

**Rethinking Social Movement Participation and Non-Participation: How and Why South
Dakota Pro-Choice Clergy Perceive, Confront, and Navigate Risks**

by

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This paper challenges predominant assumptions and definitions presented in social movement literature about risk, activism, and social movement participation by examining the unique case of South Dakota pro-choice clergy. Whereas past research assumes that participation in social movement-related activities results in activist identity, this study shows that perceptions of risk, rather than social movement activities, determine whether or not these clergy join the social movement group, Pastors for Moral Choices, and whether or not they identify as activists. Further, I show that factors often credited with causing social movement participation may be the same factors used to justify not participating in social movements. Finally, I find that progressive clergy perceive multiple levels of risk within the conservative state of South Dakota, and they navigate these risks and advocate for reproductive rights by acting as “whistleblowers.” Overall, this paper complicates social movement concepts and categories and seeks to challenge what is taken for granted in social movement research.

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PREFACE

I thank all of the clergy who took time from their busy days to talk to me. They welcomed me into their homes and churches and were gracious with their time. I thank Kate Looby, director of Planned Parenthood of South Dakota, for her support of my project. I am especially grateful to Phil Schumacher, the lay organizer of Pastors for Moral Choices. Without our many emails and phone exchanges, his willingness to provide information related to P4MC, and his efforts to contact supportive clergy, this study would not have taken place. I thank my committee members, Dr. Mohammed Bamyeh and Dr. Akiko Hashimoto for their feedback. I am extremely grateful to my advisor, Dr. Kathy Blee, for her thoughtful comments on several drafts of this paper and her guidance over my research. I thank Kim Creasap, Amy McDowell, and Kat Gray for their thoughtful feedback, productive workshops, and much needed encouragement.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

South Dakota made national headlines in March 2006 when Governor Mike Rounds signed into law a bill banning all abortions unless the life of the mother was in danger. This unprecedented action sparked abortion rights activists from the state and nation to fight to overturn the law they deemed unconstitutional. They successfully filed a petition to make the law a ballot initiative in the November 2006 election, and a small majority (55 percent) of South Dakota residents voted to overturn the initiative. Another abortion ban—this time including more exceptions—appeared on the 2008 ballot, and it was also narrowly overturned by the state’s voters. Nonetheless, South Dakota continues to have arguably the most restrictive reproductive health laws in the country. Currently, if a woman seeks to terminate her pregnancy in the state, she must receive state-directed and scripted counseling that will inform her that she will be at a higher risk for depression and suicide if she has an abortion and that she will be terminating the “life” of a “whole, separate, unique living human being.” She is then offered to see a sonogram and must wait 24 hours before the procedure can be performed. The director of the Sioux Falls Planned Parenthood, the only clinic in the state to offer abortion services, has received multiple death threats, and she describes South Dakota as being one of the most religiously conservative states in the nation.

Seventy percent of South Dakota's residents are religiously affiliated, more than any other state in the Midwest¹ except North Dakota. Roman Catholics and conservative Lutherans (from the Wisconsin and Missouri Synod) are the dominant affiliations in the state as a whole, comprising almost 50 percent of those with religious affiliations. Methodists make up seven percent, Baptists make up four, and United Church of Christ affiliates make up three. There are three Jewish synagogues and only one Muslim Mosque in the entire state (Barlow and Silk 2004). Many religious groups in South Dakota, including Catholics, Lutherans, and most other Protestant denominations, are visibly anti-abortion.²

In 2005, to respond to the dominant anti-abortion religious presence in the state, Planned Parenthood staff and interns at the Sioux Falls clinic (myself included) organized a small group of sympathetic ministers to discuss the formation of a pro-choice clergy group. This small group of Protestant clergy formed Pastors for Moral Choices (P4MC), the first and only formal pro-choice religious group in the state. While maintaining close ties with the local Planned Parenthood, they expanded to become an active political force in South Dakota. P4MC created a website and its members write to the legislature and local newspapers on issues related to reproductive rights. The group organized its two largest events during the 2006 campaign to overturn the abortion ban. In two South Dakota cities, they hosted conferences, both titled "Controversy and Clergy," which addressed controversial political topics including gay rights and abortion. The goal of this event was to allow an opportunity for progressive clergy in the area to receive literature on political topics and to interact with other liberal religious leaders.

¹ Barlow and Silk (2004) define North Dakota, South Dakota, Nebraska, Kansas, Minnesota, Iowa, Wisconsin, Illinois, Michigan, Ohio, Indiana collectively as the Midwest.

² Throughout this paper I use the term, "anti-abortion," instead of "pro-life" or "right-to-life." Although some anti-abortion activists are "pro-life" in the sense that they oppose capital punishment, support nuclear disarmament, etc., most are not, and "anti-abortion" best describes their political activities (Blanchard 1994).

P4MC did not allow journalists to attend the conference in order to maintain the anonymity of the clergy who attended. P4MC members note that this anonymity was necessary to draw a large crowd at the event. According to one member,

We had to do a lot of reassuring that no press were going to be allowed in. [Clergy asked] ‘would there be any photos taken [...]?’ [We had to say], ‘no, no photos.’ We had another person who said, even if the press weren’t there, he was confident there would be ‘right to lifers’ there taking down license plates, and that they would find out who he was, and it would get back to his congregation. So a huge amount of fear, a very high level of fear.

A second event, a press conference, was organized precisely to attract the public’s attention to clergy who opposed the abortion ban. At this event, P4MC members read a statement on behalf of the group, and approximately 30 clergy stood to visibly support P4MC and abortion rights in the state of South Dakota. P4MC members successfully recruited other sympathetic clergy to the event with a simple message: “we’re saying this is your chance to speak out. You’ve got to show up. We need you.” This visibility was important since, according to P4MC members, most South Dakota residents do not know that some religious leaders are pro-choice. The very presence of pro-choice clergy in a public setting counters the claim of religious anti-abortion activists that Christian beliefs are inevitably anti-abortion beliefs. P4MC continues its presence within the abortion debate in the state, and since my fieldwork in May 2008, the group became an official nonprofit organization under the national organization, Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice (RCRC).

1.1 CATEGORIZING RELIGIOUS GROUPS

For this paper, I do not disclose clergy's specific denominational affiliations since the religious community in South Dakota is relatively small. Therefore, I categorize Protestant denominations into four groups: mainline, liberal, conservative, and fundamentalist.

I use mainline Protestant to describe denominations including the United Methodist Church, the Episcopal Church, the Presbyterian Church USA, and the Disciples of Christ. I use liberal Protestant to describe denominations including the United Church of Christ, Unitarian Universalists,³ and the Religious Society of Friends (Quaker). Both mainline and liberal Protestant denominations place emphasis on a non-literal interpretation of the bible and on social justice issues (Balmer and Winner 2002). Mainline denominations differ from liberal ones in that they are more conservative now than they were 30 years ago, and they are currently divided over controversial political topics, such as gay rights and abortion. Liberal denominations, for the most part, are liberal both theologically and politically and support abortion rights and gay rights (Hertzke 1988). I use conservative Protestant to describe the Lutheran traditions of the Missouri and Wisconsin Synod and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (Balmer and Winner 2002). Especially in South Dakota, these denominations are more visibly anti-abortion and anti-gay rights than are other mainline denominations (Barlow and Silk 2004; Olson, Crawford, and Guth 2000).

I consider fundamentalism to be “a small subset of conservative Protestants [...who] emphasize a strict literal interpretation of the bible” (Woodberry and Smith 1998: 28). This tradition believes in a universal truth and that the bible speaks specifically on moral issues such

³ Although Unitarian Universalists do not consider themselves to be solely Christian, many scholars categorize this denomination with other liberal sects of Protestantism (see Olson, Crawford, and Guth 2000).

as sexual chastity, abortion, and homosexuality (Jelen 1993). Denominations from this tradition include the Southern Baptist Convention, the Assembly of God, and the Christian Reformed Church, and also include a growing number of nondenominational contemporary churches (Guth Green, Smidt, Kellstedt, Paloma 1997). Clergy in this study note that the anti-abortion presence in the state comes not only from fundamentalist Protestants, but also from the Catholic church that openly opposes abortion and from many mainline and conservative Protestant clergy, who identify as anti-abortion almost as often as do fundamentalist clergy (Blanchard 1994; Jelen 1993).

1.2 PURPOSE OF RESEARCH

As recent, well-publicized events across the globe demonstrate, religion can motivate people to take severe risks in pursuit of political goals. Yet there is relatively little research on the role of religious faith in high-risk activism in the United States, where activists may face risks to their livelihood or social standing rather than (or in addition to) risks of physical violence. This case study explores US high-risk activism by comparing South Dakota pro-choice clergy who became active in an abortion rights group with comparable sympathetic clergy who did not. The questions driving this study are: How do South Dakota pro-choice clergy navigate their political and religious beliefs in an environment that is religiously conservative with a strong anti-abortion sentiment? How do South Dakota pro-choice clergy perceive risks associated with being a religious leader who supports reproductive rights? Why do some clergy choose to confront perceived risks and participate in visible pro-choice activism while other

clergy, even those who share the same faith and political beliefs, decline to do so? This study sheds new light on how people draw on religious frameworks to make political decisions. Further, the focus on clergy who support abortion rights will help counterbalance the overwhelming scholarly attention to religious leaders who engage politically in opposition to abortion.

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

To better understand the specific case of South Dakota pro-choice clergy, I review social movement literature focusing on factors that influence participation in social movements, specifically movements that are associated with potential risks. Next, I examine the ways in which risk is conceptualized by scholars who study “high-risk activism,” and then discuss how researchers understand the relationship between joining social movements, participating in social movement activities, and activist identity. I conclude by summarizing this literature as it relates to this project’s research questions.

2.1 CREATING CLOSENESS TO SOCIAL MOVEMENTS

A common thread in social movement scholarship focusing on incentives for joining social movements is the necessary “closeness” an individual must feel with a particular social movement. In this section I review two factors often attributed to influencing this closeness: ideological affinity to a movement’s goals and interpersonal networks.

Ideology is often credited with influencing social movement participation; that is, individuals join social movements when their beliefs match up with the articulated ideology of a social movement (Barkan, Cohn, and Whitaker 1993). Social movement participants often have strong political beliefs before they join social movements and such beliefs influence which

movements they are likely to join (Schussman and Soule 2005). This is especially true for clergy whose political beliefs intersect with religious faith. As Guth et. al point out, “the extent of clergy activism often depends upon the mesh between the current national agenda and those issues that their own worldviews identify as vital” (1997: 14). For example, Jelen (1993) argues that since fundamentalist Protestant clergy are likely to believe that the opposition to abortion and other moral reform issues are central components of their faith, they are more likely to be anti-abortion activists than mainline Protestant clergy, who may identify as anti-abortion but who do not necessarily consider moral reform to be a crucial component of their faith. For religious activists, faith plays an important role in shaping ideological support for social movements.

