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“Inspired by our Feminist Foremothers”

Feminists For Life’s Appropriation Of First-Wave Feminist Rhetoric And History

by

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## Abstract

This thesis explores Feminist for Life's (FFL) appropriation of feminist history and rhetoric in creating their individual identity as a new and unique social organization. I examine how FFL, a pro-life organization, utilizes traditional feminist history and literature in addition to mainstream feminist language to legitimize their mission. I examine FFL's use of these traditionally pro-choice tools and the manner in which FFL uses them to establish itself as the true continuum of first-wave feminism. In doing so, I enter a scholarly debate concerning both the framing of dissident identities within social movements and the self-characterization of Feminists for Life as a part of the feminist movement. I approach my research question by analyzing and comparing FFL's choice of language and self-portrayal in contrast to that of the National Organization for Women (NOW). I hope to demonstrate that by appropriating traditional feminist history and rhetoric, Feminists for Life both legitimizes itself and attempts to delegitimize mainstream feminism's claim to be today's true feminists.

## Introduction

The organization Feminists for Life (FFL) is a source of controversy and debate nationwide due to both their pro-life views and the language they use to legitimize and support these views. FFL's mission statement, as found on their website, is a rallying call to those with similar beliefs:

Feminists for Life of America: If you believe in the strength of women and the potential of every human life, if you refuse to choose between women and children, if you believe no woman should be forced to choose between sacrificing her education and career plans and sacrificing her child, if you reject violence and exploitation: join us in challenging the status quo...because women deserve better choices ("FFL's Mission").

With such a powerful mission statement, FFL firmly distinguishes itself from mainstream, pro-choice feminist organizations like the National Organization for Women (NOW). NOW is an established feminist organization that has been internationally active in pursuing women's equality since 1966 and is self-described as "the largest organization of feminist activists in the United States" ("About NOW"). While NOW is active in many global issues, including 'Economic Justice' and 'Promoting Diversity & Ending Racism,' abortion and reproductive rights are the organization's primary focuses. Accordingly, though NOW addresses a variety of issues while FFL is solely concentrated on protecting life after the moment of conception, their work related to reproductive rights offers a fascinating case study of feminist rhetoric and framing. I primarily focus on these organizations' rhetoric and strategies from the last two decades in order to both narrow my scope and concentrate on the years that FFL has been most active and visible. Through examining the way that both NOW and FFL approach the issue of abortion through feminist rhetoric and simultaneously place themselves within feminist history, I

am able to draw conclusions about FFL's role in contemporary feminism. By appropriating traditional feminist history and rhetoric, Feminists for Life legitimizes itself as a social movement under the umbrella of feminism. Simultaneously, Feminists for Life attempts to delegitimize mainstream feminism's self-identification as the true feminists through reinterpretation of materials conventionally used to affirm the mission of mainstream feminism.

My research enters a sharply divided scholarly debate whose resulting articles I will utilize to further inform my research paper. The controversial concepts of the transitory waves of feminism form the foundation of my research (Harnois 2008). As FFL considers itself to be the true continuation of the first wave of feminism, rejecting what they see to be the perversion of the early feminists' beliefs by the second and third waves of feminism, the dynamics between different eras of the feminist movement are essential to my research. A general discourse important to my inquiry is that of organizations that claim to represent a larger social movement's goals while simultaneously undermining their key beliefs. These dissident identity organizations must use innovative framing techniques to claim legitimacy while still distancing themselves from what they view to be the corrupt leadership of the larger social movement (Kretschmer 2009). Dissident identity organizations tend to promote a distinct mission through the presence of a prominent, public leader who challenges the legitimacy of those who lead the larger umbrella movement (Kretschmer and Meyer 2007).

A hotly contested debate concerns the presence of FFL on college campuses. Many scholars criticize the rhetoric that FFL uses that specifically targets this demographic, concerned with both the language used and the potential vulnerability of the population (Oaks 2009). Others, particularly those with a pro-life slant, contend that FFL's narrowly focused audience is a vital part of their rhetorical strategy and essential to their mission (Meehan 2008). Abortion is a

key topic in many scholarly articles pertaining to both FFL and the feminist movement as a whole. Scholars have recently examined the shifts in FFL's rhetoric after the landmark case *Roe v. Wade* (1973), when the Supreme Court upheld a woman's constitutional right to have an abortion while simultaneously lowering the standard for evaluating restrictions of that constitutional right. Scholars highlight an FFL's increased emphasis on the mother-child bond in creating a sense of "fetal personhood," and a shift in the use of the word "choice" within FFL's literature (Halva-Neubauer and Zeigler 2010, Harris and Smith 2009).

While there is obviously a wealth of scholarly discourse surrounding FFL's controversial mission and publications, present research fails to form a cohesive picture of FFL's overall rhetorical strategy as a member of a larger social movement. All too often authors acknowledge FFL's use of traditional feminist history and language without delving into the original sources. Therefore the biggest question goes unanswered: How do the Feminists for Life, as a pro-life group, use traditional feminist rhetoric and history to place themselves within the feminist movement? Many scholars focus on specific terms, like the word "choice," but few approach FFL's linguistic style or even trace direct quotations appropriated and slanted toward FFL's mission. Without a full investigation of the first-wave feminists' works, the picture of FFL's appropriation of feminist history and rhetoric is incomplete and difficult to substantiate. Kelsy Kretschmer states that the entirety of FFL's feminist identity "is based on the position that key first-wave feminists were against the liberalization of abortion laws." As the feminist movement has no official doctrine which FFL can reclaim, the organization instead "uses the speeches and writings of early feminists" (Kretschmer 2009). A thorough knowledge of the original feminists' rhetoric and beliefs is essential to evaluating the FFL's use of these women's rhetoric in their current mission and publications.

