

The Words Behind the Abortion Wars

Comparing Nonprofit Narratives about Abortion from 1973 to the Present

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List of Abbreviations

Abbreviation

Definition

AUL

Americans United for Life

NLRC

National Right to Life Committee

NARAL

National Abortion Rights Action League

Planned Parenthood

Planned Parenthood Federation of America

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Abstract

This paper uses a comparative historical methodology to investigate how the language of pro-choice nonprofits compares to that of anti-choice nonprofits since the passage of *Roe v. Wade* in 1973. Four nonprofits serve as the primary sources of this study: Planned Parenthood, NARAL Pro-Choice America, Americans United for Life, and National Right to Life Committee. The findings suggest that the narratives of nonprofits within the pro-choice and anti-choice movements have evolved in conjunction with historical social movements, and that certain similarities and differences have withstood time to remain prevalent today. Notable similarities between nonprofits in both movements involve discussions of social inequalities and the wellbeing of women. On the other hand, discourse about fetal personhood and personal privacy continue to represent differences in the rhetoric of anti-choice and pro-choice nonprofits. The results highlight that certain language represents a common ground between pro-choice and anti-choice nonprofits, and that centering messaging around these shared talking points may be a useful tool for pro-choice advocacy in the future.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

The issue of abortion has been a steady topic of American political and social discourse since the 1970s. Unlike other issues, such as transgender rights and gun ownership rights which became prominent sources of public contention in recent decades, abortion has remained a renowned and divisive topic for over fifty years in the United States. Importantly, nonprofits have been particularly influential in the American struggle over abortion. Whether they are lobbying members of Congress to restrict abortion, leading rallying chants in favor of abortion at protests, or advocating for the need to protect unborn children on highway billboards, nonprofits have played an essential role in public debates regarding abortion and helped to shape the American public's views about the legality and morality of abortion. Moreover, the views that individuals develop about abortion influence electoral outcomes, as American citizens increasingly center their voting around the issue of abortion (Knoll and Smitt 2022).

The U.S. Supreme Court's decision to overturn *Roe v. Wade* in June of 2022 was momentous for American civil society. While anti-choice organizations celebrated what they viewed as a major victory that had taken nearly fifty years to accomplish, pro-choice groups had to grapple with the reality that a decades-long freedom was no longer federally protected (Scherer et al. 2022). There were, however, warnings that the federal protection of abortion was in a precarious position. In December of 2021, seven months prior to the decision to overturn *Roe v. Wade*, the Guttmacher Institute published a report documenting the 108 "abortion restrictions" that conservative legislatures passed in 19 different states throughout the country and deemed 2021 to be "the worst year for abortion rights in almost half a century" (Nash 2021).

At the time of this paper's publication, thirteen states have banned abortion and nine of those states have no exceptions for rape or incest (McCann et al. 2022). Additionally, five other

states have severe restrictions in place based on a “gestational limit”, and eight other states have potential bans forthcoming that are currently blocked through the court systems (McCann et al. 2022). To illustrate these statistics more clearly, 1 in 3 women have likely lost abortion access in America (Shepard, Rouben, and Kitchener 2022). These numbers are merely stepping stones for those who oppose abortion. Anti-choice activists have been clear about their ultimate goal as a movement: to completely eliminate abortions in the United States (Munson 2008, 99).

Although many activists in the pro-choice community have voiced concern about the increase in abortion restrictions throughout the country for years, the actual moment that the Supreme Court overturned *Roe v. Wade* underscored the reality that the rights of women and people who can become pregnant in this country are rapidly regressing. For pro-choice advocacy organizations, many of which are nonprofits, the dismantling of *Roe v. Wade* underscored the need for re-examining strategies to protect abortion. Pro-choice nonprofits have managed to combat attacks on abortion in several states since the overturning of *Roe*; however, efforts to restrict reproductive autonomy continue to emerge throughout the country.

To understand the decades-long struggle over abortion in this country, it is necessary to understand the rhetoric about abortion that pro-choice and anti-choice nonprofits have employed since the passage of *Roe v. Wade* in 1973. Stated simply, *pro-choice* describes the mindset that all people should be able to make personal decisions about their reproductive capabilities, including the decision to end a pregnancy with abortion (Holland 2022, 16-17). Conversely, *anti-choice* refers to the ideology that abortion should not exist and that all pregnancies should result in the birth of a child (Cambridge Dictionary, n.d.).

Nonprofits across the pro-choice and anti-choice movements have used strategic messaging to frame their positions, gain allies or followers, and advance their agendas. Like all

types of rhetoric, the language that nonprofits use to discuss abortion originates from specific value systems and has the capacity to influence the opinions of others. As Norman Fairclough (2015) asserted in his book *Language and Power*, “power” both creates language and exists within it (3). Thus, the impact of language extends far beyond words themselves. Making sense of the struggle over abortion in this country requires an analysis of the ways that civil society has described and framed abortion to the public. This paper presents an investigation into the intricacies of the language that nonprofits have employed to advocate for and against abortion in the United States.

Chapter 2: Literature Review & Statement of Problem

Literature Review

While many Western countries have ceased to question the right to abortion following its legalization, abortion continues to divide Americans and spur consequential debate. An abundance of literature analyzes the broader discussion about abortion and the movements that support and oppose it. This literature reaches across a range of methodology, including empirical studies and broader theoretical arguments. Additionally, because the abortion debate extends into a diverse set of issues ranging from healthcare to the economy, the literature surrounding abortion advocacy is thematically diverse.

This paper investigates how the language of pro-choice nonprofits compares to that of anti-choice nonprofits since the passage of *Roe v. Wade* in 1973. Before conducting this analysis, a review of existent literature is necessary to understand the background of messaging about abortion in the United States. Three themes are especially relevant for establishing this background: the key historical moments that have changed abortion laws over time, the common

debates about abortion across the two movements, and the ideologies that mobilize each movement.

Part One: Theoretical Framework

Prior to investigating the themes stated above, it is necessary to understand the broader theoretical framework of this paper and expound on the terms *pro-choice* and *anti-choice*. Like all aspects of abortion in America, the definitions of the movements and opinions supporting or opposing abortion have changed over time and continue to be cause for debate.

The theoretical lens that guides this paper is modern pro-choice ideology. Specifically, pro-choice ideology asserts that all people deserve the right to make decisions about their reproductive capabilities, when or if to have children, and their bodily autonomy. A key requirement for having *choice* in personal reproductive decisions is that reproductive health care, including abortion services, be accessible. As Marlene Fried (2013) describes, the concept of accessibility became a priority of the pro-choice movement in the late 1990s following a rise in violence against abortion providers and the resultant decrease in access to abortion care throughout the country (12).

