenly to bear children, there would be no question of the legality or morality of abortion.”<sup>143</sup> By April 1970, women’s voices could be heard loudly, as in the letter from

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<sup>140</sup> Brenda Smith, Letter to the Editor, Globe and Mail, September 7, 1961, 6.

<sup>141</sup> Hazel Goldstein, Letter to the Editor, Globe and Mail, April 15, 1967, 5.

<sup>142</sup> Nora Adams, Letter to the Editor, Globe and Mail, April 18, 1967, 6.

<sup>143</sup> Mrs. W. J. Makowry, Letter to the Editor, Globe and Mail, June 2, 1967, 6.

Helen Johnson: “In our culture men are the ones who make the laws. They are the ones who need to read the items that are printed about abortion. Today the Women’s Liberation Movement is going to start to haul a coffin from Vancouver to Ottawa to illustrate the point that from 1,000 to 2,000 women die each year from backroom abortions. Canada must remove restrictions from our abortion laws.”<sup>144</sup> All of these letters, unequivocal on the right of women to control their reproductive lives, call into question assumptions about women’s absent voices from the 1960s abortion dialogue. But they do more than that. These letters were written by women tired of men ostensibly speaking on their behalf. In turn, these same women were making a claim to speak on the issue on behalf of all women, a rhetorical strategy designed to demonstrate the authority of their claims based on their identities and experiences as women.

As was the case in Chatelaine, in letters to the Globe and Mail women responded to one another’s words and actions with praise and condemnation. In May 1970, Teresa Schwaim wrote in response to the recent Abortion Caravan actions in Ottawa. She began her letter by stating, “I am not a feminist. I do not belong to any feminist organization. I am an individual and I am a woman-in that order.”<sup>145</sup> She then recounted the Caravan rally in Toronto, at which she listened to “their speeches of self-pity that bordered on hysteria.... I decided they were all a bunch of – disturbers.... Their conduct in Ottawa was disgraceful.” Not tempted to partake in their chosen mode of protest, Schwaim reported instead that she wrote her MP because “it’s the way to do it: show some respect; you will be heard and your opinions respected. In other words, act like nothing, then

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<sup>144</sup> Helen Johnson, Letter to the Editor, Globe and Mail, April 22, 1970, 6.

that's what you will stand for – nothing.” Betty Kohll agreed with Schwaim’s criticisms of “feminists” who, she thought, should “keep in mind the male-female relationship is the purpose of our being.”<sup>146</sup> For her, “The time has come for the non-radical and well-adjusted females to speak up and give their views on such subjects as abortion and equality.” Although she did not name Schwaim, Marjorie Sheard Carter wrote in response to the criticism of the Caravan participants: “It is easy to criticize the dramatic pleas of the young women..., just as it was easy to criticize and laugh at the suffragettes who chose equally dramatic means to bring about women’s right to vote.”<sup>147</sup> Andree Stewart wrote similarly that she “wholeheartedly support the women who have been maligned, ridiculed, ignored and frustrated working for this cause and hope our government will heed them.”<sup>148</sup> These letters demonstrate that while their preferred strategies may have differed, women were very much invested in the political activities or discussions around them. This exchange also offers interesting insight into the competing feminisms of the late 1960s and early 1970s and the politics that attracted or repelled them.

Echoing the coverage in Chatelaine, some women writing to the Globe and Mail saw liberalized abortion laws as a solution to social problems. In 1964, Louise Smith indicated that she was glad that “at last a movement was on foot to re-examine the abortion laws.”<sup>149</sup> Smith felt revisions would not only eliminate “unlawful, dangerous and expensive” illegal abortions, but would put an end to forced marriages between

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<sup>145</sup> Teresa Schwaim, Letter to the Editor, Globe and Mail, 15 May 1970, 6.

<sup>146</sup> Betty Kohill, Letter to the Editor, Globe and Mail, 1 June 1970, 7.

<sup>147</sup> Marjorie Sheard Carter, Letter to the Editor, Globe and Mail, 20 May 1970, 6.

<sup>148</sup> Andree Stewart, Letter to the Editor, Globe and Mail, 19 June 1970, 7.

young people that resulted in divorce and “brought unwanted children into the world, many of whom will become delinquent.” Yet not all writers were willing to concede that social problems were behind the call for legal abortion. Elsie Hackett’s letter is a strong indictment of rape as a reason for abortion: “Don’t tell me that a woman who hollers ‘rape’ in the third or fourth month was ever raped.... If rape is reported to the police as soon as it takes place..., then the seed of the aggressor can be washed away in a hospital before true pregnancy can occur. So let’s leave abortion for rape out of it!”<sup>150</sup> While Hackett’s position comes across as harsh, even shrill, not to mention factually inaccurate, it can also be read as reflecting a concern that some women (and men) expressed over the decade that abortion not be used with unnecessary or “unjustified” frequency.

Religion played out here as in other forums. Those who argued that value must be accorded to fetal life often reported strong religious beliefs. Ewa Jarmickl’s 1961 letter illuminates this position: “Man exists within a framework of justice decreed by God. Sin may cause conception, self-interest may see it as undesirable-but neither of these errors can be corrected by destroying human life.”<sup>151</sup> In 1964, Mary Lucas’s feelings were similar: “What crime does an unborn child commit that it should be adjudged sentence of death, without trial and jury, because some advocates feel that abortion laws should be relaxed?... Who shall judge these ‘judges’, O ye moderns?”<sup>152</sup> Likewise, in 1970, Phyllis Evans argued, “Abortion is wrong, wicked and evil. Even an

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<sup>149</sup> Louise Smith, Letter to the Editor, Globe and Mail, 16 March 1964, 6.

<sup>150</sup> Elsie Hackett, Letter to the Editor, Globe and Mail, 31 August 1967, 6.

<sup>151</sup> Ewa Jarmickl, Letter to the Editor, Globe and Mail, September 7, 1961, 6. A letter by this author also appeared in the United Church Observer.

expected baby has its Bill of Rights given to it by God, so that it has its own soul, and no mother has the right to dictate whether she is going to have the baby or not.”<sup>153</sup>

Yet not all women who identified themselves as religious were against abortion law reform. Anne Davidson, writing in 1967, identified herself as a Catholic and stated unequivocally, “I feel very strongly that a woman’s right to have an abortion should be absolute.”<sup>154</sup> In 1966, Miss M. M. Terry, B.A., B.L.S., identified herself as a member of the Catholic Women’s League (CWL) and expressed dismay at the recent adoption of a position against liberalizing the abortion laws. In particular, she voiced disagreement with the statement “abortion is murder” by arguing that the fetus is “neither medically, scientifically nor theologically” human since it lacked a soul and was unable to live separately from its mother until late in the pregnancy.<sup>155</sup> Terry’s letter prompted a response from another self-identified CWL member, Louise Summerhill, who not only disagreed with Terry’s arguments, but questioned her religiosity since her position “openly opposes the official teaching of the Catholic Church.”<sup>156</sup> Wading into the debate within the letters page, Cecelia Wallace argued that it provided the opportunity to look more closely at the Catholic Church; she questioned how one could be loyal to the Church “when half its membership are not allowed, or have not been allowed, the initiative or training to take part in theological disputes which concern them more than

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<sup>152</sup> Mary Lucas, Letter to the Editor, Globe and Mail, June 13, 1964, 6. A male letter writer responded to Lucas’s letter stating, “Let us have morality tempered with mercy.” See Robert J. Collens, Letter to the Editor, Globe and Mail, July 1, 1964, 6.

<sup>153</sup> Phyllis Evans, Letter to the Editor, Globe and Mail, August 15, 1970, 6.

<sup>154</sup> Anne Davidson, Letter to the Editor, Globe and Mail, May 30, 1963, 6.

<sup>155</sup> M. M. Terry, Letter to the Editor, Globe and Mail, October 3, 1966, 6.

<sup>156</sup> Louise Summerhill, Letter to the Editor, Globe and Mail, October 12, 1966, 6. Summerhill, writing again in 1967, argued “The moral position of the [Catholic] Church on abortion is that the fetus is a human

they do men?”<sup>157</sup> She also invited the women of the CWL to reflect on both their feelings about abortion as well as the place of women in deciding theological issues in the Catholic Church. Notably, all of these women used a public forum to argue forcefully about the relationship of religion and abortion.

As with letters to Chatelaine and the RCSW, women sometimes referenced their personal experiences, particularly in relation to maternity, when writing to the Globe and Mail, although their stances varied dramatically. In 1963, Janet Dearing began her letter by positioning her feelings this way: “Being a mother, I am, of course, vitally concerned with questions regarding parenthood.”<sup>158</sup> She then proceeded to argue that the law should be reformed to prevent women from relying on “the unclean hands of a professional illegal abortionist.” Louise Summerhill also began with “I am a mother” and then explained that she had “given birth to seven children and miscarried three times.” She continued, “I was grief-stricken. It would be inconceivable for me to believe that to destroy this life...could be anything but morally wrong.”<sup>159</sup> In 1968, Margaret McLean wrote, “I have mothered seven children, four of my own and three of my husband’s first marriage, every one loved, every one wanted. Giving birth was, by a wide margin, the easiest part.... No man-I repeat, no man, and no government-has the right to tell any

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being made in the image and likeness of God. The mystery of God’s creation is attacked when abortion is attempted.” See Louise Summerhill, Letter to the Editor, Globe and Mail, May 29, 1967, 6.

<sup>157</sup> Cecelia Wallace, Letter to the Editor, Globe and Mail, October 14, 1966, 6.

<sup>158</sup> Janet Dearing, Letter to the Editor, Globe and Mail, October 16, 1963, 6.

<sup>159</sup> Louise Summerhill, Letter to the Editor, Globe and Mail, October 12, 1966, 6. Similarly, in 1967, Norma Calzonetti wrote a long letter in which she described receiving the results of amniocenteses, which carried the prognosis of likely fetal death or deformity. She shared that she continued the pregnancy anyway and her baby was born “happy, healthy and normal.” She consequently argued strongly against abortion for suspected fetal deformity. See Norma Calzonetti, Letter to the Editor, Globe and Mail, May 6, 1967, 6.

woman that she *must* undertake this truly awesome responsibility.”<sup>160</sup> What is important about these and all letters to the Globe and Mail throughout the decade was the strength of the convictions women presented, their understanding of the issue within larger contexts, and their desire and willingness to be heard (and read) in a mainstream forum. Women were clearly able and keen to participate in a mainstream dialogue; they also had a language, rooted in (but not exclusive to) their female experiences and bodies, with which to do so. They did not question their authority to speak. Their voices, while diffuse, were powerful and need to be factored into understandings of the decade of reform.

*Elizabeth Thompson Advises*<sup>161</sup>

*Elizabeth Thompson Advises* was an advice column that appeared regularly in the Globe and Mail throughout the 1960s. It is unclear who wrote the column attributed to “Elizabeth Thompson,” but it ran from 1954 until 1978. Over the 1960s, reader letters and Thompson’s replies referenced abortion just 15 times, some only in passing. Yet Thompson’s column is an interesting site because readers could write with the guarantee of anonymity, which resulted in the sharing of personal experiences that they might not have been willing to share in letters to the editor. Readers also responded to one another, even sending multiple letters on an issue. The following analysis highlights several

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<sup>160</sup> Margaret McLean, Letter to the Editor, Globe and Mail, March 18, 1968, 6.

<sup>161</sup> During its run, the column was variously known as Mrs. Thompson Advises, Mrs. Thompson Gives Advice, and Elizabeth Thompson Advises.

exchanges that demonstrate women's efforts to carve out a space for dialogue within the paper.

Many scholars have analyzed advice columns in newspapers and women's magazines. David Gudelunas, who studied the discussion of masturbation through Ann Landers's advice column, argues, "The newspaper advice column is a mediated space where readers and leading (popular) culture authorities can talk both formally and informally about topics prohibited elsewhere."<sup>162</sup> His characterization has some salience for the discussion of abortion in the 1960s. He contends that these columns "reflect larger cultural values and serve as a type of social barometer."<sup>163</sup> Like the safe forum provided by Chatelaine's letters page, "Advice columns present a unique 'protected' environment for discourse relating to human sexuality."<sup>164</sup> Opinion is divided on the function of advice columns. Gudelunas argues that readers partake in discussions offered by the space of advice columns because "they want their vote...to be recorded and distilled by the columnist, perhaps influencing the view of the columnist that will in turn influence millions of other readers."<sup>165</sup> In her study of adolescent girls just forming their individuality, Dawn Currie argues for a less activist role, believing instead that advice columns offer such girls a space for "self-discovery through comparison reading."<sup>166</sup> While her focus is on teenagers, this conception nevertheless could apply to women who wrote to Elizabeth Thompson seeking advice or information in the sense that for *some*, grappling with the issue was new – or at least doing so publicly was. Both of these

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<sup>162</sup> Gudelunas, "Talking Taboo," 64.

<sup>163</sup> Gudelunas, "Talking Taboo," 64.

<sup>164</sup> Gudelunas, "Talking Taboo," 73.

<sup>165</sup> Gudelunas, "Talking Taboo," 75.

characterizations are more helpful than ones that see such columns as primarily voyeuristic or entertainment opportunities.<sup>167</sup>

The earliest letter in *Elizabeth Thompson Advises* that referenced abortion was a response to another letter in which the author expressed a fear of childbirth. Printed in March 1961, “Mother-of-None” wrote Thomson to express her concern that there “is so little freedom of choice” in regards to the number of children to have.<sup>168</sup> After discussing, at some length, why pregnancies should be desired, “Mother-of-None” opined: “Until people demand the right to control their own reproduction they will remain the pawns of those in authority.” The author ended by expressing concern about bringing a child into a world with the threat of nuclear war so prevalent. While she did not reference abortion specifically, Thompson’s response affirmed the woman’s (and her husband’s) right to decide for themselves not to have children. She pointed out that not all unplanned pregnancies were unwanted and stated, “The human race would be in danger of extinction” if people waited for ideal circumstances to have children. This early letter and the reply are noteworthy for the author’s fairly liberal ideas, but also for Thompson’s balanced reply, which reminds one of Anderson’s efforts to address her readers where she thought they were on an issue.

Two other letters worth mentioning were written at different ends of the decade. In 1961, “Marion” wrote to Thompson because she found herself pregnant and alone. Her boyfriend of two years, with whom she enjoyed a “carefree, happy” relationship, had

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<sup>166</sup> Currie, “Dear Abby,” 276.

<sup>167</sup> See, for example, Susan McKay, “Advice columns as cultural intermediaries,” *Australian Journal of Communication* 35, no. 3 (2008), 100.

<sup>168</sup> Elizabeth Thompson, “Reader Has Special Ideas on Birth Control,” *Globe and Mail*, March 9, 1961, 22.

ceased to contact her once he found out about her pregnancy one week earlier.<sup>169</sup> Marion indicated that while it would not bother her to be married for less than nine months before the baby arrived, “the idea of facing this situation without him is something I can’t do. What should I do, Mrs. Thompson?” In her reply, Thompson advised Marion to contact the boyfriend and remind him that he shared responsibility, to consult a lawyer, and “whatever you do, don’t be persuaded to attempt an abortion.” Thompson sent her the names of several residences where she could have her baby. It is not clear whether Thompson advised against abortion because of her personal feelings or because of the hazards surrounding illegal abortions in the early 1960s. It was not until 1970 that she clarified her stance on abortion. “Susu” wrote in August 1970 asking Thompson if she knew of any place in Montreal or New York where she could get an abortion since they were unavailable in Toronto. Thompson replied that abortions were indeed available at non-Catholic Toronto hospitals. She noted that she “always preferred prevention to cure,” but nevertheless provided the reader with information on how to get an abortion in Toronto.<sup>170</sup> In another reply in 1970, Thompson was even more candid and advised a reader who did not want to be pregnant: “Scarborough Centenary, Wellesley Hospital and Toronto General Hospital are said to be the most liberal and perform the most abortions,

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<sup>169</sup> Elizabeth Thompson, “Teen-Ager Has Turned Against Her Mother,” *Globe and Mail*, June 1, 1961, 22.

<sup>170</sup> In this instance, Thomson functioned as what Joseph J. Moran terms a “clearing house of information.” See Joseph J. Moran, “Newspaper Psychology: Advice and Therapy,” *Journal of Popular Culture* 22, no. 4 (Spring 1989), 122; Elizabeth Thompson, “Birth prevention termed urgent,” *Globe and Mail*, October 13, 1970, 12; Elizabeth Thompson, “Toronto’s hospitals do grant abortions,” *Globe and Mail*, August 6, 1970, W8.

so you might find a doctor who refers patients to one of these if you decide to terminate your pregnancy.”<sup>171</sup>

Readers engaged with Thompson and also commented on the letters of other readers. As in *Chatelaine*, but on a smaller scale (at least in reference to abortion), some dialogue appeared in *Elizabeth Thompson Advises*. Two exchanges in this period involved abortion – and in one it was the focus of the letters.<sup>172</sup> In September 1970 Thompson’s column featured a letter by a reader named “Desperate” who found herself pregnant again when her youngest of three children was thirteen. The woman did not want to continue the pregnancy for several reasons, including the fact that she was looking forward to the freedom offered by having older children. She also loathed the baby and toddler years so much that she spent several years in psychotherapy because “their demanding screaming nearly put me around the bend.”<sup>173</sup> Thompson advised “Desperate” to see her psychiatrist again and noted that “a late child can bring great joy,” nonetheless advising her to decide quickly since the safest abortions were performed earliest.

Five letters were printed in response to the letter by “Desperate” and Thompson’s reply to her. “Been There And Regret It” advised “Desperate” not to seek an abortion, and reasoned, “Everything will work out.”<sup>174</sup> “No Regrets” wrote to share that she had also been in a similar situation as “Desperate” and chose an abortion. For her, the

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<sup>171</sup> Elizabeth Thompson, “Woman desperate over pregnancy,” *Globe and Mail*, September 10, 1970, W9.

<sup>172</sup> In the other column, premarital sexual exploration was the larger focus, with abortion a secondary issue. See Elizabeth Thompson, “Faithful not sorry that she slept with several men,” *Globe and Mail*, February 21, 1967, 13; Elizabeth Thompson, “Reader finds inconsistencies in letter from ‘amoral’ woman,” *Globe and Mail*, March 20, 1967, 13.

<sup>173</sup> Elizabeth Thompson, “Woman desperate over pregnancy,” *Globe and Mail*, 10 September 1970, W9.

deciding factor was “overpopulation and the attendant pollution crisis.”<sup>175</sup> She viewed not continuing her pregnancy as a duty owed to the next generation. Thompson’s response to “No Regrets” was brief, saying only that “few people can view such a personal thing with such objectivity,” whereas another reader praised “No Regrets” and hoped more people would be willing to “accept a personal role in the control of population...for the good of the world and future generations.”<sup>176</sup> “Pro-Abortion” wrote to Thompson, “I detected a bias in your reply in favour of this poor woman having an obviously unwanted baby.”<sup>177</sup> Like “No Regrets” she was concerned by the problem of overpopulation and reasoned, “Surely it is of the utmost urgency that we at least prevent the birth of unwanted children.” It was in response to this letter that Thompson indicated that she preferred “prevention” to cure, demonstrating a complexity in her position that resembles those expressed by many other women throughout the decade who had mixed feelings about abortion. Although these exchanges were short and they appeared less frequently than did those in *Chatelaine*, *Elizabeth Thompson Advises* provided a unique forum; this space, carved out of a much larger whole, allowed women to share intimate experiences with one another, within a guaranteed anonymity that made freedom of expression possible.

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<sup>174</sup> Elizabeth Thompson, “Birth prevention termed urgent,” 12.

<sup>175</sup> Elizabeth Thompson, “Overpopulation led woman to get abortion,” *Globe and Mail*, September 21, 1970, 12.

<sup>176</sup> Elizabeth Thompson, “Birth prevention termed urgent,” 12.

## **“Legalize abortion, but...” : the United Church Observer**

The United Church of Canada has a history of social activism across the twentieth century.<sup>178</sup> This activism includes a long interest in birth control issues. Brenda Margaret Appleby has shown that, between 1932 and 1960, the Church made various pronouncements concerning procreation within marriage. Ultimately the United Church supported the idea of “responsible parenthood,” which meant that “spouses were responsible for choosing whether or not acts of intercourse were also intentions of procreation.”<sup>179</sup> In 1960, the Church’s General Council approved of therapeutic abortions for mental or physical reasons, but not for family planning or as relief for an unmarried mother.<sup>180</sup> In 1966 the United Church’s submission to the federal government’s Standing Committee on Health and Welfare argued for legalizing contraceptives for a variety of reasons, including the fact that such measures would reduce the number of both unplanned pregnancies and illegal abortions.<sup>181</sup> The Church’s active participation in the dialogue on birth control and abortion was manifested less formally in the pages of its monthly magazine, the United Church Observer, which today

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<sup>177</sup> Elizabeth Thompson, “Birth prevention termed urgent,” 12.

<sup>178</sup> See, for example, Ted Reeve, Claiming the Social Passion: The Role of the United Church of Canada in creating a culture of well-being in Canada (Toronto: The United Church of Canada, 1999); Tracy J. Trothen, Linking Sexuality and Gender: Naming Violence Against Women in The United Church of Canada (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2003).

<sup>179</sup> Brenda Margaret Appleby, Responsible Parenthood: Decriminalizing Contraception in Canada (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999), 69.

<sup>180</sup> de Valk, Morality and Law, 10.

<sup>181</sup> *Ibid*, 71.

enjoys editorial independence from the Church itself, a slow process begun in the late 1960s by then editor A. C. Forrest (1955-1979).<sup>182</sup>

Throughout the 1960s, the Observer was published twice monthly. It highlighted numerous social issues including, but not limited to, birth control, abortion, adoption, alcoholism, youth alienation, and prostitution.<sup>183</sup> Between 1959 and 1970, it published 13 articles, news items, and editorials that mentioned abortion, eight of which had abortion as the focus. Three of these were feature articles and two were editorials; the remainder were brief half-page or paragraph pieces.<sup>184</sup> Like other churches, and as seen in articles in the Globe and Mail and Chatelaine, the United Church of Canada was grappling with the place of abortion in a modernizing Canada throughout much of the decade, and, in particular, questioning its morality.<sup>185</sup> In March 1963, for example, at the same time as Rev. Ray Goodall's article appeared in Chatelaine, Reverend Gerald Paul's article, "Abortion is Wrong," appeared in the Observer, exemplifying the division within the Church over the issue.<sup>186</sup> The analysis in this section looks briefly at the three articles and two editorials on abortion. It then addresses the two relevant reader letters published in response. Because little space was given to female voices – only one editorial and one

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<sup>182</sup> Christal Gardiola, "The Mission," Ryerson Review of Journalism (Spring 2009). <http://www.rj.ca/m4188/> [accessed March 2011].

<sup>183</sup> See, for example, Michele Landsberg, "Are We Failing the Unwed Mother?" United Church Observer, August 1, 1966, 14-5, 29-30; Thirza M. Lee, "There's Always Room for One More, and So We Adopted: Pat, Ronnie, Laurie, Linda, David, Susan, Richard," United Church Observer, May 15, 1967, 16-8, 40.

<sup>184</sup> The articles on abortion were: Gerald W. Paul, "Abortion is Wrong Because...", United Church Observer, March 15, 1963, 16-7; Ray Goodall, "A Case for Induced Abortion," United Church Observer, May 1, 1963, 15-6; Ruth Ann Soden, "Is Abortion Always Wrong?" United Church Observer, October 15, 1968, 16-19.

<sup>185</sup> For discussion of the United Church of Canada and abortion, see Appleby, Responsible Parenthood, 69-72; Trothen, Linking Sexuality and Gender, 23-26.

<sup>186</sup> Interestingly, Paul would later publicly change his stance on abortion in "The New Morality" in Chatelaine's June 1967 issue.

letter written solely by women – the analysis of the Observer's role in the public discussion on abortion is brief.

In his article, Paul argued that doctors and lawyers were incapable of dealing with the issue of legalizing abortion, asserting instead, "Religious leaders must point out the moral aspects of abortion."<sup>187</sup> The morality of the issue, for Paul, meant a detailed discussion of when life begins. Paul would only allow for abortion when a woman's life was at risk, and then only if a surgeon, clergyman, and lawyer, as well as both the woman and man in question, deemed the abortion both legal and moral. Ultimately, for him, allowing abortion to prevent a woman's suffering was unchristian and immoral. Presumably the inclusion of clergy in the decision would guard against immorality. Two months later, a piece by Goodall entitled "A Case for Induced Abortion," appeared. As with his piece in Chatelaine, Goodall began his article with a narrative; this time, he pointed out the immorality of the current abortion law by using a pregnancy that resulted from incest as an example. Goodall identified what he believed to be the futility of quoting Bible passages to support one's position since the Bible is full of many contradictory passages. He instead claimed to argue "from general principles relative to the value of life and human personality."<sup>188</sup> He asserted that while fetal life may exist from conception, "there is NO PERSON in existence." Perhaps in refutation of Paul's piece, he recounted the history of opposition to abortion, noting instances of disagreement and hypocrisy to make the point that there had been no historical consensus

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<sup>187</sup> Paul referenced a recent Globe and Mail editorial in his article, demonstrating that the publications fed off one another. Gerald W. Paul, "Abortion is Wrong Because..." United Church Observer, March 15, 1963, 16.

<sup>188</sup> Ray Goodall, "A Case for Induced Abortion," United Church Observer, May 1, 1963 15.

on the matter. Ultimately, he called for an end to women's suffering by allowing them to choose abortion when desired, "in consultation with recognized authorities - her physician and maybe the minister or priest." Unlike Paul, then, while Goodall allowed that there might be room for the clergy in the decision, it was not a mandatory participation.

A third article on abortion ran in September 1968. Ann Soden's "Is Abortion Always Wrong?" began by focusing on the problem of illegal criminal abortions and the dangers women risked when pursuing that option. As was the case with Goodall's use of narrative, she used tales from people she had interviewed to illustrate that women died from these procedures. She then addressed the United Church's official position on abortion, as presented to the Health and Welfare Standing Committee earlier that year, which supported legalizing abortion under certain circumstances and establishing therapeutic abortion committees to oversee the decisions. The remainder of her article was based on an interview with an obstetrician at Women's College Hospital, Dr. Marjorie Moore, supporting the medicalization narrative. Ultimately, she argued that making birth control easier to access would eliminate much of the need for abortion.

Two editorials were run in the Observer during the period in question. The first, Patricia Clarke's "Abortion: The Back Door to Birth Control," focused on the work of New York abortionist Dr. Nathan Rappaport as a lead into the subject. She related that Rappaport supported the position that the abortion decision is a private one between a woman and her doctor and, through the use of statistics related to illegal abortion, Clarke also ultimately supported that position. She quoted him as saying, "A woman has the

right to control her body,” and warned that while churches and governments debated attendant moral questions, “thousands of women who want abortions now are determined to find them, from someone.”<sup>189</sup> By relying on Rappaport’s voice, Clarke was able to advance his stance while lessening the possibility of directly alienating readers with opposing views. The second editorial was a fairly short piece entitled “Legalize abortion, but...” that appeared in October 1967. It argued that the government should reform the law immediately to prevent “irresponsible voices” from being heard and to counteract the number of criminal abortions being performed.

Only a few letters were published in response to the Observer articles on abortion. Between 1959 and 1970, it published only three letters that referenced abortion specifically and a total of twenty-two that touched on the related subjects of birth control, unwed mothers, or the “new morality” of the decade. One letter, written in response to the 1967 editorial, was signed by “Mr. and Mrs. K. W. Fox,” who argued “No man has the right to call himself a Christian who would even hesitate to grant an abortion to a woman or girl pregnant as a result of rape or incest.”<sup>190</sup> They further expressed their central concern as for women who died at the hands of illegal abortionists. On the opposite side of the issue, Grace Gordon, writing in response to Soden’s article, noted that she was “outraged...that a woman’s convenience or health is of more value than the life of her child.”<sup>191</sup> She denied that the law could be broadened at all since doing so would “effectively strip all legal protection from the unborn – a drastic reduction in civil

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<sup>189</sup> Patricia Clarke, “Abortion: The Back Door to Birth Control,” United Church Observer, November 15, 1966, 8.

<sup>190</sup> Mr. and Mrs. K. W. Fox, Letter to the Editor, United Church Observer, January 15, 1968, 2.

rights, to say the least.” It is not clear why there were so few letters in relation to abortion published aside from the fact that the magazine did not make much room for readers’ letters in comparison to the Globe and Mail and Chatelaine. This editorial decision meant that there was virtually no space for a dialogue between readers and authors to develop.

## **Conclusion**

Early in the 1970s, Alphonse de Valk singled out Chatelaine as an important source of abortion articles throughout the 1960s, noting that it received “support” in its push for abortion law reform through coverage in both the Globe and Mail and the United Church Observer. The preceding analysis confirms that Chatelaine consistently pushed for abortion law reform (and later repeal). It also finds that the Globe and Mail provided a similarly important forum for women’s voices. By comparison, both the coverage of the topic and the opportunity to hear women’s voices was much less significant in the Observer, although the Observer may be seen as a noteworthy contributor to the discussion because of its religious audience and its possible role of fostering debate amongst United Church leaders and believers.

Still, Chatelaine’s singular importance for Canadian women stands out because women’s voices were the dominant ones, both as authors and readers. In Chatelaine, there were two discernable periods in the coverage of abortion: abortion law reform

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<sup>191</sup> Gordon also wrote the RCSW. Grace Gordon, Letter to the Editor, United Church Observer, December

(1959-1968) and abortion law repeal (post-1968). When the decade began, Chatelaine persistently, but cautiously, argued for abortion law reform by framing abortion as a “solution” to social problems under certain circumstances. The early articles are reflective of the attempts made by institutions and professions (medical, legal, religious, and social welfare) to be responsive to changes in Canadian society. While much has written about women’s relative absence from the public debate on abortion in the 1960s, this analysis shows that women did engage with the issue publicly – through the dialogue created in Chatelaine and in the Globe and Mail. During both periods of coverage, Chatelaine provided a forum for women to discuss their feelings about and experiences with abortion. The transmission of ideas and the debates fostered in the magazine allowed women to exercise some agency, even when they had little or no legal or political control. It allowed them to participate in setting the boundaries of the debate within the magazine by signaling those circumstances in which they supported abortion and those in which they did not. The readers’ letters also demonstrate that some Canadian women were in favour of more liberal access to abortion as early as 1959 (and likely earlier). In the forum provided by *The Last Word Is Yours*, these women reacted to the articles, shared personal experiences, and often advocated for a sympathetic and responsive law. For some women, this understanding resulted from the role of the magazine as a disseminator of information, and more importantly, as a safe forum in which they could engage in the debate. Their responses to the manner in which abortion was framed helped establish the boundaries of the debate by signaling which frames

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15, 1968, 2.

resonated with them and which did not, underlining the reciprocal relationship women felt existed between them and the magazine and its editor.

The Globe and Mail's coverage of the abortion issue and women's letters in response shows that women's voices (or words) were audible in the mainstream discussion of abortion. It is essential not to overstate women's engagement with the newspaper, and an analysis like this that seeks out such voices can erroneously overemphasize women's participation. Yet numerically, women's letters about abortion were published more often than were letters by men, indicating at the very least that women were as engaged in the discussion. In the forum provided by the advice column, *Elizabeth Thompson Advises*, a dialogue similar to that found in Chatelaine emerged, albeit on a much smaller scale. Arguably, the exchange of ideas that occurred here had much to do with the anonymity provided by the forum, which allowed readers to share intimate details of their reproductive lives and to have their ideas validated either by appearing in print or through the responses of Thompson and other readers. The United Church Observer was not as important to the coverage of abortion in terms of the frequency or depth of coverage. Yet it has some importance as a journal of a religious institution openly grappling with abortion. Ultimately, the decision to publish few letters from readers in response to individual articles meant that it did not allow room for readers to engage in a dialogue with the editors or authors or with one another by commenting on each other's letters. In these print media outlets, many women found a chance to learn, to share, and to shape public debates and beliefs, drawing on their experiences, or those of others, and on their religious and personal beliefs.

The letters women wrote to the editors of Chatelaine and the Globe and Mail do not just demonstrate their ability, willingness, and even eagerness to be heard. The letters also reveal the diversity in women's thoughts and positions on abortion. They approached the subject in numerous ways. At times their appeals were emotional, driven by their reproductive (or maternal) experiences or those of women close to them. At other times their appeals were spiritual (or moral), based on their religious understandings. They could also be feminist, rooted in a belief that only women should control abortion since they were the only ones capable of being pregnant. Women were pragmatic, as well, allowing that abortions were a necessity while birth control, and the humans who practice it, remained fallible. In these instances, they called for reforms. In letters, women grappled with issues of morality in relation to sexuality, the value accorded fetal life, and the humane treatment of women. All of these diverging positions demonstrate how "hopelessly multiple," women's voices were on abortion during the long 1960s.<sup>192</sup> While this multiplicity means that women's voices are harder to categorize, the number of women who were willing to write to the media and take political stances publicly suggests that they need to be factored into our understanding of the overall context within which reform occurred.

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<sup>192</sup> Davis, "What's in a Voice?" 353.

## Chapter Two

### **“The woman’s body, her problem, her decision, her life”: Hearing Women’s Voices Through the Royal Commission on the Status of Women in Canada**

In 1968, when F.R.<sup>1</sup> of Manitoba wrote to the Royal Commission on the Status of Women in Canada (RCSW), it is unknown whether she was consciously asserting her authority over the issue of abortion, yet she did so. After stating her unequivocal belief in the pregnant woman’s right to decide whether or not to continue her pregnancy, she wrote:

I am writing this letter on behalf of the present and future unborn and unwanted children. I am speaking from bitter experience. I am nearing 80 years of age and am still cursing the day I was born. Oh! yes, my parents were properly married.... But I was not wanted, so was raised in an iceberg home-as are all unwanted children. The affect [sic] on a child of such loneliness and bitterness can never be removed-especially is this true of children raised in institutions.<sup>2</sup>

Like many other women who wrote to the Commission, it was her personal experiences – in this example, as a child – that formed the basis of her authority over the issue, legitimizing not only her position, but her “right” to speak.

Also writing from her personal experience, although as a mother instead of as a child, R. H. of Windsor, Ontario, argued for legalizing abortion on request by stating:

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<sup>1</sup> In letters of opinion to the Commissioners several women asked that their identities be kept anonymous; doing so enabled them to share intimate details with the Commissioners. I have referred to the authors of letters of opinion by their initials, but have used women’s names in instances when those names were published in the official RCSW report.

<sup>2</sup> Vol.8, file Letters of Opinion – Manitoba, RG 33/89, RCSW, LAC.

The abortion laws will never be a success or fair until the decision rests with the only person concerned with this problem, and that is the pregnant woman.... I speak from experience – experience that has caused not only myself, but my three children a lot of pain. I had an unwanted child eight years ago – he is still unwanted – no matter how wrong or guilty I may feel in feeling this way. This child – or because of the child, has changed the course of five lives drastically. No child! and I repeat – no child should be brought into the world unwanted.<sup>3</sup>

R. H.'s letter is startling to read. At a time when motherhood was one of the benchmarks of womanhood, it was unusual for a mother to admit that her living child was and remained unwanted. Her reference to her other existing children, as a justification for legalizing abortion, however, was a more common strategy of those arguing for changes to reproductive laws. The frankness in this letter stems in part from the nature of the Commission. It speaks to my argument that women used their own experiences to make broader claims to authority. They saw the Commission as a legitimate avenue for seeking to change aspects of their personal lives – and by extension those of other women – that were not only unacceptable, but unsustainable. This chapter explores these authority claims in depth.

Early feminist writing about the RCSW marked it as a key event in the course of Canadian second wave feminism. Writing in 1985, Penny Kome argued that the release of the report marked the beginning of the modern women's movement in Canada, calling the Report's release a consciousness-raising exercise.<sup>4</sup> Certainly for some women the whole process of the Commission, not simply the release of the report, could be called a consciousness-raising experience. Political scientist Naomi Black calls the RCSW the

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<sup>3</sup> Vol.9, file Letters of Opinion – Ontario, RG 33/89, RCSW, LAC.

<sup>4</sup> Penny Kome, Women of Influence: Canadian Women and Politics (Toronto: Doubleday, 1985), 85.

“first success” of the second wave of feminism in Canada, while Cerise Morris suggests it was “an idea whose time had come.”<sup>5</sup> Sue Findlay elaborates on the importance of the RCSW and notes that “regardless of political orientation, many women participated in preparing briefs for the Commission.” She continues, “It was through the very participation of thousands of women nationwide that the Commission ultimately won legitimacy in the eyes of Canadian women.”<sup>6</sup> Several articles about the RCSW take the form of reflection pieces by members of the Commission’s staff or assessments of the RCSW’s successes and failures at various points after the Report’s release.<sup>7</sup> Less attention has been directed toward what Canadian women actually said through their participation in the RCSW.

There are three noteworthy exceptions. The first is Annis May Timpson’s “Royal Commissions as Sites of Resistance: Women’s Challenges on Child Care in the Royal Commission on the Status of Women,” which analyzes what women said about child care in their briefs to the RCSW.<sup>8</sup> The second, and most recently published, is Joan Sangster’s “Invoking Experience as Evidence,” which uses letters to the RCSW to get at

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<sup>5</sup> Naomi Black, “The Canadian Women’s Movement: the Second Wave,” in Changing Patterns: Women in Canada, eds. Sandra Burt, et al. (1990; repr., Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1988), 83-84; Cerise Morris, “‘Determination and Thoroughness’: The Movement for a Royal Commission on the Status of Women in Canada,” Atlantis 5, no. 2 (Spring 1980), 16.

<sup>6</sup> Sue Findlay, “Facing the State: The Politics of the Women’s Movement Reconsidered,” in Feminism and Political Economy: Women’s Work, Women’s Struggles eds. Heather Jon Maroney and Meg Luxton (Toronto: Methuen, 1987), 35.

<sup>7</sup> See, for example, Florence Bird, Anne Francis: An Autobiography (Toronto: Clark Irwin, 1976); Dawn Black, 20 years later : an assessment of the implementation of the Recommendations of the Royal Commission on the Status of Women, ed. Marika Morris (Ottawa: Office of Dawn Black, M.P.: 1990); Monique Bégin, “The Canadian Government and the Commission’s Report,” in Women and the Canadian State, eds. Caroline Andrew and Sandra Rogers (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1997): 21-38.

<sup>8</sup> Annis May Timpson, “Royal Commissions as Sites of Resistance: Women’s Challenges on Child Care in the Royal Commission on the Status of Women,” International Journal of Canadian Studies 20 (Fall 1999): 123-48.

patterns of women's (changing) work experiences and ideas.<sup>9</sup> Although she frames her analysis in a discussion about the use of "experience" as evidence, when she addresses the briefs she does not explore the ways in which women approached their letters strategically, drawing out claims of authority over the issues they addressed. The third piece is Barbara Freeman's insightful analysis of the media coverage of the RCSW, The Satellite Sex: The Media and Women's Issues in English Canada, 1966-1971. Freeman argues specifically about the treatment of abortion at public hearings, writing that "few women, including journalists, were willing to personalize their stories by speaking openly about such intimate matters."<sup>10</sup> Her accurate assessment of the public hearings, however, does not extend to the letters of opinion and some of the briefs written to the Commissioners by women from across the country, in which women were generally more candid and emotional when recounting personal experiences with unplanned and unwanted pregnancies. Many submissions took the form of an autobiographical letter to the Commission, which is not surprising given women's long history as letter writers; the personal intimacy and political potential of such letters are well documented.<sup>11</sup> While many women requested that their names be kept private, they wanted their personal experiences and opinions taken into consideration in the hope of facilitating or preventing change. For some women the RCSW was a site of knowledge construction, a sort of

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<sup>9</sup> Joan Sangster, "Invoking Experience as Evidence," Canadian Historical Review 92, no. 1 (March 2011): 135-161. Sangster also made use of the RCSW letters in another work, see Joan Sangster, Transforming Labour: Women and Work in Postwar Canada (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2010), 233-268.

<sup>10</sup> Barbara M. Freeman, The Satellite Sex: The Media and Women's Issues in English Canada, 1966-1971 (Waterloo: Wilfred Laurier University Press, 2001), 166.

