

Pro-lifers, Prayer, and Protest:

Resource Mobilization and Conservative Social Movements

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Introduction

Much of sociological research covers liberal movements, and groups that seek to align themselves with institutions of power. This project uses content and textual analysis and participant observation to do the exact opposite: study a conservative, pro-life social movement with more interest in its ties to religious institutions than legal or political ones. Using mixed methodology allows for creating a picture of what it is to be apart of a social movement that is typically overlooked in the literature, despite having pressured two local clinics to shut down in two years. This furthers the argument that for sociologists to truly understand how individuals change a system, they must work in both sides of the political spectrum.

Competing Theories

Political Opportunity

The context of a movement influences its development and potential impact

Resources and relationships stem from these opportunities

Resource Mobilization

Emphasizes the variety and sources of resources sometimes *despite* lack of opportunity

Notes importance of relationship to other social institutions (eg. Government)

Research Questions

- (1) How does this social movement accomplish its goal (reducing abortion)?
- (2) How is this movement different from previously studied SM's?
- (3) What can political sociologists learn about the mechanics of social movements by studying conservative group?

Methodology

Collect all literature (pamphlets, fliers etc.)

54 pieces of literature were coded to identify trends in

- Vocabulary
- Tone
- Imagery
- Word count
- References
- Connection to other social issues

Participant Observation

25 hours of observations were coded to identify themes regarding:

- Use of resources
- Opportunities available
- Group attitude
- Composition / organization
- Relationship with public

Limitations

To fully determine the validity and reliability of data, this study should be paired with

- in depth interviews of SM protesters to understand motives
- In depth interviews with staff and clientele affected by their presence to determine impact

Themes

Protests: (1) almost exclusively middle aged Catholic women of color. (2) Silent protests feature prayer vigils, picket lines, but no civil disobedience (3) Any aspect of the protest has religious symbolism

Themes

Religious Justification: (1) Motivation for participation is akin to obligatory devotion to life (and therefore its creator). This is reflected in recruitment and retention of members (2) Almost all conversations and literature rest on religious doctrine or beliefs (3) Participants feel their work is a labor of love, and are desperate to do what they feel saves lives.

Information Quality: (1) Extremely poor use of citations and statistics, likely due to the grassroots nature of the SM. (2) Citations come from pro-life organizations or legal cases (3) Repeated use of slippery slope logic (4) Group leaders are gatekeepers of what constitutes valid information. This usually points pregnant women in the direction of Pro-life crisis centers.

Images: (1) Obvious emphasis on pregnant women, fetal images, medical supplies (2) Pieces not about abortion or birth control contained happy images of moms and babies or heaven-related pictures, whereas (3) pieces for those considering abortion featured more ominous photos and depressed women.

Message to the public: (1) Legalizing abortion is related to euthanasia, the degradation of women, gendered violence, genocide and economic fraud by Planned Parenthood while (2) banning it is conducive to women's health, moral standing, and patriotism

Charity & Neoliberalism: Although SM made ties to other social movements, no connection to any intersectional or socioeconomic approach. SM provides material goods for pregnant women who change their mind, but do not attempt to address (or bring attention to) systemic/institutional causes of unplanned pregnancy.

Conclusion

Much more attention needs to be paid to conservative and apolitical social movements, since they too impact their communities. The greatest resource of any social movement is presence and accessibility. This movement aims to change not the policy, but the culture surrounding abortion. Through careful framing of abortion dialogue, this SM successfully challenges federal and state policy at the interpersonal level.