In addition to accessibility, pro-choice ideology must recognize the different experiences that individuals of diverse backgrounds face. In her paper “Racism and Patriarchy in the Meaning of Motherhood”, scholar Dorothy Roberts (1993) highlights how the intersections of racism and sexism create disproportionate challenges for women of color in exercising their bodily autonomy (2-3). In addition to race, other identity markers that systems of power target with bigotry and discrimination include sex, gender identity, sexuality, socio-economic status, citizenship status, language, disability, and religion. As Patricia Hill Collins (2000), the founding scholar of intersectionality describes, “as opposed to examining gender, sexuality, race, class,

and nation as separate systems of oppression, the concept of intersectionality references how these systems mutually construct one another” (47). Thus, pro-choice ideology must be inclusive of how identities intersect and face varying degrees of discrimination. To account for these intersections, the meaning of pro-choice in this paper is rooted in an inclusive understanding of choice.

While pro-choice describes the mindset that all people should be able to exercise their bodily autonomy, anti-choice in this analysis consequently refers to the mindset that reproduction should be policed in some capacity. Although the majority of the anti-choice movement would identify as “pro-life” because the life of the fetus is their proclaimed priority, this paper posits that the two ideologies of the abortion debate stand in direct opposition to one another (Roberti 2021, 207). Thus, in identifying as “pro-life” and taking steps to limit others’ reproductive freedom, the pro-life movement rejects the choice described above. As such, when discussing the movement that has taken and continues to take steps to limit, restrict, or outlaw abortion and reproductive autonomy, this paper will use the term “anti-choice” instead of “pro-life.”

Part Two: Key Themes

The three most prominent themes, within literary discussions of nonprofit pro-choice and anti-choice advocacy, are historical overviews of the key moments that have shaped America’s abortion laws, the common debates about abortion, and the ideologies within each movement. Regarding the first of these themes, existent literature focuses on the influence of the Roe v. Wade decision in 1973, the increase of abortion restrictions in individual states, and the implications of the recent overturn of Roe v. Wade.

Historical Stages

There is consensus among authors who write about abortion in America that the Supreme Court has been instrumental in dictating the ability of Americans to access abortion services. The Supreme Court legalized abortion in the 1973 *Roe v. Wade* decision and affirmed that abortion was a matter of “individual autonomy and privacy” (Ernst, Katzive, and Smock 2004, 1). While this decision was seen as a major victory for pro-choice groups, it simultaneously became a galvanizing force for the anti-choice movement to act. Mary Ziegler (2020), an abortion historian, describes the way the anti-choice movement “immediately” took action in response to the *Roe* decision, by advocating for a constitutional amendment that recognized “fetal rights”, prioritizing the election of anti-choice Justices and politicians, and finding creative ways to restrict abortion services (23-26). While *Roe v. Wade* legalized abortion in the U.S., it simultaneously prompted the start of the American abortion wars and created a major chasm between the country’s political parties.

In addition to discussing the impact of federal laws surrounding abortion, numerous authors have researched how individual states have taken action to restrict abortion within their state borders and local communities. In a 2018 study, authors Bentele, Sager, and Aykanian (2018) used a “multi-level modeling approach” to investigate why abortion restrictions in individual states have increased in recent years (491). After examining the results of their study, the authors concluded that the increase in anti-choice groups, expanded “Evangelical influence,” and the Republican wave that spread across state legislatures in 2010 caused significant amplifications of abortion restrictions (Bentele, Sager, and Aykanian 2018, 505; 511). Sanctuary cities are one mechanism by which the anti-choice movement has produced state and local-level abortion restrictions. According to a 2021 article in *Christianity Today*, numerous anti-choice

nonprofit organizations, including the Personhood Alliance, have advocated for resolutions and legislation that define fetuses as people, and therefore establish that fetuses are deserving of the same protections as fully developed humans (Anderson 2021, 20). Anti-abortion groups have worked at the local, state, and federal level to restrict abortion.

A third historical phase that has been the topic of significant discussion is the recent overturn of *Roe v. Wade* on June 24th, 2022. In the months following the decision and allowing states to dictate the legality of abortion, much of public discourse has pointed to the decades-long strategy of anti-choice groups to overturn *Roe*. In a recent interview on PBS, James Bopp Jr., the General Counsel for the nonprofit Right to Life, emphasized how the anti-choice movement has worked incrementally to regain control of the Supreme Court and gradually diminish the “legitimacy” of the 1973 decision (Woodruff 2022). When Donald Trump won the 2016 election, prominent republicans, such as Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell, vocalized their hopes for regaining control of the Supreme Court and pursuing abortion restrictions (Scherer, et al. 2022).

As of December 2022, abortion has been almost entirely banned in thirteen states throughout the U.S., with more restrictions projected to follow (McCann et. al 2022). While many news articles have focused on the ongoing threats to abortion, certain stories have emerged regarding wins for the pro-choice movement. Notably, Peter Slevin (2022) from *The New Yorker* documented the successful work of pro-choice groups in Kansas to rally voters against a ballot initiative that would have threatened access to abortion in the state. In particular, Slevin investigated the strategies that pro-choice groups employed to engage and mobilize voters of all political affiliations in Kansas. The overturn of *Roe v. Wade* has prompted retrospection and continuous monitoring of state and national news.

Debates

Several key debates shape the advocacy of the pro-choice and anti-choice movements: the life of the fetus, bodily autonomy, women's rights, and equity. While some of these debates are unique to one movement, others extend across the two movements.

Anti-choice activists often emphasize the life of the fetus and the concept of life beginning at conception as reasons to oppose abortion. In his book *The Making of Pro-Life Activists*, Ziad Munson (2002) delineates the variety of ways that the anti-choice movement tries to teach the "wider public" about fetal life (116). Among the numerous phrases that the anti-choice movement advertises are claims such as "she's a child, not a choice", a statement that the Minnesota-based 501c(3) Human Life Alliance has repeatedly made (Munson 2002, 118). According to Munson, the long-term goal of groups such as Human Life Alliance is to develop a "culture of life" by demonstrating to the public that abortion is murder (116). The life of the fetus is thus key to the strategic outreach and publicity of the anti-choice movement.

Reversely, an analysis of the literature also demonstrates how the pro-choice movement has centered bodily autonomy and freedom from government interference within its arguments. According to Marlene Fried (2013), in the decades following the 1973 Roe decision, abortion rights groups consistently defended the use of the term "choice" and spoke about the right to "privacy" that the Constitution protects (10). In other words, pro-choice groups claim that abortion is a personal decision and thus abortion restrictions represent government infringement on individual freedom. Ironically, conservatives frequently lambast heavy government for infringing on rights such as gun ownership, however, conservatives often argue that the government has a duty to end abortion and protect unborn children. Authors and activists Borgmann and Weiss (2003) argue that by framing abortion as an issue of women's "autonomy"

and a decision that should be personal rather than dictated by the government, the pro-choice movement can elevate abortion to the category of a “moral choice” (42). Both the women’s autonomy argument and the life of the fetus are unique to specific movements; however, the two sides also debate abortion with similar arguments.