I became interested in Feminists for Life in the fall of 2009 when the organization visited the Fordham University Rose Hill campus. Serrin Foster, the president of FFL, delivered her speech “The Feminist Case *Against* Abortion” as a part of Fordham’s “Right to Life” week. I was taken aback at Foster’s framing of the abortion issue; I had previously only been exposed to the debate in terms of “pro-choice” and “pro-life.” The lack of resources available to pregnant mothers was rarely part of this discussion that was often framed as a strict dichotomy. What struck me most, perhaps, was FFL’s assertion that their views represented what should be the true platform of the feminist movement. The self-appointed second wave, according to Foster, in many respects ignored the early feminists’ teachings and, in doing so, had perverted the original feminist movement. And so began months of research about an organization with which I hardly relate. While I wholeheartedly support FFL’s demand for more resources for pregnant women and mothers, I am firmly pro-choice and had difficulty removing that lens from my research. One of the most challenging parts of writing my thesis—which I hope to demonstrate that I was able to overcome—was limiting my bias towards a pro-choice position. I hope that my thesis will illustrate a sincere effort towards a neutral analysis of FFL’s rhetorical devices and appropriation of feminist history.

I begin my thesis with a brief look at the history of Feminists for Life and the National Organization for Women, both of whose founding stories contribute to their claims of legitimacy and the necessity of their association with the larger feminist movement. I then move to the bulk of my research, an investigation of the primary first-wave feminist materials cited by both FFL and NOW, examining the means in which they were cropped, framed, and supported. Beginning with key players Susan B. Anthony and Elizabeth Cady Stanton, then widening my lens to include Mary Wollstonecraft, Emma Goldman, Betty Friedan, and more, I conduct a thorough

investigation into the use of early feminist writers as tools for contemporary social movement strategy. I investigate the appropriation of each of these early feminists by both FFL and NOW. I examine the rhetoric and history used in FFL's website and quarterly publication *The American Feminist* over the course of the past decade, paying particular attention to the publication's use of the word and concept 'feminism' and references to members of the first wave of the feminist movement. In addition, I analyze speeches delivered by members of Feminists for Life to college campuses across the country, including Serrin Foster's speech titled "The Feminist Case *Against* Abortion."

Similarly, I rely heavily on NOW's website, press releases, and other promotional and educational materials in order to glean their rhetorical strategies. They also publish a newsletter, the *Campus Affiliate Manual*, which I analyze for rhetorical strategies and compare to *The American Feminist*. The most controversial and potentially convincing FFL argument, that they represent the real legacy of the early feminist movement, stems from their self-placement as a continuation of the first-wave's beliefs. I analyze these references to early feminists, examining the quotations in their original context and the framing techniques used by both FFL and NOW. Accordingly, I refer to many anthologies and original publications of the first-wavers' essays, articles, correspondence and more to both find the quotations used by FFL and to examine the potential for more mainstream feminist arguments within the first wave's beliefs. I then move to a discussion of the strategic and framing choices made by FFL and NOW in both choosing how to use first-wave quotations to legitimize their mission and choosing exactly which early feminists to cite—Victoria Woodhull, Dr. Elizabeth Blackwell, and Margaret Sanger are just three examples of controversial first-wave women which FFL and NOW both refer to and frame

in different ways. Finally, I conclude with a discussion of FFL's position as a dissident social group within and purposefully outside of the transitory, increasingly diverse third wave.

### Continuing (and Splintering) a Movement

The National Organization for Women, or NOW, was established in 1966 in response to a hole in the Civil Rights Act of 1964. After intense lobbying by feminists, the act was amended to include Title VII, a prohibition against sex discrimination in employment. Yet, to the feminists' dismay, Title VII contained little protection for women in the workforce and lacked the teeth needed to ensure enforcement. Though the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) was formed in 1965 to implement Title VII, feminists' hopes were dashed when the commission voted to allow sex segregation in job advertising—"help wanted" ads could remain directed toward a potential employee of a specific sex ("The Founding of NOW"). The Third National Conference of Commissions on the Status of Women, held in Washington, D.C., in 1966 represents a reemergence of the feminist movement to NOW. Along with Dr. Pauli Murray, a law professor at Yale, and Betty Friedan, author of *The Feminist Mystique*, hundreds of representatives met to take action. Frustrated by the lack of authority given to decisions made by the conference attendees, Friedan met with over a dozen women in her hotel room to discuss their grievances. Out of that hotel room, a new organization was born—NOW, the National Organization for Women. Officers were elected, a Statement of Purpose was drafted, and early agendas plotted out methods of taking action against the distinct inequalities left unaddressed by the Civil Rights Act.

