

**Chapter 1: Introduction**

“The current ethical and policy issues with long-acting contraceptives have an important historical context. Well-intentioned efforts to empower all women, including poor women of color, must be balanced with a keen sense of the abuses evident in the history of the birth control movement. Racism and eugenic concerns have been consistent issues in debates about controlling fertility, and out targeted educational programs and initiatives must be sensitive to community concerns. Empowering women to make their own reproductive choices is a praiseworthy goal. It can only be achieved if we maintain an awareness of the successes and failures in the history of the birth control movement” (Kathleen E. Powderly, 1995, *Hastings Center Report*, Vol: 25 issue 1)

The birth control movement in the United States historically “provides clear examples of the tensions that have always existed between empowering women to control their fertility and promoting limitations on fertility for the disadvantaged” (Powderly 1995: 563). In a similar fashion, internationally, two different philosophies have promoted reproductive rights; women’s human rights and population control (Freedman and Isaacs 1993). Tensions also arise in the provision of birth control because the meaning and experience of reproduction varies radically across women, yet INGOs often seek to identify and promote universalistic visions of reproductive rights. Tension is a key word in this dissertation. Examining the issue of reproductive rights through a globalization and gender framework allows me to hone in on and better understand these tensions.

More specifically, in my work I seek to understand whether international reproductive rights organizations can engage in universalistic discourses while simultaneously being inclusive of diverse women and reproductive practices. My main research questions are:

- 1) Who gets access to sites to define human rights and reproductive issues?
- 2) Within organizations, what is the relationship between interpreting universal conceptions of reproductive rights and being inclusive of diverse women and reproductive practices?
- 3) How do organizations working on reproductive issues conceptualize and bring in the local and/or diverse issues?
  - a) How does this affect who is seen as having expertise to define the issues?

4) What is the process through which reproductive rights are constructed in organizations and who is included in this process?

a) What tensions do the organizations face in this process and how do they deal with the tensions?

Before moving forward to discuss my interest in and background of my dissertation topic, I must include a discussion of two key terms used in this dissertation: universal (or universality) and diverse. These two terms are commonly used both in social science and common discourse, though their meanings are not always clear. Both terms imply a conception of power, which is important to the ways I use them in my dissertation.

Beginning with the term universal, this term stems from both the gender and globalization literatures, in particular human rights and international law for the latter. Although the terms' meaning is similar across the two literatures, I draw upon the globalization literature in utilizing "universal" in my dissertation and my research questions. Typically, universal is thought of as a concept or idea that *should* apply everywhere which implies that there is agreement upon the idea or concepts' meaning. For example, human rights' norms as stated in international law, such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) or the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), are considered to be universal as they have agreed upon meaning and thus thought to apply to all people and places. Yet, as I discuss in more depth in Chapters 2 and 3, the idea of human rights in relation to universal applicability is contested in that many believe that these ideas of human rights advocated by the international community, such as the United Nations, are Westernized conceptions (Matua 2001) or are enforced differently in developing versus developed nations (Boyle, Smith, and Guenther 2007). Thus, the term universal norms, in my case applied to reproductive rights, implies hegemonic ideas regarding these norms. And, related, as I explain in Chapter 3, is that these "universal norms" are often stated in ambiguous terms in international documents, which leaves room for interpretation.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> In Chapter 2, I also describe how the term universal applies to conceptions of gender. Although different from the discussion of universal in international law, it is similar in that a "universal" definition of gender assumes that all women (or men) experience gender the same because of their assumed biological sex. Yet, multi-cultural and international feminists have shown how gender is not a universally experienced category because of the intersections of race, class, and other identities with gender. Lastly, universal definitions of

My use of the term diverse also requires discussion. A popular term both in everyday, popular and academic discourse, this term is also contested and ambiguously used. As Bell and Hartmann (2007) point out in their work, people often infer diversity to mean race. When asked about diversity, people list a range of identities or attitudes, but when asked about specific examples of experiencing diversity, they focus on race. In a similar light, Anderson and Hill-Collins (2007) critique the world diverse because it has been used as a way to celebrate difference (i.e. different cultures) at the expense of addressing structural inequalities these groups face in society. As they state, “... diversity and difference are recognized in society, but these groups continue to be defined as ‘other’; that is they are perceived through dominant group values, treated in exclusionary ways, and subjected to social injustice and economic inequality” (9). Furthermore, they argue that “... dominant ways of thinking remain centered in the experiences of a few” (9). Thus, in my dissertation, and specifically in my research questions, I ask how organizations are inclusive of diverse women and reproductive practices in their interpretation of reproductive rights. What do I mean by this in light of the this discussion?