The pro-choice and the pro-life movement have each underscored the importance of supporting women in their claims for and against abortion. Although the pro-choice movement has recently become inclusive of different gender identities, historically the movement has argued that abortion is primarily impactful for “human rights” of “women” (Clinton 1995; Center for Reproductive Rights 2004). In addition to discussing the dangers that undergoing forced pregnancy can cause in a medical capacity, the pro-choice movement often discusses the way forced pregnancy forces women into “caretaking” roles and hinders their ability to live autonomously (Ziegler 2011, 49). According to Religious Studies professor Rebecca Todd Peters (2014), pro-choice ideology inherently advocates for women’s equality, because it assumes that women are just as capable as men at making personal decisions about their bodies (136). Conversely, denying women their bodily autonomy insinuates that they are lesser than men. The pro-choice movement considers abortion to be a gender equality issue.

While it has an opposing goal to that of the pro-choice movement, the anti-choice movement also views abortion as a gendered issue. Specifically, Amanda Roberti (2021) found in a recent study analyzing legislative bills that the anti-abortion groups often emphasize the importance of saving women from abortion’s negative side effects and teaching them about such consequences (214; 215). Although there is no scientific consensus to support these claims, the anti-choice movement frequently mentions emotional trauma and risks of cancer or infertility as potential effects of abortions (Roberti 2021, 216). Similarly, Erika Bachiochi (2011) argues that

abortion is harmful for women's equality, because abortion implies that men's bodies are "normative", and thus abortion rights generate stigma towards "pregnancy and motherhood" (893). Like Bachiochi, an entire subset of anti-choice activists consider abortion to be a source of endangerment and degradation for women. Among these activists are Kristan Hawkins and Lauren Enriquez (2016), who describe the anti-abortion cause as similar to the work of "the early Suffragists and feminist foremothers" because stopping abortion is a struggle for equality (17). Debates about the effects of abortion for women has been prominent within each movement and played a key role in how each side manipulates their respective arguments.

A second debate that extends across the two movements is the relationship between abortion and social disparities. Equity represents a primary motivation for advocacy across the two movements. Numerous pro-choice scholars and activists frame abortion as a racial equity issue, and the literature on abortion advocacy reflects this. In *Killing the Black Body*, Roberts (1997) recounts how white slave owners forced black mothers to have children as a mechanism of perpetuating slavery (21). Additionally, Roberts (1993) characterizes abortion as an intersectional feminist issue, because restricting access to abortion is especially destructive for "poor women of color" due to the government's longstanding history of policing the bodies of women of color and the dependence of poor women on government-assisted programs (33).

Similarly, legal scholar and bioethicist Katie Watson (2022) claims that understanding abortion as a "health disparity" is essential for decreasing racial and economic inequalities in America (26; 27). A recent study by the Kaiser Family Foundation claimed that women of color and poor women often have more difficulty accessing birth control, comprehensive sexuality education programs, and quality health care services in general and thus they are more likely

than white women and affluent women to experience unwanted pregnancies (Artiga et al. 2022). The pro-choice movement considers reproductive autonomy to be a critical equity issue.

Racial and economic disparities as well as disability rights are also fixtures in the arguments of groups that oppose abortion. More specifically, anti-abortion groups frequently point to the racist and classist histories of pro-choice organizations such as Planned Parenthood in targeting poor communities of color with birth control campaigns and aligning with eugenics practices (Munson 2002, 145). In his interviews with anti-choice activists throughout the U.S., Ziad Munson (2002) recounts how the activists often juxtapose abortion and race, and make claims that abortion is a racist tool of the pro-choice movement to restrict procreation in communities of color (145-146). Just as limiting abortion and birth control access has consistently harmed communities of color and poor communities, inhibiting the ability of these communities to pro-create is a painful reality of the nation's history. The American government repeatedly perpetuated forced sterilization campaigns against people of color and the disabled community until as recently as the 1970s (Stern 2020). Due to this past, skepticism about the intent behind birth control and abortion campaigns remains common today. The anti-choice movement and the pro-choice movement each connect abortion to issues of discrimination.

Ideologies

Another theme that the literature on abortion advocacy frequently investigates are the types of ideologies that drive the nonprofit organizations within the larger pro-choice and anti-choice movements. Views about gender, religion, and political party alignment are the primary forces driving ideological differences between the anti-choice and pro-choice movements.

Numerous scholars have studied how anti-choice activists differ in their views about gender roles from those of pro-choice activists. In a recent study that examined the 2010-2012

Evaluations of Government Society Study ANES Surveys, Arizona State University professor Eric Swank (2021) found that anti-choice activists were more likely to have “conservative” views about gender roles (124). Specifically, Swank’s research demonstrated that anti-choice activists tended to believe that women should be homemakers while men work and are more likely to deny witnessing “gender discrimination” (130). Importantly, Swank remarks that there are no findings establishing that women are “more or less engaged in pro-life activism than men” (132). In other words, this conservative ideology extends to women in the anti-choice movement as well as men.

Religion is a second source of influence in the ideological divisions across the two movements. In his demographic analysis of anti-choice activists based on four prior studies, Munson (2008) concludes that a significant portion of anti-choice activists in the United States identify as Catholic (24). Additionally, Munson notes how religious settings such as churches or organizations that are religiously affiliated are common points of recruitment to the anti-choice movement (50). Interestingly, Munson argues that “pro-life activism” oftentimes leads activists to their religious faith, rather than developing their anti-choice ideology from religion (50). Among the numerous anti-choice groups that are religiously affiliated is the Becket Fund. According to former president of NARAL Pro-Choice America Ilyse Hogue (2021), the Becket Fund is a nonprofit within the Christian Right that has consistently argued for abortion and birth control restrictions on the basis of religion. While the organization claims to defend “the free expression of all religious traditions”, Hogue emphasizes that every position the organization has defended is rooted in conservative Christian ideology (Hogue 2021). Unlike the pro-choice movement, conservative Christianity permeates the anti-choice movement.