<sup>11</sup> See, for example, Olga Kenyon, 800 Years of Women's Letters (Winchester, MA: Faber and Faber, 1992); Anna Bondoc and Meg Daly, eds. Letters of Intent: Women Cross the Generations to Talk About Family, Work, Love, Sex, Love and the Future of Feminism (New York: Free Press, 1999).

consciousness-raising exercise that engendered reflection, discussion, and sharing. For other women, the Commission provided an opportunity to share already strongly held beliefs. In both circumstances, reading the letters and briefs submitted to the Commission provides the opportunity to hear women's voices on abortion and related reproductive issues.

The RCSW was a complex forum that was at once very public, as Royal Commissions are designed to be, and yet oddly private in the sense that, because it was run primarily by women about women's issues, it was interpreted by many Canadian women as an opportunity for them to share their personal feelings and intimate experiences publicly in a new way. Additionally, Freeman relates how the RCSW was initially mocked or derided by the mainstream press because of its focus and make-up.<sup>12</sup> Such marginalization (initially anyway) would have reinforced the idea that the Commission was a woman's space. This unique aspect of the RCSW, combined with the sensitive subject matters addressed by the Commission, was compounded by the fact that many "everyday" women were unused to expressing themselves or being heard publicly on matters like abortion.

In the letters to the RCSW, women's voices are heard both individually and through group submissions. For this project, I reviewed all briefs submitted to the RCSW and all letters of opinion contained in the archives, separating out those that referenced abortion, about a couple hundred. From there, I grouped the submissions by theme. The resulting evidence was abundant and I chose to narrow it down by highlighting the voices

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<sup>12</sup> Barbara M. Freeman, The Satellite Sex: The Media and Women's Issues in English Canada, 1966-1971 (Waterloo: Wilfred Laurier University Press, 2001), 29-33.

of individual women whenever possible. This is not to say that briefs or letters by individual women were more important, but rather they were sometimes more likely to refer to personal experiences with reproductive concerns. As well, the political nature of the act of signing an individual name to a brief, especially knowing it could become public, seemed worthy of attention. Still, it is important to note of the briefs written by organizations or groups that they were generally written through a process of group discussion and consensus building that is no less important to revealing women's thoughts on and constructions of authority over abortion as is seen the group briefs that are included in the following analysis.

Both individual and collective voices, then, are heard in the following pages. According to Deborah P. Britzman "Voice...suggests the individual's struggle to create and fashion meaning, assert standpoints, and negotiate with others. Voice permits participation in the social world."<sup>13</sup> She elaborates:

The struggle for voice begins when a person attempts to communicate meaning to someone else. Finding the words, speaking for oneself and feeling heard by others, are all part of this struggle... Voice suggests relationships: the individual's relationship to the meaning of her or his lived experience and hence to language, and the individual's relationship to the other, since understanding is social.<sup>14</sup>

Similarly, in Women's Ways of Knowing (1986), Mary Field Belenky and her colleagues explore how women come to understand or know "truth," how they navigate authoritative sources of knowledge, and how they perceive and/or construct themselves as knowledgeable or authoritative about such truths. They describe their work as

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<sup>13</sup> Deborah P. Britzman, Practice Makes Practice: A Critical Study of Learning to Teach (Albany, New York: State University of New York Press, 2003), 34.

<sup>14</sup> Britzman, Practice Makes Practice, 44.

uncovering “the ‘roar which lies on the other side of silence’ when ordinary women find their voice and use it to gain control over their lives.”<sup>15</sup> They also argue that women in many contexts are not simply silent or lacking a voice, although some are, but that they have a range of voices that vary in message, strength, and authority. While it is important not to essentialize the ways women speak, this work alerts us to look for the diverse strategies the women who wrote to the RCSW used to demonstrate or legitimize the authority of their voices over the issue of abortion or their authority or “right” to speak to the issue.

Indeed, carefully hearing women’s voices expressed in the letters and briefs to the RCSW shows that women indeed held positions on abortion and were able – and eager – to share them. Thus, although participation in the RCSW was indeed a consciousness-raising exercise for some women, a place in which those views were formed, for others who already had opinions on the issues it was a forum to share their existing views. The public nature of the RCSW allowed women to decide on the extent to which they wanted their views made public and whether to contribute by writing letters or speaking at public hearings. The ways in which they constructed their authority is especially interesting. The women’s letters on abortion are an optimal example of how the personal is political. Or, as Linda Alcoff writes, “Who is speaking, who is spoken of, and who listens is a result, as well as an act, of political struggle. Simply put, the discursive context is a political arena.”<sup>16</sup> These letters, although not the obvious public face of the abortion

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<sup>15</sup> Mary Field Belenky, et al., Women’s Ways of Knowing: The Development of Self, Voice, and Mind (New York: Basic, 1986), 4.

<sup>16</sup> Linda Alcoff, “The Problem of Speaking for Others,” Cultural Critique 20 (Winter 1991-1992), 15.

issue in the 1960s, were part of the politics shaping the 1969 changes to the Criminal Code and are instructive about Canadian women's ideas about and experiences with abortion.

In their letters and briefs, consciously or not, women constructed their authority to speak on the issue in a variety of ways. The most common method of constructing authority was by drawing lessons from their own lives, including their experiences as children or with motherhood. Other women highlighted their professional experiences and education or social characteristics like age as the basis of their authority. Still other women represented their authority as based in their rejection or acceptance of religious and moral dictates, often reiterating positions they learned from external authorities. Some women who belonged to professional or educational associations deployed group surveys, not only to encourage discussion, but to legitimate the numerical strength of their opinions. Finally, some women argued that their authority over the issue stemmed from their identities as women: as the people most directly affected by unwanted pregnancies, at the very least they sought the greater involvement of women in the public realm or, more forcefully, total control over the abortion decision. The range of these strategies suggests that these ordinary women had myriad positions on abortion and an ability and willingness to speak or write on the issue when presented with a forum in which they felt comfortable or invested. Examining the submissions as they pertain to the way the women claimed authority allows their voices to be heard by highlighting either what they believed was important or what they perceived would be most important or credible to their audience. Before analyzing the content of women's letters and briefs

to the RCSW, it is illuminating to look at some of the mechanics of the Commission in relation to the reception and use of the submissions.

### **Setting the Stage for Women's Voices**

“What do you have to say about the status of women,” read the cover of a pamphlet prepared by the RCSW. The Commissioners knew from the beginning of their endeavour that they had to somehow solicit submissions from a segment of the population that was seen as less vocal on political issues in the post-World War II era.<sup>17</sup> This section outlines their efforts to reach a broad spectrum of Canadian women by ensuring the accessibility of the Commission's terms of reference and the process of encouraging submissions and then outlines the nature of the responses to the submissions the Commission received.

While serving as a Liberal cabinet minister for Prime Minister Lester B. Pearson, Judy LaMarsh (alongside various women's groups) campaigned tirelessly for a royal

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<sup>17</sup> As was the case with many Royal Commissions before it, the RCSW's commissioners were selected to provide geographical representation and also represented different professions, politics, and perspectives. Lola Lange from Claresholm, Alberta, was a farmer's wife, a member of a farm union, and the mother of three daughters. Jeanne Lapoint from Quebec City was a professor of French literature at Laval University and had also served on the Parent Commission. Doris Ogilvie was a Juvenile Court judge in Fredericton, New Brunswick, and mother of four daughters. Jacques Henripin was the head of the Department of Demography at the University of Montreal, father of three daughters, and a devout Catholic. Elsie Gregory MacGill from Toronto was the first female aeronautical engineer in Canada. Donald Gordon from Waterloo, Ontario, was professor of political science who resigned after eight months and was replaced by John Humphrey, from Montreal, who was a professor of Law and former secretary-general of the United Nations Human Rights Commission. See *Report of the Royal Commission*, vii; Bird, *Anne Francis*, 265. Additional important members of the team included Monique Bégin, Dorothy Caldwell, Monique Coupal, and Dr. Grace Maynard.

commission to be appointed to inquire into women's status.<sup>18</sup> LaMarsh reports that in early 1965 she gave Pearson "a draft of the proposed terms of reference, with a copy of the Kennedy Commission's reference, and with its report, together with a long list of women who might serve on such a commission."<sup>19</sup> The official Terms of Reference for the RCSW are outlined in P.C. 1967-312, according to which a Commission would be appointed to "inquire into and report on the status of women in Canada, and to recommend what steps might be taken to ensure for women equal opportunities with men in all aspects of Canadian society."<sup>20</sup> Nine areas were specifically outlined for inquiry, including "the position of women under Criminal Law," which covered the issue of abortion.<sup>21</sup> In their forward to the Report, the Commissioners note that some of the individual items covered by the nine subject areas outlined were "so extensive and diverse they could have been the subject matter for a separate Royal Commission."<sup>22</sup> Some participants agreed. Mary Cooper of Ottawa, Ontario, felt that in soliciting submissions on abortion, the Commission was working beyond its capabilities: "We respectfully submit that the question of abortion is beyond the competence of any commission solely concerned with the status and rights of women. It should be referred instead to a royal commission on the status of children, born or unborn."<sup>23</sup> She was critical of the terms of reference because she believed they "naturally invite submissions

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<sup>18</sup> For the efforts of women's groups see Freeman, *The Satellite Sex*, 25-27.

<sup>19</sup> The Presidential Committee on the Status of Women was established by U.S. President John F. Kennedy in 1961 and reported in 1963 on issues related to women status, especially legislation related to employment, social security, and education. Judy LaMarsh, *Memoirs of a Bird in a Gilded Cage* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1969), 301.

<sup>20</sup> *Report of the Royal Commission*, vii.

<sup>21</sup> *Report of the Royal Commission*, viii.

<sup>22</sup> *Report of the Royal Commission*, ix.

<sup>23</sup> Vol. 18, file 438, RG 33/89, RCSW, LAC.

from those who regard abortion from one narrow standpoint—that of women’s rights.”<sup>24</sup> She did not want abortion positioned within a framework of women’s rights. Her criticism highlights the importance of not interpreting the preponderance of “pro-choice” letters to the Commission as representative of the whole of Canadian women’s thoughts on abortion. As she argues, those with particularly strong feelings on either side of the issue would be most inclined to write.

Nevertheless, Monique Bégin executive secretary of the RCSW, strenuously argues that the report reflects the will of those who participated. On the subject of collecting data, she recalls, “We granted maximum importance to the process – the public’s movement through public hearings, briefs, and recommendations – that distinguishes royal commissions from ‘expert’ studies and research.”<sup>25</sup> She further suggests that “because of the absence of a general theory, the commission remained as close as possible to the women of Canada whose voices we wanted to amplify.”<sup>26</sup> She argues that “listening to what women themselves had to say and reporting their demands appeared, to most members of the commission, senior staff included, as an important process in itself and as the only legitimate course of action.” She further notes that the commission chose a “common sense” versus ideological or theoretical approach to studying women’s condition, which reflects how women related their personal experiences to the Commissioners.<sup>27</sup> Moreover, she contends that “one philosophical

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<sup>24</sup> Vol. 18, file 438, RG 33/89, RCSW, LAC.

<sup>25</sup> Bégin, “The Royal Commission,” 33.

<sup>26</sup> Bégin, “The Royal Commission,” 31.

<sup>27</sup> She wrote: “The commission did not have an explicit conceptual framework or a shared political philosophy, other than its commitment to the ‘equal rights’ approach, which coexisted with general notions of the value of a specifically ‘female culture.’ We survived as a group, and produced an almost unanimous

statement the commission strongly adhered to was that no one was equipped to pass judgment on women's sexual, reproductive, or work-related choices except women themselves."<sup>28</sup> Her insights into the Commission are helpful in assessing the extent to which women's voices were "heard" by the Commissioners – at least from the perspective of one involved in the Commission's deliberations.

Sangster argues that the letters "assumed a low priority" because they were considered "more subjective" and argues, without reference to any supporting documents, that the commissioners "favoured submissions that provided 'hard' evidence, with statistics (presumed not to lie), and concrete, pragmatic, realistic policy suggestions."<sup>29</sup> Administrative documents from the RCSW archives do not support her contention. In a meeting memo dated March 4, 1968, "The Management Team" outlined that it desired to "reach as many significant groups or individuals as possible" because they were looking to "gather data and scientific information," to "collect opinions of the citizens," and "to stimulate interest and obtain participation" in the Commission's work."<sup>30</sup> This memo suggests, then, that while scientific data was definitely important it was not clearly privileged over letters or statements of opinion and experience. In fact, studies were commissioned by the RCSW that were not statistical in nature and, when it came time to

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report, by keeping to as pragmatic an approach as possible." Bégin also argues, "Although lacking a clear theoretical framework, the RCSW's report was inspired mainly by the idea of equal rights and equal opportunities and, to some extent, by a view of society based on the cultural feminism of Simone de Beauvoir. These foundations account for both the report's strengths and weaknesses." Monique Bégin, "The Royal Commission on the Status of Women in Canada: Twenty Years Later," in Challenging Times: The Women's Movement in Canada and the United States, eds. Constance Backhouse and David H. Flaherty, 21-38 (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen University Press, 1992), 29 ; Bégin, "The Canadian Government and the Commission's Report," 14.

<sup>28</sup> Bégin, "The Royal Commission on the Status of Women in Canada," 29.

<sup>29</sup> Sangster, "Invoking Experience as Evidence," 136.

<sup>30</sup> Vol. 36, file "Relations with Participants – miscellaneous," RG 33/89, RCSW, LAC.

write the report, it is significant that they did not adopt a strongly theoretical model for so doing; they prepared a brief based largely on their impressionistic assessments of the evidence delivered throughout the process.

Moreover, both the Chair of the Commission, Florence Bird, and one Commissioner, Elsie Gregory MacGill, were quoted in the press advising women that letters of opinion would be given the same consideration as formal briefs. MacGill noted that “the word ‘brief’ scares many women” and assured them that “a hand written letter from an individual telling of a problem or something will be considered just as certainly as a formally prepared brief.”<sup>31</sup> Seeming to contradict her, however, Bird was quoted in the Toronto Star as saying, “I regard a letter as a brief.... It can’t be a personal thing—‘my husband beats me’ or some such—but must be concerned with more general situations.”<sup>32</sup> Yet as the subsequent analysis of letters in this chapter reveals, many women wrote just such intimate letters to the Commissioners. Arguably, the personal revelations are what make the letters such a valuable historical source. Moreover, while I disagree with Sangster over the importance attributed to the letters, whether or not letters were valued as much as more report-like submissions is not as important as the fact that the public assertion of the Commissioners’ willingness to treat letters of opinion on an equal footing with briefs may well have encouraged submissions from women who otherwise might have been uncomfortable writing to the RCSW.

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<sup>31</sup> Anne Bond, “They search for definition answers to women’s status” Vol. 40, file “Scrapbook No. 1,” RG 33/89, RCSW, LAC.

<sup>32</sup> “A letter may be a ‘brief’ to status commission,” Toronto Star, February 9, 1968, Vol. 40, file “Scrapbook No. 1,” RG 33/89, RCSW, LAC.

Some 468 briefs and around 1,000 letters of opinion were submitted to the RCSW.<sup>33</sup> The submissions came from women as individuals and as members of groups or associations. Men also submitted to the Commission, although more often as members of groups than as individuals and with nowhere near the frequency as women. Of those submissions that were technically categorized and numbered (and microfilmed) as one of the 468 “briefs,” many came from groups or associations and some were quite lengthy. Among the numbered briefs, though, are many letters from individual women that took the form of letters of opinion. In the archived files there are many letters that resemble some of the letters assigned a brief number, but which were not assigned a similar number. In reviewing the files, it seems as though, in the classification process, later submissions from individuals were treated as letters of opinion while earlier ones were designated “briefs,” suggesting that there was not uniformity or consistency in how letters from individuals were labeled. This inconsistency could suggest that they were not prepared for the volume of letters received and might have decided subsequently that it was important to distinguish between briefs and letters in some manner.

There are also organizational and classification ambiguities in the archives. Although most individual letters were placed into files labeled “Letters of Opinion,” organized by province, random letters appear sporadically in other files. And while the Commission reported approximately 1,000 letters of opinion, they do not all appear to be available in the archives, so any attempt to provide a sense of how many of those 1,000 letters addressed abortion is simply not possible. Nor is there any sense of how some

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<sup>33</sup> Report of the Royal Commission, ix.

letters ended up in the archived files while others apparently did not. Additionally, early in the process, when the Commission staff attempted to provide a breakdown of the number of letters of opinion that referred to any given topic, they recorded only those topics that they considered to be a “major” theme of the specific letter, thereby excluding letters from the count that addressed abortion, for example, only briefly. As a result, a report of major themes dated February 23, 1968, titled “Letters of Opinion,” noted that of the 124 letters received by that date, eight referred to “abortion and birth control” as a “major topic,” compared to nine that referred to “alimony and other rights for deserted and/or legally separated wives” and nine that referenced “tax problems (usually exemptions for sitters etc.).”<sup>34</sup> This labeling process suggests that abortion was an important topic, but how important – quantitatively speaking – is unclear because this system does not record how many of the 124 letters that “touch lightly on numerous subjects” referenced abortion.

Briefs and letters may also have been assessed differently. While an analyst read and commented on most of the numbered briefs received by the Commission that have been microfilmed and the report form can be found in the file with the submission, the same analysis was not completed on letters of opinion. At most, some letters may have a hand-written notation on the front specifying the major topic(s) in the letter. This apparent lack of analysis of later letters of opinion raises the question of how much consideration was given to these later submissions in the writing of the report.

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<sup>34</sup> “Letters of Opinion, February 23, 1968,” Vol. 35, file Public Hearings – Relations with Participants, RG 33/89, RCSW, LAC.

As noted, summaries of many briefs were written by analysts and accompany the archived submissions. The analysts divided the reports into the following subheadings: Subject Category, Author, Date, Length of Brief, Background Information [of presenter], Remarks on Brief by Analyst, Questions.<sup>35</sup> The analysis and summary reported the topics and stances taken in the submission and suggested questions the Commissioners could pose to the writers were they to appear at a public hearing. At times, the personal opinions of the analyst are apparent through the comments that they made in the “Remarks on Brief by Analyst” section, occasionally revealing critical, even biased evaluations of the submissions. For example, the analyst of one brief wrote: “This brief has some good points. However, it reflects a very shallow understanding on the part of the writers, of the Canadian political process. Its tone is throughout traditional and highly puritanical.”<sup>36</sup> Another brief garnered these remarks: “The brief is badly written and badly presented, but makes a number of good points and recommendations – on subjects the Commission is aware of.”<sup>37</sup> Of Mrs. W. E. D’Altroy’s brief, the analyst wrote, “She makes her points forcefully and supports them with logical arguments.”<sup>38</sup> Of Wilma Brown’s brief, the analyst surmised, “She makes a sincere plea to this commission to change Canada into a country where women can develop fully their human capabilities.”<sup>39</sup> More disparaging, though, are the remarks for one brief, which read: “This is not of great value – really a letter of opinion.”<sup>40</sup> Sangster contends that such

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<sup>35</sup> See, for example, Vol. 11, file 27, RG 33/89, RCSW, LAC.

<sup>36</sup> Vol. 11, file 84, RG 33/89, RCSW, LAC.

<sup>37</sup> Vol. 15, file 282, RG 33/89, RCSW, LAC.

<sup>38</sup> Vol. 14, file 258, RG 33/89, RCSW, LAC.

<sup>39</sup> Vol. 13, file 187, RG 33/89, RCSW, LAC.

<sup>40</sup> Vol. 11, file 50, RG 33/89, RCSW, LAC.

comments as “no value” written onto some letters support her contention that letters were not treated as equal to briefs, but I think the explanation may be more complicated than she suggests.<sup>41</sup> We need to allow that these remarks could be unique to the particular analyst. Or, if they are reflective of the general attitude of the Commissioners, they call Bird’s and McGill’s pronouncements to the contrary into question. The fact that the analysts’ personal opinions or judgments sometimes intruded into the summaries is noteworthy for the potential influence they might have had on who was invited to formally present at the public hearings, what questions were asked of them, and possibly even how the issue was framed in the final report, although the exact extent of this influence would be difficult to determine.<sup>42</sup> Moreover, it is important to remember that the Commission was not a static entity, but it, and those associated with it, changed during the course of its mandate such that Bird and others would later report being changed personally and politically by the testimonies they heard.<sup>43</sup>

Many women who submitted briefs seemed self-conscious about their submissions and made qualifying statements or even proclaimed that their submissions were not “briefs.” Several were unsure what a “brief” was. Patricia Handy from Prince George, British Columbia, for example, began her submission by writing, “May I submit

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<sup>41</sup> Sangster, “Invoking Experience as Evidence,” 137.

<sup>42</sup> Although all Canadians were welcome to comment during general discussions, not all were invited to present their opinions.

<sup>43</sup> For example, one Commission report relates, “More and more the Commission was beginning to hear tragic individual stories,” suggesting that even the nature of testimony given changed during the Commission’s lifetime. Monique Bégin asserts that while McGill was already a feminist when she was appointed to the Commission, Bird, Lange, Lapointe, and Ogilvie “became feminists in their own right. This politicization occurred through a process of group education: the reading of essays and existing research material, followed by the shared experience of the public hearings.” See Vol. 35, file “Public Relations – Reports,” RG 33/89, RCSW, LAC; Bégin, “The Royal Commission on the Status of Women in Canada,” 28.

my feelings – I really do not know what a brief is – regarding the status of women. I wish I knew what form or information you desire. I shall do my best, and would be very happy to go into more detail, or provide more information should you wish it. In the meantime, I will try to be as ‘brief’ as possible.”<sup>44</sup> Conversely, others like Mildred Moir of Halifax, N.S., seemed confident in their presentations. She titled her submission “Legal Abortion and The Status of Women in Canada.”<sup>45</sup> While some submissions like Moir’s were typed, others were handwritten, sometimes almost illegibly, including words scribbled out or written in the margins. This range in the presentation of submissions speaks to the accessibility of the Commission – women, whether or not they felt comfortable with the process, wrote to the Commission because they felt either they would be heard or they needed to be heard and the effort involved did not feel wasted to them.

Accepting letters as briefs was one step the Commissioners took to ensure the RCSW’s accessibility. In the forward to the Report of the Royal Commission on the Status of Women in Canada (1970), the Commissioners outlined the other steps they took to ensure that the RCSW reached as many women as possible. These strategies included: (1) the production of a pamphlet explaining what the Commission was interested in hearing about and the format submissions should take<sup>46</sup>; (2) the publicizing of the RCSW at venues, like shopping malls and libraries, considered traditionally female spaces or in

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<sup>44</sup> Vol. 11, file 33, RG 33/89, RCSW, LAC.

<sup>45</sup> Vol. 18, file 431, RG 33/89, RCSW, LAC.

<sup>46</sup> Of the pamphlet, Bird recalled, “We hoped they would have a useful educational effect as we believed that the Commission should do more than merely produce a report to guide governments.” Florence Bird, “Reminiscences of the Commission Chair,” in Women and the Canadian State, ed. Caroline Andrew and Sandra Rogers (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1997), 188.

sections of publications that were also aimed at women<sup>47</sup>; (3) the holding of public hearings in similar venues to make women feel more comfortable attending; (4) the holding of public hearings in the evenings to encourage attendance from working women; and (5) the establishment of a “hot-line” telephone service to hear from women who were unable (or unwilling) to attend public hearings, although this effort was short-lived due to a lack of resources.<sup>48</sup> Choosing to publicize the RCSW in traditionally “female” spaces and hold public hearings in some of those same spots was a deliberate tactic of the Commissioners. Bégin notes of the RCSW that it was “the first to hold hearings not only in major downtown hotels but also in church basements, community halls, and...shopping malls.”<sup>49</sup> These efforts speak to the transitional nature of the decade. While some women felt comfortable speaking out, others were less so and “traditional” female spaces were “safer” for them. Also, those women who continued to do household chores whether employed outside the home or not, would see pamphlets and posters in supermarkets, shopping malls, and libraries. All of these strategies illustrate the efforts to ensure that the Commission not only reached but reflected the views of ordinary Canadian women.

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<sup>47</sup> One RCSW inter-office memorandum on “Advertising for Public Hearings and Briefs” suggested “that ads in dailies be placed on women’s pages, preferably in the Saturday editions.” Volume 35, file Public Hearings – Advertising and Publicity, RG 33/89, RCSW, LAC.

<sup>48</sup> Report of the Royal Commission, ix-x.

<sup>49</sup> Bégin, “The Royal Commission,” 33.

## Constructing Authority over Abortion

As exemplified by the excerpts of the letters presented at the beginning of this chapter, women writing to the Commission drew on personal experiences to claim authority, even expertise, to speak about abortion and related reproductive issues. When A.R. from Bassana, Alberta, wrote to the RCSW, she signed her letter “Desperate” instead of with her proper name, similar to the anonymous monikers used in advice columns. Her letter, which is reproduced at length at the beginning of this dissertation, was an emotional argument for accessible, legal, elective sterilization, in which she touched powerfully on abortion. Although sterilization was not mentioned in the Criminal Code, Linda Revie reports that in the pre-World War Two era, the Canadian Medical Association and the Canadian Medical Protective Association “advised doctors that the operation was illegal, except as a medical necessity,” and McLaren and McLaren (1986) note that it was not until the late 1970s that vasectomies and tubal ligations became increasingly popular strategies for limiting additional births.<sup>50</sup> The letter by A.R. or “Desperate” demonstrates the difficulty some women had in accessing voluntary sterilization procedures: “I asked my doctor for an operation and he treated me like I had asked for an abortion! I did not! ... I was...terrified that I would have another baby. I only wanted to be sterilized.... Isn’t that a better solution than the wish for an abortion and the pressure that comes with too many children.”<sup>51</sup> Regardless of whether she was

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<sup>50</sup> Linda Revie, “More than just boots! The eugenic and commercial concerns behind A. R. Kaufman's birth controlling activities” *Canadian Bulletin of Medical History* 23, no. 1 (2006), 135; McLaren and McLaren, *The Bedroom and the State*, 134.

<sup>51</sup> Punctuation in original. Vol.8, file Letters of Opinion – Alberta, RG 33/89, NAC RCSW, LAC.

conscious of doing so, she used various techniques to emphasize the authority of her stance. Most importantly, A.R. relied on her personal experiences to reinforce the validity of her position. She established herself as a wife and mother of five children, concerned for the well-being of her large family. Historically women have used abortion for fertility control and it was not unusual for them to cite their roles and identities as mothers to argue for the well-being of existing children when justifying the termination (or prevention) of a pregnancy.<sup>52</sup> As a mother she extended this legitimacy to other women when she claimed that her feelings must be representative of “many, many mothers,” thereby normalizing her call for legal sterilization. When she related that her desire to avoid another pregnancy and child was so strong that she was willing to ignore her moral and religious feelings to end a pregnancy through abortion, she suggested to the Commissioners that the status quo not only was untenable, but pushed women to contravene laws – legal, social, and religious. Her experience with her doctor, moreover, demonstrated that conferring authority for the decision on the medical profession was an insufficient solution; this rejection of traditional medical authority also underlined the legitimacy of her own ideas on the matter.

A.F. from North Vancouver, British Columbia, explicitly argued for abortion on request by also sharing her reproductive experiences and those of females close to her. First, she provided a very detailed outline of her own and her family’s medical and mental health history, explaining that she had “4 live children, 2 miscarriages, and 5 D &

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<sup>52</sup> See, for example, Angus McLaren and Arlene Tigar McLaren, The Bedroom and the State: The Changing Practices and Politics of Contraception and Abortion in Canada (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1997), 32-51; Stephen Brooke, “‘A New World for Women’? Abortion Law Reform in Britain during the 1930s,” American Historical Review 106, no. 2 (2001): 431-59.

C's."<sup>53</sup> In case her own medical/reproductive history proved insufficient to support her call for legal abortion, she included examples from the lives of women around her. She wrote:

I also have a girl friend who contracted and had measles in the early part of her pregnancy by the time she got finished with examinations by Doctors and Psychiatrists etc, and the decision was made that she could have an Abortion it was so far along in the pregnancy that it would have meant a Caesarian Section. She refused that and had the baby but is worried all the time about what the results may be as years go by.

Additionally, she shared, "I also have a niece who should have had a Legal Abortion – Thank God when the Pregnancy was terminated the child was Stillborn – It was so terribly malformed it was Hideous & God in his mercy didn't allow it to live." Her stories highlight the value she attributed to knowledge born from personal experience, rather than arguments based on religious, legal, medical, or social dictates. For her, abortion on request was a common-sense solution to a widespread problem.

Even in letters that did not include specific examples of unplanned pregnancies or illegal abortions, women commiserated with other women's reproductive fears. There are letters and briefs that attempted to serve as a voice for voiceless women or that expressed concern for "other" women.<sup>54</sup> Diana C. Louis, who supported abortion on request, observed, "There are people who do not want a child, or any more children *with teeth-clenching stomach-churning intensity*."<sup>55</sup> The letter from Edmonton, Alberta's Norma F. Bricknell also reads as a plea for women living in situations where another child would be detrimental: "If the uterine nest is not healthy and suitable enough for an

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<sup>53</sup> Vol. 17, file 7, 1-108, RG 33/89, RCSW, LAC.

<sup>54</sup> Freeman also found that concern for other women was a theme that appeared during the RCSW's public hearings. See Freeman, *The Satellite Sex*, 170.

<sup>55</sup> Emphasis added. Vol. 17, file 364, RG 33/89, RCSW, LAC.

embryo to develop into a fetus, nature aborts the embryo. A woman, whose 'home nest' is non-existent, or not healthy or suitable enough for a baby to develop into a responsible adult, has the right and the WISDOM OF NATURE to have an abortion during the embryonic phase."<sup>56</sup> Wilma Brown from Regina, Saskatchewan, reported that she was making her recommendations for abortion on request, among other things, "from my personal experience and knowledge of other women's problems."<sup>57</sup>

Women who spoke of the needs of others not only advocated liberalizing abortion laws. On the other side of the issue, H.B. from Manning, Alberta, wrote to the Commission "hoping to appeal to your compassion *for the mothers of tender toddlers who cannot, themselves, take the initiative.*"<sup>58</sup> The frustration some anti-abortion women experienced in feeling powerless or voiceless comes across in the brief by Mildred Moir of Halifax, Nova Scotia. Her biographical statement noted that she "has never been associated, even indirectly, with any organization opposing abortion," although she often referred to "we" in her brief and maintained that she spoke on behalf of "average" Canadian women (and men) who shared her views.<sup>59</sup> She argued that "even in a matter...which is probably fully understood only by women...our society is not particularly interested or impressed with the views of average Canadian women." But, she contended, "A significant proportion of Canadian women (it may well be a majority) are opposed to abortion for reasons which should be of interest to all Canadian

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<sup>56</sup> Vol. 17, file 388, RG 33/89, RCSW, LAC.

<sup>57</sup> Vol. 13, file 187, RG 33/89, RCSW, LAC.

<sup>58</sup> Vol.8, file Letters of Opinion – Alberta, RG 33/89, RCSW, LAC.

<sup>59</sup> She wrote, "I believe that because I am a rather average person, my own standpoint and views on this question are shared by many others," Vol. 18, file 431, RG 33/89, RCSW, LAC.

women.”<sup>60</sup> While in some instances women may well have spoken for “others” as a way of removing themselves from the discussion and avoiding sharing intimate information, their appeals are noteworthy because these women felt compelled to speak for others – those they believed to be voiceless or otherwise unable or unwilling to speak for themselves. In so doing, they claimed to represent a greater number than themselves, perhaps fortifying their position in the process.

Many women expressing opinions on abortion shared motherhood as a common experience. Nations are Built of Babies (1993), Cynthia Comacchio’s study of motherhood issues in the first half of Canada’s twentieth century, argues that “reproduction is more than procreation: it encompasses the socialization, physical maintenance, and emotional nurture of family members.”<sup>61</sup> She further suggests that, in the decades immediately preceding the 1960s, “The enhanced social implication of child rearing as a service to the state created a veritable cult of motherhood.”<sup>62</sup> Echoing Comacchio’s assertion, some women who wrote to the Commission represented motherhood, specifically or in allusions, as a “holistic” experience. These women, who drew their authority from their experiences as mothers, presented arguments for the pregnant woman’s well being that referenced their existing children or the unborn in question. Jean H. Sloan of Lloydminster, Saskatchewan, spoke of the potentially negative outcomes for women and children when women were denied control over their bodies: “Whereas the care and rearing of one child is a twenty year commitment, women

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<sup>60</sup> Vol. 18, file 431, RG 33/89, RCSW, LAC.

<sup>61</sup> Cynthia Comacchio, Nations are Built of Babies: Educating Ontario’s Mothers and Children, 1900 – 1940 (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1993), 6. See also Wendy Mitchinson, Giving Birth in Canada 1900-1950 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2002), 13.

<sup>62</sup> Comacchio, Nations are Built of Babies, 140.

must have the right to abortion at any time during pregnancy.... Women must be freed from motherhood by coercion.” She also argued that “their arrival pattern” and “the rearing of them must be to the child’s advantage not necessarily to her own frustrated lifetime desires.”<sup>63</sup> Concern for the pregnant woman and child was also expressed by G. O. of Willowdale, Ontario, who thought that abortion laws should be abolished and that only the pregnant woman should make the decision to abort or not: “After all, she is the one who has by far the major responsibility for looking after and rearing the child, which is one of the most difficult tasks that can be undertaken by an individual and which calls for the utmost patience, self-sacrifice, devotion and love.”<sup>64</sup>

G. O., however, also expressed concerns for the unborn. She wrote: “These are all characteristics that can not be forced, and I feel in this day and age that much the greater crime is perpetrated against humanity in bringing into the world a child who is unwanted and will therefore be unloved and rejected, thus setting on the road of life a warped and stunted human being with all its attendant misery and unhappiness.”<sup>65</sup> Others similarly wrote from that perspective. Diana C. Louis supported abortion on request by arguing on behalf of the unwanted children’s best interest:

There are those who object to abortion as they feel it is the destruction of life. While I don’t necessarily agree with them, I can understand their point of view. But, how about the more subtle destruction of life or personality...The ‘battered children’...The rejected children...Many of these are illegitimate children who are kept by their mothers, but who are always the butt of her displeasure even if she subsequently marries and has other children. This is the history of many of our delinquents.<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> Vol. 18, file 456, RG 33/89, RCSW, LAC.

<sup>64</sup> Vol. 8, file Letters of Opinion – Ontario, 5-136, RG 33/89, RCSW, LAC.

<sup>65</sup> Vol. 8, file Letters of Opinion – Ontario, 5-136, RG 33/89, RCSW, LAC.

<sup>66</sup> Punctuation in the original. Vol. 17, file 364, RG 33/89, RCSW, LAC.

She also argued that many children were “considered unadoptable [sic]” or were “shunted from foster home to foster home – never achieving complete acceptance by anyone. They too know, with devastating certainty, no one wants them.”<sup>67</sup> Similarly, Bonita M. Bridge., who identified herself as a young housewife from Winnipeg, wrote, “Either abortion laws must be changed to make a much wider use of abortion legal, or else provision must be made, more than it has been, that unwanted children will be well-cared for and most importantly, given the love and attention that they need and deserve.”<sup>68</sup> L.F. of Cymric, Saskatchewan, similarly wrote, “On abortion...I can think of no other such heinous crime as to bring an unwanted child into an already over populated world. In most cases the sexual act is committed for selfish pleasure only and very little if any thought of responsibility is ever considered.”<sup>69</sup> All of these submissions indicate that many women viewed abortion as a benefit not solely for the potential mother, but also for the unborn or potentially unwanted child. Comacchio argues that in the early twentieth century, when the medical profession became involved in child welfare, the medicalization of motherhood resulted in a new role for the state as a moderator and educator of mothers.<sup>70</sup> In this context, it is not surprising that so many women expected state action to ensure that the child’s welfare was protected; for some of these women this meant legalizing abortion to protect unwanted children from future neglect or abuse.

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<sup>67</sup> Vol. 17, file 364, RG 33/89, RCSW, LAC.

<sup>68</sup> Vol. 15, file 279, RG 33/89, RCSW, LAC. After outlining her position on a woman’s right to choose, W. E. D. of Burnaby, British Columbia, argued that there was a “right of each child to be born into a WANTED atmosphere.” See Vol. 14, file 258, RG 33/89, RCSW, LAC.

<sup>69</sup> She identified herself “as a farmers [sic] wife” who “would like to suggest a few things that must be changed if rural existence is to go on in a decent manner any women that would stay on under present conditions is an utter fool.” See Vol.8, file Letters of Opinion – Saskatchewan, RG 33/89, RCSW, LAC.

<sup>70</sup> Comacchio, Nations are built of Babies, 5, 53.

Motherhood legitimated an expertise drawn from personal experience. Among the other ways women attempted to demonstrate their authority – or expertise – over the abortion question was from their work or professional experiences. Although Dr. M. C. M., a psychiatrist from Saskatoon, did not use her title when she signed her name to the brief she submitted, but her cover letter was written on letterhead from her medical office. Given her specialty, it is not surprising that she mentioned the potential role for psychiatrists in the abortion decision. When recommending the use of therapeutic abortion committees, she argued that any doctor involved in the decision should share the legal onus with other doctors so that no one doctor’s “personal, religious feelings” or “fears of prosecution” would guide their decision-making.<sup>71</sup> That said, she ultimately argued that the final decision should belong to the pregnant woman. Her 4-page, type-written brief was well-argued and more articulate than many submissions, reflecting her education and training. Moreover, in her cover letter she reported that her written brief had been requested by one Commissioner following her presentation at an evening hearing on May 3, 1968, where she spoke on behalf of the Saskatoon chapter of the Voice of Women. Noting this request highlighted the fact that her opinion had been expressly sought by the Commission, thereby granting her brief even more authority than her professional credentials had likely already conferred.

S. B. of Port Hope, Ontario, also referenced her professional (and personal) credentials in her brief, when she argued against abortion:

I think it is up to the women in the world to keep our standards as high as possible on Marriage, Divorce, Abortion and the use of the pill. I am a

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<sup>71</sup> Vol.8, file Letters of Opinion – Saskatchewan, RG 33/89, RCSW, LAC.

registered nurse as well as being a farmer's wife and I believe a doctor and a nurse should preserve life instead of destroying it. I think it should be a criminal offense always to perform an abortion unless a doctor verifies that the woman's health is at stake and she will die.<sup>72</sup>

K. T. C. of North Bay, Ontario, also established her qualifications at the beginning of her brief, asserting, "This is not a brief. Only my views as a wife, mother of 5 children and a teacher of 28 kindergarten children."<sup>73</sup> She continued, despairing, "To think that a mother-to-be is willing to murder her innocent unborn child is just too incomprehensible. Isn't it the duty of our government to protect all its people, particularly the innocent children, even those yet unborn?" Although K. T. C. claimed her letter was not a brief, her self-identification as a wife, mother, and teacher underscored her authority as a woman whose identity – both personal and professional – involved caring for others, particularly children. This self-identification underscored her authority and buttressed her position. P.D. from Dorval, Quebec, also began her letter with identifying characteristics: "I am 41 years of age, happily married with 6 children aged 17-7 years.... I have been associated over several years with social work...and with voluntary service.... I am at college aiming for an Arts degree in Communication Arts."<sup>74</sup> P.D.'s careful construction of her identity is notable. While she did not elaborate as to the reasons for her opinions, two paragraphs later she wrote "Abortion, Starvation, War} are all legal but each is illicit."<sup>75</sup> Although she did not necessarily privilege her identity as a wife and mother over her work, volunteer, or educational experiences per se, the order in

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<sup>72</sup> Punctuation in original. Vol. 8, file Letters of Opinion – Ontario, RG 33/89, RCSW, LAC.

<sup>73</sup> Vol. 8, file Letters of Opinion – Ontario, RG 33/89, RCSW, LAC.

<sup>74</sup> Vol. 9, file Letters of Opinion – Quebec, RG 33/89, RCSW, LAC.

<sup>75</sup> In her letter she listed abortion, starvation and war, drew the symbol typed above, and wrote her comment on the list.

which she listed the characteristics she used to describe herself is notable. All of her identities added layers to her authority – such that, for her anyway, they either negated the need to explain why she held the position on abortion that she did or suggested that to her the wrongness of abortion was axiomatic. Overall, these letters demonstrate, as Kathy Davis suggests, that women’s identities are “ongoingly negotiated.”<sup>76</sup> Lessons learned from one identity, say as a mother, were translated through lessons learned from another identity, say, in this case, as a social worker, so that no one identity functioned alone at any given time, but rather worked in tandem to bolster authority claims.