NOW's agenda grew to comprise of a multitude of issues pertinent to and spearheaded by women. Today, some of NOW's priority issues include 'Economic Justice,' 'Lesbian Rights,'

‘Promoting Diversity & Ending Racism,’ and ‘Stopping Violence Against Women’ (“NOW’s Top Priority Issues”). The first listed, most emphasized issue is “Abortion Rights/Reproductive Issues”—a source of controversy since the time of NOW’s founding. The National Organization for Women could not, either in 1966 or in 2011, fully represent the range of issues and stances held by women across the world or even within the United States. That became utterly clear to a woman named Pat Goltz. Having joined NOW specifically to fight the pro-choice element within its agenda, though supportive of many of its other goals, Goltz and her pro-life friend Catherine Callaghan ruffled feathers with their pro-life views. Disappointed with a lack of forum for NOW members to discuss pro-life standpoints, Goltz and Callaghan formed Feminists for Life (FFL) in 1973. While they attempted to remain members of NOW, the executive board of the Ohio chapter of NOW kicked Goltz out of the organization. Though their membership at a national level was not rescinded, Goltz’ expulsion from the Ohio chapter left a bitter taste in many pro-life feminists mouths that has lasted to today. Feminist for Life member and pro-life author Cindy Osbourne states in a pro-life anthology that “With only two votes of support and much fanfare, Pat was kicked out of the state chapter for daring to speak against NOW’s sacred cow, abortion-on-demand” (Derr, MacNair, and Naranjo-Huebl 2005).

Feminists for Life grew rapidly over the next three decades. FFL views the lack of financial resources and lack of emotional support as the two basic causes that women have abortions (Foster 2004). Their main refrain is “Women Deserve Better than Abortion,” placing abortion as a symptom of society instead of a “choice.” To FFL, that choice is forced upon women due to a lack of funding, discrimination against pregnant women and mothers, a lack of daycare, and other societal problems that make abortion seem like the only option. FFL members and advocates “Refuse to Choose,” “connecting the dots between resources and life” (“Increase

Your Impact”). In 1996, Feminists for Life began focusing their outreach efforts and resources on helping pregnant and parenting college students—a demographic they view as most susceptible to the factors that drive women to have abortions. Representatives from Feminists for Life travel the country giving speeches and advocating for more comprehensive resources for young women and mothers. Interestingly, FFL takes no position on birth control, stating that “Preconception is outside FFL’s mission” (“FFL’s Frequently Asked Questions”).

Both their pro-life stance and their refusal to discuss birth control, much less advocate for its availability and use, would seem to put FFL distinctly outside of the umbrella of the feminist movement. Along with NOW’s claims to be the largest organization of feminist activists in the world, FFL would seem out of place in a largely pro-choice movement. Yet, instead of countering groups like NOW by claiming an entirely different identity, Feminists for Life chooses to be known strictly as feminists, even including the title in the organization’s name. Far from seeing themselves as an offshoot of the feminist movement, FFL sees themselves as the rightful heirs to the first wave—the early feminists whose pro-life views fit much more cohesively with their contemporaries. Serrin Foster, the long-time president of FFL, states in her infamous speech “The Feminist Case Against Abortion,” that “Those who refuse to choose between women and children and work to systematically eliminate the root causes that drive women to abortion, already walk in the shoes of Susan B. Anthony and the other feminist foremothers” (Foster 2005). FFL emphasizes this “pro-woman, pro-life,” first-wave legacy in nearly every publication, advertisement, editorial, speech, and article that the organization has a hand in. *The American Feminist*, FFL’s semiannual magazine, regularly features a section called “Herstory Worth Repeating,” a regular homage to early feminist writers and thinkers. Quotations by Susan B. Anthony, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Mary Wollstonecraft and more fill the

publication, placed next to stories of botched abortions and testimonials by women who regret their decision to have an abortion. An image of Susan B. Anthony leaning over Elizabeth Cady Stanton is captioned “Live the legacy, Leave a legacy,” denoting a section where readers can fill in an Electronic Fund Transfer Form and donate to FFL (*The American Feminist* Summer/Fall 2004). The ways in which both FFL and NOW utilize the early feminists’ images, words, and beliefs sheds light on how both organizations simultaneously self-legitimize by placing themselves within the feminist movement and attempt to delegitimize the other by rejecting the place of dissimilar believers in the movement.

#### Living the Legacy: Susan B. Anthony

Susan B. Anthony and Elizabeth Cady Stanton are two giants of the early feminist movement who are consistently referred to by both NOW and (especially) FFL. The feminist movement has no one doctrine or founding myth. Particularly due to the evolution of the movement’s goals over the past two centuries, from suffrage to equal employment rights to breaking through the glass ceiling, there is no one authoritative voice which the feminist movement can claim as its standard (Kretschmer 2009). While NOW and other mainstream feminist groups choose to tackle this potential problem by embracing this evolution, placing themselves within a loose continuum which still has the potential for further diversification and evolution, FFL established what they believe to be an authoritative feminist doctrine and set of beliefs through the work of early feminists like Susan B. Anthony and Elizabeth Cady Stanton. Anthony and Stanton actively pushed for women’s suffrage for decades before their deaths—and before an amendment was passed that saw their dream realized. Both FFL and NOW certainly recognize the importance of suffrage to early feminists and the impact the suffragists had on

women today. In an article celebrating the inclusion of FFL archival documents in a new library, Serrin Foster includes a letter written by Anthony to a “Dear Young Friend” written in 1872. Anthony writes “The best service you can give in return for this moment of mine is that you will study the great principles of justice and equality to women and work to establish them in the Constitutions of state and nation—the *ballot only can* secure equal rights and equal chances” (Qtd. in Foster 2011).

