

Abortion Clinic Violence: A Comparative Study of Mainstream and Extremist Pro-Life Organizations

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ABSTRACT

Since 1993 there have been 8 murders of abortion providers and clinic employees, guards and volunteers in the United States. In addition to many other less serious forms of violence, such as assault, bombings, arson, and death threats, these murders point to an interesting phenomenon within the pro-life movement. Although spokespersons for well-known pro-life groups, such as the National Right to Life Committee, vehemently deny that violence has any place in the pro-life movement, arguing that the individuals who commit murders in the name of life are not pro-life at all, we hear a very different story from extremist pro-life groups, such as the Army of God, who employ violent tactics. Extremist pro-life groups appear to have the same goal as the mainstream pro-life groups: to end abortion; yet, the two types of groups seek to achieve this goal in very different ways. This research is an attempt to understand what sets these two types of groups apart, inciting the extremists to use violence, and the mainstream pro-lifers to reject it. This paper presents a content analysis of extremist and mainstream pro-life groups in an attempt to fill the gap in the current literature on comparative studies of the two types of organizations. Employing the theoretical work of Edwin Lemert, Travis Hirschi, Howard Becker, Donald Black and James Hunter, this paper argues that the mainstream pro-life groups' emphasis on the family, unity, happiness and life makes violent tactics unthinkable, whereas the extremist pro-life groups' emphasis on blood, destruction and death makes violence an understandable and justifiable "next step" to take in order to end abortion practices in our country.

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Over the past fifteen years there have been eight murders, fourteen attempted murders, two-hundred and forty death threats, and eighty-nine incidences of assault on abortion providers and their employees or volunteers (National Abortion Federation 2009). Most recently, late-term abortion doctor George Tiller was shot to death in May, 2009 while he attended church services with his family in Wichita, Kansas. Yet despite this violence, millions of anti-abortion activists have protested and marched peacefully and formed peaceful organizations dating back to the Supreme Court decision of *Roe v. Wade* in 1973. Furthermore, many of the mainstream pro-life organizations, such as Americans United for Life and the National Right to Life Committee, condemned the murder of George Tiller and stated that violence has no part in their agenda. However, extremist pro-life groups, such as the Army of God, have celebrated the murder and embraced the killer as a hero and martyr. Therefore, it is evident that although both extremist and mainstream pro-life organizations seek to end abortion practices in our country, they are quite different in the way that they approach the issue, specifically in terms of the use of violence. Why do some pro-life organizations condone the use of violence while others condemn it? What is the trigger for violence; what causes this drastic step to be taken? This is the issue that this paper will explore.

Existing research on pro-life organizations and abortion clinic violence tends to focus on the most drastic cases of violence. For example, there is an abundance of literature addressing abortion clinic violence as terrorism and the specific murders that have occurred over the past fifteen years (Baird-Windle and Bader 2001; Jenkins 2003;

NAF 2009). There is also existing literature that addresses peaceful pro-life organizations, such as Maxwell's *Pro-Life Activists in America: Meaning, Motivation, and Direct Action* (2002). However, I was unable to find any comparative studies of mainstream and extremist pro-life groups. Thus, we can ground ourselves in the literature on both groups separately and become familiar with group values and behaviors, but there is a gap in the comparison between the two. This paper will seek to bridge that gap.

This is an important issue to examine for a number of reasons. First, for many of us, especially those who are pro-choice, it is very hard to reconcile anti-abortion violence. Pro-choice individuals believe that a woman's right to choose is a significant freedom and is an aspect of reproductive rights that they are unwilling to give up. While some pro-choice individuals may tolerate the pro-life belief that abortion is wrong, it seems evident that the pro-choice community does not condone the use of violence to stop abortion. Thus, the use of violence by members of extremist pro-life organizations serves to further alienate the pro-choice community from the pro-life community. Furthermore, it allows the pro-choice community to strengthen its belief that the pro-life community is composed primarily of fanatical, intolerant, religious zealots. Therefore, abortion clinic violence and the justification and reasoning behind it, is necessary to understand for the sake of toleration. By no means am I arguing that violence should be tolerated, by members of either group; rather, I am arguing that it is important to understand the distinction between mainstream pro-life organizations and extreme pro-life organizations, so that we do not discount or discredit the entire pro-life movement as a whole, and to prevent fostering further violence and hatred.

Second, anti-choice extremist violence is a topic that deserves academic attention because it has a huge impact on our safety, our choices, and our social reality. As Wilder, Baird-Windle and Bader, and NARAL Pro-Choice America point out, this violence, statistically speaking, is serving as a deterrent for new doctors considering entering the field of abortion provision, and is causing others who have been in the field for years to decide that they can no longer remain for fear of their own lives and the lives of their loved ones (1998; 2001; 2009). Although it is important to approach information that is coming from a partisan organization, such as NARAL, which clearly has a pro-choice agenda, with an added measure of scrutiny, I found similar arguments on the deterrence effect in the bipartisan literature as well (Wilder 1998; Baird-Windle and Bader 2001; Jenkins 2003). Furthermore, acts of extreme violence, such as murder or physical assault, are also recorded in news articles, police records, and town blotters (Fausset 2009; Dana 2009). These bipartisan sources indicate that although some of my sources do not purport to be objective, they do provide data that is both reliable and valid.

