

Narrative Analysis of the US Anti-abortion Movement Blog Posts

Construction of Womanhood in Pro-Life Narratives

Siiri Lampinen
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Political Science
Department of Social Sciences and Philosophy
University of Jyväskylä
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Tiivistelmä

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Tässä pro gradu -työssä tutkin amerikkalaiseen abortinvastaiseen liikkeeseen kuuluvien järjestöjen blogikirjoituksia hyödyntämällä narratiivista analyysiä. Työn tavoitteena oli ymmärtää abortinvastaisen liikkeen toimijoiden tuottamia kertomuksia naiseudesta, ja tutkia millaisia narratiivin manipuloinnin välineitä hyödyntämällä nämä toimijat pyrkivät vaikuttamaan aborttia koskeviin keskusteluihin ja asetuksiin Roe-v Wade lain kumoamisen aikana ja sen jälkeen. Aloitin analyysin luokittelemalla aineiston Hayden Whiten teorioimiin juonilajeihin; tragediaan, komediaan ja romantiikkaan. Temaattisella analyysillä tutkin narratiivisia muovaavia työkaluja ja sitä, kuinka kolmea abortinvastaisessa narratiivissa usein esiintyviä tarinahahmoja (abortinvastaiset (eng. "pro-life"), aborttioikeuden tukijat (eng. "pro-choice") ja "naiset") on luonnehdittu.

Eri hahmoille annettiin erottuva rooli tarinoissa. Esimerkiksi abortinvastaista pro-life-hahmoa kuvattiin usein "sankariksi", "moraaliseksi auktoriteetiksi", "rakastavaksi", "kristityksi", "altavastaajaksi" ja "naisten kannattajaksi". Vertailun aborttioikeuden eli pro-choiceen kannattajia nimitettiin teksteissä "abortin kannattajiksi", "aborttiteollisuudeksi", "harhaanjohtajiksi", "ahneiksi", "tappajiksi" ja "naisten oikeuksien vastustajiksi". Naiset taas esitettiin "aborttiteollisuuden" uhrena, ja heitä kuvailtiin "naiiveiksi", "haavoittuvaisiksi", "harhaan johdetuiksi" ja "suojelua tarvitseviksi". Naisten toimijuus tuli lähinnä esille, jos nämä olivat abortinvastaisia. On mahdollista esittää, että nämä narratiiviset valinnat eivät vaikuta pelkästään aborttipolitiikkaan ja tähän liittyviin mielipiteisiin, mutta myös heijastavat ja rakentavat sukupuolta ja naiseutta amerikkalaisessa kulttuurissa. Tämä projekti on pyrkinyt osoittamaan, kuinka naiseuden kertomuksia voidaan käyttää poliittisena työkaluna.

Avainsanat: Narratiivinen analyysi, Abortti, Abortinvastainen liike, Naiseus

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1. Introduction

In 1973 the Supreme Court guaranteed in its ruling of *Roe v. Wade* the individual's right to decide on the continuation of their pregnancy. Half a decade later on 24.6.2022, the decision was overturned, granting the states the ability to ban or limit access to abortion. By 1.5.2024 abortion has been banned in almost all circumstances in Alabama, Arkansas, Idaho, Indiana, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, Missouri, North Dakota, Oklahoma, South Dakota, Tennessee, Texas, West Virginia, and many other states have added restrictions for limited access. (New York Times, 2024)

The bans and restrictions have been widely criticized. Natasha Howard in her article "Coming to Terms with the Overturn of *Roe v. Wade*" (2023) writes in defense not only individual's autonomy in the decision to carry a pregnancy but also brings up concern over what the new laws would mean to medical treatment of women who want children. In particular, Howard worries that the possibility of terminating a pregnancy that poses a risk to the health or life of the mother, for example in case of fetal death in the womb or pregnancy complications, could be compromised. She writes that in Texas, where abortion is supposed to be allowed in cases where the life of the mother is threatened, in multiple scenarios doctors have been hesitant to terminate the pregnancy due to the fears of repercussions. This has caused some patients unnecessary suffering and complications. She argues that as some states seek to define the start of life the women undergoing fertility treatments such as IVF will also be affected. (Howard, 2023)

Around 50 countries have expanded abortion rights this century while only three, counting the US, have gone against this trend. Singh and Sedgh question in the article "Global implications of overturning *Roe v. Wade*" (2022), given the United States' global influence including the reproductive health programs, if overturning the federal right to abortion in the US affects the international trend. Singh and Sedgh write that not only can the decision slow down the trend of liberalizing abortion laws around the world, but it may also strengthen antiabortion activists in sub-Saharan Africa (the region with high mortality from unsafe abortion), Latin America, and the Caribbean.

The United States has a strong civil society (Ferree, 2002, p.5) and the anti-abortion movement has been lobbying for overturning the Roe. v Wade law since its making (Holland, 2016) now lobbying for an abortion ban in individual states. American anti-abortion movement, typically referred to as “pro-life”, true to its name has a strong life-framing in its narratives (Ferree, 2002, p. 118). Pro-life often defines itself as a defender of “pre-born children”, keeping track of neonatal research to support its agenda and seeking to establish human life to start in conception. However, the US anti-abortion movement also frequently involves ideas of social morality in the pro-life agenda (Ferree, 2002, p.118), and I will be focusing on this aspect of the movement.

More specifically, I will investigate pro-life narratives of women. I choose the feminist approach because I believe in shedding light on the pro-life’s wider narratives but also investigating the narratives constructed of and around women. Through investigations on these narratives, we can better aim to recognize and dismantle harmful ideas that contribute to the restriction of reproductive rights not only in the United States but globally. Thus, the central research questions of this thesis are:

1. How do pro-life organizations characterize women in their texts and use the concept of womanhood in their narrative to further their goal of abolishing abortion?
2. How does pro-life in its narrative depict the relationship of women to itself and its opposing movement, pro-choice?

I will seek answers to these questions using material available on several pro-life organizations’ websites. I will be using the method of narrative analysis to analyze this material. Narrative analysis is a qualitative research method that reveals how meaning is conferred in an experience (Bamberg, 2012). Narrative analysis has been stated by Walter Fisher, who further developed this method, to be the best in use of analyzing the arena of public moral argument, as “facts” created by stories are moral touchstones that could serve as bases for evaluating ethics, social conventions, and morals (Carlson, 2009, p.2). The abortion discourse is undisputedly a topic prominent in the public arena, often in which arguments are built based on morals and ethics. I argue that this makes narrative analysis a fitting tool when analyzing anti-abortion publications.

I start this thesis with a literary review of a volume by Cheree Carlson that greatly inspired the development of this thesis. By investigating her methodology, use of rhetorical and narrative tools, and contributions to current debates I aim to position my thesis in the wider conversation. Second, I will contextualize this thesis with the history of abortion in the United States and explore the narrative framings of women regarding abortion in the 19th and early 20th centuries. Next, I will introduce the theoretical framework, methodology, and material and finally focus on the analysis of the material, the pro-life blog posts.

1.1 The Approach: Historical Perspective

In Chapter 3 I present the historical context of the anti-abortion movement by introducing the cultural aspects of abortion, the birth of the anti-abortion movement led by AMA, and how abortion became illegal in the US. I also introduce framings in anti-abortion narratives of women during this time, and later in the thesis, I compare the contemporary narrative to the historical one. This poses the question, why compare the anti-abortion movement “pro-life” in the modern US to a century before when so many things have changed regarding reproductive rights, reproductive technologies, and women's emancipation?

There are a few reasons. Through this approach, we can compare the anti-abortion lobbying that at the end of the 19th century led to abortion bans with the pro-life movement that contributed to the overturning of *Roe v. Wade* in 2022. We may not only gain an understanding of the development of anti-abortion narratives through time but also by doing this I hope to unravel the influence of one of the main differences between the anti-abortion movements between now and then: the presence of women. Women play a large role in the modern anti-abortion movement. The pro-life activists, volunteers, and founders are almost always women (Holland, 2020), and this is also noticeable when noting the gender of the authors whose work is used as material in this thesis. In gathering the material the gender of the author was not a qualifying factor, but a woman wrote all blog posts (that had a credited author). This means that in researching how the pro-life narrative treats womanhood and women, we are ultimately also questioning how a woman's voice in the debate regarding reproductive rights presents. How do women manipulate the narrative that has been primarily

established by men? Do women use the same narrative tools about women that men did a century ago?

2. Literary Review: Carlson's "The Crimes of Womanhood", Frameworks, Arguments, and Contributions to Current Debates

For the thesis literature review, I have chosen to review the volume *Crimes of Womanhood: Defining Femininity in a Court of Law* (2008) by Cheree Carlson. I will summarize its role in the current debates, theoretical and conceptual frameworks, arguments, and the strengths and weaknesses of the arguments presented. Lastly, I will write about the book's relevance to my thesis and how my thesis contributes to this contemporary political debate as a whole.

Carlson analyzes six notorious court cases of women from the 19th and early 20th centuries. By investigating the historical court texts using coherent rhetorical and narrative theory, she explores how the characterization of womanhood was used in the court to sway the opinion of the jury and the audience regarding the innocence or guilt of these women. Carlson aims to reveal how typical strategies like "symbolic transformation" or "framing" can shape the narratives about women and womanhood and in continuation demonstrate the importance of the inclusion of a woman rhetor in an argument field (Carlson, 2008, p. 165).

2.1 Outlining the Current Debates

First, I aim to explore how Carlson's work, which analyzes the cases of five women from the 19th to early 20th century relates to contemporary political debates. Carlson contributes to a couple of current debates in this volume. Carlson states in her introduction, that it is commonly accepted among scholars and legal practitioners that narratives and storytelling are heavily relied on in the field of law. She argues that stories of law, not unlike classical stories and comic books, are subject to rhetorical strategies and rules. Communicators can construct these stories by transforming beliefs into believable arguments and presenting facts with

elements found in popular narratives. Carlson states that stories of law, in contrast to literature, influence jurors and verdicts, which could set precedents for future cases, law, and social morality. (Carlson, 2008, pp.1-2) By examining the court cases through the lens of rhetorical and narrative theory Carlson addresses the role of legal discourse: what kind of power does legal discourse hold over the convictions in the courtroom and as a result the public perception? How do the culturally ingrained narratives and symbols in turn shape the rhetorics in the courtroom?

The appeals in the 19th to early 20th-century court cases Carlson analyses were tied to law but also cultural narratives, such as societal ideals of womanhood (Carlson, 2008, p. 158). This is why in *Crimes of Womanhood*, Carlson contributes to feminist legal theory and the intersection between law and society. She explores the influence of narratives of womanhood, how gender is stereotyped in society and its legal institutions, and makes an argument about the importance of the rhetoric of womanhood in these debates. Carlson's analysis provides historical context for not only the feminist theories regarding gender roles in society but also the intersection of womanhood and law.

2.2 Theoretical and Conceptual Framework

Next, I will outline the theoretical and conceptual framework Carlson drew on when constructing her arguments in this volume. Carlson draws heavily on Kenneth Burke's rhetorical analysis and narrative theory. By analyzing the historical court texts using coherent rhetorical theory, she explores how the characterization of womanhood was used in the court to sway the opinion of the jury and the audience. Alongside the rhetorical theories, Carlson contextualizes her work concerning theories of the meaning of "womanhood" or "the cult of true womanhood". My objective is to draw from her theoretical frame of womanhood in this research.

2.2.1 Narrative Theory and its Tools

Carlson writes that even though the court of law claims to work outside the realm of produced narratives and purely rely on facts, the court cannot control the people involved in

the process not to have internalized pre-existing narratives of everyday life. This means, Carlson argues, that some arguments appealing to these preexisting narratives can be used to sway the jury's opinions (Carlson, 2008, pp. 1- 2). Thus, by investigating the records of these six court cases using rhetorical analysis, Carlson explicates narratives and manipulated images of womanhood constructed by male lawyers, and how they were used in the courtroom for the desired result. She argues that trials are an "arena of discourse where popular culture and life or death decisions are merged through the skills of communicators" (Carlson, 2008, p.11), and emerging narratives can reveal what womanhood meant in the 19th and early 20th centuries. (Carlson, 2008, pp.11, 17)

Carlson uses the narrative approach in her book, which is a well-established subdivision of rhetorical scholarship, in which arguments are analyzed like stories. Carlson cites Jackson's definition of a narrative:

-narrative is a major (perhaps the major) form of cultural communication of common-sense notions. It is the mode in which many of our value judgments are stored and transmitted— rather than being conceptualized or communicated in analytical discourse (Jackson, 1988, 61, cited in Carlson, 2008, p. 17).

Narratives can be manipulated by different tools, such as by "transforming" symbolic structures or using certain frames in rhetoric. Carlson seeks to analyze the communications arising in court cases as a form of storytelling and determine the basis for the jury's decision to accept or deny the story. She notes, that according to Walter Fisher's prototypical model of narrative rationality, the audiences judge the plot, character, timing, and other story elements when evaluating if the story "rings true" in their cultural context. (Carlson, 2008, p. 17)

Carlson leans on Burkean concept of symbolic structures in her analysis. According to Burke's theory, symbols are created to order the world and often without concretely tying them into reality. Multiple symbols can exist referring to the same thing, and the choice of a specific symbol can have intent behind it, such as when communicating a certain attitude toward the referant. Carlson mentions as an example naming defendants in a bombing case as freedom fighters or anarchists in a way of influencing the perspective of the jury in their favor. Symbols are often overlapping and not mutually exclusive. This may leave space for ambiguity that can be exploited by a skilled rhetorician to manipulate a culturally acceptable

narrative. Carlson uses this theory of symbolic structure when asking a question of how the society of this period viewed ideals of womanhood. (Carlson, 2008, pp.18-19)

In the third chapter of my thesis, I focus on contextualizing my thesis by exploring cultural manipulations of socio-legal narratives in the 19th-century anti-abortion argumentation. The AMA-related physicians framed women seeking the services of abortionists in a negative, tragic light. Abortionists were often characterized as “greedy”, “villains” and “murderers” and women could be seen as “naive victims”, “mentally ill”, or/and morally corrupt, not understanding the consequences of their actions. Feminists of the time could, however, frame the same event (a woman seeking abortion services) as women trying to take back their right to their bodies and futures in a situation caused by sexually exploitative selfish men. Even though in both cases there is a process of framing, and hence of narrative simplification of the abortion event, in the first one the abortionists fulfill the character of a villain in the narrative, and in the second one, it is “a lustful” man. The first frame would not have worked if the notion that women could be ‘hysterical’ and ‘naive’ was not already, at least partly, culturally accepted. Thus, the used frames in the court cases and how they rang true with the jury inform Carlson of the reality of what womanhood meant in the culture of the late 19th to early 20th century.

Carlson draws upon the framing theory, deeming it useful for her analysis. Burke sees frames as organized systems of meanings that can be applied to a series of events to lead audiences to evaluate these events differently (Carlson, 2008, p.20). In simple language, by giving elements of the story a different set of symbols or, for example, leaving some elements out of the narrative, this narrative can be shaped into a frame that is already familiar or acceptable in the cultural context of the audience.