However, ideological alignment does not inevitably lead to social movement activity. Consider the fact that female clergy are far more liberal on the issue of abortion than both male clergy and the public, yet female clergy are not more likely to be activists than their male counterparts or the public (Crawford, Deckman, and Braun 2001). Specifically for activism that involves high-risks, McAdam finds that participants share an “intense ideological identification with the values of the movement” (1986: 64), but that this ideological identification alone does not prompt activism. His study, comparing participants in the Freedom Summer project with “no-shows” who applied to participate and then did not, finds that both participants and the no-shows support the ideology of the Civil Rights Movement.

McAdam (1986) concludes that ideology is a necessary but not sufficient cause of high-risk activism, but Munson (2008) challenges this claim with his in-depth qualitative study of American anti-abortion activists. He finds that in some cases, anti-abortion beliefs actually develop after an individual participates in social movement activities, revealing an “action before belief” model that counters much social movement scholarship. Before involvement in the anti-

abortion movement, many individuals in Munson's study were ambivalent about abortion and some were even pro-choice. Once involved in the anti-abortion movement, activists express a wide range of beliefs that are often contradictory. As Munson indicates, ideology for social movement participants cannot be considered pre-existing, homogeneous, or causally related to successful movement recruitment.

In addition to (or instead of) ideological affinity with a social movement, interpersonal networks prompt social movement participation. Also called microstructural factors (McAdam 1986) or structural availability (Schussman and Soule 2005), these networks stem from social and/or organizational ties. Individuals almost always join social movements after they have been asked to participate (Schussman and Soule 2005). White (1992) finds that social ties allow for the nonaggrieved, or those with no apparent grievances, to feel connected with the aggrieved and become involved in social movements. Even those with no apparent grievances to prompt activism sometimes appropriate the grievances of others and commit to social movements. For example, participants in the Solidarity Movement had no personal connection to the oppression of the poor in Central America. Nepstad (2004) finds that individuals became involved in the movement after spending time with missionary activists who used Christian themes to prompt movement involvement. This shows that ideology does indeed influence social movement participation but that it often depends on social ties.

Research on clergy activists also acknowledges that organizational and professional ties influence political involvement. Crawford, Olson, and Deckman (2001) find that women clergy are more likely to become activists if they are highly socialized in their profession. Clergy serving within traditions with other like-minded clergy are more likely to become political activists. For controversial issues, clergy with ties to clergy organizations are more likely to

become involved with local social movement activity (Olson 2002). For example, the first formal pro-choice clergy organization, the Clergy Counseling Service for Abortions (CCSA) successfully recruited sympathetic clergy by using networks of clergy who were involved in the Civil Rights Movement (Carmen and Moody 1974).

Specifically for high-risk activism, ideology and interpersonal ties may be more important than the belief that a social movement will succeed in reaching its goals. As Jasper (1997) reminds us, social movement participation is not always motivated by the prospect of a movement's success; instead, participation is often an end in itself, and individuals often decide to join a social movement for personal gratification. In her study of Plowshare activists, Nepstad (2008) points out that even though the movement has never reached its goals of nuclear disarmament or changing the Catholic Church's position on war, 200 people have participated in approximately 80 Plowshare actions since 1980. These actions often lead to the arrest of participants, yet Plowshare activists "felt an obligation to act" (Nepstad 2008: 2) because of both strong ideological convictions and close personal ties to other activists.

Through ideological alignment and interpersonal networks individuals become convinced that social movements are "close" to meaningful aspects of their lives. For some social movements, this closeness is obvious because of primary personal experiences. For example, most gay rights activists are either gay themselves or have gay family members or friends. Closeness to a social movement, from personal experience, social ties, and ideology, is revealed through real personal stakes that include the very lives of gay individuals (Armstrong 2002). Also for the Child Sexual Abuse Survivors' Movement, most participants are survivors of sexual abuse, and are therefore intimately connected to the social movement through primary experiences (Whittier 2001).

For many movements, participants cannot rely on primary experiences to provide ideological affinity or interpersonal networks to prompt activism, and therefore closeness to a movement must be created through other means. Nepstad and Smith (2001) argue that people of faith, specifically Catholics, were most likely to participate in the Solidarity Movement because they were most likely to come into personal contact with Central Americans through American missionary programs. These secondary personal experiences provided “closeness” to the movement and instigated feelings of moral outrage that prompted movement participation. On the other hand, Whittier (2001) finds that secondary experiences involving intimate knowledge of people’s suffering may not positively affect social movement participation. For the Child Sexual Abuse Survivors’ Movement, television portrayals of survivors produced ambivalent responses. Because talk shows often portray the helplessness of survivors, Whittier notes that “feelings of pity and horror are not particularly conducive to mobilization” (2001: 244). More research is needed in order to know if different television portrayals, of the strength of survivors for example, would in fact influence mobilization.

More research is also needed in order to better understand what causes social movement participation and what incentives lead people to become activists (Barkan, Cohn, and Whitaker 1993). Most studies on joining social movements focus on social movement participants, that is, their data often are from joiners. On the abortion debate specifically, Munson (2008) points out that researchers have spent far more time comparing pro-life and pro-choice movements, instead of comparing joiners with non-joiners. This makes motivation to initially join a movement difficult to determine since a social movement participant’s memories of such motivation are influenced and often altered by the movement itself. Indeed, an individual’s biography is often reconstructed in a way that better fits the rhetoric of any given movement (Jasper 1997). Further,

because most studies do not include non-participants, it is unclear whether or not those factors that motivate participation in social movements for some people also exist for individuals who do not join social movements.

2.2 RISK AND SOCIAL MOVEMENTS

Most research on factors that influence social movement participation fail to account for potential risks associated with activism. As McAdam points out, this scholarship tends to “focus on only the safest, least risky forms of activism” (1986: 66). Many studies that do focus on high-risk activism use religious-based social movements as their case for analysis (see Nepstad and Smith 1999; Nepstad 2004; 2008; Wiltfang and McAdam 1991; Wood 2001). This section will review how risk is conceptualized in social movement research, paying special attention to the role of religion in such activism. There is no consensus on the definition of risk in social movements, and scholars use the concept in different ways.

McAdam (1986) first explores the concept of high-risk/cost activism as it applies to participants of the Freedom Summer campaign during the Civil Rights Movement. He defines risk as the “anticipated dangers—whether legal, social, physical, financial, and so forth” (1986: 67). Similar to our everyday use of the word, McAdam understands risk as something that one takes. He measures taking risks as participating in the Freedom Summer campaign; those who do not participate avoid taking risks and thus avoid high-risk activism. What distinguished those who took risks and those who did not was biographical availability, or the “absence of personal constraints” that would increase risks for certain individuals, such as their employment and familial responsibilities. Davis (2005), in his personal account of pro-choice clergy activism,

validates McAdam's notion of biographical availability for clergy activists. For clergy, personal constraints include the type of congregation, denomination, and the geographical area in which clergy minister. If clergy work within moderate-liberal congregations in urban areas, they are more likely to avoid personal constraints associated with liberal activism and are more likely to visibly support abortion rights.

Although McAdam's use of biographical availability is extremely relevant for clergy activism, his use of the concept in relation to high-risk activism is somewhat contradictory. He argues that Freedom Summer participants are high-risk activists because of "anticipated dangers," yet he also states that participants are biographically available (such as students without job or family responsibilities) and therefore reduce risks associated with participation. On the one hand, the activism in question involves high risks; on the other hand, those who participate in activism have lower risks than others. This contradiction shows a gap in social movement literature; more research is needed on how risks are dynamic and differ depending on an individual's context. It would be fruitful to expand beyond a notion of high-risk activism as being defined by either taking risks or not.

Two studies on the Solidarity Movement challenge and expand upon McAdam's (1986) findings (Wiltfang and McAdam 1991; Nepstad and Smith 1999). Wiltfang and McAdam (1991) attempt to correct McAdam's dichotomous definition of risks (as being taken or not) and distinguishes between objective and subjective risks. However, the measures for these variables are extremely limited: objective risk is defined as having direct contact with Central American refugees (lack of contact signals lack of risk), and subjective risk is defined by only one attribute, the fear of being arrested. Their study confirms McAdam's (1986) finding that biographical availability is the greatest predictor of high-risk activities and that prior activism and religious

involvement (measured by church attendance) are also predictors of such activities; however, Nepstad and Smith (1999) find that biographical availability is not a predictor of high-risk activism. Those who were biographically unavailable and still participated in the Solidarity Movement possessed skills and abilities to overcome risks; such skills went unnoticed by McAdam (1986) and Wiltfang and McAdam (1991) since they rely on survey data that masks the potential for individual agency.

Nepstad and Smith (1999) introduce the important dimension of navigating risks associated with social movement activities. Unlike previous studies on high-risk activism, they understand that activism involves more than a decision to take risks or avoid risks. When considering high-risk activism, one must seek to understand “agency, commitment, and personal abilities” that motivate individuals to navigate risks, instead of simply “taking” them (1999: 38). Both Wiltfang and McAdam (1991) and Nepstad and Smith (1999) acknowledge that social movements consist of numerous activities that involve various levels of risk. The dynamic and changing components in their analyses are the activities themselves, not the risks. Whether or not perceptions of risk associated with a single activity change based on individual context is unknown.

2.3 PARTICIPATION, IDENTITY, AND ACTIVITIES

As noted in Section 1.1, social movement research focuses almost exclusively on those who choose to participate instead of those who don't. In a notable exception, Oegema and

Klandermans (1994) use a case study on the Dutch Peace Movement to focus on a social movement's loss of supporters and its inability to mobilize support. In doing so, they distinguish participants from nonparticipants using the single act of signing a petition to signal social movement participation. Like Oegema and Klandermans (1994), many social movement scholars consider movement participation to be a dichotomous variable, either an individual is a participant or she is not (see Klandermans 2004; McAdam 1986). What these scholars fail to articulate are the multiple ways that one can become involved in social movements (Munson 2008).