This deterrence effect has a great impact not only on abortion providers and their families, but on the future of women's health care in general. While *Roe v. Wade* gave women the Constitutional right to choose, this violence serves as a fear tactic both for patients and doctors; a woman's right to choose is being limited, to some degree, by anti-choice extremists. What is the result of individuals acting as moral crusaders, employing vigilante justice and labeling it as "justifiable homicide," and how does this affect our perception of the pro-life community and a woman's right to choose? These questions point to the ways in which abortion clinic violence affects our social construction of reality, and to the importance of giving this issue academic attention.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Much of the literature surrounding abortion clinic violence frames the abortion controversy as a “culture war,” or what James Hunter defines as a “political and social hostility rooted in different systems of moral understanding” (Luker 1984; Hunter 1991: 42; Ginsburg 1998). In the culture war model, the abortion controversy is viewed by both pro-life and pro-choice groups as a struggle over much more than just abortion; it is seen as a battle over the country’s values and identity (Luker 1984; Hunter 1991). The "Theoretical Framework" section of this paper will expand on the culture war model and the way in which it informs the relationship between the abortion controversy and violence.

In her work *Killing for Life: The Apocalyptic Narrative of Pro-Life Politics*, Carol Mason reinforces the notion that the abortion controversy may be viewed as a battle between good and evil. She highlights one of the most common themes in the literature surrounding anti-abortion extremists: religious rhetoric. The literature reveals that most extremist pro-life groups use violence because they believe it is the will of God, and that if they do not end abortion, God will no longer protect them (Donovan 1985; Mason 2002; Risen and Thomas 1998). Furthermore, for many pro-life extremists, the struggle over how we define ourselves as a nation is strongly rooted in traditional Christian values, and they are fearful that these values are slipping away (Ginsburg 1998; Mason 2002). In this case, violence is used for the greater good, as a way to restore God’s order and maintain his protection, and ultimately to have good triumph over evil (Donovan 1985; Risen and Thomas 1998; Mason 2002).

There is also common reference to Genesis 9:6 in the literature surrounding abortion clinic violence: “Whosoever sheds man’s blood, by man his blood shall be shed” (Risen and Thomas 1998: 340). The literature points out that Genesis 9:6 is often used as a justification for violence and that for anti-abortion extremists, violence is not considered an illegitimate tactic. Rather, it is viewed as logical, justifiable, and even necessary (Wilder 1998, Mason 2002). The literature also stresses that there is not one particular profile for anti-abortion extremists; they are not all religious zealots, nor are they necessarily disturbed individuals with psychological problems (Maxwell and Jelen 1996; Risen and Thomas 1998).

The literature indicates that many extremist pro-life groups justify violence with a utilitarian argument. In other words, while these groups may assert that killing is wrong, they argue that killing one abortion doctor will save thousands of children’s lives, and is justifiable because losing one life is less costly to society than losing thousands of lives (Risen and Thomas 1998; Wilder 1998; Baird-Windle and Bader 2001; Jenkins 2003). This is often referred to as the “doctrine of necessity,” which Ginsburg defines as “...a belief that violence is permissible as a last resort to stop or prevent greater violence...” (1998: 230). In this sense, violence is used to stop what is considered greater violence in the future, whereas the invocation of Genesis 9:6 presents violence as a form of retribution for wrongdoing. Some pro-life groups may also turn to violence because they feel that peaceful protesting will not cause the changes that the group wants to make (Ginsburg 1998; Mason 2002). With this argument violence is viewed as a political resource and a means to make a change for the good of society (Ginsburg 1998; Wilder 1998; Mason 2002).

Existing literature also reveals that while the murder rate of abortion doctors is relatively low (eight murders in the past fifteen years is less than one murder per year), abortion clinic violence is a serious issue that affects abortion providers and clinic employees (Wilder 1998; Baird-Windle and Bader 2001; Mason 2002; National Abortion Federation 2009; NARAL 2009). Clinic violence is serving as a deterrent for those considering entering the field, and is causing some doctors to quit their practices for fear of their own lives or the safety of their families (Wilder 1998; Baird-Windle and Bader 2001; Mason 2002).

Thus, it is evident that the abortion controversy may indeed be viewed as a kind of holy war, or a battle between good and evil. Violence is justified with the notion of a greater good, the will of God, or as punishment for doing something evil. Utilitarian arguments and religious rhetoric are both used to bolster this justification. Quotations from anti-abortion extremists in the literature reveal that violence may also be used simply because other, less extreme tactics are not working. For example, Ginsburg quotes Randall Terry, head of the extremist anti-choice group "Operation Rescue," on why he started using violent tactics: "I also realized that the pro-life movement was not creating the tension and upheaval necessary to produce political and social change. We were being too nice" (1998: 231).

While the mission of the pro-life movement as a whole is to legalize abortion, some groups choose to protest in peaceful, legal ways, while others use violence. Can this be explained simply with the notion that the extremists are *more* anxious to make a change? This may be a part of their motivation, but it does not explain the stark contrast between mainstream pro-life group action and extremist pro-life group action. While the

literature points out many overarching themes within the extremist anti-choice movement, there is a gap in the literature comparing extremist anti-choice and mainstream anti-choice groups. While many of the themes identified in the literature will surely play into the distinction between the two groups, I seek to understand what exactly causes this distinction. It is my hope that this research will shed new light on this topic and will provide comparative information that is currently overlooked in the literature.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Travis Hirschi's control theory, James Hunter's culture war model, Donald Black's concept of "self-help," and Howard Becker and Edwin Lemert's theoretical work on moral entrepreneurs inform my research on extremist and mainstream pro-life groups.

Self-Help

Donald Black's theoretical work on the concept of "self-help" reflects one of the distinctions between mainstream pro-life and extremist groups. Black explains that self-help occurs when a crime, such as murder, is used as a form of social control in order to respond to what is perceived as deviant behavior. Black asserts that self-help involves a grievance expressed by one group or individual upon another in the form of theft, murder or rape. Thus, Black argues that in our modern society, acts that are labeled criminal are often acts of self-help. Black's concept of self-help offers an explanation as to why certain extremist groups use violence to further their agenda because they view this violence as justifiable retribution for abortion practices.