NOW’s account of their foundation includes a letter written to Anthony in 1880 joining her wrath about the lack of women’s suffrage, stating, “Words fail to convey the bitter hatred I have for the foul demagogues who would take from me the freedom they claim for themselves” (Qtd. in “The Founding of NOW”). Former NOW President Kim Gandy commemorated Anthony’s birthday in 2002, extolling Anthony as “unorthodox, uncompromising and ahead of her time... She was a powerful political figure who worked tirelessly for the dignity, respect and legal rights for all women.” Gandy goes on to mention Stanton in the same commemoration, stating, “With Elizabeth Cady Stanton and others, [Anthony] plotted the first wave of the feminist movement... We will never forget Susan B. Anthony’s invaluable legacy of ideas and activism” (Qtd. in Keller 2002). This is perhaps one of the strongest statements by NOW regarding Anthony’s legacy. To NOW, Anthony not only represents women’s suffrage and legal equality, but the “plotter” of the first wave. As a self-described second wave organization, NOW is clearly establishing their succession to Anthony, Stanton, and their other contemporaries.

Yet, while NOW appropriates Anthony and Stanton as leading figures in the women’s movement due to the lasting effects that these women’s work has had on the lives of women, they often overlook positions held by Stanton and Anthony that have not flourished in the women’s movement. Intent on demonstrating an evolving view of feminism and the feminist

movement, NOW highlights quotations by and about Stanton and Anthony that represent values still held by mainstream feminists. A NOW publication describes Anthony as “a great leader in the women’s movement,” later listing her active campaigns as “the abolition of slavery, women’s rights to their own property and earnings, educational reform, and women’s suffrage”—all issues close to the mainstream feminist movement’s heart today (Keller 2002). NOW affirms the existence of one feminist movement by using the phrase “*the* woman’s movement,” (emphasis my own), and legitimizes some of their key platforms with Anthony’s actions. Yet, for groups like FFL, NOW’s stances do not represent every aspect of the woman’s movement. Accordingly, FFL’s use of Anthony and Stanton quotations and stances vary drastically from that of NOW.

Feminists for Life fervently believes that the second wave of the feminist movement, spearheaded by the self-appointed National Organization for Women, have perverted the stance of Stanton, Anthony, and others by purposefully omitting pro-life statements and works by these early feminists. FFL’s newsletter, *The American Feminist*, quite frequently cites *The Revolution*, a newspaper created and edited by Stanton and Anthony that existed from 1868-1870. While the majority of articles were written by other feminist authors, Anthony and Stanton did pen quite a few. FFL extols this publication for its anti-abortion ad and editorial policies, placing it on a near-doctrinal pedestal. In *The American Feminist*, *The Revolution* is extoled for, along with “most other feminist publications of the last century,” refusing to “join in the common practice of printing advertisements for thinly-disguised patent medicine abortifacients” (Qtd. in *The American Feminist* Fall 2008). Later in the same article in *The American Feminist*, the FFL writer states that “We proudly continue the feminist tradition of working for a society in which women can make life-affirming choices for themselves and their children” (*The American Feminist* Fall 2008). These are presented as cohesive quotations and ideas, reaffirming FFL’s

mission. A later FFL publication entitled “The Truth About Susan B. Anthony: Did One of America’s First Feminists Oppose Abortion?” also extolls *The Revolution*’s ban on immoral advertisements, noting that “these ads were a large source of revenue for periodicals of the time. The women who produced the paper were not opposed to alternative and self-help medicine, but refused such advertisements because “Restellism [a period term for abortion] has long found in these broths of Beezlebub, its securest hiding place” (Clark 2007). FFL makes sure to emphasize what they see as the driving force behind *The Revolution*’s ban of these medicines—their effect, not their side effects. This factors perfectly into one of FFL’s key positions—that first-wave feminists, contrary to what many mainstream feminists believed, were not primarily concerned with the safety of the procedure but with the intended result.

A potential issue is the authorship of the articles within *The Revolution*, particularly one entitled “Marriage & Maternity” found in the July 8<sup>th</sup>, 1969 edition. The article is merely signed “A,” provoking many historical questions. All of the authors of *The Revolution* wrote under pennames, usually abbreviations like “ECS” for Elizabeth Cady Stanton. Susan B. Anthony was largely known to write as “SBA,” not “A.” Accordingly, many pro-choice scholars decry the attribution of the article to Anthony, claiming historical distortion. Can this article be definitively attributed to Anthony, the woman that FFL claims as a legitimizing movement authority? FFL President Serrin Foster responded, “If one reads the actual text of *The Revolution*, and every mention of abortion in Anthony’s newspaper opposed abortion, then how can anyone come to the conclusion that she was in favor of it?” (Qtd. in *The American Feminist* Spring 2007). Further, they dryly acknowledge the controversy in “The Truth About Susan B. Anthony...”, stating, “As Feminists for Life has gained more attention in the media, FFL’s pro-life feminist legacy has met with increasing suspicion and skepticism, with some accusing FFL of hijacking

America's leading suffragist, Susan B. Anthony" (Clark Spring 2007). Yet, FFL glossed over this issue in a 2008 edition of *The American Feminist*, stating, "In [Anthony's] publication, *The Revolution*, was written: Guilty? Yes. No matter what the motive, love of ease, or a desire to save from suffering the unborn innocent, the woman is awfully guilty who commits the deed" (*The American Feminist* Fall 2008). They do not assert, but instead merely suggest that Anthony had a hand in the article that is cited.