Barkan, Cohn, and Whitaker (1995) argue that social movement research must move "beyond recruitment" in order to better understand how and why individuals participate in social movements. Because there are multiple levels of participation in social movements, it is not analytically useful to only distinguish participants from nonparticipants. Social movements often depend on multiple activities and different types of activists in order for a movement to be sustained. The pro-choice movement, for example, relies on both grass-roots activists and professional activists, those who are paid to work for social movement organizations (SMOs) (Staggenborg 1991). Further, Ennis and Schreuer point out that social movements often include "those whose attachment to movements is weak" (1987: 390). Weak support often goes unnoticed: either scholars categorize these supporters as nonparticipants or they are subsumed within the category of participant. Participation and nonparticipation are not dichotomous, mutually exclusive categories, and social movement scholarship would benefit from further complicating these terms.

In recent decades, social movement scholarship has begun to question the notion of activist identity. In his seminal work that complicates the notion of activist identities, Melucci

(1996) argues that identity must be created; it does not exist before participation in social movements. In other words, activist identity should be considered a verb, an active process, instead of a noun, a static category. Many scholars who accept Melucci's notion of identity assume that the process of creating activist identities is an inevitable effect of social movement participation (Klandermans 2004). Bobel (2007) critiques this model that assumes participation causes identity and argues that scholars must distinguish between "doing activism" and "being activist." His in-depth interviews with participants in the Menstrual Movement reveals that they believe that activist identity requires a "perfect standard" that is unmet by most movement participants. This sense of humility means that they do not consider themselves to *be* activists; rather, they believe they *do* activist work.

Especially for activism that is associated with risks, identity is greatly influenced by social movement activism (see Rupp and Taylor 1999). However, as Einwohner (2006) points out, identity expression may be hindered by activism in high-risk settings. In her study on Jewish resistance fighters in the Warsaw Ghetto in 1943, she finds that activists perform "identity work" and suppress their identity as Jews in order to navigate their positions within a highly repressive setting. More research is needed in order to understand how identities are influenced by and expressed as a result of high-risk activism.

A problem with social movement research is that doing activism, whether or not that leads to being an activist, is equated with social movement participation, and often social movement group membership. In other words, social movement activities exist only within the confines of the movement itself. Much research on clergy's political involvement demonstrates this point. Clergy are in a unique position to become politically active. In many ways, they are professional activists; that is, they are able to integrate their work with activities geared toward

social change (Crawford, Olson, and Deckman 2001; Wiltfang and McAdam 1991). Unlike many people who work full-time and must advocate for social issues “after hours,” clergy are expected to spend work time ministering to underserved populations. However, clergy are not the same as social movement professionals, who are paid to work for an SMO. Their duties may include activities related to social movements, but their job requires activities that are unrelated to social movements as well. Social movement scholars, then, are at risk of conflating “activism” with “ministerial duties.” What is considered social movement activity and what is part of ministerial duties is contestable and perhaps depends on a clergy’s own interpretation of his/her activities. It is also unclear whether or not clergy who *do* activism through their ministerial work consider themselves to *be* activists.

For clergy involved in the pro-choice movement specifically, research is limited to formal clergy organizations as the units of analysis. Mills (1991) analyzes general strategies of the national organization, the Religious Coalition for Abortion Rights (RCAR), and Evans (1997) analyzes multiple framing tactics used by the RCAR. Even works written by the clergy themselves use organizations as their point of reference (see Carmen and Moody 1973; Davis 2005). This research perspective does not allow for distinguishing between movement activities versus other ministerial activities as it does not include the many pro-choice clergy who are not involved in formal movement organizations (Olson 2000).

2.4 IMPLICATIONS FOR RESEARCH

As this literature review suggests, further research is needed in order to understand the relationship between joining social movements, risks that are associated with such movements, and doing activism versus being activist. The model presented in existing literature is broadly outlined in Figure One.

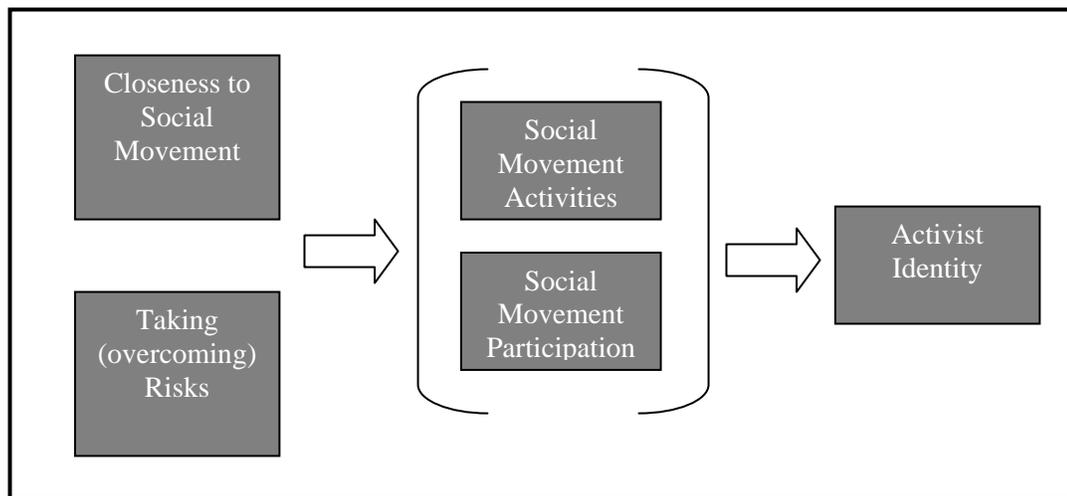


Figure 1 Causal Links to Activist Identity and Social Movement Participation

Research on why individuals join social movements tends to emphasize that closeness to a social movement motivates individuals to participate in that movement. For social movement issues that do not immediately impact individual's daily lives, ideology and interpersonal networks are credited with creating a sense of closeness to these issues. The notable exception is Whittier's (2001) work on the movement to oppose child sexual abuse, where revealing intimate details about such abuse leads to ambivalent responses on behalf of the public. More research is needed to understand how closeness to (or distance from) a movement impacts participation. In order to address this gap in social movement literature, I include pro-choice clergy involved at various levels in the social movement group, Pastors for Moral Choices, and include individuals

who are not involved with the group to compare their experiences related to reproductive rights. My first research question is, what role does closeness to or distance from the issue of abortion play in determining how pro-choice clergy advocate for reproductive rights (i.e. whether or not they join P4MC)?

As Figure One illustrates, most scholarship on high-risk activism assumes that choosing to take a risk (McAdam 1986) or finding ways to overcome risks (Nepstad and Smith 1999) leads to participation in social movements. This scholarship assumes that risks are one-dimensional, and it does not leave room for multiple risks to be perceived at the same time. My second research question asks, how do P4MC members navigate risks associated with the multiple contexts in which they interact?

Social movement participation is defined by activities associated with the social movement. Scholars conflate these categories without questioning whether or not these activities exist only within social movements. Further, as Bobel (2007) points out, these activities do not inevitably lead to activist identity, although most social movement research assumes this causal relationship. More research is needed in order to understand the relationship between social movement participation and political activities that are often associated with social movements, especially for those movements that involve high-risks. My final research question is, how do perceptions of risk affect the relationship between P4MC membership and activities related to reproductive rights? Overall, this paper serves as an exploratory and corrective project, seeking to complicate categories that are taken for granted in social movement research.

3.0 METHODOLOGY

This project is a qualitative case study of social movement participants and nonparticipants who merge religion with politics. In order to understand how pro-choice clergy in South Dakota navigate their political and religious beliefs, I rely primarily on semi-structured one-on-one interviews with these clergy. I also use informal conversations with informants and document analysis in order to gain a better understanding of the context of my study. Before conducting fieldwork in May 2008, I read all P4MC meeting minutes, blogs written by both pro-choice and anti-abortion activists, and newspaper articles that mention P4MC. Rather than using a deductive research design, I implement an inductive qualitative design that allows concepts and findings to develop *from* the data (Corbin and Strauss 2008). Because I lived in Sioux Falls for two years and interned for Planned Parenthood of South Dakota in 2005, I have a general understanding of the abortion debate in the state. I use my familiarity with P4MC and the South Dakota abortion debate to guide my research process.

3.1 SAMPLING

As an intern for Planned Parenthood of South Dakota in 2005, I was involved with organizing the first meeting of local pro-choice clergy, who would later develop the group, Pastors for Moral Choices. Although I left South Dakota later that year and ended involvement

with P4MC, I understand my potential bias in studying the group. I am sympathetic to the goals of P4MC and to the South Dakota pro-choice movement; however, I believe this benefits my research rather than hinders it. As Holstein and Gubrium (1995) point out, no interviewer is completely objective, and my opinions about abortion and P4MC are, for the most part, irrelevant to my research questions. Further, without intimate knowledge of P4MC, it is doubtful that pro-choice clergy in South Dakota would agree to speak candidly with an outside researcher. My past involvement with Planned Parenthood and my connections with the core P4MC members helped establish trust with my research subjects.

Because of the recent publicity surrounding the abortion debate in South Dakota and because of the strong anti-abortion sentiment in the state, there is no official list of P4MC members. Therefore for this study, I used a snowball sampling method to contact clergy who were actively involved in P4MC and clergy who were known supporters of abortion rights. In order to interview all active P4MC members, I utilized an informant, the lay organizer of the group, to contact group members who did not already know me. All active group members (seven total) agreed to be interviewed. With the help of the P4MC lay organizer and the core P4MC members, supportive clergy who were not actively involved in P4MC were also contacted (see Appendix A for recruitment email). Of the approximately 20 who were contacted, eight clergy agreed to be interviewed. While this response level (40 percent) is somewhat low, the number of respondents in this study is comparable to other qualitative studies on clergy and abortion (see Jelen 1992). While this small sample size makes generalizing conclusions more difficult, the population of pro-choice clergy is small and relatively hard to reach. Further, even though my study includes only eight clergy who are not members of P4MC, most social movement researchers do not include any nonparticipants in their samples.