Through the phrasing of my questions, it is implied that diverse (or different women) are not included in the universal agreed upon reproductive rights’ norms. And by phrasing my questions this way in using the term diverse, this could imply the “othering” of minority women across the globe. However, my point is not to name these groups as the “other”, but to draw attention to and explore how a gendered issue, such as reproductive rights, may be defined and interpreted by dominant groups in society (i.e. White and Western; see Chapter 3). Thus, by asking how diverse women and reproductive practices are or are not included in the interpretation and advocacy of reproductive rights, I highlight the power embedded within these visions of “universal” reproductive rights norms and their interpretations. I further draw attention to how the locations in which human rights are defined are stratified settings and the characteristics of organizations that are more likely to recognize structural inequalities and power differences among groups of women in addressing reproductive rights. Hence, my use of

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gender tend to stem from hegemonic normative visions of gender derived from White, Western middle class standards.

the term diverse does imply difference in that I assume that not all women experience reproduction the same or have equal power in defining reproductive rights. Yet, in drawing upon difference, I highlight the key sociological aspects of power and inequality and attempt not to reify the “othering” of these groups.

In my research, I examine the complexity and tension in ideals of human rights, globalization, and conceptions of gender through the lens of reproduction. While numerous studies have been done on reproduction, few have focused on organizations located in the West doing international work on reproductive rights. Most demography research tends to be quantitative examining factors that affect fertility and related concepts such as mortality (except for Watkins 1993). More interdisciplinary and women’s studies work has examined reproductive rights on the ground, looking at women’s perceptions of contraception, country specific family planning programs, and other actors involved such as men and family planning workers in addition to women.

Sociological work on reproduction and reproductive rights covers a large span from the criminalization of pregnancy (Gomez 1997), historical and specific concerns with abortion (Ginsburg 1989), teen pregnancy (Luker 1997), the pill, and medicalization of reproductive events to name a few. The new trend in reproduction research in sociology examines structural factors and institutions that affect events such as breast feeding, Caesarean sections, and natural childbirth<sup>2</sup>. Specific neo-institutionalist studies on reproduction have examined two related factors. Barrett and Frank (1999) examined international population discourse historically to the present to assess international and global factors that prompted certain national discourses about population. Barrett and Tsui (1999) examined nation state population policies in regards to funding.

Universal, or “essentialist”, definitions of gender assume all women are the same via the biological rationale of their sex; hence, all women would have similar experiences. On the other hand, through the evolution of feminist movements and theories, social scientists have come to recognize that not all women experience gender the same. Race, class, ethnicity, and other statuses interact with gender to create different experiences for diverse groups of women. This is defined as intersectionality (Mohanty

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<sup>2</sup> This is discerned from some published research, but also sessions on reproductive health at professional sociology meetings, and debates over feminist sociology list-serves (such as SWS and Repronetwork).

1992). One thing to point out, which I discuss further in Chapter 3, is that the gendered experience of reproduction is not the same for all women. A trite example, but one that highlights the point, is the historical eugenics philosophy in the United States. Anti-natalist sentiments aimed at the poor and immigrants sought to limit their reproduction, while pro-natalist policies encouraged the reproduction of majority groups (i.e. White, middle-class, non-immigrants). Thus, reproduction not experienced the same, but this links back to the question of how a universal human rights principle concerned with gender can be interpreted and/or applied globally across diverse groups of women. This is of particular concern because the definition of reproductive rights in international law is ambiguous (Eriksson 2000). Thus, I am interested in organizations' interpretation of this ambiguity in defining reproductive rights.

In this dissertation, I examine reproductive right, using neo-institutionalist and feminist theories of globalization, through organizations that deal with reproductive issues internationally. Traditionally, neo-institutionalist studies have focused on assessing why nation states across the globe are similar in their policies. Few neo-institutionalist studies, except those named above and Boyle's (2002) work on female genital cutting, have examined reproduction. While there is much feminist work on reproduction and globalization, as highlighted above, few take the approach of looking at organizations located in the West that work on reproduction in assessing their inclusivity.