Additionally, FFL operates under the assumption that Anthony's editorial approval of the newspaper's content means that she agreed with all that was printed. The quotation, however, is indisputably anti-abortion. It continues, "...thrice guilty is he who...drove her to the desperation which impelled her to the crime!" (*The American Feminist* Fall 2008, Foster 2005). FFL uses this statement over and over again in their advertisements, publications, newsletters, and nationwide speech tours. It is primarily anti-abortion, but also hints at what FFL believes is the true nature of abortion—a forced choice. There is nothing about an evil deed perpetrated by a woman, but instead a man is chosen as the root cause of her crime. The quotation establishes both legitimacy for FFL as a continuation of the first wave's efforts and frames the abortion debate in a rhetorical manner essential to FFL's mission—eliminating the root, societal causes of abortion. Accordingly, FFL uses another excerpt from the same article in *The Revolution* that reads "We want prevention, not merely punishment. We must reach the root of the evil..." (Qtd. in *The American Feminist* Fall 2008).

Feminists for Life also employs the rhetoric used by Anthony, Stanton, and others in *The Revolution* and in their speeches and personal correspondence to illustrate the legitimacy of their pro-life stance. FFL aims to prove that early feminists rejected abortion for its intrinsic nature and its societal causes—not, as many pro-choice feminists may argue, because of the incredibly

dangerous nature of abortion procedures in the 19<sup>th</sup> century United States. In “The Truth About Susan B. Anthony...”, FFL states that, “While early feminists were indeed concerned about abortion’s physical and psychological dangers to women, as advocates of abortion point out, they also opposed abortion itself—as their use of the term “child murder” implies” (Clark Spring 2007). This quotation demonstrates several of FFL’s key rhetorical strategies. Firstly, FFL connects the first wave to current women by not only discussing a disagreement between pro-life and pro-choice women today, but by framing the disagreement as a debate between pro-choice women today and pro-life women of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. As FFL takes these early feminists to be their doctrinal voice, this establishes FFL’s belief that pro-choice feminists today are at heart rejecting the early feminists’ beliefs, thereby delegitimizing them. Perhaps more importantly is FFL’s strong assertion that early feminists not only believed that the procedure was dangerous, but that the intrinsic nature of abortion and those who performed them was corrupt and even evil.

FFL repeatedly highlights early feminists’ use of scathing language to describe abortions. In “The Truth About Susan B. Anthony...”, FFL notes that “Early 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century suffragist writings regularly referred to abortion as “ante-natal murder,” “child murder,” “ante-natal infanticide,” or “infanticide”” (Clark Spring 2007). The article continues “These early feminists regarded abortion as violence against women and their children, and attributed its practice to the denial of their rights and a death of nonviolent choices for women” (Clark Spring 2007). Words like “ante-natal infanticide” surely have a violent connotation, and therefore fit well with FFL’s framing. FFL advocates “nonviolent choices,” viewing abortion as a necessarily violent act against both mother and child. It is this reasoning that FFL uses to explain their stance against women who, though they may have all of the resources and societal assistance in the world, may still elect to have an abortion. Though pro-choice advocates may argue that this is the

very definition of un-coerced choice, FFL unwaveringly sees abortion as a violent decision that, in and of itself, is wrong. They highlight quotations from early feminists that support this belief in the violent nature of abortion.

“Social Purity,” the famous speech given by Susan B. Anthony in 1875 which attests to abortion’s violent nature, is quoted many times in FFL publications and articles. Anthony said, “The prosecutions on our courts for breach of promise, divorce, adultery, bigamy, seduction, rape; the newspaper reports every day of every year of scandals and outrages, of wife murders and paramour shooting, of abortions and infanticides, are perpetual reminders of men’s incapacity to cope successfully with this monster evil of society” (Qtd. in *The American Feminist* Spring 2007). In Anthony’s speech, abortion is not only immediately conjoined with infanticide, but categorized in a similar manner with rape, murder, and other acts that would be condemned universally in today’s society. FFL can point to the inclusion of these horrors in the same statement as abortion as an indication that early feminists saw abortion as intrinsically wrong. Additionally, Anthony once again emphasizes the societal roots of abortion—and men’s inability to eradicate them. FFL frames Anthony’s speech as a call to arms against the evil of abortion and other horrors present in society by first eliminating its root causes.