Of the 15 clergy I interviewed, five were women (33 percent) and 10 were men (67 percent). Nationally, female clergy make up less than 25 percent of clergy within mainline Protestant denominations, and because many of these female clergy live in urban areas, this percentage is likely to be less in South Dakota (Olson, Crawford, and Deckman 2005). Therefore, women are overrepresented in this study, as would be expected since female clergy are more likely to be pro-choice than male clergy (Crawford, Deckman, and Braun 2001). Ninety-three percent of respondents are married (14 total), and all have children. Forty percent of respondents (six total) are retired, and 60 percent of respondents (nine total) either actively serve parishes, work as hospital chaplains, or hold administrative positions within their denominations. Of those currently involved with P4MC, 71 percent (five of seven) are retired. Ninety-three percent of respondents (14 total) have an educational attainment of a Masters degree or higher. Eight clergy (53 percent) represent mainline Protestant denominations, six (40 percent) represent liberal Protestant denominations, and one (six percent) works in a conservative-mainline Protestant denomination.⁴

3.2 DATA COLLECTION

Before interviewing South Dakota clergy, I conducted a pre-test of pro-choice clergy in the Pittsburgh area. I interviewed three clergy who expressed interest in a Planned Parenthood of Western Pennsylvania clergy group. This pre-test helped me to develop a semi-structured

⁴ I categorize clergy's denominations into three groups—mainline, liberal, or conservative-mainline Protestant—in order to maintain clergy's anonymity. Mainline Protestantism refers to denominations such as United Methodist, Presbyterian USA, or Episcopal Church of America. Liberal Protestantism refers to the United Church of Christ, Unitarian Universalists, or Quaker Society of Friends. Conservative-mainline Protestantism refers to the Lutheran Church (South Dakota ELCA, Wisconsin, or Missouri Synod) or the American Baptist Church.

interview template for the respondents in my study. I conducted 15 one-on-one interviews between May and July 2008. Most were conducted in respondents' homes or church offices, and for the two clergy who were unable to meet with me in person, interviews were conducted over the phone. I began each interview with a brief set of structured interview questions to obtain basic demographic information (see Appendix B for interview template). However, the research questions guiding this study cannot best be answered using a structured interview format. Semi-structured interviews were most appropriate for this study as they allowed the respondents to construct meaning out of their life experiences and political and religious beliefs through open-ended questions (Weiss 1994). Since this study is inductive in nature, I began the interview with a list of topics relevant to my research questions but allowed my conversation with the respondents to vary greatly within those topics and expand beyond my predetermined topics (see Appendix C for semi-structured interview template). I loosely guided respondents through the interview process, and rather than encouraging specific responses, I probed respondents for elaborative and detailed responses (Holstein and Gubrium 1995).

I also observed one P4MC monthly meeting and conducted one informal focus group at the end of that meeting. The focus group included 40 percent (six respondents) of my interview sample and P4MC's lay organizer. It was unstructured with very few questions, and my role was to mainly observe and listen to the conversation of group members (see Appendixes D and E for meeting observation and focus group templates). Focus groups are useful for qualitative research because they often bring out group dynamics that would otherwise be missing from one-on-one interviews (Babbie 2007), and this is especially relevant for understanding the actions of a social movement group, in this case P4MC.

3.3 DATA ANALYSIS

Because qualitative data analysis is iterative (Corbin and Strauss 2008), I used multiple deductive and inductive codes to analyze data. I began by reading all of my interview transcripts in their entirety. Then using existing literature and my fieldnotes from time spent in South Dakota, I created a list of 36 deductive codes. Next, I used the qualitative data analysis software program, NVIVO 7, to code my interview transcripts and write memos on emerging concepts and themes. After reading these memos, I developed new, inductive codes from my data and the process began again. This iterative process requires a continual questioning, exploring, and comparing of data to understand how concepts relate and overlap and to understand the significant themes that emerge.

3.4 LIMITATIONS AND CHALLENGES

The time constraints of a master's thesis and the geographical location of this study pose both limitations and challenges to my research. I spent two weeks in South Dakota in May 2008 and was unable to conduct follow-up interviews with any respondents. This study is, by necessity, cross-sectional although it would benefit from a longitudinal component in order to understand the projectory of P4MC and its members. I interviewed the group members at a time when P4MC was fairly inactive—they were in a state of planning, preparing for the November ballot initiative that would ban abortions in the state. Unfortunately, my research does not capture any of P4MC's activities for the 2008 campaign. Further, even though I was familiar with P4MC's history, I am still an unknown outsider to many pro-choice clergy in the state of

South Dakota. Because there are risks associated with being a religious leader who visibly supports abortion rights, this posed a challenge in convincing clergy to participate in my study, and indeed many declined to do so.

3.5 RESEARCH ETHICS

This study received an “exempt status” from the University of Pittsburgh’s Institutional Review Board (IRB). After receiving verbal permission to record all interviews, I personally conducted all interviews and subsequent analysis and informed each participant of his/her right to refuse answering any question and to stop the interview at any time. I informed all participants that no identifying information, including their names, church names, or denominations, would be revealed in anything I write. Pseudonyms are used throughout this thesis. Further, any information that could potentially identify participants (such as basic demographic information) is kept separate from both the written and recorded transcripts of the interviews. All data are stored on my password protected computer and only accessible by me.

4.0 PERCEIVING, CONFRONTING, AND NAVIGATING RISKS

Social movement scholars have long been interested in how and why individuals choose to participate in activism that is accompanied by high-risks, and in this chapter, I use the case of Pastors for Moral Choices to contribute to social movement literature. In the first section, I begin with a brief introduction of the clergy in this study and their various levels of participation in P4MC. The multiple levels of involvement in P4MC indicate that social movement research would benefit from complicating the dichotomy of social movement participant or nonparticipant. In Section 4.2, I discuss clergy's perception of risks as they relate to activities related to reproductive rights and activist identity. Social movement research presents risks as one-dimensional phenomena, but my findings suggest that one individual may perceive multiple layers of risk. Further, most literature suggests that political activities lead to activist identity, but by including nonparticipants in my sample, I find that activities are similar for both P4MC members and nonmembers. My analysis shows that it is perceptions of risk, not the actual activities of pro-choice clergy, that influence activist identity. In Section 4.3, I examine how personal experience and faith influence one's perceived closeness to or distance from the issue of abortion. Most research on joining social movements suggests that closeness to a social movement is a necessary factor in prompting movement participation. My findings suggest that closeness to the issue of abortion does not influence joining P4MC. Finally in Section 4.4, I consider risk to be a dynamic concept, rather than a fixed one. I argue that P4MC members act as

“whistleblowers” in order to actively navigate the risks associated with being a pro-choice religious leader in South Dakota.

4.1 A PROFILE OF P4MC MEMBERSHIP

Of the 15 clergy in this study, four consider themselves to be core members and informal leaders of P4MC. Reverend Lee, Reverend Olson, and Reverend Hart have been centrally involved in the group’s development since 2005 and continue to attend every P4MC meeting and event. In 2006, they recruited Reverend Duncan who has since become a core group member. Both local clergy and the public consider these individuals to be the voice and representation of the group, and they are often the “go to” people for speaking on behalf of P4MC. Reverend Lee and Reverend Olson are the only active members who also actively serve a parish, a Sioux Falls liberal Protestant denomination. Both Reverend Hart and Reverend Duncan formerly served mainline congregations but are now retired. Beyond the core P4MC members, there are multiple levels of participation in the group.

Although social movement research often makes a clear distinction between social movement group participants and nonparticipants, the distinction of membership is actually quite blurry for most social movement groups (Blee forthcoming), and this is especially true for P4MC. All clergy I interviewed recall some involvement in P4MC, even though about half of the respondents do not consider themselves to be current members of the group. Reverend Lawson, Reverend Griffin and Reverend Perry attended a few meetings in 2005 and 2006 but no longer attend P4MC meetings or events and do not consider themselves to be group members. Reverend Oliver considers herself to be a member of P4MC but does not attend group meetings. Reverend

Foster and Reverend Schmidt both attended one P4MC event, and Reverend Foster actually spoke on behalf of P4MC at a local press conference, but neither women consider themselves to be group members. Reverend Warren and Reverend Byrd, two retired pastors who served mainline congregations, attended P4MC meetings and events in the past but neither expressed strong convictions supporting abortion rights; their involvement in the group since 2006 has waned. Reverend McCoy and Reverend Miller, who are active members, are most interested in expanding the group's platform to include social issues beyond abortion rights, so they currently attend meetings with the hopes of transforming the group. Social movement research often takes for granted the coherence of a social movement group, but as P4MC shows, the distinction between members, past members, and non-members is extremely complicated and incoherent. In the following sections, I often dichotomize the respondents into members and nonmembers for the purpose of my argument but the multiple and various levels of participation in P4MC should be kept in mind.

4.2 PERCEIVING RISKS AND DEFINING ACTIVISM

Research suggests two camps for participants in American social movements: either professional activists, those who work for formal SMOs, or nonprofessional activists, those who must volunteer their time outside of work-hours to engage in social protest. This is especially true for the American pro-choice movement, which effectively relies on both grassroots nonprofessional activists and professional SMOs (Staggenborg 1991). Clergy, however, offer a unique case for social movement literature, as they bridge the dichotomy of professional or

nonprofessional activist by incorporating what is considered “social movement activity” into their work life, which is not formally a part of a social movement organization.

Many researchers consider clergy to be “everyday activists”—that is, they are able to integrate social justice activism with their ministerial duties (Jelen 1993). However, my research shows that just because clergy engage in activities that are often defined as “activist” by scholars, it does not mean that clergy define themselves as activists. In this section, I detail the risks that pro-choice clergy in South Dakota face and show that perceptions of these risk affect how different clergy in this study define their activities as either activist or non-activist, political or apolitical. Clergy who perceive low-risks associated with being politically outspoken are likely to define themselves as activists, while clergy who perceive high-risks are not likely to join P4MC and do not consider themselves activists even though they participate in many of the same activities as P4MC members.

4.2.1 Layers of Risks

P4MC exists in an adverse climate; South Dakota residents, in general, are conservative both religiously and politically. Therefore, there are often social and occupational risks for religious leaders who visibly advocate for abortion rights. Regardless of their level of activity in P4MC, all respondents in this study discuss risks associated with being a religious leader who is visibly pro-choice in South Dakota. Most talk about risks to their own jobs, to their spouse’s jobs, to their reputation in the community, and less frequently, risks to their personal safety. For example, Reverend Foster, a hospital chaplain who attended one of P4MC’s major events in 2006, despite disapproval from her supervisors, describes the occupational risks of involvement

in the group bluntly: “I think they would say, Jodie, you need to cut this out, or you can’t work here, and they absolutely would.”

Sometimes, clergy describe risks and the religious conservative community in general terms. Reverend Olson describes this as the “mainstream, fundamental conservative right,” who “are the only people that have the microphone [so] you begin to believe that’s the only way of being a Christian or religious.” Respondents repeatedly describe what to them is the visible, but inaccurate, face of American Christianity, using pronouns like “they” or “them,” or generalizing the label of “the church.” This is interesting since, as clergy, they must exist within “the church;” Section 4.4 tends to this matter and describes how some pro-choice clergy frame their argument using this generalized notion of Christianity.