During a period of increasing university enrolment and student activism, it is to be expected that there would be submissions to the RCSW by groups or individuals who highlighted their status as students.<sup>77</sup> One particular brief by university students warrants attention because of how the authors highlighted their education as a source of their identity and authority. The U. B. C. Committee of Mature Women Students submitted a 27-page brief to the RCSW that purported to outline the experiences and challenges encountered by the 700 mature female students at the university. They qualified their brief, which was prepared through weekly discussion meetings, as one that “contains no highly original or startling recommendations.”<sup>78</sup> Yet they continued, “We feel most fortunate to be able to attend university, and feel a great responsibility as privileged women, to help and encourage other women who are less fortunate. We want to urge them most strongly to do as we are doing; to continue to educate themselves, to develop

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<sup>76</sup> Kathy Davis, “What’s in a Voice? Methods and Metaphors,” *Feminism & Psychology* 4, no. 3 (1994), 357.

<sup>77</sup> Doug Owsram, *Born at the Right Time: A History of the Baby-Boom Generation* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996), 181, 277.

<sup>78</sup> Vol. 14, file 217, RG 33/89, RCSW, LAC.

themselves to the fullest, in order to give Canada the benefit of their intelligence.” This group made nine recommendations to improve women’s status and presented an analysis showing their consciousness of the interconnectivity of issues pertaining to women’s oppression and (in)equality. In their conclusion they queried, “Just what IS woman’s most important role in an over-populated world?” They answered by asserting, “It may have been procreation when the human species was young, and when mortality rates were high. Now women have a choice of many roles which can be important to society.” Ultimately, the students recommended abortion on request, with adequate and free counselling, performed by a qualified physician. Their final assessment was as follows: “Abortion is an individual, personal matter, which should be decided on the basis of a woman’s total situation and her own considered and mature outlook on her situation. The decision to have an abortion is hers, and hers alone.” This brief demonstrates that these women had a good sense of how their status was linked to the unequal power they wielded in society. It shows, as well, another dimension of women’s authority construction.

Not unlike the U. B. C. Committee of Mature Women Students’ weekly meetings, the RCSW prompted discussion among other women as they used the establishment of the Commission as a springboard for discussion within formal and informal groupings. The letter of C. R. of Don Mills, Ontario, demonstrates the role of the Commission in prompting discussion: “When I picked up your pamphlet a week ago, I found too much to think about to answer immediately without some quiet reflection and discussion with

other interested women.”<sup>79</sup> M. H. claimed her brief reflected the outcome of a discussion among 35 rural women, suggesting the shared experience of anxiety over unplanned pregnancy, the role the RCSW may have played in igniting discussions among women, and the fact that it is difficult to fully ascertain how widespread support was for these measures as one brief could represent the views of many.

Similarly, the St. Mark’s Women’s Association of St. Laurent, Quebec, noted of its brief that “approximately 50 women took part in discussions leading to the compilation of this brief.”<sup>80</sup> The brief by the Cariboo District Women’s Institute of Quesnel, British Columbia, is also illustrative. Mrs. R. V. P., the group’s “Publicity and Public Relations Convener,” handwrote a letter of introduction which stated:

Most of the members do not work outside the home and those who do, usually are not very active members or drop out, finally, as they do not have the time or the energy for volunteer work. Many of the members are not a bit interested in the ‘status of women’ but our District Board is, and felt we should send in a brief representative of the rural homemaker’s thoughts on this subject (those who do think, that is). Whatever comes out of this Royal Commission, I do believe it has made women think, which is important.<sup>81</sup>

While her remarks could be read as disparaging, they more importantly demonstrate the range of consciousness women had of the types of issues the Commission was dealing with and the amount of time women were willing or able to devote to such issues.

Similar to reporting that a brief was based on group discussion, some women chose to underline the strength of their positions through the use of group surveys or referenda. The University Women’s Club of North York held a public forum on the

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<sup>79</sup> On abortion, she wrote simply that it “should be legalized, and practiced at the discretion of the doctor and patient.” See Vol. 9, file Letters of Opinion – Ontario, RG 33/89, RCSW, LAC.

<sup>80</sup> Vol. 13, file 174, RG 33/89, RCSW, LAC.

<sup>81</sup> Vol. 11, file 30, RG 33/89, RCSW, LAC.

abortion (and divorce) laws in December 1967, at which they circulated questionnaires to canvass members' opinions. The majority of participants, they reported, supported liberalizing abortion (and divorce) laws. The club's official brief was presented on behalf of its 436 members and advocated that "the law should be amended to permit abortion at the mother's request after she has received the best medical advice available."<sup>82</sup>

Similarly, the University Women's Club of Woodstock circulated a questionnaire among its members to solicit their opinions on issues raised by the RCSW. They reported, "155 women replied to the question regarding the abortion laws. Thirty [19.4%] of these wanted no change in the present laws, 89 [57.4%] were in favour of liberalizing present abortion laws and 36 [23.2%] were in favour of abortion at the request of the woman."<sup>83</sup>

The largest survey was submitted by Chatelaine magazine, which submitted both French and English briefs to represent the French and English editions of the magazine. The magazine conducted a reader survey on the issues raised by the RCSW and presented the results of the approximately 11,000 replies received. Chatelaine reported that 22.1% wanted the law to remain unchanged, 54.6% wanted abortion available under certain circumstances, and 24.7% wanted to "permit abortion on a medical recommendation."<sup>84</sup> Moreover, the magazine sought to demonstrate the representativeness of the sample to strengthen its claims. In response, the analysts of both the French and English briefs were quite critical of Chatelaine's submissions, stating of the English brief that it "was nothing more than a description of the figures without much consideration of the

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<sup>82</sup> Vol. 11, file 29, RG 33/89, RCSW, LAC.

<sup>83</sup> Vol. 14, file 220, RG 33/89, RCSW, LAC.

<sup>84</sup> Vol. 15, file 308, RG 33/89, RCSW, LAC.

implications of these figures.”<sup>85</sup> They doubted any claim made of representativeness, arguing that the responses represented only .2% and .25% of the total French and English female population over 18 years. Overall, after discussing the ways in which the respondents were not representative of the age and income distribution of the Canadian female population (among other variables), the analyst of the English brief concluded, “The usefulness of an uncontrolled survey such as this with such obvious limitations...is restricted since it is non-representative...[and]...lacks projective accuracy.”<sup>86</sup> Their criticisms did not end there.

The analysts also were critical of the design of the questionnaire, specifically that multiple choice answers were provided rather than open-ended questions. They further argued that “it is doubtful whether all questions were understood by the respondents a point which limits the meaningfulness of the answers.”<sup>87</sup> The editors of Chatelaine had much greater faith in their readers and in the results of the questionnaire. In the French brief, they argued that responses “reflect with a rare unanimity, so we think, the opinion of French-Canadian women of all social classes and of all ages, who are aware of the feminine problems and who want to play in our country the role which would bring about an actual equality.”<sup>88</sup> Moreover, as discussed in a previous chapter, in many ways the utility of Chatelaine (like the RCSW) for its female readers was that it gave them a space

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<sup>85</sup> Vol. 16, file 308, RG 33/89, RCSW, LAC; Vol. 17, file 346, RG 33/89, RCSW, LAC.

<sup>86</sup> Vol. 16, file 308, RG 33/89, RCSW, LAC; Vol. 17, file 346, RG 33/89, RCSW, LAC. Similar criticisms were made of the survey by the University Women’s Club of Woodstock. See Vol. 14, file 220, RG 33/89, RCSW, LAC.

<sup>87</sup> Vol. 16, file 308, RG 33/89, RCSW, LAC; Vol. 17, file 346, RG 33/89, RCSW, LAC. These criticisms call into question Sangster’s assertion, discussed earlier, that statistical studies were treated with more weight than letters of opinion.

<sup>88</sup> Vol. 16, file 308, RG 33/89, RCSW, LAC; Vol. 17, file 346, RG 33/89, RCSW, LAC.

in which they could comfortably express their opinions. Chatelaine was a springboard for thought and discussion. On this point, the analyst of the French brief argued critically that the sentiment in the returned questionnaires “represents a group of opinionated women who felt strongly enough about the issues to submit their views” and not necessarily the opinions of Canadian women in general.<sup>89</sup> These judgmental remarks ignored the fact that for some women, speaking out about recently taboo issues like abortion was courageous – even through the anonymity offered by a questionnaire. Ultimately, whether scientifically useful or not, these numbers were used by the authors of the submissions to create or present a sort of numerical authority behind their stances; the implication was that the majority of Canadian women felt similarly. Used to a political system in which might was right and where polls and statistics carried authority, such a strategy made sense. And, as noted previously, women’s responses to the questionnaire indicate that they were aware of such issues, they possessed positions, and they had a language through which to express them.

When presenting their opinions, women did not rely solely on their own experiences or credentials, but also looked to external sources to bolster their legitimacy as speakers on the issue. One way in which they did this was by referencing abortion laws outside of Canada as justification for changing Canadian laws. Tracy Penny Light has noted that abortion laws in Britain historically had a large impact on laws in Canada and her assertion hold true for the RCSW.<sup>90</sup> The Alta Vista Women’s Progressive

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<sup>89</sup> Vol. 16, file 308, RG 33/89, RCSW, LAC; Vol. 17, file 346, RG 33/89, RCSW, LAC.

<sup>90</sup> Tracy Penny Light, “Shifting Interests: The Medical Discourse on Abortion in English Canada, 1850-1969” (PhD. dissertation, University of Waterloo, Waterloo, 2003), 177.

Conservative Association advocated changes to Canada's law "along the lines of Britain's new law," which, as of the Abortion Act (1967), which legalized abortion performed by physicians.<sup>91</sup> Similarly, the Manitoba Volunteer Committee on the Status of Women reported, "Britain has already legitimized abortion."<sup>92</sup> Hazel Goldstein of Burlington, Ontario, argued for women to have the "'basic human right' to decide when and how many children she should have, as is the case in Sweden and Britain."<sup>93</sup> Women similarly referenced laws outside of Canada to argue against liberalizing the abortion laws. Mary Cooper of Ottawa wrote: "By official admission, illegal abortions are still performed in Hungary.... Indeed we know of no country where wider abortion laws have eliminated illegal abortion. On the contrary, there is evidence that permissive laws increase the number of illegal abortions, by creating a new climate favorable to abortion."<sup>94</sup> Referencing abortion laws from other countries was a strategy that allowed these women to argue for the legitimacy of their stances. It was also, on some level, a "safe" way of asserting their beliefs since it allowed them to champion a position from an impersonal perspective.

Another way that women referenced external authorities was by addressing the place of the medical profession in the abortion decision. It is not surprising that women would support the involvement of the medical profession in the abortion decision given that throughout much of the 1960s the Canadian Medical Association was the primary

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<sup>91</sup> Vol. 15, file 288, RG 33/89, RCSW, LAC.

<sup>92</sup> Vol. 16, file 318, RG 33/89, RCSW, LAC; Penny Light, "Shifting Interests", 178.

<sup>93</sup> Vol. 12, file 108, RG 33/89, RCSW, LAC. The Children's Aid Society of Vancouver referenced Scandinavia in its support of liberalized abortion laws, relating that "in Scandinavia where modified abortion programs have been in effect for thirty years, the quality of life does not appear to be deteriorating." See Vol. 13, file 188, RG 33/89, RCSW, LAC.

<sup>94</sup> Emphasis in original. Vol. 18, file 438, RG 33/89, RCSW, LAC.

public face of the abortion debate in Canada and since women's reproductive lives had already been medicalized.<sup>95</sup> For some women, this acceptance of the physician's place in abortion resulted in concern for the doctors' well being. The Local Council of Women of Windsor, Ontario, argued that the confusion in the law needed to be addressed since it "leaves doctors who perform abortions, even to save the life of the mother, in the difficult position of violating the Criminal code."<sup>96</sup> Similarly, the Anglican Church of Canada argued that there was a "need for clear and definite legislation to replace the confused and uncertain state of the law whereby a doctor never knows whether or not he acts on a legal precedent for abortion."<sup>97</sup> Not all women accepted the protection of doctors, however, as an acceptable reason for passing a new law on abortion. Mary Cooper of Ottawa criticized "the hypocrisy of the government's proposed amendments on abortion laws." She continued, "The purpose of these amendments is not to protect women or to improve their status. The government bill is really a doctors' bill, intended to protect a small number of doctors and to free them of legal restraints."<sup>98</sup> Cooper was not rejecting the medicalization of abortion, but rather its legalization, as she went on to say, "Under the proposed amendments a hospital abortion committee would be a law unto itself."<sup>99</sup>

For those women who accepted the medicalization of abortion, the establishment or retention of a committee to oversee the abortion decision made sense. Jan Bevan of

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<sup>95</sup> See, for example, Penny Light, "Shifting Interests," ; Larry Collins, "The Politics of Abortion: Trends in Canadian Fertility Policy," *Atlantis* 7, no. 2 (Spring 1982), 2-5; Jenson; Brenda Margaret Appleby, *Responsible Parenthood: Decriminalizing Contraception in Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999), 29-36.

<sup>96</sup> Vol. 16, file 315, RG 33/89, RCSW, LAC.

<sup>97</sup> Vol. 11, file 52, RG 33/89, RCSW, LAC.

<sup>98</sup> Vol. 18, file 438, RG 33/89, RCSW, LAC.

<sup>99</sup> Vol. 18, file 438, RG 33/89, RCSW, LAC.

Victoria, British Columbia, argued that “to lessen the possibility of a hasty decision, each prospective abortion patient should be given counselling with persons trained in psychiatry; several private sessions over at least two weeks.”<sup>100</sup> M. M. T. of Toronto recommended that in some cases, there was merit to the idea that “the family, medical-psychological personnel, legal, and possibly social workers as well as the mother be involved in the consultations and decision.”<sup>101</sup> While the Manitoba Volunteer Committee on the Status of Women argued that “the mother should have the final choice on the matter of abortion,” and should not be compelled to plead her case before a panel, it suggested that “two physicians should be empowered to authorize an abortion before a committee,” thereby keeping abortion a medical issue.<sup>102</sup> The St. Mark’s Anglican Women’s Association, which supported abortion under certain circumstances, supported “the present safeguard of three separate medical opinions to authorize abortion” and argued that “doctors should be assured that legal abortions involve the same legal responsibilities as any other operation.”<sup>103</sup> The letters arguing in favour of the establishment or maintenance of panel decisions did not, however, reflect the majority of the opinions received, suggesting that some women did not accept the (continued) medicalization of the procedure.

After the influence of the medical profession on the public abortion discussion, organized religion was the greatest external authority jockeying for a say. As noted in the introduction to this dissertation, throughout the 1960s Canadian churches involved

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<sup>100</sup> Vol. 17, file 389, RG 33/89, RCSW, LAC.

<sup>101</sup> Vol. 9, file Letters of Opinion – Ontario, RG 33/89, RCSW, LAC.

<sup>102</sup> Vol. 16, file 318, RG 33/89, RCSW, LAC.

<sup>103</sup> Vol. 13, file 174, RG 33/89, RCSW, LAC.

themselves in public dialogues or forums on abortion and also discussed the matter in their governing bodies and memberships.<sup>104</sup> In letters to the RCSW, however, there was no consensus about the extent to which women adhered to religious dictates and some women condemned religion or religious leaders' involvement in the abortion decision.<sup>105</sup> Although not always specified as such, much of the criticism seemed directed at the Roman Catholic Church in particular. F. R. of Manitoba wrote, "Churches make the excuse that unborn babies must not be killed. There is no proof that the soul is in the embryo or fetus. Even if it is, abortion will only return it to its heaven unharmed, but the unwanted child has a very poor hope of eternal happiness."<sup>106</sup> M. M. of Ottawa pointed to the preponderance of religious (and governmental) male voices in the debate: "The voices most often heard on this subject are those of church men or government men who have an interest in maintaining the status quo and who obviously don't have to worry over thoughts of getting an abortion."<sup>107</sup> Marielle Demorest of Richmond, British Columbia, wrote:

The Catholic Church, to which I belong, has of course a strong objection even though it prides itself on advocating personal development of the individual.... How can a house full [sic] of celibate bishops and male politicians decide what is the course to take in such a personal matter? The church will change only through politicizing [sic] by its lay members.... There's a great deal of knowledge that is kept too locked up because the control is afraid that they, the sheep followers, might decide to think on their own.<sup>108</sup>

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<sup>104</sup> See, for example, Appleby, *Responsible Parenthood*, 62-82, 87-197.

<sup>105</sup> For how the press interpreted religious references at the public hearings, see Freeman, *The Satellite Sex*, 167-173.

<sup>106</sup> Vol.8, file Letters of Opinion – Manitoba, RG 33/89, RCSW, LAC.

<sup>107</sup> Vol. 9, file Letters of Opinion – Ontario, RG 33/89, RCSW, LAC.

<sup>108</sup> Vol. 15, file 281, RG 33/89, RCSW, LAC.

N. L. of Toronto sent a letter to the Commission that was also highly critical of the Roman Catholic Church. In particular, she wrote, “I think the dictatorship of the Roman Catholic Church should be over in the middle of the Twentieth Century. This issue is not a religious issue, but a medical, social and political one.”<sup>109</sup>

Conversely, women also used religion to argue against abortion and in so doing either defended organized religions or denied that the churches were major actors in opposition to legal abortions. Mildred Moir of Halifax contended that “contrary to popular belief, those who are opposed to abortion are not opposed on the grounds of faith” and denied that most opponents of abortion were Roman Catholics.<sup>110</sup> Rather, she argued that abortion “properly comes under the Department of Justice” since “abortion is a violation of justice.” She continued, “In an argument for justice...surely it should not be necessary to call upon the laws of our religion for support, the laws of our country should suffice.”<sup>111</sup> G. G. of Cornwall, Ontario, who vehemently opposed abortion “except to save the mother’s life,” similarly wrote of herself: “I am not a Roman Catholic, a point which I personally consider quite irrelevant, but which is raised by those who favour abortion with astounding frequency.”<sup>112</sup> Conversely, Rita M. Moran of Edmonton unabashedly referenced her religious beliefs in her brief, reflecting, “We who have been enriched by Christian teaching look on abortion as the evil it is.... The soul is

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<sup>109</sup> Vol. 9, file Letters of Opinion – Ontario, RG 33/89, RCSW, LAC.

<sup>110</sup> Vol. 9, file Letters of Opinion – Nova Scotia, RG 33/89, RCSW, LAC.

<sup>111</sup> Vol. 18, file 431, RG 33/89, RCSW, LAC.

<sup>112</sup> Vol. 9, file Letters of Opinion – Ontario, RG 33/89, RCSW, LAC.

present at the time of conception and any interference with the products of conception is interfering with a living soul.”<sup>113</sup>

H. B. of Manning, Alberta, looked to religious persons to solve the problem of abortion when she appealed “to the C.W.L. [Catholic Women’s League], K of C. [Knights of Columbus], all religious and conscientious orders, and all interested organizations, to support the cause of our mothers in defense of our children, who may, one day, very well be our defense; had they not been snuffed out of existence.”<sup>114</sup> To this end, the Catholic Women’s League sought the establishment of a Royal Commission on abortion since it doubted that extending the availability of abortion would “minimize the number of illegal abortions” or that the issue had been sufficiently studied.”<sup>115</sup> Finally, although H. J. P. of Merritt, British Columbia, did not present her religious beliefs, it is possible to read religion into her understanding of conception: “I believe girls should be taught that they are the creator and if they are not willing to do everything to create and bring forth a healthy human being and also a love and care for that human being until it reaches adulthood she should not gratify sexual desires in herself or a male (without protection from conception).”<sup>116</sup> Reflecting the heterogeneity of religious beliefs, these excerpts show a range of feeling over the place of religion in the abortion issue. In an effort to strengthen the authority of their positions, some women denied a link between their stances on abortion and their religion or religious ideals, while other women saw those same links as justifying their stances.

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<sup>113</sup> Vol.12, file 117, RG 33/89, RCSW, LAC.

<sup>114</sup> Vol. 8, file Letters of Opinion – Alberta, RG 33/89, RCSW, LAC.

<sup>115</sup> Vol. 11, file 56, RG 33/89, RCSW, LAC.

<sup>116</sup> Vol. 7, file Letters of Opinion – British Columbia, RG 33/89, RCSW, LAC.

Strategies designed to demonstrate the authority of a position or belief relate to, yet are different from, efforts to determine *who* should have authority over the abortion decision. Many women argued forcefully and often that women, as the ones who get pregnant, should be at least centrally if not solely responsible for the decision to terminate a pregnancy. Their frustration at their perceived lack of a voice in the public debate and their desire to alter that silence were forcefully and frequently articulated in the letters of opinions and briefs. B. H. of Sudbury, Ontario, wrote:

Regarding the laws on abortion, divorce, birth control, there should be no laws at all. If a woman wants an abortion, its [sic] no one else's business at all, least of all should it concern M.P.s (mostly men) and Priests, Bishops etc, who know nothing about these subjects anyway.... A woman, no matter who, and no matter how much money she has should be allowed to have an abortion. It concerns no one else whatever.<sup>117</sup>

Similarly, Wilma Brown of Regina, Sask., wrote, "Clinical abortions should be allowed to all women who so desire them... Since most doctors and legislators in this country are men, it looks as though the decision on this matter is still to be left with those who are not vitally concerned, whereas, only the particular woman concerned should have the right of decision in this matter."<sup>118</sup> Dorothy E. Stogre of Penticton, British Columbia, who eloquently argued for women's freedom of choice, stated that the pregnant woman alone was aware of her circumstances and limitations and reasoned that, "If a woman is considered intelligent enough to be entrusted with the care and upbringing of a family,

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<sup>117</sup> Vol. 9, file Letters of Opinion – Ontario, RG 33/89, RCSW, LAC.

<sup>118</sup> Vol. 13, file 187, RG 33/89, RCSW, LAC.

surely she must be intelligent enough to make this most vital decision.”<sup>119</sup> M. T. of Chilliwack, British Columbia, a mother of five children, supported abortion on request, noting, “I think the only person that is affected is the woman with the problem. It is her problem only, and she is the one who should decide what she is going to do with her body, a simple matter of – the womans [sic] body, her problem, her decision, her life. She should be able to go to any qualified doctor and have an abortion if she desires.”<sup>120</sup> With a touch of humour, she added “Statistics prove that most accidents happen in the home, let us be realistic and admit the fact, the bedroom is no exception.” Whether expressed through rational thought, frustration, anger, humour, or other emotions, many women claimed that the authority over the abortion decision belonged solely to the pregnant woman in question.

Similar to submissions addressing who should make the abortion decisions, some women lamented the relative lack of women’s voices in public debates and policy decisions. R. G. of Haney, British Columbia, wrote, “Laws that directly affect us as women should be decided on by women. Abortion, birth control and divorce concern us all, yet no one asked my opinions before changing these laws.”<sup>121</sup> Likewise, M. H. of High River, Alberta, who wanted women in general to have a more authoritative public voice, argued “that when laws of the land pertain to the rights of women, they should have more representations on such boards which make up these same laws.”<sup>122</sup> Dr. M.C.M. of Saskatoon lamented, “Abortion Committees are almost always composed of

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<sup>119</sup> Vol. 14, file 250, RG 33/89, RCSW, LAC.

<sup>120</sup> Vol. 7, file Letters of Opinion – British Columbia, RG 33/89, RCSW, LAC.

<sup>121</sup> Vo. 17. file Letters of Opinion- British Columbia, RG 33/89, RCSW, LAC.

<sup>122</sup> Vol. 15, file 268, RG 33/89, RCSW, LAC.

men.... It would seem that a question of such urgent importance to women should not be decided so prominently by men.”<sup>123</sup> One of the most emotionally argued letters came from Mrs. W. E. D’Altroy of Burnaby, British Columbia, who pleaded powerfully against letting men decide women’s fate:

I...am appauled [sic] to find that in this enlightened supposedly free era that right now at this moment we have a number of old and middle aged men mauling [sic] over the abortion law – still trying to make up THEIR minds whether they should allow females the freedom of controlling [sic] their bodies – a freedom men have always taken. How come, that body of individuals is not entirely women (the only sex the problem afflicts) and made up of women doctors, social workers, mothers and just women. How do men, regardless of their training, ever think they fully understand a thing that can never happen to them? They talk about the emotional damage of an abortion, and forget the tremendous emotional damage of bearing a child out of wedlock, the damage of young girls taken out of society for months during pregnancy, delivery and signing away their child. How can women any longer shut their ears to *the soft crying of distraught females* caught in the horrors of a situation brought on by natures [sic] demand, a falter in dedication to a discipline, and the punishment metered out by persons making laws who NEVER can be in the situation where they will be the receivers of such justice. There should be no law on abortion -- it should be the decision of each female whether she wants a child or an abortion.”<sup>124</sup>

Women’s desire for the greater involvement of women – both professionals and the pregnant women – in the making of abortion laws and decisions – stemmed from the fact that they were the ones experiencing the fears and realities of unplanned pregnancies and illegal abortions. The Commission provided a vehicle through which women’s voices could be heard or to which, in the case of letters of opinion and briefs, women could voice their fears, frustrations, and desires.

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<sup>123</sup> She suggested: “I think we must also question whether women are still not being used as the scapegoats of social-sexual guilt, required to suffer in penalty for society’s as well as their own sexual ‘sins’.” See Vol. 8, File Letters of Opinion – Sask., RG 33/89, RCSW, LAC.

<sup>124</sup> Italicized emphasis added. Vol. 14, file 258, RG 33/89, RCSW, LAC.

Political scientist Jane Jenson's observation of the public abortion debate in the 1960s is that women never "gained recognition as major actors in the debate."<sup>125</sup> She argues that women lacked a collective feminist consciousness and identity, noting that "few as yet had a critique of the system of gender relations which subordinated women to men and silenced female voices in public debates." In her analysis of letters to the RCSW, Sangster disagrees, arguing "many women identified ideological barriers and structural inequalities in society."<sup>126</sup> This observation extends to many women who addressed abortion as well since women connected their inequality with the socio-political order. Inez Baker of Willowdale, Ontario, wrote, "As long as woman is treated like an animal to be bred—with the master (government, church, etc.) exercising the controls—her position in society can never be considered one of equality—she is enslaved!"<sup>127</sup> Bonnie Kreps of Toronto, who did not place limits on her support of legalized abortion, also used the image of slavery in her brief: "Woman must be freed from her present partial or complete slavery to the species. That is, she must have the right to determine when she will become pregnant. Therefore, it is imperative that a program of sec [sic] education, birth control information and devices, and liberalized abortions be set up."<sup>128</sup> E. S. of Vancouver believed: "Until women have full status, and are liberated from the soulless, brainless 'vessel' thinking we will produce dull and

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<sup>125</sup> Jane Jenson, "Getting to Morgentaler," in *The Politics of Abortion*, eds. Janine Brodie, Shelley A. M. Gavigan, and Jane Jenson (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1992), 25-26, 31.

<sup>126</sup> Sangster, "Invoking Experience as Evidence," 143.

<sup>127</sup> Vol. 14, file 254, RG 33/89, RCSW, LAC.

<sup>128</sup> Vol. 17, file 373, RG 33/89, RCSW, LAC.

thwarted citizens for the children's concept of the world comes largely from this very 'vessel'.<sup>129</sup>

Diana C. Louis's brief is notable as well because she began by introducing herself to the Commission: "I am married but I have no children."<sup>130</sup> She continued, "Women are people first of all. They may become wives. They may become mothers." This structure emphasized equality and freedom of choice. Dr. M. C. M. of Saskatoon argued that the exclusion of the woman from the decision was "a grave disrespect to human dignity and rights," and further reasoned, "If a woman is regarded in this condition as simply an incubating machine then her status as a human being is gravely undermined."<sup>131</sup> Norma F. Bricknell of Edmonton wrote emphatically on the issue: "At the moment...I, a woman, – mother of four children, – I, am an accessory to crimes against this law. I buy birth control pills! to prevent conception!...The doctor who prescribes the pills; the druggist who stocks and sells the pills are all criminal under this law...IT WOULD CERTAINLY IMPROVE MY STATUS IF SECTION 150 was thrown out."<sup>132</sup> These letters indicate that these women perceived a link between control over their reproductive choices and their status within Canadian society more generally, indicating an awareness that likely predated the RCSW.

But some women did not want equality as it was envisioned by second wave feminism or women's liberation movements. Mary Cooper of Ottawa wrote a

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<sup>129</sup> Vol. 7, file Letters of Opinion – British Columbia, RG 33/89, RCSW, LAC.

<sup>130</sup> Vol. 17, file 364, RG 33/89, RCSW, LAC.

<sup>131</sup> Vol. 8, file Letters of Opinion – Sask., RG 33/89, RCSW, LAC.

<sup>132</sup> Punctuation in original. Vol. 17, file 388, RG 33/89, RCSW, LAC. Mrs. D. R. W. of Calgary, Alberta, wrote "Birth control must be legalized. It disgusts me that I have to break the law everyday. My conscience won't let me agree to completely legalizing abortion though." See Vol. 8, file Letters of Opinion – Alberta, RG 33/89, RCSW, LAC.

memorable brief against abortion, in which she attacked the women's movement. She argued that since women's rights were human rights, women "should never demand the sacrifice of other human rights," which is what she perceived those advocating for access to abortion were guilty of.<sup>133</sup> Specifically, she was critical of "super feminists whose zeal is untempered [sic] by a broader human concern." She continued, "These self-styled liberals talk glibly about a woman's 'absolute right to her own body'—unmindful that abortion destroys the body of another human being.... This push for easy abortion is the cancer of the women's movement—a misdirected liberalism run wild and out of control."<sup>134</sup> Cooper was not the only woman to criticize the woman's movement as misdirected or out of touch with the general public. G. B. S. of Burnaby, British Columbia, reported that after lengthy discussion with "other women," she and presumably they were of the opinion that, "Mostly women wish to get married and bear children. God intended it this way, creating us in a manner that we might become a wife and mother.... Not having the ability to bear children, [men] became our providers and guardians."<sup>135</sup> She demonstrated what she perceived as the potential "problems" of feminism when she queried: "Do women want to give up all the gallantry.... Do women want to become Amazons, or become the bread winner.... Would the majority of women want a Nation's Prime Minister to be a women [sic].... I venture to say the answer would be NO." Similarly, Rita M. Moran of Edmonton cajoled other women: "We, as women, have made many mistakes but it is never too late to change a pattern. Maybe a good start

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<sup>133</sup> Vol. 18, file 438, RG 33/89, RCSW, LAC.

<sup>134</sup> Vol. 18, file 438, RG 33/89, RCSW, LAC.

<sup>135</sup> Vol. 7, file Letters of Opinion – British Columbia, RG 33/89, RCSW, LAC.

would be to be more proud of ourselves as women and not be so concerned with trying to emulate or take over the masculine role.”<sup>136</sup> In opposition to the previous group of letters, these women rejected changes to their roles that would, in their eyes, sacrifice the protection they felt inherent in the status quo. Notably, there is a perception among these women that motherhood was a defining role to which women should aspire.

## **Conclusion**

Of letters written to the RCSW, Sangster argues that “they were more likely to be letters of complaint, critique, or calls for change: the very satisfied and unconcerned would have been less likely to write.”<sup>137</sup> Certainly women seeking to change Canada’s abortion law seem to have written most often; these were women who were invested in changing the status quo. Still, a fair number of voices against change were also heard; these were the women either invested in maintaining the status quo or concerned about the life of the unborn. When women wrote the Commission, they did so because they wanted to be heard and used many strategies in their efforts to construct their authority over the issue of abortion. Many women shared personal experiences with the Commissioners that are surprisingly intimate. In these examples, women attempted to confer authority on themselves by virtue of their experiences or identities as mothers or as women who had dealt with unplanned or unwanted pregnancies. Others drew on professional or educational training and experience to ground their opinions, in some

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<sup>136</sup> Vol. 12, file 117, RG 33/89, RCSW, LAC.

<sup>137</sup> Sangster, “Invoking Experience as Evidence,” 144.

cases seeking the type of authority that was often automatically granted to people who possessed certain credentials. Still others anchored the authority of their truth claims through numerical strength as expressed through group surveys. When not justifying their right to speak to the legal status of abortion, women spoke to the place of women, whether as professionals or as pregnant women, in the abortion decision. In doing so they were addressing authority differently – in this instance answering the question of who has the authority to decide whether a woman should have an abortion – and arguing forcefully for the place of women in the decision. Ultimately, through the act of writing to the Commission, women not only had the occasion to verbalize what they (already) thought about unplanned pregnancies and abortion, but to share their expertise born through their own personal experiences and layered identities. These letters, regardless of stance or strategy, demonstrate that women were not silent, without positions, or critical of women's status. Their letters, sometimes thoughtful, sometimes fretful, reveal many of their passionately held beliefs.

## **Chapter Three**

### **“I Had a History”: The Women of the Abortion Caravan**

The Abortion Caravan of 1970 was Canada’s first national protest that called for unrestricted access to legal abortion. Unlike the previous chapters, which showed how women expressed themselves on the subject of abortion through the mass media and government-sanctioned forums – Chatelaine magazine, the Globe and Mail, and the Royal Commission on the Status of Women in Canada – this chapter is an exploration of the women behind the Abortion Caravan. In this direct collective action, women’s voices on abortion were not muffled through a filter of respectability or brought to light through a mediated source. Nor was there a buffer between the participants and the responses to their words and actions. Instead, their anger, rage, frustration, helplessness, desperation, and hopefulness were expressed directly. At least for this specific moment in time, these women were finished waiting for changes to occur and were tired of waiting for others to act on their behalf. Frustrated by limited government action and inaction, the women declared war on illegal abortion and on the government for its failure to act on women’s behalf. The change in tactics and arena reflects the fact that different women were involved in the Caravan than most of those who had engaged in the issue over the previous decade. They were younger, more radical, and less willing to work within a system in which they did not believe. In addition, social, cultural, and political changes

over the course of the 1960s made a national protest of this character imaginable.

Women's experiences in the various protest movements of the decade, the emergence of women's liberation, and the process of radicalization that affected so many women in this period influenced the planning and execution of the Abortion Caravan.

Utilizing the participants' voices through oral narratives collected for this project, this chapter explores, in depth, the personal characteristics of the participants, assessing how these influenced the women's abortion rights activism. These features include age and generation, race/ethnicity, marital status, place of birth, religion, class, and education. The women's personal reproductive experiences and those of significant women in their lives are explored when they proved to be a motivating factor in their participation in the Caravan, and form the basis of authority claims over the issue of abortion. Finally, this analysis looks at the women's activism in other areas and explores how that helped to shape their abortion rights activism. The analysis presented in this chapter situates the women of the Caravan within the context of the 1960s activism. Studies on abortion activism more generally, when they include a broader contextual analysis typically position abortion within the women's liberation movement or second wave feminism, often neglecting the women's identities as members of the student, anti-war, and civil rights movements, and the strategies and ideas learned from these other movements. When positioned in relation to other movements, the Abortion Caravan can be understood as part of a process of radicalization and as significant to the development of women as activists beyond the issue of abortion rights specifically. In fact, this analysis illuminates the complexities of their feelings about abortion and the ways in which they

came to participate in the action. Approached in this manner, the Caravan becomes part of an ongoing radicalization process – and not a separate struggle – that not only enabled these women to see how they wanted their lives to change, but also assisted them in their efforts to make those changes.

In the last decade, scholars have paid increased attention to the Abortion Caravan. For a long while, the only exhaustive secondary source on the Caravan was Frances Wasserlein's M.A. thesis "'An Arrow Aimed at the Heart': The Vancouver Women's Caucus and the Abortion Campaign, 1969-1971" (1990).<sup>1</sup> Other works referenced the Caravan, but most offered as little as a sentence or not more than a few pages about the event.<sup>2</sup> Even Angus McLaren and Arlene Tigar McLaren in The Bedroom and the State: The Changing Practices and Politics of Contraception and Abortion in Canada, 1880-1980 (1986), the seminal book on birth control and abortion in Canada, offered only a single reference to the Abortion Caravan and did so by paraphrasing Kathleen McDonnell's work.<sup>3</sup> Since 2004, four new works have joined the growing historiography. Judy Rebick's Ten Thousand Roses: The Making of a Feminist

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<sup>1</sup> Frances Wasserlein, "'An Arrow Aimed at the Heart': The Vancouver Women's Caucus and the Abortion Campaign, 1969-1971" (master's thesis, Simon Fraser University, Burnaby, 1990).

<sup>2</sup> For brief references, for example, see Naomi Wall, "The Last Ten Years: A Personal/Political View," in Still Ain't Satisfied, eds. Maureen Fitzgerald, Connie Guberman and Margie Wolfe (Toronto: Women's Press, 1982), 19; Anne Collins, The Big Evasion: Abortion The Issue That Won't Go Away (Toronto: Lester & Opren Dennys, 1985), 21-23, 25; Kathleen McDonnell, Not An Easy Choice: A Feminist Re-examines Abortion (Toronto: Women's Press, 1984), 18-19; Catherine Dunphy, Morgentaler: A Difficult Hero (Toronto: Random House, 1996), 90. Another volume provides a number of primary documents related to the Caravan, but the coverage is still brief. See Ruth Roach Pierson, Marjorie Griffen Cohen, Paula Bourne and Philinda Masters, eds., Canadian Women's Issues. Volume I: Strong Voices (Toronto: James Lorimer, 1993), 43-45, 99, 123-127.

<sup>3</sup> Angus McLaren and Arlene Tigar McLaren, The Bedroom and the State (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1986), 143. For the origin of their reference, see Kathleen McDonnell, "Claim No Easy Victories: The Fight for Reproductive Rights," in Still Ain't Satisfied: Canadian Feminism Today, ed. Maureen Fitzgerald, Connie Guberman and Margie Wolfe (Toronto: Women's Press, 1982), 32.

Revolution (2005) is a collection of interviews with activists who worked on a variety of social justice issues.<sup>4</sup> Ann Thomson's Winning Choice on Abortion: How British Columbian and Canadian Feminists Won the Battles of the 1970s and 1980s (2004), which includes a narrative account of the Abortion Caravan from the perspective of an activist, provides important details about events in British Columbia leading up to the Caravan, the Vancouver Women's Caucus (VWC) trek across the country, and events in Ottawa.<sup>5</sup> In September 2009, Christabelle Sethna and Steven Hewett's article, "Clandestine Operations: The Vancouver Women's Caucus, the Abortion Caravan, and the RCMP," appeared; it analyzes the RCMP's interest in the VWC and the Abortion Caravan from a "state surveillance" perspective.<sup>6</sup> Most recently, Barbara Freeman has contributed to our understanding of the Caravan with an analysis of the tensions between journalistic objectivity and the activism of two participants in "'My Body Belongs to Me, Not the Government': Anne Roberts, Kathryn Keate and the Abortion Caravan Publicity Campaign of 1970," a chapter in her new book.<sup>7</sup> These new works demonstrate an increased interest in the Abortion Caravan and reflect its importance in the history of Canadian women's fight for reproductive freedom as well as in the women's liberation movement more generally. This dissertation contributes to this growing literature, in part, by drawing out the ways women constructed authority over the issue of abortion.

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<sup>4</sup> Judy Rebick, Ten Thousand Roses: The Making of a Feminist Revolution (Toronto: Penguin, 2005).

<sup>5</sup> Thomson's book was originally self-published through Trafford. Parts of her work are quite similar to Wasserlein's thesis and it is sometimes difficult to determine when Wasserlein's work is being referenced and when Thomson's interviews produced the same responses from interviewees because some references are incomplete. Ann Thomson, Winning Choice on Abortion: How British Columbian and Canadian Feminists Won the Battles of the 1970s and 1980s (Trafford: Victoria, 2004).

<sup>6</sup> Christabelle Sethna and Steve Hewitt, "Clandestine Operations: The Vancouver Women's Caucus, the Abortion Caravan, and the RCMP," Canadian Historical Review 90, no. 3 (September 2009): 463-495.

<sup>7</sup> Barbara M. Freeman, Beyond Bylines: Media Workers and Women's Rights in Canada (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2011).

## **The Women**

This section explores who the Abortion Caravan participants were by examining their personal characteristics. In particular, it examines how their age, generation, race and ethnicity, marital status, place of birth, religious background, class, and education shaped their activism, as well as their experiences and fears related to reproduction and their involvement in other protest movements. These components combined and competed, forming the individual and collective identities of the women who participated in the Caravan. Their personal characteristics illuminate who these women were and why they were motivated to be involved in the Caravan. This analysis helps to situate these women within the processes of radicalization that transformed some women's lives in the 1960s and 1970s. Other scholarly studies of women's liberationists identify a general set of personal characteristics shared by the women who participated in the movement. The following collective profile of the Abortion Caravan participants is consistent with the conclusions of other studies of women's liberationists. In the Canadian context, this study contributes to an understanding of how women's competing political identities or commitments affected their activism around abortion and illuminates their often ambiguous or conflicted connection to the issue.