Culture War Model

Hunter's culture war model frames the abortion controversy itself and sheds light on the way certain groups construct the controversy differently from others. Hunter explains,

I define cultural conflict very simply as political and social hostility rooted in different systems of moral understanding. The end to which these hostilities tend is the domination of one cultural and moral ethos over all others. Let it be clear, the principles and ideas that mark these competing systems of moral understanding are by no means trifling but always have a character of ultimacy to them. They are not merely attitudes that can change on a whim but basic commitments and beliefs that provide a source of identity, purpose and togetherness for the people who live by them. (1991: 42)

Within the culture war model, the abortion controversy is seen as a holy war; it is not simply a battle over abortion rights, but a struggle over the soul of the country and the values both pro-life and pro-choice individuals hold dear. This model will shape my discussion of the way in which violence is justified by extremist groups in the name of a greater good, or as the will of God, and may explain why these groups take drastic action when others with the same agenda do not.

Control Theory

Travis Hirschi's control theory can be applied to the seemingly hypocritical use of violence by pro-life extremists who assert that *all* human life is sacred. Hirschi asks, "How can a person believe it is wrong to steal at the same time he is stealing?...if both the deviant and the non-deviant believe the deviant act is wrong, how do we account for the fact that one commits it and the other does not?" (1969: 31-32). This question will frame my discussion of how two groups with similar beliefs (i.e. abortion is wrong, murder is wrong) can act so differently (i.e. one is peaceful and one is violent). Hirschi explains that one approach taken by control theorists to explain this contradiction "argues that the deviant rationalizes his behavior so that he can at once violate the rule and

maintain his belief in it....” (1969: 32). This assertion supports the argument put forth in the literature that anti-choice extremists justify the use of violence in order to prevent further violence.

Moral Crusade

Edwin Lemert’s concept of moral crusade will shape my analysis of why some pro-life groups turn to violence while others do not. Lemert explains that,

One kind of theory proposes that the rise of new moral and penal definitions is the work of ‘moral entrepreneurs,’ or ‘moral crusaders’ imbued with a sense of mission to impose their own morality on others in order to preserve a threatened way of life. Such people are unconcerned with means to ends... (1972:19)

Moral crusade relates to the way in which extremist pro-life groups utilize violence to protect a threatened way of life, and to the extremist pro-life organizations’ construction of the abortion controversy as a kind of “holy war” or "moral crusade." Howard Becker’s theoretical work on moral entrepreneurs brings up similar issues. Becker writes of the moral entrepreneur:

The existing rules do not satisfy him because there is some evil which profoundly disturbs him. He feels that nothing can be right in the world until rules are made to correct it. He operates with an absolute ethic; what he sees is truly and totally evil with no qualification. Any means is justified to do away with it. The crusader is fervent and righteous, often self-righteous. (1963: 147-148)

In Hunter’s culture war model, individuals tend to view the world in absolute terms. As Becker explains, the moral entrepreneur is quite similar and sees a strong distinction between right and wrong. This can be applied to the way in which extremist pro-life groups construe the abortion controversy in black and white terms.

METHODS

Content analysis was performed on four mainstream pro-life organizations' websites and one extremist organization's website. Groups were selected on the basis of a few different factors: organizations were identified, for the purposes of my research, as "mainstream" if their public response to the death of Dr. Tiller was condemnatory, while organizations were identified as "extremist" if their public response to the death was celebratory. An effort was made to choose the most well-known and established organizations, therefore I selected organizations based on whether they are mentioned on the National Abortion Federation and NARAL Pro-Choice America websites, and based off of the frequency that the organizations were mentioned in the existing literature. I chose to use these organizations' websites, as opposed to magazines, pamphlets or books, as my object of analysis because this was the most accessible way to learn about the organizations. The issue of accessibility was key for this research because the controversial groups I chose to study have had their publications censored, many of their known members are in jail, and the other members are anonymous and therefore impossible to contact for information. Thus, I decided that the best way to access information about these controversial groups was the internet, and because I wanted to closely compare the two types of groups, I chose to look at their websites and examine the similarities and differences.

Although I had originally intended to analyze ten organizations, five extremist pro-life and five mainstream pro-life, this ended up being problematic. While there is a multitude of mainstream organizations with websites on the internet, I was only able to find one that explicitly condoned the use of violence. I did find an interesting category of groups that did not condone the use of violence for its own members, but did not

discourage others from using violence. I will include a brief discussion of these organizations in my "Results" section, but chose not to perform content analysis on them due to the limited scope of this research.

I chose to analyze the Army of God as my extremist organization and 40 Days for Life, the National Right to Life Committee, the Pro-Life Action League, and Americans United for Life as my four mainstream pro-life groups. Although I didn't have a choice in terms of the group I selected for my extremist analysis, as previously mentioned there are hundreds of mainstream pro-life groups with websites, so I had a lot of these groups to choose from. Initially I wanted to use only national groups that did not self-identify as policy, law, or religious organizations because I wanted to analyze the most representative groups as possible. However, I found that very few pro-life organizations fall under this description, so I selected the most well-established and representative groups I could find. The National Right to Life Committee is a national policy group that was founded in 1973 in direct response to the *Roe v. Wade* Supreme Court decision. Americans United for Life is a public-interest, non-profit policy group with offices in Chicago and Washington, D.C. It was founded in 1971 and is the oldest national pro-life organization in the country. The Pro-Life Action League, founded in 1980 by Joel Scheidler, is a national pro-life activist and educational organization based in Chicago. 40 Days for Life is a pro-life group which organizes pro-life campaigns across the country. It organized its first campaign in Bryan/College Station, Texas in 2004 and to date has coordinated five national campaigns through fasting, vigils, prayer, and community outreach. From the many organizations to choose from, I chose these four instead of the American Life League and the Lambs of Christ, both of which are also strongly

established organizations. This choice was made because, in some of the literature, despite identifying as non-violent on its homepage, the Lambs of Christ has been referred to as an "extremist" organization (National Abortion Federation 2009). Furthermore, the American Life League would have also been a good option, but self-identified as a Catholic organization and I preferred to use groups that were as non-partisan and ecumenical as possible.