Finally, anti-choice and pro-choice organizations often position themselves with opposing political parties in the United States. A 2022 study conducted by Pew Research Center found that Democrats tend to believe that abortion “should be legal in all or most cases” whereas Republicans tend to believe that abortion “should be illegal in all or most cases” (Pew Research Center 2022). In her most recent book *Dollars for Life*, Mary Ziegler (2022) documents how nonprofit organizations within the anti-choice movement have strategically positioned themselves around the Republican Party to pass legislation that restricts access to abortion by developing less stringent campaign finance laws. Importantly, Ziegler attributes the partisanship within the American abortion debate to single issue voting based on abortion; both anti-choice and pro-choice activists vote for candidates who will advance their respective interests on abortion, and this tends to fall along party lines (205). The composition of the Supreme Court is among the most critical issues for voters concerned with abortion, and this issue ultimately dictates the voting decisions individuals (Ziegler 2022, 205). Similarly, Munson (2008) documents how prominent activist groups have developed political arms to lobby for their abortion interests in political circles at the national, state, and local levels (105). Political party affiliation has become an increasingly divisive factor in the ideologies of the anti-choice and pro-choice movements.

Conclusion

Existent literature demonstrates the far-reaching impact of the American abortion debate and emphasizes the range of opinions that attempt to explain why abortion continues to be such a contentious issue in this country. The key historical stages relating to abortion in recent decades, the common debates about abortion, and the ideologies of activists each provide useful insights about how the pro-choice and anti-choice movements have attempted to protect or restrict

abortion in America. While this literature has built a substantial foundation for mapping changes in abortion rights and the advocacy that has caused these changes, more research is needed to understand how the nuances of the language that nonprofits across the two movements employ.

Statement of Problem

The wave of abortion restrictions throughout this country points to the disturbing trend of anti-choice activism prevailing over that of pro-choice organizations. If pro-choice nonprofits wish to defeat the ongoing threats to abortion and protect reproductive autonomy into the future, they need to self-reflect and critically analyze the work of their opposition. More specifically, pro-choice nonprofits must assess their own actions and attempt to understand how they have compared to those of the anti-choice movement in the decades between the federal legalization of abortion in 1973 and the present-day. Ample literature exists about the activism and activists of nonprofits advocating for and against abortion throughout history, however, there is little research that focuses directly on the language used within such activism.

This paper aspires to mend this literary gap by providing a comparative historiography of the rhetoric that nonprofits have used to discuss abortion. Specifically, groups within the pro-choice and anti-choice movement have created narratives about abortion in an effort to advance their interests, educate the public, and expand their bases of support. While some of this language is unique to groups within one movement, other language extends to nonprofits within each movement. This research seeks to uncover how nonprofits have framed abortion over time as well as how the language of the pro-choice compares to that of the anti-choice movement. The comparative historical approach serves as the methodology for answering the central question of this research.

Language is critical for developing opinions as well as forming and maintaining social groups. Additionally, language plays an essential role in determining how individuals act with one another as it can serve as a source of division or unification. Because of the significant influence that language holds in society, an in-depth analysis is necessary to decipher how the language of pro-choice and anti-choice nonprofits has changed over time, as well as which similarities and differences exist within each movement's messaging. Through this research, this paper strives to provide insights for pro-choice nonprofits that will better position them to communicate with historically hostile populations and expand their bases of support. Ultimately, introspection and a willingness to learn from the opposition are necessary steps for effecting future change.

Chapter 3: Methodology & Data Collection

Methodology

This paper will analyze the language of pro-choice and anti-choice nonprofits since the passage of *Roe v. Wade* in 1973. Although the language that was effective several decades ago may no longer influence contemporary discourse, documenting how this language has evolved, and uncovering which wording remains pertinent, is necessary to establish a broader understanding of the phrasing and words that are particularly impactful regarding abortion. Because the theoretical framework that guides this paper is modern pro-choice ideology, the ultimate goal of this work is to highlight language that may ultimately help pro-choice nonprofits to advance their rights in the future.

The comparative historical analysis will serve as the methodology to answer the central research question. Although it holds a long-standing history in literary works, Mahoney and Rueschemeyer (2003) investigated the modern application of comparative historical analyses in

their book *Comparative Historical Analyses in the Social Sciences*. They characterize this methodology as "...defined by a concern with causal analysis, an emphasis on processes over time, and the use of systematic and contextualized comparison" (Mahoney and Rueschemeyer 2003, 6). Additionally, Mahoney and Rueschemeyer highlight the range of "big questions" about contemporary social issues that historical comparative analyses have investigated by examining phenomena with "similarities" over time (7). This methodology attempts to explain a trend or issue and reach conclusions with a retrospective analysis of the relationship between two or more elements.

A comparative historical analysis combines multiple methodologies and fields together. Specifically, Lange (2012) delineates the presence of comparative historical analysis across several disciplines, including "political science", "sociology", and "anthropology" (3). Importantly, Lange describes the methodology as incorporating four components: "comparative" methods which investigate the similarities and differences between two subjects, "within-case" methods which represent the "historical" or "temporal" nature of the project, "units of analysis" such as "social movements", and an "epistemological" method that recognizes the value of "social scientific research" (3-5). The narratives of pro-choice and anti-choice movements share differences and similarities in the decades between the passage and overturning of *Roe v. Wade*. A critical assessment of this common and differing language is needed for the pro-choice movement to establish effective ways to defend abortion in the future.

A definition of "language" is necessary to understand the broader methodology of this research. Language in this research refers to the messaging and wording used to describe abortion and argue for or against it. Nonprofits within both the pro-choice and anti-choice movements employ language to frame abortion and advance their cause, change minds, and

influence laws throughout America. Among the numerous platforms to communicate this language are websites, legislative bills, campaign ads, billboards, written petitions, speeches, and interviews.

Language is also a tool of public policy. The late Senator Paul Wellstone developed a framework for successful advocacy that activists now refer to as the “Wellstone Triangle” (Wellstone Action 2005, 1). According to Senator Wellstone, “good public policy, grassroots organizing, and electoral politics” are the “three critical ingredients to democratic renewal and progressive change in America” (Wellstone Action 2005,1). Specifically, public policy within the Wellstone Triangle refers to the messaging and framing of issues (Wellstone Action 2005, 2-3). The language of effective public policy must emphasize the “issues facing regular citizens” for the general population to feel heard and valued (Wellstone Action 2005, 2). Although he specifies his strategy for more liberal organizations, Wellstone’s definition of strong public policy can apply to nonprofits with diverse political leanings.

Importantly, “nonprofit” in this research refers to several types of public charities. The nonprofit organizations that compose the pro-choice and anti-choice movements include 501(c)(3) and 501(c)(4) organizations, in addition to certain organizations which have both a (c)(3) and (c)(4) arm. Moreover, a portion of the organizations that have (c)(4) arms have also formed political PACs to carry out more pointed electoral work. For example, Planned Parenthood Federation of America is a 501(c)(3) whereas Planned Parenthood Action Fund is a 501(c)(4), and PP Votes is a political PAC. Nonprofits that are solely registered as 501(c)(3) organizations are allowed to lobby in some capacities; however, lobbying cannot consume a “substantial part” of the organization’s “activities” (Board Source 2016). Differently, 501(c)(4)

organizations are allowed to engage in significant lobbying with less restrictions if organizational staff are diligent with their use of funds (Board Source 2016).