Carlson also explores the use of Burke’s bridging devices. This is a common tactic for narrative manipulation. If the symbol shares elements of multiple social categories, there arise areas of ambiguity, which can be used to transform the narrative around the symbol. (Carlson, 2008, p. 20)

How does Carlson apply these theories in her material? The use of framing, for example, can be found in chapter two “Framing Madness in the Sanity Trial of Elizabeth Parsons Ware Packard”, in which Carlson summarizes and analyzes the arguments presented in Elisabeth

Packard's trial. According to Carlson, Packard was a headstrong woman who in the year 1858 got fascinated with spiritualism. This, however, was at odds with her traditionally christian peers. Her husband felt the pressure of having a converted wife, and as it was allowed by the law, he had the right to send her to Illinois State Hospital's "maniac" ward without her consent by gaining the approval of two doctors. After her return he locked her up in a nursery with no clothes, planning to send her out of state into another asylum, but Packard managed to get help. This started a sanity trial, where her mental health was in question: if she was found insane, her husband would have the right to decide on her treatment, and if not, she would be set free. (Carlson, 2008, p. 25)

Carlson states that the accusers, backed up by the medical community afraid of losing its credibility, used a Burkean "burlesque" frame. The burlesque frame is a negative frame used to build a narrative around an individual who "rejects an aspect of the social order" (Carlson, 2008, p. 27) and is approached from the point of view of the other characters in the story. This frame leans on making a caricature of the person and their actions and their "symptoms" without touching on the person's motives or pressures behind the behaviors. In Packard's case, according to Carlson, the accusers focused on those elements that showed her rejecting the social role of woman of the time. Rejecting the religious beliefs of her husband and showing anger and disdain towards him were marks of an "unfeminine" woman and a "bad spouse". This framing fails to explain the details behind Packard's negative opinions of her husband, as he, for example, told the whole neighborhood that she was insane. Even her domesticity was brought into question because although she kept the house tidy and the children happy, she sometimes showed an angry attitude, further implying her insanity according to the accusers. (Carlson, 2008, pp. 27- 32)

Carlson writes that in turn Packard's defense used a "comic" frame, which in contrast to the burlesque, leaned on the relatable social aspects behind Packard's character and behavior. The arguments sought to make the audience identify with Packard: Her spiritual beliefs may not be shared by her husband or peers, but they are believed in by thousands of smart individuals, so why should she be considered insane for these beliefs? Who would not be agitated when called insane by their husband or be stressed doing all the housework with little help? Carlson notes that in this framing the "narrative of true womanhood" was violated, but there was a good reason for it. In the end, the jury sided with the defense and ruled Packard sane. (Carlson, 2008, p. 36)

Carlson finds the use of a bridging device in the chapter “You Know It When You See It”: *The Rhetorical Embodiment of Race and Gender in Rhinelander v. Rhinelander*” (Carlson, 2008, p. 136). In this case, Alice Jones married an affluent white man, Leonard Rhinelander, who a month after the marriage sued her for fraud, claiming Alice Jones had deceived him of her ancestry and was, in fact, not white herself. The defense and prosecutor both used Alice Jones’ race and gender as bridging devices. She was seen to be in two categories, a person of color and a woman. The parties could thus characterize her in whichever category suited their goals. Her defense leaned on the category of womanhood, and how she acted like any woman in her vulnerable position would. Prosecutors leaned more heavily on her race, such as using common symbols of black women as “sexually loose” and “aggressive” to frame her actions in a more negative, calculative light. (Carlson, 2008, pp. 138-139, 142)

2.2.2 “The Cult of True Womanhood”

Carlson contextualizes her work by exploring the concept and development of womanhood as a narrative trope in the 19th century and the feminist critiques of “true womanhood”. Carlson writes that American culture adopted the British sentimental view of women that developed into the “Victorian ideal of feminine character” (Carlson, 2008, p. 5). Carlson writes that, unlike the British, Americans transformed this character into a distinctive entity, that was assigned the responsibility of upholding and guiding the morality of the country, and to “embody her society” (Wasserstrom cited in Carlson, 2008, p. 5). As the nation’s strong identification with this feminine character elevated, Carlson writes that the body of American literature at the time (beginning in the 1820s) aimed to determine the final traits of this character, first in the form of “domestic writing”¹ and eventually fictional pieces. When a new generation of writers, most of them female, reached maturity in the 1850s the “ideal” feminine character was defined. Carlson writes that the women authors were expected to create soft, compliant (although plucky) female characters to set the mold of “good feminine behavior” and thus guide the American women to emulate this proper role. (Carlson, 2008, pp. 5-6)

¹ These pieces included household advice that included not only home economics but also advice on improving one's character. (Carlson, 2008, p. 5)

Barbara Welter first introduced the concept of true womanhood in her study of 19th-century literature, but it was a subject of disagreement and development among scholars. Some argued that true womanhood meant harboring a cluster of specific feminine traits (e.g. “pure”, “domesticated”, and “soft”), often derived from literature, and was a male “conspiracy” to keep women subjugated (e.g. Welter, 1976). Others saw womanhood as a way of empowerment for women. (Carlson, 2008, pp. 6-7).

Carlson, in her volume, focuses on Linda Kerber’s view of analyzing the language of women’s sphere and viewing womanhood as a rhetorical entity capable of reflecting as well as changing the social world. Kerber argued that gender itself was a rhetorical construction. (Carlson, 2009, pp. 8-9) Carlson notes, that according to Burkean ideas of gender, “masculine” and “feminine” are linguistic concepts separate from physical sex, and as such the defining characteristics of “true womanhood” have little to do with an average American woman. (Carlson, 2008, p.166)

2.3 The Prevalent Arguments in “The Crimes of Womanhood”

By analyzing the court documents Carlson can make a variety of descriptions of stereotypes and attitudes towards women and womanhood in the 19th to early 20th century. I will be focusing on outlining two overarching arguments that Carlson derives from these case analyses. First, I dissect Carlson's argument about the importance of the feminine voice in the arena of law. In her second argument, she proposes that tenets, such as symbols, ideals, and stereotypes of womanhood can and are being used as rhetorical and transformative tools.

2.3.1 Feminine Voice in the Arena

Carlson states that it is commonly known among rhetorical scholars that “facts” in the realm of decision-making can be only presented by human actors. She states that the predominance of male actors in the courtrooms contorted the representations of women into odd narratives: women's sphere was seen as mysterious, so skilled rhetoricians could sway male jurors by capitalizing on the stereotypes men and society upheld of women. Carlson writes; “Physicians and lawyers could freely argue that their side “understood” women best in their

attempts to gain legal control over female bodies” (Carlson, 2008, p. 158) Thus, Carlson argues that when a female voice is heard in the courtroom, the jurors might have a completely different verdict- especially if the power of transformation is understood. (Carlson, 2008, pp.162, 165)

This could be seen in the case of Mary Lincoln, where the jury gave a verdict of insanity. In the re-trial, however, Mary Bradwell’s female intervention turned the verdict around. According to Carlson, in the chapter “True Womanhood” and Perfect Madness: The Sanity Trial of Mary Todd Lincoln” by using her rhetor skills Bradwell played with the womanly stereotypes differently, having the credibility of being a woman and thus understanding womanly needs. Carlson writes, that she portrayed Lincoln as a sensitive woman, disturbed by the harsh world and now the cold legal and medical institutions. Bradwell drew on women’s role as natural nurturers and argued that the best place for Lincoln to recover further was in the hands of her tender sister. (Carlson, 2008, p. 82)

Carlson argues that consciousness of the role of gender may maybe more important than ever in a contemporary setting when women are more prominently playing all the parts in the legal world. Carlson states that as “late arrivals” in the legal world, women have to navigate the centuries-old male-made construct of themselves and that they have to face the work to reframe the law to dismantle the pre-existing narratives of womanhood. (Carlson, 2008, p. 162)

2.3.2 Tenets of Womanhood as Rhetorical Tools

The second argument Carlson makes is that womanhood and its tenets can be used as rhetorical tools. Even though the law was supposedly blind, the rhetors knew that the jury needed a verbal delivery for these facts and that they could use the rhetorical tactics available. As discussed in the first point of “Feminine Voice in the Arena”, the women’s sphere was mysterious, and thus womanhood, its symbols, and stereotypes could be bent to create a certain narrative (Carlson, 2008, p. 158). Womanhood as a tool to draw upon, according to Carlson, was seen in all discussed cases. The tenets of womanhood could be used to create a total transformation: transformation in the framing depended on whether it was done by attack or defense: in Alice Jones’ case, a black woman became white, and in Lizzie Borden's,

she turned from a cold murderer to a grief-stricken and overwhelmed woman. (Carlson, 2008, pp. 160-161)

From the cases Carlson analyzed, I found Mary Lincoln's to be one where the power of the use of this rhetoric took shape. Mary Lincoln, who Carlson described as having embodied the virtues and characteristics of true womanhood (e.g. nurturer, feminine, dainty) was also subjected to this transformation. Carlson writes that women performing their feminine roles were only safe if their "paternal protectors" (often husbands, fathers, or sons) agreed that their performance was up to their standards: she could even perform "too well" and cross the line to insanity. As there were no strict rules or guidelines, Carlson states, that women had to walk in a social minefield. Some virtues celebrated turned into insane behavior in the notes of a physician. (Carlson, 2008, pp. 69, 84) This, alongside the other cases, demonstrates Carlson's argument of womanhood as a rhetorical entity and tool, rather than a cultural rule book (which the arguer draws from (Carlson, 2008, p.161)) or "natural" female behavior.

Carlson argues that the cult of true womanhood is still present today. She states that according to Hirshman's research, progress has been stalled because of old-fashioned domesticity and the belief that this homemaking is in women's nature. Hirshman believes, according to Carlson, that this notion puts pressure on educated women's career decisions. Hirshman's research argues that this pressure and expectations are especially difficult to dismantle, as quitting work to raise children and take care of the home is masked as a choice. Hirshman's research is not limited to gender division in the personal decisions of modern women, but she states that modern sexual politics and sexual arrangements have their roots in past gendered ideologies. (Hirshman cited in Carlson, 2008, p. 163) This is how Carlson's work on past court cases contributes to the modern day: to understand the present we must understand the past.

2.3.3 Evaluation of the Arguments

Carlson's utilization of the narrative theory and Burkean tools of framing, symbols, and bridging devices in historical court cases is, in my opinion, successful at revealing the cultural narratives of womanhood of this period. I found the use of narrative analysis in court

cases especially well-fitting, especially since courtrooms are well-known for carefully constructed narratives and stories.

Carlson's chosen material may mandate certain strengths and weaknesses in the final arguments. Courtrooms (alongside publishings like newspapers) seemed to be one of the few public arenas that had the power to shift public perception on either singular cases or overall morality. As Carlson states, court records showcase the process of reasoning til the final verdicts and they mirror the public morality and values. (Carlson, 2008, p. 16) I found the narrative analysis on courtroom documents especially successful in revealing the power of tenets of womanhood as transformative tools: having access to texts of both attack and defense showcased how the same situation and the same woman could be transformed with calculated use of culturally accepted "facts" about womanhood in their rhetorics.

One weakness of the material is the possibility of generalizing the arguments of the courtroom to the wider society. For example, in the chapter "Bodies at the Crossroads: The Rise and Fall of Madame Restell" (Carlson, 2008, p. 111) both "abortionists" and women having abortions were commonly persecuted by courts and the press. Court cases and many other public forums can not, however, reveal all the layers of society and moral attitudes toward women. Leslie Reagan in her book *Women, Medicine, and Law in the United States, 1867-1973* (1996) argues that "popular morality that accepted abortion was almost never publicly expressed but was rooted in people's daily lives". According to popular morality, Reagan argues, women were often privately, among family, friends, and some doctors supported in their abortions, and up until the 1920s early abortion and contraception had virtually no difference in American culture. (Reagan, 1997, p. 6) By only analyzing the court cases, one might be misled into believing that values and attitudes toward abortion were virtually all negative during this time. Thus, Carlson's cultural evaluation could potentially be left lacking. However, even though this cultural evaluation of attitudes towards women and womanhood would not take into consideration all aspects of society, I do not find that this would influence her important arguments of the use of womanhood as a rhetorical tool, or the importance of a female voice.

Carlson demonstrates transparency in this issue, though I could not find her stating this clearly. She, for example, in the Rhinelander chapter finishes the case analysis on the juror interviews after Alice Jones' win, in which one juror states that "race prejudice didn't enter

into the case at all” and another that “if we had voted according to our hearts the verdict might have been different” (“Rhinelanders Lose” 27, cited in Carlson, 2008, p. 153). This, in my opinion, demonstrates that Carlson acknowledges that the courtroom does not perfectly mirror the true opinions of the public.

2.4 Relevance to My Thesis

I will be utilizing Carlson’s concept of womanhood as a part of my framework in this thesis. I present questions similar to Carlson’s but in the contemporary context of the abortion debate and pro-life organizations: how are women presented or situated in the overarching narratives of pro-life actors by using narrative analysis of pro-life blog articles? Do similar narratives, framings, and symbols rise among the anti-abortion organizations today as among the anti-abortion actors in the 19th to early 20th century?

Access to abortion in the US is a widely debated topic at multiple levels of society: in legal and governmental platforms and civil society, such as in non-governmental organizations. Organizations like pro-life spread narratives that build, dismantle, and/or reinforce cultural perceptions and norms, especially of women and womanhood; abortion is commonly regarded as a very gendered subject. These narratives can be widely spread on the internet through blogs, articles, and videos, and in person by brochures, marches, or anti-abortion “health clinics”. As Carlson stated, legal platforms need a person to argue for or against a person or a law, and culturally accepted “facts” or ideologies can be used in the hands of skilled rhetoric to influence the laws and verdicts made. The decisions made in law have in turn the power to influence future cases and culture (Carlson, 2008, pp. 2, 158). The US has a robust civil society (Ferree, 2002, p. 5), and the widespread distribution of ideologies through the internet also influences the culture and can thus be used by rhetors in the courts and lawmaking. I argued in the section “Outlining the current debates” that one current debate Carlson contributes to is the debate on the cultural influence and the use of cultural narratives in rhetorics in the courtroom. I argue that I am adding to this debate by examining strong cultural influencers outside the field of law, whose ideology could and is affecting the legal rights to abortion across multiple states.

With my thesis, I am also adding to the feminist conversation on womanhood and gender by examining the characterization of women in these blog posts: how women are described in anti-abortion rhetoric and how does it utilize the common tropes of womanhood discovered by feminist scholars? Due to my contemporary material, I will also be investigating how the “feminine voice” in the abortion debate can be utilized in the anti-abortion movement narrative in modern America.

3. Historical and Cultural Context of the Anti-abortion Movement and its Narratives in the United States

3.1 Introduction to Contextualizing Chapter

In this chapter, I will be contextualizing my thesis by reviewing the early history of the anti-abortion movement and more specifically the political or moral narrative framings about women used in anti-abortionist rhetorics. The anti-abortion discourse in the United States has a deeply rooted history of relying upon and producing certain narratives and framings about women and abortion and its harms. Anti-abortionists have depended on religious moral codes and varied across different cultural tropes from depicting villains out of abortion practitioners to concern over women’s health, position, and responsibilities. These narratives reflect, reinforce, and build societal and cultural norms and policies of their time and I argue continue to affect the framing of important current politics and discourses today.

I will focus on three groups that influenced the anti-abortion discourse in the mid-19th to early 20th century. First I will discuss the all-male physician-led American Medical Association AMA, which was formed in 1847 and started a campaign to regulate the practice of physicians and access to abortion. Secondly, I will outline the anti-abortion narratives and the resulting policies found in the field of law and policymaking (This includes actors such as the US state legislators/policymakers, committees, and lawyers). . Thirdly, I will look into the influence and opinion of the religious institutions, such as the protestant and catholic churches, in the height of the anti-abortion discourse.

Exploring the early anti-abortion rhetoric and analyzing its prevalent narratives and framings aids the comparison of these historical narratives to current narratives in later chapters and thus serves to contextualize my research within a broader temporal span, but also to investigate which framings are still effectively in use today and which have been (mostly) abandoned. One of my key reference points is the rise of medical interest in abortion and a proliferation of physicians' arguments against abortion, addressed in relevant scholarship as the "physicians crusade" from the late 1840s to the beginning of 1900s and I will look into what kind of narrative framings of women and abortion they utilized to convince the public and the US legal world to change the cultural values and legality of abortion.

3.1.1 The "Woman" Under Debate

It is also important to question the use of the word "woman" in the narrative framings of the early anti-abortion discourse I will identify in this chapter. When speaking of this "woman", few assigned roles and descriptions arise, such as "married", "home-maker", "infertile", "pleasure-seeking", "overcivilized" and "white". By using and combining these and other similar symbols and roles and drawing arguments dependent on these images it can be argued that there is a very specific type of female that fits the title of a "woman" whose body was in the midst of a debate in this 19th-century anti-abortion discourse. Who is left out and is there a different discourse about women who are not white, Anglo-American, non-immigrant, or middle to upper-class?

