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FRAMING AND RHETORICAL THEMES
IN 1970s-1980s MEDIATED ABORTION DISCOURSE IN NEW ZEALAND

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ABSTRACT

Abortion discourses have garnered attention from all corners: medical, legal, psychological, rhetorical, ecclesiastical, etc. From the desks of scholars to the sidewalks in front of Planned Parenthood, people engage intimately with the topic of abortion, inquiring about its impact on the individuals involved and on society. However, the vast majority of abortion conversation has been U.S.-centric. This paper addresses rhetoric and framing appeals in abortion-related mediated discourse in New Zealand in the 1970s-80s. I look at a wide range of media artifacts, representing the perspectives of various prolife and prochoice groups in New Zealand during and immediately after their own legislation changed to allow abortions. While my analysis is modeled after McCombs and Shaw's agenda setting theory, it seeks to investigate how common rhetorical strategies and framing themes – rhetoric of choice, rhetoric of personhood, health of the mother, and victimization/violence – were used in abortion discourse in New Zealand. This is an important conversation to have, not only because abortion remains an emotionally charged topic in New Zealand, but also because critical analysis of abortion discourses through a specific New Zealand lens is limited. Additionally, this discourse is important because it sheds light on how we talk about abortion, and as a result, how we are primed to think about it.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Limited scholarship examines abortion discourse in New Zealand media during the 1970s-80s; however, literature exists that discusses the context and frameworks from which this discourse sprung and within which it operated. The subject of abortion in New Zealand has been deeply contested, with gritty discussions and political framing emerging in mainstream media as early as the 1930s.¹ Within the general climate, abortion-related discussion has taken the podium in a wide array of fields, including medical, psychological, ethnographic, media, religious, legal, political, and human-rights activist literature. For example, the book, *Abortion: Judicial History and Legislative Response* by Jon Shimabukuro views abortion through the lens of various U.S. Supreme Court decisions regarding abortion's legality; while Lafarge, Mitchell, and Fox navigate through ethnographic means, focusing on women's stories and psychological experiences in their article "Termination of Pregnancy for Fetal Abnormality: A Meta-Ethnography of Women's Experiences."

Yet despite the diverse angles from which abortion rhetoric is scrutinized, New Zealand abortion research has been conducted primarily in medical and political realms. The binary character of New Zealand's abortion scholarship may be attributed to the nature of its abortion legislation, which, while not universally legalizing abortion, does allow for abortion in instances when pregnancy significantly affects the mother's health. This paper contextualizes the environment from which framing strategies and rhetorical themes in abortion-related media

¹ Marita Leask, "From Bad Women to Mad Women: A Genealogical Analysis of Abortion Discourses in Aotearoa New Zealand," *New Zealand Sociology*, 28.2 (2013), p. 104.

emerge, and analyzes how they are employed in New Zealand media from the 1970s-80s. These strategies/themes, as identified by other rhetoricians and scholars, are as follows: rhetoric of choice, rhetoric of personhood, health of the mother, and victimization/violence.

Chapter 2

Abortion Landscapes in New Zealand & the United States

The 1970s-80s were a pivotal time in both New Zealand and the United States. Landmark case *Roe vs. Wade* took place in 1973 in the U.S., followed shortly thereafter by the Royal Commission in 1975 in New Zealand. By the 1980s, prolife and prochoice activists had firmly entrenched themselves in powerful social movements who promoted opposing sociopolitical agendas. This section looks at the political steps taken in New Zealand during the 1970s and U.S. influence on New Zealand prolife social movements in the 1980s, both of which helped set the framework for abortion discourses. Because New Zealanders have historically taken cues from Americans on the matter of abortion, especially New Zealand proliferers, it is important to understand the various forces at play in both New Zealand and the United States in order to grasp how abortion is discussed in New Zealand during the 1970s-80s.

Royal Commission

The New Zealand Parliament commenced a Royal Commission² on September 12, 1975 to investigate and consider abortion as well as contraception and sterilization. The Commission recognized the traditional prolife stance, that the unborn child is possessed of human life from the moment of conception, and therefore has a rightful claim to state protection of its life. However, the Commission also upheld that pregnancy begins at implantation and did not deem

² Hence referred to as “Commission.”

the various stages of pregnancy, such as quickening, viability, or brain development, as rendering the fetus any more or less a person. Alongside these recognitions, the Commission further considered the role and health of the mother, ultimately recommending that mothers had the right to seek an abortion, within the first trimester, on the justification of mental or physical health.

The Commission resulted from five years of heated debate and conflict over the abortion issue in New Zealand, culminating “in a police raid on the Auckland Medical Aid Trust, a private clinic providing abortions and the subsequent judicial and legislative circus which saw Dr. James Woolnough, its director, tried, granted a mistrial and then retried and acquitted for performing abortions.”³ Hearing and reviewing over 10,000 pages of testimony, the Commission sat for two years, during which there were widespread and sometimes violent protests and demonstrations throughout New Zealand.

Fear and hostility characteristic of an inquisition marked the Commission’s proceedings. Hearings were held throughout the country, from Auckland to Dunedin, where witnesses read their statements and were then privately questioned by members of the Commission. Experts and organization representatives were subjected to public questioning, including lawyers spanning the abortion gamut: the Society for the Protection of the Unborn Child (SPUC) and the Abortion Law Reform Association of New Zealand (ALRANZ).⁴ According to Molloy in her review of the Commission:

These sessions were very like hostile cross-examination in court-room trials, and, even on paper twenty years after the event, the hostility is glaringly obvious. Early on, the

³ Maureen Molloy, “Rights, Facts, Humans and Women: An Archeology of the Royal Commission on Contraception, Sterilisation and Abortion in New Zealand,” *Women’s Studies Journal* 12.1 (1996), p. 64.

⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 64-65.

Commission was asked to grant immunity from prosecution to witnesses who wished to give evidence which might lead to them being prosecuted for offences...[but] was unable to give immunity...the ultimate result was that the most personal and most compelling evidence was often heard only by Commissioners.⁵

After finishing the hearings, the Commission engaged in further research, analysis, and discussion before releasing their final report: *Contraception, Sterilisation and Abortion in New Zealand: Report of the Royal Commission of Inquiry*.⁶

It is acknowledged that the Report downplayed various facts in arriving at its decision, including “research on public attitudes to abortion, psychological and psychiatric research, and the knowledge of women who presented evidence of lives marred by ill health, poverty and lost opportunity.”⁷ Rather, the Report reviewed various subsets of positions, including genetics, developmental research, social consequences, and morality. Here, there was much controversy among consulted sources and studies, stimulating conflicted debate during the Commission. “Facts” that could not be universally accepted concerning the beginning of human life and the implications of the fetus’ eligibility for rights at different stages of its biological development were generally disregarded by the Commission.

Molloy writes, “Whereas there was no methodological criticism in the discussion papers and the *Report* of any of the scientific ‘facts’ used to determine the origin of human life, research on public and medical attitudes to abortion was given little weight and was repeatedly criticized or dismissed on the grounds of methodological unreliability or that the opinions expressed were

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Referred to from now on as “Report.”

⁷ Ibid., p. 70.

not informed by all the relevant facts.”⁸ Thus, the only “facts” validated by the Commission in relation to the fetus “were determined principally by social and professional status.”⁹ That is, testimonies and narratives offered by individuals lacking credible status, afforded either by a high position in society or professional fields (namely, medicine), were not considered. Such discarded “facts” included narratives from individual women affected by abortion legislation.

In addition to relevance and reliability of facts, the Commission was also concerned with the position of women within this discourse on rights and abortion. Molloy identifies two narrative movements that sprung from this examination: negatively connoted metaphors and associating women with stereotypical irrationality. She says, “There was a conflict between representation of women as rational human beings choosing to control their lives...and that of women as irrational, emotional and unable to make informed judgments.”¹⁰ The latter characterization was only (re)emphasized in the case of pregnant women, who are generally subject to greater emotional strain due to hormonal changes. This irrationality was deemed as evidence of “psychological disturbance” natural to the biological processes undergone during pregnancy.

Upon release of the Report in 1977, New Zealand passed the Contraception, Sterilization, and Abortion Act. This Act established the Abortion Supervisory Committee, whose purpose is to maintain “the list of certifying consultants who decide whether a woman meets the lawful ground for an abortion...[and] oversees the quality of services and where they are available.”¹¹ Insofar as this “lawful ground” was concerned, abortions were permitted only within the first

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 73.

¹¹ “The Law Around Abortion,” New Zealand Family Planning.

trimester,¹² and only on the basis of women's health, requiring that two doctors certify "that continuing the pregnancy would result in serious danger to a woman's mental or physical health."¹³

During debate of this legislation, Members of Parliament created a stark dichotomy between pro- and anti-abortion factions, making either clear arguments on behalf of the fetus and its rights as a person or on behalf of the mother and her health rights. Marita Leask, a New Zealand academic whose research focuses on a sociological perspective of abortion in New Zealand, sums up some of these debates:

In the Parliamentary debates on the Bill [Contraception, Sterilization, and Abortion Act] many MPs [Members of Parliament] made explicit foetal-rights [sic] based arguments. Robert Muldoon spoke of 'the sanctity of human life' and Mick Connelly talked about the 'responsibility to protect human life.' T.J. Young went even further and posed the question of abortion as a 'question of two human lives of equal value.' Dr. Wall used highly emotive languages, stating 'this is not an emotion; it is the hard cold facts of what we are discussing – whether that little boy or girl should be sucked out through a sucker.'¹⁴

Leask goes on to discuss the constructive base of arguments for the fetus, arguing that MPs at the time made the ontological claim that fetal personhood is an inherent quality of the unborn. She says that in fetal-rights discourse, images are used to portray victimization of the unborn who are abandoned and murdered by their mothers.