This research will draw from the work of nonprofit organizations with 501(c)(3) and 501(c)(4) tax statuses. Specifically, this paper is focused on the advocacy language of two 501(c)(3) organizations, Planned Parenthood Federation of America and Americans United for Life (AUL), and two 501(c)(4) organizations, NARAL Pro-Choice America and the National Right to Life Committee (NRLC). The author chose these organizations because they each have longstanding and prominent roles in abortion or anti-abortion advocacy within the U.S. and they maintain a presence throughout the entire country.

These organizations were all founded prior to the passage of *Roe v. Wade* in 1973; Planned Parenthood in 1916, NRLC in 1968, NARAL Pro-Choice American in 1969, and Americans United for Life in 1971. NRLC and AUL each place eliminating abortion at the core of their missions; however, NRLC engages in direct lobbying to advance its interests whereas AUL primarily focuses on legal advocacy and education for its programming (NRLC, n.d.; AUL, n.d.). Similarly, while NARAL Pro-Choice America lobbies and engages with policymakers to protect abortion, Planned Parenthood provides health care, including abortion, and education to ensure that individuals can protect their bodily autonomy and exercise their basic rights (Planned Parenthood, n.d.; NARAL, n.d.). Despite the slight differences in their focuses, each of these organizations has a national following and has influenced the abortion landscape in the United States in recent decades.

Data Collection

A combination of primary and secondary research serves as the data for this analysis. Apart from scholarly articles that require subscriptions to online journals, each of these sources

is readily available to the general public. The primary sources provide specified examples of contemporary language while the secondary sources offer historical overviews of how language has developed and depicts larger messaging trends.

Secondary sources that illustrate historical patterns include history books and peer-reviewed journal articles. The information from these sources will help to illustrate how the language has changed since the passage of Roe v. Wade in 1973 to the present-day. A second grouping of the secondary sources that influence this research are studies, journal articles, and books describing the most common language that the two movements use. These studies either track the occurrence of talking points that groups in one movement have used across multiple geographic areas, or they examine messaging that groups in each movement have employed.

This research will also use primary and secondary sources to analyze contemporary language on abortion. In particular, the language on pro-choice and anti-choice nonprofit websites will serve as primary sources that can illustrate the ways that specific groups are communicating their message to the public today. Additionally, recent news articles and editorials with activists from specific nonprofits will comprise the secondary sources for the analysis of present-day rhetoric.

These sources were accumulated with basic internet search engines such as Google and Google Scholar as well as more detailed search features through the Johns Hopkins Library. “Abortion” “pro-choice” “anti-choice” “advocacy” “language” and “messaging” served as the key Boolean search words to locate sources specific to the research question. Finally, specific sections of the focal nonprofits’ websites, including their mission and vision statements, key issues, and responses to current events serve as the data to assess how the four nonprofits are communicating about abortion issues today.

The aforementioned methodology and data collection technique are tools for charting changes in the language that nonprofits have used to frame abortion over time and for highlighting the similarities and differences of the pro-choice and anti-choice nonprofit messaging. This research design aspires to distinguish between language that resonates with audiences composed of diverse ideologies as well as rhetoric that solely appeals to the views of individuals on one side of the movement. Numerous talking points about abortion are needed to reach the span of viewpoints that individuals in this country hold and to make people of varying political leanings feel acknowledged. Moreover, this research aims to highlight how nonprofits on each side of the abortion debate frame common arguments surrounding abortion, such as the relationship between abortion and women, race, and inequality.

Chapter 4: Analysis

The resources analyzed for this research demonstrates both differences as well as similarities across the language of pro-choice and anti-choice nonprofits since 1973. While certain themes in rhetoric have maintained a steady presence in the language of the two movements over the past fifty years, other talking points are unique to specific historical time periods and have since dwindled from the general discourse surrounding abortion. Interestingly, the messaging of nonprofit organizations within each movement seems to have evolved in tandem with the broader social changes that have occurred in American society. This analysis describes the historical commonalities and divisions within pro-choice and anti-choice language and presents findings about the most notable similarities and differences across the contemporary language of nonprofits within the two movements. The findings establish that the similar messaging across the two movements has withstood time and remains pervasive today, signaling

that anti-choice and pro-choice nonprofits may benefit from using language that resonates with diverse ideologies.

Assessment of the Methodology & Data Sources

The comparative historical methodology was effective in identifying the similarities and differences of the language used across the two movements over time and assessing how historical trends have influenced themes in contemporary messaging. Applying this methodology to the research successfully exposed the most significant similarities and differences between the language of nonprofits within the two movements. By juxtaposing historical language with contemporary rhetoric, this research fulfilled the methodology's goal of analyzing information from the past to explain a current reality. The current reality that concerns this research is the contentious nature of abortion in the U.S. and its relationship to the language of pro-choice and anti-choice nonprofits.

The range of sources contributing to the data collection provided information for a comprehensive analysis. As predicted, historical books and articles were most useful for the assessment of historical trends. Differently, the websites of Americans United for Life (AUL), National Right to Life Committee (NRLC), Planned Parenthood, and NARAL Pro-Choice America (NARAL), as well as recent news articles, served as the primary data sources for the assessment of similarities and differences in contemporary language.

Primary Changes in Language Over Time

Despite their inherently opposing interests, both the anti-choice and the pro-choice movement developed their messaging in conjunction with the broader discourse of the time periods in which they existed. Specifically, movements such as civil rights and feminism, progress in scientific discovery, as well as the primary social inequalities throughout history have

all influenced the rhetoric of nonprofits within the pro-choice and anti-choice movements. While the language of the two movements has differed over time in numerous ways, discussions of abortion's relationship to social inequalities and the wellbeing of women emerge as shared talking points since the passage of *Roe v. Wade* in 1973. The following section presents a chronological overview of the historical changes in language and highlights similarities and differences in the messaging of the two movements over time.

Evolution of the Pro-Choice Movement's Language

In the decades following the passage of *Roe v. Wade*, the pro-choice movement struggled to find a cohesive voice in their advocacy language. However, messaging primarily focused on women's rights when the Supreme Court legalized abortion in 1973. *Roe v. Wade* passed in the middle of the Second Wave Feminist movement, a social struggle for "women's liberation" that primarily advocated for the rights of white women (Fried 2013). In the years leading up to the decision and the months directly following, much of the public discourse described abortion as a key moment of progress in women's fight for freedom.

In the mid 1970s, a faction of the pro-choice movement attempted to characterize abortion as an issue of "population control" (Ziegler 2013, 20). In particular, NARAL and Planned Parenthood both formed alliances with groups like Zero Population Growth in the hopes that describing abortion as an issue of population growth would be more appealing than simply framing it as a "women's issue" (Ziegler 2013, 20-21). The rhetoric linking abortion to decreasing the birth rate was short-lived, however, because pro-choice nonprofits began to acknowledge the problematic presence of racism inherent in such messaging (Ziegler 2013, 21).