Through *The American Feminist*, FFL connects Anthony’s condemnation of abortion to the present day, stating, “Susan B. Anthony’s words and actions, in the broader context of early American feminism, lead to the logical conclusion that Anthony was truly pro-woman and pro-life” (Clark 2007). The phrase “pro-woman, pro-life” is frequently used in FFL’s educational and promotional materials. The phrase reflects a basic but effective rhetorical strategy, placing a woman who is not pro-life as simultaneously anti-woman. Further, FFL intimates that understanding Anthony’s words (admittedly “in the broader context of early American

feminism”) in today’s contemporary understanding of the word “pro-life” is logical, thus strengthening their argument about Anthony’s position and simultaneously implying that a pro-choice woman is illogical. Serrin Foster does state that the connection between FFL’s pro-life decision and Anthony’s work is not the end-all-be-all for FFL’s views, but uses her to legitimize FFL as continuing Anthony’s legacy: “While we would be pro-life feminists whether or not Susan B. Anthony and the other early American feminists opposed abortion, we are proud to continue their legacy... We are working to realize their unfulfilled vision for the world” (Qtd. in *The American Feminist* Spring 2007). Perhaps a bit contradictorily, Foster claims that FFL would be actively pro-life even without Anthony, yet are simultaneously working to realize Anthony and other early feminists’ unfulfilled vision.

#### Herstories Worth Repeating: Elizabeth Cady Stanton

While Susan B. Anthony is by far the most frequently referenced early feminist in FFL’s publications, many other key early feminists’ works are utilized to help frame FFL’s legitimacy as a feminist organization. Though Elizabeth Cady Stanton is often referred to by both FFL and NOW in conjunction with Susan B. Anthony, her friend and coworker, one element of FFL’s rhetorical strategy rests squarely on the shoulders of Elizabeth Cady Stanton’s legacy: motherhood. Stanton was a mother of seven committed to the open celebration of her children and motherhood as a whole. FFL decries what they see as the animosity between mother and child forced on pregnant women by pro-choice feminists. As such, the openly celebratory Stanton is an ideal figure to demonstrate the first wave’s dedication to childrearing. Firstly, throughout FFL literature, the fetus is almost always referred to as a child. FFL utilizes Stanton’s commitment to her children in union with the rhetorical strategy of ‘fetus’ as ‘child’. FFL’s

literature frequently cites a letter written by Stanton to Julia Ward Howe in 1873: “When we consider that women are treated as property, it is degrading to women that we should treat our children as property to be disposed of as we see fit” (Qtd. in *The American Feminist* Fall 2008). Stanton firmly connects the fetuses that will “be disposed of” through abortion to their potential to have been a child. The treatment of this ‘child’ as property must have struck home with early feminists, as Stanton notes that women at the time were equated with property. FFL uses quotations and rhetorical devices such as these which emphasize the bond between mother and ‘child’ to further develop the concept of ‘fetal personhood,’ a status which gives their argument a heightened sense of gravity (Halva-Neubauer and Zeigler 2010).

Accordingly, Stanton’s celebration of motherhood is a significant element of FFL’s framing techniques. Stanton is recognized by both pro-choice and pro-life organizations as a key figure in denouncing the relegation of pregnancy, birth, and motherhood to the private sphere. NOW commemorates Stanton’s involvement in the creation of the Seneca Falls Convention of 1848 by commenting, “In early July 1848, 32-year-old Elizabeth Cady Stanton had poured out her dissatisfaction to Lucretia Mott, Martha Wright, Mary Ann M’Clintock and Jane Hunt. Having left an active life in Boston, Stanton chafed at “being confined to the women’s sphere,” raising children in the small town while her husband continued to travel widely” (“Viewpoint: A Historic Opportunity”). NOW celebrates Stanton’s respect for the indigenous Iroquois women she met living in Seneca Falls, quoting her observations like “among the greater number of the American aborigines the descent of property and children were in the female line” (Qtd. in Wagner 1999). For NOW, Stanton’s greatest accomplishments when all is said and done are her legal strides and her ability to enter the public sphere as an activist. NOW honors Stanton in the announcement of their new blog “Say It, Sister!” by highlighting her well-known quotation:

“These splendid people are hungry, hungry. Oh, for more power to give out the truth!” (Qtd. in “NOW Launches Action-Oriented Blog on Women’s Equality Day). To NOW, Stanton is a symbol of the perpetually evolving, striving feminist movement, always hungry for more.

FFL similarly celebrates Stanton’s rejection of being relegated to the private sphere, but does so through the lens of motherhood. FFL explains the title of an act they lobbied for, titled “The Elizabeth Cady Stanton Pregnant and Parenting Students Services Act,” by emphasizing her commitment to being a mother: “The mother of the women’s movement celebrated her maternity and challenged the culture to accept and support mothering... Upon giving birth to her seventh child, she raised a flag in front of her Seneca Falls home in celebration. Stanton raised Victorian eyebrows by publicly savoring motherhood” (“Why is this bill named after Elizabeth Cady Stanton?”). Interestingly, Stanton is framed as the “mother” of the women’s movement—a feminine, matriarchal term that has both authoritative and caring connotations. FFL believes one of the many root causes of abortion is shame—particularly on college campuses, a focus of FFL’s campaign, visibly pregnant women are oftentimes openly judged or even discriminated against. FFL draws parallels between this type of modern day judgment and the Victorian practice of seclusion during pregnancy—factors that limit a woman’s ability to actively live life and, therefore, may contribute to her decision to have a baby. Stanton does just the opposite—she emerges from her home before the birth of her child and, as FFL repeatedly emphasizes throughout their literature, even raises a flag in celebration of the child’s birth. FFL not only reinforces the idea of fetal personhood through this celebration of motherhood in conjunction with a pro-life argument, but goes one step further and attempts to demonstrate another logical progression in a 1996 issue of *The American Feminist*: “It is not surprising that a woman who was brassy enough to celebrate her motherhood in a scandalous fashion upheld motherhood as