Sometimes when describing risks, clergy distinguish various levels of risks associated with multiple contexts in which the clergy interact. They describe risks at the level of their congregation, their denomination, or what I call the public level, referring to a nondenominational, but specifically conservative religious, state community. All South Dakota pro-choice clergy face risks at the level of the public, but risks at the other levels vary. Reverend Olson, for example, states that she avoids risks because she works “in a more liberal church,” but later discusses how she does have to confront risks at the level of the public. She describes how anti-abortion activists act as “the bully,” specifically discussing an instance where a local conservative church’s website advertised a P4MC event, a panel discussion at a local university. The website, calling P4MC “Pastors for (Im)Moral Choices,” posted the attendees’ names and churches, and in one instance the name and occupation of a spouse. She says, “it is never nice to hear nasty things about you, but then I think, that is the bully, and what are you going to do with a bully? You kind of got to stay in the game.” Here she indicates that even though she avoids

risks at the congregational level, she must confront risks, or “stay in the game,” at another level of context. It is clear that when clergy perceive risks at the most local and immediate level (their congregation), they will also perceive risks at the other levels. Reverend Oliver describes risks at the congregational level in this way:

Some ministers “are bound and gagged [...] and they would not be able to continue in ministry if they took a stand. I don’t know how many there are, but there are a lot of them. [...] I was talking to a couple of [...] Lutherans [...who were] against [the abortion ban], but were not allowed to say so.

Another respondent, Reverend Perry, is not an active member in P4MC because of risks that exist at the denominational level. He currently serves as the associate to the Bishop in his moderately conservative denomination and had this to say about how he obtained the position:

I love this job. [...] I know I wouldn’t have it if, and I mean it wasn’t in a calculated way that I said that, ‘some day if I want to be in the Bishop’s office, then I better [not be politically outspoken].’ It wasn’t in that way at all, I was totally surprised when the call came, but [...] had I [...] adopted a really prophetic public role, it never would have happened.

He predicted risks associated with controversial visible activism at the denominational level and is therefore not involved in controversial activism.

Social movement research often flatly describes high-risk activism: either participants are at risk or they are not, either they overcome risks or they do not, etc. However, the case of pro-choice clergy in South Dakota indicates that risks are multifaceted and dependent upon level of context. As the next subsection will show, activism, too, is a multi-dimensional category that for South Dakota pro-choice clergy, depends on self-definition and perceptions of risk more than the actual activities involved.

4.2.2 Low-Risks, Activists

The majority of P4MC is made up of retired pastors, who perceive low-risks on the congregational and denominational levels when it comes to abortion rights activism because their jobs are no longer in jeopardy. The only P4MC members who actively serve a parish avoid occupational risks because they work within a liberal Protestant denomination, and their congregation is overwhelmingly pro-choice. As Reverend Olson notes, “If I thought the congregation was split fifty-fifty, I would have been less apt to be a very vocal representative of Pastors for Moral Choices, but [...] when there is an overwhelming consensus, it is easier.” The core members of P4MC perceive a low-level of risk, mostly because their jobs are not in jeopardy because of their beliefs and actions surrounding the abortion issue. They still must confront risks associated with the public level (see Section 4.4), but by avoiding risks at the most personal and immediate levels (congregational and denominational) that have the greatest impact on their job security, they feel comfortable in their ability to visibly advocate for abortion rights.

When discussing activism, P4MC members brought up conventional social movement group activities: regular attendance at P4MC meetings and events; writing letters to the legislature and local newspapers; and being the visible face of the group, and indeed the religious face of the South Dakota pro-choice movement. They also discuss other forms of activism: sermons related to social justice broadly, or abortion specifically; congregation or public discussion groups about the abortion ballot initiatives; and individual counseling sessions with women and families considering terminating a pregnancy. Reverend Hart, for example, describes a personal letter he wrote to the local newspaper. In his tell, Reverend Hart uses “I” (personal) and “we” (the group) interchangeably although the letter did not receive unanimous group support, nor was it sent on behalf of P4MC. All activities related to reproductive rights were

often perceived by pastors as an extension of P4MC group activities—and part of the clergy’s activist work. Because P4MC members work within a more progressive congregation and denomination or because they are retired and free from accountability to a congregation or denomination, they openly participate in P4MC and define their activities, even those that are not directly linked to P4MC, as “activist” activities.

4.2.3 High-Risks, Non-Activists

For South Dakota clergy who support reproductive rights, perceptions of risk are an important factor in what they define as activism and what they see as part of daily life as a pastor. If pastors perceive significant risks associated with being a pro-choice clergy activist, not only are they less likely to join P4MC, they also do not define their activities associated with reproductive rights as “activist activities.”

All clergy who perceive high-levels of risks, at either the congregational or denominational level, are not active members in P4MC. Those who do not use multiple narratives to conclude that the costs are too great to become involved in the group. Reverend Griffin, a hospital chaplain, ultimately ended his involvement in P4MC because, as he states,

Not only do I have my job I want to hold on to, but my wife is a professor at a Baptist college, and so I’m sort of walking a line in terms of how politically and/or visibly vocal I can and want to take a stand [...] on issues like that.

Reverend Lee, an active P4MC member, is familiar with this kind of reasoning, as she is often in charge of recruiting clergy to participate in P4MC events. She recalls, “we had another person who said even if the press weren’t there, he was confident there would be ‘Right to Lifers’ there taking down license plates [...] and it would get back to his congregation. So [there’s] a huge amount of fear.”

The clergy who choose not to participate in P4MC engage in many of the same activities as the core P4MC members. Many said they frequently counsel women and families dealing with an unwanted pregnancy. Both Reverend Griffin and Reverend Oliver host church discussion groups on political issues, including abortion. Reverend Griffin even gave a sermon that directly addressed abortion and revealed his pro-choice beliefs. Pastors who are not members of P4MC struggle to define these activities, and use terms like “local work” or “day to day interactions,” but hesitate to call themselves abortion rights activists. Reverend Foster, for example, helped to organize an adult education discussion series, similar to the one hosted by P4MC. When describing this event, she says, “I don’t know, I didn’t think of that as being an activist, but I suppose it could have been.” Considering Reverend Foster’s articulation that her job would be in jeopardy if she were to join P4MC, it is not surprising that she would want to define activities related to reproductive rights as apolitical and non-activist in nature.

Some respondents express guilt over the fact that they are not more involved in P4MC, but most emphasize that their “local work,” as Reverend Carroll puts it, does make a difference, though through different means than P4MC. Their faith, which reportedly influences all respondents’ beliefs on abortion, is carried out in these activities that are not perceived as activism. This offers one explanation of how pro-choice clergy navigate their positions within a conservative religious environment—by choosing which activities are “activist” and which are “daily, pastoral duties.”

Clergy who do not consider themselves P4MC members stress their interests in appearing apolitical before their congregations and the public. Research shows that the public considers clergy to be the highest of ethical social leaders (Fowler, Hertzke, Olson 1999), and because they hold such social authority, many respondents in this study feel uneasy about sharing their

personal beliefs with their congregation or the public. Many clergy, then, don't want to be considered abortion rights activists because all of their activities, regardless of whether or not those activities are done "after hours," will be linked by congregants to their role as pastors and linked to the congregations and denominations they represent. For example, Reverend Griffin, a hospital chaplain, was told by his supervisors that were he to become involved in P4MC, he must keep his political activism separate from his role as a minister. He explains how this is an impossibility: "somebody becomes a political activist and walks into a patient's room and they say, 'I don't want you, you don't represent God, you represent the devil.' Then the hospital has reason to say you've stepped over the line." As this statement implies, clergy realize that their identity as religious leaders influence all other public roles.

4.2.4 Defining Activism and Risk

Clergy who have low risks associated with reproductive rights activism at the congregational and denominational level are likely to be members of P4MC and define themselves as activists, while clergy who do not want to appear politically outspoken on the abortion issue because of perceived risks at all levels, are not inclined to be active members of P4MC or to identify as activists. Both groups of clergy, though, engage in similar activities when it comes to the abortion issue. This implies that what scholars of social movements traditionally define as "social movement activity" often takes place outside of what we formally consider to be social movements.

This has significant implications for how scholars consider both activism and risks. First, it is important to understand that risks are not objective categories; instead they are complicated, multiple, and dependent on interpretation and how they are perceived. By understanding "layers"

of risks, we are able to better explain how individuals can confront some risks and avoid others. For example, P4MC members feel as if they are able to confront risks at the public level precisely because they avoid risks at congregational and denominational levels. Second, by emphasizing perceptions of risks, rather than risks as objective realities, the complicated nature of “activism” becomes apparent. As Bobel (2007) usefully points out, activist work and activist identity should not be conflated. For South Dakota pro-choice clergy, who identifies as an activist and who participates in activist work is contingent upon perceived risks. This means that scholars should use caution when labeling research subjects as activists or not; the category of activism should develop *from* data, rather than *before* it.

4.3 CONFRONTING RISKS USING FAITH AND EXPERIENCE

In the previous section, I discussed how respondents perceive risks, and in this section, I attempt to answer the question, why confront these perceived risks associated with being a pro-choice clergy in South Dakota? In other words, why do clergy decide to become visible activists for abortion rights? Social movement literature offers multiple reasons for participating in high-risk activism. I focus on two factors: personal experience and religious faith. For the case of South Dakota pro-choice clergy, I discuss how respondents use personal experience and religious faith in multiple ways. I argue that closeness to intimate personal experiences related to abortion both inhibits and motivates involvement in abortion rights advocacy and that religious faith is used by both P4MC members and nonmembers to justify their actions. In other words, the factors that justify participation in P4MC are also the factors that justify *not* participating in P4MC.

4.3.1 Closeness and Personal Experience

Although McAdam (1986) argues that prior activism is key to motivating participation in the high-risk activism of the Freedom Summer project, this is not the case for all high-risk activists. For Americans involved in the Central American Solidarity Movement, Nepstad (2004) found that one's background (such as prior activism) did not necessarily directly influence their participation. This is because most participants had no previous involvement or knowledge of the movement; the issue at hand (conflicts taking place in other countries) was not directly connected to participants' daily lives. Similarly, most respondents in this study do not have personal histories directly related to the issue of abortion.