Discussions of race and personal freedom divided the messaging of the pro-choice movement in the 1980s. According to Marlene Fried (2013), "women of color and low-income

women” felt ignored by the broader discourse of the pro-choice movement due to the lack of recognition about the unique ways that abortion restrictions harm women of color and poor women (12). As such, women of color asserted the hypocrisy of the historical movement and emphasized the importance of a reproductive justice lens that demanded the same opportunities for *all* women to make decisions about their reproductive capabilities (Fried 2013, 12).

Meanwhile, much of the rhetoric within larger groups like Planned Parenthood and NARAL remained focused on the concept of “choice” and “privacy” in their framing of abortion (Fried 2013, p. 10).

In the 1990s and early 2000s, the messaging of pro-choice nonprofits became increasingly defensive as organizations attempted to counteract legislative attacks and physical violence from the anti-abortion movement. When numerous abortion providers suffered violence from anti-abortion extremists, pro-choice groups began to vocalize the importance of protecting patients and health care workers, as well as ensuring that mechanisms to defend “access” existed despite such violence (Fried 2013, 12). In the early 2000s, nonprofits such as Live Action, AUL, and NRLC publicly criticized the work of specific pro-choice nonprofits like Planned Parenthood by questioning the organization’s ethics, abidance of the law, and transparency with patients (Ziegler 2020, p. 187-189). Pro-choice groups answered these attacks by asserting that the anti-choice movement had encouraged a “war on women” throughout the country and had no respect for the actual health of women (Ziegler 2020, 191).

The defensive messaging of the pro-choice movement eventually changed to more defiant and prideful language in 2010. Instead of framing abortion as something that is emotional or painful, Planned Parenthood and NARAL endorsed the “Shout Your Abortion” campaign and encouraged women to share their abortion stories with others in an attempt to “destigmatize” the

procedure” (Ziegler 2020, 197). The focus on destigmatizing abortion also transformed how organizations discussed the procedure; nonprofits and the broader medical community started to describe abortion as a normal or basic healthcare procedure and thus attempted to dismantle the image that it is a traumatic, dangerous, or out-of-the-ordinary event (Hogue 2017).

In a stark change from the movement’s early years, the language of pro-choice nonprofits in recent decades is heavily focused on inclusivity and equity issues. Pro-choice organizations frequently discuss the unequal harm that abortion restrictions cause for women of color and poor women due to the specific barriers they face in accessing health care. While these organizations still place abortion access and reproductive rights at the core of their missions, they assert the link between their own movement and other contemporary issues, such as police brutality against people of color, prison reform, immigrants’ rights, LGBTQ+ rights and economic inequalities. The NARAL website has a page under its “About” section titled “Intersectional Commitments and Supporting Policies” that affirms the organization’s support of movements like Black Lives Matter (NARAL, n.d.). Similarly, Planned Parenthood describes securing “health care for people most harmed by racist and discriminatory systems” as one of the organization’s top priorities (Planned Parenthood, n.d.).

The movement has also made efforts in recent years to acknowledge its racist roots. Alexis McGill Johnson (2021), the president and chief executive of Planned Parenthood Federation of America, wrote in a recent Opinion piece for the New York Times that Planned Parenthood needed to “reckon” with its early engagement in the eugenics movement and its harmful fixation with “white womanhood”. In other words, Johnson and other pro-choice nonprofit leaders are advocating for a critical assessment of the compounding systems of oppression that women of color face in order to build a more inclusive movement.

Evolution of the Anti-Choice Movement's Language

Unlike the pro-choice movement, the anti-choice movement was relatively united in its messaging in the years that followed the federal legalization of abortion in 1973. During this time, much of anti-choice nonprofits' language focused uniquely on the "life" of the fetus and its need for "protection" (Ziegler 2020, 26). For example, groups like Americans United for Life (AUL) and National Right to Life Committee (NRLC) advocated for a constitutional amendment that would protect "fetal rights" and allow them the same protections as any American citizen (Ziegler 2020, 23-24). In this sense, anti-choice groups framed their work as a struggle to defend all people, which included the unborn fetus.

Anti-choice groups also incorporated rhetoric about racial discrimination in their messaging, however, the topic of racial oppression emerged earlier in the discourse of anti-choice organizations. Specifically, a faction of the movement in the 1970s began to fixate on messaging from the civil rights movement and insisted that abortion was an act of racial "genocide" aimed at decreasing the populations of communities of color (Ziegler 2013, 26). In the late 1960s, members of the Black Panther Party had openly voiced their opposition to abortion due to concerns that abortion represented yet another effort to oppress black people (Ziegler 2013, 26). The pro-choice movement's historical alignment with eugenics added to the weight of claims about abortion's racist intents. Prominent anti-choice nonprofits would later return to this language as a primary talking point for galvanizing supporters.

A portion of the rhetoric from anti-choice organizations in the 1970s and 1980s focused on conservative religious convictions. According to abortion historian Jennifer Holland (2020), "white conservatives used abortion politics to...narrow the definition of religion" and assert their anti-choice views as proof of their "morality" (88). In other words, these activists publicly stated

that opposing abortion was a requirement for a person of faith. Furthermore, the religious messaging of the time period portrayed women who had abortions as “sexually promiscuous” and lacking in moral conviction (Holland 2022, 99; Agostinone-Wilson 2020, 152).

In the 1980s and 1990s, scientific and technological advancements resulted in increased “personification” in the anti-choice movement’s description of the fetus (Holland 2020). Due to the photos that new technology was able to capture of embryos and new scientific discoveries about the developmental stages of a fetus throughout a pregnancy, the anti-choice movement began to assert that a fetus was in fact a “baby” that had visible human features in the early stages of its development (Agostinone-Wilson 2020, 155). In the 1990s, anti-choice organizations went to new depths to frame abortion as the death of infants, by describing living children as “survivors” of abortion (Holland 2020, 16). In other words, the movement portrayed abortion as a threat to babies everywhere, and thus any child that was living had escaped the injustice of abortion. Finally, in 1995 NRLC began using the phrase “partial-birth abortion” to describe the “dilation and extraction” abortion procedure and attempt to frame it as a surgery that kills babies (Rovner 2006). This terminology emphasizes the anti-choice viewpoint that a fetus is a person.