The idea of the Caravan, as will be discussed in the next chapter, originated with Betsy Wood, which is noteworthy primarily because in many ways she did not share the typical personal profile of the other Abortion Caravan organizers and participants who were interviewed. By her own account, she was ten to fifteen years older than most

women in the Vancouver Women's Caucus (VWC), having been born in 1930.<sup>8</sup> By the time of the Caravan, Wood was a divorced mother of four teenagers and had more "lived experience" simply because of her age. Only one other woman interviewed, Myrna Wood, was close to Betsy Wood in age, having been born in 1936. The other women were born between 1943 and 1949, placing them in their early-to-mid twenties by May 1970. Wasserlein's nineteen interviewees were divided into the following age groups at the time of the Caravan: 19- 20 years (2), 21-24 years (5), 25 – 29 years (6), 30-34 years (2), and 40+ years (2).<sup>9</sup> While scholars disagree over the precise dates of the Baby Boom, making arguments for or against including "war babies" and disagreeing about when the boom ended, this analysis identifies most of the participants as early members of the Baby Boom generation.<sup>10</sup> As members of this generation, these women came of age in the 1950s and 1960, attended high school between 1957 and 1967, and would have mostly begun menstruating between the late 1950s and the mid-1960s. This latter point is relevant in that the women would have spent at least part of the 1960s reproductively

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<sup>8</sup> Wood was also known as Betsy Meadley and Besty Meadley Wood during the late 1960s and early 1970s as she was separated and then divorced during this period.

<sup>9</sup> See Wasserlein, "An Arrow Aimed at the Heart," 28. The *Calgary Herald* reported "Average age of the women is about 25, but members prefer to say they represent all ages of women on the abortion issue." See Lynne Rach, "Abortion Caravan on Move," *Calgary Herald*, in *Abortion Caravan Scrapbook*, p. 30, F-73-item1, Women's Movement Collection (Marge Hollibaugh Collector), Simon Fraser University Archives.

<sup>10</sup> For debates over the timing of the Baby Boom see: Doug Owsram, *Born at the Right Time: A History of the Baby-Boom Generation* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996), xiii, xiv; François Ricard, *The Lyric Generation: The Life and Times of the Baby Boomers* trans. Donald Winkler (Toronto: Stoddart, 1992), 22; Ruth Rosen, *The World Split Open: How the Modern Women's Movement Changed America* (New York: Viking, 2000), 38; Alice Echols, *Daring to Be Bad: Radical Feminism in America 1967-1975* (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minneapolis Press, 1989), 65; Dimitry Anastakis, ed., *The Sixties: Passion, Politics, and Style* (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2008), 3-4; Magda Fahmi and Robert Rutherford, eds., *Creating Postwar Canada: Community, Diversity, and Dissent 1945-75* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2008), 3-4.

capable, but most of them likely did not (yet) want to reproduce.<sup>11</sup> Their age is also significant in that they were generally younger than the women identified as readers of Chatelaine, setting them apart from the women of the earlier chapters.

Situating these women within the Baby Boom generation makes it important to consider the cultural characteristics of that generation. Three defining characteristics of that generation are its relative affluence or privilege (which was less true for working class, immigrant families, and visible minority families), the veneration of youth, and the tension between conformity and rebellion, especially in relation to gender ideals. In his study of student movements in Canada, the United States, and West Germany, Cyril Levitt argues that student activism was a “revolt of privilege against privilege, for privilege in a society in which the character of privilege had been changing.”<sup>12</sup> By this he means that the Boomers – who became members of various social movements – had been raised in an environment in which they experienced relative affluence, against which they rebelled while also adapting to the fact that the post-war conditions that shaped their upbringing were changing. In Born at the Right Time (1996) Doug Owram concurs that this generation of women experienced a period of unprecedented prosperity. As discussed below, the majority of Caravan participants report middle-class upbringings. Participant P.A. notes the effect of privilege on her generation:

When I say we're a privileged generation we are privileged in the sense that we could take risks in terms of doing demonstrations and stuff in the way that people are afraid to do now, for good reasons, and we could take

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<sup>11</sup> Of the thirteen women who responded to queries about their use of birth control at or before the time of the Abortion Caravan, eleven report having tried the pill, two diaphragms, and one the IUD, indicating that almost all had practiced birth control at some point during the 1960s.

<sup>12</sup> Cyril Levitt, Children of Privilege: Student Revolt in the Sixties. A Study of Student Movements in Canada, the United States, and West Germany (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1984), 4.

risks in terms of we weren't as worried if we didn't have jobs or pensions or whatever, again for good reason, because our parents had come home from the war and established a social security system and state support. [Al]though far from perfect... [it] did create conditions that gave us the luxury, you know, of thinking 'I don't really have to worry about a job.' The kind of sense of security that we had as a generation helped us fight all those kinds of things and helped us win.<sup>13</sup>

For her, privilege was freedom from economic insecurity as well as from other repercussions of protesting.

The 1960s were years in which youth was venerated.<sup>14</sup> Owram argues, "The youth cult of the 1960s had its basis in the 1950s. Thus when the baby-boomers arrived at adolescence, they did so not only as a group of children who had always been treated as important, but in a society that gave youth culture a distinct and important position."<sup>15</sup> He suggests that it was in the 1960s that "the baby boom became conscious of itself as generational force and began to think of itself as special," and that the "idealism of the era" was manifested in multiple protest movements.<sup>16</sup> This sense of uniqueness and the accompanying idealism comes across in the words of the Caravan women. Narrator Marcy Cohen reflects on the general feeling of the decade:

I think it was one of those times, because if you look at it, it was happening around the world... There's something about the fact that there was some post-war prosperity and there was a space to do more than just get a job, to think about the broader world, the kind of world you wanted to live in. And there was a sense, a feeling that you really could make a difference and that you could change the world and that the world was yours to change.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> P.A., personal interview, October 26, 2006.

<sup>14</sup> Owram, *Born at the Right Time*, x-xi, 12, 136-137, 175, 309-310.

<sup>15</sup> Owram, *Born at the Right Time*, 137.

<sup>16</sup> Owram, *Born at the Right Time*, 136, 217.

<sup>17</sup> Marcy Cohen, telephone interview, March 2, 2007.

Interviewee Charnie Guettel agrees, stating, “There are moments in history where there are revolutions in thought. And that was a moment when a number of things gelled that actually produced a framework. If you were going to go out to become an organizer in your own life, in your neighbourhood, or your union, or wherever, there was a moment when you said, ‘Hey I can do that.’” She believes, “It was a moment in which you were overcoming the ways in which you had been dominated in your mind and using that rebellion against that domination to think that it would be possible to carry that forward. It was hugely electric, emotionally exhilarating.”<sup>18</sup> These comments support Owram’s contention that the boomers had a strong sense of themselves as standing at a moment in time when change was possible through direct personal action.

Several scholars have documented how restrictive gender roles were perceived as confining by many young women who grew up at the height of the Cold War.<sup>19</sup> In her analysis of the social values of the baby-boom era, Mariana Valverde finds that “postwar discussions of gender ideology reveal a tension between upholding a mythical prewar patriarchy and an effort to expand the wartime slogans of democracy and freedom into

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<sup>18</sup> Charnie Guettel, personal interview, February 26, 2007.

<sup>19</sup> See, for example, Joy Parr, ed., A Diversity of Women: Ontario, 1945-1980 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1995); Owram, Born at the Right Time; Mary Louise Adams, The Trouble With Normal: Postwar Youth and the Making of Heterosexuality (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997); Joan Sangster, Regulating Girls and Women: Sexuality, Family, and the Law in Ontario, 1920-1960 (Don Mills, Ontario: Oxford University Press, 2001). American studies include Elaine Tyler May Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era (New York: Basic, 1988); Wini Brienes, Young, White, and Miserable: Growing Up Female in the Fifties (Boston: Beacon, 1992); Beth Bailey, From Front Porch to Back Seat: Courtship in Twentieth-Century America (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1988); Joanne Meyerowitz, ed., Not June Cleaver: Women and Gender in Postwar America, 1945-1960 (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1994).

the realm of the family.”<sup>20</sup> Interviewee Charnie Guettel relates that her mother had to give up her teaching career when she got married, but was involved in volunteer work. Her remembrances of her mother’s social activism in New Jersey and of her father’s accommodation highlight the restriction many young women grew up observing:

The kind of volunteer work that mothers like I had in the fifties, it was prefaced on your first job was to take care of the family.... One time I asked my mother when she was in her seventies, “Do you ever miss that you didn’t marry somebody in Indiana, stay in Indiana?” And she said, “There isn’t anyone in Indiana who would have let me go to a meeting after supper.”<sup>21</sup>

While Guettel’s mother enjoyed the “freedom” to engage in civic activism, it was a limited freedom that was dependent on fulfilling certain expectations. Witnessing their mothers’ negotiations between gender conformity and other aspirations awakened in these women, often at a young age, a sense of frustration that fed into the radicalization process. This sense that there was a possibility to transcend dominant gender roles, when combined with the overall sense of optimism as identified by Owrap, was a powerful mix. In the end, dissatisfaction with prescribed roles directly contributed to the women’s involvement with protest movements and ultimately with women’s liberation.

As has been noted, the women of the Abortion Caravan were from a different generation than those who wrote letters to Chatelaine, the Globe and Mail, or the RCSW. In an effort to gauge linkages between the different women studied, I asked the Caravan women if they read Chatelaine magazine or had done so growing up. Many, like Myrna Wood, did not: “No, I didn’t read Chatelaine. In fact, I was not a regular newspaper

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<sup>20</sup> Mariane Valverde, “Building Anti-Delinquent Communities: Morality, Gender, and Generation in the City,” in A Diversity of Women: Ontario, 1945-1980, ed. Joy Parr (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1995), 39.

<sup>21</sup> Charnie Guettel, personal interview, February 26, 2007.

reader. Actually, I was pretty ignorant of abortion facts and realities.”<sup>22</sup> Joan Eliesen reported only reading Chatelaine if there was a specific article that interested her.<sup>23</sup> Heather Bishop reports that they did not have any magazine subscriptions because they were working class and also that “reading wasn’t a big thing” in her home. Her dad, however, was a strong advocate of reading the daily newspaper since, he would tell her, “you can’t understand the front page without reading the business page.”<sup>24</sup> A few women reported that their mothers had subscriptions to Chatelaine. Walker’s mom read the magazine because “she really thought Doris Anderson was great.” Peggy Morton relates that her mom also had a subscription and she had likely read it since it was on hand. She observes, “Even for us, who considered ourselves revolutionaries and Chatelaine hopelessly bourgeois, Doris Anderson certainly played her role at that time.”<sup>25</sup> P.A. was one of the few women interviewed who had a subscription to the magazine. She relates, “Well, I had a subscription for it because it was doing a lot of good stuff under Doris.... It had a lot more feminist stuff [which was] was really important then because it went into a lot of women’s health stuff.” She notes that it was “the only mainstream” magazine that took a feminist stance.<sup>26</sup>

Other responses illuminate the disconnect that existed among some women in this study. N.T.R.’s response to whether or not she read Chatelaine captures exactly the sort

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<sup>22</sup> She continued, “However, there was not a female over twelve that was not totally aware of how pregnancy affected our lives and unwanted ones hung over the heads of every woman who could not afford another child, or an unmarried woman. As I said before, I, like everyone, learned from the women before me.” Her assertions highlight the importance of experiential knowledge and the transmission of that knowledge. Myrna Wood, written interview, January 8, 2008.

<sup>23</sup> Joan Eliesen, telephone interview, April 15, 2007.

<sup>24</sup> Heather Bishop, telephone interview, February 20, 2007.

<sup>25</sup> Peggy Morton, telephone interview, February 17, 2007.

<sup>26</sup> P.A., personal interview, October 26, 2006.

of perception of Chatelaine Doris Anderson desired to change: “I saw it as the kind of magazine that housewives read, and didn’t see it as having any political content, but also I was in my early twenties, not planning to have kids at that point, so it didn’t seem to speak to me.”<sup>27</sup> Pocock’s assessment of Chatelaine is more critical. She recalls, “So you have people that we hated at the time because we thought they were hopelessly right wing, Doris Anderson and these kind of people, take on this issue [of abortion].”<sup>28</sup> She claims, that coverage “Never would have happened without the work that we did. So they never would have associated with us, but they took on these kinds of issues and incorporated them into a reformist campaign.” Pocock’s assessment neglects the fact that Chatelaine, under Anderson, had been advocating for abortion law reform since 1959, but nicely highlights the divisions (both perceived and actual) among various feminisms in this decade.

Like membership in an age cohort or specific generation, race and/or ethnicity was an important defining characteristic among the women interviewed. While none of the Abortion Caravan narrators report that their ethnic or racial backgrounds affected their involvement with the Caravan or with activism in general, most shared a common background in that they were white and mostly of British or Northern European descent. Of the fifteen interviewed, nine specifically characterize themselves as “WASPs” or of British background, two are Jewish, and the lone male interviewee is of Italian heritage; other backgrounds the women mention include Northern European, French, and German.

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<sup>27</sup> N.T.R., telephone interview, October 31, 2006.

<sup>28</sup> Pocock related of the women she associated with, “We wrote a lot of papers, and distributed a lot of papers, and responded to a lot of papers. It was really interesting because women really asserted themselves at that time.” Judy Pocock, personal interview, November 30, 2006.

The 19 women Wasserlein interviewed for her study on the Caravan were also all white.<sup>29</sup> The “whiteness” of the Canadian women’s liberation movement is consistent with the findings of scholars of the American women’s liberation movement who have found that most black women did not necessarily relate to the claims of oppression made by white women.<sup>30</sup> In part, this “whiteness” also reflects the relative homogeneity of Canadian society at this time, as outlined in the introduction. The relatively privileged position of these young, white women – when compared to women of colour – likely allowed them the space or “comfort” to address issues of gender oppression while their racialized counterparts tended to focus on their other multiple oppressions.

Yet the women’s whiteness did not mean they were colour blind. Many of them were committed to the civil rights movement. Charnie Guettel came to Canada in 1965, but had been involved in the civil rights movement in the United States and had attended the March on Washington in 1963. She argues, “I think I was radicalized by my African friends who were way more politically developed than anybody.... They told me what to read.”<sup>31</sup> Marcy Cohen also reports a strong connection to the civil rights movement, recalling, “I remember hearing the first civil rights speaker and it brought tears to my eyes. It was obviously something about equality and justice that had resonated with me.” For her race was an incredibly significant issue. She reports that her strong ties to Black power activists complicated her feelings about abortion when some criticized abortion as

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<sup>29</sup> Wasserlein, “An Arrow Aimed at the Heart,” 28.

<sup>30</sup> See Echols, *Daring to Be Bad*, 32; Rosen, *The World Split Open*, 110-114.

<sup>31</sup> Charnie Guettel, personal interview, February 26, 2007.

an aspect of racial oppression.<sup>32</sup> For her, these complications in her understanding of abortion, at the same time that she was helping the VWC run abortion referral services, resulted in a “large personal crisis around abortion” in which she had to ask herself “what was more progressive” in terms of what a new world would look like.<sup>33</sup> So while the women themselves were white, some nevertheless grappled with issues affecting non-whites, sometimes in defining ways.

In contrast to the fairly homogenous nature of the women’s racial/ethnic backgrounds, there was more heterogeneity in their marital and relationship patterns, which is reflective of ongoing renegotiations of social norms. While sexual orientation would become an important issue in women’s liberation groups over the next few years, the divisiveness and debates that arose over lesbianism and heterosexuality were not really a factor in Canada at the time of the Caravan in 1970. Only one of the women interviewed says she identified as a lesbian at the time of the Caravan, having come out in 1970. When asked about their marital status at the time of the Caravan, the majority report that they were single or unmarried (seven, including the lone male) or divorced or

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<sup>32</sup> She also reports that she was very involved with deserters and draft dodgers, some of whom were very anti-abortion, which further complicated her feelings on the issue. That Canadian women’s liberationists felt strong links to the Black Power movement in the sixties is captured, for example, in an article in the Montreal Star announcing the Caravan: “They liken their fight to that of the Blacks and claim that Woman Power will leave as much of a mark on the 70s as Black Power did on the 60s. ‘We stand today where Black emancipation was five years ago.... Our job now is to make women aware of themselves as a group. The Blacks came to believe they were inferior, and it’s the same with women. We must use the media, marches and sit-ins to make women start thinking.’” See Margaret Penman, “The Feminists go marching on” Montreal Star, May 8, 1970, in Abortion Caravan Scrapbook, p. 30, F-73-item1, Women’s Movement Collection (Marge Hollibaugh Collector), Simon Fraser University Archives.

<sup>33</sup> Marcy Cohen, telephone interview, March 2, 2007.

separated (three).<sup>34</sup> Five women were married, although of those marriages, one ended just a few months after the Caravan. Demonstrating the fluidity of relationships that existed in this period and among that age group, one woman said she was single “sort of” while another said, when asked whether she had been in a committed relationship, “I think so, but a committed relationship didn’t last very long in those days.”<sup>35</sup> This fluidity is linked, in part, to the phenomena that is termed the “sexual revolution” and also to the “New Morality” of the 1960s. Although the sexual revolution began earlier in the decade (or even before), Joy Parr argues that “the years from 1968 to 1972 have been described as ‘a permissive moment’ in the North Atlantic World.”<sup>36</sup> Men and women, it should be noted, experienced the “sexual revolution” differently. While the availability of the pill in Canada as of 1961 theoretically made it more possible to separate sexual intercourse from reproduction, the restricted availability of the pill and the expensive and uncertain – not to mention still illegal – availability of abortion meant that women were not really “free” to enjoy sexual intercourse without fear of reproductive repercussions. Indeed, many scholars recognize that increased sexual freedom had dangerous consequences for women.<sup>37</sup> Nevertheless, the incidence of premarital intercourse increased in this period, as did both the age of marriage and the acceptance of cohabitation as an alternative to

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<sup>34</sup> Wasserlein indicates that of her interviewees, thirteen were in relationships that were “monogamous, serial-monogamous, married, or common-law” with a heterosexual partner, one was divorced, and another did not answer the question. See Wasserlein, “An Arrow Aimed at the Heart,” 29.

<sup>35</sup> Peggy Morton, telephone interview, February 17, 2007; Judy Pocock, personal interview, November 30, 2006.

<sup>36</sup> See Parr, *A Diversity of Women*, 7. See also Angus McLaren, *Twentieth-Century Sexuality: A History* (Malden, Mass.: Blackwell, 1999), 166-167.

<sup>37</sup> See, for example, Brenda Margaret Appleby *Responsible Parenthood: Decriminalizing Contraception in Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999), 4-5; Owram, *Born at the Right Time*, 248-279.

marriage within the demographic represented by most of the Caravan participants.<sup>38</sup> The women's adoption or acceptance of this "New Morality" is an important indicator that they were rebelling or had already rebelled against the type of social conventions regarding gender roles with which many of them had been raised.

It is somewhat difficult to classify the women's place of origin as many report moving several times during their childhoods. Still, although they were born across Canada, the narrators tend to hail from larger cities (including Calgary, Edmonton, Ottawa, Toronto, Regina, Vancouver) and small towns (described by narrators as such and not specifically named); none of the women interviewed came from rural areas. Three came from the United States during the mid-to-late 1960s and one was from London, England.<sup>39</sup> Most do not think their place of birth had any effect on their protest activities or feelings about reproductive rights. Yet Rebecca Klatch, who interviewed activists from the 1960s to uncover trends in identity formation, argues that one's community is one of the main catalysts shaping the development of women's identities and ultimately their activism in her study of this period.<sup>40</sup>

In this vein, one woman, P.A., feels strongly that her upbringing in a small town very much affected how she came to perceive her role within any community of which she was a part. According to her, growing up in a "small town where community involvement was heavily stressed," which included "the church and all other kinds of community things," affected her awareness of and involvement in protest and political

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<sup>38</sup> McLaren, *Twentieth-Century Sexuality*, 173-174.

<sup>39</sup> Myrna Wood, N.T.R., and Charmie Guettel. Jackie Larkin was born in London, England; her mother a "war bride."

<sup>40</sup> Rebecca E. Klatch. *A Generation Divided: the New Left, the New Right, and the 1960s* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 61-89.

activities.<sup>41</sup> In P.A.'s case, these feelings about community responsibility are linked to what she identifies as Red Toryism, a political philosophy which, according to Charles Taylor, is favoured by "conservatives with a conscience" and emphasizes the theme of "mutual obligation."<sup>42</sup> P.A. notes that "although my parents voted Tory all their life, it was the Red Tory version of community participation and responsibility to be involved and engaged and stand up for what you believe in," which supports Klatch's argument.<sup>43</sup>

Some of the women who believe their geographical origin did not factor into their identity as activists nevertheless acknowledge the significance of community or civic engagement in their upbringing. Peggy Morton, for example, explains, "That sense of social responsibility plays out for my parent's generation.... The values of your family were to have a sense of social responsibility, to do something to change the world."<sup>44</sup> Cathy Walker shares how her parents' attitudes affected her: "My parents were fairly progressive, so I developed a progressive point of view. They weren't members of the NDP, but they certainly were opposed out here to the Social Credit government."<sup>45</sup> Dawn Carrell Hemingway also notes the influence of her family's values on the development of her own: "I grew up in a progressive and very political family. I gave my first allowance (25 cents) to Tommy Douglas.... I remember in Grade 8 entering a public speaking contest with a talk I'd written about why we as students should be more

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<sup>41</sup> She says, "I think that this sort of package that was my life up until I went to university had a lot to do with where I ended up." See P.A., personal interview, October 26, 2006.

<sup>42</sup> Charles Taylor, Radical Tories: The Conservative Tradition in Canada (Toronto: Anansi, 1982), 112, 115.

<sup>43</sup> P.A., personal interview, October 26, 2006.

<sup>44</sup> Peggy Morton, telephone interview, February 17, 2007.

<sup>45</sup> Cathy Walker, telephone interview, February 16, 2007.

interested in our government and community.”<sup>46</sup> Similarly, Judy Pocock recalls, “My mother and father were both quite progressive in their ideas and if you felt like you could do something, it made a lot of sense [to do so].”<sup>47</sup> Such values, instilled by families, and part of a process Klatch calls “the development of political consciousness during childhood,” were reinforced by the communities in which some of these women lived.<sup>48</sup>

Sometimes disconnection from one’s community also affected the activists. Although Marcy Cohen lived in one of the larger cities, she nevertheless felt stifled there. She reports that her involvement in protest movements “was an outlet to express myself, and to express who I was, that I didn’t get to do in the world I lived in - in Calgary.”<sup>49</sup> There could be more dire consequences when a sense of community did not exist. Importantly, and in contrast to P.A.’s small town background, interviewee Susan Kennedy attributes her difficulty finding an abortionist to her family’s loose ties to their community: “In certain circles, people knew [where to find an abortionist]. Years later, when I talked to women I met, women from up north, in a small town they knew someone who regularly women went to. But because my dad was in the air force, we moved around, and we didn’t have strong roots in any one place.... I think that may have made a difference.”<sup>50</sup> So while place of residence might not have universally affected the

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<sup>46</sup> Dawn Carrell Hemingway, written interview, April 29, 2007.

<sup>47</sup> Judy Pocock, personal interview, November 30, 2006.

<sup>48</sup> Klatch, *A Generation Divided*, 6.

<sup>49</sup> Marcy Cohen, telephone interview, March 2, 2007.

<sup>50</sup> Susan Kennedy, telephone interview, January 2007. On how region can affect healthcare access see Megan Davies, “‘Mapping Region’ in Canadian Medical History: The Case of British Columbia,” *Canadian Bulletin of Medical History* 17 (2000): 73-92; Peter L. Twohig, “Written on the Landscape: Health and Region in Canada,” *Journal of Canadian Studies* 41, no. 3 (Fall 2007): 5-17.

women in the sense that they hailed from specific regions per se, it nevertheless affected individual participants in defining ways.

Religion, or disconnection from religion, is also an important defining characteristic among the participants. In Born at the Right Time (1996) Owram argues that although church membership actually increased between the end of World War Two and 1960, this growth does not reflect increased religiosity. Rather, he contends, “Much of the revival had to do with children. To these parents, religion was the ultimate formal organization by which societal values could be transmitted.... The church taught children how to behave and reinforced family values.”<sup>51</sup> Owram’s point that the churches’ religious function was less important to the membership may help account for the ambivalence and disconnect Caravan participants claimed to feel toward religion or the churches they attended as children. Almost all interviewees claim that religion had little effect on their activism, a point that echoes Wasserlein’s study.<sup>52</sup> The majority (eleven) of the narrators reported Protestant backgrounds, with affiliations to either the Anglican or United Churches, while one woman reported a Quaker background and two identified Jewish or secular Jewish backgrounds.<sup>53</sup> It is of note that none of the women reported having had a connection with the Catholic Church; the only person who had a Catholic background was the sole man interviewed for this project.<sup>54</sup> Asked whether the Catholic Church influenced his participation in pro-choice actions, he replies, “Only indirectly....

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<sup>51</sup> Owram, Born at the Right Time, 106-107.

<sup>52</sup> Wasserlein, “An Arrow Aimed at the Heart,” 28.

<sup>53</sup> Of those reporting Protestant backgrounds, four women report having attended the Anglican Church, five the United Church, one does not identify a denomination, and another reports belonging to a few different denominations throughout her life.

<sup>54</sup> Wasserlein notes that three of the women she interviewed were educated by the Roman Catholic Church. See Wasserlein, “An Arrow Aimed at the Heart,” 28.

There was a connection, there's a path you can trace to political activism.... It wouldn't be traced to Catholicism so much as a reaction to Catholicism."<sup>55</sup> While this sample of narrators is too small to make assertions about the position of Catholic women on the issue of abortion, one would expect that those women who maintained a strong, ongoing connection to the Catholic Church would adhere to the Church's position on abortion and would not be found advocating for abortion rights or, as we saw in earlier chapters, did so quietly.

Despite identifying religious affiliations from their childhood, most of these women reported that active church or synagogue attendance had waned by their mid-to-late teen years. The lack of connection women felt to the church is supported by Owram's study in which he argues of the Baby Boomers, more generally,

As a generation they were brought up in a society that presumed religious training and belief was part of day-to-day life. Yet because it was the end of an era, that belief was, for many of them, really more an extension of modern concerns about socialization than faith and doctrine. Then, as they moved into adulthood, they became the first of the truly secular generations, rejecting as a body the pretense of their parents that religion was central to their society.<sup>56</sup>

Indeed, several Caravan participants reported breaking with the church even as very young adults. Cathy Walker reports, "When I was a kid I went to the United Church for a little while; pretty tenuous relation let's say."<sup>57</sup> Heather Bishop recalls, "I was baptized

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<sup>55</sup> He links his religion more directly to his civil rights activism, but still recognizing the failure of his Church: "It seemed like the right thing to do. I was following the Civil Rights Movement. I think the relationship between religion and what I did was following through on the principle and confronting hypocrisy. So the principle was 'love thy neighbour' and the reality was it wasn't happening." Dante Nardone, personal interview, April 20, 2007.

<sup>56</sup> Owram, *Born at the Right Time*, 109.

<sup>57</sup> Cathy Walker, telephone interview, February 16, 2007.

Anglican, but my family, we weren't tight in the church."<sup>58</sup> Myrna Wood asserts, "During a crisis in my life when I was 18 I realized that there was no god and rejected religion thereafter."<sup>59</sup> Jackie Larkin jokingly recalls that she joined the United Church in her early teens, which she attended more frequently than her parents, "until I decided that there probably wasn't a God."<sup>60</sup> Similarly, Dawn Carrell Hemingway reports attending Sunday School at the United Church while 10 or 11 years of age, but "as a young, inquisitive girl, no one could convince me about any of the 'miracles' and how they might have happened, so my attendance didn't last long."<sup>61</sup> Hemingway's rejection of religion suggests a questioning of authority not uncommon among the youth of her generation. Heather Bishop, the only woman to identify a direct connection between her religion and her activism, made a negative connection, arguing that her family's loose affiliation with the Anglican Church "absolutely" affected her activism because to her it meant, "I didn't have a lot of guilt to wade through."<sup>62</sup> Bishop's assertion that her loose religious affiliation allowed her activism to develop more easily is consistent with the narrators who argue that religion did not affect their activism at all.

Others recognized the importance of the church not for its religious function so much as for its communal one. Betsy Wood reports that she became involved with the Unitarian Church after marrying and moving to Edmonton because "they would sponsor

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<sup>58</sup> Heather Bishop, telephone interview, February 20, 2007.

<sup>59</sup> Myrna Wood, written interview, January 8, 2008.

<sup>60</sup> Jackie Larkin, personal interview, April 15, 2007.

<sup>61</sup> Dawn Carrell Hemingway, written interview, April 29, 2007.

<sup>62</sup> Heather Bishop, telephone interview, February 20, 2007. Interestingly, Marcy Cohen, a Jew, reports being involved with the Student Christian Movement, a progressive component of the United Church.

interesting speakers” and not because of any religious aspirations.<sup>63</sup> P.A. explains religion’s influence on her activism: “The church doesn’t particularly stand out” as a specific influence, but was “just part of the package,” of her small town life, reinforcing the idea of the church’s communal function.<sup>64</sup> Religion, then, in spite of their assertions to the contrary, seems important in a few ways. For some women, the church provided a sense of community. And, in its absence, women may have sought that same sense of community elsewhere – such as was offered by membership in the various protest organizations. For others, rejecting religion may have been an important step in rebelling against authority generally. Also, the rejection of formal religion may be seen more clearly as a disavowal of the church’s specific teachings on a variety of issues, including birth control and abortion, as was the case with the male interviewee.

Just as most of the women discounted religion as a factor contributing to their activism, many denied a connection between their class background and their protest identities. Yet the analysis here suggests that their class backgrounds did factor significantly into their identities and consciousness. When Caravan participants were asked about their class background, the meaning of class was left open to their interpretation. Some chose their parents’ occupations and/or incomes, while others looked to their educational achievements as central to their understanding of their class background.<sup>65</sup> Despite these differences in how the women interpret class, they tend to have pretty clear ideas about where they should be slotted. In “Feminism as a Class Act:

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<sup>63</sup> Betsy Wood, telephone interview, May 13, 2007.

<sup>64</sup> P.A., personal interview, October 26, 2006.

<sup>65</sup> Levitt supports the idea that attainment of a university education in Canada served to maintain or raise one’s class. See Levitt, *Children of Privilege*, 26.

Working-Class Feminism and the Women's Movement in Canada," Meg Luxton rejects the claim that the women's movement "was largely middle class and that its politics reflected the concerns and interests of such women"; she argues instead that "union-based, working-class feminism...has been a key player in the women's movement, the labour movement, and the left since the late 1960s and early 1970s."<sup>66</sup> Yet as found in studies of the American women's liberation movement and at first glance in contrast to Luxton's argument, most of these women do report having come from the middle or upper-middle classes.<sup>67</sup> Nine women define themselves as middle-class in background, three as upper-middle-class, and three as working-class.<sup>68</sup> Two narrators note that their fathers were in the military and use the term "army brat" to describe themselves; they claim their father's occupation (one specifies that her father was an officer, the other did not indicate rank) pushed their class a little higher than most other activists.<sup>69</sup> Wasserlein's study of the women from the VWC generally supports this finding, with 12 of 19 women claiming a middle class or upper middle class background and significantly fewer (although slightly more than in my sample) women (7 of 19) claiming a working-class background.<sup>70</sup> The women who report working-class backgrounds believe that this served to differentiate them from the rest of the movement. Heather Bishop, for example, claims that her class "made me a bit odd in that regard; there weren't very many of us

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<sup>66</sup> Meg Luxton, "Feminism as a Class Act: Working-Class Feminism and the Women's Movement in Canada," *Labour/Le Travail* 48e (Fall 2001), paragraph 3. <http://www.historycooperative.org/journals/llt/48/03luxton.html> (accessed July 2007).

<sup>67</sup> See Echols, *Daring to Be Bad*, 65; Klatch, *A Generation Divided*, 159.

<sup>68</sup> The interviewees who identify as working class are Heather Bishop, Cathy Walker, and Dawn Carrell Hemingway.

<sup>69</sup> These narrators were Susan Kennedy and Jackie Larkin.

<sup>70</sup> Wasserlein, "An Arrow Aimed at the Heart," 27.

who were working class involved in it.” She continues, “The Left in general was pretty much middle class.”<sup>71</sup> For Dawn Carrell Hemingway, who also reports a working-class background, her class exposed her to organizing at an early age: “My dad was active in his union and I can remember turning all the lights off in our house during an illegal strike so that they couldn’t find my dad to serve him with an injunction.”<sup>72</sup> For these women, their claim of a working-class background was a source of pride and distinctiveness.

Class is fluid, though, and a few women indicate that their class had changed by the time of the Caravan. While they had grown up in middle-class families, they became working class when they left home or because of a change in their marital status. By 1970, for example, Betsy Wood was a divorced mother working in an underpaid clerical position to support herself and her four children. Not surprisingly, as a bright woman who was stuck in a “pink collar” position, Wood notes that she does not believe that one’s occupation “really defines your intellectual abilities.”<sup>73</sup> For N.T.R., her inability to work in Canada for a year while she waited for a permit, her husband’s “inconsistent” work as a supply teacher, and their basement apartment in what she calls “a pretty working-class community” served as indicators that her class position had dropped noticeably since growing up.<sup>74</sup> Similarly, Judy Pocock reports supporting an entire household on the \$6,800 per year she was earning as a teacher at the time of the Caravan. Thus, while working-class backgrounds may not have shaped the women’s experiences

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<sup>71</sup> Heather Bishop, telephone interview, February 20, 2007.

<sup>72</sup> Her father, like her maternal grandfather, worked for the railway, while her paternal grandfather had been a longshoreman. Dawn Carrell Hemingway, written interview, April 29, 2007.

<sup>73</sup> Betsy Wood, telephone interview, May 13, 2007.

<sup>74</sup> N.T.R., telephone interview, October 31, 2006.

growing up, Luxton's assertion that working-class sensibilities shaped Canadian feminism gains currency when their changing class experiences are considered.

Luxton's argument is even more relevant when the women's beliefs, and not their actual class backgrounds, are considered. Certainly the Canadian women's liberation movement was invested in socialist feminist or Marxist analyses (more so than the American movement); several narrators use the term "socialist" to describe themselves or their ideas at the time.<sup>75</sup> Marcy Cohen recalls, "Both my parents had socialist leanings...I absorbed it from them."<sup>76</sup> Jackie Larkin argues:

Once the radicalization goes beyond a single issue and starts connecting to issues of war and race and gender and then class, then the people are drawn to the overarching ideologies that help them understand those relationships.... The weakness of the socialist position is greater in the [United] States than Canada. A lot of the women in Canada had been influenced by or connected to the NDP or the New Democratic Youth. That was one wing of it. There was another wing that was more influenced by the Chinese Revolution, Maoism, the Vietnamese Revolution, and the anti-war movement. So they identified with the NLF.<sup>77</sup>

Similarly, Peggy Morton argues, "As far as the socialist women were concerned, I think that we really had that consciousness that women have more reason to want to change the society, to build a new society, than anybody else and...we were convinced you couldn't really have the liberation of women or affirmation of women's rights within a capitalist system."<sup>78</sup> Heather Bishop reports, "Coming from the working class, the politics of the Left made absolute sense to me. Both as a woman and as a working class person, the

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<sup>75</sup> Women who specifically identified themselves as socialists were Marcy Cohen, Cathy Walker, Jackie Larkin, and Peggy Morton. Charnie Guettel called herself a Communist. Still other women talked about socialist ideas, without specifically labelling themselves socialists.

<sup>76</sup> Marcy Cohen, telephone interview, March 2, 2007.

<sup>77</sup> Jackie Larkin, telephone interview, April 15, 2007.

<sup>78</sup> Peggy Morton, telephone interview, February 17, 2007.

politics of understanding class, understanding capitalism, understanding the economic basis for oppression all clicked in and helped me understand my life.”<sup>79</sup> For many of these Caravan women, then, awareness of their class oppression was an important factor in their belief in the need to change the society in which they lived.

If university education was a means of elevating one’s class, by the 1960s a substantial number of Canadian women – white women anyway – had the opportunity to capitalize on that vehicle.<sup>80</sup> Through the decade, women’s full-time undergraduate university enrollment increased by close to 300%; in the 1960-61 school year women constituted 24.8% of the full-time undergraduate student population in Canada, while by 1970-71 they represented 36.7%.<sup>81</sup> All of the narrators experienced some years in university (except for Betsy Wood, who had attended business college) prior to their involvement with the Abortion Caravan. At the time of the Caravan, a few were still enrolled, pursuing undergraduate or graduate degrees, while others had found employment, including some who were working on university campuses in the libraries or student organizations based there. Yet it should be noted that scholars contend that “patterns of increased enrolments and degree attainment...may have resulted not from a growing participation of all women, but of women disproportionately from upper status

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<sup>79</sup> Heather Bishop, telephone interview, February 20, 2007.

<sup>80</sup> Roberta Lexier, “How Did the Canadian Women’s Liberation Movement Emerge from the Sixties Student Movement? The Case of Simon Fraser University,” Women and Social Movements in America, 1600-2000 13, no.2 (Fall 2009). <http://womhist.alexanderstreet.com/Lexier/doclist.htm> (accessed June 2011).

<sup>81</sup> In actual numbers, their enrolment climbed from 26,629 of 107,211 full-time undergraduate students to 101,352 of 276,297 students. Men continued to dominate graduate programs with women representing only 22.4% (or 2,116 of 9,609) of Masters students and 9.3% (or 151 of 1,625) of Doctorate students. See Neil Guppy, Doug Balson, and Susan Vellutini, “Women and Higher Education in Canadian Society,” in Women and Education: A Canadian Perspective, eds. Jane S. Gaskell and Arlene Tigar McLaren (Calgary, Alberta: Detselig, 1987), 174, 177.

backgrounds.”<sup>82</sup> This connection between class and education is also important in relation to scholarship that argues that middle-class, university-educated women had the luxury of evaluating their oppression in a way not traditionally done by most working-class women. In The World Split Open: How the Modern Women’s Movement Changed the World (2000), Ruth Rosen, for example, argues that American working class women came to question their oppression only after “they gained a sense of middle-class entitlement from their education.”<sup>83</sup> Thus, while most of the Caravan participants did not recognize clear links between their class backgrounds and their involvement with the Caravan or protest activities, a case can be made to suggest otherwise. Attending university led many of them to protest organizations proliferating on campus, where they were exposed to the oppressive sexual hierarchies within such groups.

In her assessment of student activism pertaining to the arts curriculum offered by Canadian universities in the 1960s, Patricia Jansen suggests a byproduct of society’s focus on education: “By nurturing the idea that the university was the single most important institution in securing the welfare of the nation,” society “encouraged among students an exaggerated perception of their own political influence.”<sup>84</sup> It is not surprising, then, that universities became “breeding grounds” for protest activities. Levitt, for example, contends that the student movement, and thus the university, was the

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<sup>82</sup> Guppy, Balson, and Vellutini, “Women and Higher Education in Canadian Society,” 179.

<sup>83</sup> Rosen, The World Split Open, 46-47.

<sup>84</sup> Patricia Jansen, ““In Pursuit of Human Values (or Laugh When You Say That)’: The Student Critique of the Arts Curriculum in the 1960s,” in Youth, University and Canadian Society: Essays in the Social History of Higher Education, ed. Paul Axelrod and John G. Reid (Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1989), 253.

locus of anti-war activism at least from 1965-67.<sup>85</sup> Many narrators report having become involved in protest activities in high school, which most would have attended between 1957 and 1967.<sup>86</sup> The protest activities, of the women interviewed for this project, at high school and later at university involved both formal and informal political organizations as well as charitable and non-political group affiliations. During the interviews women identified the following groups to which they belonged during the 1960s: the CARE campaign, the United Nations Club, New Democratic Youth for Social Democracy, National Council of the NDP, Student Christian Movement, Canadian Union of Students, Students for a Democratic University, Friends of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, Combined Universities Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (which later became the Student Union for Peace Action), Ottawa Women's Liberation, Toronto Women's Liberation, Vancouver Women's Caucus, Vancouver Women's Liberation, Feminist Action League (Simon Fraser University), Canadian Girls in Training, Red Collective, and Partisan Organization. Notably absent from this list, and indicative of the generational divide among these women and women discussed in earlier chapters, are the more mainstream, liberal feminist organizations like Voice of Women and the National Council of Women.