Despite various levels of involvement in P4MC, the respondents in this study have very similar personal histories. This is not too surprising since, in many ways, the respondents themselves are remarkably similar: they are all white Protestant clergy, ages 37-82, are politically moderate to liberal (only two identify as Republican), and support abortion rights. All of the respondents have spent at least the past 10 years living in South Dakota and live in Sioux Falls, the largest city in the state, or in a small but relatively progressive university town. Many respondents share a personal history similar to Reverend Lee's:

I found that the conservative, literal understanding that I was being taught [in the church in which I grew up] was illogical and I just had an innate sense that God gave me a good mind and expected me to be able to use it. And I left the church at 15 thinking I will never go back. That is for people who don't think. And in college I had a professor who taught religion. I thought, my, this is an oxymoron; this intelligent person is Christian. And he taught us in a world religions class that there are ways of understanding scripture that are more appropriate to the ways scripture was formed, which was not to be literalist [...]. So it was a hermeneutical change, it was a using the bible in a much different way, which makes me a progressive and liberal Christian.

Many respondents grew up in conservative Midwestern towns, as Reverend Lee did, and left their homes to attend college and/or seminary where they became both politically and theologically progressive. Later they returned to South Dakota, called to practice and preach moderate to progressive theology in a conservative environment.

Being politically and theologically progressive does not inevitably lead to political activism, though, especially when it comes to abortion rights. All of the retired clergy I interviewed mentioned involvement in the Civil Rights and Anti-war Movements of the 1960s and other clergy mentioned past involvement in gay rights activism, the Women's Movement, and the Central American Solidarity Movement. No clergy, however, had been involved in a formal pro-choice organization before P4MC. Most identify as "pro-choice" on a fairly abstract level, as they cannot remember intimate personal experiences related to abortion. Munson (2008) finds that similarly, anti-abortion non-activists also use vague language to describe their beliefs about abortion. My study, however, suggests that even social movement participants are unable to concretely describe experiences associated with their political beliefs.

All respondents recall common anecdotes, such as knowing a friend in high school or college who had an abortion, recalling the known horrors of obtaining an abortion before the practice became legal, and remembering the landmark Supreme Court case, *Roe v. Wade*. Yet few could remember intimate details or close attachments to such narratives. When asked, do you remember events or individuals that/who shaped your feelings about abortion, Reverend Lee, a core P4MC member, explained,

I can recall [...] being glad it was legal, so there was a part of me who always knew that this was something that we needed to have legal. You know, there were girls in college that got in situations where they needed to get an abortion. But I don't remember; you are asking me to reach back and I can't reach back.

Most respondents, including three of the four core P4MC members, could not recall individuals or events who/that influenced their abortion beliefs. Reverend Lee, who is a core P4MC member, has distance from intimate experiences related to abortion. Although she feels very strongly about the issue, she is only able to describe her past experiences with abortion in predictable, vague terms.

It seems reasonable to assume that clergy with intimate personal experiences related to abortion would be more likely to advocate for abortion rights because they have more at stake when it comes to the abortion debate. And indeed that is true for some of the respondents in this study. The daughter of one respondent was raped, and, although she did not become pregnant, this experience heightened the respondent's awareness of the importance of abortion rights, and he has since become a core member of P4MC. Another P4MC member recalls that his daughter had an abortion several years ago, and this made him aware of the politics associated with reproductive issues and prompted his involvement in the group.

On the other hand, one respondent who is not involved in P4MC, shares that his wife had been raped, became pregnant, and terminated the pregnancy. In this case, it appears as if the abortion issue was *too* personal for political activism. Consider the following statement,

A lot of my understanding of 'pro-choice' really comes from personal experience and basically [the] experience of my wife, who was raped when she was in high school and her parents didn't believe her, and [...] if the rules now were pertaining to what they were then, I think she would have ended up having to have that baby. She had a doctor in the loop who did a great job. [...] So I think for me, that really brings out some of the complexity of the issue some of the things about women's choice and women's rights. This is really strong for me, [...] but I find myself hesitant sometimes to work on this issue and I really think it is [...]because of] people who are completely emotional about it. I mean irrationally emotional is what happens, in my experience.

This pastor explains that the abortion issue for him is a personal one, yet he does not politically advocate for abortion rights. He indicates that this is because even though abortion for him and

his wife is deeply personal and emotional, for many anti-abortion advocates, it is not personal and they are “irrationally emotional,” or without real-life experiences to justify their convictions about abortion. For this respondent, closeness to the abortion issue dissuaded political activism. While Nepstad and Smith (1999) argue that individuals with personal connections to a political issue are more likely to become activists for said issue, the above statement indicates that the opposite may also be true. Distance from personal experiences related to abortion may actually make abortion rights activism more likely, especially in an environment that is strongly anti-abortion. This may explain why most P4MC members do not have intimate personal experiences related to abortion.

While distance may enable clergy to become invested in an emotional issue, such as abortion, it also may inhibit activism. For example, several pro-choice clergy in this study who were not involved in P4MC or abortion rights activism were known supporters of gay-rights issues, either striving to make their church reconciling or to defeat anti-gay legislation.⁵ Reverend Carroll considers why he is involved in gay rights activism but not abortion rights activism, even though he supports both causes: “my helping this congregation get a 96 percent vote to welcome the gay couple here did more for gay rights [in this town] than any ballot issue ever would. We are transforming hearts.” For him the issue of gay rights is extremely personal; it embodies the identity of members of his congregation and therefore affects him on an at-least weekly basis. Abortion, however, is largely battled as a “ballot issue,” which is impersonal, and according to Reverend Carroll less important than the personal interactions he has with his congregation. Women who consider terminating a pregnancy do not share a collective identity

⁵ A reconciling church refers to one that visibly accepts and supports the gay, lesbian, bisexual (and sometimes transgender) community. In 2006, clergy in reconciling (or soon-to-be reconciling) churches in South Dakota, visibly opposed a ballot initiative that would ban same-sex marriage through a state constitutional amendment.

the same way gays and lesbians do, nor does their abortion necessarily influence their interactions with their pastors. For this reason, distance from abortion as a personal experience could provide grounds for lack of involvement in P4MC.

Personal experiences, specifically distance from intimate abortion-related experiences, are used in multiple ways. Some P4MC members do justify their involvement with personal history, while most do not have intimate personal experiences related to abortion yet are still involved in abortion rights activism. However, this lack of intimate personal experiences could be a reason why clergy are not involved in P4MC but are instead involved in gay rights activism. But closeness to the abortion issue also potentially provides a barrier to abortion rights activism. Distance and personal experience both impede and motivate participation in P4MC; personal experience does not lead to inevitable outcomes. Closeness to a social movement may not be causally linked to social movement involvement since respondents cite both closeness to and distance from the abortion issue as reasons for participating in P4MC and for not participating.

4.3.2 Faith and Activism

Social movement scholars agree that for religious based high-risk activism, religious faith is particularly influential in motivating persons to participate (Nepstad 2004; Wood 2001). For religious leaders, such as clergy, it is a combination of religious faith and a sense of social authority that motivates them to confront risks and participate in activism (Carmen and Moody 1973; Nepstad 2008). The clergy in this study fit within a category that scholars define as “liberal” clergy or those who adhere to a “social gospel,” meaning that they believe that “scripture must be read in the context of history and modern sciences” (Fowler, Hertzke, and Olson 1999). Reverend Perry describes his religious beliefs in this way:

My approach to hermeneutics [...] is a trust in the assertion that scripture is alive, that it is not a dead word on page. [...] The Holy Spirit is involved with this process of reading and sharing and digesting scripture [...] that at any given time may actually mean different things. [...] I look at some of the texts that seem so obvious to people, [...] to me it isn't that obvious, because as I explore those texts I see there is nuance there, and there are social circumstances that adhered [historically] which don't today.

When discussing why they became involved in abortion rights activism, P4MC members repeatedly reference religious faith. As Reverend Hart describes, "I was moving from individual ethics to social ethics, from love your neighbor to love your neighborhood." Clergy whose faith supports this notion feel a moral obligation to live out this faith. Unlike lay activists, clergy understand that their social authority has great implications for their political activities. And this authority, especially for those who believe in the social gospel, must be navigated carefully. Judgments of what is right and wrong for sensitive political topics are avoided; as Reverend Carroll puts it, "I would never presume to tell you how to think, that would be against everything I stand for."

Religious faith, for some, justifies a lack of involvement in P4MC. Even Reverend Lee, who is a core P4MC member, acknowledges, "you [...] have a responsibility to provide guidance on moral issues, but you have to do it in very careful and gentle ways. Being a person who is a vocal representative of Pastors for Moral Choices is not the gentlest way." Some clergy choose to not be involved in P4MC because such involvement could resemble a sort of "bully pulpit" or pastors telling the public what to think. Especially for diverse congregations, Reverend Schmidt says that involvement in P4MC means that "you're no longer really shepherding the flock. You're actually [...] sorting them. And that's not helpful in my point of view." As discussed in the last section, non-members of P4MC find ways to support reproductive rights, but they do not

connect these activities to a social movement group nor do they consider themselves to be activists. They justify these actions with explanations of their faith.

On the other hand, P4MC members find value in speaking out as religious authorities in ways that counter the dominant religious discourse in the state. When discussing South Dakota's pro-choice movement, Reverend Olson says, "we thought it had a stronger voice, when it is pastors saying these things." Visibility, a sort of "coming out" as pro-choice clergy, is a crucial part of fulfilling a moral duty. Similar to gay rights activists in the 1950s and 1960s, it is the process of becoming visible that not only advocates for broader societal changes, such as changes in policy or laws, but also is a way to liberate one's self (Armstrong 2002). This is made apparent particularly by those who are *not* active in P4MC, who express anxiety about the apparent disconnect between their faith, which provides grounds for pro-choice beliefs, and their lack of involvement in the visible pro-choice clergy group. Reverend Griffin describes his feelings in this way: "what makes this sort hard for those of us who believe very strongly but don't live out that belief, [we] are really living at odds with [our] own integrity and our own faith, and I think it takes its toll, psychically." Pro-choice clergy who remain "closeted" about their abortion beliefs avoid confronting risks associated with activism but must grapple with its "psychic toll." Reverend Olson, a core member of P4MC, describes how she, too, considers the implications of "coming out:"

It's that constant conundrum of if I have the ability to speak and I don't speak [...] am I allowing the rabid crowd to just step all over people? [...] So for me it's trying to walk the path of [Jesus] who guides my life. [...] I don't believe in individual salvation. Jesus died on the cross, saved my sins, and I am saved, but I believe in what I call community salvation. Nobody is saved until everybody is saved, you know. So, my belief structure would not say well I am saved so screw you, [...] so my salvation is at stake a little bit.