¹² Contraception, Sterilisation, and Abortion in New Zealand Act, "Abortion," Section 18, 1977.

¹³ "The Law Around Abortion."

¹⁴ Leask, "From Bad Women to Mad Women," p. 110.

As Leask notes, positivist objectivity circulates this fetal victimization discourse, aligning itself with universal truth and basic human reasoning: “Foetal [sic] images are coded in the language of positivism and scientific objectivity, consequently the ontological claims associated with discourses on foetal [sic] images are often accepted as realist.”¹⁵ Attributing personhood status to the unborn fetus is hardly a new concept in abortion-related discourse, with the United States offering perhaps most examples of this argument in its own abortion legalization history. There are several key points of interest where the anti-abortion movement in the United States has crossed paths with its New Zealand counterparts. The following section looks at the prolife movement in the United States and its influence on the New Zealand prolife movement in the 1980s.

United States Influence

Joe Scheidler, American prolife activist, founded the Prolife Action League in the United States in 1980, a catalytic movement that developed from already vibrant anti-abortion currents in the 1970s following *Roe v. Wade*. This organization, along with Operation Rescue tactics established by fellow American anti-abortion activist Randall Terry, laid the groundwork for active protest that has since been used as a model by prolife organizations throughout the United States. These tactics include hosting prayer rallies in front of clinics, employing graphic imagery, bombarding abortion clinics (called “blitzes”), and thus barring abortion-seeking women from entering, and other strategies.¹⁶

¹⁵ Ibid, p. 111.

¹⁶ Robin Marty. “Meet Joe Scheidler, Patriarch of the Anti-Abortion Movement,” *Political Research Associates*, 2015.

Through Scheidler and Terry, a connection between the prolife social movements in the United States and New Zealand was forged. Both activists made trips to New Zealand in the 1980s to establish their social protest strategies among New Zealand prolife groups. Operation Rescue New Zealand, which lasted from 1988-1993, resulted from Scheidler and Terry's efforts in New Zealand. Operation Rescue led to the development of other New Zealand prolife groups, as well as chapters of the international prolife organization 40 Days for Life Campaign (which was also inspired by Scheidler's activist tactics).¹⁷

An article published during the heat of Operation Rescue New Zealand describes one of their pickets that took place on October 12, 1989:

On that occasion 40 novice "rescuers" installed themselves in the doorway of the Auckland Medical Aid Centre (AMAC) in Dominion Road in an attempt to stop the woman booked for abortions that morning from ever reaching the abortionist. Several, warned of the siege, rescheduled their appointments. Operation Rescue, convinced that delay invites reconsideration, chalked this up as a success and also claimed that their sit-in was successful on two other counts. Word had leaked out before that first protest that Operation Rescue was about to strike and the Epsom Day Hospital, worried it could be a target, had closed its door for two days.¹⁸

The article recounts many other Operation Rescue activities, including confrontations with the Women's National Abortion Action Campaign (WONAAC) in Wellington, where prolife protestors confronted prochoice proponents, where "Di Cleary, the feisty president of WONAAC, sneeringly called the rescuers 'nasty little dying embers of the prolife movement.'"¹⁹

¹⁷ Marty, "Meet Joe Scheidler."

¹⁸ Lynne Loates, "State of Siege," *More*, 1990, p. 64.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 66.

This tense relationship characterizes ongoing relations between prolife and prochoice agencies and individual supporters throughout New Zealand. Other rhetoric, such as Colleen Bayer's term "anti-lifers," used to categorize abortion supporters,²⁰ was frequently volleyed between the two factions, especially during the late 1970s-1990s. However, these terms were not "just" words, but rather examples of an electrically charged, ongoing discourse over which proponents were willing to be arrested for what they believed in.²¹

Operation Rescue New Zealand, the Society for Protection of the Unborn Child (SPUC), the Women's National Abortion Action Campaign (WONAAC), and the Abortion Law Reform Association of New Zealand (ALRANZ) constituted the four major prolife and prochoice organizations during this period. Of these, the latter three were particularly active in creating and issuing promotion and campaign media specific to their cause, a large sample of which has been referred to and analyzed for the purpose of this discussion.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid.

Chapter 3

Abortion-Related Rhetoric and Framing Appeals

With the historically great importance placed on abortion and determining whether the mother's or fetus rights outweigh one another, the conversation surrounding this debate has garnered wide scholarly attention in terms of its rhetoric and framing strategies. In reviewing this scholarship, various themes are reiterated and emphasized, such as rhetoric of choice, victimization, and personhood of the unborn child. While each scholar offers a different nuanced view or critique of abortion, scholars unanimously acknowledge that the rhetoric and framing strategies used in abortion discourse are of paramount importance, with very real and tangible consequences for women and the unborn.

In a critique of prochoice rhetoric “almost as old as the *Roe v. Wade* ruling,” Karen Weingarten writes about the “rhetoric of choice,” arguing that the way in which abortion is discussed often undermines a sense of choice for women.²² Calling it a “decision trap,” Weingarten joins other scholars in questioning, “whether the rhetoric of choice guarantees women the most assured and secured access to abortion” and references abortion rhetoricians Rickie Solinger and Rosalind Petchesky. Collectively, they believe that the rhetoric of choice so commonplace in prochoice discourse is indicative of an individualistic societal attitude, an attitude where choice is everything and mitigates personal responsibility, concluding that “choice” is a “problematic framework in certain conditions.”²³

²² Karen Weingarten, “Impossible Decisions: Abortion, Reproductive Technologies, and the Rhetoric of Choice.” *Women's Studies, An Inter-Disciplinary Journal*, 41.3 (2012), p. 266.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 267.

Lealle Ruhl also acknowledges the rhetoric of choice and its shortcomings, particularly “its inattention to diverse economic, social, and gender settings.” While she writes specifically within a liberal feminist context, Ruhl contrasts how the rights of women versus those of the fetus are considered, arguing that pregnant women are not considered as “legitimate subjects,” rendered inferior in a sense by their pregnancy rather than as full individuals. Conversely, she says the fetus enjoys “extraordinary rights:”

Whereas parents have the legal right to refuse to give blood, organs, or biological materials to a fatally ill child, pregnant women are routinely expected to subject themselves to the most heroic measures on behalf of the fetus...[The argument I present here is not that fetuses gain personhood at the expense of pregnant women, but that the subjectivity of the fetus is not the subjectivity of the liberal subject...Neither the fetus nor the pregnant woman has true personhood in a liberal paradigm.²⁴

Thus, despite this contrast in rights, Ruhl argues that neither pregnant mother nor unborn child truly enjoy the liberties of personhood as recognized in a liberal framework.

Ruhl goes on to link the way in which motherhood and fetus are conceived, saying that medical and political framing “have reinforced the image of the fetus as a separate subject contained within the pregnant woman,” that is, “we have a bifurcated view of the pregnant woman: she is clearly one but also clearly (or at least potentially) two.”²⁵ This “bifurcated” view of pregnant women begs a series of questions about her responsibility to her unborn child. In a social context, Ruhl holds, the fetus “is literally *seen* as an embattled individual,”²⁶ and this is evident in the way that abortion is discussed. Mother and child are often pitted against each other

²⁴ Lealle Ruhl, “Disarticulating Liberal Subjectivities: Abortion and Fetal Protection,” *Feminist Studies*, 28.1 (2002), p. 40.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 38.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 40.

in a battle of rights and “rhetoric of personhood,” and while this battle is “often confusing,”²⁷ there is no denying that it is vitally important where pregnant women and the unborn are concerned.

Randall Lake, professor of Communication at the University of Southern California writes that prolife rhetoric seeks to embody “a certain pattern of Order” that includes themes of innocence of the personhood of the fetus.²⁸ He writes, “The nostalgic appeal to innocence is particularly powerful in the abortion context because, according to anti-abortionists, the fetus, completely and utterly innocent, is the ‘perfect’ child. Therefore, the symbolic form that appeals to the state of the innocent childhood also leads one to identify with the unborn.”²⁹

The majority of scholarship concerned with abortion discourse focuses on textual analysis, with limited attention to visual abortion rhetoric. However, as in the adage, “A picture is worth a thousand words,” visual rhetoric plays a powerful role in shaping the way the public thinks about abortion and engages in dialogue about prolife and prochoice points of view. Often heavily relied upon in both prolife and prochoice circles, visual rhetoric communicates different abortion-related perspectives and promotes sociopolitical agendas, whether through a stand-alone image on a poster, or images paired with text in newspaper articles and other publications. Scholars Petchesky, Condit, Myrsiades, and Leask agree that visual rhetoric and its role in abortion discourses warrant further investigation and scholarly attention.

The rhetorical and framing themes discussed – rhetoric of choice, rhetoric of personhood, and exceptionalism – are not restricted to text; they pervade and shape visual rhetoric as well.

Rosalind Petchesky attributes the introduction of visual rhetoric into abortion discourse to

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Randall Lake, “Order and Disorder in Anti-Abortion Rhetoric: A Logological View,” *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, 70.4 (1984), p. 437.