Yet despite political activism dating back to high school, it was while enrolled in university that many women report a more committed membership in various social movements, as well as an escalation of their self-awareness. Susan Kennedy, for

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<sup>85</sup> Levitt, *Children of Privilege*, 49.

<sup>86</sup> Klatch similarly finds that many of her narrators were "already active citizens in their [high] schools." See Klatch, *A Generation Divided*, 70.

example, argues that her radicalization began in high school, but her determination to continue and further her activism in university meant that she became involved “practically my first day of university.” She explains, “I was out looking for it quite frankly. I had been politicized in high school.... So when I went to university, one of my first acts was to seek out the people who I thought thought like me.”<sup>87</sup> Likewise, P.A.’s exposure to political issues was aided by her residence at university: “I had ended up with a roommate that was NDP, which I thought was really wild and dangerous at the time. She dragged me out to meetings about that and about other things so she was really important.”<sup>88</sup> Being immersed in the university setting, then, could be important to this increased radicalization.

Within these organizations to which women increasingly devoted their political energies, they began to perceive their sexual objectification and powerlessness, which was an important precursor to the rise of women’s liberation movements.<sup>89</sup> Stokely Carmichael’s reputed comment that “the position of women in SNCC is prone” is an in/famous example of the way women were objectified and devalued in various movements. Of that oppression Peggy Morton recalls, “Our initial insight was that these groups had so-called revolutionary politics, but they were fairly bourgeois in their social relations and we as women were really expected to just continue to play the role we were

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<sup>87</sup> Susan Kennedy, telephone interview, January 2007.

<sup>88</sup> P.A., personal interview, October 26, 2006.

<sup>89</sup> For women’s perception of their sexual objectification, see Nancy Adamson, “Feminists, Libbers, Lefties, and Radicals: The Emergence of the Women’s Liberation Movement,” in *A Diversity of Women*, 256-57. Serious and ultimately divisive examples of this exploitation permeate the American New Left as evidenced in the works of Rosen, *The World Split Open*, 94-140; Echols, *Daring to Be Bad*, 51-137.

supposed to play within the society within these groups.”<sup>90</sup> N.T. R. recalls, “There was a lot of sexism in the anti-war movement and the student protest movement of the 1960s, black and white, it didn’t matter what the racial or class component was. It was also part of the whole counter culture at the time. There was a sense that women’s primary function in that environment was kind of a social outlet for the serious male activist.”<sup>91</sup> Heather Bishop argues, “It was such a struggle in those days to get the men in the movement to recognize any issues that were seen as women’s issues as being as important as others that we really had to fight for every inch of ground.”<sup>92</sup> Cathy Walker agrees: “The whole student movement was really dominated by men and women had to keep arguing for their place, their rights, their issues – there was a lot of male chauvinism.”<sup>93</sup> Recognition of such chauvinism was only the beginning.

Increasing frustration over the sexual hierarchies within the protest movements led to analysis and action. Judy Pocock explains, “If you look at the early documents like ‘Sisters, Brothers, Lovers, Listen’ and another one... by Tom Hayden’s wife [Casey Hayden] women got really angry about how they had been treated in the movement both sexually and in terms of work and a lot if it came out of a very personal experience.”<sup>94</sup>

Charnie Guettel gives further detail:

For generations women had done mainly the shit work (“women’s work”) of “on the ground” organizing, mainly the envelope stuffers and telephoners, picketers, rather than the speechmakers, theoreticians, writers.... It was resisting chauvinist attitudes within left organizations...that spurred the rebellion.... Women as socialists and

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<sup>90</sup> Peggy Morton, telephone interview, February 17, 2007.

<sup>91</sup> N.T.R., telephone interview, October 31, 2006.

<sup>92</sup> Heather Bishop, telephone interview, February 20, 2007.

<sup>93</sup> Cathy Walker, telephone interview, February 16, 2007.

<sup>94</sup> Judy Pocock, personal interview, November 30, 2006.

radicals applied our politics to our immediate experience as political organizers, and transformed ourselves and our political organizations (and created new ones), transformed our politics, and our organizing out in the world.<sup>95</sup>

This oppression pushed women to assess their lives, including their intimate relationships. This process of self-examination includes what is referred to as consciousness raising (CR).

Scholars generally accept that CR enabled women to connect personally to the causes and movements to which they already belonged, so that they learned to apply the values of freedom and equality to their own situations as women. Nancy Adamson argues that CR groups led to “the politicization of women” since “the focus on personal experience allowed women to develop an explicit understanding of their oppression as women.”<sup>96</sup> The resulting recognition of their oppression directly speaks to the slogan “the personal is political,” which was one of the most popular in the women’s movement. Bonnie J. Dow relates that it “derives from second-wave feminist consciousness-raising groups, which functioned to create awareness that what women perceived to be personal problems were, in fact, shared by other women and were the product of their positions as members of an oppressed political class.”<sup>97</sup> Like scholars, many baby boom women also

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<sup>95</sup> Charnie Guettel, personal communication, February 27, 2007.

<sup>96</sup> Adamson, “Feminists, Libbers, Lefties, and Radicals,” 262. Other scholars who emphasize the importance of CR groups include: Debra Michals, “From ‘Consciousness Expansion’ to ‘Consciousness Raising’: Feminism and the Countercultural Politics of the Self” in Imagine Nation: The American Counterculture of the 1960s and 1970s, ed. Peter Braunstein and Michael William Doyle (New York: Routledge, 2002), 63, 46; Rosen, The World Split Open, 36; Kristin Luker, Abortion and the Politics of Motherhood (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 109, 100-101; Echols, Daring to Be Bad, 4.

<sup>97</sup> Bonnie J. Dow, “Politicizing Voice,” Western Journal of Communication 61, no. 2 (Spring 1997), 248. See also Nancy Adamson, Linda Briskin, and Margaret McPhail, Feminists Organizing For Change: The Contemporary Women’s Movement in Canada (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1988), 200.

accept the importance of CR in their lives. Caravan participant Joan Eliesen, for example, relates:

I was politically very interested in social issues and poverty and anti-war and intrigued with the emerging things about the women's movement coming out of the States. And when a friend told me that there was a little group starting in Ottawa, a women's lib group, I was very excited to join up. And that's when I really started to learn and read and talk and discuss about women's issues. And it changed my life.<sup>98</sup>

Several scholars argue that CR was a necessary precursor to developing a language with which women could articulate their demand for rights like access to abortion.<sup>99</sup>

As noted in earlier chapters, however, evidence from the letters to the editor of Chatelaine, the Globe and Mail, and in the numerous submissions to the RCSW demonstrate women's ability and eagerness to address abortion, often exhibiting an understanding of the systemic causes of their oppression. Theirs was a language born out of the lived experience of inadequate birth control, fears of unplanned pregnancy, and illegal, unsafe, and difficult to access abortions. In every opening provided, women showed that they did not lack an awareness of the serious reproductive consequences confronting them. Caravan participant Peggy Morton also challenges the idea that women lacked an understanding of their oppression:

I think one of the things that the Caravan did was sort of got us out of our small circle of women who were endlessly discussing what the problem was and we actually went out and started talking to a lot of ordinary women who were not involved in that. And, I think, one of the things that really hit us like a ton of bricks at the time was that this whole conception that the problem was that women needed to be told they were oppressed, that they didn't know they were oppressed, then they had to have their consciousness about their oppression raised, was just bullshit. Women

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<sup>98</sup> Joan Eliesen, telephone interview, April 15, 2007.

<sup>99</sup> See, for example, Luker, Politics of Motherhood, 109,111; Klatch, A Generation Divided, 180.

were very acutely aware of the problems they faced on all kinds of fronts.... And the whole thing that women were wanting to discuss stuff was what are the solutions, what do we do about it, how do we change it, not whether it exists or not.<sup>100</sup>

Morton's criticism is echoed by Alice Echols when she notes of the American women's liberation movement, "Women on both sides of the politico-feminist divide were concerned that consciousness-raising was being done to the exclusion of action."<sup>101</sup> In Freeman's work, Caravan participant Barbara Robert's reports perceiving CR groups as suspect because of their focus on male-female relationships and patriarchy over capitalism, which socialists like her perceived as the source of women's oppression.<sup>102</sup> Arguably, it was not a lack of consciousness that had prevented women from protesting publicly about intimate issues like abortion.

Here Leslie Reagan's caution that abortion was an "open secret" that women talked about discreetly and not something about which women were "silent" is pertinent.<sup>103</sup> It may be that the confidence (and/or frustration) gained from their other protest activities led some women to have a more vocal presence through the women's liberation movement and led to specific actions like the Abortion Caravan. This explanation makes sense when coupled with women's frustration at being ignored by the government or medical profession, as well as changing social mores that made talking more openly about such subjects acceptable. Indeed, while Myrna Kostash argues that through CR, "women learned how to be articulate and get the ear of others for the first

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<sup>100</sup> Peggy Morton, telephone interview, February 17, 2007.

<sup>101</sup> Echols, *Daring to Be Bad*, 85

<sup>102</sup> Freeman, *Beyond Bylines*, 129.

<sup>103</sup> See Leslie J. Reagan, *When Abortion Was a Crime: Women, Medicine, and Law in the United States, 1867-1973* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 21.

time,” she also states that “women pulled out from the confines of male-dominated groups, gushed with literacy and eloquence and intellect.”<sup>104</sup> It may well be that hearing women’s voices was not a matter of them finding a language they did not have nor having their consciousness raised, but adopting a language that had greater currency in the male-dominated public/political space, or – as in the case of the Caravan – creating the opening for their voices to be heard and demonstrating how their voices were authoritative ones on the issue of abortion.

If women adopted a political language that had greater resonance in the public domain, their personal experiences motivated their actions. Not surprisingly, some women’s reproductive activism arose from personal experiences with unplanned pregnancies, providing them with a basis for making authority claims over the right to speak on the issue. Scholars contend that unwed mothers in the postwar period put up their children for adoption largely because of social pressures; being an unmarried mother was neither a respectable nor a moral option.<sup>105</sup> Narrator Susan Kennedy concurs on the common reaction to unplanned teenage pregnancy: “You were a slut, you were bad...you never talked about it. People went away, that’s what you did, and if you’re not from that generation, you have no sense of what it was like to say ‘Oh my God, what am I going to do?’”<sup>106</sup> There were also systemic factors working against single-motherhood. Although single mothers became eligible to receive the Ontario Mothers Allowance in 1956, for

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<sup>104</sup> Myrna Kostash, Long Way From Home: The Story of the Sixties Generation in Canada (Toronto: James Lorimer, 1980), 170-171.

<sup>105</sup> See, for example, Veronica Strong-Boag, Finding Families, Finding Ourselves: English Canada Encounters Adoption from the Nineteenth Century to the 1990s (Don Mills, Ontario: Oxford University Press, 2006), 80-106; Adams, The Trouble With Normal, 64-69.

<sup>106</sup> Susan Kennedy, telephone interview, January 2007.

example, Margaret Jane Hillyard Little reveals that “restrictions ensured that many unwed mothers did not qualify for the allowance.”<sup>107</sup> So even if a woman had the courage to buck social judgments, it was difficult to support her child without independent means, familial help, or a good job.

Narrator Susan Kennedy’s experience of an unplanned pregnancy illuminates how restrictive women’s reproductive options were in the 1960s – and how those limitations could be politicizing. She recalls, “I got pregnant in 1966. Abortion was not legal. At the time I would have had an abortion had it been legal. I was in my last year of high school and there were no options.” She relates turning to her sister, who was living in Toronto: “My sister, in fact, helped me look whether abortions were available. At the time I recall one could go to Puerto Rico or England. And Puerto Rico was extremely risky and England was expensive, not for the abortion itself, but to get there and to have the contacts to be able to do it.”<sup>108</sup> Without the possibility of procuring an abortion, Kennedy states, “There were really two options: you got married or you gave the baby up and I did not want to get married. For me, I had a life, but the idea of having to give the child up was really, really difficult.”<sup>109</sup> A consequence of being forced to carry her pregnancy to term and having to give up her child for adoption, Kennedy argues, was her

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<sup>107</sup> Margaret Jane Hillyard Little, No Car, No Radio, No Liquor Permit’: The Moral Regulation of Single Mothers in Ontario, 1920-1997 (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1998), 135.

<sup>108</sup> Susan Kennedy, telephone interview, January 2007. On Canadian women’s travels for abortions see Christabelle Sethna, “All Aboard? Canadian Women’s Abortion Tourism, 1960-1980,” in Gender, Health, and Popular Culture: Historical Perspectives, ed. Cheryl Krasnich Warsh (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2011): 89-108.

<sup>109</sup> Kennedy, who notes that her mom was always pro-choice, recalls, “I do remember, I was about 3 months pregnant when I told my mother, and she said, ‘Is there any possibility of an abortion?’” indicating her strong familial support.

later activism: “I had been politicized by the fact that I had had a child.”<sup>110</sup> Kennedy’s decision to place her child up for adoption, as opposed to marrying the biological father, could suggest a degree, however limited, of agency. Her words, “I had a life,” speak to a sense of optimism that her life could become something more than traditional gender roles prescribed. Undoubtedly, her experience with unplanned pregnancy created “experiential knowledge” and legitimized her authority to speak on the issue similar to the authority of the women who had written the letters explored in earlier chapters; what had changed was the venue in which her beliefs were expressed.

Like Kennedy, narrator N.T.R.’s experience with an unplanned pregnancy also fed her later activism. She recalls, “I had an abortion in March of 1969. It was in Montreal.... It was a French-Canadian doctor who performed abortions in an apartment. The nurse who assisted him, it was probably her residence. You would have to go alone and spend the night before the abortion at those premises.”<sup>111</sup> Of the procedure itself, she notes, “It was an extremely well-performed abortion, did not cause any health problems, it was a general anesthetic, and I was allowed to spend three or four hours afterwards recovering from it.” Her recollection of the professionalism of the procedure does not convey the anxiety accompanying the journey to obtain the abortion:

I had to call in advance to make the appointment and use a code, say a few words that would let them know why I was really calling, let them know how far along I was. I was afraid I was bumping up against the fourteen-week deadline. They would not perform them after that, quite rightly, because under the circumstances that would have been unsafe. So I was

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<sup>110</sup> Susan Kennedy, telephone interview, January 2007.

<sup>111</sup> N.T.R., telephone interview, October 31, 2006.

getting close to that and we were advised to try to establish as closely as possible when the actual date of conception was.

Although her husband and mother-in-law drove her to the appointment, they were not allowed to stay with her. She recalls, “Once I got there, I didn’t speak any French beyond a few words, and the woman who lived in the apartment where I was didn’t speak any English, so it was a pretty scary night.” Her experience with an unwanted pregnancy and clandestine abortion made her an expert of sorts and contributed to her later helping other women seek out abortions before they were legal.

Another Caravan participant also had experience with unplanned pregnancy. She shares that after her second child was born, she went to a doctor to be fitted with an IUD, but got pregnant anyway. Following the conception, she changed doctors and was told, “Some doctors aren’t very good at fitting birth control devices.” She recalls, “After that I guess I was very upset that birth control didn’t always work.”<sup>112</sup> She does not report questioning the decision to continue her pregnancy, but her frustration at the ineffective birth control and at having to rely on a doctor who was seemingly unconcerned about the efficacy of the birth control his patient used, not to mention his role in that method’s failure, contributed to her sense of the importance of reproductive freedom.

In addition to personal experiences with unplanned pregnancies, incidents involving friends or community members influenced women’s involvement in abortion rights activism. In one such example, Judy Pocock recalls, “I had a number of friends who went through really disastrous abortions. I remember having a friend who went through an abortion here that was incredibly painful. She had complications, and it was

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<sup>112</sup> Name withheld.

done without anesthetic, and it was really, really horrible. And I also had another friend who went all the way to Japan to get an abortion.... So people were going to great lengths. So I was very aware of the injustice of it.”<sup>113</sup> Narrator Marcy Cohen says she came to support the need for greater access to abortion “by being moved by these stories of other women” who had struggled to obtain illegal abortions.<sup>114</sup> Pocock’s and Cohen’s remembrances echo the concern for other women expressed in letters to the RCSW. Myrna Wood recalls a remarkable story from her childhood in a small town in Iowa, which at once demonstrates the challenges women faced and how collective action could alter lives:

When I was in grade 10 (1952) in high school there was a revolt by the students of my small town. The most popular couple (she was a cheerleader and he was a football player) got pregnant. She was expelled, per usual. She refused!!! The students organized, and she was elected Prom Queen (!) in the face of the Principal and the school board. Every one of us kids were questioned by our parents. We defended them. (Even me, who at that age didn’t know what sex was.) No one was ever expelled again.... I guess what I am trying to convey is that before birth control, ‘reproductive politics’ defined women’s lives.<sup>115</sup>

The veracity of Wood’s assessment was repeatedly demonstrated by women’s appeals for legal abortion, as is evidenced in previous chapters. The narrators’ concerns about their own reproduction – fears of unplanned pregnancy or the sense of being exploited – and the experiences of women they knew and loved illustrate exactly how the personal was political and how women used their personal experiences to assume control over the issue.

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<sup>113</sup> Judy Pocock, personal interview, November 30, 2006.

<sup>114</sup> Marcy Cohen, telephone interview, March 2, 2007.

<sup>115</sup> Myrna Wood, personal communication, January 12, 2008.

It was not only intimate experiences like unplanned pregnancies that motivated involvement in the women's liberation movement; other protest movements in which they participated also played a role. For activists of the sixties, involvement in multiple social movements was normal. Cerise Morris claims that the "three interwoven social currents which facilitated women's social action and emerging feminist consciousness were: the American civil rights movement, the 'ban the bomb' movement and the opposition to the war in Viet Nam."<sup>116</sup> Of the significance of membership in multiple movements, David Meyer and Nancy Whittier refer to the "spillover effects" whereby "the ideas, tactics, style, participants, and organizations of one movement often *spill over* its boundaries to affect other social movements."<sup>117</sup> For many of the narrators, the anti-Vietnam War movement held particularly personal or intimate meaning. Owram concurs with its importance, arguing that Vietnam was the "most important rallying-point for protest throughout the decade."<sup>118</sup> Of all the interviewees, only Betsy Wood and Myrna Wood did not specify Vietnam as one of their political interests.<sup>119</sup> Yet despite the importance attributed to anti-Vietnam activities, the influence of the anti-war movement on women's struggle for abortion rights in Canada has not been explored.<sup>120</sup>

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<sup>116</sup> Cerise Morris, "'Determination and Thoroughness': The Movement for a Royal Commission on the Status of Women in Canada," *Atlantis* 5, no. 2 (Spring 1980), 5. For a brief analysis of Canadian women's antiwar organizing, see Lara Campbell, "'Women United Against the War' Gender Politics, Feminism, and the Vietnam Draft Resistance in Canada," in *New World Coming: The Sixties and the Shaping of Global Consciousness*, eds., Karen Dubinsky, Catherine Krull, Susan Lord, Sean Mills, and Scott Rutherford (Toronto: Between the Lines, 2009): 339-346.

<sup>117</sup> David S. Meyer and Nancy Whittier, "Social Movement Spillover," *Social Problems* 41, no. 2 (May, 1994), 277.

<sup>118</sup> Owram contends SUPA used Vietnam to gain members, claiming, "SUPA was well aware of the potential of Vietnam as a means of radicalization." See Owram, *Born at the Right Time*, 219, 221.

<sup>119</sup> Jackie Larkin notes she was not as involved in the anti-war movement as in other issues.

<sup>120</sup> A good example of such an analysis in the American context is Alice Echols, "'Women Power' and Women's Liberation: Exploring the Relationship Between the Antiwar Movement and the Women's

The women's connections with the anti-war movement were propelled by different factors. On one level, the women's protest was shaped by the context in which they lived. Both socially and politically, their lives were undeniably affected by anti-Vietnam War mobilization. Of the almost 200,000 Americans who are known to have come to Canada between 1965 and 1973, most settled in Vancouver and Toronto, the two cities in which most of the Caravan participants lived; moreover, these are official immigration figures only and the total number of Americans in Canada, when draft deserters are included, is estimated at as many as 500,000.<sup>121</sup> Many Caravan participants lived with and/or dated draft dodgers. Interviewee N. T. R. came to Canada with her draft-dodging husband, while Charnie Guettel had two brothers and a husband who were draft dodgers.<sup>122</sup> Marcy Cohen lived in communal housing with draft dodgers and argues that the anti-war movement in Vancouver "was very much a part of my life."<sup>123</sup> N.T.R.'s involvement with draft dodgers continued once in Canada. She recalls, "After my own abortion, I started helping other women get them. That was mainly through my work helping deserters, the draft dodgers. A lot of them were married. They would come up to Canada with absolutely nothing. If the wife got pregnant, or the girlfriend, finding a safe source of abortion that was affordable became critical."<sup>124</sup> In short, these women lived the anti-war experience much like their counterparts in the United States and, as the

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Liberation Movement," in *Give Peace A Chance: Exploring the Vietnam Antiwar Movement*, Eds. Melvin Small and William D. Hoover (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1992): 171-181.

<sup>121</sup> James Dickerson, *North to Canada: Men and Women Against the Vietnam War* (Westport, Connecticut: Praeger, 1999), xiii. See also David Stewart Churchill, "When home became away: American expatriates and new social movements in Toronto, 1965-1977" (PhD Dissertation, University of Chicago, Chicago, 2001), 144.

<sup>122</sup> See Charnie Guettel, personal interview, February 26, 2007; N.T.R., telephone interview, October 31, 2006.

<sup>123</sup> Marcy Cohen, telephone interview, March 2, 2007.

<sup>124</sup> N.T.R., telephone interview, October 31, 2006.

comment by N.T.R. reveals, their participation in different causes was not compartmentalized, but overlapped in important ways.

Yet the personal connection women felt to the anti-war movement was not simply drawn from living among or with draft dodgers. Rather, as Rosen argues, women in North America felt tied to Vietnamese women: “Vietnamese women and their heroic struggle became a symbol of both American imperialism *and* the revolutionary potential of women.”<sup>125</sup> In other words, since the women felt like “colonized bodies” in the New Left organizations of which they were a part and since they could not forge alliances with other oppressed women in North America, they connected to the plight of those in Vietnam. That some Canadian women made the same connection American women made to women in Vietnam is demonstrated, for example, by their organizing of the 1971 North American-Indochinese Women’s Conference in Toronto and by the writing of articles in their newsletters, like that by Diane Shrenk, “Solidarity with Vietnamese Women,” in The Pedestal.<sup>126</sup>

Fighting the Vietnam War also included supporting those who did not want to fight there. Several narrators recall active and committed involvement in anti-war activities. Heather Bishop recalls participating in anti-war activities at the University of Regina, which included helping to smuggle deserters over the border.<sup>127</sup> During her four years at Carleton University in Ottawa, Joan Eliesen remembers, “I was very upset and angry at the war in Vietnam and at the rationale by the Americans for it, so I became

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<sup>125</sup> Rosen, The World Split Open, 137. Activists also perceived Canada as a “colony” of the United States and made links to Vietnam on that level. See Charles Campbell, “The Vietnamization of Canada,” AmEx 2, no. 2 (1970), 26.

<sup>126</sup> Diane Shrenk, “Solidarity with Vietnamese Women,” The Pedestal, April 1970, 7.

<sup>127</sup> Heather Bishop, telephone interview, February 20, 2007.

active first just by attending demonstrations and then I graduated to being a marshal.”<sup>128</sup>

Cathy Walker recalls participating in organizing forums on the war, going on anti-war marches, and attending open mall meetings.<sup>129</sup> Susan Kennedy relates, “I was looking for causes to support, quite frankly, especially around women’s stuff and around the Vietnam War. Those were the two big ones for me.”<sup>130</sup> She continues, “I was politicized by the events of the day, that being the civil rights movement and the Vietnam War and the...growing surge [sic] of hippies and an alternate lifestyle. That all had a major effect on me.”<sup>131</sup>

Despite women’s involvement in such activities, the anti-war movement is perceived as a predominantly (white) man’s movement in the sense that women’s involvement was largely relegated to and perceived as that of “helpmate” since they could not themselves dodge the draft. The slogan “girls say yes to boys who say no” glibly illuminates this predicament. While arguments against this perception appear, for example, in AmEx, the American expatriate paper printed in Canada, they do so alongside notices for “The Group of Young American Women,” which focused on organizing to address the domestic needs of draft dodgers and their families.<sup>132</sup> So while the women report being absolutely committed to anti-war activities so much so that it constituted an important element of their self-conception, they also engaged in protests,

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<sup>128</sup> Joan Eliesen, telephone interview, April 15, 2007.

<sup>129</sup> Cathy Walker, telephone interview, February 16, 2007.

<sup>130</sup> Susan Kennedy, telephone interview, January 2007.

<sup>131</sup> Susan Kennedy, telephone interview, January 2007.

<sup>132</sup> Dorothy Jones, “Exiled Women Are Organized” AmEx 2, no. 19 (April-May 1970), 30. For a recent exploration of the role of AmEx among draft dodgers and war resisters, see Jay Young, “Defining a Community in Exile: Vietnam War Resister Communication and Identity in AMEX, 1968-1973,” Histoire sociale/ Social History 44, no. 87 (May 2011), 115-146.

like those for abortion rights, which enabled them to work on issues that were more singularly women's issues. On these issues they could more easily claim leadership roles not least because they could make claims to authority over the issue rooted in their personal reproductive experiences and fears.

For some women, abortion was a key issue and planning a national protest around it seemed logical. For Cathy Walker, quite simply, women's right to legal abortion was "central to women's rights activities," especially for young women.<sup>133</sup> For Susan Kennedy, the importance of the issue was unmistakable: "From [my] personal experience of having a child, having to give up that child, I really came to a conclusion that the system was wrong and that I had to do something to fight that."<sup>134</sup> She elaborates,

Because of what I had gone through, the idea that you could give up a child to some needy, needy people who really could look after this child and you couldn't, *embodied in that was such a putdown of us women and me as a woman....* I recognize the importance of it politically...but...for me personally, it has such a personal aspect to it. I did not know many women who'd had an abortion...People didn't talk about it.<sup>135</sup>

For Kennedy, then, taking action on abortion was central to a claim of equality and self-worth. For Betsy Wood, the issue was a logical focus for the VWC because it inspired committed activism: "We knew abortion affected one in four.... It crossed political lines. It affected both men and women. And it didn't matter whether you were Social Credit, or Liberal, or NDP. When you had a problem with an unwanted pregnancy, it was a big problem. So its time had come."<sup>136</sup>

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<sup>133</sup> Cathy Walker, telephone interview, February 16, 2007.

<sup>134</sup> Susan Kennedy, telephone interview, January 2007.

<sup>135</sup> Susan Kennedy, telephone interview, January 2007.

<sup>136</sup> Wood as quoted in Thomson, *Winning Choice*, 32.

Caravan participant Jackie Larkin argues that “abortion was the right issue” around which to plan the first national women’s liberation action, “because it’s a part of sexual freedom, part of the whole process” of “middle-class radicalization.” For Larkin, abortion had clear links to women’s sexuality:

It is important to make the point that the abortion rights issue also was raised in the context of the broader question of the sexual freedom of women. So it wasn’t just ‘do I have the right to get an abortion.’ It’s ‘do I have the right to know about my own body’ and ‘do I have the right to choose my sexual partners and have the sexuality that I want.’ So, it was about sexual orientation, it was about sexual pleasure, it was about knowing your body, and it was about being able to control the path of choices you did make.<sup>137</sup>

For Larkin, control over the abortion issue encompassed women’s sexuality as a whole and was a defining issue of their equality. Judy Pocock concurs: “Sexuality became much more open and people were rejecting what they had been brought up with... And then, of course, people would get pregnant and there were ramifications for that that were pretty serious. So it was very much on the agenda as young women who were becoming sexually active and were interested in the sexual part of our lives. You know, not getting pregnant was a lot of work.”<sup>138</sup> The blend of Pocock’s pragmatic assessment of the need for legal, safe abortions and the more ideological connection that tied control of one’s body to women’s oppression made abortion rights seem like a natural focus for the women’s movement at that moment in time. As one Caravan participant observes, “The abortion issue lent itself very easily to a focused mobilization. As we radicalized, we were thinking what had big control over our lives – men, the media, advertising, and the

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<sup>137</sup> Jackie Larkin, telephone interview, April 15, 2007.

<sup>138</sup> Judy Pocock, personal interview, November 30, 2006.

state. Abortion was a great example of something you could go after the state on.”<sup>139</sup>

And yet abortion is an issue to which many women have a complicated relationship.

While extremely personal for some women, other women distanced themselves from abortion even as they affirmed their belief that a woman should have a legal right to abortion. Some participants clarified that abortion was “not their main issue.” P.A., for example, recalls, “It was just one of all women’s rights; it wasn’t my central focus for sure. But, you know, if you were a feminist at that time of course it was an issue.”

Similarly, in Ten Thousand Roses, two Abortion Caravan participants related that abortion “wasn’t my issue personally” and “my issue wasn’t abortion, either.”<sup>140</sup>

Likewise, Charnie Guettel explains that she became involved in reproductive rights “because everybody was in it.” She continues, “Women’s lib itself, the first couple of years everybody was in the abortion movement in the sense that it was just going down the pike.... Reproductive rights were such a big part of raising consciousness when you first became aware that you were oppressed as a woman, what your choices were.”<sup>141</sup> As discussed earlier, Marcy Cohen reports a deep personal conflict over abortion largely because of her connection to both black power activists and anti-abortion draft dodgers. While N.T.R. was motivated to work for abortion rights by her own experience of having had an illegal abortion, her connection to the issues was also motivated by a more detached assessment of its place in a larger context of issues:

I had a history in the civil rights movement, I had a history in the anti-war movement.... We became involved with helping other Americans,

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<sup>139</sup> Bonnie Beckman as quoted in Rebick, Ten Thousand Roses, 38.

<sup>140</sup> Rebick, Ten Thousand Roses, 38.

<sup>141</sup> Charnie Guettel, personal interview, February 26, 2007.

especially deserters, who were in dire need of finding some kind of refuge. So once you're well involved in one kind of activism, you start to see the parallel if there's an injustice that you've already identified and you're responding to, if you see a similar injustice in another area, you're just more sensitive to it.<sup>142</sup>

N.T. R.'s explanation highlights how her history and experience as an activist on other issues served as the basis of her authority, also as an activist, over abortion. For several women, then, abortion was not central to their identities as protestors, but part of a network of issues around which they advocated. And for still others, it was an issue about which they felt a deep ambivalence, at once recognizing it as central to women's freedom and equality, but also seeing it as something with which they were not wholly at ease. Regardless of how they related to abortion, none of the women questioned their authority to speak to the issue.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter has highlighted a number of key characteristics of women who participated in the Abortion Caravan. The women interviewed for this project were very much affected by the generation into which they were born. Its affluence and privilege, sense of optimism and idealism, and the tension between gender conformity and rebellion were all defining characteristics of the time in which most of these women came of age. Like the membership of women's liberation groups across North America in the late 1960s and early 1970s, they were mostly white and middle-class and had been raised in

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<sup>142</sup> N.T.R, telephone interview, October 31, 2006.

families that had British or Northern European backgrounds. Although most had participated in the United or Anglican Churches in their youth, few retained connections to religion past their middle teen years. This is not to say that religion did not influence their lives. For some, religion helped to introduce the importance of a sense of community, while for others it represented the opportunity to rebel against authority. Overwhelmingly these women were immersed in several protest movements and that involvement expanded or intensified while they were at university. Within those movements, most came to feel as though they were sexually exploited, discriminated against, and oppressed. They were aware that their sexual exploitation occurred within a society that promised a “sexual revolution” while their reproductive choices remained extremely limited. Several women, not surprisingly, had personal experiences with these limitations, which led them to the realization that they needed to fight for safe, legal abortion. All of these components of their identities competed with and complemented one another. It is important not to look at an action for abortion law repeal, such as the Abortion Caravan, without considering the diverse motivations that drove the women to act and that underscore their perceptions of their authority over the issue. The identities and agendas the Caravan women derived from their participation in various movements and groups intermingled, and when these women acted, they did so as holistic agents whose motivations, backgrounds, and experiences intersected.

## Chapter Four

### **“They won’t listen to us. We are forced to declare war”: The Abortion Caravan**

At a press conference held in advance of the May 1970 Abortion Caravan, Vancouver Women’s Caucus (VWC) member Dawn Carrell Hemingway argued, “The only way we can get abortion removed from the Criminal Code is not by letters to the government or pressure through channels. The only way is if large numbers of women come together and do something. *Numbers and actions are more important than presenting briefs.*”<sup>1</sup> Her statement encapsulates the sense of frustration and disappointment the women of the Caravan felt about the continuing illegality and relative unavailability of abortion in Canada – a situation that persisted despite efforts to use traditional or “legitimate” means to protest the law. The Caravan arguably demonstrates the radicalization that these Canadian women, who were described in the previous chapter, were undergoing. Understanding the Caravan and Caravan participants requires not only examining the participants, but also dissecting the events comprising the action. To that end, this chapter analyzes the origin of the idea of the Caravan, the organizing of the event, the women’s journey from Vancouver to Ottawa, and four key events in the national capital: (1) the public rally held in the Railway Committee Room on Parliament Hill when women arrived on Saturday, May 9; (2) the spontaneous march to Prime

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<sup>1</sup> Emphasis added. Dawn Carrell [Hemingway] as quoted in Sheila McCook, “‘Tremendous pressure’ for abortion reform-organizer,” *Ottawa Citizen*, in Abortion Caravan Scrapbook, p. 8, F-73-item 1, Women’s Movement Collection (Marge Hollibaugh Collector), Simon Fraser University Archives.

Minister Trudeau's residence following the rally; (3) the exhaustive discussion about Monday's protest that occurred on Sunday evening; and (4) the concurrent protests, one inside and one outside, at the House of Commons on Monday, May 11, 1970. Examining these events, along with the media reactions to them, helps us to interpret the messages the women attempted to convey, why they chose those messages, and their successes and failures in so doing. This examination uses the oral histories introduced in the introduction as well as mainstream and movement newspapers accounts, VWC meeting minutes and related documents, Caravan participants' personal correspondence, and VWC member Marge Hollibaugh's scrapbook of newspaper coverage of the VWC's activism around abortion, including the Caravan's journey across Canada.

In the following analysis it is important to remember how geography affects the women's remembrances of the Abortion Caravan. Women who joined the Caravan in Toronto and Ottawa had different experiences and perspectives than those who began the journey in Vancouver. The addition of voices from Ontario adds new dimensions to the story of the Caravan, particularly by highlighting new tensions, but it also exposes different levels of "ownership" over the events as well. Dawn Carroll Hemingway, Marcy Cohen, Cathy Walker, and Betsy Wood were a part of the Vancouver contingent. Women (and the lone male) who joined the protest in Toronto included P.A., Heather Bishop, Dante Nardone, Charmie Guettel, Susan Kennedy, Peggy Morton, Judy Pocock, N.T.R, and Myrna Wood. The women interviewed for this project who joined the Caravan in Ottawa were Joan Eliesen and Jackie Larkin.

## Organizing the Abortion Caravan

In September 1968, the Women's Caucus, later known as the Vancouver Women's Caucus (VWC), was established on the campus of Simon Fraser University (SFU), which was considered by one contemporary to be "the most volatile in English Canada."<sup>2</sup> While student activism was occurring across Canada, the women who came to comprise the VWC seemed especially creative and, in terms of the adoption of new strategies and goals, were often at the forefront of women's liberationist groups across Canada. Many of the members had participated in the student occupation of administration buildings at SFU in November 1968 and were, like women across the western world, questioning their place in New Left protest organizations.<sup>3</sup> The group's first meeting was held in July 1968, under the name "Feminine Action League," where it was decided to rename the group "Women's Caucus" and hold the next meeting on September 11. After almost a year on campus and finding that their initial efforts tended to be directed toward campus events as opposed to women's issues, the group made the decision in June 1969 "to get off the hill and do something in the city that would widen the base of the Women's Caucus."<sup>4</sup> Once off campus, the Vancouver Women's Caucus was able to attract a broader foundation of support and diversify its interests beyond the

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<sup>2</sup> John Harding, "From the Midst of a Crisis: Student Power in English Speaking Canada," in Student Protest, eds. Gerald F. McGuigan with George Payerle, and Patricia Horrobin (Toronto: Methuen, 1968), 99.

<sup>3</sup> Frances Wasserlein, "'An Arrow Aimed at the Heart': The Vancouver Women's Caucus and the Abortion Campaign, 1969-1971" (Master's thesis, Simon Fraser University, Burnaby, 1990), 56, 59. See, for example, Bryan D. Palmer, Canada's 1960s: The Ironies of Identity in a Rebellious Era (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009), 288-89.

<sup>4</sup> VWC member Marge Hollibaugh as quoted in Wasserlein, "An Arrow Aimed at the Heart," 63.

issues confronting the students at SFU. Betsy Wood, for example, found the Women's Caucus after its move, as did other women who were attracted by the VWC's newsletter, The Pedestal, which also began publication after the move.<sup>5</sup>

Over Thanksgiving weekend in 1969, the VWC hosted a Western Regional Conference for women's liberationists at the Student Union building on the University of British Columbia campus.<sup>6</sup> The theme of the conference was announced in The Pedestal as "Women: Reform or Revolution." Plenary sessions included "Women in the Work Force," "Economic Functions of the Family," "Psychological Oppression of Women," and "Women in Social Movements: The Past, Prospects for Change."<sup>7</sup> Some 200 participants were expected over the conference weekend from as far away as Alberta, Saskatchewan, Washington, Idaho, and California.<sup>8</sup>

While the idea of the Caravan did not originate at the Western Women's Conference, it was there that Caucus member Betsy Wood remembers proposing it and there that it was enthusiastically adopted by those in attendance. The idea had percolated with Wood since she attended an all-candidates meeting in the late 1960s in Horseshoe Bay. There, she asserts, the MP for North Shore was asked about birth control and abortion. Wood recalls that the MP's response was to refer the question to Sid Simons, a provincial candidate for the NDP, also in attendance.<sup>9</sup> She contends that upon hearing the MP's reply or, rather, his inability to reply, she decided it was time for women to go to Ottawa to speak for themselves: "When your Member of Parliament or a member of

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<sup>5</sup> Wasserlein, "An Arrow Aimed at the Heart," 64-5.

<sup>6</sup> Wasserlein, "An Arrow Aimed at the Heart," 62-63, 67.

<sup>7</sup> Wasserlein, "An Arrow Aimed at the Heart," 68.

<sup>8</sup> Wasserlein, "An Arrow Aimed at the Heart," 67.

<sup>9</sup> Wasserlein, "An Arrow Aimed at the Heart," 69.

the legislature is not doing what you think needs to be done, it is important that you don't complain about it. You pick up and do some kind of direct action about it to get the results that you want."<sup>10</sup> Fellow VWC member Marcy Cohen confirms that Wood was the source of the idea for the Caravan, arguing of Wood, "She was the one who was a mother and she was the one who was angry and frustrated."<sup>11</sup> In Judy Rebick's Ten Thousand Roses (2005), participant Bonnie Beckman is quoted as saying to Wood, "We wouldn't have been there if it hadn't been for you," concurring that Wood was the source of the idea.<sup>12</sup>

On the origin of the idea, several scholars make the connection between the Caravan and the On to Ottawa Trek.<sup>13</sup> In our interview Wood disagreed with this assessment, specifically referring to Rebick's inclusion of this assertion. Rebick quotes VWC member Margo Dunn as stating, "We decided on a caravan because it was linked a bit to the On to Ottawa Trek of unemployed people in 1935."<sup>14</sup> That year, hundreds of unemployed men filled box cars and headed east from Vancouver to Ottawa to protest the conditions in federally run labour camps. They were stopped by the RCMP in Regina and a handful of their members were invited to meet with the prime minister in Ottawa. When the meeting ended poorly, this small group returned to Regina to rejoin their

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<sup>10</sup> Betsy Wood, telephone interview, May 13, 2007.

<sup>11</sup> Marcy Cohen, telephone interview, March 2, 2007. See also Wasserlein, "An Arrow Aimed at the Heart," 47; Ann Thomson, Winning Choice on Abortion: How British Columbian and Canadian Feminists Won the Battles of the 1970s and 1980s (Trafford: Victoria, 2004), 20-21, 31.