Almost all of the murders of abortion doctors since 1993 have been linked to the Army of God (National Abortion Federation 2009). As previously mentioned, while I had originally intended to analyze an equal number of extremist and mainstream pro-life groups, this posed a serious challenge. I was unable to find any groups that explicitly condoned and encouraged the use of violence, except for the Army of God. This is due in part to the fact that some of these websites have been removed because of their violent content. For example, the American Coalition of Life Activists once had a website which contained what is commonly referred to as the "Nuremburg Files." The Nuremburg Files was a detailed list of abortion providers and sympathizers and included contact information for each. Every time one of the individuals on the list was killed, assaulted, or put out of work, the website would change the name from black to red font, and would put a slash through the name. It has been said that the information on the Nuremburg Files was utilized by many of the killers of abortion doctors, including George Tiller's killer, Scott Roeder. The Nuremburg Files have been removed from the internet, so I was unable to perform a content analysis of the American Coalition of Life Activists. Thus, I discovered through the course of my research that due to the explicitly violent content on the extremists' websites, much of it has been removed from the internet, or is very

difficult to find, and this may be one of the reasons why there is a gap in the comparative literature on extremist and mainstream pro-life groups. Ultimately, I was only able to analyze one extremist organization, but according to the literature, it seems to encapsulate all of the themes present in the extremist ideology.

First I examined each website separately, taking notes on all of my observations, including but not limited to the following: the physical appearance of the website (colors, fonts, organization); the different sections included on the website (calls for donations, how to get involved, history of the organization etc.); the types of photos, graphics, or illustrations used (photos of aborted babies, illustrations of medical procedures etc.); the type of language used (religious rhetoric, grammar, sentence style); the types of quotations included (scriptural passages, political speeches etc.); the groups' mission statements (or lack thereof); the history of the group (when, where and why it began); the responses to Dr. Tiller's death; the kind of imagery conjured in pictures or words (i.e. comparing abortion to the Holocaust, using crucifixion imagery, patriotic imagery); how the group frames its action (saving, protecting, defending the life of the unborn); the inclusion of other information not specifically regarding abortion (contraception, gay rights, euthanasia, bioethics etc.); the absence or presence of press releases; the absence or presence of information on alternatives to abortion (i.e. adoption, parenting); and the ways in which abortion providers and women who get abortions are portrayed (can they be saved, do they deserve forgiveness).

After taking notes on my observations separately for each group, I went back over all of my notes to look for themes. First I looked for common themes between the four mainstream groups and compiled a list of these themes. I selected the themes that were

most prevalent among the four groups by picking those that were found in at least three out of the four groups. Then I went back and compiled a list of the themes that I found for the Army of God. Thus, I selected which themes to include in the "Results" section for the Army of God differently than I did for the mainstream groups, simply because I analyzed only one extremist group and therefore didn't have any way of seeing which themes were most prevalent between different groups. Therefore, for the Army of God, I had a list of themes found on its website and for the mainstream groups I used the themes that were found in three out of the four mainstream groups. Finally, I compared and contrasted these two sets of themes. The "Results" section of this paper will discuss my findings from this comparison.

It is important to address the limitations of this study in terms of methodology, so there are a few points I would like to mention here. First, although I was able to find enough mainstream groups to analyze so that I could make some limited generalizations, this was not the case for the extremist groups. Because I was working with an extremely limited sample, it is important to note that my results are not generalizable, and provide information on only five out of hundreds of pro-life groups. I chose to limit my sample of mainstream groups because I was more interested in depth rather than breadth. This was the case for extremist groups as well, but I was limited to analyzing only one because of what was available to me.

Limitations of the study also include using internet websites as sources. Although these sites provided rich information that I probably would not have been able to find elsewhere (this is the main reason I chose to use websites as my object of study), it is important to note that internet sites are not always trustworthy. This is why I made a

conscious effort to select well-established, national groups that are represented in the literature; however, it is impossible to know if what is represented on the internet is truly coming from a particular group, or who is actually moderating the websites. Thus, while I think that for the purposes of this paper, websites were extremely helpful, they can also be problematic in terms of methodological soundness. This will be addressed further in the "Conclusion" section of this paper.

RESULTS

Performing a content analysis of 40 Days for Life, Americans United for Life, the Pro-Life Action League, and the National Right to Life Committee's websites resulted in six overarching themes that will be discussed in this section. Themes were ultimately selected on the basis of whether they appeared in at least three out of the four mainstream websites analyzed. I will then discuss the themes found on the Army of God's website and provide a comparison between the two types of groups. However, I would like to provide readers with a wider sense of these websites, so I will briefly list all of the themes I took note of in my preliminary research, and will then provide an in-depth analysis of the most prevalent themes, which I identified using the above criteria (if they appeared in three out of the four websites), and an explanation of how they compare and contrast to the themes found on the Army of God's website. Finally, although the "Results" section of this paper presents an analysis of identified themes in prose form, it also includes a presentation of the themes in chart form, for the purposes of clarity and comparison between the mainstream and extremist pro-life groups.