²⁹ Ibid., p. 438.

prolifers, saying: “The strategy of antiabortionists to make fetal personhood a self-fulfilling prophecy by making the fetus a *public presence* addresses a visually oriented culture.”³⁰

Petchesky argues that visual rhetoric not only portrays the fetus as a “tiny, helpless, suffering creature,” but also as “a ‘baby man,’ an autonomous, atomized mini-space hero.”³¹ She claims that such personifying imagery, along with cultural and political pressures, means that the fetus is viewed as an autonomous entity separate from its mother.

Prominent abortion rhetoric scholars Celeste Condit and Linda Myrsiades note similar themes that are evident in rhetoric used in prochoice and prolife mediated discourse, noting that images play an enormous role in this discourse. With these images come a large variety of calls to emotional recourse. Thus, it is no surprise that prolife and prochoice organizations heavily rely on images and visual rhetoric to promote their causes.

Celeste Condit notes in her book, *Decoding Abortion Rhetoric*, “the images intensify commitment, motivate the believers to work for a cause... Without these pictures, prolife advocates would have only an abstract argument about the importance of chromosomes... or a religious argument about the ‘soul.’”³² Condit also discusses people’s inherent attachment to images, arising from the human instinct to trust one’s own senses. A lengthy moral philosophy treatise on abortion would otherwise meet with skepticism because it can only *verbally* represent the reality it claims to promote. However, a visual image is generally exempt from such criticism because it demands attention and mental processing through sensory application. One must *see* the image, for “our trust in what we see gives visual images particular rhetorical potency.”³³

³⁰ Rosalind Pollack Petchesky, “Fetal Images: The Power of Visual Culture in the Politics of Reproduction,” *Feminist Studies*, 13.2 (1987) p. 264.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 271.

³² Celeste Condit, *Decoding Abortion Rhetoric* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1990), p. 80.

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 81.

Condit identifies several key narrative tropes present either in prolife or prochoice images. In the case of prolife visual rhetoric, the visual argument present is almost invariably that the unborn child is a human being.³⁴ By virtue of this classification, the fetus gains legal rights and equal status with adult human beings, rendering abortion a murderous act. Condit further cements this idea later in her argument, saying, ‘the prolife rhetoric attempts to construct a singular image that *identifies* this value [that the fetus is a human being] for all blastocysts/embryos/fetuses with that of a full human body.’³⁵

In the case of prochoice visual rhetoric, a different narrative is woven, one in which the mother garners the spotlight. The prochoice visual argument characterizes how illegal abortion shackles women. This argument is framed as an attack on women, similarly shocking to the attack of the fetus depicted by prolife visual rhetoric. Here, illegal abortion impedes a woman’s freedoms and violates her in an intimate and invasive manner.³⁶ Not only is she denied the right to choose whether or not to keep the child she is bearing, but should she elect to undergo an abortion illegally, her health is put at grave risk. Thus, in the narrative constructed in prochoice images, the woman’s freedom and body are irreparably violated by the denial of legal abortion.

³⁴ Ibid., p. 85.

³⁵ Ibid., p. 91.

³⁶ Ibid., pp. 92-3.

Marita Leask, a prominent rhetorician who has written extensively on abortion discourse in New Zealand, writes about how New Zealand women talk about and engage with abortion. She says, “More than one in three women [in New Zealand] will have an abortion in their lifetime, yet abortion in New Zealand is framed as extraordinary, aberrant and immoral.”³⁷ Leask examines “exceptionalist abortion discourses” by interviewing women, asserting that the strong focus on individualism “erodes the importance of abortion for women’s bodily autonomy.”³⁸

Within this rhetoric fabric is woven further “neo-liberal discourses of responsibility and ‘choice,’” which create a context where abortion is categorized as good or bad depending on factors such as rape, health of the mother, etc. This “framework of exceptionalism,” denoting that abortion is accepted only within exceptional cases, “casts abortion as something exceptional, immoral and requiring medico-juridical justification.”³⁹ Relying on external factors for justification and validation of abortion, socio-cultural framing of abortion in New Zealand is couched in terms of exceptions. Leask identifies these exceptions as health risks for the mother, rape, fetal abnormality, and contrasts them with “normal” or “unacceptable” reasons for abortion, such as financial stress, irresponsibility, eugenics, and age. In the case of exceptions, Leask argues, abortion is viewed as justified. But in the case of common or unexceptional reasons, Leask maintains that abortions are perceived as contentious and wrong.

Leask notes how the victimization of women theme pervades New Zealand’s rhetorical discourse, specifically in the context of mental health. Mental health is particularly important when discussing abortion in New Zealand because of the country’s legislation, “where mental

³⁷ Marita Leask, “An Exceptional Choice? How Young New Zealand Women Talk about Abortion.” *Australian Feminist Studies*. 30.84 (2015) p. 179.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 182.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 183.

health is the ground allowing 98 per cent of abortions.”⁴⁰ Leask writes about these post-abortion syndrome discourses, first developed in the United States, saying its “claims are modeled on definitions of post-traumatic stress disorder syndrome.”⁴¹ Within this framework, women are portrayed in the media as victims of abortion themselves, claiming they suffer mental stress after the “traumatic experience” of abortion. This view not only dominates media representations of pregnant women, but is also becoming strongly “culturally resonant.” Leask says, “In discourses linking abortion and mental health, women’s status as autonomous decision-makers is questioned. Women who have abortions are presented as victims rather than moral agents... .”⁴²

Charlotte Leslie further expounds on the theme of mental health and how it relates to pregnant women in New Zealand in her article on the “psychiatric masquerade,” saying that this trope is a result of the changing characterization of women seeking abortions from selfish to desperate, thus evoking sympathy in the public eye.⁴³ Ideas that motherhood is a woman’s natural calling and that women seeking abortions are subject to irrationality led to the theme of selfishness that originally permeated public opinion of women. The notion of feminine “selfishness” was supported by medical authorities, as “doctors were then able to draw on women’s unique physiology to define women’s health as a condition of continuous reproductive activity.”⁴⁴ Leslie writes:

The form of female irrationality most frequently invoked by the doctors was a construction of women seeking abortions as “selfish,” which drew together in an effective way the strands of the doctors’ arguments. Presenting the practice of abortion as

⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 112.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid., p. 116.

⁴³ Charlotte Leslie, “The ‘Psychiatric Masquerade’: The Mental Health Exception in New Zealand Abortion Law.” *Feminist Legal Studies*, 18.1 (2010), p. 3.

⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 8.

selfish and self-indulgent resonated with the doctors' claims that motherhood was a biological imperative and that women were incapable of responsible decision-making...The claim that women seeking abortion were acting selfishly was given an additional dimension by doctors' depiction of such women as sacrificing the future of the nation for their own convenience...[and their] refusal to fulfill their reproductive obligations.⁴⁵

Thus, these tropes promoted by medical experts, characterizing women as selfish and later desperate, were prominent in abortion-related discourse in New Zealand.

While Leask and Leslie write from a New Zealand perspective, scholarship on abortion-related rhetoric in New Zealand remains limited, with the work that does exist being largely constructed through an American rather than New Zealander perspective. This paper addresses the gap in scholarship on abortion-related rhetoric in New Zealand through the lens of mediated discourse in the 1970s-80s, when abortion discourse was heightened in New Zealand. Analysis of this mediated abortion discourse contributes to a deeper understanding of the poignant history shaping the current abortion space in New Zealand and adds to the body of literature on the subject.

⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 9.

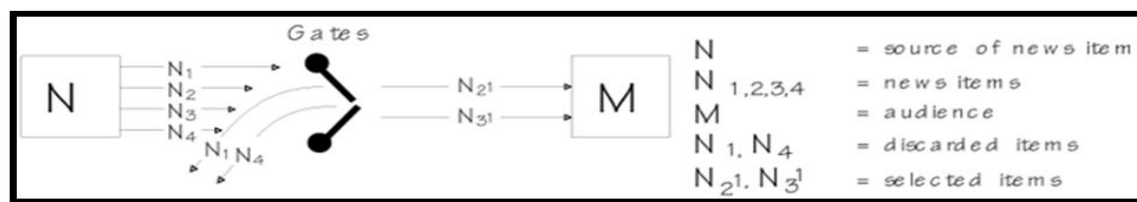
Chapter 4

Theory

McCombs and Shaw propose in their agenda-setting theory that viewers value the information that the media deems important. In other words, the theory places the media in a position to “transfer salience of issues on their new agenda to the public agenda.”⁴⁶ It emphasizes the critical role that media plays in shaping public dialogue, while simultaneously asserting that individuals retain the agency to choose between their own prioritization and the media agenda. Summing up this sentiment, political scientist Bernard Cohen proffers the idea that: “The press may not be successful much of the time in telling people what to think, but it is stunningly successful in telling its readers what to think about.”⁴⁷

McCombs and Shaw measure media agenda according to two main criteria: gatekeeping and framing. “Gatekeeping” was first coined and discussed by Kurt Lewin in 1947 in reference to how the woman of the house decides what food the family eats. She acts as “gatekeeper” by filtering which foods make it to the dinner table and which do not. Various theorists, such as White and Chomsky, have since analyzed different aspects of this concept.

Figure 1: White's Gatekeeping Model, 1964



⁴⁶ Andrew Ledbetter and Glenn Sparks, *A First Look at Communication Theory*, 9th ed. (New York, NY: McGraw Hill Education, 2015), p. 376.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

Figure 1 is White's gatekeeping model, illustrating how the media specifically acts as a gatekeeper. White's model shows how the media admits through its gates only a few news items from a group of available topics. New items that pass through the media gates are then presented to the media's wider audience. McCombs and Shaw further explore media as gatekeepers of information, for it decides what topics are included or omitted and how these topics are ordered in the media, such as whether or not a topic deserves page A1 versus D5, the size of the text, the length of a television segment, etc. Of course, behind the media are the people who create it, so editors and producers may be considered the ultimate gatekeepers. Opening stories and front-page headlines, i.e. new stories "above the fold," are thus more worthy of dissemination and consideration than stories tucked away at the end of a news segment or in the back of the newspaper.