<sup>12</sup> Judy Rebick, Ten Thousand Roses: The Making of a Feminist Revolution (Toronto: Penguin, 2005).

<sup>13</sup> See, for example, Janine Brodie, Shelley A. M. Gavigan, and Jane Jenson, The Politics of Abortion (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1992), 44; Gail Kellough, Aborting Law: An Exploration of the Politics of Motherhood and Medicine (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996), 207; Thomson, Winning Choice on Abortion, 20-21; Wasserlein, "An Arrow Aimed at the Heart," 88.

<sup>14</sup> Rebick, Ten Thousand Roses, 37. Wood claims she had not met Margo Dunn until just before the Caravan departed, indicating that Dunn could not have been involved in preparations in Vancouver. Betsy Wood, telephone interview, May 13, 2007.

compatriots; violent protest then erupted in what would come to be known as the Regina Riot.<sup>15</sup> Even if Wood's idea for the Caravan was not modeled on the On to Ottawa Trek, there were general similarities between the two actions and other participants perceived a connection. On both, participants sang songs and shouted slogans, which developed and demonstrated their solidarity as well as conveyed their message as they traveled across country. Additionally, many participants in both events had socialist orientations. Political Scientist Naomi Black asserts that the Trek has "a specifically Canadian resonance" that certainly plays out in the remembrances of Caravan participants.<sup>16</sup> Cathy Walker remembers "certainly being inspired by the On to Ottawa Trek – I had read lots about it and I thought 'gee this is great here we are 30 to 35 years later being in a similar position, with a different issue, but these are people being prepared to take on the government over an issue.'"<sup>17</sup> Ellen Woodworth also sees links to the On to Ottawa Trek if not an actual mirroring of the event when she states, "I don't think any social movement since the thirties had planned something on such a national scale."<sup>18</sup> Additionally, several movement documents make use of the slogan "On to Ottawa," indicating that the women made the connection even if the Trek was not the source of the

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<sup>15</sup> See Bill Waiser, All Hell Can't Stop Us: The On-to-Ottawa Trek and the Regina Riot (Calgary, Alberta: Fifth House, 2003).

<sup>16</sup> Naomi Black, "Ripples in the Second Wave: Comparing the Contemporary Women's Movement in Canada and the United States," in Challenging Times: The Women's Movement in Canada and the United States, eds. Constance Backhouse and David H. Flaherty (Montreal & Quebec: McGill-Queens's University Press, 1992), 96.

<sup>17</sup> Cathy Walker, telephone interview, February 16, 2007.

<sup>18</sup> Rebick, Ten Thousand Roses, 39.

idea.<sup>19</sup> In both actions, the national scale of the protest and the focus on Ottawa as the destination were centrally important.

Planning a protest on a national scale occupied much of the Vancouver Women's Caucus's attention in the months following the Western Women's Conference. The "General Meeting Report – FEB 1970" of a Vancouver Women's Caucus meeting held on February 26, 1970, shows that several decisions about the Caravan were made on that day. There, the women chose Mother's Day for the protest, decided to call for concurrent demonstrations across Canada, and agreed that the campaign would include a cavalcade that would make stops in cities across the country to hold rallies and gain support. The minutes record much of the same content that later appears in a letter sent to the prime minister and other government ministers.<sup>20</sup> A committee was established, called the Vancouver Women's Caucus Campaign Co-ordinating Committee, consisting of Vicky Brown, Marge Hollibaugh, Dawn Carrell [Hemingway], and Betsy Meadley [Wood].

One of the first actions the Committee took was to compose and mail a letter to women's groups across Canada. The letter, titled "Re: Abortion Strategy" was a two-page, single-spaced document that outlined the group's intention to coordinate a national campaign against the 1969 reform of the abortion law.<sup>21</sup> It outlines the women's belief that "abortion is a human right for women" and that "women who have a consciousness

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<sup>19</sup> See, for example, "Abortion Is Our Right," Vancouver Women's Caucus Binder 2/5 1970, F-162-3-3-0-6, Frances Wasserlein fonds, Simon Fraser University Archives.

<sup>20</sup> "General Meeting Report – FEB 1970," Vancouver Women's Caucus Binder 2/5 1970, F-162-3-3-0-5, Frances Wasserlein fonds, Simon Fraser University Archives. See also Wasserlein, "An Arrow Aimed at the Heart," 80.

<sup>21</sup> Vicky Brown, Marge Hollibaugh, Dawn Carrell [Hemingway], and Betsy Meadley [Wood], "Re: Abortion Strategy" undated [Winter/Spring 1970], file "Vancouver Women's Caucus," Box 125, Canadian Women's Movement Archives, University of Ottawa

of their oppression must lead this struggle.” It argued that a successful campaign must make linkages between abortion and other “aspects of the oppression of women.” To that end the women supported conducting and sharing research results on such things as the “structure of the medical profession...and alternative methods of organization other than the free enterprise, fee-for-service method.” Envisioning a government responsive to their action and open to dialogue, they expressed an interest in demanding “open hearings with the Dept. of Justice and the Dept. of Health and Welfare while in Ottawa,” arguing that “the advantage of hearings is that you have the chance to publicize your position.” They signalled their hope of sending a representative from the VWC “to talk with W.L. [women’s liberation] people across the prairies and, so far as time and money allows, to help women begin to organize in areas where they have been unable to do so up to now.” Finally, they outlined their vision of the Caravan:

A caravan of well decorated cars – the first with a roof rack carrying the coffin – will be leaving Vancouver around May 1 in order to reach Ottawa by May 9 for the action. We are hoping to make brief stops in all major cities to do guerrilla theatre, soap box on street corners, at parks and/or campuses (where local groups have made arrangements), camping each night in a previously publicized (again, by local W.L.s) locations where people can gather for rap sessions, songs, etc. If we have done our work well, cars will be joining the caravan from each city.

In the letter the women offered a comprehensive picture not only of how they viewed the action taking shape, but of abortion’s link to women’s oppression more generally, as well as their intention to use the Caravan as a movement-building exercise. This letter is noteworthy as well because of the way it differs from previous examples of women’s ideas about abortion. There was no hesitancy or qualifications as in some letters to the editors of Chatelaine and the Globe and Mail or in briefs and letters to the RCSW, these

women did not question their authority to speak – and be heard - on abortion. In the published letter the women did not need to personalize abortion so as to demonstrate their authority to speak on the issue; their authority was understood. They were committed to direct political action, manufacturing an opening for their voices to be heard.

The women's remembrances of planning activities vary. Asked about preparations, VWC member Marcy Cohen remembers telephoning women's groups across the country, writing leaflets and statements, making the choice of dates (which she attributes to Betsy Wood), and discussing how to frame the issues (e.g. around the slogan "every child a wanted child"). She recalls using connections with Student Union for Peace Action (SUPA) and other protest organizations to contact groups across Canada.<sup>22</sup> An Ottawa Citizen article reported that in an effort to publicize their action, the Vancouver Women's Caucus women "plied shopping centres with anti-abortion law leaflets, performed guerrilla theatre in the street and in high schools and sent speakers into schools."<sup>23</sup> Joan Eliesen, who was living in Ottawa at the time of the Caravan, recalls that a woman from the Vancouver Women's Caucus flew out to meet with the Ottawa Women's Liberation (OWL) group since they would be central in helping to organize events there.<sup>24</sup> The members of OWL organized billeting, set up meetings, and produced and posted a silk screened poster which warned in blue lettering on white

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<sup>22</sup> Marcy Cohen, telephone interview, March 2, 2007.

<sup>23</sup> McCook, "'Tremendous pressure.'"

<sup>24</sup> This woman is identified as Dawn Carrell in the VWC files. See "Newsletter March," Vancouver Women's Caucus Binder 1/5 1970, F-162-3-3-0-5, Frances Wasserlein fonds, Simon Fraser University Archives.

background: “The Women are Coming.” Eliesen remembers, “We painted them with evaporated milk so that it could be on both sides and it was very hard to get off.”<sup>25</sup>

Explaining how word of the Caravan traveled, Judy Pocock recalls, “We had a lot of communication.... We had access to travel, we’d go to these conferences so we’d meet people from across the country.... We all knew each other.” She continues, “I think by that time, there were people who had lived in Toronto out in Vancouver and there was a connection back and forth.”<sup>26</sup> Other women agreed that one “just sort of knew” about the Abortion Caravan by being associated with women’s liberation groups.<sup>27</sup> P.A. agrees, suggesting, “It’s such a small community in Canada.... Organizations...worked hard on communicating, so, you know, you just heard.”<sup>28</sup> Her point speaks to the challenges of activism in Canada in the 1960s. The sheer size of the country and the relatively small number of activists meant that reliance on existing networks and the focus on universities in which so many activists made their original connections with other activists were very important. Charnie Guettel argues, “One of the things about the sixties was that it was so hands on. We had a telephone tree in women’s lib. When you did it, you called three other people and they each called three other people. That means when there was going to be an event, seventy people talked to each other.... So that the actual, emotional contact was personal,” which may help explain the phenomenon of “just sort of knowing.”<sup>29</sup> Despite the personal connection women made with one another when planning protests, some women commented that they did not have specific remembrances

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<sup>25</sup> Joan Eliesen, telephone interview, April 15, 2007.

<sup>26</sup> Judy Pocock, personal interview, November 30, 2006.

<sup>27</sup> See author interviews with Kennedy, P.A., N.T.R., Bishop, and Morton.

<sup>28</sup> P.A., personal interview, October 26, 2006.

<sup>29</sup> Charnie Guettel, personal interview, February 26, 2007.

of planning the Caravan because even though it was unique in its national scope, to some women it was just another of the many protests they planned or attended during that period.

As indicated by Marcy Cohen, a central planning decision revolved around determining what message(s) the Caravan was intended to convey. Originally Wood envisioned Valentine's Day as the ideal date for the Caravan, but the Caucus was unable to organize in time and Mother's Day was chosen instead. They nevertheless held their first public abortion rights protest on February 14, 1970, in downtown Vancouver, drawing approximately 250 protesters.<sup>30</sup> Chosen for its symbolism, Valentine's Day, according to Ann Thomson, represented for Wood "an obvious irony in the celebration of romantic love – and the frequent outcome for women: unwanted pregnancy and the danger of a bloody, illegal abortion."<sup>31</sup> The similarly powerful symbolism offered by a Mother's Day protest was noted by the mainstream press, as evidenced by the Ottawa Journal, which observed, "Just two days before the nation's tribute to Mother, the anti-unwanted-motherhood leaders gathered in Ottawa to protest against restrictive abortion laws."<sup>32</sup> Some women from the Caravan also participated in a Mother's Day demonstration in Montreal's Lafontaine Park, where they performed guerrilla theatre and read a brief prepared for the Abortion Caravan that outlined not only the need for free, legal abortion, but also for birth control, pre and post-natal care, low-cost housing for

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<sup>30</sup> Accounts of the protest can be found in Wasserlein, "An Arrow Aimed at the Heart," 81-82; Thomson, Winning Choice on Abortion, 42-43; "Hundreds Protest Abortion Laws," The Pedestal, March 1970, 3; "Women Demonstrate For Abortion," The Peak, February 18, 1970, 2.

<sup>31</sup> Thomson, Winning Choice on Abortion, 31.

<sup>32</sup> James Tost, "Women's Cavalcade Hits City To Protest Anti-Abortion Laws," Ottawa Journal, in Abortion Caravan Scrapbook, p. 18, F-73-item1, Women's Movement Collection (Marge Hollibaugh Collector), Simon Fraser University Archives.

single mothers, and subsidized child care facilities. The protesters, the Montreal Star reported, performed a question and answer chant to which “nous sommes tané” (we are fed up) was the reply. The list of things with which women were fed up included: “To have babies ever year.... To wear midis, minis, maxis.... To be typed up, classified and badly paid.... To be denied day in day out to make decisions.” The chant ended with the women shouting in unison, “Happy Mother’s Day to all.”<sup>33</sup> While it is clear that the women viewed their struggle as one inclusive of many issues, by choosing a date on which the nation venerated motherhood, they dramatized unwanted or unplanned “motherhood” and the danger of illegal abortion.

As important as the date of the event was the manner in which the women framed their message. Both the March and April 1970 issues of The Pedestal included the text of a letter that had been mailed to Prime Minister Trudeau and other Members of Parliament in March of that year. The letter read, in part:

We charge the Government of Canada...of being responsible for the MURDER BY ABORTION OF 2,000 CANADIAN WOMEN, who enter hospitals for treatment of complications from illegal abortions.... If another country murdered 2,000 Canadian WOMEN the Canadian Government would take immediate steps to stop the murders and should the murdering not be stopped, the Government of Canada would probably call an Emergency meeting and could quite conceivably *declare war on that country*. Laws can be changed very quickly in wartime, in a state of national emergency. The deaths of thousands of women and the tragedy of unwanted pregnancies constitute such an emergency. We, therefore, demand that an Emergency Meeting be called to end such carnage of Canadian women by illegal abortion.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Sandra Dolan, “Women seek abortion right on Mother’s Day,” Montreal Star, in Abortion Caravan Scrapbook, p. 20, F-73-item1, Women’s Movement Collection (Marge Hollibaugh Collector), Simon Fraser University Archives.

<sup>34</sup> *Italicized emphasis added.* The letter is signed “Yours till Repeal.” See “Women Declare War” The Pedestal, March 1970, 2. The figure of 2,000 deaths stems from the estimation by the Dominion Bureau of

Unequivocally the women adopted the language of war. They demanded an immediate removal of abortion from the Criminal Code and further informed Trudeau, “We consider the government of Canada *is in a state of war* with the women of Canada. If steps are not taken to implement our demands by May 11, 1970 at 3:00 pm, *we will be forced to respond by declaring war* on the Canadian government.”<sup>35</sup> Words of war, death, and revolution permeated the discussions about and actions surrounding the Caravan. For women who were very involved in the anti-war movement, the adoption of this language of war was both logical and ironic. Framing their letter in this manner, as a warning or a demand, signalled, at least symbolically, both their authority to act on the issue and an unwillingness to negotiate or compromise. It indicates that they were not interested in enacting change through traditional channels, a position also demonstrated in the opening quotation of this chapter; they wanted revolution, not reform. Unlike the decade of discourse that preceded this letter, which advocated for abortion “under certain circumstances,” the message in this letter, signed “yours until repeal,” was that the women had already concluded that a “war” for legal abortion would be necessary and it confirmed their willingness to fight.

More problematically, beyond being rhetorical, it was unclear what “declaring war” actually meant. As the Calgary Herald reported, “Exactly what this tactic involves,

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Statistic that 100,000 abortions were performed yearly; more than 20,000 were admittedly yearly for complications. See “Abortion Cavalcade sets out for Ottawa,” Globe and Mail, April 28, 1970, 13.

<sup>35</sup> Emphasis added. M. Hollibaugh and B. Meadley, “An Open Letter to the Prime Minister,” The Pedestal, April 1970, 8.

they say is a secret.”<sup>36</sup> Another newspaper article under the title “Pledge War Against Gov’t On Abortion” reported, “Asked what tactics the threatened war might include, the anti-abortion law group would say only it was going to work to fill hospitals across Canada with women who need and want abortions.”<sup>37</sup> This point is repeated in the June 1970 issue of The Pedestal, which declared: “The form that this declaration of war will take is actions in hospitals all across Canada to force officials to be responsible to the women they supposedly serve. We will not be stopped by red tape or other measures of diversion.”<sup>38</sup> Again, their strategies remained unclear, which might have been their strategy. A piece written for Prairie Fire by “Members of the Regina Women’s Liberation Caucus who participated in the Abortion Caravan,” suggests that the Caravan was a first step in the struggle for legalized abortion: “The women have declared war on the Canadian government. Their actions in Ottawa did not succeed in bringing about the removal of abortion from the criminal code. Nor did they expect it would.... Last Monday, we declared war. That war has only just begun.”<sup>39</sup> In other words, the “declaration of war” can be construed as a symbolic beginning of the fight for legal abortion. This interpretation was supported by participants. When queried on this point, Susan Kennedy could not recollect the language’s intent: “I don’t remember the slogan ‘declaring war on the government’ and what exactly was meant by it at the time. All our

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<sup>36</sup> Lynn Rach, “Abortion Caravan on Move,” Calgary Herald, in Abortion Caravan Scrapbook, p. 14, F-73-item1, Women’s Movement Collection (Marge Hollibaugh Collector), Simon Fraser University Archives.

<sup>37</sup> “Pledge War Against Gov’t On Abortion,” in Abortion Caravan Scrapbook, p. 28, F-73-item1, Women’s Movement Collection (Marge Hollibaugh Collector), Simon Fraser University Archives.

<sup>38</sup> Gwen Hauser, “Parliament Forced to Listen,” The Pedestal, June 1970, 1. At the public rally on Parliament Hill, Myrna Wood is quoted as making a similar threat: “If the government refuses to deal with us this weekend they will have to face us at the hospitals.” See Sheila McCook, “Pleas for abortion greeted by silence,” Ottawa Citizen, May 11, 1970, 25.

<sup>39</sup> Author Unknown, “Women Disrupt Parliament” Prairie Fire, May 19-25, 1970, 3.

rhetoric was pretty over the top then but I assume we just meant that we would not give up the fight around this issue.... Violent action was not planned that I know of.”<sup>40</sup> The “declaration of war,” then, signalled the women’s frustration, anger, and demand to be heard, but does not convey their understanding that the action would not alter the situation in and of itself, giving later critics ammunition to claim that the women did not understand the parliamentary process.

In addition to the declaration of war, the slogan that most often appeared in announcements and articles about the Abortion Caravan was “Free Abortion on Demand.” The participants have varying explanations for the adoption of the phrase. Wood recalls, “It was good publicity-wise. It was a straight statement that anyone could understand. We weren’t going to take anything less. We wanted it out of the Criminal Code. We wanted it out. We didn’t want it adjusted, we wanted it out.”<sup>41</sup> Jackie Larkin similarly reflects that at the time the women believed, “We had the right to it, we shouldn’t have to pay for it, and we shouldn’t be negotiating with anybody about it.”<sup>42</sup> Charnie Guettel linked the slogan to the sexual revolution: “‘Abortion on demand’...was an expression of sexual rights...because a woman’s right to choose whether or not to have a baby after having sex assumed that if you have sexual freedom, accidental pregnancy of women was a part of the world.”<sup>43</sup> Peggy Morton explains the slogan in this way: “Certainly it contained a couple of thoughts to it. One was that women were

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<sup>40</sup> In her interview with Kathryn Keate Freeman also found the women purposely used “inflammatory” and “outrageous” rhetoric to get media attention. See, Freeman, *Beyond Bylines*, 147. Susan Kennedy, personal communication, November 9, 2007.

<sup>41</sup> Betsy Wood, telephone interview, May 13, 2007.

<sup>42</sup> Peggy Morton, telephone interview, February 17, 2007.

<sup>43</sup> Charnie Guettel, personal interview, February 26, 2007.

much more aggressive about that question of who gets to decide.” Morton’s second point speaks to the fact that, as discussed in the previous chapter, many women identified as socialist: “The other component was that conviction that social programs have to be free.... It was a political demand in that way...I think it was that feeling of a real need for boldness.”<sup>44</sup> Cathy Walker also sees a class connection, recalling that the call for free abortion on demand “grew out of the experiences of women who had worked in the birth control and abortion counselling centres,” who saw, among other things, that “the existing laws discriminated against poor and working class women.”<sup>45</sup>

Far removed from the earlier demands for access to abortion “under certain circumstances,” “free abortion on demand” was a position taken by different women than those who had written to Chatelaine or had submitted briefs to the RCSW, although there was some overlap in this latter group. Although free abortion on demand implied that women should have control over the issue of whether or not to abort at any point during the pregnancy, none of the narrators identified this stance as the meaning of the slogan. Many of these Caravan women had come of age during the “sexual revolution” and thus grew up exposed to more permissive sexual attitudes. The change in message also reflects the women’s frustration over the inadequacies of the 1969 “liberalization” of the abortion law. Dawn Carrell Hemingway expressed this frustration to the Toronto Globe when she said that women were tired of the “constant buck-passing at different levels of

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<sup>44</sup> Peggy Morton, telephone interview, February 17, 2007.

<sup>45</sup> Cathy Walker, telephone interview, February 16, 2007.

government.”<sup>46</sup> Within this context, and given the women’s application of a socialist-feminist analysis of their oppression, they came to feel that “legitimate” lines of protest were non-responsive and the adoption of the slogan “free abortion on demand” reflects their act of dismissing the government, the medical profession, and, to some extent, men from the decision. The women were also politically astute enough to realize that the slogan had limited appeal; it was one they were unable to “create a social majority” around and eventually dropped.<sup>47</sup> In his study of the pro-life movement in Canada, Michael W. Cuneo notes that although public opinion has, since 1967, supported “legal abortion on selective grounds,” it has not supported absolute positions on either side of the issue such as is suggested by the slogan “free abortion on demand.”<sup>48</sup> Still, the brazenness of the slogan, however intended, was a powerful statement for the time.

### **“The Women Are Coming”**

After months of planning and coordinating with other women’s groups, on April 27, 1970, members of the Vancouver Women’s Caucus gathered at the Vancouver Court House to “send off” those women who would be making the cross-Canada journey to Ottawa. For her study of the Abortion Caravan, Frances Wasserlein interviewed Caucus member Cynthia Flood, who did not go on the Caravan, but was present for the “send

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<sup>46</sup> “Abortion cavaladers will attend meeting – will PM?” *Toronto Globe*, May 7, 1970, in Abortion Caravan Scrapbook, p. 16, F-73-item1, Women’s Movement Collection (Marge Hollibaugh Collector), Simon Fraser University Archives. See McCook, “Pleas for abortion greeted by silence.”

<sup>47</sup> Jackie Larkin, telephone interview, April 15, 2007.

<sup>48</sup> Michael W. Cuneo, *Catholics Against the Church: Anti-Abortion Protest in Toronto 1969-1985* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1989). 18.

off.” Flood recalls, “I was taken by the theatricality of it, a small group was starting off [a] very...slender arrow aimed at the heart, which was Ottawa so very far away.”<sup>49</sup> Thomson reports that VWC members addressed the crowd, numbering about 100, and read aloud letters of support from the B.C. New Democrats and several labour organizations.<sup>50</sup> After the speeches, three vehicles, including Betsy Wood’s convertible and Cathy Walker’s VW van, filled with 17 to 20 women, departed.<sup>51</sup> The vehicles were painted with the slogans “On To Ottawa!” and “Abortion is our Right!” and “Smash Capitalism.” Walker’s VW van carried a coffin, strapped to the roof, which was meant to symbolize the women who died as a consequence of illegal, unsafe abortions; it also, according to Walker, “very conveniently held all the sleeping bags.”<sup>52</sup> Because of the coffin, when describing the women’s departure, an Ottawa Citizen article related, “A funeral procession started off from Vancouver, Monday night. The destination of the 25 mourners, towing a coffin, is Ottawa, where they plan to arrive on Friday, May 8.”<sup>53</sup>

On that day the women departed for Kamloops, the first of eleven scheduled stops that had been chosen because of their large populations and/or because there were women’s groups in those cities with whom the VWC had successfully connected.<sup>54</sup> As

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<sup>49</sup> Cynthia Flood as quoted in Wasserlein, “An Arrow Aimed at the Heart,” 88.

<sup>50</sup> Thomson, Winning Choice, 41- 42.

<sup>51</sup> The third vehicle has been described both as a pickup truck and as a camper. Wasserlein reports 17 women left Vancouver, while Thomson suggests it was 19 or 20. Wasserlein’s list consists of the following women: “Marcy Cohen, Margo Dunn, Betsy Meadley [Wood], Dawn Carrell [Hemingway], Ellen Woodsworth, Cathy Walker, Charlotte Bedard, Mary Trew, Bonita Beckman, Mary Mathieson, Barbara Hicks, Maxine Schnee, Dodie Wepler, Hannah Gay, Gwen Hauser, Vicki Goodman, and Colette Malo.” To this list Thomson adds Bonita Beckman and Melody Rudd. See Wasserlein, “An Arrow Aimed at the Heart,” 87, fn. 27; Thomson, Winning Choice, 42, 43.

<sup>52</sup> Cathy Walker, telephone interview, February 16, 2007.

<sup>53</sup> McCook, ““Tremendous pressure.””

<sup>54</sup> A schedule for the Caravan appeared in The Pedestal, with the following scheduled stops: Vancouver to Kamloops (April 27), Calgary (April 28), Edmonton (April 29), Saskatoon (April 30), Regina (May 1),

noted, prior to leaving the Caucus had made contact with women's groups across Canada. Through this communication the Caucus members secured free meals and accommodation, primarily in church basements, which is notable given that so many claimed no lasting ties to religion. They had also secured the help of the local supporters of women's and/or abortion rights who would organize public meetings and scout locations at which the Caravan participants could perform guerrilla theatre. The intention of each planned stop was to try to gain supporters for the Caravan as well as to converse with people sympathetic to the women's stance on abortion and educate those who may not have been. There is some disagreement about the drive. Some interviewees contend the women rotated vehicles so that everyone had the opportunity to get to know other women better over the course of the drive, while others remember remaining in the same vehicle throughout the drive. Cathy Walker remembers that the group practiced singing songs like "Bread and Roses" and "Hold the Fort." She recalls, "We certainly got some great songs, a number of which we didn't actually know the melody for. So, for example, Bread and Roses, we'd not heard the melody before so we got that one wrong. Got the words right, but we sang it to a different tune."<sup>55</sup>

Just as memories conflict, they can also "fail."<sup>56</sup> During the interviews a few women invoked specific memories from the journey across Canada, but overall the stops have blurred together so that what remains is more of a sense of the contour of the stops.

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Winnipeg (May 2), Lakehead (May 3), Sault Ste. Marie (May 4), Sudbury (May 5), Toronto (May 6-8), Ottawa (May 9-11). See "Cavalcade Schedule (Tentative)" *The Pedestal*, April 1970, 2.

<sup>55</sup> Cathy Walker, telephone interview, February 16, 2007.

<sup>56</sup> Alessandro Portelli cautions us that "there are no 'false' oral history sources" because factually "'wrong' statements are still psychologically 'true'". See Alessandro Portelli, "What Makes Oral History Different," in *The Oral History Reader*, eds. Robert Perks and Alistair Thomson (1998; repr., New York: Routledge, 2006), 37.

At each stop the women were met on the outskirts of the town or city by the local women's group. Once there they held a demonstration at which they performed guerrilla theatre, had dinner at the church where they were being billeted, and then held a public meeting for interested residents – both for and against abortion. In Edmonton, for example, the women held a public meeting at the Garneau United Church where Dr. Michael Ball, the director of the University of Alberta's student health services, spoke of the need to curb the "unwanted birth rate."<sup>57</sup> In Calgary, the women held their meeting at a Unitarian Church after being met at "the Happy Valley turn-off" by a local women's liberation group and distributing "leaflets at Foothills Hospital."<sup>58</sup> Following the public meetings, the women often talked deep into the night over issues that arose during the day or of the next day's events. The most contentious issues the women debated were whether they should be smoking dope on the journey and what slogans should be painted on the vehicles. Their schedule was busy and demanding, as reflected in a letter Dawn Carrell Hemingway wrote home to her mother: "Things are incredibly hectic: so much to do! Drive all day – rallies and parades, supper, meeting with the women's lib group in each town and then public meetings in the evening and then our own Caravan meeting. Can't believe how we're surviving the pace."<sup>59</sup> Overall, they remember being well received throughout their journey – at least until they arrived in Northern Ontario where, as Walker recalls, they felt a police presence trailing them along the highway.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> "Women's protest dramatizes horror of illegal abortions," in *Abortion Caravan Scrapbook*, p. 9, F-73-item1, Women's Movement Collection (Marge Hollibaugh Collector), Simon Fraser University Archives.

<sup>58</sup> See Rach, "Abortion Caravan On Move."

<sup>59</sup> Dawn Carrell, Caravan Participant, to Mother, undated [1970], Posted from Regina, Personal Files of Dawn Carrell Hemingway, Burnaby, B.C.

<sup>60</sup> Cathy Walker, telephone interview, February 16, 2007.

Christabelle Sethna and Steve Hewitt confirm surveillance of the women's liberationists and the Caravan's progress across Canada, although they note that for Sault Ste. Marie and Sudbury the RCMP relied on local newspapers to track the Caravan.<sup>61</sup> While the RCMP may not have followed the women physically in Northern Ontario, Walker contends that they were trailed by the Ontario Provincial Police and relates that she received a ticket for missing a stop sign.<sup>62</sup>

An important component of the Abortion Caravan's stops across the country was their guerrilla theatre performances. Discussing the emergence of guerrilla theatre in the 1960s, Michael William Doyle argues, "Political protests...began increasingly to adopt dramatic forms as a means of expressing their collective dissent from a society they saw as morally bankrupt, racist, militaristic, and culturally stultifying."<sup>63</sup> Doyle argues, through his study of the San Francisco Mime Troupe, that it was "largely through the Mime Troupe's efforts, widely disseminated by means of national tours, [that] the staging of improvisatory, didactic skits in public spaces became a staple of antiwar, women's liberation, and other social movement protests."<sup>64</sup> The VWC's guerrilla theatre troupe was formed specifically for the Abortion Caravan, and the women used guerrilla theatre tactics throughout their journey, perfecting skits they had begun to use in their demonstrations in Vancouver.

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<sup>61</sup> Christabelle Sethna and Steve Hewitt, "Clandestine Operations: The Vancouver Women's Caucus, the Abortion Caravan, and the RCMP," *Canadian Historical Review* 90, no. 3 (September 2009), 487.

<sup>62</sup> Cathy Walker, telephone interview, February 16, 2007.

<sup>63</sup> Michael William Doyle, "Staging the Revolution: Guerilla Theatre as a Countercultural Practice, 1965-68," in *Imagine Nation: The American Counterculture of the 1960s and 1970s*, eds., Peter Braunstein and Michael William Doyle (New York: Routledge, 2002), 72.

<sup>64</sup> Doyle, "Staging the Revolution," 72.

The women received some local press and this coverage provides a useful record of their guerrilla theatre performances. One Edmonton paper described the protest in that city at Sir Winston Churchill Square as a “grisly mime play showing the horror of a back-street abortion before 200 curious onlookers.”<sup>65</sup> It continued, “The mime play told about a woman who was denied a legal abortion. She went to a back-street abortionist who put on a blood-stained gown and then showed the crowd his instruments – a knitting needle, a bent coat hanger and an egg beater. After a moment of deliberation, the abortionist covered the victim with a black cape.” The women’s decision to focus on the “grisly” nature of the “back alley” abortions conforms to Celeste Michelle Condit’s argument, in Decoding Abortion Rhetoric (1990), that such narratives, popularized in magazine and newspaper exposés during the 1960s, were the most effective way through which to garner support for legal abortion because they portrayed the pregnant women in the most sympathetic manner possible.<sup>66</sup>

A Calgary paper also described the guerrilla theatre performed at the Unitarian Church there. The article explained that “four girls made up to look like white-faced, non-descript doctors entered the room” and reported that these four doctors – one by one – denied the pregnant woman’s request for an abortion.<sup>67</sup> The grounds upon which the request was denied included morality (represented by a doctor pantomiming prayer), illegality (represented by a doctor pointing to the Criminal Code), and expense (represented by a doctor presenting the woman with a bill for \$500). The final doctor,

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<sup>65</sup> “Women’s protest dramatizes horror.”

<sup>66</sup> Celeste Michelle Condit, Decoding Abortion Rhetoric: Communicating Social Change (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1990), 25-28.

<sup>67</sup> “Pregnant Woman’s Dilemma Depicted,” in Abortion Caravan Scrapbook, p. 14, F-73-item1, Women’s Movement Collection (Marge Hollibaugh Collector), Simon Fraser University Archives.

who had a large red heart pinned to his coat, agreed to perform the abortion, but was immediately arrested. The article relates, “Known as ‘Guerrilla Theatre,’ this crude but pointed way of getting a group warmed up to the subject will be used by members of the Abortion Caravan as it journeys across the country.”<sup>68</sup> The use of guerrilla theatre enabled the women to simplify their messages to and reach their audience on an emotional level. It allowed them to be graphic at a time when photographs were not really in use by either side of the issue. It is also noteworthy because when performing, the women chose silence over words, using their bodies in place of their voices. In so doing they inserted themselves physically into the debates about abortion. Moreover, since the guerrilla theatre was an orchestrated action, it built from and contributed to their bonds with one another, as each woman made themselves vulnerable and relied on one other to fulfill a role in the story. In terms of the group’s dynamics, guerrilla theatre necessitated cooperation among the women.

Yet at the same time that the Caravan demanded and enforced closeness between the women divisiveness and conflict also affected them over the course of almost three weeks of traveling. While not the root of the conflict, the decision Cathy Walker and Dawn Carrell Hemingway made, prior to leaving, to paint “smash capitalism” on one side of Walker’s VW van illuminated the fault lines that had already divided the women’s liberation movement in Toronto and large cities across the United States and that would lead to the fracturing of the Vancouver Women’s Caucus just months after the Caravan.<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> “Pregnant Woman’s Dilemma Depicted.”

<sup>69</sup> The outcome of this divisiveness was that approximately fifteen women left the Vancouver Women’s Caucus to form Vancouver Women’s Liberation. See “Women’s Caucus – A History and Analysis,” file “Vancouver Women’s Caucus,” Box 125, Canadian Women’s Movement Archives, University of

In Toronto, for example, a split between socialist-feminists (who became the Toronto Women's Liberation Movement [TWLM]) and radical feminists (who became the New Feminists) is described as bitter and acrimonious.<sup>70</sup> Some VWC members, especially Betsy Wood, objected to the presence of the slogan on the side of the van. These women feared it would detract attention from the Caravan's main message, which was the legalization of abortion, and that it would confuse or alienate people who did not share a socialist-feminist perspective, which would have included most Canadians outside protest organizations.

The debate over this slogan also reflected the fact that the Canadian women's liberation movement was a young one very much in the process of defining itself and its ideas. Debates over identities and goals were frequent. Social movements like women's liberation, Robert Benford explains, "devote considerable effort to constructing particular versions of reality" and "the outcomes of frame disputes help shape a movement."<sup>71</sup> Dawn Carrel Hemingway recalls that the slogan "captured one of the biggest debates going on within the women's movement." She explains, "Is the emancipation of women (including the right to control our own bodies) integrally connected with the emancipation of all humankind through the elimination of the capitalist system? Or can

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Ottawa; Cathy Walker, telephone interview, February 16, 2007; Dawn Carrel Hemingway, telephone interview, April 29, 2007; Wasserlein, "An Arrow Aimed at the Heart," 88.

<sup>70</sup> For analyses of this split, see Nancy Adamson, "Feminists, Libbers, Lefties, and Radicals: The Emergence of the Women's Liberation Movement," in *A Diversity of Women: Ontario, 1945-1980*, ed. Joy Parr (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1995), 256-60; Jill Vickers, "The Intellectual Origin of the Women's Movement in Canada," in *Challenging Times: The Women's Movement in Canada and the United States*, eds., Constance Backhouse and David H. Flaherty (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1992), 47; Palmer, *Canada's 1960s*, 304.

<sup>71</sup> Robert D. Benford, "Frame Disputes within the Nuclear Disarmament Movement" *Social Forces* 71, no. 3 (March 1993), 677, 698.

the emancipation of women be achieved within the existing socio-economic order?"<sup>72</sup> In other words, the conflict reflected different perceptions of abortion (and society), with proponents of each clamouring for their perspective to be seen as the authoritative one.

Walker also remembers the debates over "smash capitalism" during the Caravan:

We had some good arguments over that. I remember at the time thinking 'gee whoever the last speaker was, that's the person who I agreed with.' Back and forth and back and forth. Because people were very good at debating, very good at making the argument, but anyway finally the people who thought that it should be off sort of won the day. The only issue was 'is this something that is sort of part of the basis of unity of being on the Abortion Caravan and being in favour of women's right to choose' or do you put that issue on the back burner and not put that front and centre.<sup>73</sup>

Wood's position that "smash capitalism" should not be painted on the side of the van reflects, in part, the fact that she did not, by others' accounts, have a socialist-feminist perspective on women's oppression. Marcy Cohen recollects that there was "distrust" because Wood did not perceive the Caravan more expansively, recalling, "We were pretty militant, everything connected, it was part of a broader struggle," while Wood was perceived as anti-socialist because she linked socialism to communism.<sup>74</sup> Wood does not agree with Cohen's assessment of her political stance, but did not unequivocally identify herself as a socialist-feminist at the time.<sup>75</sup> Being fifteen years older than the other woman meant that Wood's memories of anti-communist sentiments during the Cold War era were different from those of her younger cohorts. Wood asserts that her only concern was that she did not want to confuse or alienate potential Caravan supporters. Regardless

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<sup>72</sup> Dawn Carrell Hemingway, written interview, April 29, 2007.

<sup>73</sup> Cathy Walker, telephone interview, February 16, 2007.

<sup>74</sup> Marcy Cohen, telephone interview, March 2, 2007.

<sup>75</sup> Betsy Wood, telephone interview, May 13, 2007.

of her actual politics, it is clear that at the time Wood was not viewed as sympathetic to socialist-feminism and this put her at odds with a vocal faction within the Vancouver Women's Caucus, a position only exacerbated when they reached the more politically divisive situation in Toronto, as indicated by Marcy Cohen's assertion that the environment in Toronto complicated relations among the Vancouver women: "We had to pander to the socialist feminists, exaggerating our internal differences so that the socialist feminists in Toronto would go with us."<sup>76</sup>

Intragroup conflict was not the only turmoil to confront the women; events external to the Caravan also deeply affected participants. On April 25, 1970, two days before the Vancouver Women's Caucus left Vancouver, U.S. President Richard Nixon ordered the invasion of Cambodia, a move that was publicized five days later. In response to this revelation, anti-war protests occurred across North America and, on May 4, 1970, four university students were shot and killed at one such protest at Kent State University. Demonstrations fuelled by anger, outrage, and grief occurred throughout the United States and Canada. As student and anti-war protesters, many of the Abortion Caravan participants were shocked and distraught upon hearing the news of the Kent State deaths. Cathy Walker's reaction was less emotional than some of the women: "Some people were absolutely devastated at the thought that they [the U.S. National Guardsmen] could fire on students, and for those of us who had been involved, for example, in the occupation at Simon Fraser, we sort of knew what it was like to be taken out in the middle of the night by the cops so we never figured we were friends of the state

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<sup>76</sup> Marcy Cohen as quoted in Rebick, *Ten Thousand Roses*, 40.

in the first place.”<sup>77</sup> Still, the shootings had an immediate effect on some Caravan participants.

In response to the shootings, a demonstration was planned for Saturday, May 9, in Toronto, which conflicted with the scheduled departure of Caravan participants from Toronto to Ottawa. On some level it seems as though the Kent State shootings were more significant for the women from Toronto because they had to decide whether to stay in Toronto to attend the anti-war protest or go to Ottawa, as originally planned, to participate in the Caravan. In contrast, the women from Vancouver were continuing to Ottawa regardless of any anti-war protest in Toronto because they were determined to see this action through to the end. The ease with which the decision was made varied greatly among the women from Toronto. Heather Bishop remembers, “For me this issue [access to legal abortion] had to be addressed right then,” and, “It was such a struggle in those days to get the men in the movement to recognize any issues that were seen as women’s issues as being as important as others that we really had to fight for every inch of ground...so push come to shove it’s like our turn now.”<sup>78</sup> Similarly, participant Susan Kennedy recalls:

There started to be plans made for the biggest [anti-war] demonstration ever on the Saturday.... On the Friday night before we were supposed to meet at Queen’s Park.... There had been constant debate amongst the women “should we stay with the men and fight the war or should we fight for abortion?” And I remember sitting on the bus waiting for people to come.... Everybody saying “oh so and so decided to stay” and there was sort of a sense of those of us on the bus that there were lots of people to fight around the war and that would continue, but we had to be there for

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<sup>77</sup> Cathy Walker, telephone interview, February 16, 2007. For conflict at Simon Fraer University see Palmer, *Canada’s 1960s*, 289.

<sup>78</sup> Heather Bishop, telephone interview, February 20, 2007.

abortion.... I remember waiting, waiting, waiting for people to show up....  
The buses weren't quite full. Anyway, I just felt like I had to be there.<sup>79</sup>

Dante Nardone, who chose to go on the Caravan rather than stay in Toronto for the anti-war protest, explains his decision: "The way I understood it at the time was that it was a political responsibility. In other words, it was an issue that needed support and they needed men to support it. It was a matter of choosing which one was more important at that point. It was a tough choice."<sup>80</sup> These comments demonstrate understanding not only of the importance of fighting for legalized abortion, but also of the unique opportunity offered by the Caravan which, because of its national focus, had the potential to gain the type of media attention on abortion that was already afforded the anti-war movement but had not been afforded to abortion protests before.