General Themes: Extremist and Mainstream Pro-Life Groups

Notions of unity or togetherness in the fight to end abortion were apparent on Americans United for Life and 40 Days for Life's websites. The hope to move from a culture of death to a culture of life and the notion that God is forgiving were both central to 40 Days for Life's mission. Views on contraception are included on the Pro-life Action League's website, which argues that contraception is simply another form of abortion; the Army of God takes a similar stance. 40 Days for Life's website has no mention of contraception, and the National Right to Life Committee explicitly states that it does not take a stance on contraception. Americans United for Life states that contraception provides youth with the false notion that they can engage in sex without consequences (2009). Both Americans United for Life and the National Right to Life Committee utilize a great deal of "American" imagery, such as flags, images of Capitol Hill, and red, white and blue color schemes. This may be due, in part, to the fact that both of these organizations are more politically involved than the others and reflects that a large part of their work is in policy. All four mainstream groups ask for donations and all five groups analyzed provide links to purchase material on the pro-life movement (books, DVDs etc.) on their websites. Both the Army of God and 40 Days for Life call on the notion that it is the will of God to end abortion, although the Army of God stresses the notion of being a "soldier in God's army", whereas 40 Days for Life does not. Finally, and this may seem obvious, but just to reiterate: all four mainstream organizations unequivocally condemn the use of violence, whereas the Army of God employs and encourages it. See Chart 1 below for a comprehensive visual comparison of all the themes just mentioned, in addition to some less significant themes I identified.

Chart 1. All Themes Identified on Mainstream and Extremist Pro-Life Groups' Websites

Extremist Pro-Life Group Themes	Mainstream Pro-Life Group Themes
Abortion doctors' killers are American heroes	Focus on unity and togetherness
Utilitarian argument for abortion clinic violence	Biographies and photos of members
Use of computer graphics	Photos of parents, babies and families
Homophobic language	Call to move from a culture of death to a culture of life
Use of religious language	Abortion referred to as a "holocaust"
Use of spiritual quotations	Abortion clinics referred to as "mills" or "abortuaries"
Against use of contraceptives	Photos of the groups in action
Excessive number of graphic photos of aborted fetuses or parts of aborted fetuses	The importance of forgiveness
No sense of identity or authorship of the website or the organization	Photos of the crucifixion
Gory language and photos	Dated news links and press releases
Notion that we need to save the lives of unborn children	Notion that abortion hurts women
Reference to abortion clinics as "mills" or "abortuaries"	Patriotic imagery
Abortion referred to as a "holocaust"	Against use of contraceptives
Photos of abortion doctors' killers	Purports to provide the facts
Focus on the unborn child (lack of focus on mother)	Notion that we need to protect, save and defend innocent life
Violent language used to describe abortion	Call for donations
Idea that ending abortion is God's will	No graphic photos
Violence is an acceptable means to end abortion	Use of spiritual quotations
Links to purchase pro-life merchandise	Clear message, mission statement
Patriotic imagery	Merchandise available for purchase
	Use of religious language
	Idea that ending abortion is God's will
	Violence is an unacceptable means to end abortion

Mainstream Pro-Life Groups Themes

The most common theme, which was found on all four mainstream websites, was a clear mission statement, philosophy and message for viewers to access. Similarly, 40 Days for Life, Americans United for Life, and the Pro-Life Action League included

biographies and pictures for all of their board members and group leaders. The pictures are all smiling headshots and the biographies include educational and family information, as well as how each member came to be involved in the pro-life movement. There is contact information for each individual, as well as contact information for each group as a whole. Similarly, the National Right to Life Committee had contact information, both for the group as a whole and by state, but did not include names or photos of individual group leaders. All four organizations also included press releases to the media on their websites, as well as links to relevant newspaper articles.

Americans United for Life, the National Right to Life Committee, and the Pro-Life Action League also all made the argument that abortion "hurts" or "endangers" women. 40 Days for Life, Americans United for Life, and the National Right to Life Committee included photos of healthy babies, with and without their mothers, on their websites. Americans United for Life, the National Right to Life Committee, and the Pro-Life Action League each used language which framed the pro-life movement as "defending," "saving," or "protecting" life. These common themes identified on the mainstream pro-life groups' websites are summarized below in Chart 2.

Chart 2. Common Themes Identified on Mainstream Pro-Life Groups' Websites

Common Themes on Mainstream Pro-Life Groups' Websites
Clear message, philosophy and mission statement
Biographies, contact information and photos of members
Photographs of healthy babies and of families
Abortion hurts women
We need to protect, save and defend innocent life
Dated press releases and media coverage

Extremist Pro-Life Group Themes

The most significant themes that I identified on the Army of God's website were as follows: killers of abortion doctors are portrayed as heroes; use of religious language (i.e. "sin," "hell," "condemnation," "evil"); use of violent language (i.e. "burn in hell); graphic photos of aborted babies; smiling photos of abortion doctors' killers; use of scriptural passages which are used to justify violence (i.e. Psalm 139:19, "Surely though wilt slay the wicked..."); use of moving graphics, such as dripping blood or burning flames; references to clinics as "abortion mills"; references to abortion as a kind of holocaust and abortion doctors as Nazis; lack of contact information or group identity; utilitarian arguments for abortion (i.e. now that one abortion doctor is dead, thousands of lives will be saved); condemnation of contraception because it is viewed as another kind of abortion; and the call to save the lives of unborn children (Army of God n.d.). See Chart 3 below for a summary of these themes.