On a deeper level, media's true influence lies in framing. Mass communication theorist James Tankard defines media framing as "the central organizing idea for new content that supplies a context and suggests what the issue is through the use of selection, emphasis, exclusion, and elaboration."⁴⁸ Selection, emphasis, etc. represent a level of agenda setting, because they not only transfer the importance of the issues themselves, but also emphasize particular attributes of these issues. McCombs offers a more specific definition of framing, saying: "Framing is the selection of a restricted number of thematically related attributes for inclusion on the media agenda when a particular object is discussed."⁴⁹ Thus, the media uses framing to achieve twofold goals: transferring the importance of an object from the media

⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 378.

⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 386.

agenda to the public agenda as well as transferring the prominence of a dominant set of attributes associated with an object.⁵⁰

There are two levels of agenda setting, with the first deciding what subjects are important; this level is called “priming.” The second level, “framing,” goes a step further and determines which parts of the subjects are significant. These levels of narrowing focus and framing are achieved through four distinct steps, as noted earlier by Tankard: (1) selection, (2) emphasis, (3) exclusion, and (4) elaboration. First, the media primes its audience by setting them up to think about something in a certain way. Then the media narrows its focus through framing, which is accomplished by choosing specific important components, emphasizing them, excluding all parts that are not deemed important to the media agenda, and further explaining the emphasized parts.

In their original research, McCombs and Shaw studied the 1968 presidential campaign among voters in Chapel Hill, North Carolina, looking at how their voting opinions on candidates and major issues had been influenced or swayed by selected mass media. In this work, McCombs and Shaw assign great significance to agenda setting, asserting that framing is an essential and involuntary response to reporter biases. For example, they noted how the media reported on Kennedy’s youthful attributes, but never mentioned his extramarital affairs, thus portraying Kennedy in a positive light while excluding his negative qualities.⁵¹ These findings support McCombs and Shaw’s position that the media influences how people view and engage with an issue or object.

Understanding the media has such influence on how the public thinks about issues of interest, and that there has been so little research on abortion discourses through a New Zealand

⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 380.

⁵¹ Ibid., p. 376.

lens, McCombs and Shaw's agenda setting theory offers a means for understanding and interpreting abortion-related media in New Zealand. Looking at this media from the 1970s-80s, during the time when discussion on abortion was most active because of the Commission and ensuing legislation, is valuable for unpacking how and why various rhetorical/framing strategies have changed and how this discourse may be improved moving forward.

Chapter 5

Methodology

I collected a wide range of prolife and pro-abortion related media (for example, newspaper articles, posters, and advertisements) in New Zealand between March 1, 2016 and June 30, 2016. The majority of this media was procured from the National Archives at the Alexander Turnbull Library in Wellington, New Zealand. The parameters guiding my selection were that samples be print media, either textual or visual.⁵²

My analysis focuses on materials dating from the 1970s and 1980s. First, I performed an initial analysis, sifting artifacts based on how well they met analysis criteria, namely, a clearly defined prolife or prochoice stance, the clarity of the message conveyed, and how directly the sample addressed abortion specifically.⁵³ From this initial analysis, thirty artifacts were selected for closer textual analysis. While I initially collected artifacts online, I found that they were difficult to date definitively and could skew the findings of this analysis. Therefore, all analyzed materials are restricted to library artifacts.

Through this analysis, I look at recurring rhetorical themes in various forms of media, including newspaper articles, photographs, and posters from prolife and prochoice factions in the 1970s and 1980s. I identify and consider these themes in light of the abortion rhetoric

⁵² Because abortion legislation in 1977 in New Zealand was a result of many years of public discourse and advocacy, I felt it important to equip myself with a broader context with which to perform this analysis. Thus, I initially collected a wide range of data, spanning from the 1920s to the present, from a variety of spaces. This allowed me to cast a more thoroughly informed eye and take a more nuanced approach towards analysis. However, artifacts outside of the 1970s-80s are not analyzed in this paper.

⁵³ “Clarity of message conveyed” refers to selection of precise over vague texts/images with relation to abortion. For example, various artifacts were ambiguous, taking a satirical rather than a straightforward approach in talking about abortion. Such samples are omitted from this analysis to remove any guesswork with regard to the intended message.

scholarship discussed in Chapter 3, highlighting rhetoric of choice, rhetoric of personhood, health of the mother, and victimization. I also look at various framing strategies employed and their recurrence in the sample artifacts. More specifically, I have modeled this analysis on McCombs and Shaw's agenda-setting theory, looking for evidence of how selection, emphasis, exclusion, and elaboration influence priming and framing.

I examine these artifacts in light of the broader legal and medical contexts in which abortion in New Zealand has historically been framed, and how these nuance the rhetoric and framing in mediated messages in the 1970s-80s. This project investigates the following research questions:

- (1) What are the dominant rhetorical/framing strategies employed in prolife/prochoice mediated discourse in New Zealand in the 1970s-80s?
- (2) How do these either follow or deviate from tropes and strategies identified by other abortion rhetoricians?
- (3) How does this discourse follow the four aspects of framing strategy as defined by McCombs and Shaw?
- (4) What is missing from this dialogue? Are there any exceptional anomalies?

Chapter 6

Analysis & Discussion

Four main themes emerged from the data: rhetoric of choice, rhetoric of personhood, health of the mother, and victimization/violence. Each of these themes is often framed by strong emotional appeals, with striking phrasing and/or visuals. Rather than finding enormous differences in rhetorical and framing strategies between prolife and prochoice media, there exist many similarities with regard to how both activist sides mediate their causes. In fact, in several cases, the similarity is so close that the samples in question can be interpreted as supporting either a prolife or a prochoice agenda. In the following discussion, I closely analyze and discuss various artifacts in light of these four main themes.

Rhetoric of Choice

Rhetoric of choice refers to how framing sets up the subject as an independent actor. Whether through text or visuals, the subject is lent agency and may make its own decisions. It is irrelevant whether the particular artifact criticizes the subject's full or restricted ability to choose (as prochoice media often challenges) because it does not change the fact that the media has acknowledged the subject's choosing capabilities. Of course, this acknowledgment begs the questions: "Whose choice? What is being chosen?"

The data analyzed in this project indicated that both prolife and prochoice media designate the mother, either pregnant or potential, as the moving agent. However, both factions

disagree about what choices the mother faces. From a prolife standpoint (advocated by SPUC and Operation Rescue New Zealand in the 1970s-80s), the mother chooses, quite literally, between the life and death of her child. Conversely, prochoice factions (promoted by the WONAAC and ALRANZ groups) contend that the choice consists of appropriation of the mother's body, in which the mother is granted total control over her body, and her choice predominates any potential "rights" of her unborn child.

Printed in the *Evening Post* in the August 29, 1977 edition, Figure 2 is a one-page sponsored article accompanied by two images. What first catches the reader's eye is the enormous font, highlighting the phrase: "Never to laugh or love...nor taste the summertime? ABORTION KILLS – CHOOSE LIFE." Without even reading further, this phrase has powerfully and concisely presented three imperatives: Abortion takes the life away from a living entity; it is your choice as a mother whether to squelch this life or allow it to flourish; you as a mother must choose life. The reader is launched into a perspective where a mother can legally choose to kill her child, according to SPUC, the article's sponsor and a forefront representative of the New Zealand prolife movement. The title not only selects what is important, that abortion is a choice between the life and death of a child, but also visually emphasizes it through capitalized text, large font size, and centered positioning, all used to attract as much attention as possible.

Looking more closely at the article itself, it becomes clear that the rhetoric in the meat of the article is in keeping with its title, where SPUC attempts to "shock" its reader by further promoting a view of abortion as a vital choice between life and death, while acknowledging how prochoice groups frame this choice. For example, it says: "What is not becoming obvious is a new ethic which exalts the 'quality of life' above the value of human life itself..."

They [pro-abortionists]⁵⁴ have set out to convince people that the unborn child is not a human being and that the abortion should be the woman's right to choose.”

Additionally, the article includes two photographs that further cement and frame its argument. The first is of a young woman holding a baby that appears to be about eight months old. The woman holds the child close to her face and smiles out at the audience, emphasizing the closeness between mother and child and that this closeness gives the mother joy. The second image shows a doctor's hand gingerly holding the miniscule, fully developed feet of a ten-week-old fetus, as if to say the doctor holds the child's life in his/her hands. The photo and accompanying block of text ask, “Is abortion simply a removal of a tissue? Or does abortion take a human life? Judge for yourself.” Here again, the article employs rhetoric of choice, proffering a dilemma in which the reader must choose for him/herself whether or not abortion kills a child, while also visually showing that the unborn child clearly appears to possess human life. Therefore, while the article presents a choice both to mothers and its readers, it does so in a way that emphasizes and explains, both textually and visually, that the fetus is a living entity. Furthermore, the article excludes any in-depth explanation or promotion of the opposing view, that the unborn child is just tissue and the mother can choose for herself how to govern her body.

As alluded to by the SPUC article, prochoice proponents view women's choice as the freedom to decide what happens to her own body. This theme was reiterated in nearly every prochoice sample analyzed. One such example is a poster from the 1970s published by WONAAC in Wellington, New Zealand (Fig. 3).⁵⁵ At the top of the poster, positioned right above two women consulting on a staircase, it reads: “Careful, honey, he's anti-choice.” The

⁵⁴ “Pro-abortionists” is the term used in the article to refer to members of the prochoice movement.