the ultimate right of women” (Schnittman 1996). Through use of this quotation, FFL rhetorically connects natural rights, civil rights, and motherhood. If a woman rejects motherhood, she is rejecting the “ultimate right of women” which should be celebrated, not denied. In the rights-driven culture of the United States this is a weighted point that may hit home with a feminist audience, particularly in the context of the early suffragists. Further, FFL discreetly encourages pro-life feminists to speak up through wording such as “brassy” and “scandalous.” Repeatedly throughout FFL literature, authors bemoan the absence of pro-life voices in feminist conversations, though sure that these voices exist. FFL thus calls on like-minded women to speak up, no matter how scandalous they may appear, and voice their celebration of motherhood—and rejection of abortion.

#### Whose Stories Are (and Aren't) Worth Repeating?

While Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony are often cited by both FFL and NOW, many other feminist foremothers are hotly contested. FFL purposefully calls on early feminists who represented both feminist and pro-life ideals as a whole, while NOW and other mainstream feminist organizations tend to highlight the issues these women tackled that still apply today, ignoring their pro-life views. To pro-choice feminists, the antiabortion views of the first-wave feminists should be seen in the context of their era, instead of a continuously applicable doctrine. One example of a feminist whom both FFL and NOW cite occasionally with different intentions is Mary Wollstonecraft. A descendant of English literary legacy, Wollstonecraft's *Vindication of the Rights of Women* represents to feminists of all persuasions an early call for female liberation from the private sphere and the control of men. NOW and FFL's employment of Wollstonecraft's works is very reflective of their respective agendas. The Spring

2004 issue of *The American Feminist* states that “Focusing on the emancipation and education of the female sex, [*Vindication of the Rights of Women*] reflected Wollstonecraft’s wider political and social views about the inherent dignity of the human person, regardless of sex, race, or rank” (Ehrhard 3). This basic sentiment is echoed in NOW’s publications, which tend to emphasize Wollstonecraft’s impressive contributions to female autonomy before the idea of women’s suffrage was ever taken seriously in the political sphere. On a listing of hotlines to help abused women, NOW includes a quotation by Wollstonecraft: “We did not wish women to have power over men, but over themselves” (Qtd. in “Need Help?”). NOW quotes Wollstonecraft as an advocate of women’s personal solutions, rarely acknowledging her other works.

FFL, however, frames Mary Wollstonecraft in similar ways as Elizabeth Cady Stanton, using both as representatives of intelligent, educated, outspoken mothers. FFL’s Spring 2004 edition of *The American Feminist* quotes Wollstonecraft thus: “To be a good mother, a woman must have sense, and that independence of mind which few women possess who are taught to depend entirely on their husbands. Meek wives are, in general, foolish mothers” (Qtd. in *The American Feminist* Spring 2004). Many elements of Wollstonecraft’s quotation ring true with feminists of all political persuasions. The word “meek,” in particular, is a character description that has been rejected by feminists for decades. Wollstonecraft’s language represents a strong female, fervent in her beliefs. However, particularly in the context of FFL’s framing, Wollstonecraft’s words represent not only praise of women, but praise of motherhood—something FFL holds dear. Wollstonecraft states, “Many men attend to the breeding of horses...who would, strange want of sense and feeling! think themselves degraded by paying any attention to the nursery” in a quotation often repeated by FFL (Ehrhard 4). In using this quotation, FFL surely intends to elicit negative reactions to its animal imagery. Many feminists

of all political stances would react harshly to being compared to horses, animals Wollstonecraft intimates often received more care and attention from men than women. FFL's use of the quotation emphasizes, once again, a root cause of the "problem" of abortion—the weakness of men. Wollstonecraft joins many other early feminists, particularly when selected by a FFL member with a specific narrative in mind, of casting men as one of the root causes of the societal evils that lead to abortion.

An investigation that is perhaps as important as discovering which early feminists are cited as early movement authorities, is that of who is *not* cited. FFL frequently mentions and cites Dr. Elizabeth Blackwell, the first female physician. The Fall 2007 issue of *The American Feminist* quotes one of Dr. Blackwell's diary entries: "The gross perversion and destruction of motherhood by the abortionist filled me with indignation, and awakened active antagonism. That the honorable term "female physician" should be exclusively applied to those women who carried on this shocking trade seemed to me a horror..." (Qtd. in *The American Feminist* Fall 2007). Dr. Blackwell's position as the first female physician in the United States is in and of itself a feminist accomplishment. NOW rarely mentions Dr. Blackwell except in sweeping histories of the women's movement. To FFL, however, Dr. Blackwell is an impressive figure who worked tirelessly against abortion—and her opinion deserves special emphasis for her unique position as the first female physician.

Betty Friedan, the author of *The Feminine Mystique*, is another controversial feminist leader. Though not a member of the first wave of feminism, active largely from the 1960s onward, Friedan has remained both a celebrated figure and respected author for the second wave of feminism and beyond. While NOW celebrates Friedan's hand in founding the National Organization of Women and lending it a public voice, FFL instead notes the absence of abortion

in the first edition of *The Feminist Mystique*: “[On] 2-23-1963 *The Feminist Mystique* by Betty Friedan was first published. Abortion was not mentioned in the first edition. “I am not for abortion, I am for the choice to have children” was added after Friedan founded the National Organization for Women...” (“On This Day in Herstory”). Here, FFL arguably not only sets up Betty Friedan as a changeable woman but, by highlighting the shift in her rhetoric after the founding of NOW, sets up NOW as an opponent. Stating that abortion was not mentioned in the first edition of Friedan’s book clearly points to a perceived shift in NOW’s philosophy that departs from its founders’ intentions, implying that NOW had an underlying agenda.

