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A Feminist Analysis of Prenatal Care in the U.S.

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Oral Presentation 1.2

A FEMINIST ANALYSIS OF PRENATAL CARE IN THE U.S.

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The aim of this project is to analyze the U.S. system of prenatal care from a feminist point of view. I begin by investigating the connection between prenatal care and birth outcomes; studies indicate that adequate prenatal care is almost causally related to positive birth outcomes. However, certain women are likely to fail to receive proper care. A set of maternal characteristics describes women who are unlikely to receive adequate prenatal care. Since these same characteristics also describe women in poverty, I propose that poverty is the underlying cause of women's inability to receive proper health care. An examination of the dynamics of poverty reveals that the forces which place people in poverty affect women more than men. In addition, welfare, which is meant to assist the poor, actually prevents people- particularly women- from climbing out of poverty.

Using Ronald Dworkin's theory of social justice, I argue that because of the way welfare works, poverty effectively undermines women's equality as citizens. This theory, called the Equality of Resources theory, requires that each person has equal access to community resources and no person utilizes more than his/her share. In order to maintain women's equality, some type of welfare must therefore compensate for the inequalities in access to resources, including prenatal care. However, the present system of welfare does not compensate adequately for any inequalities; in particular, poor women are prevented from seeking adequate prenatal care. In order to restore women's equality as citizens, welfare must be reformed to include prenatal care for poor women.