⁵⁵ Two versions of this poster were collected for this analysis – one in blue and one in red.

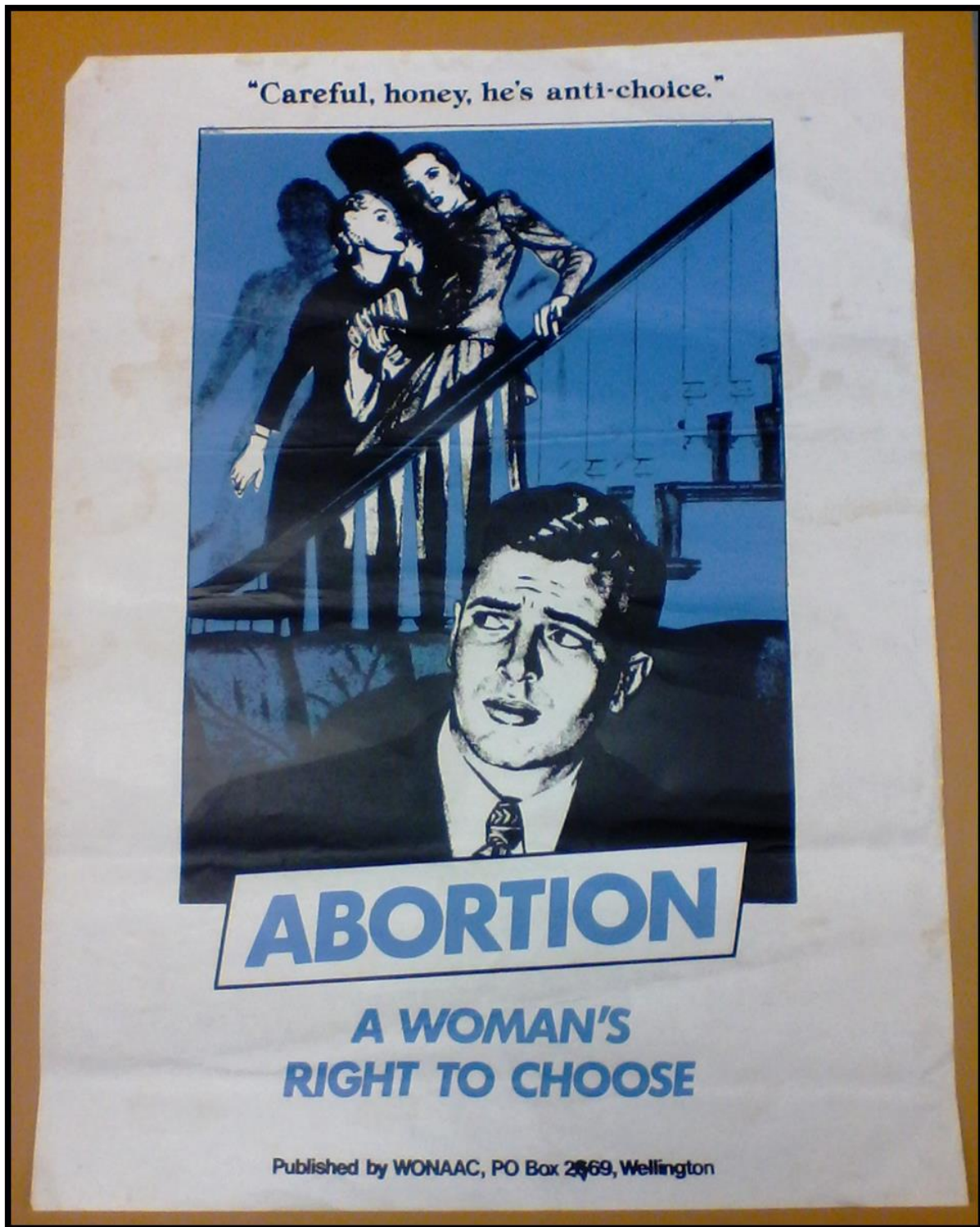
“he” in question is of course the perplexed man pictured at the forefront of the poster. Right beneath him in large print, “Abortion” and “A Woman’s Right to Choose” are emphasized.

This poster offers a more nuanced approach to choice from the prochoice perspective reiterated in many prochoice media samples, one that positions women’s choice over their bodies in direct contrast with the perceived masculine viewpoint. Textually, the poster establishes a gendered conflict, where women seek to assert choice over their bodies, a choice that men oppose. Specific use of “anti-choice” rather than “prolife,” “conservative,” etc. denotes *direct* opposition to the choice that women are advocating for themselves.

The visual elements in the poster reaffirm this argument, most notably in the limited yet starkly contrasting colors used. The white and black are exact opposites, with the blue background serving to highlight this opposition all the more clearly.⁵⁶ Additionally, the women are diminished, placed as they are in the background behind the stair rail barrier that separates them and their point of view from the man in the forefront. Conversely, his larger size and frontwards positioning accentuate the man’s prominence, implying he is a more powerful influence over the women in the poster’s context. Framing the masculine presence as prominent and powerful, out of touch with the perspective of women in the matter of choice over their bodies, is representative of the vast majority of other prochoice samples analyzed.

⁵⁶ Or red background, as in the case of the red version of this poster.

Figure 3: WONAAC Poster, 1970s



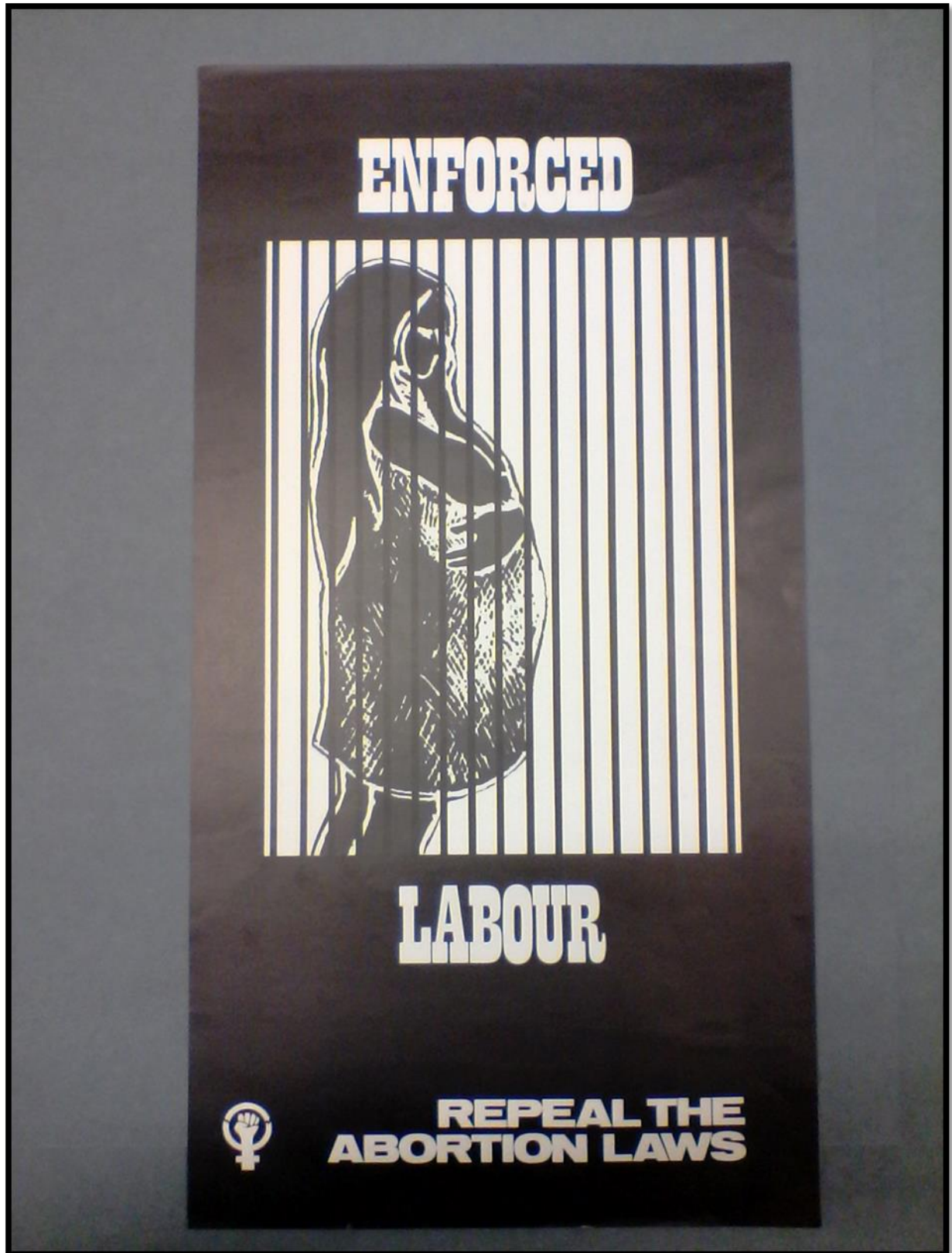
At its core, rhetoric of personhood refers to whether or not the subject is assigned personhood and all the rights attributed to such status. In prolife and prochoice discourse, rhetoric of personhood is generally used insofar as the fetus is concerned. In this context, debate is fetus-centric and tries to determine at what point the fetus may be considered a person, thus legally entitled to the rights assigned to other individuals, or whether or not a fetus ever reaches this status.⁵⁷ However, at times, the mother is also framed in light of losing her own personhood status when denied choice in her pregnancy. As discussed previously, Ruhl also contends that women and fetuses alike lose their personhood through abortion discourse, at least in what she describes as a liberal, left-leaning framework.