These two strands of globalization theory are concerned with the transfer and penetration of global cultural norms. Neo-institutionalism tends to focus more on a top-down approach, assessing reasons, such as legitimacy and funding, as to why nation states and other international actors endorse international norms that may not mesh with local culture.<sup>3</sup> Feminist theories of globalization on the other hand tend to be more concerned with the interactive process of local cultural change and international norms. Although feminist theories of globalization agree with neo-institutionalism on the idea that top-down mandates of cultural change are important, they place more significance on local initiative. Thus, feminist theories of globalization argue that the local matters in the

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<sup>3</sup> This is defined as decoupling (see Songora 2006 or Boyle 2002 for further discussion).

processing of constructing global norms. It can both contest or reinterpret global norms and simultaneously affect the process of globalization.

I utilize both theories in tandem with each other to understand how organizations interpret and advocate international norms about reproductive rights and issues. Although one theory explains some organizations better than the other does, I am not attempting to test these theories or generalize from the few cases I have. Instead, I see these theories as explanatory tools to help explain why the organizations interpret international norms about reproductive rights in different or similar ways. Furthermore, elements of both of the theories can be applied to various organizations. Lastly, in my work I hope to show how these two theories, which have typically been pitted against each other, can speak to each other in displaying the different ways universalism is interpreted regarding reproductive rights and local concerns, particularly as my conclusions point to both pragmatic and theoretical concerns about the different interpretations and levels of inclusivity.

In Chapter 2, I examine diverse literatures to understand the debates regarding gender, globalization, human rights, reproductive rights, and organizations. I begin with a detailed discussion of the gender literature pointing to the importance of understanding gender through an intersectional lens and how this affects gendered experiences, including reproduction by detailing the evolution and critiques of feminism both within the United States and internationally. I then discuss work on feminist organizations and on gender and organizations generally. Next, I present the relevant globalization literature by discussing the evolution globalization theories, from modernization theory, which assumes the non-West will develop similar to the West, to current theories that detail global inequalities, such as world-systems theory. Speaking more specifically to concerns about human rights and culture in globalization, I discuss the key works in neo-institutionalism, which argue that cultural change happens in a top-down fashion because of legitimacy and benefits bestowed on actors by the international system. I then present feminist theories of globalization, which argue that local actors do not merely accept the norms suggested by international community, but instead may contest or re-interpret these. Proponents of these theories also argue that these contestations and re-

interpretations are themselves a significant influence on global norms. Related to this discussion of globalization, I include details from critical human rights authors who believe that the current human rights agenda and movement is rooted in a Western imperialistic perspective.

In Chapter 3, I delve into the specific case of international law and reproductive rights, focusing my discussion on how international law defines reproductive rights as a human right, and the problems inherent in doing so.

I examine my research questions through a multi-method qualitative approach including ethnography at the Commission on the Status of Women meetings at the UN and other international events relating to reproduction, interviews with organizations I observed, and lastly content analysis of the organizations' websites. My methodology and its rationale are spelled out in Chapter 4.

Even if organizations wanted to be inclusive of every possible person and perspective, the environment they operate within forecloses certain types of interactions. In Chapter 5, I focus on my role as a participant observer at the United Nations through the international committee of Sociologists for Women in Society (SWS) and at International Women's Day Celebrations in Minnesota. I point out the barriers that may keep many individuals and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) from participating in these type of meetings. Individuals who encounter these barriers are less likely to interact with reproductive rights organizations, even when the organizations would like to be inclusive.

Chapters 6 and 7 present my empirical data and analysis on interpretations of reproductive rights and inclusivity. In Chapter 6, I analyze the organizations' sources of legitimacy in relation to how this affects the organizations' inclusion of diverse views in their framing of reproductive rights and who has the expertise to define reproductive issues (the organization, locals, or both). I do this by analyzing the organizations' presentations in public, activist settings, where diverse women react to the organizations' messages. In addition, I analyze the organizations' sources of legitimacy through an analysis of their websites. The information from the websites illustrates how the

organizations present themselves and who their information is catered to through contextual and visual cues that cannot be assessed in the observations or interviews.