Chart 3. Significant Themes Identified on Extremist Pro-Life Group's Website

Themes on Extremist Pro-Life Group's Website
Abortion doctors' killers are American heroes
Utilitarian argument for abortion clinic violence
Parallels drawn between abortion practices and the Holocaust
Reference to abortion clinics as "mills" or "abortuaries"
Utilization of scriptural passages and religious language
Use of violent graphics
Lack of contact information
Notion that we need to save the lives of unborn children
Excessive photos of aborted fetuses

When I compiled a list of themes prevalent in at least three out of the four mainstream websites, I found parallels to these themes on the Army of God's website, both in terms of similarities and differences, which are discussed below.

Similar Themes between Extremist and Mainstream Pro-Life Groups

First, I will outline what I considered the similar themes between the mainstream and extremist websites and then will analyze the differences. Both mainstream and extremist pro-life groups included information on alternatives to abortion, such as adoption or becoming a parent. The idea that we need to stand up for life, or protect, defend, or save innocent life was also prevalent on all five websites. Both the Pro-Life Action League and the Army of God made parallels between abortion and the Holocaust, and referred to abortion clinics as "abortion mills," or "abortuaries." Thus, this notion of what 40 Days for Life refers to as a "culture of death" is magnified on many of these websites, and abortion services are portrayed like death camps, "killing" people in masses (40 Days for Life 2009). Both the Army of God and 40 Days for Life utilized scriptural quotations, although the frequency was much greater for the Army of God's website. See Chart 4 below for a summary of these themes.

Chart 4. Common Themes Identified on Both Mainstream and Extremist Pro-Life Groups' Websites

Themes on Both Mainstream and Extremist Pro-Life Groups' Websites
Information provided regarding alternatives to abortion
The notion that we need to stand up and protect the innocent lives of children
Parallels drawn between abortion practices and the Holocaust
Reference to abortion clinics as "mills" or "abortuaries"
Utilization of scriptural passages and religious language
American imagery

Opposing Themes between Extremist and Mainstream Pro-Life Groups

No photographs, biographies or even names of members are included on the Army of God's website. While there are links to notorious anti-abortion activists' (all of whom have employed violence as their main tactic) personal websites within the Army of God's website, there is no explicit recognition of these individuals as members of the Army of God. Also, an email address and phone number are provided on the Army of

God's website, as well as the address of a reverend who you can send snail mail to, but beyond this the website is completely anonymous. The Army of God also posts no mission statement, philosophy or aim of the organization on its website. While it is evident that the Army of God reveres those who murder abortion doctors, the website does not even explicitly state killing abortion providers as one of the group's goals. The Army of God includes no links to newspaper articles, or to any press releases sent out to the media. Presumably this is because they have not written any, but this is not entirely clear. This contrasts to the very prominent position that all four mainstream pro-life groups hold in the media. Thus, I identified a lack of authorship or identity as a theme on the Army of God's website. This directly contrasts to the mainstream pro-life groups' multitude of smiling photographs and pages of biographical information on key members of the organizations, as well as to their clearly defined philosophies and mission statements.

While the mainstream pro-life groups include many photographs of beautiful, smiling babies and mothers holding their babies, the Army of God has no photographs of babies or of mothers. Instead, upon entering the Army of God's homepage, one is bombarded with extremely graphic photos of aborted fetuses and body parts of aborted fetuses, such as a head or a hand. The Army of God does include smiling photographs on its website, but only of individuals who have killed abortion doctors, such as Scott Roeder (killer of Dr. George Tiller in 2009) and Paul Hill (killer of Dr. John Britton in 1994).

While the Pro-Life Action League, Americans United for Life, and the National Right to Life Committee each argues that abortion hurts women and endangers them, the

Army of God makes no mention whatsoever of the expectant mother. Instead, it focuses solely on the fetus and the killing of "innocent children" (Army of God n.d.). See Charts 5 and 6 below for a summary of these observations and their implications.

Chart 5. Analysis of Themes Identified on Mainstream Pro-Life Groups' Websites

Mainstream Pro-Life Group Observations	What Do These Observations Indicate?
Contact information, biographical information, photographs, clear mission statement, press releases	Clear sense of authorship and group identity
Photographs of healthy, smiling babies both with and without parents	Emphasis on happiness, family, unity, and life
Abortion hurts and endangers women	Focus not only on the potential life, but on the life and welfare of the mother

Chart 6. Analysis of Themes Identified on Extremist Pro-Life Group's Website

Extremist Pro-Life Group Observations	What Do These Observations Indicate?
Very little contact information, no biographical information or photographs, no mission statement or press releases	No sense of authorship or group identity
Gory photographs of aborted fetuses and body parts of aborted fetuses, no photographs except of killers of abortion doctors	Emphasis on violence, blood, destruction, and death
Abortion kills innocent babies	Focus solely on the potential life

DISCUSSION

Although there were many similarities among and between mainstream and extremist pro-life groups, there were also several clear cut differences. The most salient differences can be summarized as follows: mainstream groups focus not only on the life of the unborn child, but also on the life of the mother, while the extremist group focuses solely on the life of the unborn child; mainstream groups have a strong sense of identity

and purpose and display this proudly, while the extremist group has a lack of identity and no clear mission statement; the mainstream groups focus on life and the beauty that children and family bring to the world, while the extremist group focuses only on the bloody, gory aspects of abortion; while the mainstream groups honor mothers and children, the extremist group honors the killers of abortion doctors. Although the mainstream and extremist groups' vastly different presentations of self are very interesting, it seems that the most significant difference, in regards to my research question, is that while mainstream groups focus on happiness, family, unity, and life in terms of both potential life and the life and welfare of the mother, extremist groups focus on violence, blood, destruction, and death, and emphasize only the potential life of the fetus, making no mention of the mother. See Chart 7 for a comparison of these themes.