The reasons other women made the decision to leave for Ottawa rather than stay in Toronto for the antiwar protest are more ambivalent and reflective of a perhaps greater sense of conflict over their identities and priorities. Toronto-based, Peggy Morton explains her internal conflict this way:

We'd been planning this thing [the Abortion Caravan] for a long, long time.... Then that week was the week that Nixon invaded Cambodia, and then, about five days later, announced it. So you have these huge spontaneous demonstrations all across Canada. Four days later the Ohio [Kent] State students were killed. Imagine how torn we were. We, who'd been very much a part of the anti-war movement, now we're sort of *duty-bound* to go and carry on this thing which we've started, but the whole focus of the movement that weekend is somewhere else. Here we are, we're in the Parliament, we feel *duty-bound* to do what we said we would come for, but at the same time, I think there was that real sense of here we stopped the Parliament and the thing that the entire movement, at least in

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<sup>79</sup> Susan Kennedy, telephone interview, January 2007.

<sup>80</sup> Dante Nardone, personal interview, 20 April 2007.

North America if not the world was focused on, we were far from it. So it was kind of bittersweet in that way, just because of the timing. That must have lead to discussion and debate afterwards, you know, did we handle that correctly?<sup>81</sup>

Morton's repeated use of the term "duty-bound" betrays her ambivalence at having to decide between the two protests. It also speaks to the point that although many women supported the fight for abortion rights generally, since they perceived that it was connected with women's rights overall, for them abortion was not their "key" issue and none were single-issue feminists.

In fact, for several of the women interviewed, the anti-Vietnam movement seemed to be a more important issue. Judy Pocock's memory of the decision reflects this privileging of anti-war identities:

Of course for us the excitement was...what was going on here in Toronto.... All the women went to Ottawa and all of the guys had the biggest, most militant demonstration ever around Kent State. It was huge and a bunch of the men we were involved with or were friends with were arrested. It was a very big deal. I think we probably got a lot less publicity than we would have otherwise 'cause that was such a huge thing. It was really strange because we weren't there. So on our way there was conflict because we were there doing the Abortion Caravan, *but our hearts, for many of us, were in Toronto* because that was such a big deal. And for many of us that was all part of the same thing. That's really important that those two things happened at once.<sup>82</sup>

The decision to nevertheless participate in the Caravan is reflective of how social movements not only spillover, but compete. For many of the women, the decision to support the Caravan was a moral one. Richard L. Hughes attempts to connect anti-

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<sup>81</sup> Emphasis added. Peggy Morton, telephone interview, February 17, 2007.

<sup>82</sup> Emphasis added. Judy Pocock, personal interview, November 30, 2006.

Vietnam activists to the American pro-life movement by arguing, “If the complexity of the war in Southeast Asia caused moral indecision, abortion became, at least for some, a clear case of evil.”<sup>83</sup> Along the same vein, but to a very different end, supporting “free abortion on demand” became a moral position for some Caravan participants because allowing the continued death of women as a consequence of illegal abortion was as unacceptable as were the deaths of civilians and soldiers in Vietnam.

#### **“We are forced to declare war”: The Abortion Caravan in Ottawa**

The idea that free, legal abortion is moral was conveyed through the messages of the speakers at the first event in Ottawa: the public rally held in the Railway Committee room on Parliament Hill. Estimates put the audience at between 400 and 600.<sup>84</sup> Speakers at the rally included Dodie Wepler, who recounted the Vancouver Women’s Caucus’s failed efforts to meet with government officials, Judy D’Arcy (now Darcy) from Toronto Women’s Liberation Movement, who read a brief prepared by the Abortion Caravan, New Democrat Member of Parliament Grace MacInnis, Dr. Henry Morgentaler, and anti-poverty activist Doris Power of the “Just Society Movement.” Other Members of Parliament who were present were David Lewis (New Democrat, York South), Lorne

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<sup>83</sup> Richard L. Hughes, “Burning Birth Certificates and Atomic Tupperware Parties: Creating the Antiabortion Movement in the Shadow of the Vietnam War,” *The Historian* 68, no. 3 (2006), 543.

<sup>84</sup>For various figures see Susan Becker, “Abortion Caravan sits in at 24 Sussex,” *Montreal Star*, May 11, 1970, in Abortion Caravan Scrapbook, p. 21, F-73-item1, Women’s Movement Collection (Marge Hollibaugh Collector), Simon Fraser University Archives; McCook, “Pleas for abortion greeted by silence.”; Maggie Siggins, “Abortion law protesters take coffin to PM’s home,” *Toronto Telegram*, in Abortion Caravan Scrapbook, p. 26, F-73-item1, Women’s Movement Collection (Marge Hollibaugh Collector), Simon Fraser University Archives.

Nystrom (New Democrat, Yorkton-Melville), and Gerald W. Baldwin (Progressive Conservative, Peace River).<sup>85</sup> Although Morgentaler's biographer describes the meeting in this manner, "Speaking at it were the stars of the issue: Henry, as well as New Democratic MP Grace MacInnis, the lone female member of the House," at this point Morgentaler was not universally known to the women present or recognized as a "star" of the issue.<sup>86</sup> Morgentaler began making his stance on abortion known through his participation in the Health and Welfare Committee hearings in 1967, his presence in the Montreal Humanist League, and his provision of the service at a Montreal clinic beginning in 1969; his commitment to the issue became better known following his first arrest in June 1970 for performing illegal abortions. The choice of MacInnis, in addition to the fact that she was the sole female Member of Parliament, no doubt reflects the fact that she had previously introduced a private member's bill to legalize abortion and was, thus, sympathetic to the women's stance. Her presence was also strategic since it was likely to guarantee media attention.

More striking than the choice of speakers, however, was the response of the audience members to the speeches. When MacInnis, for example, suggested to the assembled women that they compile petitions supporting legalizing abortion, some of the participants booed her. A newspaper reported the response to her suggestion in this way: "The women, however, booed her down, saying they could not wait that long."<sup>87</sup> By

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<sup>85</sup> See Becker, "Abortion Caravan sits in at 24 Sussex."

<sup>86</sup> Catherine Dunphy, *Morgentaler: A Difficult Hero* (Toronto: Random House, 1996), 92-93. In some sources, Doris Power is also referred to as Doris Powers.

<sup>87</sup> For media coverage see Siggins, "Abortion law protesters take coffin to PMs home,"; McCook, "Pleas for abortion greeted by silence,"; "Ladies talking tough to make their points," in *Abortion Caravan*

then, the women of the Caravan did not feel the government was responsive to their position on abortion. Meg Luxton asserts that “most socialist feminists assumed the state was both capitalist and patriarchal and therefore hostile to women’s concerns,” which offers another reason why some women may have booed MacInnis’s speech; she suggested an option that necessitated recognizing the state’s legitimacy and authority over the issue.<sup>88</sup> Booing MacInnis also illuminates the gulf between older, more mainstream, female activists and younger, more radical ones.

While Sethna and Hewitt suggest Morgentaler was booed “because of his sex,” Luxton’s observation about socialist-feminists provides a more nuanced explanation as to why some women similarly booed him; Morgentaler represented a medical profession that, like the government, seemed unresponsive to the women’s concerns.<sup>89</sup> He also held a position on abortion that appeared to some to be “elitist.” Two of the narrators speculate about the reception given to the Montreal doctor. Peggy Morton opines that the context surrounding the abortion debate was very complex: some women, as evidenced in the preceding chapter, were troubled by the notion forwarded by some Black power activists that abortion was being used as a weapon against their community as well as by the idea that abortion was being used as a punishment for the poor, who were promised abortions in return for consenting to sterilization. Within that context, she argues,

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Scrapbook, p. 28, F-73-item1, Women’s Movement Collection (Marge Hollibaugh Collector), Simon Fraser University Archives.

<sup>88</sup> Meg Luxton, “Feminism as a Class Act: Working-Class Feminism and the Women’s Movement in Canada,” *Labour/Le Travail* 48e (Fall 2001), paragraph 48. <http://www.historycooperative.org/journals/llt/48/03luxton.html> (accessed July 2007).

<sup>89</sup> Sethna and Hewitt, “Clandestine Operations,” 489. Moreover, the VWC were supporters of Dr. Makaroff, an abortion provider in B.C. indicating that they did not have a problem with male doctors in general, but Morgentaler specifically. See Wasserlein, ““An Arrow Aimed at the Heart,”” 83.

Morgentaler's position appeared not to be about women's choice, but about not bringing unwanted children into the world. She relates that "there was a debate, a concern about whether his position sort of had that class bias or not."<sup>90</sup> Participant Jackie Larkin's explanation concerns Morgentaler's personality: "In the early days, I think the perception about Morgentaler was that he was his own person, he didn't work with anybody, he had his own mission. So I think that that was also kind of seen as male ego stuff... The position that we took then was 'free abortion on demand' and I don't know that that was his position."<sup>91</sup> Regardless of the reasons, Morgentaler's message obviously did not resonate with all of the women present, not surprisingly given that they were tired of others speaking for them and making decisions on their behalf.

The voice that most resonated with the audience was that of Doris Power, who was approximately seven months pregnant because a therapeutic abortion committee had denied her request for an abortion. Her speech positioned her stance within her anti-poverty activism: "We the poor of Canada are dirt shovelled under the rug of a vicious economy.... I am not a young woman. I'm not one of the women who sang on the way up here, because I don't have a goddamned thing to sing about."<sup>92</sup> She reported, "Had I agreed to sterilization, I may have been granted an abortion.... It [sterilization] must be available to women on demand – not as a prerequisite to abortion, and not enforced on a certain class of people."<sup>93</sup> This assertion reinforces Morton's notion of a class bias

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<sup>90</sup> Peggy Morton, telephone interview, February 17, 2007.

<sup>91</sup> Jackie Larkin, telephone interview, April 15, 2007.

<sup>92</sup> Gwen Hauser, "Parliament Forced to Listen," *The Pedestal*, June 1970, 1.

<sup>93</sup> Doris Powers, "Statement to Abortion Caravan Rally," in *Canadian Women's Issues. Volume I: Strong Voices*, eds. Ruth Roach Pierson, Marjorie Griffen Cohen, Paula Bourne, and Philinda Masters (Toronto: James Lorimer, 1993), 125.

among certain abortion advocates and would have resonated with the socialist-feminists in attendance. Powers's description of her experience gave a tangible example of the failure of the 1969 abortion law reform: "When I was refused the abortion, the doctor asked if I would obtain an illegal abortion. I replied that many women did. He then said, 'Well, take your rosary and get the Hell out of here.'"<sup>94</sup> This excerpt of her speech likely would have enraged many women present because it not only demonstrated the complete lack of control Powers had over her own body, but highlighted how the religious and moral beliefs of those in positions of power affected women's freedom. It is unlikely that the religious undertones would have sat well with the largely atheist or agnostic audience nor with the women who did not recognize the state's legitimacy in this or other areas.

Perhaps not surprisingly given the outrage the speeches invoked, following the rally many women were not satisfied to simply disperse. Newspaper reports contended that the women's disappointment over the small number of MPs who attended the rally, despite being invited, contributed directly to their decision to march to Prime Minister Trudeau's residence at 24 Sussex Drive, an almost three kilometre walk from the Hill. The Ottawa Citizen explained the connection this way: "'Big Brother' wasn't watching. Nor was he listening.... No one from the government came to listen.... Frustrated and angry, the marchers, most of them women, headed off to 24 Sussex in hopes of flushing Prime Minister Trudeau out of his residence to hear their demands."<sup>95</sup> Between 150 and 300 women (along with a handful of men) joined arms and walked down Sussex Drive,

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<sup>94</sup> Doris Powers, "Statement to Abortion Caravan Rally," 125.

<sup>95</sup> Ottawa Citizen, 11 May, 1970, in Abortion Caravan Scrapbook, p. 25, F-73-item1, Women's Movement Collection (Marge Hollibaugh Collector), Simon Fraser University Archives.

filling one lane of traffic.<sup>96</sup> They carried signs that read “The State Does Not Belong in the Uterus of the Nation” and “We Are Furious Females.”<sup>97</sup> They sang songs and shouted chants such as “Up from the kitchen! Up from the bedroom! Up from under! Women unite!”<sup>98</sup>

When the marchers arrived at the prime minister’s residence, they found only a handful of RCMP guards whom they pushed past; then they assembled on the lawn.<sup>99</sup> Or, as the Montreal Star and Ottawa Journal respectively described, “The grounds of Prime Minister Trudeau’s residence were invaded Saturday” and “some 150 angry feminists laid siege to Prime Minister Trudeau’s residence.”<sup>100</sup> Another newspaper recorded the RCMP response: “An RCMP officer said this was the first time a group has managed to get on to the Prime Minister’s grounds although many have tried. He admitted that the strength of the women had been underestimated.”<sup>101</sup> Joan Eliesen recalls feeling trepidation over the RCMP that were on horses, but notes, “They weren’t as aggressive as I’m sure they would have been had we not been women.... They didn’t quite know what to do with us.”<sup>102</sup> That the women chose not to push into the residence could reflect, among other things, the newness of this sort of abortion rights protest, an uncertainty of boundaries, an unwillingness to jeopardize the Monday protest, and for some a fear of or concern about being arrested. Moreover, given the spontaneous nature

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<sup>96</sup> The Telegram’s estimates of the crowd – “about 650 women and 50 men” – is larger than most estimates. See Siggins, “Abortion law protesters take coffin to PMs home.”

<sup>97</sup> Siggins, “Abortion law protesters take coffin to PMs home.”

<sup>98</sup> See “Ladies talking tough to make their points.”

<sup>99</sup> Sethna and Hewitt put the number of guards at 8. See Sethna and Hewitt, “Clandestine Operations,” 490.

<sup>100</sup> Stan McDowell, “Abortion backers dump coffin at PM’s door,” Toronto Star, in Abortion Caravan Scrapbook, p. 24, F-73-item1, Women’s Movement Collection (Marge Hollibaugh Collector), Simon Fraser University Archives.

<sup>101</sup> Siggins, “Abortion law protesters take coffin to PMs home.”

<sup>102</sup> Joan Eliesen, telephone interview, 15 April 2007.

of the protest, the women had not planned the logistics or agreed upon any course of action.

After some moments of uncertainty, the protesters began to sit on the lawn; newspaper accounts put the sit-in at one half to two hours.<sup>103</sup> The women recall exchanges with the RCMP (some women called them “pigs”) and exchanges with one another (some women objected to others calling the RCMP “pigs”).<sup>104</sup> Since the three officials with whom the women were most interested in meeting – Prime Minister Trudeau, Justice Minister Turner, and Health Minister Munro – were all unavailable, negotiations between the women and the RCMP began instead. An aide of Trudeau’s, Gordon Gibson, was not recognized by most women from Ontario, when he emerged from the residence, but the women from British Columbia recognized him from that province. His bumbling and ineffectual exchange with the women is well-documented in the newspaper accounts and remembered by the women involved. It is reported that he won immediate disapproval from the women, as described by participant Kathryn Keate in Saturday Night: “He doesn’t tell us who he is or what his position is. ‘Just thought I’d come out and see what I can do,’ he tells us glibly.... He asks us to leave, calling us ‘ladies’ (!) and addressing one of our leaders as ‘Miss’ in a very now-now-girls tone of voice.... He leaves, somewhat embarrassed.”<sup>105</sup> This exchange between Gibson and the

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<sup>103</sup> See “Angry Feminists Cry Out For ‘Free Abortion’ Laws,” Ottawa Citizen, May 11, 1970, in Abortion Caravan Scrapbook, p. 24, F-73-item1, Women’s Movement Collection (Marge Hollibaugh Collector), Simon Fraser University Archives; Siggins, “Abortion law protesters take coffin to PMs home,”; Marcy Cohen, telephone interview, March 2, 2007.

<sup>104</sup> Becker, “Abortion Caravan sits in at 24 Sussex.”

<sup>105</sup> Kathryn Keate, “‘Out from under, Women Unite!’: Personal notes of an activist in the Women’s Liberation Movement,” Saturday Night, July 1970, 17.

women exhibits the frustration the women had been experiencing in terms of confronting male chauvinism within both their social movement groups and on a social level.

Despite this hiccup, the women negotiated to leave after being allowed to place their coffin on the doorstep of Trudeau's home. As the coffin was placed, Margo Dunn made a speech about the tools of the illegal abortionist and how each one contributed to the death of Canadian women:

There are garbage bags on top of that coffin. These are used to pack the uterus to induce labor. Since they are not sterile, they often cause massive infection, resulting in sterilization, permanent disability, or death.... There are knitting needles on top of that coffin. These are used to put in the vagina in order to pierce the uterus. Severe bleeding results.... There is a bottle which is a container of Lysol, on top of that coffin. When used for cleaning, it is in solution. Women seeking to abort themselves inject it full strength into their vaginas. This results in severe burning of tissues, haemorrhage, and shock. Death comes within a matter of minutes. Intense, agonizing pain is suffered until the time of death.... There is part of a vacuum cleaner on top of that coffin. The hose is placed in the vagina in order to extract the fetus, but results in the whole uterus being sucked from the pelvic cavity.<sup>106</sup>

Dunn's speech highlighted the lengths to which some women would go not to be pregnant, underlining the personal experiences behind the call for legal abortion. This section of Dunn's speech, a grisly and emotional edict, does not appear to have been quoted in any newspapers. She also repeated some of the information conveyed in the VWC's original letter to the government announcing the Abortion Caravan, including their declaration of war and the unacceptability of women's deaths from illegal abortions.

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<sup>106</sup> Keate identifies Dunn as "Elsa," but the women interviewed in Rebeck's book verify Dunn as the speaker. The women often used names of famous feminists rather than their own names when speaking to the media. See Keate, "'Out from under, Women Unite!'," 17; Rebeck, *Ten Thousand Roses*, 42.

Following Dunn's speech, the women voluntarily dispersed as rain began to fall. During that protest, the choices the women made speak to the messages they were seeking to convey. They chose a non-violent sit-down, but expressed a clear brazenness by pushing past the RCMP onto the prime minister's lawn. They stopped at the lawn, despite feeling they could have pushed further. They chose to leave only after negotiating to place their coffin on the doorstep. Their unwillingness to be easily dispersed reflects both their veteran status as experienced protesters (even if new to abortion protests), but also the fact that they had been pushed by government inaction to act outside the boundaries of "legitimate" protest. They specifically highlighted how illegal and dangerous abortions, whether self-induced or performed by others, led to the intolerable deaths of Canadian women. The Montreal Star, unaware of the women's plans to protest inside the House the following day, described the demonstration at 24 Sussex as having "represented the climax of [the] Abortion Caravan."<sup>107</sup> The action demonstrated a new willingness to address a once taboo or private issue in a forum that was neither safe, nor specifically female, nor governmentally sanctioned and likely to receive media attention.<sup>108</sup> It is also another example, not unlike their guerrilla theatre performances, in which they inserted themselves physically into the abortion struggle – in this instance using both their words and their bodies to make a point.

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<sup>107</sup> Becker, "Abortion Caravan sits in at 24 Sussex."

<sup>108</sup> Following the protest at Trudeau's residence, the women dispersed and, with the ever-present anti-war movement in mind, joined members of the Viet Nam Mobilization Committee and Students For A Democratic Society for an anti-war demonstration at the National War Memorial. The Toronto Star's report of this protest demonstrates the spillover between identities: "Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau was burned in effigy, called a murderer and had a coffin planted on his doorstep Saturday in a chain of demonstrations linking supporters of free abortion with opponents of the Viet Nam war and a handful of Quebec separatists." See McDowell, "Abortion backers dump coffin at PM's door."

While the protest at 24 Sussex was spontaneous, the one that was to occur inside the House of Commons on Monday was not. The details about that protest, however, had not been fully decided in advance. Discussions that took the better part of Sunday night helped flesh out those details. For their time in Ottawa the women were lodged in a vacant school, and it was there that the participants congregated for these deliberations. Initially the women splintered into groups based on their town or city of origin to make choices on their own before coming together as a single group to share their decisions. Interviewee Jackie Larkin recalls that there was supposed to have been a party that night following the meeting, but discussions lasted into the early morning hours, eclipsing any celebrations.<sup>109</sup> Kennedy recalls, “We were up late having a struggle session until about 4 o’clock in the morning.”<sup>110</sup> P.A. recalls that such sessions were frequent, suggesting “There were always, in the sixties, different fractions and factions and there were always debates.”<sup>111</sup> Walker concurs, “Life was one long meeting at that stage.”<sup>112</sup> These sessions and the seemingly endless debates and divisions around issues, well documented in histories of women’s liberation movements, reflect both the consensus-based decision making the women engaged in and the relative youth of the women’s liberation movement whereby determining their positions on issues necessitated this type of soul-searching discussion. Some of the narrators seemed reluctant to talk about the disagreements or conflicts that occurred between the women during this evening of discussion. This reluctance, however, could stem from the substance of some of the

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<sup>109</sup> Jackie Larkin, telephone interview, April 15, 2007.

<sup>110</sup> Susan Kennedy, telephone interview, January 2007.

<sup>111</sup> P.A., personal interview, October 26, 2006. Kennedy and N.T.R. concur on this point.

<sup>112</sup> Cathy Walker, telephone interview, February 16, 2007.

decisions that were made at the time; while they felt justifiable then, time and distance has altered the way some women recall the choices made that night.

About the Sunday night discussion, narrators remember points of contention differently. Memories differ, for example, over whether or not the decision to protest inside the House was planned in Vancouver or was spontaneous. Women from Vancouver recall departing that city already knowing that they intended to protest inside the House of Commons. Marcy Cohen remembers that the Vancouver women had brought skirts, nylons, and make-up with them, all items necessary for “doing that transformation” that would enable them to enter the House without raising suspicions among the guards.<sup>113</sup> Others, like N.T.R., argue for the spontaneity of the event, recalling, “People had given up a lot of time, a lot of money, a lot of energy to plan this, and it was just under the radar.” She and others felt there was a need for an act of civil disobedience in the form of disrupting House proceedings: “I felt if we didn’t do it, the Caravan would have been for nothing.”<sup>114</sup> An Ottawa resident at the time of the Abortion Caravan, Larkin explains that there was some feeling by women in Ottawa that the women from Toronto and Vancouver were “way more radical” and concurs with N.T.R.’s recollection that some women, a grouping that would have included women from Ottawa primarily and some from Toronto, had to be talked into civil disobedience.<sup>115</sup> Cohen’s recollection unites these perspectives, “The experience of Ontario was that we kind of had to wait for them to decide it was a good idea too and to

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<sup>113</sup> Marcy Cohen, telephone interview, March 2, 2007.

<sup>114</sup> N.T.R., telephone interview, October 31, 2006.

<sup>115</sup> See author interviews with Eliesen, Larkin, and Cohen.

make it their own and to buy into it.”<sup>116</sup> Once the women who were assembled on that Sunday evening agreed to enter the House, a larger and more divisive discussion over who would enter the House followed.

Geography, money, and personal responsibilities factored into the decision of who was chosen or allowed to go into the House of Commons. So, too, did personality and politics. Narrator Cathy Walker, who had participated in the occupation of the administration building at Simon Fraser University in November 1968, argues that experience had shown the protesters that getting arrested was “enormously draining of money and time when you get into large numbers of people having to go to court,” and so many argued vigorously to limit the number of women going into the House. Specifically, they decided that “anybody who was going in would have to be prepared to be arrested,” and it was important “that they not have any prior criminal record of any kind and that they not be at risk of deportation if they were a landed immigrant or on a student visa or something.”<sup>117</sup> For some women, parental responsibilities also negated their participation. One woman, for example, was nearing the end of her pregnancy, while another was caring for her newborn daughter; neither felt she could risk arrest.<sup>118</sup> Betsy Wood, mother to four teenagers, was not herself concerned about being arrested, but some of the other women present expressed concern on her behalf. Or, at least, they cited this reason to explain why they did not support her entering the House.

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<sup>116</sup> Marcy Cohen, telephone interview, March 2, 2007.

<sup>117</sup> Cathy Walker, telephone interview, February 16, 2007. N. T. R concurs on this point. N.T.R, telephone interview, October 31, 2006.

<sup>118</sup> P.A., personal interview, October 26, 2006; Joan Eliesen, telephone interview, April 15, 2007.

The debate over whether or not Wood should enter the House seems to have had less to do with her four children and more to do with the perception of her politics. As noted earlier, Wood was at odds with several other VWC members over the “smash capitalism” slogan, a conflict that only worsened in Toronto when Wood was perceived to be associating with the New Feminists who had splintered from TWLM. Wood recalls being shocked by the decision to let only three women from Vancouver (Marcy Cohen, Ellen Woodsworth, and Dawn Carrell Hemingway) enter the House, but that seemingly “any teenager who had joined up along the way could go in.”<sup>119</sup> Wood’s facetious comment does not mask the deep hurt she felt or the complex emotions surrounding the decision. Rebick’s book includes the following exchange between Betsy Wood, Marcy Cohen, Jackie Larkin, and Ellen Woodsworth:

**Betsy:** Only three of us from Vancouver could go in, and I wasn’t going to be one of them. Finally Mary Trew stood up and said, ‘Is this a plan to keep Betsy out?’ and a woman said ‘Yes.’ The reason given was to protect me. If we were charged by the police, there would be trips back and forth to Ottawa, and since I had four kids, I couldn’t afford it, or so they said.

**Marcy:** We were all part of that decision. It was torturous, and there was a lot of discussion as to who could hold the position of the group. There was a feeling that some people had a different philosophy from the rest of the group about how we should be arguing our position on abortion and how to deal with the police or a trial.

**Ellen:** Our differences were not only over the “smash capitalism” slogan and dope smoking. We were debating whether we were for the right to abortion only, or whether we were fighting to smash a system....

**Betsy:** The only division I saw was that this was not the place for “Smash capitalism”.... But as sisters, everyone else was making up my mind for me.

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<sup>119</sup> Betsy Wood, telephone interview, May 13, 2007.

**Jackie:** I think a lot of what went on was the political immaturity of the movement.<sup>120</sup>

In our interview, when queried about the exclusion of Wood, Cohen asserts, “In the Vancouver group, people didn’t choose Betsy to go in because people didn’t trust her politics at that point and that was extremely hurtful for her and she was particularly angry at me. Because I was sort of the leader, one of the main leaders.”<sup>121</sup> Cohen contends the exclusion stemmed, in part, from their distrust of Wood’s politics, but also argues that some distrust was “legitimate” because Wood “was very individualistic and if the group decided something, she might do something different. So there was some justification, but I think things were wrong with what we did or how we framed things as well.”<sup>122</sup> To some degree, while an example of intolerance, this was also an insistence on conformity which, while it does not jive with a generation characterized by a counter-cultural identity that was grounded in non-conformity, makes some sense given the “immaturity,” in Larkin’s words, of the women’s liberation movement. At their first national protest, they felt it was important to present a united front. Arguably, doing so would have underscored their authority over the issue. As well, decisions resulting from consensus-based decision making do not satisfy all members of the group equally.

Dissatisfaction with the group’s decision manifested when the VWC returned to Vancouver. There, Caucus member Mary Trew reflected on the “political

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<sup>120</sup> Rebick, *Ten Thousand Roses*, 42-43. Margo Dunn was involved in the exchange, but is not quoted here. In our interview, Cohen seemed to express guilt at the way Wood had been excluded and stressed, at different points throughout the interview, how integral Wood had been to the conception and planning of the Caravan.

<sup>121</sup> Marcy Cohen, telephone interview, March 2, 2007.

<sup>122</sup> Marcy Cohen, telephone interview, March 2, 2007.

disagreements” that emerged in the Ottawa discussion for an article in The Pedestal. In it she reasoned, “We should ask ourselves who will enter this movement if only so-called Marxists are included?” She also criticized “the attempt to exclude women who weren’t ‘pure’ in their politics from in fact playing any kind of leadership role,” which she labelled “a sort of witch-hunting in reverse.”<sup>123</sup> Wood was different from most women because of her political views, her perception of the focus of the Caravan (abortion versus overthrowing the entire capitalist system), and her age. Reflecting on the decision, Wood states, “I just can’t understand because every night we were up until 2 in the morning talking about sisterhood and I just can’t imagine why then when we got to Ottawa this split came.” She continues, “One woman said ‘Don’t you understand Betsy, it’s like Mayor Campbell (then mayor of Vancouver), when Mayor Campbell talks about ‘the community’, he’s not including the hippies. When they talked about sisterhood, they’re not including you.’ But I thought I was part of the sisterhood.”<sup>124</sup>

Other women do not recall planning discussions as being as acrimonious as Trew’s reflections suggest. Rather, their recollections are more harmonious, as in Peggy Morton’s assertion, “We really worked as a collective.”<sup>125</sup> Pocock concurs, arguing that the Caravan was “very much of a collective experience.”<sup>126</sup> Charnie Guettel similarly says, “What I remember was the unity, because we didn’t agree, but we were unified.”<sup>127</sup> N.T.R. reflects, “It was a good experience of collective discussion, decision making, in which participation was universal and the conclusion was that everyone’s views were

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<sup>123</sup> Mary Trew, “How We Differ,” The Pedestal, June 1970, 1, 8.

<sup>124</sup> Betsy Wood, telephone interview, May 13, 2007.

<sup>125</sup> Peggy Morton, telephone interview, February 17, 2007.

<sup>126</sup> Bishop, too, states, “my recollection was of a pretty unified group.”

<sup>127</sup> Charnie Guettel, personal interview, February 26, 2007.

respected and people had the opportunity to express them in a meaningful way... which was to ultimately influence legislation and to bring this into as much public spotlight as possible.”<sup>128</sup> It could be that these women did not perceive the debating as discordant because they were not a part of the VWC and were less affected by the divisiveness because they were from Toronto. As well, both Morton and N.T.R. participated in the House of Commons protest, so they were “victors” in a sense. Alternatively, their remembrances could reflect those of Dawn Carrell Hemingway, who was a part of the VWC, and reflects, “I don’t recall it as ‘conflict’ but I do remember differences of opinion.”<sup>129</sup> In general, aside from Wood and Cohen, the women I interviewed did not recall the deliberations as a negative experience.

Still other details were determined on that Sunday evening and preparations began early Monday morning. Plans were also made for the concurrent protest that was to be held outside Parliament. Women would circle the eternal flame, chanting and giving speeches. They planned to wear black kerchiefs which, as one woman recalled, were worn “for the death of women, unnecessary deaths from botched abortions.” She recalls the outside protest “was meant as a diversionary action so that’s what the government would think we were doing, not going in the House.”<sup>130</sup> At 3:00 p.m. they planned to remove the black scarves to reveal red ones that symbolized their declaration of war; one newspaper reported that the kerchiefs were worn “in the style of women of the French Revolution.”<sup>131</sup> In preparation, Betsy Wood and another woman went out early on the

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<sup>128</sup> N.T.R, telephone interview, October 31, 2006.

<sup>129</sup> Dawn Carrell Hemingway, written interview, April 29, 2007.

<sup>130</sup> Marcy Cohen, telephone interview, March 2, 2007.

<sup>131</sup> Sanger, “Angry Women Halt Sitting of Parliament.”

Monday morning to purchase the red and black material from a local fabric store. As well, some narrators recall that early on Monday morning, the few men involved went out to purchase the chains the women would need to secure themselves to the chairs in the galleries.<sup>132</sup> One woman recalls that Dante Nardone purchased a large number of chains from a pet store by telling the owner he was opening a kennel.<sup>133</sup>

The women who planned to enter the House made more intensive preparations. Those who had not brought “proper” clothing with them busied themselves finding such clothes, while all of the women entering the House had to style their hair and apply make-up. Their ability to look “presentable” – what Sethna and Hewitt describe as “decorous, white, middle-class, heterosexual femininity” – and quite unlike the stereotypical image of the women’s liberationist – was central to their success.<sup>134</sup> Susan Kennedy remembers that she was able to attend the protest inside the House because “I was one of the women who could pass for ‘straight.’”<sup>135</sup> Immediately following the caravan, participant Kathryn Keate described the process women undertook to prepare themselves and voiced dismay over the frenzy that seemed to go into the preparations because she perceived that women had lost sight of the reason for the protest, arguing that there was an “atmosphere of a high school prom.”<sup>136</sup> Supporting her observation of the festive atmosphere, although without Keate’s censure, is N.T.R.’s description of the events: “We were dressed up as much as possible. The Ottawa contingent lent us clothes

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<sup>132</sup> For an account of the debate over whether or not to use chains, see Keate, “Out from under, Women Unite!”, 18.

<sup>133</sup> N.T.R. confirms the use of chains purchased at pet stores, which the women carried in their purses and pockets, and is still in possession of hers. N.T.R., telephone interview, October 31, 2006.

<sup>134</sup> Sethna and Hewitt, “Clandestine Operations,” 492.

<sup>135</sup> Susan Kennedy, telephone interview, January 2007.

<sup>136</sup> Keate “Out from under, Women Unite!,” 19.

to make us look like normal people. Those of us who normally never wore make-up made up, we all put on lipstick and eyeliner. It was kind of fun, it was like a dress up.”<sup>137</sup> Heather Bishop, who recalls borrowing clothes from the Ottawa women, relates, “We hadn’t gone with dress up clothes and we had to look like tourists, so they lent us clothes.”<sup>138</sup> Larkin agrees that there was a “scramble to get appropriate clothes...to get into the gallery unnoticed.”<sup>139</sup> Peggy Morton’s recollection highlights the irony of the transformation the women underwent:

I remember, it was so funny, if you can just imagine these 30 to 40 odd young women with the typical dress of the time, putting on make-up for the first time in years – we’d all sworn off make-up – doing our hair in these nice little buns, and putting on high heels and nylons, and all these clothes that we hadn’t worn in years, making ourselves look like such nice little things, then getting into the gallery and then chaining ourselves.<sup>140</sup>

The change in appearance was considered a necessary precursor to the women’s success since they could not protest in the House if they could not get past the guards.

On Monday, May 11, at the outside protest approximately 80 women, holding placards and shouting chants, circled the eternal flame and listened to speeches made by women among them.<sup>141</sup> Describing this outside protest, the Montreal Gazette, reported, “Donning red bandanas, they chanted ‘No more women will die’ and ‘Free abortion on demand’ and then listened to one of their leaders [Betsy Wood] tell them: ‘We will no

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<sup>137</sup> N.T.R., telephone interview, October 31, 2006.

<sup>138</sup> Heather Bishop, telephone interview, February 20, 2007.

<sup>139</sup> Jackie Larkin, telephone interview, April 15, 2007.

<sup>140</sup> Peggy Morton, telephone interview, February 17, 2007.

<sup>141</sup> The crowd of women was smaller on the Monday because it was a work day. For the estimation of 80 women protesting outside, see Brian McKenna “MPs Study Ways to Curb Disruptions,” Montreal Star, May 12, 1970, in Abortion Caravan Scrapbook, p. 30, F-73-item1, Women’s Movement Collection (Marge Hollibaugh Collector), Simon Fraser University Archives.

longer permit irresponsible male legislators to use this law to repress us. The women of Canada answer with fire.”<sup>142</sup> The Globe and Mail quoted one woman telling those assembled, “The legislators made this murderous law.... They won’t listen to us. We are forced to declare war. Women are enslaved.” It then described how one protester burned a “large parchment” upon which was written the relevant section of the Criminal Code because the women “no longer recognize laws that destroy rather than protect lives.”<sup>143</sup> The declaration of war illustrates how the Trudeau administration, as well as the individual provincial administrations and medical associations, had lost legitimacy in the eyes of the women who planned and participated in the Caravan. After repeated requests for meetings were denied, these peace activists became warriors. Rather than not understanding participatory democracy, as Turner would later claim, these women signalled their belief that democracy was not working for them, that it had lost its authority.<sup>144</sup>

For the inside protest the women entered the House separately so as not to arouse suspicions among the security staff. Some entered the House in pairs, some were accompanied by a male protestor, and some entered alone; the idea behind these staggered entries was that the women would look like tourists, not protestors. As they walked up to the House of Commons, the women recall that they were careful not to look at the protestors outside so as to appear that they did not know them. Cohen remembers

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<sup>142</sup> Gordon Pape, “Women Yelling for Abortion Halt Commons,” Montreal Gazette, May 12, 1970, 1, 2.

<sup>143</sup> See Sanger, “Angry Women Halt Sitting of Parliament”; McKenna “MPs Study Ways to Curb Disruptions”; Wayne MacDonald, “Protective shield urged for MPs,” Vancouver Sun, May 15, 1970, in Abortion Caravan Scrapbook, p. 39, F-73-item1, Women’s Movement Collection (Marge Hollibaugh Collector), Simon Fraser University Archives.

<sup>144</sup> See Sanger, “Angry Women Halt Sitting of Parliament”; McKenna “MPs Study Ways to Curb Disruptions”; Wayne MacDonald, “Protective shield urged for MPs.”

“waiting in line and not saying hello to these other people that we knew.”<sup>145</sup> Once inside, the women spread out through the Members and Opposition galleries, having obtained and forged passes to both. As they took their seats, they tried to fasten their chains without being noticed. Some succeeded, while others failed when they encountered difficulties with their locks; instead they tried to loop the chains together as effectively as possible. One protestor managed to connect a microphone to the simultaneous translation box at her seat, which would give her voice added strength once the protest began. Each sat with her portion of the speech that had been prepared the night before.

At approximately ten minutes before 3:00 pm, the first woman stood and began to read her excerpt of the speech. As the guards removed her, another woman followed, and soon all of the women were on their feet or, if successfully chained, seated, shouting their demands; the ordered protest gave way to a chorus of voices instead. One newspaper described the protest this way: “The women rose at first one at a time and were physically removed from the galleries by Commons guards; but eventually they rose in unison to chant ‘free abortion on demand.’”<sup>146</sup> Another article quoted a guard as saying, “They were popping up all over the place.”<sup>147</sup> The following slogans were shouted down from the galleries: “free abortion on demand,” “we demand free abortion,” “we want control of our bodies,” “no more women will die,” and “they have killed 2,000 of our sisters.”<sup>148</sup>

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<sup>145</sup> Marcy Cohen, telephone interview, March 2, 2007.

<sup>146</sup> Ben Tierney and Peter Calamai, “Free-Abortionists’ Bring House To Halt,” Calgary Herald, May 11, 1970, 1.

<sup>147</sup> See Sanger, “Angry Women Halt Sitting of Parliament.”

<sup>148</sup> The Globe and Mail article reported that the official Hansard record reads: “Editor’s note: At this point there was an interruption from the public gallery developing into a series of interruptions which continued until the adjournment of the House,” in Abortion Caravan Scrapbook, p. 35a, F-73-item 1, Women’s Movement Collection (Marge Hollibaugh Collector), Simon Fraser University Archives.

Details are unclear, but at this time the women are said to have thrown paper and a water balloon down to the House floor.

The reaction of Parliamentary members (and security officers) to the disruption varied. A few narrators remember New Democrat Member of Parliament Ed Broadbent turning to the women and smiling, apparently in appreciation of their moxie. The newspapers reported that at first several members of Parliament laughed or pounded their tables, believing that the women were joking. In The Pedestal, Gwen Hauser wrote that when “the guards were unable to stop us, the MPs became increasingly disturbed. Shouting cries of ‘Whores!’ ‘Sluts!’ and other goodies from a male chauvinist repertoire, some of them rushed up into the galleries.”<sup>149</sup> One article records the MPs response in this way: “After the initial surprise some MPs reacted with loud laughter, others with desk thumping, but when a feminist screamed down that the women were dead serious and the issue wasn’t a laughing matter the reaction turned to anger.”<sup>150</sup> Once it became clear that removing the women would take some time, given the necessity of cutting through chains, the Speaker of the House, Lucien Lamoureux, recessed the session, which was unprecedented and guaranteed media coverage.

It took between fifteen and thirty minutes to remove the women from the galleries. A Calgary Herald article reported, “No injuries were reported as a result of the scuffles between Commons guards and demonstrators although the exchanges were at times violent,” and noted that “guards were seen to gag the women with their hands.”<sup>151</sup>

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<sup>149</sup> Hauser, “Parliament Forced to Listen,” 124.

<sup>150</sup> McKenna “MPs Study Ways to Curb Disruptions.”