Both Reverend Olson and Reverend Griffin's statements reveal that there is a liberatory effect of being a visible pro-choice activist. Especially in an environment where religion is used to advance an anti-abortion agenda quite visibly, it appears that some pro-choice clergy who are not visibly advocating for abortion rights feel guilt and anxiety about their inaction. On the other hand, those clergy who do visibly advocate for abortion rights feel a sense of satisfaction and faithful reward for their actions.

Even though P4MC's victories have been small and contestable and South Dakota continues to have some of the most restrictive reproductive health laws in the country, P4MC members are proud of their activities. Reverend Oliver describes how P4MC is relatively ineffective but yet still persists: "Pastors for Moral Choices doesn't have big support, doesn't have the impact the anti-choice people have. They are not a political movement, they are just a bunch of folks pulling together to figure out how to get justice." Reverend Lee similarly voices the importance of P4MC's presence for personal reasons, rather than to reach a political end:

I don't think I would be the lone voice if I were the lone voice in town. Maybe Reverend Olson would, maybe Reverend Hart would, I don't know. But I am not sure I would, so for me having some little sense of a group that views the scripture the same way I do is really important.

As Jasper (1997) reminds us, social movement participation is often an end in itself; individuals join social movements often because they gain pride and satisfaction from doing so, not because they always expect the movement's goals to be achieved.

Faith is an important tool used by South Dakota pro-choice clergy to interpret their actions. It is used to justify a lack of involvement in P4MC, and it is used to justify involvement in P4MC even though the group doesn't achieve many visible successes. This means that faith, which is often used to explain why individuals participate in high-risk activism, may be a

meaningless variable in the study of social movement participation, since participants and nonparticipants use it to justify their actions.

4.4 NAVIGATING RISKS AS WHISTLEBLOWERS

This section focuses on the South Dakota pro-choice clergy who decide to become visible supporters of abortion rights through the group, Pastors for Moral Choices. These clergy must navigate their pro-choice positions carefully. Clergy who support abortion rights, unlike lay people who are pro-choice activists, are faced with the unique task of navigating their religious authority. This is necessary because clergy identity exists inside and outside of the church; the role of a pastor is not one that can be left behind or taken off. Further, regardless of whether or not P4MC members serve liberal Protestant churches or are retired and free from accountability to a congregation, these clergy must still deal with risks at the public level, or the broader social and religious environment in South Dakota that is strongly anti-abortion. As Reverend Hart points out, all P4MC events attract the attention of anti-abortion activists: “any events that are for the public, you can’t advertise them without believing they [the Christian Right] are going to be there.” This section examines how P4MC members accomplish advocating for abortion rights, using their religious authority, and navigating their positions within a conservative environment. I argue that P4MC members accomplish these tasks by framing their position in a way similar to corporate whistleblowers.

4.4.1 What is Whistleblowing?

Whistleblowers are individuals, usually employees, who go “outside their organizations to expose what they feel are illegal, inefficient, immoral or unethical practices of their employing organizations” (Perrucci, Anderson, Schendel, and Trachtman 1980, 149). Whistleblowing takes place in many forms. It can take place individually or collectively, and it does not always successfully discredit the organization in question. Scholarship on the subject focuses most often on corporate employees who make public their supervisors’ hidden, unethical, and sometimes illegal activities. Other examples of whistleblowing include students who expose a school administration that overlooks cheating or a staff who make public a senator’s questionable acts (Jenson 1987). For the multiple ways that whistleblowing is enacted, there is one crucial component of a whistleblower’s claim: making visible the “discrepancies between the legitimating rhetoric of a profession or organization and an organization’s actual behavior” in order to correct the actual behavior (Bernstein and Jasper 1996: 573). In other words, whistleblowers reveal internal, discriminating information to a public audience, thereby revealing a disconnect between what an organization claims to practice and its actual practices.

Examining whistleblowing from a social movements perspective is advantageous in many ways. While much social movement scholarship focuses on activism that takes place outside of institutions, whistleblowers remind us that social and political activism takes place within institutions as well. As Katzenstein argues, since the 1960s there has been an increase in protest within institutions because of the “growing representation of diverse groups in middle-class institutions [that are] no longer segregated by race, ethnicity, or gender” (1998, 5). Indeed, there has been a steady increase in reports of and public support for whistleblowing in the past 50 years (Jenson 1987). Further, whistleblowers must navigate their positions both within and

outside of institutions or organizations. Studying whistleblowing, then, allows scholars to bridge the dichotomy between institutional and extra-institutional political actions. This is useful since many social movements in the United States exist simultaneously inside and outside of institutions (Staggenborg 1991).

Religious reform that takes place within the church is often instigated by clergy; though scholars have not, at least explicitly, considered clergy to be whistleblowers. However, for the case of P4MC, such a consideration accurately describes the ways in which members navigate the risks associated with being a pro-choice religious leader in South Dakota. While clergy feel most accountable to God rather than an employer or supervisor, most clergy work within a bureaucratically structured denomination, with regional and national administrations that influence how a clergy's job is carried out. Because there has been a conservative shift in mainline Protestantism over the past 30 years, many progressive Protestant clergy feel as if the Church⁶ misrepresents Christianity and masks the positions of progressive theologians. The clergy in this study support Olson and Carrol's position that, "[w]ithin the general public, [...] only the conservative agenda has much connection to religion" (1992: 778).

4.4.2 The Making of Clergy Whistleblowers

All respondents in this study were careful to point out their "respect" and "understanding" for those who oppose abortion. Clergy continually reiterate that a pro-choice position is not a pro-abortion one, and that they, along with anti-abortion activists, would like to

⁶ Although there is not one "Protestant Church" and there are multiple approaches to Christianity, the respondents in this study direct their frustration and blame towards a broad category that most refer to as, "the church," or "Christianity."

see the number of abortions reduced. The problem with the church, as understood by P4MC, is not that it promotes anti-abortion beliefs, but rather that anti-abortion beliefs are *the only* position being promoted. As one respondent described it, “I think that wherever God language is being used by one side of an argument, [...] I believe then that there needs to be a counterbalancing voice that includes verbal and visible clergy.” In this way, P4MC members are similar to corporate whistleblowers in that they believe that their proverbial company (the Church) is practicing unethical activities by leaving out a valid perspective on the issue of abortion. Reverend Olson describes it in this way: “I feel that there is a bully pulpit, and people are using it and misinterpreting text. I don’t interpret text like they do, but we don’t get much chance to talk about a different approach.” In this statement, Reverend Olson argues that her position is a legitimate interpretation of biblical text but that it is silenced by “them,” indicating a one-dimensional wrong-doer.

Whistleblowing literature often describes a moment or event that was powerful enough to motivate ordinary employees to transform into whistleblowers. Whistleblowers frequently contact SMOs who are likely to support a whistleblower’s accusations in order to gain support (Bernstein and Jasper 1996), but in the case of P4MC members, an SMO contacted the group. Planned Parenthood of South Dakota first contacted a few clergy who were known supporters of abortion rights, but it was when these clergy realized that progressive theology had been abandoned by the church that they were motivated to act. Consider the following statement by Reverend Olson, a core P4MC member:

I watch some of [the recent political events unfold] and think, oh my gosh, I mean are we become Nazi Germany? I am not sure sometimes. Once the particular religious perspective, which I call in this country right now conservative, fundamental, [...] all kinds of damage can be done to people, all kinds of oppression I think can be done, for the sake of the righteous religion that is

backed by the state, that backs the state. [...] I see my [religious freedom] going away.

In this statement, Reverend Olson expresses her concern and outrage about one religious perspective dominating religious discourse in the United States. Later she connects these feelings to the reason she helped create P4MC. Like corporate whistleblowers, Reverend Olson became aware of what she considers to be an immoral action (the taking away of religious freedom) that is done on behalf of the Christian church. Similarly, Reverend McCoy feels strongly that Christianity has “sold itself out” and shares with me his perception of how the church in South Dakota has evolved:

When I came in [to my mainline denomination in the 1970s], we used to be one of the most progressive conferences [...]. We would have debates about social concern issues, and that’s all gone by the wayside. [...] and I think it is because we are afraid and we are losing members and we lose members anyway because we are in a state that loses people. But [...] we’ve had bishops now, and ever since the 80s, who have been more concerned about church growth than social issues, and so the church to me has not been a church anymore. It has *sold itself out* to the numbers game.

Interestingly, Reverend McCoy uses “we” to describe the church until he places blame on the church, at which point he separates himself from the entity, using “it” instead of “we.” This statement reveals that, like corporate whistleblowers, P4MC places blame on an entity of which its members are a part. Although probably not all respondents would agree with Reverend McCoy’s statement, the feelings of frustration and betrayal were expressed by almost all clergy I interviewed. In the following section, I describe how P4MC channels the feelings expressed by both Reverend McCoy and Reverend Olson into tactics that allow members to advocate for abortion rights while minimizing their perceived risks. They do this by acting as whistleblowers.

4.4.3 Whistleblowing to Navigate Risks

As the above section indicates, P4MC members use language that is similar to corporate whistleblowers in expressing their discontent with the Church. Further, I argue that they use whistleblowing tactics in order to navigate their visible pro-choice positions in the conservative state of South Dakota. As stated earlier, whistleblowing involved making visible to the public private information of an organization or company. P4MC does this by making visible the pre-existing denominational statements that support abortion rights in certain circumstances. Before detailing this tactic, I will first explain why alternative tactics would be ineffective and in some cases harmful to clergy's careers and social positions.

In South Dakota, the pro-choice movement attempts to appeal to the libertarian philosophy of "live and let live" that is prominent in the state. Planned Parenthood advocates a position that the government should not regulate moral issues, and abortion is one such moral issue. However, it is, for the most part, ineffective for clergy in the state to articulate these positions from a personal faith perspective. For example, some members of P4MC frequently write letters to the editor of the Sioux Falls newspaper, *The Argus Leader*, and receive responses that question their religious authority and the biblical grounds on which these clergy make pro-choice statements. This quickly becomes an unwinnable debate, as conservative religious leaders argue that their position is in fact grounded in biblical texts, literally the word of God, and this position is what is most familiar to the general public. The more radical anti-abortion activists also have used such statements made by P4MC members to personally attack their merits as religious leaders. One anti-abortion pastor's blog included the following statements about P4MC:

“a group of pastors who believe it's okay to shed innocent blood and exploit women”

“highly-educated clergy? What the heck is that? Sounds like slam that snuck out of the elitist Obama death camp.”