Language that frames abortion as a discriminatory tool has persisted to recent decades. In 2003, Representative Trent Franks, a member of the Arizona affiliate of NRLC, publicly stated that abortion causes more harm to the “African-American community” by killing unborn black babies than did the “policies of slavery” (Holland 2020, p. 2). In addition to describing abortion as a racist weapon, the anti-choice movement has repeatedly insinuated that anyone who supports abortion is hostile towards people with disabilities. NRLC has a packet on its website titled “When They Say... You Say” that teaches supporters about communication with pro-choice

people (Turner and Balch, n.d.). In response to a hypothetical question about justifying an abortion decision on the basis of a fetal anomaly, the packet instructs supporters to describe such an action as “the height of prejudice” and to reiterate the “worth” of every human being (Turner and Balch, n.d., 6).

In the 1990s and 2000s, anti-choice organizations began taking steps to emphasize the importance of protecting women from abortion in a manner reminiscent of the pro-choice movement’s women-focused rhetoric. When AUL and NRLC helped to pass state laws that restricted abortion after a certain number of weeks, AUL characterized these laws as “Women’s Late Term Pregnancy Health Acts” and “Mother’s Health and Safety Acts”, thus directly insinuating that the legislation was aimed at saving women (Ziegler 2020, 190). In a recent study analyzing anti-abortion legislative bills from 2007-2018 in every state within the U.S., political science scholar Amanda Roberti (2021) concluded that that the majority of the bills used “pro-woman” messaging to advance their agendas (207; 214). Specifically, this discourse frames abortion as a physical and emotional danger for women (Roberti 2021, 207). Similarly, the AUL website has a page titled “Why Abortion is Unsafe” that delineates the harm abortion causes for women as well as the “failure” of the “pro-abortion” movement to defend “young girls” from violence (AUL, n.d.). The messaging of the anti-choice movement has increasingly framed the work of opposing abortion as a fight for the protection of women.

The historical changes to language of anti-choice nonprofits demonstrate both shared and divergent messaging to that of the pro-choice nonprofits. While descriptions of the unborn fetus and religious claims represent language that is unique to anti-choice organizations, messaging that links abortion to issues of discrimination and social inequality, and language that emphasizes protecting women are all similarities with the messaging of pro-choice groups.

Contemporary Similarities and Differences

Several key similarities and differences that emerged across the two movements over the last fifty years remain pertinent with nonprofits today. Specifically, each movement frames abortion as an issue of social equality and protecting vulnerable populations while emphasizing the experiences of women. At the same time, primary differences in the language are discussions of privacy and the life of the fetus. The messaging of Planned Parenthood, NARAL Pro-Choice America (NARAL), Americans United for Life (AUL) and National Right to Life Committee (NRLC) provide examples of how these similarities and differences present themselves today.

Part 1: Similarities

Alleviating Social Inequalities & Assisting the Vulnerable

Nonprofits within the two movements continuously emphasize the role that their work plays in combatting social inequalities in society. The AUL website states that the organization's primary "motivation" is the inherent equality of humans: "we are all equal members of the human family and equally worthy of respect, solidarity, and love" (AUL, n.d.). Similarly, pro-choice nonprofits like Planned Parenthood and NARAL frequently highlight the importance of making reproductive health care and bodily autonomy accessible to "all" people (Planned Parenthood, n.d.; NARAL, n.d.). Likewise, NARAL affirms its commitment to "dismantling inequalities" in the "Road Map to Equity" section of the website (NARAL, n.d.). The historical discussions of abortion as a social justice issue remain present today.

Organizations primarily discuss inequality by emphasizing the importance of supporting "vulnerable" populations (NRLC, n.d.). In this sense, the movements each use caretaking or savior-based language that presents the respective organization as essential for helping individuals in need. Importantly, the two sides view many of the same people as vulnerable. As

the historical trends describe, each movement has discussed the relationship between abortion and race, class, and gender.

NRLC's mission statement asserts that the organization recognizes the "dignity" of all people, especially "vulnerable people" and "those who cannot defend themselves" (NRLC, n.d.). For anti-choice organizations like NRLC, vulnerable people include the unborn child, people with disabilities, the pregnant woman, and the children who grow up in a society that offers abortion. Additionally, at-risk populations in the eyes of anti-choice nonprofits are racial minorities and poor people, who may think that abortion is the "only option" when an unplanned pregnancy occurs (NRLC, n.d.).

On the pro-choice side, vulnerable people include anybody who is facing an unwanted pregnancy, racial minorities, young people, and people with limited economic means. For example, NARAL explicitly describes the necessity of ensuring accessibility to abortion care for everyone "regardless of zip code or income" (NARAL, n.d.). Similarly, Planned Parenthood cites the "disproportionate impact" that abortion restrictions have on vulnerable populations such as BIPOC communities, immigrants, and younger generations (Planned Parenthood, n.d.). Despite their opposing missions, both pro-choice and anti-choice nonprofits prioritize language that focuses on combatting social inequality by defending the vulnerable.

Helping Women

Another key similarity across the discourse of the two movements is a focus on the wellbeing of women. In a study that assessed the language within debates about abortion policy during the 2013 California Legislative Session, Jesudason and Weitz (2015) determined that both sides of the debate employed "women-protective" language to position their arguments despite the different goals of the two movements (259; 266). In other words, while one side of the debate

wanted to restrict abortion and the other wanted to expand access to abortion, both sides stated their commitment to defending women.

Although the pro-choice movement has recently made efforts to include transgender people in their descriptions of people who can become pregnant, the movement still frames abortion access as a vital component of women's rights (Facci 2022). NARAL emphasizes that abortion restrictions harm the "fundamental equality of women" (NARAL, n.d.). Similarly, Planned Parenthood references the physical damage that abortion restrictions have caused for women over time. In particular, the organization discusses the risk that women took to access illegal abortions prior to Roe's passage (Kessler 2019). In recent years, the organization has continued to emphasize the danger that women without abortion access face throughout the country. Although they maintain that abortion should be accessible in all scenarios, pro-choice organizations also discuss the extreme harm that abortion restrictions create for victims of sexual abuse due to the compounding trauma that a forced pregnancy can create (Betts 2022).

Similarly, anti-choice nonprofits frequently describe why abortion threatens women's safety. Americans United for Life (2017) published a report called "Unsafe: Why Abortion Endangers Women" which explicitly delineates the range of ways that abortion negatively impacts women. The testimonials expressing support for this publication praise AUL for its commitment to "keeping women safe" (AUL 2017, 197). Additionally, anti-choice nonprofits have developed strategic language that includes medical words to dissuade women from seeking abortions, such as "post-abortion syndrome" (NRLC, n.d.). Although there is no medical consensus to support this claim, anti-choice groups theorize that abortion causes long-term psychological damage for women (Cohen 2006).