Many scholars agree that late 19th century politics around abortion are not only gender- but also racial politics (e.g. K. Beisel in "Abortion, Race, and Gender in Nineteenth-Century America" 2004, and Laura Briggs in "The Race of Hysteria: "Overcivilization" and the "Savage" Woman in Late Nineteenth-Century Obstetrics and Gynecology" 2000). Because I am focusing this research on anti-abortion narratives specifically, it is important to keep in mind that even though women of color were majorly and uniquely affected by the abortion ban and racist stereotypes around their reproductive qualities, they were not necessarily in the focus of the anti-abortion rhetoric in the 1800s. In this contextualizing chapter, I will also address the issue of narratives about women of color and how these relate to the common narratives about women of this time.

3.1.2 The Early History of Non-regulated Abortion

While secularism was one of the constitutional foundations of the US, the importance of religion did not diminish in the 1800s. Christianity had a dominant impact on societal moral codes regulating sexual behavior strongly before the 1800s including the role that religious morality played in discouraging and shaming premarital sex and adultery. This religious code only approved of sex as a means of procreation. (Carlson, 2018, p. 114) It is important to note that the explicit anti-abortion stance of the Christian church is itself a modern phenomenon; while the church leaders never approved abortion per se, before the modern period it had not taken a dogmatic stance on the issue ² (Castuera, 2017). In colonial America abortion, if found out, could be punished if it happened in certain circumstances, such as if the woman wasn't married, but was overlooked when it functioned as a means of controlling the number of children within a marriage (Fernandez-Villaverde, Greenwood, Guner, 2014). Historians have noted that concern about abortions during this time mostly related to the women's health and well-being (McCoyd, 2008).

Cheree Carlson writes that before the development of modern reproductive medicine, there were multiple ways of birth control relying on traditions passed down by women. If they failed, midwives with generational knowledge and experience assisted in childbirth as well as abortion. She writes, that with the transformation of traditional societal models in the first decades of the 1800s the church's control of sexual behavior in society had weakened. With the declining influence of religion and before the professionalization of legal and medical regimes regulating reproductive norms towards the end of the 19th century- lawyers and doctors being the two professions with, as Carlson notes “much potential to control women's bodies” (Carlson, 2008, p. 114), women were left much to their own with contraceptives and abortions during this time. Doctors, Carlson says, had “enough work in preventing the proliferation of untrained practitioners, many of whom posed genuine threats to public health.” (Carlson, 2008, p. 114)

3.1.3 “Physicians Crusade”

² Abortions before “quickenings”, the felt movements of the fetus, were not seen morally wrong (Castuera, 2017)

Abortion in the United States had not been a subject of public discourse until the second half of the 19th century which also occasioned a shift of social attitudes towards it. According to Carlson, the American Medical Association AMA, and the legal world, who often were competing for status and power, were united in their intent to regulate abortions. AMA sought to gain control over the medical field and thus clear it of “competitors”, who were openly marketing their services (such as abortion) and were gathering wealth from their business (Carlson, 2008, p. 159). This competition to AMA’s regular male physicians consisted of “irregular” physicians, such as midwives, homeopaths, immigrants, water-cure practitioners, health reformers, and other practitioners independent from medical institutions (Dudden, 2019, p. 104).

According to Carlson, to justify their lobbying AMA combined the moral and religious arguments with more practical medical concerns. This is why the AMA focused on narratives around abortion providers, who were painted as dangerous, false doctors, whom women needed protection from. These practitioners were deemed as morally corrupt, with no respect for the fetus’ or mother’s health or life. The resulting policies, Carlson notes, weakened the power of midwives to treat their fellow women and strengthened the moral, medical, and legal power over women's bodies held by state laws and professional lobbies and institutions dominated by men. (Carlson, 2008, p. 115) This masculinization of medicine was received critically by the rising women’s rights movement and feminists of the time, and many of them started favoring “irregular” medicine and homeopathy (Dudden, 2019).

3.2 Anti-abortion Narratives in the US in the 19th Century

3.2.1 Physician’s Representation of Women

Even though abortion providers were a chief target of the campaign, women seeking abortion were also depicted in a negative light. A stark example of the AMA discourse on anti-abortionist discourse at the time was H. R. Storer³, who argued that women suffering from “nervousness⁴” would commonly “trick” practicing doctors and physicians to accidentally perform abortions during routine medical care by pretending to suffer from

³ Storer was also the leader of the AMA’s movement to criminalize abortion in the latter half of 19th century (Briggs, 2000, p.256)

⁴ nervousness was often a diagnosis for various distresses of mind and body (Briggs, 2000, p.247)

uterine illnesses (Briggs, 2000, p. 256). He also questioned women's ability to make such a decision by themselves by arguing: "If each woman were allowed to judge for herself in this matter, her decision upon the abstract question would be too sure to be warped by personal considerations, and those of the moment" (Storer cited in Dudden, 2019, p. 104) and claiming that even if carried to term was deemed to be dangerous to the mother, abortions were much more dangerous, often leading to cancer, epilepsy and "idiocy". Storer also stated that abortion was "clearly murder" (Storer cited in Dudden, 2019, p. 104) (Dudden, 2019). Childlessness, miscarriages, and abortions were also linked with declining or deficient mental and physical health of women, whether they wanted children or not (Briggs, 2000).

In addition to denigrating traditional midwives and dismissing the mother's health concerns, open pronatalism constituted another argument for abortions to suppress and prevent middle- and upper-class women's interests and pursuits outside of childbearing, domestic life, and motherhood. An example of such arguments can be found in the article of Judith McCoyd, who is a professor at Rutgers University's School of Social Work; "Women in No Man's Land: The Abortion Debate in the USA and Women Terminating Desired Pregnancies Due to Foetal Anomaly" (2008). In the article, McCoyd made a political pronouncement released by AMA which shows that in addition to medical reasonings, AMA relied on pronatalist arguments:

She becomes unmindful of the course set out for her by Providence, she overlooks duties imposed on her by the marriage contract. She yields to the pleasures, but shrinks from the pains and responsibilities of maternity; and, destitute of all delicacy and refinement, resigns herself, body and soul, into the hands of unscrupulous and wicked men. (Atlee and O'Donnell (1871), cited in Smith-Rosenberg and Rosenberg, 1999, p. 120)" (McCoyd, 2008, p. 4).

AMA's rhetoric was not restricted to medical arguments but utilized and promoted an ideal of womanhood. This ideal assigned a woman's place at home and resisted the rising autonomy of women in society. As a result, the physicians' misogynistic rhetoric started to shape a culture that prioritized the fetus over the woman's health. For example, some physicians justified saving the fetus over the woman in an emergency by claiming that the fetus might contribute to society later on in life, while a mother with difficulty bearing children didn't add value to the life of the husband or society in general. (McCoyd, 2008, p. 4)

In response to the AMA's advocacy of eliminating abortions through restrictive laws the women's rights movement opposed criminalization of abortion, even while they did not unanimously support abortion as a social practice. Feminists in the mid-19th century sought to address the underlying reasons behind abortions. Feminists like Mathilda Gage (who herself condemned abortion) saw men's sexual demands and "enforced motherhood" as the root of the problem. Putting the focus on women's rights and education would be the best way to reduce the need for an abortion. (Dudden, 2019)

3.2.2 Policy Makers debate and resulting policies

Outside of the AMA-physicians' professional interests, according to Kay and Beisel in "Abortion, Race, and Gender in nineteenth-century America"(2004), the critical political context for the anti-abortion movement was immigration, which was seen as threatening the social hegemony of Anglo-Saxon political power, as their control depended on numerical dominance at the polls. (Kay, Beisel, 2004) Thus, declining child rates among white, Anglo-Saxon American-born women were also seen as an issue. Urbanization, industrialization, and other social developments before and during the 1840s influenced American (especially white) women to gain more autonomy. The rising popularity of commercial printing in the middle of the century meant wider access to methods of contraception and abortion advertised in newspapers and books. The possible impacts of this raised concern among many policymakers. (Withycombe, 2019)

To overcome this issue Ohio's legislative committee, for example, issued a report following the stricter abortion law in 1867 that stressed the concern over the decline of the "Anglo-Saxon race" as the abortion rate was statistically high among white women, stating: "-Shall we permit our broad and fertile prairies to be settled only by the children of aliens?" (cited in Castuera, 2017, p. 193). The Ohio legislators shared their discontent over white, married women's choice to have an abortion, stating that such action meant that women were actively avoiding their marital responsibilities⁵ of producing offspring and were "living in a state of legalized prostitution" (cited in Castuera, 2017, p. 193). The Ohio legislators were

⁵ note the similarity of this argument to AMA's pronatalistic narratives

one vote away from voting in favor of placing the greatest penalties on abortions of married women to preserve the vitality of the Anglo-Saxon race. (Castuera, 2017) This narrative of “endangered whiteness” was thus used to promote racist eugenics (Briggs, 2000).

By 1880 legislators in virtually all states had worked to criminalize abortion and had given authority to AMA-approved male physicians to decide whether abortion was medically necessary (Reagan, 1997, p. 5). The laws criminalizing abortion meant outlawing abortion even before “quickenings”⁶, making abortion a felony, forbidding advertising of abortion providers, and increasing penalties (Dudden, 2019, p.104). Many of the abortion-related restrictions and state laws were only repealed in 1973 after the Supreme Court’s *Roe. v Wade* decision (Beisel, Kay, 2004)

The pronatalist politics by legislators can be seen also outside of an abortion ban as there were other laws put in place, partly to prevent citizens’ ability to control the number of children; for example, Congress passed the Comstock Act of 1873 including the obscenity bill to control the spread of “immoral” material (such as erotica, sexual implements or material advertising such), and information about birth control and how to prevent pregnancy. (Horowitz, 2006) The Comstock Act's birth control provisions were overturned in 1936 (Brunette, 2009).

After the turn of the century starting from the 1890s however, all abortion discourse seemed to quiet down. This general silence lasted until the 1950s, and was labeled by Luker (1984) as a “century of silence”. (Luker cited in Ferree et al, 2002, p. 24). According to Leslie Reagan, the restrictive abortion laws weren’t fixed, but fluid. Abortion and its criminal status and medical complexities continued to be argued in the courtrooms and among medical practitioners depending on medical advancements, interpretations, and opinions. common civilians participating in jury duty also influenced the effects of the criminalization of abortion on a case-to-case basis. (Reagan, 1997, pp. 5-6)

3.2.3 Narratives of Religious Authorities

⁶ when the fetus’ movements could be felt

I find it important to outline the role of religion in the 19th-century anti-abortion movement since the narratives of the movement heavily relied on morality, and traditionally the church and religion are seen as an important moral influence. Religion and religious actors seemed to be the least influential of the three political forces behind the abortion regulation in the 19th century that I'm outlining in this chapter. The influence of religion in anti-abortion discourse grew in the 20th century when protestant churches, for example, became increasingly politicized and were divided into liberal and conservative, partly due to the disagreements on contraceptives and abortion (Castuera, 2017). In the 19th century, however, the role and narratives of religious parties were not cohesive, as churches in the US seemed to give little public support to AMA's campaign.

Neither the Catholic or Protestant church as a whole participated visibly in anti-abortion campaigns in the 19th century, although some religious individuals or individual groups aligned with AMA's efforts. Several Protestant leaders spoke up against abortion as a form of murder, and one Catholic Bishop and Pope Pius IX condemned it in 1869 (Castuera, 2017). The Catholic church as a whole seemed to avoid making a clear statement publicly to moral questions of abortion in the US. In the article "A Social History of Christian Thought on Abortion: Ambiguity vs. Certainty in Moral Debate" (2017) Castuera discusses possible reasons by Mohr (1978, p. 182-184) who theorizes that this might be due to the taboo nature of the subject: Castuera notes that according to Mohr the church officials might not have seen a problem with early abortion, since there was no clarity in the religious texts when human life began, or, Mohr speculates, maybe they were in denial of Christian women performing abortions. Also, as church-related publications like pamphlets and church bulletins were meant to be read by the whole family, sex-related topics, especially as taboo as abortion, could have been poorly received. (Castuera, 2017, p. 197)

At the turn of the century and in the 1900s anti-abortion views gained more public approval from religious groups. The Roman Catholic Church, for example, went as far as to condemn not only abortion as a way to control the number of children but also the removal of the fetus in the case of cephalopelvic disproportion, which was a condition potentially leading to death or disabilities for women. (McCoyd, 2008).

3.3 Common Framings

To take a closer look at these three actors and the narratives found in their arguments, I will identify the common framings of women. These framings, which are shaped by patriarchal projections of models of womanhood, can be found in the commonly utilized stereotypes, tropes, and how a certain argument is made. These framings of women are all from a masculine outside perspective, and thus fitting in the Burkean burlesque⁷ frame mentioned in the literature review, section 2.2.1.

To explore the briefly described arguments of AMA and religious authorities as narratives about women, I am identifying three keyframes: (a) women needing protection, (b) the character of a woman, and (c) women as a threat to society. These three frames can be found utilized alone (e.g. (a) abortionists have no morals and do not care about the health of women or babies) or together to strengthen each other (e.g. Overcivilized⁸ woman is frail and infertile (b) which is a threat to the power of the Anglo-Saxon race in the United States (c)). Next, I will look into the meanings and goals of these narratives found in the three anti-abortion groups inspected.

3.3.1 Women in Need of Protection

The first framing was most prevalent in the rhetoric of AMA arguments regarding the physicians and midwives providing abortions. Women needed protection from the “evil abortionists” (Carlson, 2008, p. 115). The arguments created on this framing undermined pregnant women’s agency and did not pay attention to the other factors such as social pressures, her financial ability to raise a child or the role of the father of the child that would be born.

⁷ The burlesque frame is a negative frame used to build a narrative around an individual who “rejects an aspect of the social order” and is approached from the point of view of the other characters in the story. (Carlson, 2008, p. 27)

⁸ “Overcivilization is a concept in scientific and popular discourse regarding a theory, in which cultural evolution begins with the “savage” (referring to indigenous people, Africans, Latin Americans, or sometimes poor people in general) and culminates in the “civilized”, which contains the possibility of degeneration- overcivilization, which was seen as a root cause for example for “nervousness” (Briggs, 2000)

What counts as “protection” in this context seems to include protecting women from themselves: women who didn’t want to bear children were seen as suffering from nervousness. Childlessness, birth control, miscarriages, and abortions made them frail-minded and/or potentially physically ill (Briggs, 2000). Women were not seen as capable of making moral decisions to use the services of abortionists who tried to take advantage of this frailness and cause more harm (Dudden, 2019). Limiting women’s capacities to offer reproductive health services outside of the formal structure due to the masculinization of the medical was part of this rhetoric.⁹ Thus this framing suggested that social role of protecting women, alongside all medical care, needed to be outsourced to the AMA.

The rhetoric of protecting women from dangerous abortionists and the consequences of abortion did not seem to cover the dangers of pregnancy nor mention abortions done to protect the mother’s life. Even when concern over women’s health was raised by some physicians (e.g. Bowditch to Storer¹⁰), the subject was mostly ignored by anti-abortion advocates (Dudden, 2019, pp. 112-113.) The medical expertise of the AMA extended to all aspects of female reproductive health, including sexual and moral aspects of pregnancy. That also included the authority to determine the status of fetal life as “personhood”. Permission and access to abortion to protect the mother’s life and health were made by the local physicians, who could, in case of an approved abortion, be in danger of getting legal consequences over their decision. (Reagan, 1997, p.5) Thus one important characteristic of the rhetoric of protecting women is that it is used distinctively to advocate an abortion ban, not in cases where abortion could protect women from health issues or death.