<sup>151</sup> Tierney and Calamai, “Free-Abortionists’ Bring House To Halt,” 1.

The Montreal Gazette quoted one protester's description of the guards' actions: "They gagged us. They lifted my sister beside me and pushed her throat against the wall so she was coughing and couldn't breathe. The other guy grabbed my mouth very firmly and was holding it and trying to stick his hand in my mouth. He forced me backward over the chair so I was almost fainting."<sup>152</sup> Once they were freed, the women descended from the galleries to rejoin their fellow protestors outside. Susan Kennedy recalls joining arms and singing Bread and Roses, specifically the line "we come marching, marching," as she descended the large wooden staircases from the galleries.<sup>153</sup> Others remember that some women were briefly detained, but that no one was arrested. Outside the press questioned the women about the action; articles filled newspapers across the country over the next few days.

### **Reactions and Remembrances**

Press coverage of the Abortion Caravan indicates that the media seemed to take the women seriously. In some cases the reporting was alarmist in tone and content. Many newspaper reports focused on the apparent organization behind the Caravan. The Winnipeg Free Press account of the demonstration in the House was especially strident in tone:

Complete disorder and pandemonium took over the Commons Monday as 31 young women rose one after another in the public and members' galleries and screamed at startled MPs 'free abortion on demand.' It was

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<sup>152</sup> Pape, "Women Yelling for Abortion Halt Commons."

<sup>153</sup> Susan Kennedy, telephone interview, January 2007.

chaos and confusion of the street demonstrations moved into the galleries of the House of Commons. A harassed and frustrated protective staff found it impossible to cope with the well-planned and co-ordinated moves to disrupt the proceedings of parliament.... Bedlam broke loose at 2:45 p.m. For five frantic, desperate minutes the guards struggled with the squirming, shouting and screaming women.

Moreover, it contended, "Parliament had been overwhelmed by the screaming tumult.

MPs sat in shocked silence. Never had they experienced anything like this before in the Commons."<sup>154</sup> This article also called the protest "one of the best organized ever to disrupt Parliament."<sup>155</sup> The Calgary Herald reported: "Shouting and chanting from every part of the public galleries, about 100 women forced adjournment of the House of Commons sitting today.... It was clearly a well-organized protest."<sup>156</sup> The exaggerations of the number of women who participated conveys not only the sense of disorder, but the enthusiasm with which the 36 women protested. The Montreal Gazette compared the protest to "tactics reminiscent of the suffragette movement" and suggested it "was a masterpiece of timing and organization," which does not actually represent the evolution of the protest and the fact that many details were determined just hours before, but likely was a reaction to the unprecedented recessing of Parliament.<sup>157</sup> This nod to the women's apparent organization underlines that they were not simply dismissed, but were taken seriously – at least by some observers.

The serious and alarmist nature of the coverage is also evident in language choices made by the newspapers. The Montreal Star, for example, reported, "At the

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<sup>154</sup> Victor Mackie "Protestors Force House to Adjourn" Winnipeg Free Press, May 12, 1970, in Abortion Caravan Scrapbook, p. 36, F-73-item1, Women's Movement Collection (Marge Hollibaugh Collector), Simon Fraser University Archives.

<sup>155</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>156</sup> Tierney and Calamai, "'Free-Abortions' Bring House To Halt," 1.

<sup>157</sup> Pape, "Women Yelling for Abortion Halt Commons."

height of the demonstration a water bomb was thrown into the chamber. It landed in front of a startled MP but failed to burst.”<sup>158</sup> The Toronto Star similarly reported, “One woman hurled a water bomb at the government benches before she was rushed from the galleries.... The water bomb made of a thin, plastic-like membrane, landed near the empty seat of Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau.”<sup>159</sup> This “water bomb” sounds suspiciously like a water balloon. The decision to call a “water balloon” a “water bomb” while perhaps an attempt to convey the potential seriousness of such a security breach, also misrepresents and escalates the actual threat that was involved.<sup>160</sup> Both generally and in reference to the “water bomb”, the newspapers’ responses to the Caravan reflect the fact that the protest was groundbreaking in its brazenness. It also may reflect the fact that the protest followed closely on the Kent State shootings and their aftermath and was likely a response to the perception of the growing militancy of some protest groups. Sethna and Hewitt argue that the Caravan was perceived as a threat, at least by the RCMP, because of its links to “Trotskyist groups” and not because of its aim of legalizing abortion.<sup>161</sup> At least some of the media’s perception of these women, however, indicates they were indeed taken very seriously.

Still, there is something to the argument that the fears were less about the women and more the concern that the action would set a precedent. Contemplating the repercussions of the protest, a Montreal Star article began, “In the wake of an historic disruption of Parliament by the Women’s Liberation Movement, shaken party leaders are

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<sup>158</sup> McKenna, “MPs Study Ways to Curb Disruptions.”

<sup>159</sup> McDowell, “Abortion backers dump coffin at PM’s door.”

<sup>160</sup> Oddly Sethna and Hewitt choose not to interrogate this language, but instead reproduce it. See Sethna and Hewitt, “Clandestine Operations,” 492. McKenna “MPs Study Ways to Curb Disruptions.”

<sup>161</sup> Sethna and Hewitt, “Clandestine Operations,” 485.

today considering far ranging measures to prevent similar outbreaks by other militant protest groups.”<sup>162</sup> It further suggested that “MPs from all parties are alarmed that yesterday’s fireworks may catch on like aircraft hijackings, with other movements following swiftly on the heels of the women’s demonstration.” The Ottawa Citizen stated, “Screaming, ranting women demonstrating for free abortion forced the Commons to a halt Monday, causing fears that similar protests could cripple the parliamentary system.” It continued, “Solicitor-General McIlraith warned that if other, more sinister groups take up this tactic, Parliament would be unable to function.”<sup>163</sup> The reference to “other more sinister groups” betrays a bias against the Caravan women; it suggests they were not considered a serious threat explains why no one was arrested.

The responses of various governmental officials, as recorded by the media, to the women’s disruption of the House of Commons were varied. Following the protest, the Montreal Star quoted New Democrat Lorne Nystrom, then 24 years old and the youngest Member of Parliament, as saying, “I wouldn’t have done it myself – but I understand their frustration.... If nothing else, it sure as hell shook up the old MPs. At least now they’ll start thinking about the issue.”<sup>164</sup> Andrew Brewin, the New Democrat Member of Parliament for Greenwood, is reported as having said,

I think they’ve got a lot of guts and gumption. If they have a good case they have to find some way to bring it to the attention of the public and members of parliament. This they have now done. Perhaps the way they did it was a bit dubious. But remember their grandmothers had to do the

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<sup>162</sup> McKenna “MPs Study Ways to Curb Disruptions.”

<sup>163</sup> Greg Connolly, “House Screams to a Halt,” Ottawa Citizen May 12, 1970, in Abortion Caravan Scrapbook, p. 33, F-73-item 1, Women’s Movement Collection (Marge Hollibaugh Collector), Simon Fraser University Archives.

<sup>164</sup> McKenna “MPs Study Ways to Curb Disruptions.”

same thing, fighting for women's rights. They were pushed and shoved around in the suffragette movement but they finally made their point.<sup>165</sup>

Other Members of Parliament seemed to want to put the issue to rest. The Globe and Mail, for example, quoted Liberal MP Jack Cullen, from Sarnia, as having said, "This thing has been blown out of proportion, and these women given more publicity than they warranted."<sup>166</sup> One MP who seemed among the most upset likely felt this way because his name was forged on a gallery pass. The Progressive Conservative representative for Grand Falls-White-Bay-Labrador, Ambrose Peddle, announced that he was asking for an RCMP investigation into the forged passes, and said: "Forgery is a crime."<sup>167</sup> The Ottawa Citizen reported of the investigation into the women's use of forged passes, "Some of those [MPs] victimized...strongly opposed any easing of abortion law," suggesting that the women likely chose to use their names ironically.<sup>168</sup> This article, under a subtitle "Nazi-style tactics," quoted the Progressive Conservative Member of Parliament for Oxford, Wallace Nesbitt, describing the protest as "something like the tactics the Nazis used in the thirties to break the German parliamentary system."<sup>169</sup>

The harshest criticism of the women's action came from one of the government officials they had been most interested in meeting, Minister of Justice John Turner. The Globe and Mail quoted Turner as having stated that it was "likely that these young

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<sup>165</sup> Mackie "Protestors Force House to Adjourn."

<sup>166</sup> Sanger, "Signatures forged in abortion protest."

<sup>167</sup> Sanger, "Signatures forged in abortion protest."

<sup>168</sup> Connolly, "House Screams to a Halt."

<sup>169</sup> Connolly, "House Screams to a Halt."

women don't understand the democratic process.”<sup>170</sup> Turner further dismissed the women by saying, “He would not submit ‘to ultimatum or public blackmail. These ladies demonstrate a lack of patience that makes dialogue virtually impossible.... I would not think this would be the way to convince the Canadian public of the legitimacy of their cause.’”<sup>171</sup> Their failed attempts to meet with provincial politicians meant that it is unlikely that the women misunderstood the democratic process. Rather they had reached a point where it lacked legitimacy for them. Still, Turner's criticism holds some validity. While the women gained a lot of publicity from the Caravan weekend, in the years following the Caravan, the manner in which they framed the politics of abortion evolved. Jackie Larkin explains the changing message by arguing, “When you're trying to win a social majority...things like a woman's right to choose became a way more effective slogan in connecting with more people” than was the slogan “free abortion on demand.”<sup>172</sup> Trudeau's response to the women can be situated in relation to this latter point. While no official response from the Prime Minister is recorded in the immediate aftermath of the Caravan, when Trudeau met with many of the same women in Vancouver in June 1970, he told them in relation to decriminalizing abortion: “It is your job to change public morality. The public is not ready for this.”<sup>173</sup> Ultimately, then, key government officials were relatively unresponsive to the Abortion Caravan.

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<sup>170</sup> See Sanger, “Angry Women Halt Sitting of Parliament,”; McKenna “MPs Study Ways to Curb Disruptions,”; Wayne MacDonald, “Protective shield urged for MPs.”

<sup>171</sup> See Sanger, “Angry Women Halt Sitting of Parliament,”; McKenna “MPs Study Ways to Curb Disruptions,”; Wayne MacDonald, “Protective shield urged for MPs.”

<sup>172</sup> Jackie Larkin, telephone interview, April 15, 2007.

<sup>173</sup> “PM defends abortion laws,” *Globe and Mail*, June 16, 1970, 10.

Neither the media nor the government's response to the Caravan, however, is the sole or even most important way to view the action. Rather, the women's immediate and long-term responses to the Caravan help to situate its success for women's liberation and abortion rights activism. Immediately following the House protest, participants expressed genuine surprise that no one was arrested as a result of the disruption in the galleries. Walker, for example, recalls feeling tense during the outside protest because they did not know what was happening inside and then being "absolutely flabbergasted to find out that everybody successfully chained themselves, successfully shouted the house down, [and that] nobody got arrested."<sup>174</sup> This success was tempered by her perception that the "state was just in such utter contempt of the women's movement that they didn't even bother to infiltrate" the Caravan's Ottawa meetings. Sethna and Hewitt make no references to RCMP informants being present for the Sunday evening planning meeting and indicate that RCMP files pertaining to the House protest were "heavily censored," so it is possible that Walker's assessment is an accurate one.<sup>175</sup> Similarly, Heather Bishop recalls of the protest at Trudeau's residence, "They took us so lightly.... We just bowled them right over." She continues, "They had completely underestimated us and I think it was sexism. They just thought, you know, it's just a bunch of women."<sup>176</sup> So, on the one hand, the failure to arrest any women could be read as the women being dismissed as a serious or dangerous threat. On the other hand, because they felt that they were not taken

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<sup>174</sup> Cathy Walker, telephone interview, February 16, 2007.

<sup>175</sup> Sethna and Hewitt, "Clandestine Operations," 492.

<sup>176</sup> Bishop also argues of the planning meeting at the school house, "There were tons of us.... We planned this thing in a public forum and the powers that be had no whiff of what we were about to do that's how not seriously they took us, that they hadn't infiltrated us – anybody could have dropped in on that meeting and found out what we were planning to do." See Heather Bishop, telephone interview, February 20, 2007.

seriously by the police or government, which was similar to the treatment they experienced in the male-headed protest groups to which they belonged, the women themselves perceived the Caravan as an important event in correcting that perception. Following from the Caravan's success, Bishop contends, "It certainly changed the way the government and the police force looked at women's demonstrations.... It had a much broader effect than just one simple issue. There was never again a women's demonstration that was not taken seriously."<sup>177</sup>

The participants credit the Caravan with bolstering women's confidence as political actors and organizers, drawing women into a national movement, and making abortion a subject about which women could speak publicly. For Bishop, the Abortion Caravan "changed the face of so much politically in this country because it empowered us as women."<sup>178</sup> Similarly, Susan Kennedy argues, "I think it was successful in pulling together the women's movement, in giving us confidence as women...not really in tangible ways, but in millions of intangible ways."<sup>179</sup> Peggy Morton concurs,

Another aspect of the success is that women had, with no resources, with nothing, organized a coast-to-coast action, traveled from one end of the country to another, gone into community after community, brought all kinds of women into that and made all kinds of links here and there, and then gone and shut down the Parliament and done something extremely bold. We'd done it as a national action without any resources whatsoever.<sup>180</sup>

The confidence the participants gained in themselves and their organizational skills would serve them well in the coming years.

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<sup>177</sup> Heather Bishop, telephone interview, February 20, 2007.

<sup>178</sup> Heather Bishop, telephone interview, February 20, 2007.

<sup>179</sup> Susan Kennedy, telephone interview, January 2007.

<sup>180</sup> Peggy Morton, telephone interview, February 17, 2007.

The participants also believe that the Caravan made abortion an everyday topic of conversation. Morton believes that organizing the Caravan was the first time that TWLM members had “leafleted as women, held public meetings in working-class areas, at which activists and women who had been denied abortions, actually got up and spoke in public I think for the very first time about those things. It was quite something really.” She continues, “That sense of going out and talking to all kinds of women, and the absolute daring of the time, daring to speak in public about things people had never spoken about before. And the response we got from women, which was very, very, very supportive. And organizing those things right out on the street in public that was quite new for us.”<sup>181</sup> N.T.R. contends, “It certainly publicized the issue the way any action like that does,” which helped to make abortion a less taboo subject about which to speak publicly.<sup>182</sup> Kennedy also credits the Caravan with allowing women to discuss abortion more openly. She argues, “Even that whole split between do you stay in Toronto and go on the biggest demonstration Toronto’s ever seen or do you go on the Caravan – there were enough women who said this is our struggle, this is our fight, nobody else is going to fight it for us.” She continues, suggesting that the fight “carried on long after. It wasn’t just the demonstration. The Caravan was only the culmination of meetings across the country in all big and small communities.... The Caravan work still went on. It wasn’t a one shot deal.”<sup>183</sup> Making the topic less taboo was also accomplished by reaching a broad spectrum of women, as Bishop argues the Caravan did: “There were women from all over

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<sup>181</sup> Peggy Morton, telephone interview, February 17, 2007.

<sup>182</sup> N.T.R., telephone interview, October 31, 2006.

<sup>183</sup> Susan Kennedy, telephone interview, January 2007.

the country, and all ages, and everything from little secretaries and working class women like myself to university professors, so it was a real broad range of women.”<sup>184</sup>

Participants drew different lessons from the Caravan. Bishop’s recollection of how the Caravan made her feel demonstrates the personal benefits: “I remember feeling very empowered that, you know what, we can really make a statement.... It was such a different world then for women and for us to do that and do it successfully, and have that big an impact was very empowering. I felt very proud.”<sup>185</sup> For Larkin, the Caravan was an irrefutable success because “It was creative, it was gutsy, and it was a really powerful vehicle for the level of anger women felt and I...certainly remember the depth of anger that I felt about learning what it meant for women to go for back street abortions, and use coat hangers. There was a lot of really deep anger that women felt around that.”<sup>186</sup> In some cases, the individual effects were not as positive. As Marcy Cohen recalled, “I didn’t appreciate it for probably 20 years as a success.... The acrimony that came out of it – Women’s Caucus did not survive for that long after it, and a lot of the relationships were torn and broken.”<sup>187</sup> Similarly, Judy Pocock’s assessment is measured: “It was incredibly important and probably wasn’t as earth-shattering as we had hoped.”<sup>188</sup> Like Pocock’s analysis of a more limited success, Joan Eliesen’s reaction was mixed. Of the Trudeau protest she says, “Right when it happened it was very heady, very exciting, very empowering.” But while she left the Caravan with a sense of optimism, which made her

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<sup>184</sup> Heather Bishop, telephone interview, February 20, 2007.

<sup>185</sup> Heather Bishop, telephone interview, February 20, 2007.

<sup>186</sup> See Jackie Larkin, telephone interview, April 15, 2007. Morton’s sentiments were similar: “We had really put this issue on the map; it was a very bold thing to do.” Peggy Morton, telephone interview, February 17, 2007.

<sup>187</sup> Marcy Cohen, telephone interview, March 2, 2007.

<sup>188</sup> Judy Pocock, personal interview, November 30, 2006.

think, “look at what we did, we got them to stand up and take notice, and we’ve got the momentum, they have to listen to us now,” that optimism was, she soon came to realize, “very naïve.”<sup>189</sup>

For other women, situating the Caravan in a larger context meant connecting it to their other protest identities. For the women from Toronto, for example, in the immediate aftermath of the House protest it was important to connect with protesters there. Following the Monday protests, they contacted activists from home. Kennedy recollects these calls:

We spent time calling people in Toronto about the demonstration because it was the biggest anti-war demonstration Toronto had ever had including the mayor being arrested. And we spent hours on the phone trying to find out who had been arrested and comparing notes. And it was a real sense of coming back and being excited that we had gone off and done this at the same time. And to me there was also the sense that we felt things were happening in Ottawa, things were happening in Toronto, things were happening in other centers across Canada and across the States. You felt very much that you were part of something really big because between this [Abortion Caravan] and the stuff around the war and Kent State there was just so much activity that there was a tremendously powerful feeling.<sup>190</sup>

Kennedy’s sense of momentum building on a number of issues points to the way in which many women assessed their successes within a socialist-feminist perspective.

Walker, for example, explains that her assessment of the Caravan’s success at the time was viewed “Always in the context of the overall political issue of ‘we’re still left with capitalism’ – that sort of always coloured any successes we had. We weren’t really necessarily as good at celebrating our victories and recognizing how long it was going to

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<sup>189</sup> Joan Eliesen, telephone interview, 15 April 2007.

<sup>190</sup> Susan Kennedy, telephone interview, January 2007.

be. I think we thought the revolution was going to happen a heck of a lot sooner than it seems to have happened.”<sup>191</sup> So for the socialist-feminists, and especially for those whose hearts lay with issues other than abortion, their perception of the Caravan’s success was necessarily a limited one.

The Caravan’s impact must also be measured within a larger social and political context. P.A. explains how, for her, the Abortion Caravan connected to broader issues:

The Caravan was a kind of visible manifestation of a whole lot of other things that were going on around maternity care. I mean it wasn’t just women saying we don’t want any babies, it was women saying we want to have babies differently...and abortion was just a small piece of it, but it was such an important piece because of lack of education and information on contraceptives, sexually transmitted diseases, and birth itself, and lack of control over birth, and what happened to your babies afterwards, and daycare for those babies afterwards. That period was very much a period where people tried to connect those issues. So it wasn’t isolated. The people involved, people like me, for whom this wasn’t the main thing they were working on were still there because it was so interrelated and it was understood to be interrelated to all these other things.<sup>192</sup>

For P.A., then, the authority over the abortion decision was a part of women’s control over their whole reproductive lives. Larkin similarly connects abortion to a larger context arguing,

It’s useful to remind oneself that that was a time when women did not have this right and it was assumed that they didn’t have this right. And so we were a very radical, small voice.... I never felt like it felt wrong to be doing what we’re doing, it felt very right, it felt very obvious, and it had a lot of good energy around it.... And also, it is important to make the point that the abortion rights issue also was raised in the context of the broader question of the sexual freedom of women. So, it wasn’t just ‘do I have the right to get an abortion’ it’s ‘do I have the right to know about my own body’ and ‘do I have the right to choose my sexual partners and have the sexuality that I want.’ So, it was about sexual orientation, it was about

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<sup>191</sup> Cathy Walker, telephone interview, February 16, 2007.

<sup>192</sup> P.A., telephone interview, October 26, 2006.

sexual pleasure, it was about knowing your body, and it was about being able to control the path of choices you did make. So I guess what I'm saying was it was part of a more whole process that one could argue was very much rooted in a middle-class radicalization of young women who were really spreading their wings and wanting to stretch in terms of their possibilities.<sup>193</sup>

The larger contexts that P.A. and Larkin identify are difficult to convey in a single slogan or action and were not the lasting message imprinted on either the media or government. Rather, these messages were the ones they hoped took root among the women they met and talked with in towns and neighbourhoods across the country; it was the context of their ongoing activism in the following years.

In the final analysis there are definite successes stemming from the actions surrounding the Abortion Caravan. As some of the women noted, the Caravan brought the issue of abortion into the open in towns and cities across Canada, especially in those places where the Vancouver Women's Caucus stopped and held public meetings. Until that point, abortion may have been discussed, but it was done so more privately and individually as indicated in letters to the editors of Chatelaine and the Globe and Mail or in letters and briefs to the commissioners of the RCSW. The demonstrations of the Abortion Caravan also garnered front page coverage for a least a few days following the Caravan weekend in Ottawa – and did so despite the Kent State shootings and the anti-war protests it inspired. While the women suggest that media coverage of abortion became more plentiful following the Abortion Caravan, a quantitative study would be required to test that assertion.<sup>194</sup> When women returned to their respective cities and

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<sup>193</sup> Jackie Larkin, telephone interview, April 15, 2007.

<sup>194</sup> Both Larkin and Morton claim press coverage of abortion increased at this time.

groups, there are examples of some women wanting to continue to focus on abortion to build on the Caravan's momentum, while others were not interested in a single-issue focus. Over the next few years, the movement diverged even more. And yet observed through Morton's eyes, this divergence was an opening of doors: "I think the Caravan showed us the possibilities of being organizers.... It was sort of the beginning of breaking out of the university."<sup>195</sup>

Additionally, while the women seem to view the amount of media attention directed to the action and to the issue as a measure of success, their tactics likely sat uneasily with some of the women (and men) they were attempting to persuade to adopt their point of view. Canadian citizens who were older or more conservative, and perhaps concerned by the apparently growing radicalization of protest movements and of these women would not have embraced the women's actions in the way the women wanted to be seen. Given the way that laws are changed in Canada, the Caravan could only ever have limited and symbolic gains. So while the Caravan was an empowering and confidence-building exercise, it was never going to change the abortion law in and of itself. The women knew the Caravan was only the first step in a long campaign, as signalled by their declaration of war. The choices they made mirrored the milieu in which they lived in which references and images of war were pervasive. Whether consciously or not, the women's involvement in the anti-war movement especially affected how they chose to struggle for abortion rights at this moment in time. Through their repeated declaration of war, they signalled that they were unwilling to accept the

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<sup>195</sup> Peggy Morton, telephone interview, February 17, 2007.

status quo and were no longer prepared to use the traditional channels to enact change. For these women, winning reproductive freedom was a fight, a battle, a struggle; the Abortion Caravan or cavalcade or campaign, as it was variously known, was a march of war or a march against death. Their actions throughout the Abortion Caravan demonstrate that they no longer had tolerance for the idea of reform, but demanded “free abortion on demand” and never questioned their right to so do. Their voices were no longer limited to “respectable” forums and they were willing to insert their bodies into their fight for safe, legal abortions.

**Conclusion: “He must have been pregnant at one time.”**

On Friday, January 25, 2008, The Faculty of Law, University of Toronto, held a symposium, titled “Of What Difference: Reflections on the Judgment and Abortion in Canada Today,” to mark the twenty-fifth anniversary of *R. V. Morgentaler*, the Supreme Court Decision that struck down Canada’s 1969 abortion law.<sup>1</sup> Speakers included a mix of law and medical professors and medical practitioners, although space was also created for the participation of Carolyn Bennett and Heather Mallick, a feminist Member of Parliament and a feminist journalist, respectively. Yet although the group included quite a number of female feminist scholars, an indication that more women’s voices are recognized in public discussions of abortion than were in the 1960s, no room was created to hear from representatives from any of the women’s organizations that had been involved in the abortion rights campaign that had led to the historic court decision. During the question period, Carolyn Egan, a long-time abortion rights activist in Toronto and a founding member of the Ontario Coalition for Abortion Clinics, got up to speak from the floor.<sup>2</sup> She raised her concern that women’s efforts to overturn the law and their role in the 1988 decision were being overlooked. She began to list the many ways in

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<sup>1</sup> It was organized by the law school and the National Abortion Federation, with the support of the Canada Research Chair in Health Law and Policy. See [http://www.law.utoronto.ca/visitors\\_content.asp?itemPath=5/10/0/0/0&contentId=1689](http://www.law.utoronto.ca/visitors_content.asp?itemPath=5/10/0/0/0&contentId=1689).

<sup>2</sup> The centrality of the Ontario Coalition for Abortion Clinics to the abortion rights struggle in Ontario throughout the 1980s and beyond is discussed in Patricia Antonyshyn, B. Lee, and Alex Merrill, “Marching for Women’s Lives: The Campaign for Free-Standing Abortion Clinics in Ontario,” in Social Movements/ Social Change: The Politics and Practices of Organizing, eds. Frank Cunningham et al. (Toronto: Between the Lines, 1988): 129-156; Gail Kellough, Aborting Law: An Exploration of the Politics of Motherhood and Medicine (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996), 204-250.

which women participated alongside Henry Morgentaler – fundraising, establishing and then defending clinics, escorting Morgentaler and the women he treated, collecting petitions, working to change public opinion, organizing protests, and so on. Although Egan had been speaking for only a short time, one of the symposium organizers, cut her off, such that the small place for recognizing women’s activism that Egan tried to create was disallowed. This failure to address women’s contributions to Morgentaler’s campaign is revealing and concerning. First, it diminishes the important roles women played – through their words and actions – in the history of abortion law reform in Canada. Second, it suggests that important analyses of abortion law history in Canada continue to overlook women’s contributions to law reform.

This dissertation has sought to counter the dominant narrative of abortion law reform in 1960s Canada because it does not give much credit to women as thinkers or actors in their own lives. Too often, and with little interrogation, scholars have accepted the notion that women were unable or unwilling to contribute to the public dialogue on abortion.<sup>3</sup> The literature has focused on the medicalization of abortion and the liberalization of abortion laws, emphasizing the roles of doctors, lawyers, politicians, and clergy – mostly males during the 1960s – in the abortion debates. Until scholars discuss the late 1960s, women hardly enter the narrative except as victims of illegal abortions or

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<sup>3</sup> A recent example of a scholar perpetuating the dominant narrative by repeating Jenson’s explanation of women’s absent voices is Melissa Hausman, “‘What Does Gender Have to Do with Abortion Law?’ Canadian Women’s Movement-Parliamentary Interactions on Reform Attempts, 1969-91,” International Journal of Canadian Studies 21 (Spring 2000), 129. To be fair, my sense reading this article was that Hausman was not entirely comfortable with the explanation for the absence of women’s voices, but perhaps offered it as no alternative existed.

“mothers” of unborn children. They are then most often incorporated into the story in reaction to the 1969 law changes.

Yet women were not silent or unwilling to talk about abortion and the aim of this study has been to uncover their voices throughout the long 1960s. It does so with the belief that, as Kathy Davis argues, it is important to understand “how individual women give meaning to their lived experiences.”<sup>4</sup> I employ an expanded definition of the “political” to include the personal and thereby deny that only those actors who enjoyed recognition within organized political or official debates spoke with relevance and authority on the issue. This is not to say that women’s voices held the same currency as male voices. Often they did not, but they were neither absent nor silent. First individually and then collectively, women spoke whenever any opening allowed them to do so. When speaking in those openings was no longer enough, they engineered new openings, forcing people to listen.

As the words, letters, and actions described in the preceding pages demonstrate, women used every opening they could find to share their fears, concerns, hopes, and experiences with unplanned and unwanted pregnancies and abortion. Many women were not reticent about expressing their beliefs publicly. The women also wrote letters to the editors of Chatelaine magazine and the Globe and Mail and later authored articles for and letters to student and political newspapers. These letters were political. Women signed their names, which was tantamount to a public declaration of their position on abortion since their name were often published for family, friends, neighbours, and community

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<sup>4</sup> Kathy Davis, The Making of Our Bodies, Ourselves (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007), 132-33.

members to see. The women also wrote to their individual Members of Parliament, the Prime Minister, the Royal Commission on the Status of Women in Canada, and the House of Commons Standing Committee on Health and Welfare. They created and joined political groups and planned, publicized, and participated in protests for abortion rights. While these sites were explored here, undoubtedly there are more sites to uncover and more voices to hear.

Within the print media, Chatelaine's coverage of abortion and the place it created for Canadian women stands out. The magazine was both a disseminator of information and, more importantly, a safe forum in which women could engage in the debate for or against abortion. There are two discernable periods in its coverage: abortion law reform, which was promoted between 1959 and 1968, and abortion law repeal, which came to the fore after 1968. From the time of the first 1959 article through 1968, Chatelaine cautiously framed abortion as a "solution" to social problems *under certain circumstances*. Later, the frames transformed to highlight a woman's right to control her reproductive decisions. During both periods of coverage, Chatelaine provided information and a forum for women to discuss their feelings about and experiences with abortion through the letters' page *The Last Word is Yours*. This transmission of ideas and the debates fostered in the magazine allowed women to exercise some agency, even when they had little or no legal or political control. Through their engagement they helped establish the boundaries of the debate within the magazine by signaling those circumstances in which they did or did not support abortion. The readers' letters also belie the idea that women did not have positions or a language with which to discuss the

issue. Women clearly had opinions, feelings, and ideas about abortion prior to Chatelaine's coverage of the issue, yet the attention the magazine devoted to abortion and the space it created for women made the subject speakable for many women in a way it had not previously been.

The Globe and Mail played a significant role as a barometer of public opinion on abortion. The visibility or audibility of women's voices in the Globe and Mail throughout the decade was surprising given the general contours of the accepted abortion narrative that downplays women's voices. The Globe and Mail's coverage of the abortion issue, and especially women's letters in response, shows that women's voices (or words) were present in mainstream discussions of abortion, whether or not they received much attention. While it is essential not to overstate women's engagement with the newspaper, numerically women's letters about abortion were published as much or more often than were letters by men, suggesting at the very least that women were as engaged in the discussion as were men, even if they did not wield the same power to make changes to the abortion law. In the forum provided by the advice column, *Elizabeth Thompson Advises*, a dialogue similar to that found in Chatelaine emerged, albeit on a smaller scale. Arguably, the exchange of ideas that occurred here had much to do with the anonymity provided by the forum, which allowed readers to share intimate details of their reproductive lives and to have their ideas validated either by appearing in print or through the responses of Thompson and other readers. The use women made of this space, in combination with the letters to the editors, reinforces the notion that women were eager to engage in public discussions on abortion whenever the opportunity arose.

Like those who wrote letters to the editors of newspapers and magazines, women who wrote letters to the Royal Commission wanted to be heard. In voices that came across with varying degrees of confidence, hundreds of women used this opening to express their views and they deployed many strategies in their efforts to construct their authority over the issue of abortion. Many women shared surprisingly intimate experiences with the Commissioners as a way to convey their beliefs and claim authority to do so. Some drew on professional or educational training and experience to ground their thoughts. Others sought recognition of their truth claims through evidence of numerical strength as expressed through group surveys. Many women argued that only women – whether as professionals or as pregnant women – should have the right and authority to make decisions about abortion. In so doing, many echoed Nora Adams, who had, in the Globe and Mail, sarcastically claimed of a man writing so knowingly about abortion, “He must have been pregnant at one time.”<sup>5</sup> These Canadian women not only wanted to control their own bodies, but believed themselves singularly knowledgeable on the issue. Ultimately, through the act of writing to the Commission, women not only took advantage of the occasion to express what they (already) thought about unplanned pregnancies and abortion, but also had the opportunity to share their expertise born through their own personal experiences and their layered identities as women.

Although many women writing letters for or against abortion to Chatelaine, the Globe and Mail, or the Royal Commission made clear that they were married and mothers, many did not reveal much demographic information about themselves.

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<sup>5</sup> Nora Adams, Letter to the Editor, Globe and Mail, April 18, 1967, 6.

Although we have hints from reader surveys and questionnaires, it is difficult to present a meaningful portrait of their age, class, race, or marital status. In contrast, the demographics of the women who participated in the Abortion Caravan are clearer. The women interviewed for this project were shaped by the generation into which they were born. Its relative affluence, its sense of optimism and idealism, and the tension between gender conformity and social rebellion were all defining characteristics of the time in which most of these women came of age. Like the membership of women's liberation groups across North America at the time, they were mostly white and middle-class (although some claimed working-class upbringings) and had been raised in families that had British or Northern European backgrounds. Although most had participated in Protestant Churches in their youth, few reported retaining connections to religion past their middle teen years. This is not to say that religion did not influence their lives. For some, religion helped to introduce the importance of a sense of community, while for others it represented the opportunity to rebel against authority. Most of these women were immersed in several protest movements and that involvement expanded or intensified while they were at university. Within those groups, most came to feel that they were exploited, discriminated against, and oppressed as women. They were aware that their sexual exploitation occurred within a society that promised a "sexual revolution," while their reproductive choices remained extremely limited. Several women, not surprisingly, had personal experiences with these limitations, which led them to the realization that they needed to fight for safe, legal abortion and also served as the foundation upon which they understood their authority over the issue to be based. All of

these components of their identities competed with and complemented one another. The identities and agendas the Caravan women derived from their participation in various movements and groups intermingled, and when these women acted, they did so as holistic agents whose motivations, backgrounds, and experiences intersected. Yet these women were not all committed to abortion rights activism in the same way, illuminating the complexity of the women's personal motivations.

In the chapter detailing the Abortion Caravan's cross-country trek, women's voices emerge as a roar. Unlike the previous chapters, where women's voices filled spaces created by others, these women were responsible for creating this opening to express their ideas and beliefs. They succeeded brilliantly in garnering attention from both the media and politicians, however briefly. Their actions and words expressed their frustration at having been ignored for too long on a subject only they – as women – could experience personally. Their voices were different from the women who preceded them. For them, the state's inaction on abortion led them to question its legitimacy. They were not liberal feminists working through government-sanctioned channels, but warriors declaring war on a government that had failed women.

Yet despite the declaration of war, the Caravan's successes were limited because Trudeau's 1969 abortion law remained in effect until it was struck down by the Supreme Court of Canada in 1988. Although several factors contributed to this delay, two particular developments stand out. The first was the diverging interests and efforts of women who took on a wide variety of feminist causes throughout the 1970s and beyond. The second was the emergence of and reliance on Henry Morgentaler as a central figure

in the Canadian pro-choice movement. The proliferation of feminist causes is sometimes perceived as a fracturing of interests away from a focus on abortion; this perception has currency in the literature and among activists from the time. Charnie Guettel, for example, argues that the legal change took so long, “Because there were so many other things on the agenda.... My memory is that women’s liberation just fragmented into whatever you were interested in.... Sectarianism was a huge, negative force.”<sup>6</sup> Indeed, this fracturing of interests is said to have moved feminist activism so far away from abortion that by 1982 one Canadian feminist argued that it was the “forgotten issue of the women’s movement in Canada.”<sup>7</sup> Yet this analysis of Caravan participants has shown that most women already had diverging interests as well as sometimes ambiguous connections to the push for abortion rights. Certainly divisive issues arose in the 1970s, further complicating already diverse activist groupings. All of this is to say that the struggle for abortion rights in Canada’s history, and the role of women therein, is more complex than much of the literature allows for.

The influence of Morgentaler’s involvement clearly complicated the push for abortion law reform. In my interview with N.T.R., she wondered explicitly, “If Henry had not been available...would [it] have happened sooner?” She believes that the “safe alternative” provided by Morgentaler’s willingness to perform illegal abortions in his clinics and fight the law through court challenges took the pressure off the government to

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<sup>6</sup> Charnie Guettel, personal interview, February 26, 2007.

<sup>7</sup> Kathleen McDonnell, “Claim No Easy Victories: The Fight for Reproductive Rights,” in *Still Ain’t Satisfied: Canadian Feminism Today*, eds. Maureen Fitzgerald, Connie Guberman, and Margie Wolfe (Toronto: Women’s Press, 1982), 32-42.

reform the 1969 abortion law.<sup>8</sup> Reflecting on the focus on establishing clinics (and, by association, Morgentaler), Jackie Larkin views women's role as more important in the process:

What became the sort of leading edge of the struggle... was the setting up of the clinics where women just said, 'fuck you, if you're not going to do it, we're going to set up our own clinics.'... And I think that that was a very good strategy to set up the clinics because then you were not only providing the service for women who needed it, but you had something that you could defend.... The clinics were, I think in many ways, the symbol of 'we're going to do it no matter what.' And so they created a de facto right even though there wasn't a legal right.<sup>9</sup>

With Morgentaler (and his clinics) as the focus of the pro-choice movement, the issue also became much more polarized and dichotomized between pro-choice and pro-life factions. The result of this dichotomy, and the dominating presence of Morgentaler on the pro-choice side, arguably worked to "silence" women's voices in the dominant narrative – at least to some extent – because legal scholars, political scientists, historians, and the media have chosen to highlight his legal battles, casting Morgentaler as the hero or villain, with little attention to the women fighting alongside him.

With so much attention on Morgentaler, women have remained curiously outside of the dominant narrative, as was clear in the symposium celebrating the twentieth anniversary of the 1988 Supreme Court decision. Hence the importance of insisting, as I have here, on the significance of the words, letters, and actions of women who have sought to have a public say about abortion in the past and who continue to take a stand today as pro-life voices and actions get louder and more violent today. There are reasons

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<sup>8</sup> N.T.R., telephone interview, October 31, 2006.

<sup>9</sup> Jackie Larkin, telephone interview, April 15, 2007.

why a woman will place herself physically between an anti-abortion protestor and another (usually unknown) woman seeking an abortion, so as to protect that woman's right to choose. The history of abortion law reform in Canada needs to be rewritten to make room for such women and for women as more than just the subject of "back alley" abortion narratives or the "mother" of the unborn fetus. Women's voices are pertinent to the dialogue and should not be dismissed or overlooked. This dissertation has sought out those voices in articles and letters to Chatelaine, in the pages of the Globe and Mail and the United Church Observer, in written testimony sent to the Royal Commission on the Status of Women, and in the actions of the women who planned and participated in the Abortion Caravan. Their diverse opinions, expressed in words, letters, and actions, contributed to shifting public opinion away from reform to repeal, initially as a goal and as of 1988 as a legal reality. As Tracy Penny Light noted of the 1960s public abortion dialogue, the "medical discourse" on abortion did not change during the 1960s; this observation raises the question "*What did?*"<sup>10</sup> Here we have the opportunity to reassess women's contributions to public debates and political protests in the Sixties as part of the answer.

Despite legal victories, abortion remains inaccessible to many women in Canada because of geographic and monetary considerations. Moreover, the May 2, 2011, election of a majority Conservative government, with the ability to appoint members to both the Supreme Court and the Senate (the political institution that is supposed to provide "sober second thought") and with a socially conservative agenda, means that this

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<sup>10</sup> Tracy Penny Light, "Shifting Interests: The Medical Discourse on Abortion in English Canada, 1850-1969," (PhD dissertation, University of Waterloo, Waterloo, 2003), 188.

battle not only continues, but is likely to become increasingly heated over the next few years. Once again political institutions are in a position to determine what is best for women reproductively. Ultimately, in order to maintain the reproductive rights already enjoyed by Canadian women, abortion rights activists will need to assess why the vast majority of supporters are only passively pro-choice. Somewhere along the way, the tenuous connection some women felt to abortion rights activism has become more problematic such that abortion has become, arguably, “a dirty word.”<sup>11</sup> Women risk losing the rights they have won if they are unable to wrestle the meaning and use of the word back from those who oppose a woman’s right to choose.

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<sup>11</sup> For a intelligent and engaging analysis on how abortion as a “dirty word” plays out in popular culture see Heather Latimer, “Popular Culture and Reproductive Politics: Juno, Knocked Up and the Enduring Legacy of The Handmaid’s Tale,” *Feminist Theory* 10, no. 2 (2009): 211-226.

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