Motherhood

Within their discussions of women, organizations across the two movements also implement rhetoric that references mothers and the maternal experience. Whereas anti-choice organizations regularly characterize any pregnant woman as a mother and insinuate that the fetus within her will become a child, the pro-choice side often describes the role that abortion plays in allowing women to become mothers at a time of their choosing. For example, the NRLC “When They Say...You Say” packet instructs members to use the term “mother” instead of “pregnant woman” when discussing abortion (Turner and Balch, n.d., 5). Throughout the 19-page packet, the word “mother” appears 51 times and consistently serves as the descriptor for any sentence that references a pregnant person (Turner and Balch, n.d.). The maternal experience is central to anti-choice messaging.

Pro-choice groups also reference mothers when they are describing the need for abortion. Specifically, pro-choice nonprofits characterize abortion as a component of the broader array of services that are necessary for individuals to have healthy families. In the months following the overturning of *Roe v. Wade*, much of the discourse about abortion has centered on mothers who have received abortions throughout their life. The Planned Parenthood website references the experiences of mothers who have decided to have abortions due to developmental defects of their fetuses (Planned Parenthood, n.d.). On a similar note, NARAL (2019) tweeted a statistic on Mother’s Day about the number of parents who seek abortion care, exclaiming that “moms need access to safe abortion care to be able to make the best choices for themselves and their families”. The pro-choice movement juxtaposes abortion with mothers as a method of demonstrating the universal need for abortion care and the reality that individuals who choose to have children may still require such services.

Part 2: Differences

Despite the numerous similarities that exist across the historical and contemporary language of the two movements, the life of the fetus and privacy remain sources of division in messaging. These subjects appear to create clear messaging boundaries between the two movements; pro-choice nonprofits avoid discussing the life of the fetus in the context of unwanted pregnancies, and the anti-choice movement evades referencing personal freedom and privacy.

Fetal Personhood

Anti-choice nonprofits like AUL and NRLC place an emphasis on fetal rights and frame the fetus as an unborn child in a manner that is consistent with historical rhetoric. The “Abortion” page of the NRLC website has an entire section devoted to “facts” about the “Unborn Baby” including a description of the early stages of the “baby’s” development and the “Pain of the Unborn Child” (NRLC, n.d.). Similarly, on the “Mission” section of its website, AUL mourns the manner in which “those not yet born have been dehumanized” as a result of abortion in the United States (AUL, n.d.). Descriptions of fetal life are ever-present in the language of anti-choice nonprofits.

Infringement on Privacy

Differently, pro-choice nonprofits continue to frame abortion restrictions as an act of government overstep that diminishes bodily autonomy and infringes on privacy. Among the numerous examples of this type of language is NARAL’s assertion that abortion is a decision that only concerns patients and their doctors (NARAL, n.d.). Similarly, a portion of this messaging portrays politicians as intruders in intimate decision-making. In response to the Trump-era “Gag Rule” that prohibited Title X funding recipients from providing or discussing

abortion, Planned Parenthood’s Clergy Advocacy Board criticized the policy for metaphorically allowing “politicians into the exam room” and “undermining the patient’s moral agency” (Planned Parenthood 2019). This language insinuates that the government and individual politicians reject the autonomy of people who can become pregnant and thus threaten the American value of personal freedom.

Chapter 5: Conclusion and Recommendations

This research confirms that similarities in the messaging of pro-choice and anti-choice nonprofits have emerged repeatedly since the passage of *Roe v. Wade* in 1973 to the present day. Nonprofits on each side of the abortion debate have continuously framed abortion as inherently connected to issues of social inequality and women’s health and wellbeing. At the same time, certain messaging has remained unique to nonprofits within one of the movements, fetal personhood has consistently emerged as a talking point for anti-choice nonprofits and privacy has assumed a steady presence in the rhetoric of pro-choice nonprofits.

Despite the animosity that has existed throughout history between anti-choice and pro-choice nonprofits, the findings of this research underscore that language may be a unifying tool amidst such division. Concerns about the wellbeing of women and social inequalities extends across diverse demographics and ideologies, regardless of individuals’ views about abortion. Additionally, while they have opposing goals, the shared talking points across the two movements demonstrates the potential for increased dialogue between pro-choice and anti-choice groups. As such, messaging that emphasizes the relationship between abortion and these issues may serve pro-choice nonprofits in the future.

The precarious status of abortion in America impacts families and individuals throughout the country on a daily basis. Unfortunately, abortion is not simply a cause for debate in this

country. Rather, it is a medical procedure on which thousands of individuals rely, and the politicization of abortion threatens the health of American citizens. According to the Guttmacher Institute (2022), in 2020 “20.6% of pregnancies” resulted in abortion. Furthermore, historian Karissa Haugeberg (2019) asserts that prior to the legalization of abortion in 1973, an estimated 200 women died from illegal procedures or self-induced abortion annually, and others faced extreme medical issues as a result of unsafe procedures. The consequences of denying individuals access to abortion are vast, and thus pro-choice nonprofits have to act now to combat abortion restrictions. Pro-choice nonprofits may benefit from a critical assessment of how they frame abortion if they wish to halt the recent spread of abortion restrictions and ensure that American citizens can exercise their bodily autonomy.

Understanding how the language of the pro-choice movement has historically compared to that of the anti-choice movement can be a useful educational tool for pro-choice nonprofit leaders. More specifically, acknowledging the similarities and differences of the two movements’ messaging can help pro-choice nonprofits to assess which talking points appeal to diverse demographics and ideologies. In the long-term, employing this knowledge in messaging strategies may allow pro-choice nonprofits to connect with populations that have historically identified as anti-choice.

The findings in this paper add to prior research focused on the similarities and differences between pro-choice and anti-choice nonprofits as well as studies that investigated themes in language across the two movements. That said, by focusing on the language of nonprofits within the two movements since 1973, this research offers a distinctive comparative historical analysis that differs from prior research.

Importantly, as a capstone project, this paper does not offer a comprehensive analysis of all forms of messaging across the two movements since 1973; however, future research can add to this study and provide more information about patterns in the language of pro-choice and anti-choice nonprofits. In particular, research examining the link between language and successful advocacy campaigns would be useful. Additionally, future research could examine regional differences in abortion rhetoric throughout the country. Finally, a historical comparison between the language of pro-choice and anti-choice nonprofits within the U.S. and the rhetoric of comparable nonprofits abroad would be interesting. Among the numerous countries that could provide fruitful data are Ireland, Mexico, and Colombia as they have each advanced abortion rights in recent years.

Ultimately, the similarities in rhetoric that have persisted over time insinuate that certain talking points can resonate with diverse ideologies and withstand historical changes. It is undeniable that significant hostility exists between organizations within the two movements. That being said, the data within this research asserts that nonprofits within each movement have employed comparable messaging over time to expand their supporter bases, gain awareness for their causes, and advance their advocacy goals. This research signals that appealing to common ground or shared interests may be an effective approach to messaging for nonprofits advocating to protect and advance abortion rights.

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