3.3.2 Character of a Woman

The second framing concentrates on women’s characterization as “nervous”, “frail”, or “insane”. Its use can be seen in all three narratives and it also served the purpose of justifying

⁹ Of course, some women continued to act in these professions, more or less legally. This was the case of Madame Restell, the face of abortionists for 30 years, who was arrested repeatedly during her time in business (Carlson, 2008). By excluding women from the conversation and professions relating to the female body using these narratives, AMA gained control of the field.

¹⁰ Dr. H. Bowditch questioned practicality of anti-abortion laws and consequences for a mother in early stages of a risky pregnancy and who possibly already had several children (Dudden, 2019, p. 112)

why abortion restrictions were needed. As such, it is related to the frame above, which outlined why women could not be permitted to make these decisions autonomously.

The narrative of weak, nervous, frail-minded women needing protection was not exclusive to anti-abortion discourse but was part and parcel of the conservative response to the women's rights movements gaining attention and becoming prevalent.

Laura Briggs describes the concept of the late 19th century hysteria. According to Briggs industrialization and urbanization in combination with the women's rights movement resulted in a swift cultural change in the role and rights of women in society; higher education became available for women, as well as paid employment and they gained more access to the public sphere. (Briggs, 2000) This social change in women's role, heavily promoted especially by suffragists, met with criticism from conservative segments of society (Beisel, Kay, 2004). Part of the critical response to women's social emancipation was the construction of new narratives, often promoted by medical society and legislators, explaining why this change was dangerous not only for society as a whole but for women specifically. The arguments against tolerating women in the workforce or higher education as well as arguments against contraceptives and abortion were often based on women's bodies and mental qualities.

One argument, according to Briggs, was based on the postulate about declining fertility which physicians of the time saw as a result of conditions such as "hysteria" or "nervous weakness" among mostly Anglo-American higher-class white women. These conditions were linked to infertility, and were attributed to many reasons, such as education and "luxurious living" but it was also linked by some physicians with birth control, such as condoms or douching, and with abortions. (Briggs, 2000, pp. 254-256)

According to this frame, women were meant to be mothers. Briggs argues that avoidance of that role was interpreted as a mark of an "irresponsible", "selfish", "masculine" and "uncaring" character, and further reinforcing a woman's responsibility as a mother and a wife was seen as a protection from these moral failures. Briggs writes that hysteria could manifest in dozens of different ways and be diagnosed with vastly different symptoms, thus clumping together women's mental health (e.g. little interest in sex, apathy, instability) and physical problems (e.g. infertility, uterine illnesses) They were all attributed to these new cultural changes and "over-civilization", which was a concept that relied on the idea that cultural

evolution started from “savage”¹¹ and resulting to “civilized”. It was theorized, however, that this process could lead to degeneration (Briggs, 2019, p. 255). This framing, though it could be potentially directed at the public as a whole, was mainly targeted at women as a warning and played a deterring function.

According to Briggs feminist historians and scholars (e.g. Barbara Ehrenreich and Deirdre English) suggest that the diagnosis of hysteria was used as an instrument to undermine women's newly acquired place in society and depict them as incompetent participants in the public sphere. This was a warning to women of the dangers of engaging in “unfeminine” behavior, such as seeking to participate in higher education (Briggs, 2000). This narrative is reflected in and entangled with the anti-abortion discourse, though abortion was not a central topic of debate in the public sphere. Within that frame, women needed to be protected not only from the evils of abortionists or risks to their or fetus’ physical health but also from “over-civilization” embodied by higher education and participation in public debates.

Compared to the first frame I argue this framing depicts women in a more active role: they were acknowledged to actively try and “stretch” the traditional gender roles and to participate in the changing society, by widening women’s social roles beyond that of motherhood and marriage.

3.3.3 Women as a Threat to Society

The third prevalent frame in the anti-abortion discourse was that of women as a threat. It was based on the arguments used to further pronatalism and resist changing social roles of women in society. This framing is similar to the character-oriented frame as it also relates to women expanding the narrowly defined gender roles, but the rhetoric of this frame concentrates on its potential societal impact, rather than the “decay” of the woman’s virtue. As mentioned, the changing position of women in society was claimed to be dangerous for women’s health and character, but within the “women as a societal threat” frame it was also considered to be dangerous for the higher class, white, male-dominated society as a whole.

¹¹ Indigenous people, Africans, and sometimes poor people in general were according to this theory “savage” (Briggs, 2000, p. 246)

As mentioned in section 3.3.1, According to McCoyd the progress of the rising women's rights movement and the furthering of women's participation in society was seen as threatening not only women's well-being but also men's position and the patriarchal system. In this frame, women seeking abortion were seen as abandoning their duties in marriage and motherhood (McCoyd, 2008, p. 4). This frame is also clear in section 3.3.2 where in the mentioned Ohio legislative committee report anti-abortion and pro-natal arguments and resulting policies were openly discussed to be designed not only to control the medical field but women's behavior as a social group. (Castuera, 2017, p. 193)

The "women as a threat" frame can be also found in the context of racial "threat". According to Briggs, white women's movement for political and social autonomy was often recontextualized as a racial threat. Briggs writes that due to abortion, contraceptives, and disinterest in traditional roles as a wife and mother, white middle- and upper-class women were seen as endangering the domination of the white population in US society. This racist narrative was reinforced by narratives of the reproductive qualities of women of color: black or Latino women were stereotyped as fertile, hypersexual, and able to give birth more easily (Briggs, 2000, pp. 249-250). An immigrant woman with many children, for example, could be used to contrast the stereotype around infertile white women to create an illusion of danger. An example can be found in the mentioned Ohio legislative report: "-Shall we permit our broad and fertile prairies to be settled only by the children of aliens?" (cited in Castuera (2017)).

3.4 Conclusions

My objective for this chapter is to give historical context for the analysis of the contemporary anti-abortion discourse. I have outlined the relevant actors of anti-abortion discourse and their commonly used narratives: AMA was formed to regulate the medical field. Regulating access to abortions, which traditionally were offered by midwives, allowed the AMA to narrow the field of "irregular" practitioners and enforce their status. Much of this anti-abortion movement relied upon narratives of morals regarding the fetus' personhood and the safety and character of the mother.

Policymakers and other legislative actors in all states criminalized abortion and abortionists and in some of their narratives emphasized the importance of women maintaining their morals and roles as wives and mothers or the concerns over the declining fertility of the white population. Protestant and Catholic churches, yet to be divided into liberal and conservative, had a smaller role in the anti-abortion movement in the 19th century and voiced their opinions on the issue more cautiously.

To better understand the prevalent narratives regarding women in the anti-abortion movement, I sought to identify three main types of frames in the anti-abortion discourse: women needing protection, the character of womanhood, and women as a threat to society. These frames will be relevant in my analysis, as I will ask how and if these frames are still relevant in the contemporary abortion debate and how they have been adjusted.

4. Theoretical Framework: Narrative theory and feminist approach

Narrative analysis is a methodological approach being applied in many fields from history and law to film and literature. In this section, I will be introducing its theory and application in feminist texts before applying narrative analysis to my own thesis material. First, I will start by looking into narrative theory, and then continue to use of narrative analysis in feminist texts. I will be referencing multiple books and articles that have contributed to the scholarship of narrative theory, for example, the book *The Cambridge Companion to Narrative Theory* (Garrett, 2018) and more specifically chapter five, “The Feminist Foundations of Narrative Theory” by Judith Roof. I will also be referring to *The Cambridge Introduction to Narrative* (2008) by H. Porter Abbott and Herman’s *The Cambridge Companion to Narrative* (2007) and its chapter 13 “Gender” by Ruth Page.

4.1 Narrative theory- Introduction to the Methodology

4.1.1 History of the Scholarship

Narrative theory as a field concentrates on the nature of storytelling and its impacts on the human condition. According to Herman (2007), The interest in the concept of narrative has grown in the past few decades, as narrative theory has been applied to a wide variety of disciplines and research contexts: this phenomenon is named “narrative turn” by Martin Kreiswirth. This development partly contributed to structuralist narrative theories in the mid to late 1960s as the structuralists developed the theory beyond the traditional literary analysis. The word “narratology” was coined by literary scholar Tzvetan Todorov to define the “science of narrative” in structuralist theory, modeling this on structural linguistics by Ferdinand de Saussure. (Herman, 2007, pp. 4-5)

In addition to Saussure, Herman writes that structuralists drew on ideas of Russian formalist literary theorists (e.g. Propp, Levi-Strauss), who studied narrative prose from Russian literature, such as Tolstoi and Russian fairytales. Herman writes that Russian formalists developed narrative structuralism: Shkolovskii distinguished what is told versus how something is told and Tomashevskii established the basis from which Roland Barthes formed a distinction between story elements of “nuclei” and catalyzer”¹². (Herman, 2007, pp. 5, 13) Barthes credited the Russian formalists for identifying the dilemma of narratives: narratives are always formulated as part of the surrounding system units and rules, which can be identified (Barthes, 1975).

Numerous theorists supported the shift of narrative theory from prose to any genre of writing to all discourse, that could be constructed as narratively organized. According to Herman structuralists like Barthes argued for the narrative approach for its cross-disciplinary possibilities of analyzing the stories as supporting many cognitive and communicative activities. The cross-disciplinary nature of the scholarship, demonstrated by initiatives such as the Centre for Interdisciplinary Narratology at the University of Hamburg and Columbia University's Program in Narrative Medicine surrounding narrative, is one of its defining features. (Herman, 2007, p. 5)

¹² “Delete or add to the kernel events of a story and you no longer have the same story; delete or add to the satellites and you have the same story told in a different way.” (Herman, 2007, p.13)

4.1.2 What is Narrative?

Roland Barthes writes in his article “An Introduction to the Structural Analysis of Narrative” (1975):

The narratives of the world are numberless. Narrative is first and foremost a prodigious variety of genres, themselves distributed amongst different substances – as though any material were fit to receive man’s stories. Able to be carried by articulated language, spoken or written, fixed or moving images, gestures, and the ordered mixture of all these substances; narratives are present in myth, legend, fable, tale, novella, epic, history, tragedy, drama, comedy, mime, painting (think of Carpaccio’s Saint Ursula), stained glass windows, cinema, comics, news item, conversation. (Barthes, 1975, p. 237)

According to Barthes narrative starts with the beginning of mankind, as there have never been people without narratives. Barthes writes that for that reason narratives are transhistorical, transcultural, and historical since all groups, classes, and cultures from all times have their stories. (Barthes, 1975, p. 237)

A narrative is a representation of an event or events from a particular perspective, which includes a story (sequence of events) and a narrative discourse (how the story is represented) (Abbott, 2008, p. 19). According to Abbott a simple description, such as “My dog has fleas” is not a narrative, but if it is represented as an event, “My dog was bitten by a flea”, it is. Abbott notes that some scholars require more than one event to be represented or these events to be linked, but the fundamental building block of one presented event, in written words or another way, is key to more complex narratives. However, this makes defining a singular narrative difficult among scholars, as it is contested if long, more complex works such as T.S. Eliot’s “The Waste Lands” (1922) can be comprehended as a singular narrative. Thus Abbott argues there are at least two definitions for the term narrative: “compact and definable”, and “loose and generally recognizable”. The first is defined by the mentioned building blocks that are used for longer narrative structures, events, and representation. The latter is broader,

longer structures, such as genres like tragedy and epic, and are recognized by some form of narrative coherence. (Abbott, 2008, pp. 13-14)

A narrative includes a story and a narrative discourse. Barthes writes that the story is the argument involving the logic of syntax of the characters (Barthes, 1975). Stories, according to Abbott, have certain defining qualities in their structure, such as entities, events, and settings. Abbott writes that the story materializes when we gather information from discourse and in our minds sort and reconstruct the events into a story: A story is always mediated either by the camera lens, style of writing, voice, etc. Abbott uses the story of Cinderella as an example; the story doesn't have to be distinctly referred to as the fairytale, but its kernel story beats are found through the specific discourse. To decide which piece of the story is essential is versatile and can be disputed. Narrative discourse means the representation of the story (or narrative world). (Abbott, 2008, pp. 19-21). According to Barthes, the discourse includes aspects, tenses, and narrative modes. (Barthes, 1975)

4.1.3 Structuralist Approach

To explore narrative structures, it is important to look into different elements and structures identified in stories, such as theories of characters and plots. The character can be succinctly defined as a story world participant (Abbott, 2008). Characters, like the story and plot, can be classified. Vladimir Propp was an influential structural narrative theorist who in his work analyzed and identified rules governing Russian folktales. He identified several underlying character roles (such as villain, hero, helper, and donor) that are elements in thirty-one basic events in the story. He finds that even though 31 events are not in every tale, they always occur in the same order. This influenced the narrative theory of character and plot and the structural breakdown of stories. (Phelan, 2006) According to Abbott, "character" designates any entity, individual, or collective - normally human or human-like - introduced in a work of narrative fiction (As shown later in the thesis' material, non-fiction can contain narrative elements such as characters). Characters thus exist within story worlds, and play a role, no matter how minor, in one or more of the states of affairs or events told about in the narrative. (Abbott, 2008)

Abbott writes that in addition to story and narration, plot is one of the three principles

overarching the concept of narrative. “Plot” is a difficult term in the English language, as it can be used to refer to different things, but in its simplest form, it refers to the order of the events. However, in common English use, the plot may refer to the story. It also has been used to mean the shaping principle or dynamic in the story or a type of story, such as in “The Revenge Plot”. (Abbott, 2008, p. 18). There are many plots like “the revenge plot” identified across literature and media, such as “hero’s journey” (popularised by Campbell), or Frye's structural plotlines “tragedy”, “comedy”, “romance” and “satire” (Frye, 1971). These plots can be identified in both fiction and non-fiction.

Carlson writes about narrative theory in the context of discourse and rhetoric by examining Burkean theory. Kenneth Burke expanded the limits of narrative theory not only by concentrating on the structure of the narrative but to the devices used to manipulate it. Much of his work related to the power of symbols: in this theory, Burke explains that symbols are created to reflect reality, but that these symbols often reflect only the perception of the symbol user. Similar to Freye's structural plotlines, Carlson writes that according to Kenneth Burke, framing the same series of events differently can be presented can lead to a different response from the audience. He divided these frames into tragedy, comedy, satire, and burlesque. (Carlson, pp. 18-20) I explore Burkean theory of symbol manipulation and framing in more detail in the literary review chapter (section 2.2).

4.2 Narrative Analysis and Gender

According to Ruth Page (2007, p. 190), gender is an important area of consideration when analyzing a narrative. Feminist narratology first surfaced in the mid-1980s as a result of second-wave feminism. Page writes that the feminist narratology theorist Susan Lanser criticized the field of narrative theory for only concentrating on gender-specific narratological models and texts mostly written by men and centered on male characters. As narratology was applied to texts of and by women, it provided a useful tool in identifying in which ways women’s narratives differed from men’s, revealing the male-centric prominent narrative structures. Feminist narratology has since, according to Page, developed to be a prominent sub-genre in narrative theory, which concentrates on gender and clarifies that this includes gender, sex, sexuality, and feminist terms. Page writes that even though feminist narratology has developed over quite a few decades, two prominent qualities have continued: it serves as

a means of interpretation of narrative texts, focusing interpretations on gender-related matters. Second, it provides a possibility to reflect on and even reformulate the scholar of narrative theory itself (Page, 2007, p. 191).

According to Ruth Page, feminist narratology developed alongside the postmodern gender theory during the 1990s as terms like gender and sex and their use were reconceptualized. Page writes that feminist works such as *Gender Trouble* (1990) by Judith Butler inspired her to consider gender in terms of fluid performance, instead of a fixed given, which in turn encouraged narrative theory scholars to ask a more diverse set of questions on how gender might be of importance in the narratives. This encouraged the intersection of sex and gender with other factors, such as class, race, and cultural context.