Figure 4 is an advertisement sponsored by prochoice group ANZAC in 1973 and features a pregnant woman enclosed by prison bars. In capital letters, the text reads: “Enforced Labour. Repeal the Abortion Laws,” the latter phrase being a popular slogan in prochoice media collected from the 1970s. With white text set against a black background, these phrases are stark and demand the viewer’s attention. The font is reminiscent of vintage “Wanted” posters, suggesting the subject is a criminal. The mother’s arms are wrapped around herself with her hand caressing her cheek, embracing both her unborn child and her own body in one gesture. She is alone, with only herself as comfort.

But more importantly, the prison bars literally frame her as a social outcast, adding to the force of the image and the woman’s solitary role. She is barred from participating fully in society

⁵⁷ Recent abortion debate does not restrict itself to fetuses as subjects of rhetoric of personhood. This debate has expanded to question whether or not prematurely born babies count as persons, as well as handicapped babies/children and newborns up until the first year of life after birth. See, for example, Peter Singer’s commentary on abortion.

Figure 4: ANZAC Poster, 1970s



as a contributing member and is denied full personhood by her society as well as the benefits and rights that personhood affords. Thus, she is caged like a criminal without access to her right to freedom – freedom both of choice and of movement. Coupled with the title, “Enforced Labour,” the poster leaves no ambiguity in framing the expectant mother in terms of lost personhood and rights, a prisoner of societal expectations.

On the other hand, the prolife media views the fetus as the subject that loses its personhood, only in an even more corporeal sense. However, the prolife media analyzed views personhood as a twofold issue: 1) the fetus is denied personhood in a *legal* framework because it is denied individual rights that are assigned to any other person, such as the right to life; and 2) the fetus is denied personhood in a *somatic* sense because it loses its life through the abortion procedure. Figure 5 exemplifies the latter viewpoint, emphasizing that unborn children denied personhood are denied life. The 1980s poster⁵⁸ reads: “Some toys will have fewer children to play with this Christmas. Some 32,378 aborted children less.” This figure represents the number of abortions performed in New Zealand from 1972-1981.

Central to the poster is a crying toy rabbit which, given the accompanying text, may be assumed to be weeping because there are no children with whom it can play, children who would otherwise be alive if not for abortion. Overall, the poster channels a theme of simple innocence in dealing with a subject that is fraught with complication and nuance. It uses cartoons and the concept of childless toys to stress the societal impact of the 32,378 children’s lives lost over the course of a decade in New Zealand.

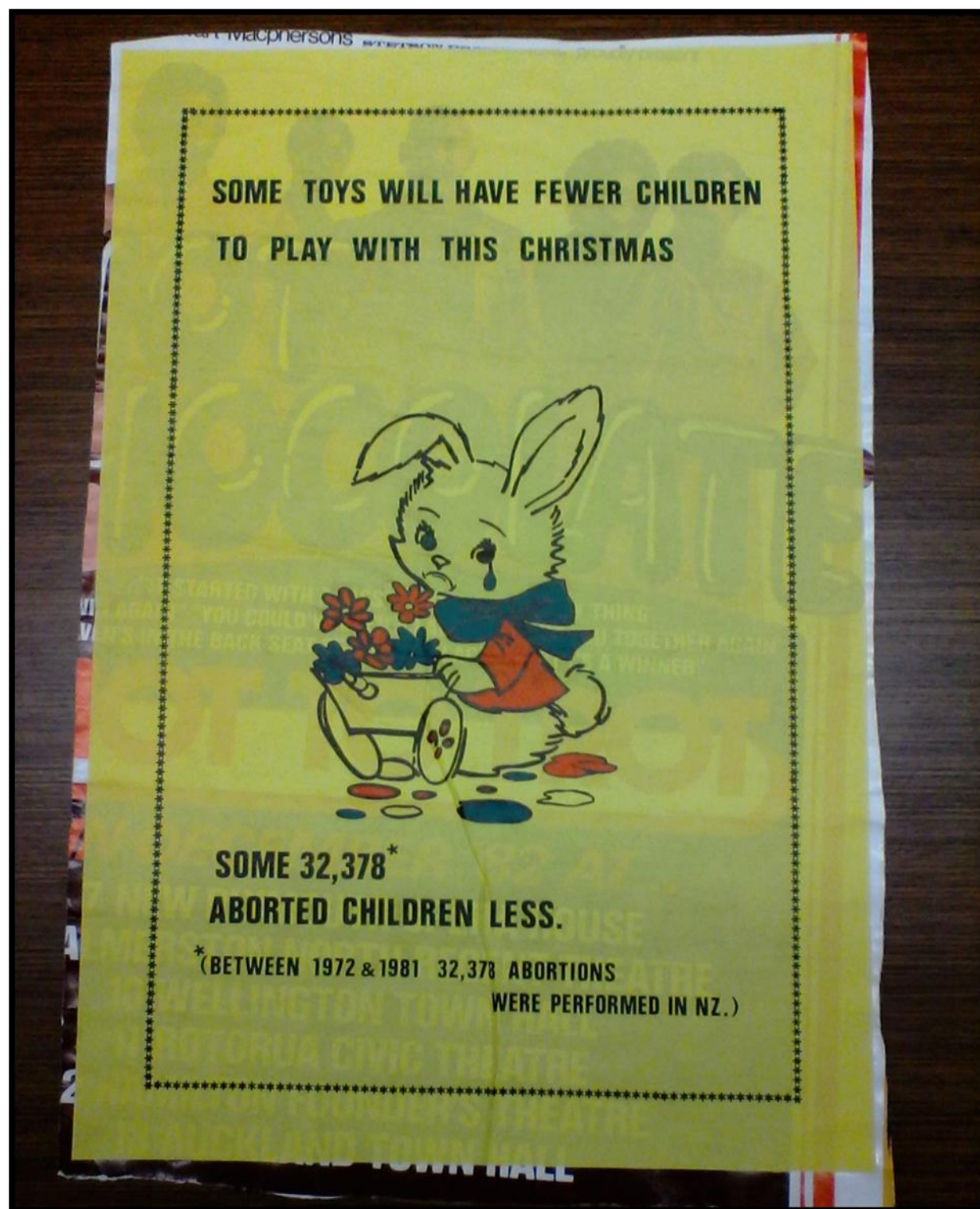
Relating to other prolife samples in this analysis, the denial of personhood for the fetus is often portrayed in terms that are violent and viscerally “real,” with photographs of the fetus

⁵⁸ This poster was part of a donated private collection found in the library archives. Its sponsoring group/individual was not documented. The poster was pasted on top of another advertisement.

demonstrating clearly its claim to life by depicting its human-like qualities, namely, a developed human body as in Figure 2. Here, we see fingers holding onto tiny yet clearly developed feet. The child's ownership of its own personhood is made clear, with the underlying argument based on appearance: "If it *looks* like a person, then it *is* a person." This argument of appearance advocates for fetal personhood and is a strategy utilized by many of the other artifacts.

However, Figure 5 is particularly noteworthy because it uses a different strategy, yet still employs rhetoric of personhood. The rabbit looks directly at the viewer, inviting him/her to share in its sorrow. The droopy ear, small frown, single tear, and scattered flower petals all contribute to an atmosphere of sadness. Stylistically, the image is elegant in its simplicity. There are no extraneous details distracting from the fact-based reality that the poster addresses: there are over 32,000 fewer children in New Zealand because of abortion. Rather than showing a fully developed fetus in order to establish its personhood, the poster relies on the power of human association to carry its argument. The rabbit is mournful that its friends have been taken away, symbolic of the real sense of loss that we experience when someone in our lives is no longer present. In rooting its prolife argument in the human need for connection, the poster offers a more nuanced perspective of the fetus. The unborn child is not a person simply because it looks like a person, but because it is capable of establishing the interactive and emotional connection that is at the heart of the human experience.

Figure 5: Prolife Poster, 1980s



The health of the mother plays a vital role in how abortion is discussed, especially in a New Zealand context where abortion legislation stipulates that the mother's health⁵⁹ must be negatively impacted to justify having an abortion. Both prolife and prochoice sides advocate on behalf of the mother and her wellbeing; however, the mother's health as a persuasive strategy is utilized far more by prochoice proponents than by their prolife counterparts in the analyzed samples.

In the "health of the mother" discourse, prochoice groups often frame themselves and their cause as champions of women's health. Conversely, they paint prolife supporters as advocating *against* women's health, either by directly positioning the prolife movement in this light or by excluding prolife voices entirely from discussion of women's health. On the prolife side, specific parts of women's health are emphasized, most especially their emotional health. They position women in a space where motherhood can only bring great joy and happiness, increasing the mothers' own emotional and spiritual wellbeing.

Figure 7 is one of several examples that depict the mother in a state of raw vulnerability: a naked woman lays dead, face on the floor, because of an illegal abortion. This photo is evocative of the famous U.S. image of a dead woman in a crouched position on the floor of a Norwich Motel room in Connecticut (Figure 6).⁶⁰ The distressing image from the U.S., which has since become an iconic photo in the prochoice movement, shows Geraldine "Gerri" Santoro, dead from hemorrhaging after she and her husband attempted an illegal abortion in 1964 (though the photo first publicly appeared in 1973 in *Ms. Magazine*.