Many early feminists have been selectively chosen or ignored by both NOW and FFL. FFL often calls upon Victoria Woodhull, the first female presidential candidate of the United States and a vehemently anti-abortion woman, as an often-ignored but valuable member of the early feminist movement. NOW utilizes the history and legacy of controversial yet historically significant women whom FFL rejects, including Margaret Sanger and Emma Goldman. Goldman’s advocacy of atheism, anarchy, and free love, though in conjunction with provocative theories of gender studies, was not only rejected by the early feminists of her time but by FFL today. Similarly, Margaret Sanger, the founder of Planned Parenthood and a fervent advocate of birth control, is ignored by FFL but celebrated by NOW. Sanger’s reputation as a proponent of racist eugenics is one of the reasons FFL uses to defend their decision to exclude her from their early feminist doctrine, but many contemporary feminists point to Sanger’s contributions to women’s reproductive rights. FFL explicitly states that their mission starts at the moment of conception, and therefore do not take a comprehensive stance on birth control in general, much less views as controversial as Sanger’s.

## Conclusion

Feminists for Life sees their mission as an uphill battle against the pro-choice mainstream feminist movement. A common FFL refrain is that “Debunking the myth that nineteenth-century women’s rights supported abortion is a constant challenge, especially for historians faced with prejudice and political correctness” (Schnittman 2004). Particularly in the face of perceived oppression by a much larger, more mainstream feminist group, FFL must utilize various rhetorical and appropriational strategies to establish themselves as legitimate successors of the first wave. To FFL, these early feminists should represent near-doctrinal authorities for the feminist movement. Appropriating the history and words of Susan B. Anthony, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, and more, FFL frames early feminist works and quotations in a manner which places FFL as the true heirs of the feminist movement. Susan B. Anthony’s publications, not merely the articles she personally wrote, are expressed as legitimate authorities on the future progression of the women’s movement. Elizabeth Cady Stanton is honored for her virtuous praise and celebration of motherhood. Mary Wollstonecraft is similarly placed as the ultimate mother figure, determined to receive an education while stepping out from the private sphere to the public.

By appropriating these early feminists’ works and rhetorical devices, Feminist for Life twists sources used by NOW and other mainstream, pro-choice feminist organizations to legitimize themselves as the true interpreters of the early feminists and the true heirs to their legacy in the United States. FFL not only places their pro-life views as the rightful views of the feminist movement, but simultaneously rejects one of the key beliefs of mainstream feminists. In doing so, FFL claims to belong to the larger feminist movement while distancing themselves from the beliefs of the dominating pro-choice feminist organizations. This enables FFL to imply

oppression at the hands of the “elite” leaders of the feminist movement, claiming near-persecution for their pro-life beliefs. The argument becomes one of inclusion or exclusion, acceptance or rejection instead of one strictly based on a pro-choice, pro-life debate. The increasing emergence and prominence of pro-life organizations like FFL has vast implications for the feminist movement as a whole. The continued diversification of the feminist movement may threaten its ability to unite around a common goal and move forward as a cohesive unit dedicated to attaining equality. If more strides are to be made, feminists must make choices about their constituency, their beliefs, their platforms, and the objectives they hope to achieve. Otherwise, the feminist movement may splinter beyond recognition, a loosely-bound group of people with different views claiming legitimacy under the umbrella of feminism.

My research prompted as many questions as it answered, particularly concerning the future of the feminist movement as a network of members with varying beliefs and a no-longer cohesive platform. There also remains a larger, more opinion-based question—is the weight that FFL attributes the writings of the first wave of feminism even valid? Susan B. Anthony, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, and their contemporaries were surely incredible, ground-breaking figures that pushed back against the normative view of a woman in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and fought for equality for many contingencies. Yet, the early feminists could not have imagined the strides women have made in the past few decades nor the diversity that the movement would embrace. While many of the suffragists crusaded for the abolition of slavery and, later, the right of people of color to vote, many were still hesitant to acknowledge the need for racial equality on a larger, societal scale. The emergence of the LGBTQ movement and the inclusion of queer studies and equality in the feminist agenda would surely have shocked many first-wave feminists. How can near-doctrinal authority be attributed to these early feminists who lived in such a different time?

While I believe there is validity to celebrating the early feminists' achievements and honoring their works, they cannot be used as the foundation of contemporary feminism. In order to continue making strides for equality in the United States, the feminist movement's goals must be based firmly upon the experiences and beliefs of women *today*. Additionally, though the increasing diversification of the beliefs of the women who comprise the movement is in some ways admirable, dilution of the movement's goals threaten its ability to push for real change. While many different views may be acceptable under the umbrella of pro-woman, the feminist movement must remain steadfast in their pro-choice persuasion in order to implement any real progress—both in remaining a proponent for reproductive and abortion rights, and remaining a strong political player with the ability to lobby for change.

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