To demonstrate the feminist narratology in use to produce productive interpretations Ruth Page analyses Angela Carter's novel *The Passions of New Eve* where a man named Evelyn is kidnapped and turned into a biological woman "Eve" by a cult of women worshipping a fertility goddess, "Mother". "Eve" is forced to marry a man, but then gets involved with their object of desire, a woman named Trisdessa, who later turns out to be a man. Page starts her analysis by stating that exploring a character is a wide-ranging area in narrative theory. To approach this task, she starts analyzing the text by using a "bottom-up" approach to trace how character traits are established. Evelyn, according to Page, is established to have biological masculine traits but also often refers to male-dominated sports such as rugby and football, and his desires are heterosexual. Trisdessa is also written as a traditionally feminine character, as she is described with words that have feminine connotations, such as "beautiful".

According to Page, the switch is sudden and surprising, forcing the reader to consider the gender identities of the two main characters and the implications of social, physiological, and biological aspects of gender and womanhood. Page writes:

Gender becomes plural, fluid, a changeable process rather than a stable attribute. Thus even when Eve is coded as biologically female through body parts (vagina, breasts, and clitoris), named as "woman," and referred to with feminine pronominal expressions, the narrator makes it clear that the psychological transformation into womanhood is separate from this. (Page, 2007, p. 194)

Judith Roof argues that feminist scholars have approached gender in narrative theory and structuralism primarily from three perspectives: representation of women in narrative and women's writing, feminist film theory, and the feminist critique of psychoanalysis. Vladimir Propp's study, according to Roof, revealed early on the sexed bases for plot and action in Russian folklore and thus sexism undergirded in the narrative: male characters were the agents and female characters the passive objects. Roof criticizes the scholarship of the narrative theory itself for its tendency to prioritize the male experience in its structures. Roof writes that many feminist writers have sought to question the often patriarchal narratives in literature and other cultural narratives. Roof mentions scholars such as Virginia Woolf, who questioned the patriarchal values integrated into narratives; why are male-centric interests such as football more important than shopping, or war-related books deemed as better than books about the feelings of women? (Roof, 2008, pp. 72-74)

Contemporary feminist scholars have sought to reclaim and amplify the experiences of women in narratives that challenge gender roles. One way of doing this is to critique or reveal the sexist narratives of popular stories. Kate Millett's *Sexual Politics*, a text in feminist literary criticism, provides a critique of patriarchy in literature and the analysis of its manifestation in literary narratives. Millett explores themes of sexuality, poverty, love, and marriage and explores the concept of womanhood in literary works. She, for example, analyses historical works, such as *Of Queen's Gardens* (1865) and *Jude the Obscure* (1895), and their narratives of womanhood and how women are treated differently by narrative compared to men. (Millett, 1970, p. 127)

Outside of fictional literary works, feminist narrative analysis is used to explore magazine publications, other media, historical texts, etc. Application of this method can be found, for example in the research article "Exposing a Motherhood Penalty in Sport: A Feminist Narrative Inquiry of Media Stories of Canadian Athlete Mothers' Journeys to the 2020 Tokyo Games" (2023) and in the work of Cheree Carlson (in Chapter 2. literary review).

4.3 Methodology and Material

I have chosen to use narrative analysis as my method for this thesis because I aim to analyze the anti-abortion organizations' narratives and what beliefs are reflected and promoted in the

pro-life story world. The narrative method provides useful tools for identifying and analyzing characters, plotlines, elements, and framings in anti-abortion texts. In this chapter, I will first contextualize the material, introduce the chosen research material and the reasoning for choosing said material.

4.3.1 Contextualizing Material: What is Pro-life?

“The century of silence” (mentioned in section 3.3.2) regarding abortion in the United States came to a halt in late 1950. Myra Ferree in the book *Shaping Abortion Discourse: Democracy and the Public Sphere in Germany and the United States* (2002) writes that the abortion issue became a topical subject due to multiple events, such as Planned Parenthood questioning the restrictive abortion laws, ALI¹³ model abortion laws passing in California, North Carolina, and Colorado by 1967, but especially due to New Yorks reform. The state legalized abortion, according to Ferree, in the first trimester. This led to the mobilization of the anti-abortion movement. Ferree writes that on January 22, 1973, the Supreme Court’s decision in the case of *Roe v. Wade* took abortion regulation in the first two trimesters from the hands of the state legislatures. Following this decision, the National Right to Life Committee, supported by the Catholic bishop, was formed and sought to overturn the decision. Rapidly forming anti-abortion groups launched a “Right-to-Life”¹⁴ campaign against the new constitutional law, which largely stalled by 1976. This mobilization against abortion also included non-catholic religious activists, such as people belonging to protestants, and orthodox and mormon churches. Ferree writes, that anti-abortion violence, including bombings, kidnapping personnel, and threats saw a rise in the late 1970s, but most (although not all) of the movement moved into two distinct directions by the end of 1988: first relied on nonviolent action to block access to clinics, and the second relied on insider influence especially on the Republican Party. Ferree writes, that although states were unable to regulate abortion like before the *Roe v. Wade*, anti-abortion protests (self-identifying as “pro-life”), both non-violent and violent, had moderate success in deterring abortion providers and limiting easy access to affordable abortion. (Ferree, 2002, pp. 25-36, 40)

¹³ ALI model abortion law allowed termination of pregnancy for women who were raped, whose health was compromised or whose fetuses did not develop normally

¹⁴ Which of the name “pro-life” derives

Jennifer Holland in her article “Abolishing Abortion: The History of the Pro-Life Movement in America” (2016) writes that anti-abortion activists had a focus on framing the movement on fetus rights excising the women. The movement developed new ways to convey its message to the American audience, for example by spreading graphic pictures of aborted fetuses¹⁵ and in the 1990s and 2000s ultrasound visuals of fetuses to push people to understand a fetus as a baby, both culturally and legally. This was also done to frame anti-abortion activists as abolitionists and abortion as a human rights violation. According to Holland, anti-abortion activists avoided discussing repercussions to women in case of denying access to abortion but also condemned those in their midst voicing that pregnancy punished promiscuous women. They shifted the blame to abortion providers and feminists, who condoned legal abortion. Holland writes, that from the 1990s anti-abortion movement self-identified as protectors of women and the true women’s movement. (Holland, 2016)

The anti-abortion movement’s efforts today are visible, for example, in the pro-life protests, CNC pregnancy centers, and on social media. The objective of this thesis is to focus on pro-life rhetoric spread through the internet and social media, where the published posts have access to a wide audience and are easily shared.

4.3.2 Introduction of the Research Material

For the research material, I have chosen multiple blog post articles from different pro-life organization websites to identify the common narrative plotlines and elements used in the pro-life movement. To narrow down the research material but also not limit my research to a specific organization, I have chosen four prominent American organizations identifying themselves as pro-life: Students for Life of America, ProLife Across America, Focus on the Family, and Human Coalition. I am seeking to narrow down the volume of the potential research by analyzing articles that are directly relevant to my research questions: how do these pro-life blogs portray women in their narratives? What roles are ascribed to other characters and how? Is there a common story arc, or the mode of emplotment, used in the blog posts?

¹⁵ Such as in John and Barbara Willke’s Handbook on Abortion (Holland, 2016)

One important qualification is that the articles were published after 2020 since I aim to place my analysis close to the event of overturning the Roe-v Wade law (June 2022). This is not only to engage with the most culturally relevant and recent material but also to analyze the anti-abortion narratives that may have affected the ruling of overturning Roe-v Wade and narratives that are used to lobby for abortion bans in all states after abortion's status as a constitutional right ended. Lastly, I will seek to identify significant similarities and differences between the common framings in modern blog posts versus the significant framings I collected from the scientific literature on the abortion discourse in the 19th century as presented in Chapter 3.

To properly introduce my research material, I will first identify the major themes and present examples of the foci of these organizations. The organization Students for Life of America (SFLA) defines itself as a student-led organization that seeks to encourage and educate new generations to impact the existing abortion policies to help abolish abortion and offer support to pregnant women. The common theme of SFLA is that it aims to inform its audience of abortion's harms to the body and mind. (Our Campaigns and Initiatives, n.d). 40 Days for Life contains short-form blog posts and defines itself as "An internationally coordinated 40-day campaign that aims to end abortion locally through prayer and fasting, community outreach, and a peaceful all-day vigil in front of abortion businesses" (40 Days for Life, About overview; Helping to end the injustice of abortion, n.d) 40 Days for Life activates Christian individuals and communities to advocate for shutting down abortion-providing facilities and changing minds of the pregnant people by protesting in front of these facilities as demonstrated for example in the blog post "DAY 26: Rejected Abortion AND Joined the Vigil!" (2023). Focus on the Family is a pro-life and christian organization that promotes itself as an organization spreading the word of God and helping families thrive by following christian principles (Focus on the Family, OUR VISION, n.d). Focus on the Family targets pregnant people or families, like parents, foster and adoptive parents, parents of disabled children, couples, and caretakers of the elderly. Human Coalition is similarly a christian pro-life organization, and its website claims to protect "pre-born babies" and women from abortion (Human Coalition, Who we are, n.d).

4.3.3 Narrative Methodology in the Analysis

In the following analysis section (Chapter 5) I will through the lens of feminist narratology identify the common modes of emplotment from the posts, provide examples of how they follow these plot lines, and what tools are used to enhance a certain framing in the narrative. To identify the plots of the material, I will be utilizing the modes of emplotment theorized by Northrop Frye and follow their use as found in the narrative analysis by Hayden White, a prominent figure in the scholarship of literary theory and history, in his book *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (1973).

The modes of emplotment are tragedy, comedy, romance, and satire, but I will focus on the first three because they seem to be the most prominent emplotments in pro-life blog posts. White defines “tragedy” by writing that the world is divided in a tragic story, and the protagonist must suffer the downfall resulting from the final conflict. Tragedy aims to reveal the forces opposing the protagonist. Unlike tragedy, comedy is a story about the triumph of a man. According to White, there is a reconciliation of opposing forces in a comedic frame, and the conflict results in a better world. Lastly, in a romantic emplotment good triumphs over evil through a transformation, which White calls “romantic drama of redemption”. (White, 1973, pp. 9- 10)

By utilizing the category of emplotment I aim to provide meaning or worldview behind the blog posts and identify the kind of story that is being told. Although White applies Frye’s modes of emplotment in historical texts, I believe they can also be applied in modern texts that similarly to historical texts may seek to frame events in certain narrative frames to influence the readers’ opinions. It is important to emphasize, that these structural plotlines often do not work independently from each other, but one blog post can be structured by using multiple emplotments or have elements from the others. The division of the blog posts into different modes of emplotment does not aim to be the main focus of the analysis, nor be undebatable, but merely to aid the analysis of the structure, narratives, and symbols of the material and thus the worldview of the writer and the story produced cohesively.

I will also analyze how plots and tools are used to influence the depiction of the characters and vice versa. I have identified three major character entities in the pro-life blog posts: pro-life character, pro-choice character, and character of a woman, all of which will be analyzed in each section divided by the modes of emplotment. These characters may be presented as a demographic (such as the “abortion industry” or “pro-life movement”) or

singular characters (such as “pregnant teenager”) as long as they are engaging in the story world. It is necessary to note, that even though the participants of both pro-life and pro-choice activists can be women when referring to the character “the woman” I mean someone who is identified in the text as a woman or a girl who can be influenced by either ideology. Often by the end of the story the character of “the woman” is moved to a different frame, which I will present many examples of in this thesis.

4.4 Narrative Theory and Method: Conclusion

Narrative analysis serves as a tool to structuralize and interpret stories and discourses. Narrative theory has developed with the help of many other scholars, such as linguistics, structuralism, and rhetorics. Narrative analysis is versatile, as it can be used to inspect history, literary work, feminist texts, movies, and discourses by using the same structures and elements of plot, symbols, characters, nonlinear narratives, narrator, or manipulation of the narratives. It can be criticized for being a rigid tool, as narrative analysis may cause simplification of complex stories by forcing them into predefined structures and categories. Through narrative analysis, however, we can gain an understanding of the surrounding culture and beliefs around sex and gender through the feminist lens, and like Carlson’s work showcases and this research project aims to do, reveal how the concept of womanhood can be used as a narrative tool.

5. Analysis of Pro-life Blog Post

I. The Tragic Outcome

According to the Britannica encyclopedia’s definition of “tragedy” in “Theory of Tragedy” (2023), it is often described as “- a branch of drama that treats in a serious and dignified style the sorrowful or terrible events encountered or caused by a heroic individual. By extension, the term may be applied to other literary works, such as the novel” (Covens, Sewall, edited in 2023). “Tragedy” is often used as a broad description (White, 1973, p.8), so I will specify

the definition of tragedy in this thesis before introducing the material fitting tragic employment.

Hayden White writes that in tragedy the intimations of “states of division among men” during the drama and the resulting tragic conflict leave the protagonist in a worse state than they were in the beginning. The aim of a tragedy is, according to White, to reveal the nature of the forces opposing the protagonist. The protagonist faces a tragic downfall, although White notes that tragedy is not always totally threatening to those surviving the test of the given conflict. There may be a gain of knowledge for those spectating the tragic event. The reconciliations at the end of tragic stories are often somber: the tragic conditions are asserted to be eternal, and the characters have to work under these conditions that may limit their aspirations in the quest for security in the world. (White, 1973, p. 9-10)

5.1 The Material

In the collection of the thesis’ research material, the following selection of texts was identified as fitting the tragic genre as defined by White.

Story 1: In the Students for Life blog post by Jessica Nardi “Teenage Girl Dies from Abortion Drugs, Yet the Abortion Industry Still Pushes for Them” (Nardi, 2021) Nardi argues for the illegalization of misoprostol as a method for abortion by telling the story of a 16-year-old Papua New Guinean girl. Nardi writes that the girl had gotten hold of the drug illegally and died as a result of complications due to the effects of the drug. The girl in the article is described as “having had her whole life ahead of her” and losing it due to a drug marketed as safe by the “abortion industry”. She refers to an article that contains a heart-wrenching interview with the girl’s father who lost his daughter and now wants to protect other girls and women from the same faith. In addition, there is a photo of a candle, a common symbol of grief, and a memorial for the deceased. Nardi writes that the same drug is commonly used in America in 40% of abortions and has since its legalization in the year 2000 killed 24 American women. She writes that despite this fact the “abortion industry” seeks to misinform the public about the possible harms of this drug and offers it to young women on college campuses or targets them by mail. (Nardi, 2021)

Story 2. In another Students for Life- article “NOT SAFE Even If Legal: Doctor’s Study Shows that Legal Abortion is Bad for Women’s Health” (Wharton, 2022) Carolina Wharton writes that the “abortion industry” seeks to lobby in pro-life countries to make abortion legal with dire consequences. By quoting a pro-life doctor, she argues that for example in Ethiopia, where abortion was legalized, “The proportion of women admitted to intensive care tripled. And in the following years, there was a further 50% increase in severe complications, and the proportion of women with organ failure quadrupled.” (Wharton 2022, cited in Miller 2022). Even if legal, Wharton argues, “abortionists” are still responsible for the deaths and complications of mothers and “babies”. Wharton also appeals to the reader by writing about another situation raised by Miller’s research. Wharton claims that an Argentinian woman who was a “pro-abortion” activist had been ‘misled’ by other activists to have an abortion and died as a result from abortion-related complications.