Chart 7. Comparison of Analyses of Themes Identified on Extremist and Mainstream Pro-Life Groups' Websites

Extremist Pro-Life Group Themes	Mainstream Pro-Life Group Themes
No sense of authorship or group identity	Clear sense of authorship and group identity
Emphasis on violence, blood, destruction, and death	Emphasis on happiness, family, unity, and life
Focus solely on the potential life	Focus not only on the potential life, but on the life and welfare of the mother

What do these differences tell us about extremist and mainstream pro-life organizations? Can we use these results to determine what sets the two groups apart, causing the extremists to use violence and the mainstream pro-lifers to condemn the use of violence? While this research doesn't provide us with a clear cut answer to this question, it does offer clues as to why some groups turn to violence and others don't. First and foremost, the focus on the importance of family and the sanctity of human life that is

present on the mainstream websites indicates that the mainstream groups want to maintain the family and the sanctity of human life, and that killing of *any* kind is directly contrary to this end. On the other hand, the Army of God focuses on the act of abortion itself; blood, gore, evil, sin, and murder are central to its argument that abortion must be stopped at all costs, regardless of the means, as Lemert explains of moral crusaders, "Such people are unconcerned with means to ends..." (1972:19). Almost like the way men are incited to battle in a war by being informed of the atrocities committed by the opposing side, the Army of God incites violent acts by focusing attention on the sick and violent baby killers.

The notion of the "doctrine of necessity" and the utilitarian argument presented in the literature, and exemplified by the Army of God's website, are both central to the group's use of violence and to its presentation of graphic, disturbing photos and battle imagery and language. One could argue that extremist groups like the Army of God see the world through the eyes of a moral crusader, operating with an absolute ethic and viewing the world in very black and white terms. With this worldview, abortion is unequivocally wrong and immoral; as Becker explains of the moral entrepreneur,

The existing rules do not satisfy him because there is some evil which profoundly disturbs him. He feels that nothing can be right in the world until rules are made to correct it. He operates with an absolute ethic; what he sees is truly and totally evil with no qualification. Any means is justified to do away with it. (1963: 147-148)

Thus, Becker's moral entrepreneur will do anything in his power to stop the "evil that disturbs him." In this case, the extremists believe that killing abortion doctors will achieve this end; they consider themselves justified in their actions because they are trying to stop evil and restore God's protection over humanity.

Although all of the mainstream groups condemn abortion, many calling it evil or a sin, in no way do they assert that violence is justified to stop it. In a sense, the mainstream groups frame abortion as a tragedy, whereas the Army of God frames abortion as an atrocity. Thus, even though both types of groups view abortion as murder, they construct abortion in very different ways. Black's notion of "self-help" ties into this analysis; extremist groups like the Army of God assert, not only that murder is justifiable, but it is necessary in order to control what they perceive as deviant behavior. In the case of self-help, the ends justify the means and actions that are labeled criminal in our modern society (i.e. murder, assault etc.) are viewed as acceptable in order to police unacceptable behavior, which in this case is abortion. The mainstream groups hope that what they are doing will eventually restore the sanctity of life and the importance of the family. The extremist groups hope that they too will bring an end to abortion, but they seem to be much more focused on the *means* to achieving this end, rather than the end itself. What I mean by this is that the Army of God seems to be almost obsessed with killing the killers and with exposing the gory photos of aborted babies. Furthermore, the notion of being a soldier in God's army frames the abortion controversy as a war, which again focuses on violence and killing, rather than resolving a heart-wrenching issue. In this sense, it is the extremist group itself who is perpetuating this "culture of death," rather than focusing on restoring the importance of life.

The way in which extremist pro-life groups frame the abortion controversy as a battle between good and evil relates back to Hunter's culture war model and to Lemert and Becker's theoretical work on moral crusade and the moral entrepreneur. Becker explains, "It is appropriate to think of reformers as crusaders because they typically

believe that their mission is a holy one..." (1963: 148). Hunter argues that the culture war is over much more than a particular political issue, such as abortion; instead it is a battle over the values that provide a source of purpose, identity, and togetherness for those who subscribe to them (1991). Thus, for the extremist pro-lifers abortion is not simply about an issue that they disagree with; it shapes their view of the world and their beliefs about right and wrong. I would assert that this is also the case for mainstream pro-lifers, but that a central value to the mainstream groups that is wrapped up in this culture war is the sanctity of *all* human life, and forgiveness even for those who commit wrongdoing (i.e. abortion doctors). Thus, notions of peace, unity, and love are intertwined with the mainstream groups' beliefs about the sanctity of life, and therefore within the culture war, violence is not considered a viable option to stop abortion. However, for the extremists, the culture war is over the evil of abortion and the sense of identity and purpose that the extremists gain from this belief. Thus, in the extremists' view, violence is necessary to stop abortion, and is central to the belief that it is our responsibility to restore God's faith in humanity with whatever means possible.