⁵⁹ "Health" is not restricted to physical health, but also includes mental, emotional, psychological, etc.

⁶⁰ This U.S. image was included in a 1970s article sponsored by WONAAC called "Abortion and Women's Rights," one of the samples analyzed for this study. Figure 6 is the image as it appeared in the WONAAC article.

Figure 6: Gerri Santoro, 1964



Figure 6 accomplished what prochoice images had failed to: it illustrated the consequences for women who do not have proper access to legal abortions in shockingly visceral terms. With powerful strokes, it paints a grotesque tragedy in which

women are powerless in terms of their bodies and their health. This image inspired a new approach within prochoice discourse, where more images crop up featuring the “unsightly” reality of denying legal abortion.

Figure 7 is such an image, with capitalized text reading: “THIS WOMAN DIED / WE CARE.” The word “DIED” has a line of its own, a rhetorical, if not poetic, device emphasizing the concept of death and giving it space to be seen, felt, and contemplated, thus forcing the reader to pause in order to soak it in. The photo and text are in black and white, as in many other samples, perhaps suggesting that there is no room for ambiguity or interpretation when it comes to the issue of women’s health. The photo is quite focused on the woman’s physical health rather than on her mental, emotional, or psychological health.

Figure 7: Prochoice Poster, 1977



The woman's body is strung out in a position that not only compromises her dignity, but also shows that her body has been horrifically violated. Her legs form a "V," forcing the viewer's eyes to the space between her limbs. Consequently, we see the point of violation, and in gazing at the woman from such a vantage point, we are complicit in that violation, both of her body and her sexuality. The apex formed by her legs lies at a point just above the midline of the image, which is the natural resting place for the viewer's eyes. This point almost creates two separate images, the top half of the image displaying the point of this woman's violation and the bottom half showing the deadly apparatus that has violated her. The woman's body is framed by what appears to be a closet doorway; on the floor by her feet are loose newspapers and a tube apparatus used in the attempted abortion procedure. The framing inside a closet suggests the woman had no escape from her pregnancy situation, that she had no access to any alternatives and felt trapped by her circumstances.

The prolife side suggests rather than overtly addresses the health of the mother in contrast to other prochoice media samples. For example, by depicting the closeness between a woman and her baby, with the woman hugging the child close to her face and smiling at the viewer, Figure 2 suggests that the mother's emotional health is improved by keeping her child. Similar tropes showing the happiness of a mother with a baby, or the quiet bond between mother and child, suggest that motherhood is the best option for women. These prolife tropes assert: "Motherhood is healthy for women and brings them happiness!" So strong was the emphasis on the child that women's issues were excluded from the main dialogue, either textual or visual. In fact, women's health issues were almost never addressed in the samples used for this project.

Based on the collected prolife media, the 1990s signaled a shift from covert to explicit arguments for women's health. Prolife media began addressing the real health concerns

experienced by women when considering an abortion and argued against abortion on the grounds of its harm to women's emotional, mental, and psychological health. While important to note that such a shift occurred, these 1990s examples have not been analyzed because they are beyond the time-frame scope of this analysis.

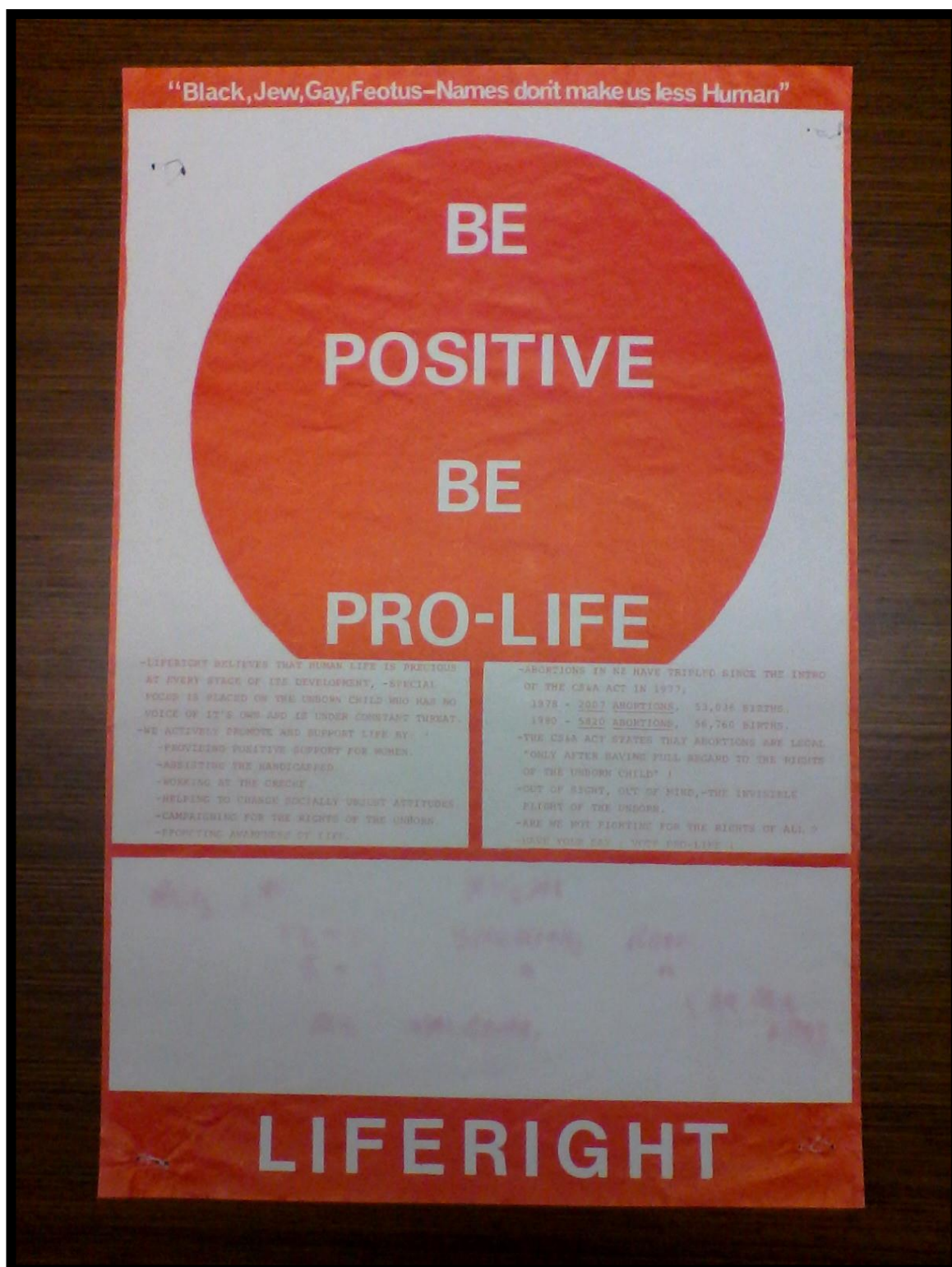
Victimization

Mediated conversation about abortion can portray various involved parties as victims, and often rely on powerful text and violent imagery to convey this viewpoint. As previously discussed, abortion discourse generally pits the mother against her child, with each vying for dominant rights over the other and their own health. From a prolife perspective, the child is the victim of the mother's choice. If the mother chooses to abort her unborn child, the fetus is terminated, regardless of what exceptional circumstances or influences informed the mother's decision. However, in a prochoice point of view, the mother is victimized by a plethora of pressures, with patriarchal systems at the root. She is portrayed as an individual devoid of agency, in stark contrast to her portrayal as an empowered individual in prochoice media following rhetoric of choice, as evidenced by a variety of analyzed samples.

On the other hand, most of the prolife discourse depicts a fetus developed to the point of recognizable human features accompanied by either an explicit or an implied comment on its battle for life over death. While still remaining a striking representation of the personhood and ultimate victimization of the unborn child, this depiction is also "generic" in the sense that it in no way specific to a New Zealand context, other than including the name of the sponsoring New Zealand prolife organization.

Figure 8 presents the fetus as a victim, but also includes a positive message, unlike many of the prolife samples that starkly present abortion as a matter of life and death, such as Figures 2 and 5. In bold letters on an orange background, it reads: "BE / POSITIVE / BE / PRO-LIFE." Also, Figure 8 relies solely on text to communicate its message, rather than incorporating fetal images. For example, various passages read: "Special focus is placed on the unborn child who

Figure 8: Liferight Poster, 1981



has no voice of its own and is under constant threat...Abortions in NZ have tripled since the intro of the CS&A Act in 1977...Out of sight, out of mind, --the invisible plight of the unborn. Are we not fighting for the rights of all?”⁶¹ This text positions the fetus in imminent and “constant” danger from abortion, yet its invisibility renders it voiceless and thus incapable of advocating on behalf of itself.

Additionally, it is important to note that this artifact does *not* exclude the mother. Rather, the sponsoring organization, Liferight, mentions that it provides “protective support for women” as part of its mission, thus acknowledging that women are very much a part of the abortion issue and require support just as their babies’ futures do. Furthermore, Figure 8 represents the only artifact from the sample which references diversity. At the top of the poster, it says: “Black, Jew, Gay, Feotus [sic]—Names don’t make us less Human.” This poster truly represents an anomaly for its time, as it seeks to be inclusive and positive about the abortion issue. Even though it communicates that abortion kills, that the unborn are voiceless victims, and that more babies are aborted every year, the poster also aligns the prolife movement with people of different ethnicities and orientations and frames prolife in a positive and welcoming light.