Story 3. Kristi Hamrick in the article “Planned Parenthood’s Annual Report Puts Profits Over People, as their Child-Ending Business Earns Record High Government Support” (2023) writes about the harms of Planned Parenthood, an American sexual healthcare organization that among other healthcare, provides abortions. Hamrick refers in her post to “Planned Parenthood’s 2021-2022 Annual Report”, writing that six hundred Planned Parenthood abortion providers made more money than before simultaneously “-ending 374,155 lives in the womb”. (Hamrick, 2023)

Story 4. Focus on the Family- blog post by Kirstie Piper “Abortion Stories: Procuring, Coercion and Walking out” (Piper, 2022) lists links to negative abortion experiences and summarizes their message by telling six precautionary stories; Abortion Pill Stories, Clinical Abortion Stories, Abortion Stories from Workers and Doctors, Abortion Stories from Survivors, Stories of Men and Abortion, and Post-Abortion Stories. Piper describes in most stories first a scenario: either subject is a teenage girl pressured by fear or peers to get an abortion; a doctor in an “abortion clinic” hearing an infant cry; or a teenage boy whose girlfriend’s dad coerced her into an unwanted abortion. Then Piper goes on to describe the repercussions of the situation. These narrative stories include different plotlines but for example in the Abortion Pill Stories section, Piper warns that even though some experience mild nausea and cramping after taking an abortion pill, others experience emotional, mental, or physical trauma. Piper also emphasizes the trauma women and men face from losing their

“babies” to abortion and how they are silenced if they speak up against abortion. (Piper, 2022)

5.2 Analysis

The tragic outcome story is applied to raise emotions such as pity and fear in the reader and encourage them to ‘learn from these stories’, which is to say to solidify a negative public attitude towards abortion. In the stories, the women or girls, such as the 16-year-old Papua New Guinean girl, the Ethiopian woman, the Argentinian activist, and the pregnant teenager play the role of the tragic characters in the story. Choosing women from different countries as tragic characters could be a discursive tactic to construct abortion as a ‘global problem’. The villain of the story is the amorphous ‘abortion lobby’ that, in stories with a tragic outcome, wins. Similarly to the 19th and 20th-century abortion discourse, abortion providers are still depicted as villains, however, there is also a new villain character: the pro-choice-movement-that advocates for women’s abortion rights. Abortion is not presented in these blog posts as an ‘enactment of rights’ but as a destructive event with individual and collective ramifications. ‘Winning’ in these blog posts often means the spread of abortion rights to different countries and getting women to believe the “false” information about abortion drugs and abortion procedures- the result is the loss of the “life” of the fetus but also the woman’s life or health.

5.2.1 Pro-Life representations

In the tragic emplotment, the pro-choice is often presented as an organization that is exposed thanks to a “truth-teller”, a character who brings forth information about activities of an organization that is illegal and/or immoral. “revealing” the “facts” and “dangerous” efforts of the “abortion industry”, like in Wharton’s blog post but also by the use of wording such as pro-life being “silenced” (Piper, 2022). Pro-life characters in these tragic outcome stories are often authors themselves, warning the reader about the misleading “abortion industry”.

There are pro-life characters in the stories of tragic outcome- stories as well. White’s definition of tragedy included the notion that tragedy is not always totally threatening to those

surviving the test of the given conflict as they may gain consciousness by spectating the tragic event. An example of this plot element can be found in Nardi's blog post, where the pro-life father experiencing the tragic loss of his daughter is empowered to rise against the villain, the practice of abortion.

5.2.2 Pro-choice representation

The villain in the tragic plotline is usually an amorphous “abortion industry”, which, depending on the context, could refer to pro-choice politicians and advocates, pro-choice organizations and media, and/or medical centers, like Planned Parenthood, that may provide abortions. Many narrative framings and elements are painting this picture of evil in the blog posts. The “abortion industry” is associated with misinformation, greed, and danger, like in Nardi's article, where she alleges that abortion “drugs” are promoted and that the industry seeks to remove all safety regulations of these drugs and actively lying about their safety (Nardi, 2022). This character fits Propp's archetype of a villain as an actor who causes damage or harm (here: “murdering babies” and harming and tricking women) in order to achieve their own selfish goals (monetary gain). Like the paradigmatic antagonist in fairytales, a “witch [taking the appearance of] a sweet old lady” (Propp, 1928), the villain in the tragic plotlines in some instances ‘disguises’ themselves as healthcare providers who have women's safety at heart.

The word “industry” in the symbol of the “abortion industry” is utilized to make abortion seem more cold, dehumanized, and businesslike. The “abortion industry” is presented as a kind of corporation, seeking to manipulate as many women as possible into abortions in order to sell unregulated drugs and procedures to make money, as seen in Nardis' article (promoting abortions on college campuses) and Hamricks' article (emphasizing the amount of money Planned Parenthood makes by performing abortions). The “abortion industry” is depicted as an impersonal unit ‘without a face’; as a greedy, cold, manipulative, and harmful entity. This is also apparent in the imagery used in the posts about the harms of the “abortion industry”: the pictures vary from photos of scissors and other abortion tools to vacant-looking Planned Parenthood buildings that dehumanize the pro-choice and abortion as a healthcare practice. Unlike women in these stories, the “abortion industry” is depersonalized and is in this narrative ascribed the majority of the blame for harming women and aborting fetuses.

This villain characterization is achieved through the usage of many other negative symbols¹⁶ regarding abortion and abortion rights advocacy. For example, the blog posts very rarely refer to the commonly recognized abortion rights movement as “pro-choice” but as “pro-abortion” to paint a picture of an organization that actively wants and pressures women to have abortions instead of birth, rather than a movement that identifies as advocacy of reproductive choice and reproductive freedom. Not using the term “choice” also serves the pro-life narrative in another way: pro-life may want to align itself with women and self-identify as a women’s advocate and thus want to distance itself from their traditional depiction as being restrictive of women’s freedom. As seen in the example posts, the posts seek to emphasize that their choice to have an abortion is not an informed choice, but that women only have abortions because they are misled or pressured to do so.

Similarly, the fetus is referred to as a “pre-born child” or a “baby” (such as in Wharton’s 2022 article) to present the fetus as a developed human and to identify the pro-choice and abortion providers as driven by advocacy for killing a human being and as actively engaged with it. It is thus not the pro-lifer, but the pro-choice who are actively breaking human rights (in this case, the right to life).

5.2.3 Women’s Representations

In the pro-life material corresponding to the tragic genre women are depicted as the tragic victims of both their circumstances and of the outside influence, especially the “abortion industry”. Their young age (“16-year-old”, “young women on college campuses”) and naivety are often emphasized. They are represented as manipulated and deceived, such as in the story of the Argentinian activist or Piper’s story of the teenage girl:

But your friend says there’s a pill that makes pregnancies go away. And you can take it in secret!! A website describes it as “gently removing the pregnancy tissue from your uterus.” But what the online description doesn’t tell you is that “pregnancy tissue” is a loose term for “aborted baby”. (Piper, 2022).

¹⁶ Kenneth Burke’s narrative theory of symbol manipulation to control the narrative.

The women perform the role of the victim of these stories. In the tragic outcome plot, their fate can range from a tragic death or physical complications stemming from the abortion procedures to emotional distress and permanent regret. These blog posts depict women as physically and emotionally fragile, naive, and easily exploitable, which ultimately causes their downfall. These blog post narratives are constructed with a woman reader in mind; unlike the arguments against abortion in the 19th and early 20th centuries, they avoid portraying the woman as a villain or an active participant in the “murder” of the fetus. Characterizing the target demographic as villains would not be an effective tactic in swaying women away from abortions or in getting them to support pro-life causes.

Women who get abortions are instead portrayed in a cautionary story frame in this narrative: they are misled by the villain (the “abortion industry”) and then suffer the negative consequences, which makes them tragic characters. This representation is thus bound together to issue a warning to female readers of reproductive age. For example, when Wharton writes about the Argentinian abortion rights advocate regarding her abortion-related death, she not only emphasizes the dangers of abortion but also issues a cautionary tale: in the narrative the woman bears the consequence of being an abortion rights advocate and trusting their “lies” about the safety of abortion. She is moved from the narrative frame of a villain (a morally corrupt abortion activist propagating myths) into another (a woman losing her life as a victim of abortion activists).

II. Comedy

White writes that, unlike tragedy, comedy results in the ultimate reconciliation of opposing forces instead of mere revelations: comedy, as a mode of emplotment, is not only socially integrative but celebrates the conservation of values held among people against the common threat. There is hope for the temporary triumph of man over the social or natural forces of his world, which in comedic mode are often symbolized by festive occasions. According to White, there is conflict, but the conflict results in the world being left saner, healthier, and purer than before. (White, 1973, pp. 9- 10)

5.3 The Material

The following selection of texts in the research material is identified to belong to White's definition of the comedic genre.

Story 5. Lydia Taylor in a guest post in the Students for Life- blog post "Making My Christian College Pro-Life Again: How Our Group Spoke with More Than 1,000 Students in 2023 About Abortion" (Taylor, 2024) writes about Students for Life of America's members and her efforts at the Campbell University to make the culture more pro-life. She writes, that they have arranged successful campaigns and events, sharing ice cream and treats to further their goals to "-reach Gen Z with the pro-life message". Taylor writes that they even held a memorial for the "innocent, sweet babies killed by the abortion industry" and set up a cemetery for "pre-born lives lost to abortion", which was "-of course, vandalized several times". Put in Taylor's words, she debated in one of their most popular events "an abortion supporter, who was a self-proclaimed "witch"(Taylor, 2024). She reports that despite the fact that the majority of the attendees were "so-called pro-choice", 70% of the audience thought Taylor had won the debate, and many left the event confidently pro-life as a result.

Story 6. Another example of a comic plot in the selected material is Chelsey Youman's blog from Human Coalition titled "Pro-life is pro-woman" (2021), which seeks to convince the reader why pro-life is inherently on the side of women, while pro-choice is not. She starts by writing about how many abortions have taken place and how only half of the population in America believes abortion to be morally wrong, which indicates the "abortion industry's" impact on the culture. Then she argues that abortion has overtaken the feminist movement. Youman's blog post takes a few examples of feminist organizations that state that access to abortion and reproductive rights are critical components of women's rights and empowerment. Youman argues, that this is not the case for a couple of reasons: she points out in her blog post that "30 million pre-born girls have been killed by abortion" (Youman, 2021) since the legalization of abortion fifty years ago, stating that they had "their fundamental right to life taken away by the very activists who claim to stand up for the fundamental rights of women" (Youman, 2021).

Then Youman argues in her post why pro-life is inherently pro-woman. According to Youman, the "abortion industry" manipulates culture to think that women want abortions.

This, she states, is not the case because 75% of the women who turn to Human Coalition for abortion information want to keep their pregnancy: “They are usually younger, uninsured, don’t have job stability, and they are concerned about very basic life circumstances- such as financial, housing, or childcare challenges”(Youman, 2021), and some end up regretting the abortion, the decision causing longterm mental health and family issues. Instead of offering abortion as a solution, Youman argues that pro-life

-believes empowerment looks like giving women dignity by providing the resources and opportunities to improve their circumstances. We believe in walking with women and families and providing comprehensive care and assistance to address the challenges they face. We believe in telling women the truth about their pregnancy and what abortion does to their child. We believe in telling the medical and anatomical truth. (Youman, 2021)

She concludes the blog post by encouraging pro-life people to speak up and change the culture and the meaning of women's empowerment. (Youman, 2021)

Story 7. Maeve Kitchens tells in a blog post “A Leap of Faith: How I Raised Nearly \$400,000 for Mothers & Preborn Children in a Town of 700 People” (2024) how she, a sixteen-year-old college student, wanted to establish PCR (pregnancy support center) in her rural hometown to “support women and save preborn lives”. Kitchens writes how she, with the help of another woman with the same aspirations, appointed a board of directors and advising committee, then held a successful fundraiser. At the end of the article, she presents herself as an example by asking the reader:

I am proof that even a 16-year-old can inspire people and make a difference up to the point of raising almost \$400,000 for the defense of life...so how are you going to change your own community? (Kitchens, 2024)

5.4 Analysis

I have identified this material as comedy (in White’s sense) because they focus on celebrating the movement of pro-life and bringing forth triumphs and values of the movement over the

“abortion industry” despite tribulations. The first one focuses on the success of Students for Life at the university campus and the other celebrates pro-life values and its role as a women’s empowerment movement. The events described by Taylor, and the pictures accompanying her writing, are often festive despite also having the more somber activities, such as building a cemetery for the aborted fetuses: Taylor describes having arranged with her team uplifting events, such as “pro-life ice cream social, a pro-life parade float, a pro-life ‘Trunk or Treat’”, and in the blog post there are pictures of young people, mostly women, smiling and having a good time. The efforts of the pro-life team were rewarded, as Taylor beat the antagonist, “the witch”¹⁷ in the debate and won over students to the side of pro-life. This article thus has many components of comedic employment, as its contents celebrate the overcoming of evil and leaving the world “saner” than before.

Chelsey Youman’s blog post “Pro-Life is Pro-woman” (2021) differs from the first article, and many others, by not presenting chronological events that are written following certain employment, but one can suggest that there are qualities of comedic employment in this blog post. Youman aims to argue why the pro-life movement is empowering and feminist, while like in the “Tragic Outcome” section, the “abortion industry” is the misleader of women. Youman seeks to celebrate the human values of pro-life: equality, “medical and anatomical truth”, sharing resources, and “rescuing children”. She encourages the reader to take action by finishing her post: “But it will take each one of us speaking up for those who cannot speak for themselves. And it will take showing our culture that the only way to be pro-woman is to be pro-life”. (Youman, 2021)

Similar to Taylor’s post, Kitchens’s blog post is a celebration of her accomplishments in changing the community. At the end of the story, her community has been bettered by Kitchen’s and the community’s collective efforts.

5.4.1 Pro-life representations

In all parts of the employment, the pro-life movement is characterized as a hero and savior but also as an ‘underdog’. I find this underdog narrative to be especially common in posts fitting the comedic frame. Underdog stories are stories in which the protagonist (the hero) is

¹⁷ Propp’s character archetype of “the witch”

disadvantaged but overcomes the odds against the more powerful opponent. These stories are often applied to inspire and instill confidence in members of organizations in many industries, such as sports or telecoms. (Steele, Lovelace, 2023) The underdog narrative can be found in both the language and events conveyed. The underdog narrative arises strongly for example in Taylor's post, where she writes about the efforts of pro-life being attacked and vandalized, and when she writes; "Despite a majority of the audience being what they called "pro-choice," our polling showed that 70% of students thought I had won the debate" (Taylor, 2024). This showcases that even against the odds, pro-life came on top.

Youman writes in "Pro-life is pro-woman"(2021) that even though abortion is ingrained in the American culture with half of the population believing abortion to be morally fine, ending abortion is possible by spreading awareness and speaking up. The underdog narrative is also present through the emphasis on the effects of the "abortion industry" by using large specific numbers¹⁸ to create a power imbalance between the two. Youman writes that Planned Parenthood has over 600 centers, and abortion has taken over 60 000 000 lives, 30,000,000 of them being girls since 1973 (Youman, 2021), displaying the power of the "abortion industry", and attempting to create a David-Goliath setting in the readers' minds.

Pro-life relies on its role as an underdog not only against specific pro-life activists but also against the law and culture of the USA, calling out discrimination in society. Many blog posts outside the ones I presented in the material depict pro-life in this manner, for example, Jordan Estabrook's "Man Convicted of the FACE Act for Sitting in Front of Planned Parenthood Entrance" (Estabrook, 2024) and Caroline Wharton's "Students for Life of America's Top 10 Worst Free Speech Violations in 2023" (Wharton, 2023).

Pro-life women's accomplishments are highlighted in this mode. Women are written as being suppressed by the society that allows abortion, but women can find empowerment through pro-life. Pro-life seeks to identify itself as "pro-woman" and as a movement furthered by women. Kitchens and Taylor are depicted as successful, driven, and passionate leaders with agency. Christianity is also a strong element of the pro-life woman's character. In Kitchens's post, there are many christian elements and symbols. Kitchens stands in front of a large cross in one of the pictures, writes that the events that took place were a "miracle" and uses

¹⁸ This underdog narrative is prevalent in all employments, for example in the "tragic outcome" material planned parenthood was specified "killing" 374,155 lives.

language such as: “-I began to pray for guidance-”. Both are young women, but Kitchens has managed to gather large amounts of money to fund the project and Taylor is organizing successful pro-life events at her university. Both are written to be very active characters through their pro-life efforts. This is a contrast to how women who are not actively named “pro-life” are depicted in other blog posts.