Let us return to Hirschi's question, "How can a person believe it is wrong to steal at the same time he is stealing?...if both the deviant and the non-deviant believe the deviant act is wrong, how do we account for the fact that one commits it and the other does not?" (1969: 31-32). This question sums up what I was trying to answer with this research: how is it that all pro-life individuals condemn what they consider to be the murder of unborn children or babies, yet a fraction of them also hold that murder is acceptable under certain circumstances? On the surface this idea seems to be deeply flawed, however, according to Hirschi, one approach taken by control theorists to explain

this contradiction argues that those who commit a deviant act (in this instance, kill an abortion doctor), rationalize the behavior "so that he can at once violate the rule and maintain his belief in it...." (1969: 32). We see this rationalization on the Army of God's website in the form of a utilitarian argument for killing abortion doctors: "George Tiller would normally murder between 10 and 30 children...each day. How many babies have been murdered by George Tiller since May 31st when he was stopped by Scott Roeder? Answer: **ZERO**" (Army of God n.d.). Thus, the argument that is upheld in the current literature regarding a utilitarian justification for violence seems to apply to the Army of God, which holds that violence is both a reasonable and logical response to abortion.

Is it feasible that extremist groups like the Army of God believe so strongly that abortion must be stopped, no matter what, that they use graphic and violent images to try and recruit people into "God's army"? The extremists hold a utilitarian mindset and believe that they must try to stop the evil they see in front of them by acting as moral crusaders and employing self-help. Because they hold that abortion is directly contrary to God's wishes, they draw the conclusion that it is God's will to stop abortion, using whatever means will be most effective. In fact, extremists don't view killing abortion doctors as murder at all; instead they view the killings as fulfilling God's will and restoring His faith in humanity. This argument is exemplified in the kinds of scriptural passages included on the Army of God's website, such as Psalm 58:10: "The righteous shall rejoice when he seeth the vengeance: he shall wash his feet in the blood of the wicked" (Army of God n.d.).

Ultimately, what sets these two groups apart is the way in which they frame abortion. The extremists frame abortion as an atrocity that must be stopped with any

means possible, whereas the mainstream pro-lifers view abortion as a tragedy that can be overcome with peace, love and persistence in faith. This is exemplified on the extremist websites with graphic, disturbing images, manipulation of scriptural passages, and the employment of war imagery and language. Conversely, the mainstream pro-lifers' view of abortion is exemplified in their use of photographs of children and families and their focus on unity, forgiveness and love, both in scriptural passages and in the language used on their websites.

The different way in which mainstream and extremist groups utilize scriptural passages on their websites is particularly relevant to understanding what sets the two types of groups apart. For example, the scriptural passages presented on the Army of God's website are overwhelmingly focused on notions of retribution for wrongdoing, evil, or wickedness, such as Psalm 55:15: "Let death seize upon them, and let them go down quick into hell: for wickedness is in their dwellings, and among them" or Jeremiah 48:10: "Cursed be he that doeth the work of the LORD deceitfully, and cursed be he that keepeth back his sword from blood" (Army of God n.d.). As previously mentioned, violence is incited on the Army of God's website not only with pictures of aborted fetuses, but also with scriptural passages that justify punishing wrongdoing with violence. Furthermore, this retributive violence is viewed as following God's wishes and doing God's work. On the other hand, the scriptural passages on the mainstream pro-life groups' websites focus on the importance of prayer, peace, and forgiveness. For example, 40 Days for Life's homepage quotes 2 Chronicles 7:14: "If my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then will I hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and will heal their land" (40

Days for Life 2009). 40 Days for Life's website also includes messages for viewers to "pray to end abortion" (40 Days for Life 2009). This reflects the mainstream pro-life groups' assertion that abortion can be dealt with in a peaceful manner, whereas the extremist pro-life group asserts that violence is the only effective means to end abortion. This stark difference in the way in which scripture is employed to incite either violence and retribution, or peace and forgiveness, reinforces the idea that mainstream pro-life groups frame abortion in terms of a tragedy that can be overcome through prayer and the restoration of God's love and protection, and that extremist pro-life groups frame abortion in terms of an atrocity which must be stopped at all costs, regardless of the means.

CONCLUSION

This research highlights significant differences between mainstream pro-life groups and extremist pro-life groups. These differences are particularly important to identify so that we do not make unwarranted generalizations about pro-life groups and lump the violent and the non-violent groups into one category. As many pro-life leaders have stated, they don't even consider individuals in organizations such as the Army of God to be "pro-life" at all; instead, they argue that "killing in the name of life" is antithetical to everything the pro-life movement stands for (National Right to Life Committee 2009). After George Tiller's death there was a surge of newspaper, magazine, and journal articles addressing how this murder will affect the public's view of the pro-life movement. Many pro-life individuals expressed the fear that the non-violent would get lumped together with the violent, and would discredit the pro-life movement as a whole; many others did just that, citing Dr. Tiller's murder as an example of how

hypocritical the pro-life movement is (National Right to Life Committee 2009). It is my hope that this research has contributed, if only slightly, to refuting this myth that the pro-life movement as a whole condones violence to further its cause.

The scope of this research project did not allow me to perform an in-depth content analysis on organizations such as Operation Rescue or Missionaries to the Preborn, which both state that although they themselves do not use violent tactics, they don't blame others who do, and furthermore do not discourage them from doing so (Operation Rescue 2009). Suggestions for further research would involve doing a similar analysis of groups like this that fall somewhere in between mainstream and extremist groups, in order to examine the differences. This analysis may provide additional information regarding why some groups consider violence to be acceptable while others do not. It would also be very helpful to perform an in-depth analysis of other extremist websites, particularly to see if the Army of God is a fair representation for these types of groups. Unfortunately, I had to use what I could find and, based on preliminary research on the Nuremburg Files and the American Coalition of Life Activists, make the assumption that the Army of God is representative of the extremist pro-life movement. However, further research on this topic would strengthen the findings in this project tremendously. It would also be interesting to recreate this research using different sources, such as pro-life brochures, manuals, books, radio stations, or magazines. This would help to dispel some of the problematic aspects of internet research and would, as with analysis of additional extremist organizations, greatly strengthen the findings of this research.

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