Figure 9 also offers a more nuanced representation of abortion’s victims. In this sample, a pregnant woman is seen crucified upon a wooden cross with the words, “Repeal All Abortion Laws” running across the bottom of the poster at the base of the cross. This advertisement advocates for legal abortion as far as the prochoice organization’s agenda is concerned. However, at first glance, the image seems to be arguing the opposite, where both the woman and her child are brutally harmed by an act that kills, where crucifixion may be analogous with abortion. The cross and crucifixion are Christian symbols, associated with the sufferings of Jesus

⁶¹ These passages are from the body of text in the middle of the poster.

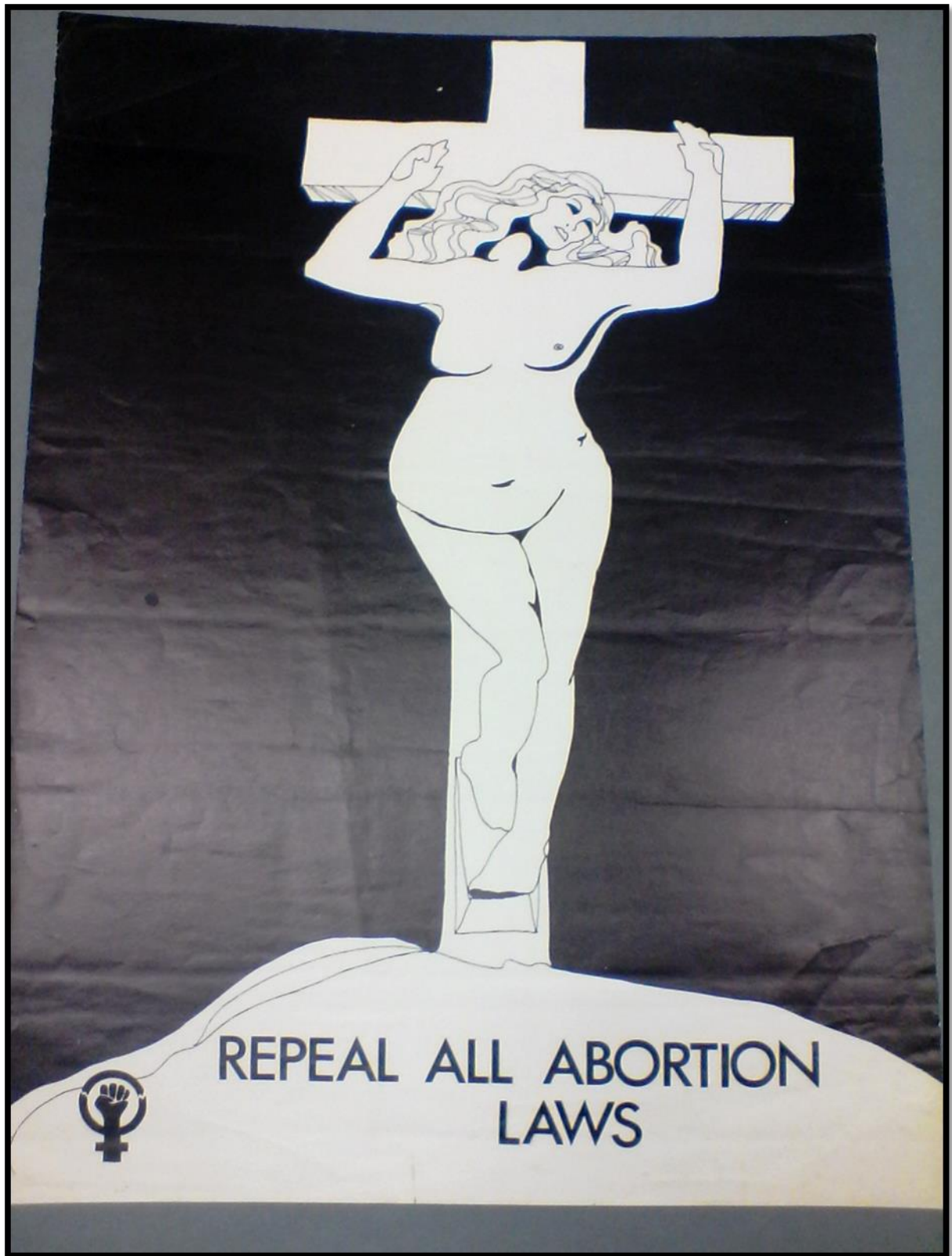
Christ and the redemptive qualities of His death. With this connotation, and the fact that Christian groups often strongly and publicly align with the prolife movement, taken at face value this image can be interpreted as though the pregnant woman is partaking in the divine sufferings of Christ. Seen in this light, her experience as a mother elevates her spiritual status in a Christian context, where such visceral sharing in Christ's suffering is considered a divine and rare honor, despite crucifixion historically representing the punishment due the lowest of criminals.

This juxtaposition of themes is reminiscent of Burke's perspective by incongruity, in which audiences engage with material in new ways by situating opposite or oddly combined symbols. Blankenship, Murphy, and Rosenwasser disseminate Burke's method, saying: "In it [perspective by incongruity] one deliberately wrenches loose a word belonging customarily to a certain category. Thus, we come to form new classifications and realignments."⁶² In the advertisement, rather than "wrenching a word," the symbol of the cross is wrenched from Christian contexts and juxtaposed with prochoice themes.

However, despite the initial ambiguity, Figure 9 is a unique example of how victimization in abortion is represented, for it includes both the mother *and* child. Even though it selects only the mother's voice to champion, by depicting the mother as visibly pregnant it gives the unborn child a voice and platform by default. As in many other samples illustrating the mother as a victim, Figure 9 features a naked woman situated in the front and center of the image. Her nakedness signals her vulnerability and lack of agency; she cannot even cling to her clothes as a safeguard against the systems that are framed as oppressing her. Deprived of modesty, the woman's body is offered for complete inspection by the viewer, hearkening in

⁶² Jane Blankenship, Edward Murphy and Marie Rosenwasser, "Pivotal Terms in the Early Works of Kenneth Burke," *Philosophy & Rhetoric*, 7.1 (1974), p. 3.

Figure 9: Prochoice Poster, 1973



some ways to Figure 7, where the viewer is almost made complicit in the woman's humiliation simply by gazing upon her nakedness.

Her face expresses anguish, and her gaze is averted from that of the viewer, as though she cannot bear to look upon those who may be construed as her oppressors. Because she is depicted on a cross, her arms are raised above her head; however, this position is also a universal gesture of surrender. Thus, the woman can be viewed as surrendering herself completely to the utmost degradation. Featuring her crucifixion on a hill on a black background serves to emphasize this point, both elevating and highlighting her humiliation.

Chapter 7

Conclusion

The emergent themes in this data strongly reflect what was already present in the United States in the 1970s-80s in terms of rhetorical framing strategies through selection, emphasis, exclusion, and elaboration, as defines the framing process in McCombs and Shaw's agenda setting theory. It is worth noting that prolife media from the 1990s shift towards messages that convey a stronger New Zealand identity. It appears the prolife movement began to assume more of a national discourse rather than simply doing a "copy and paste" of popular U.S. arguments. Of course, as the data included in this study shows, such an approach was not unprecedented, as there were isolated instances where we see injection of a national discourse, such as in Figure 4. This shift is worth further consideration, especially in terms of how it may or may not have endured or been altered in present mediated discourses, as well as its resonance with a New Zealand audience versus more generic presentations.

Additionally, the data makes evident that prolife and prochoice discourse has historically been rather singular in its approach. In looking at the subjects of each sample, the people are seemingly of European descent, excluding other ethnicities, namely Māori. Perhaps this lack of diverse representation may be attributed to a post-colonial framework; however, with ongoing initiatives in New Zealand's sociopolitical environment to celebrate and promote Māori culture, presence, and history, it is peculiar that the Māori voice and consciousness is universally absent from both prolife and prochoice media. Had this voice been included, it is possible that the

rhetoric and framing strategies observed in this project would have been different within these various cultural frames. For example, would the abortion issue remain a binary space between life and death had Māori spirituality been considered? Would the fetus have been featured more strongly as a contributing member of the community rather than as an individual? Unfortunately, it is impossible to know because the Māori voice has been excluded from this conversation. However, as we continue this discourse, it would be fruitful to investigate if and how this cultural representation has changed over the years, the impact it has had, and whether or not it has offered a non-binary perception of the abortion issue.

As the data stands, New Zealand prolife and prochoice groups in the 1970s-80s establish dualistic and uncompromising views of abortion, in which the prolife faction champions the unborn, and the prochoice side advocates for women. Such a dichotomy aggravates the position in which mother and child are placed. Abortion rhetoric and framing have very real and tangible consequences, with irreparable repercussions on all levels – physical, emotional, spiritual, mental – for both mother and child. Perhaps the importance of analyzing abortion rhetoric and framing is best encapsulated by Germaine Greer’s candid poignancy:

No one knows how many abortions have been carried out as a result of women’s free choice not to become mothers, and not because their boyfriend insisted, or their parents demanded it, or because they would lose their place at school or university or because they would face a life of hopeless poverty and degradation if they became single mothers.⁶³

This means that maintaining such binary positions on abortion hurts rather than helps, because it denies the complexity of the issue. Thus, it remains vitally important to further research how

⁶³ Germaine Greer, “A Bitter Truth Behind Misguided Rhetoric,” *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 4 May 2013.

abortion discourses have been historically shaped in order to understand how prolife and prochoice movements can build stronger bridges between their causes.

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