This “pro-woman” narrative is prominent and stresses how in addition to saving “pre-born children” they seek to support women. The pro-life women in the texts often refer to traditional traits of womanhood, such as wanting to “help”, “care” and maternal referrals to the fetuses (“We- held a memorial service for the innocent, sweet babies killed by the abortion industry” (Taylor, 2024)). Youman, for example, uses wordings such as “care”, “assistance”, and “providing opportunities”, maybe to counter or answer to the pro-choice’s criticism that pro-life pressures or guilts women into keeping their unwanted pregnancies. The pro-life posts often avoid discussing women who do want abortion and are confident in their decision. In Youman’s article, she for example focuses on the women who come to Human Coalition for help regarding their pregnancies, disregarding women who do not want to be pregnant even if their circumstances would allow them.

5.4.2 Pro-choice representations

Like in the tragic frame, women are not depicted as being an active part in getting an abortion, unlike the “abortion industry” who are the “killers” (e.g. Taylor writes “-sweet babies killed by the abortion industry”). Within the comedic genre, pro-choice is again presented as the villain of the narrative manipulating women with underlying motives of greed (e.g. “They mask the reality of what an abortion is – all while making a profit” (Youman, 2021)). It is also actively creating havoc and limiting free speech (“My group spent a day setting up a cemetery to remember the preborn lives lost to abortion —which was, of course, vandalized several times”, “We asked other students to sign our free speech petition about pro-lifers being silenced on campus” (Taylor, 2024)).

The pro-choice woman, who debated against Taylor, is not referred to by name, as “pro-choice”, or by her gender. Instead, Taylor refers to her as an “abortion supporter” and a “-self-proclaimed witch”. This choice of symbol could imply that Taylor wants to depict her

opponent as someone who wants all women to have abortions, or it is used to avoid using the symbol of “choice” by not referring to her as pro-choice. Taylor could also be using the symbol “witch” to establish that the pro-choice woman is not a christian and connect her to negative connotations (devilish, evil, non-christian) the symbol could arise especially in christian readers.

Feminist women who are pro-choice are depicted as being misled by the abortion culture. They are presented to be actually promoting women’s inequality, as Youman notes in her post that many “heroes of the early feminist movement did not support abortion. Some disavowed the practice altogether – with figures such as Alice Paul calling the procedure the ‘ultimate exploitation of women.’ ” (Youman, 2021). To support pro-life’s identity as a “pro-women”, the pro-choice is argued to display misogynist traits. Youman argues, that the “abortion industry” seeks to limit women’s equality by misleading them into abortion and “masking” its realities while making a profit. Again, pro-choice is greedy, but now also pretending to be feminist while seeking to keep “women in a cycle of dependence and instability” (Youman, 2021).

5.4.3 Women’s Representations

Women in blog posts are depicted as being victims of the culture, shaped by ominous evil, the “abortion industry”, and its construction of abortion as something to be celebrated.

The blog posts fitting into comedic mode characterize women similarly to “tragic outcome” as victims of manipulation from the “abortion industry”. Again, women are not depicted as wanting abortions but are often forced by their circumstances. They have little to no agency: they are not deciding to get abortions, as they are pressured either by the “abortion industry” or unfair society. Women are given an agency in the narrative once they are in the pro-life movement.

Belonging to the category of ‘women’ (who would be clear beneficiaries of the abortion ban) are the “over 30 million preborn girls who have had their fundamental right to life taken away by the very activists who claim to stand up for the fundamental rights of women”. (Youman, 2021) This is done to further establish abortion as a women’s rights issue and present fetuses as developed human beings with rights and wants.

III. Romantic Redemption

Hayden White regards romantic structure plot to center over the “drama of triumph of good over evil, darkness over light”, which White describes as a “romantic drama of redemption” (White, 1973 p. 9). The romantic plotline concentrates on the drama of self-identification: the hero experiences a transcendence through their participation in the world and gains victory and liberation due to the imprisonment of evil. The transformation can happen due to inner or outer forces. According to White, the romantic drama plotline is in many cases associated with christian mythology like in the story of the resurrection of Christ. White writes that the romantic mode can assimilate the contemplations of human existence in the world brought forth by both tragedy and comedy but within the drama of redemption. (White, 1973, pp. 9-10) As the romantic mode can carry similarities in structure and plot to comedic and tragic modes, I will concentrate on the posts that focus on the transcendence and redemption of the world and the characters.

In the romantic mode the villain can be a regular person but the closer the story is to a myth the more “divine” qualities are ascribed to the hero and more “demonic” to the enemy. Frye writes that for Romance plots the characters are “largely dream characters” who are often simplified as being for or against “the quest” with not many complexities. (Frye, 1957, p.108, 206)

5.5 The Material

The following selection of texts in the research material fits the mode of romantic redemption.

Story 8. In the blog post of 40 Days for Life “DAY 26: Rejected Abortion AND Joined the Vigil!” (2023) an anonymous author writes about an incident in Yuba City, where 40 Days for Life- vigil participants in front of a Planned Parenthood building encountered a Hindu family coming in for an abortion. According to the post, the sidewalk council informed the

family of abortion's true nature, as the family “didn't really understand that abortion means killing a child” (n.a, 2023). The family was so convinced about the truth of what they were told that they finally decided to continue with the pregnancy and joined the vigil. The blog post ends with a reminder that God answers those who pray. (DAY 26: Rejected Abortion AND Joined the Vigil!, 2023)

Story 9. In another 40-Days for Life post “DAY 16: Pro-abortion protesters become friends” (2020) Haywood Robinson, director of medical affairs and education in 40 Days for Life, gave a speech at a Portland vigil in Oregon, where he met a group protesting the vigil. Robinson gave a testimony to the protesters as a former abortion provider, which left the protesters with ‘changed hearts’, thanking him and shaking his hand. Hundreds of 40 Days for Life participants gathered to hear Robinson speak in Salem, Oregon, and then Eugene, where a campaign leader said: "Dr. Robinson spoke from his heart about his medical school years, his conversion, and his hope that Roe v. Wade will be overturned," (Day 16: Pro-abortion protesters become friends, 2020)

Story 10. Focus on the Family blog post by Kirstie Piper “Abortion Stories: Procuring, Coercion and Walking out” (Piper, 2022) includes a few different plotlines, and one of them is “Abortion Stories from Workers and Doctors”, which fits the romantic emplotment. In this section of the post, Piper writes that “you” a worker at the abortion provider's front desk hear the cries of an infant from the hall from where the cries should never come. Then you go home and kiss your children good night, go to bed, and dream of this horrible event. Piper refers to stories, where many former abortion workers left the industry, either because they became christian or/and had on-the-job experiences that made them quit. Here the tribulations (first-hand experiences at the abortion clinic) contribute to the transformation of the protagonist and their world.

Story 11. In a Pro-life across America blog post an anonymous author “I NEVER FELT SO BEAUTIFUL...” (n.d) shares an “anonymous” story. In the post, this anonymous woman starts by describing her life before her pregnancy, saying she was “pro-abortion”, diagnosed to be “sterile” and on the pill, got into multiple fights, smoked cigarettes, drank alcohol, and used drugs. She found out she was pregnant, and she would have aborted, but it was too late for that as she was seven and a half months pregnant. This led her, with the support of her

boyfriend and the family that wanted to adopt her baby, to a decision to keep the pregnancy and give the baby up for adoption. She writes:

If I had aborted, the most beautiful moment I ever had in my life would never have come. I would still be perfectly content downing bottle after bottle of vodka. I would still not care about my life or my career or my health. I would still be happy fighting and dealing with shady people. I would be a total, complete feral moron who likely would have ended up in jail for something awful. (I NEVER FELT SO BEAUTIFUL... n.d)

Story 12. Caroline Wharton writes in the Students for Life- blog post “Pregnant After Sexual Assault & Booked at Planned Parenthood, a Call to a Pregnancy Resource Center Changed Her Life” “(2023) about the story of Angela Harders who was sexually assaulted, got pregnant, and decided to keep the pregnancy. Wharton describes Harders as someone many in the pro-life generation (young pro-life people living in post-Roe v. Wade law society) could identify with; pro-life, from a christian home, and taught sexual purity. When she gets pregnant after an assault, however, she books an appointment with Planned Parenthood as she is terrified. Wharton writes, that Harders decides to call a pregnancy center PRC and the patient advocate said to her ”Sex doesn’t make babies, God does. And for some reason, God is choosing to give you a life out of this terrible circumstance.”(Harder quoted by Wharton, 2023). This convinced Harder to cancel her abortion. According to Wharton, Harder was stunned, however, when canceling the appointment as the “abortion facility worker” attempted to use her christian background against her to convince her to have the abortion and get their “paycheck”. The worker is reported to be saying:

Angela, you know that if you go through with [the pregnancy], you will never be able to travel again, or be a missionary, or do any of those other things that you said you wanted to do. We can take care of this problem for you so you can live your life and fulfill all the dreams that God has given you. (Harder quoted by Wharton, 2023).

Harder accuses Planned Parenthood of being manipulative and is nowadays happy with her choice. Wharton writes:

PRCs continue to be a beacon of light and hope for vulnerable women like Harders who find themselves unexpectedly pregnant and, in the haze of their shock and fear, extremely susceptible to the predatory abortion industry. While Planned Parenthood uses hurting women to help their bottom line, these life-affirming centers truly have her best interests in mind (and they outnumber Planned Parenthood facilities 14 to one). (Wharton, 2023).

5.6 The Analysis

The use of this plotline emphasizes the narrative setting of good versus evil, light (pro-life, anti-abortion) versus darkness (abortion industry, abortions), and the characters moving from one side to the other, seeing the light (like the “abortion center” workers), or resisting the evil and overcoming it (like Angela Harder). In addition to most having some elements of christian language in them (e.g. “This story shows that God answers your prayers”(DAY 26: Rejected Abortion AND Joined the Vigil!, 2023)), these posts often follow the sequence of events parallel to many christian conversion stories. The person is in the position of being on the dark side and/or the villain is in power (e.g. pro-choice agenda is at works), some event happens (e.g. they get pregnant and get pro-life support), which leads the character to have a victory over the darkness and be liberated from it by transcending into the side of the light (pro-life). These light versus darkness elements are common in these blog posts that rely on romantic plotlines.

The romance plotlines in the pro-life blog posts have a mythic quality, which is common in romantic plotlines. The characters have divine and demonic qualities: the setting in the stories, for example, starts with the theme of being misled or under the influence of the ominous and all-seeing “abortion industry”. The latter is depicted as transcending the borders of countries and presenting itself both in culture and mindset but materializes in organizations or physical buildings, such as Planned Parenthood clinics. In the last story, the anonymous woman writes about being pro-choice, which she fits together with other “corrupted” characteristics: she, for example, used drugs and got into fights (I NEVER FELT SO BEAUTIFUL... n.d). It is thus implied to the reader that her lifestyle is far from the christian ideal. This can be parallel to christian storytelling of being misguided by the forces of evil or even the devil. The Hindu family, whose religious background is deliberately mentioned as

not being christian, did not understand what abortion meant but with the force of prayer and God they were “saved”. This narrative thus places Planned Parenthood in opposition to God's will, emphasizing its demonic quality of deception.

5.6.1 Pro-life Representations

Within the romantic plotline, pro-life is characterized by divine qualities and christianity. The vigil counselor saves the hindu family by telling them the “truth” and Robinson changes the opinions of the protesters by referring to his past as an abortion provider. Like Jesus or a prophet, they have a profound effect on people changing their worldviews, thus turning them to light and “choosing life”, or saving them from the ominous “abortion industry”. The parallel between the christian and pro-life conversion is also brought forth, as this hindu man joins a christian vigil. In the abortion worker to a pro-life blog post, the conversion to christianity directly parallels the conversion from working for the “abortion industry” to becoming pro-life. In story 9, Robinson’s move from abortion provider to 40 Days for Life director was described as “conversion”. In addition to parallels to christian stories, the blog posts use a lot of christian language. The light versus darkness symbolism is strongly present. For example, the anonymous pregnant woman describes her life after deciding to keep the pregnancy as joyous, and peaceful and herself as beautiful, which are adjectives attached to goodness and light.

Pro-life is associated with christianity, goodness, and God, when the villain of the story, the ominous “abortion industry” is sometimes likened by the symbols used to a misleading devil and death. This is shown in Wharton’s post (story 12) where both pro-life and Planned Parenthood are depicted as trying to convince the protagonist to choose different paths but with a similar base for the argument: Harder’s christianity. Even though they both relied on christianity and God’s plan to convince her, only the pro-life advocate is depicted in a good light: kind, understanding, empowering, and world-changing. The Planned Parenthood worker's similar “attempt” to draw arguments from Harder’s faith is treated as appalling: misleading and greedy, preying on the vulnerable.

The possibility of change regarding abortion is also notable in the story of Robinson, who in the 40 Days for Life blog post is mentioned as having been an abortion provider in the past.

Converted pro-life activists' past is in some articles brought up as a way to give them authority over the subject of abortion, having witnessed them firsthand. Showcasing people “converting” can also be done to rely on pro-choice “protesters” the message, that despite their past they are welcome to join pro-life.

5.6.2 Pro-choice Representations

Unlike in the tragic outcome and comedic plot, the side of the commonly villainous “abortion industry” is in some cases given a redemption arc, such as the previously pro-choice woman in story 11 and the “abortion provider” worker in Piper’s story 10. They are depicted as having gone through enlightenment produced by an event (such as pregnancy getting support or hearing aborted babies cry). The past before the moment of the enlightenment is described as negative and morally wrong, and the after is contrasted with words of positivity, love, peace, and/or christianity. They depict a possibility for change, showcasing that even former “abortionists” can become pro-life.

The anonymous woman in story 11, before her transformation, is pro-choice. She is depicted as the image of what the ideal womanhood according to pro-life is not. She was selfish, did substances, got into fights, was diagnosed as “sterile”, and used contraceptives, the opposite of maternal and caring. Pro-life blog posts often pair womanhood with the notion of fertility and motherhood, so mentioning that “bad” women were infertile might be a way of stripping them of “womanly” traits or an insinuation that women are pro-choice due to their infertility and envy of other women having babies.

If the pro-choice does not go through this change, their character follows the usual trend of being portrayed as the dishonest “villain”, such as the “abortion clinic” worker in story 12.

5.6.3 Women’s Representation

The woman heroines of the two stories 12 and 11 are shown to defy and beat the villain in this romantic plotline by not getting abortions, and by calling out the harms abortion causes. Wharton describes Harder’s background and character as identifiable for pro-life readers,

which tells the reader the qualities of a woman on the side of the “light”. This gives us information on what the ideal womanhood is for this new “post-Roe generation”. She is pro-life, but also a devout christian, an aspiring missionary, and does not participate in dating or the culture of sexual freedom, practicing abstinence. She is not depicted in a bad light for first seeking an abortion. She is a victim. Even though she books an appointment for an abortion, this is presented to be strictly due to the fear and trauma of her assault and the misleading information about the hardships of motherhood produced by the “abortion industry”, and not any inner desire not to have children. In contrast to the tragic plot, even though women are depicted as being influenced by the “abortion industry” they are also agents who rose above it, overcame it, and found empowerment in pro-life. Abortion is depicted in an antifeminist, misogynist light, by way of seeking women’s consent with the dominant ‘will’ of the society.

These stories depict the qualities of ideal womanhood: Harder is christian, following christian morals of purity. She is young and vulnerable, but through guidance she accepts motherhood and this leads to her happy ending (the romantic overcoming of tribulations). She describes her daughter as being a joy in her life, and still capable of traveling and fulfilling her dreams. This notion of her happy ending, the ideal ending, mirrors the modern standards of womanhood, differing from the one in the 19th century, when upper-class women leaving the sphere of home was often frowned upon: Her sexual assault also is not mentioned to affect her life after keeping the pregnancy, and she is depicted overcoming her trauma by accepting motherhood. a woman should be resilient, and endure her pain for the sake of her fetus.