In Chapter 7, I analyze interview data to examine how the organizations define reproductive rights, or in other words, how they interpret universal reproductive rights' norms. In doing this, I analyze the organizations' history, goals, subjective characterizations of the organizations in addition to examining the organizations' definitions of reproductive rights asked in my interviews. I specifically examine the elements of their definition (health, rights, and empowerment), if the definition was concise or fragmented, and the specific contraceptive methods and issues mentioned. Thus, this chapter further accentuates my argument that an organization's interpretation of universality and inclusivity in applying and defining reproductive rights is affected by whom they aim their message at, what framework they use to understand the importance of reproductive issues (demography/scientific, legal, meta philosophical narratives, and so on) and what type of work they do (i.e. health, legal, service, access). Furthermore, inclusivity is also affected by what groups the organization focuses on and how they focus on group(s) within a global or international focus.

My concluding chapter, Chapter 8, pulls together the analysis from the previous chapters by a comparison of the organizations' definitions of reproductive rights in relation to the literatures presented in Chapters 2 and 3. This chapter further iterates the theoretical explanations of neo-institutionalism and feminist theories of globalization in relation to the organizations' interpretation of universalism and inclusion of diverse views in reproductive rights. In addition, I make theoretical contributions to both these literatures by posing questions on pragmatic and theoretical concerns related to differing ways of including diverse views in international reproductive rights.

Before moving to the heart of my dissertation where I present the literature, data, and analysis, I reflect for a moment on my personal interest in the subject matter. In presenting my work, I have been asked if a White middle class woman from the United States has the ability to interpret inclusiveness of diverse views. In other words, on an epistemological level, how do I know that my analysis is not shadowed by my own "Western-ness"? One response is that I cannot know for sure. However, I believe my

training in both sociology and feminist studies, particularly in light of the literatures utilized in this dissertation, give me a foundation to make the analysis that follows. Furthermore, my personal interest in this subject highlights my concern with inclusion of diverse views and sensitivity about who gets to decide what is right or good for others. To highlight this interest and my ability to assess representation and inclusiveness, I will begin with a couple of personal stories.

Having done two types of volunteer work in the pro-choice movement, I have two different examples of how the “other” is created. My first volunteer role was working on a letters to the editor campaign. Focusing on funding for the organization from the Minnesota state legislature, the organization was facing attacks from the largest pro-life organization in the state. What is important to highlight here is how the pro-choice side of the movement, the only one to which I had direct access, defined women who were pro-life. In an interview with the public affairs director at the pro-choice organization, she told me that pro-life women “sat home and ate bon-bons.” She expected me to take her side on this issue and name the pro-life women as such in my work. Having a at one time pro-life best friend who donated money to pro-life organizations and having read the literatures on abortion and social movements, it was hard for me to agree with the public affairs director’s characterization of all people who are pro-life as a certain way.

Pro-choice and pro-life groups are historically entangled in a framing/counter-framing battle in their social movement activities (Meyer and Staggenborg 1998). Fried (1990) conducted research when the first abortion clinic opened in Fargo, North Dakota, talking to women on both sides of the abortion debate. She concluded the women were really concerned about similar issues pertaining to gender, but talked about them in different ways.

What does this story mean in light of representation and inclusion? It points to the characterization of groups and advocacy. It also points to how feminism has been defined as pertaining only to certain contentious issues; in this case abortion politics. These varying conceptions of feminism and debates over its evolution will be highlighted more in Chapter 2. However, for the time being, I will point out that one must assess in this case how race and class have influences on views on abortion.

My next story is about the same organization, but I played a different role in my volunteer activities. I volunteered to represent the organization at summer festivals. The goal of our presence was not to promote abortion services, but to highlight the clinical services available by the organization for general reproductive and sexual health, including contraception options. Beyond other traditional promotional materials such as brochures and other trinkets, we also had free condoms and dental dams available. As volunteers, we attended a training for our participation in these festivals, which ranged from general women's health events to many festivals catered to specific ethnic and racial populations in the Twin Cities. We had the organization's diversity expert talk to us during our training. She mentioned something that I had not particularly thought much about before, but linked to and "made real" what I had learned in sociology and women's studies. She told us that we would be going into some communities in which women would be resistant to our message, particularly about using contraception. She gave the example of Latina women. She assured us the women did want to use modern forms of contraception, but it was the patriarchal culture, the *machismo* of the men, and the Catholic church that prevented them from expressing or acting on their desire for contraception. Maybe this is true, but three things. One, how do we know it is true? Two, is it true for all Latina women? Three, if it is not true, what is my role as middle class White educated women telling other women what they should be doing? Thus, in my dissertation I am interested in examining how organizations include multiple voices, the factors that affect the variation in inclusion, and the consequences of the different framing strategies.