5.7 Pro-choice, Pro-life, Women, and Womanhood in the Narrative of Pro-life Blog Posts

I identify a few different types of women appearing frequently in American pro-life blog posts. Women, who have or are at “risk” of having abortions are depicted as victims of the “abortion industry”. They are described as “young”, “financially unstable” and “vulnerable” and have or are being manipulated by the “abortion industry”. This choice often leads in the pro-life narrative to physical and mental health issues, family issues, guilt, regret, and in some cases even death. This character is usually not judged for her decision, as the “abortion

industry” and the providers are seen as being at fault. This character type can move to the category of the pro-life advocate to “save” others from the same fate. She never enters the category of pro-choice, as she is never depicted as being content with having an abortion.

The second character type in the category of women is a pro-choice woman. In the pro-life narrative, the gender of a pro-choice advocate is not as prevalent as in the characterization of a pro-life activist, and often the advocates, organizations, and activists are referred to as the “abortion industry”. This ominous, genderless “abortion industry” is usually the main villain of the story, and responsible for the suffering and deaths of women and fetuses. The symbol “abortion industry” is used frequently to distance abortion rights activists and organizations from humanity and womanhood. The symbols (such as pro-abortion) in cases of pro-choice entities being described as women create a negative picture of this character and may not be depicted as confirming in a conservative christian role (such as the character “witch” and in general going against the “Gods will”). She is depicted as being capable of manipulation and seeks to convince women to have abortions, such as the Planned Parenthood worker in story 12. She might pretend to be a feminist but is either misguided or uses feminism to misguide women to suppress women and fits the Propp’s character type of a witch dressed as a sweet old woman. This character is stripped of the traditional essence of the conservative ideal womanhood pro-life advocate embodies. She is usually not portrayed in the pictures to dehumanize the “abortion industry”. The character of a pro-choice, woman or not, can be moved to the category of pro-life, often through overcoming the “lies” of “the abortion industry or through some core-changing experience (such as in stories 9, 10, and 11).

Pro-life characters are the heroes of the pro-life stories, and this is conveyed through many different framings and symbols. They can be depicted as “underdogs” to be rooted for in the fight against the “abortion industry”, or truth-tellers exposing lies spread about abortion. They are given obstacles, such as pro-choice vandals and a “witch” (such as in story 5) to overcome with resilience and bravery.

Women in the pro-life movement are in the text and pictures presented as youthful, supportive, relatable, hardworking, and empowering and have high agency in the stories. The character of a “pro-life woman” is often presented as an example to the younger generation of women (such as in story 12) They are often white Americans and are conventionally attractive. They are depicted as following traditional gender roles by the way they dress and

present themselves (long hair, modest dressing, smiling) and they are often presented as an example to all women: conservative, modest, christian, and “sexually pure” (such as in stories 12 and 6). These traits convey the pro-life standard of “ideal” womanhood. By presenting most of the pro-life characters as women and establishing them with these ideal feminine traits pro-life may seek not only to identify itself with the concept of “true womanhood” but also to gain legitimacy in the abortion debate. It can be argued that by underlining feminine voices, pro-life can distance itself from the critique that historically the anti-abortion movement has consisted of men telling women what to do with their bodies. This quest to establish legitimacy can also be shown in the narrative with the use of bridging devices with non-female characters: the man in story 9 is depicted to as someone with authority to talk about the subject because he used to be part of the “abortion industry” and maybe has inside information. He is part of a social group of pro-life, but his character has authority through his social position as a former abortion provider.

5.8. Framings in the Anti-abortion Narratives: From Then to Now

In Chapter 3 and Section 3.3, I present the common framings of women in anti-abortion texts in the 19th and early 20th centuries. I will be comparing each of the three historical framings to the analysis of the contemporary pro-life narrative to determine the relevance of the historical framings and the difference in the framings since women’s voices have been added to the anti-abortion movement rhetoric. The most important difference relevant to all different framings is who the story is told to. The historical framings often seem to be intended to be convincing for other men in positions of power, while the contemporary framings are usually appointed to not only the policy makers or to mobilize the pro-life movement further, but to also women considering abortion.

5.8.1 Comparing the Framing of “Woman in Need of Protection”

The first historical framing is “Woman in Need of Protection” (section 3.3.1) where AMA strongly framed women as beings in need of protection from the “abortionists”. I argue that this framing, as presented in the analysis, is still very relevant on a larger scale. Women in the contemporary framing of pro-life are deemed vulnerable victims and need protection not only

from “predatory” abortion providers but also abortion drugs and the spread of abortion advertisements (such as the “abortion industry” targeting young women by mail, in story 1). In this historical framing, women were also seen as incapable of making decisions over their reproductive care themselves, as abortions, birth control, and not wanting to have children were seen as something causing mental fragility and illness. Pro-life framings also deem abortions to have these negative consequences for women, but instead of framing themselves to be against women’s choices, they frame themselves as fighting against abortion as a practice. Concerns over women’s health in risky pregnancies are mostly ignored, both in historical and current framings.

5.8.2 Comparing the Framing “Character of a Woman”

The second historical framing “Character of a Woman” (section 3.3.2) as its name suggests framed women as weak, nervous, and frail-minded which was in addition to anti-abortion discourse a conservative response to the rise of women’s rights movements in the US. According to this second frame, women were supposed to be mothers, and avoidance of this role was framed as “irresponsible”, “selfish”, “masculine” and “uncaring” and otherwise morally corrupted, and restricting access to abortion would reinforce women’s social position as a mother and wife and protect them from these moral failures. In contemporary pro-life material, women who are having abortions are mostly referred to as victims of the abortion industry (Like the Argentinian woman, or Ethiopian women in story 1). They are depicted either as grieving, regretful, or even dead, but this is often due to misguidance of the “abortion industry” and not due to moral failure. However, the women who are pro-choice or more broadly working in the “abortion industry” are depicted very similarly to the historical framing in pro-life material (Like in stories 3, 5, 11).

To compare, the historical framing portrayed a woman as a “good woman” if she was a mother, and wife and stayed at home. and in the pro-life movement narrative, the ideal women are not only, similarly to the historical frame, christian, sexually conservative, and modest, and want to carry their pregnancies to term (like in story 12), but also those who take on social action against abortion rights (e.g. in all stories in comedic employment). One can

argue that this is because the historical anti-abortion movement was a movement mainly lobbied by men, but in the contemporary anti-abortion movement many activists are women.

5.8.3 Comparing the Framing “Women as a Threat to Society”

The third historical framing “Women as a Threat to Society” (3.3.3), in which women’s changing social position and white women’s declining birth rate, and thus abortion, was deemed as threatening the existing power structure. This framing is not used in modern pro-life texts. One reason is possibly women’s better social standing in modern times and women’s prevalence in the pro-life movement. Women’s birth rate in the US is currently at an all-time low (WSJ, 2024) but even if this was part of the reason for abortion bans and restrictions, it is not a common argument for abortion bans in the pro-life narrative. Abortion can, however, be depicted as a societal issue. For example, Abortion can be framed as a threat to social morality (e.g. in story 6.), christian values, and pro-life often describe US society as living in a “Culture of death” such as in Human Coalitions “Who We Are” page: “Human Coalition is a champion of life, committed to an audacious mission: to transform our culture of death into a culture of life” (Nd. Na)

In the historical framing of “Women as a Threat to Society”, the “threat” of lowering birth rates among white middle- and upper-class women was paired with racist narratives around the reproductive qualities of women of color. Black, Latino, and Native women were stereotyped as fertile and hypersexual (Briggs, 2000, pp. 249-250) and this was seen as a threat to white supremacy and power. Next, I will explore the modern anti-abortion movement’s relation to race and gender.

5.8.4 Framing Race and Gender in the Pro-life Movement

The vast majority of the pro-life activists in the chosen material, such as the authors of the posts, people in the photos, and characters depicted in the blog post as pro-life activists are white women. Jennifer Holland in her book *Tiny You: A Western History of the Anti-Abortion Movement* (2020) writes that in anti-abortion movement organizations the board of directors of, for example, crisis pregnancy centers (CPC) is evenly divided between men and women,

but the founders, activists, volunteers, and directors are almost always women. This, according to Holland, means that white pro-life women often adopt the role of “mothering” poor, young, and non-white pregnant women to convince them to become mothers. Holland writes that white women occupy a special role in the anti-abortion movement, as they are seen as having the experiential and moral authority to speak to other women and intervene in private family matters. (Holland, 2020, pp. 123, 127) Although Holland’s research is in the context of CPC activism, one can argue that the dominant voice of white women in pro-life activism online and in the analyzed material is due to similar reasons.

Race and ethnicity are mentioned rarely in analyzed pro-life material. Women of color are mentioned only in one of the articles: “NOT SAFE Even If Legal: Doctor’s Study Shows that Legal Abortion is Bad for Women’s Health” (Wharton, 2022), where the article fitting the mode of tragic emplotment involves the “victims” of abortion, the Ethiopian women and the Argentinian “abortion activist”. This alone, may characterize American white people as saviors and having a moral duty to protect women of color and women all over the world. Adding context to this narrative framing, according to Jennifer Holland in her book *Tiny You: A Western History of the Anti-Abortion Movement* (2020), CPCs were often in the end of the 20th century established in neighborhoods with high populations of women of color, whom white activists saw as especially susceptible to abortion. Holland writes:

Poor, urban women of color had long been associated with hypersexuality and what was termed “over-reproduction,” and that association was only solidifying in the 1960s and 1970s. Many Americans believed “ghettos” were filled with women more prone to unwanted pregnancy and abortion, and thus in need of anti-abortion services. (Holland, 2020, pp. 124-125)

This implies, that racial narratives of 19th-century “hypersexual” and “savage” women, is still in part at play, although it is used differently in more recent history of anti-abortion movement. Katherine Brown in her article “Understanding the Role of Race in Abortion Stigma in the United States: A Systematic Scoping Review” (2022) writes that anti-abortion messaging targets “- Black women by using racially stigmatizing messages claiming that abortion targets communities of color as a form of a genocide”(Brown, 2002). Many blog posts seen on the organization’s sites support this research, such as Focus on the Family post “Abortion’s Impact on the Black Community” (2021) and “19 Million Lives Lost: The

Heartbreak of Black History” (2022). Women of color are in the modern framing not seen as a threat like in the historical framing but as more vulnerable to the influence of the “abortion industry”.

6. Final Conclusions

I argue that pro-life constructs versions of womanhood in its publications and manipulates its narratives with symbols, framings, and other devices that are used as tools to shape the reader's opinion of right and wrong in what comes to discourse on pro-life, the morality of abortion, and abortion rights.

I identified three main types of characters in the pro-life narrative: pro-life, pro-choice, and a woman. Pro-choice and the character “woman” may move to the category of pro-life, to either showcase the characters’ “redemption” or portray the character’s turning pro-life as the “good” ending for the story. Pro-life character in turn may be categorized as a woman, identifying with two social groups simultaneously, but never enters the category of pro-choice.

The pro-life character can be characterized with heroic traits, for example as a “truth teller” or an “underdog”. They usually are presented as having some authority on the subject: they may have previously been an abortionist, or have otherwise researched the matter. If they are a woman, they may draw upon their own experiences as a woman to justify knowing what is best for women or are otherwise characterized with pro-life’s “ideal” feminine traits. The women gain agency in the story once they become pro-life.

Pro-choice is often labeled with the symbol “abortion industry” to pair it with ideas of greed and money-hungry business, and to distance it from human values that pro-life seeks to represent. This attempt to distance pro-choice from human values and women’s rights advocacy is also present in the use of other symbols, the use of pictures (e.g. vacant buildings, “abortion” tools), and actions of the character (e.g. “killing pre-born children”, misleading and harming women).

6.1 Concept of Womanhood as a Tool in Pro-life Narrative

Pro-life blog posts use womanhood as a tool in multiple ways. Pro-life women, often portrayed as “heroes” of the story, are depicted as ideal women. Pro-life’s “ideal” woman finds agency through pro-life, is conservative, modest, christian, kind, supportive, resilient, hard-working, motherly, protective, a “guide” or an example for other women, and often is pictured as a young, conventionally attractive, white woman. By attaining this ideal, women are shown to find happiness in the side of “life” and “light”. Their life is depicted to be better, their dreams fulfilled and they often find their purpose and better their community. This may be a narrative tool to convince the reader (if the reader is a woman), that by being pro-life she can achieve this happy ending. At the same time, the pro-life narrative often punishes the women who do not conform to pro-life ideals, avoids depicting them with “admirable” feminine traits (or even as actively anti-woman), or portrays them as villains of the story responsible for the misfortune and deaths of women and babies.

Womanhood is also used as a tool to provide pro-life with authority over the abortion debate. They have maternal concern for the “pre-born babies” and sorrow for the aborted fetuses. They, as women, do not think abortion is the right choice for women’s mental and physical health. They may use their own experience as women or as women who have had (or almost had) an abortion to argue, that women will always suffer from abortions.

Women may also be characterized as a vulnerable and naive social group, especially if they are not actively pro-life. This trait of womanhood is often used by pro-life organizations as a justification for advocating for limiting access to abortion. Women are depicted as vulnerable to pressure, manipulation, and greed, and never actually want abortions, but are pressured to do so.

6.2 Key Continuities and Discontinuities Between the Historical Anti-abortion Movement and Pro-life.

I have found multiple continuations between the findings presented in this research project and the framings presented in historical contextualizations. The key continuities found are in the negative framing of historical “abortionists” and in the current-day posts about the “abortion industry”, which women in both require protection from. In the historical anti-abortion movement and modern pro-life framings, women’s mental and physical health is in danger if they attain abortions not only due to the physical complications but also due to their nature as women and traits associated with “womanhood”.

The key difference between the historical and current-day anti-abortion movements is the involvement of women. Men in the historical narrative may argue against abortion by referring to the stereotypes of women as fragile or to their social role as mothers and wives. In the pro-life movement, women claim the authority to speak on what is deemed “best” for their own gender. They may do this by referring to their own experiences and, for example, to the pressure they have faced from the “abortion industry” or society to abort.

6.3 Narrative Analysis as a Method, Limitations, and Suggestions for Future Research

The use of narrative analysis has aided me in this research in revealing storytelling tools and traits in analyzed material. This method has allowed me to interpret the meaning behind what is told, for example in interpreting the authors’ ideologies, ideals, and values through their use of narrative tools. The use of Hayden White’s three emplotments has helped me not only to analyze the material in comprehensible sections but also helped reveal the purposes behind the stories, whether they were cautionary tales, stories to convert, or tales to empower.

I acknowledge some limitations I have encountered in this research project. Firstly, narrative research as a methodology always includes a certain amount of bias and subjectivity in its interpretations. Stories and narratives may have multiple interpretations depending on the individual’s perspective. Limiting bias may be an especially difficult task regarding controversial subjects like abortion because one’s opinion of the topic often relies on traits like morality, values, and culture. I have attempted, however, to limit my personal bias in this research project.

The analyzed data may also have some limitations on the variety of narratives they reveal. The blog posts are posted on the organization's websites and may have different purposes that affect the construction of the narrative, and may thus not always reflect all views of pro-life activists. For example, the posts may aim to encourage women who have had abortions to become pro-life, or discourage women from having abortions. Thus, blaming women or describing them as "murderers" or other such negative descriptions may repel women from interacting with pro-life content or be inconsistent with other prominent narratives, such as the pro-woman narrative. Narratives that condemn can be found on platforms such as X (former Twitter) coming from individual pro-life activists¹⁹.

I believe, however, that by researching narratives produced by prominent pro-life organizations I can focus my research on the most popular and common narratives that are accepted by most people identifying themselves as pro-life.

I aim to situate my thesis to the wider debate regarding reproductive rights by exploring narratives that have had the power to, against the global trend, affect abortion laws.

Constructing gender roles, especially womanhood, can be argued to have a significant impact on political subjects such as abortion rights. I suggest that future research could explore the use of the concept of womanhood in also other topics and debates relating to women's rights issues.

¹⁹ Example of a comment published to X: Mothers! DON'T murder your children. If you abort your child...you are murdering them. You will be held accountable by God, whether you believe it or not. #abortionismurder #abortionabolitionist" (X)

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