“an illustration of the Bible’s warning about wolves that come in among the flock.”

In order to counter these criticisms, Reverend Hart describes how P4MC needed a “pro-choice position that would last through any series of coming back [responses from the Religious Right].” P4MC members believed that this could be achieved by using denominational statements, rather than personal ones. In this way, they act as whistleblowers, by forcing the Church to recognize the multiple positions on abortion that the Church itself promotes. The P4MC website, for example, lists 11 denominations and three church-related organizations that have official statements that support the legality of abortion. They point out that as recently as 2004, the United Methodist Church released a statement in support of abortion rights:

Our belief in the sanctity of unborn human life makes us reluctant to approve abortion. But we are equally bound to respect the sacredness of the life and well-being of the mother, for whom devastating damage may result from an unacceptable pregnancy. In continuity with past Christian teaching, we recognize tragic conflicts of life with life that may justify abortion, and in such cases, we support the legal option of abortion under proper medical procedures. (www.pastorsformoralchoices.org)

Like corporate whistleblowers, P4MC members make visible what already exists but is hidden from public view. P4MC gains visibility primarily through press releases and advertisements sponsored in local newspapers. These statements are simple and straightforward and include mainline and liberal Protestant denominational statements related to reproductive choice. Reverend Lee describes the ad campaign in *The Argus Leader* in the fall of 2006:

We did a series of large ads in *The Argus* [...] that listed all the mainline denominations that have [...] statements in support of keeping abortion legal that are adopted by their national governing bodies.[...] We were effective [...] with that ballot issue because we had a lot of people who said, ‘man, I was glad to see that I am not the only one who feels like that, I had no idea my denomination felt that way.’ People don’t even have a clue what their own denomination says.

Similarly, Reverend Foster's church hosted a discussion forum that used the same technique for framing their position:

I helped to set up an adult education series around this issue when it was coming up to the vote. And we talked about what our denomination says, what does scripture say, what different positions say, and how do we understand this dialogue. And basically our denomination says it is up to a woman and her clergy counsel [...] and her physician and that's it.

A theme for all P4MC activities is "education." Rarely do members talk about "convincing" the public or other clergy that their position is the "right" one. Respondents use a common metaphor to describe their theology: nothing is black and white, and their job is to highlight the grey that exists, especially for controversial issues. For a P4MC conference that was held in August 2006, the organizers did not say the goal was to convince clergy to vote against the abortion ban or even to join P4MC, rather, as Reverend Lee describes, "it was billed as an educational event. We said we are going to put curriculum in your hands that you can take back to your church [that will help you] begin to talk about controversial issues." Although Glazer and Glazer (1989) argue that community awareness is usually not the intention of whistleblowers, P4MC members, if considered whistleblowers, prove otherwise. For them, public awareness and debate is their primary goal, as they believe that recognition of multiple religious positions about abortion requires it to remain legal.

Whistleblowing allows for clergy to navigate risks associated with being visibly pro-choice in South Dakota. Reverend Foster described how she used denominational statements to justify her participation in the P4MC press conference despite disapproval from her supervisors, "Whether they took time to figure out what all that meant, that is their problem, not mine. I am speaking out in support of my church's stance on this issue." This statement pointedly describes

exactly why the whistleblowing technique for South Dakota pro-choice clergy is so effective—it depersonalizes their arguments so that it’s “not their problem.” By using statements published by mainline Protestant denominations, the clergy reduce personal accountability, while at the same time legitimize their positions with official church statements.

Further, this tactic enables clergy to avoid risks at the congregational level and still have a voice about the abortion issue. The public often considers a clergy’s opinion to be intrinsically tied to the congregation he or she serves (Jelen 1993), so it is often difficult for a clergy to discuss issues that are not unanimously supported by his or her congregation. As Reverend Oliver states, “when I preach, I am more than representing my own opinion, [...] and so to suggest that there is a consensus wouldn’t be appropriate, not from the pulpit.” Instead of speaking on behalf of a congregation, clergy are able to present denominational statements in an anonymous manner, directing blame or credit (depending on the audience) to the denomination itself, rather than a specific clergy or congregation.

It should be noted that even though this tactic allows P4MC members to adequately avoid personal accountability from congregations, they still, of course, receive criticism from the Religious Right. As Bernstein and Jasper point out, “the organizations and industries attacked by whistleblowers respond by framing the act of whistleblowing itself as a problem” (1996, 576). Pro-choice clergy are not completely void of personal accountability at the level of the public, and it is perhaps for this reason that more pro-choice clergy are not visibly supportive of abortion rights. However, whistleblowing as a tactic has the potential to recruit supportive clergy who feel comfortable discussing official church statements rather than personal beliefs and who therefore feel their personal accountability will be reduced.

In this section I have expanded how social movement scholars can use whistleblowing to describe more than the activities of disgruntled employees. I acknowledge that this is a stretch of the concept's definition: the church is not a corporation and God is not a CEO. However, the ways in which P4MC frames its argument is extremely similar to other forms of whistleblowing. They place blame on an entity, even though that entity is a broad category of Christianity, and use their credibility of religious authority, or placement within that entity, to present to the public information that was previously masked. This ensures that their information is credible, since it comes from the entity itself, and also allows clergy to advocate for abortion rights while reducing, but not eliminating, risks. Whereas previous research considers risks to be "taken" or "overcome," the case of P4MC reveals that high-risk activism is more complicated. This section considers P4MC members as agentic actors, capable of navigating risks in creative ways.

5.0 CONCLUSION

My research complicates the study of social movements and challenge many assumptions about activism and risk that are often taken for granted in social movement literature. I show that common concepts that appear clearly defined in this scholarship, such as social movement participation, activist identity, and risk, are in fact multi-dimensional and dependent upon context and interpretation. Though I focus on pro-choice clergy, an important and understudied group, my findings have broader implications for all individuals involved in political actions involving perceived risks. In this chapter, I will review my findings, situate these findings within past scholarship, and discuss their implications for future research.

Because public and religious sentiments in South Dakota are strongly anti-abortion, pro-choice clergy face the unique tasks of perceiving the risks associated with their beliefs, deciding whether or not to confront those perceived risks, and if they choose to do so, navigate their positions within a high-risk environment. The respondents in this study perceive multiple risks based on different levels of context: risks at the congregational level, the denominational level, and at the level of the public. All clergy face risks at the level of the public, but risks at the other two levels vary. Perceptions of risks at the congregational and denominational levels influence how clergy define their activities related to reproductive rights: if clergy perceive low-risks at these levels, they are likely to define themselves as activists and participate in P4MC; if clergy perceive high-risks at these levels, they do not join P4MC and do not consider themselves to be

activists, even though their activities are similar to those who are active in P4MC. P4MC members act as “whistleblowers,” by making visible what they claim to be masked by dominant religious voices. They believe the Church is acting unjustly by presenting only an anti-abortion perspective, rather than multiple perspectives on this issue. They use preexisting denominational statements that support the legality of abortion to justify this claim.

5.1 LIMITATIONS OF RESEARCH

By using a case-study approach to understand social movement participation and nonparticipation, activist identity, and navigating risks, I am unable to compare the case of South Dakota pro-choice clergy with other forms of “high-risk activism.” It is unclear then whether or not the variables I found to be insignificant would be insignificant for others considering participation in high-risk activism. Further, my limited sample size excludes many pro-choice clergy not involved in P4MC who refused to be interviewed. Their absence in my study may affect my findings, as their reasons for not joining P4MC may have been notably different from the non-member clergy who did agree to talk with me.

5.2 IMPLICATIONS OF RESEARCH

My findings suggest that the two most common reasons given for motivating participation in P4MC (personal experience and faith) were also the most common reasons given

for *not* participating in P4MC. In some instances, it seems that the lack of intimate experiences with abortion, and therefore distance from the abortion issue, allowed for clergy to become members of P4MC. In other instances, it was precisely that distance from the abortion issue that kept clergy from joining the group. Those with intimate personal experiences used them to either justify their activism or their lack of involvement in P4MC. Faith, too, was used in multiple ways by the respondents in this study. For P4MC members, visible activism was a way to live their faith and fulfill a moral conviction. Faith was used by those not involved in P4MC, who claimed that their faith is carried out in ways other than participation in a social movement group. This signals that the factors of closeness to or distance from a social movement may not be causally linked to participation in social movements. Figure Two shows what my findings suggest about factors influencing participation in social movements and activist identity. My analysis finds that two variables (closeness to social movement and social movement activities) used in the literature are not in fact meaningful in the construction of social movement participation and activist identity in this case.

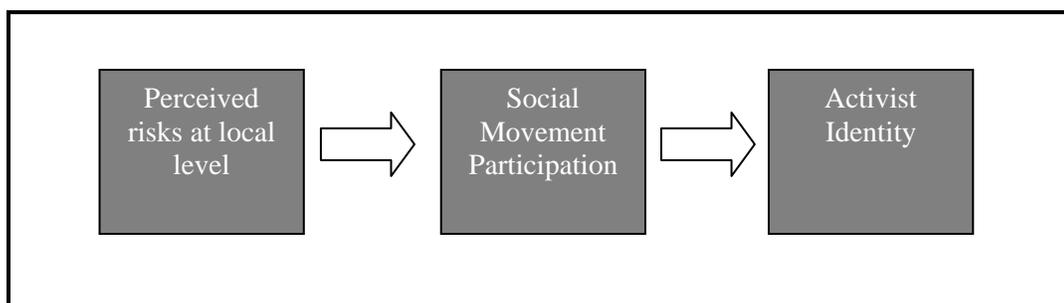


Figure 2 Causal Links to Activist Identity and Social Movement Participation, Reconsidered

My research allows for social movement participation, social movement activities, and activist identities to be distinct categories. Group membership, as my respondents indicate, is not a simple matter, nor does it necessarily define the actions of either members, nonmembers, or those somewhere in between. Social movement research rarely includes non-participants, and my study is able to include what sympathetic clergy are doing outside of formal SMOs. By doing so,

we can better understand both the actions of sympathetic non-joiners and also the actions of those involved in movement organizations. I find that P4MC members and non-members are participating in very similar activities related to reproductive rights, but only P4MC members consider these to be activist activities and self-identify as activists. Nonmembers, participating in these same activities, define them differently and do not consider themselves to be activists. This supports Babel's (2007) findings that activist identity and activist work are not one in the same, even though they are often treated as such by researchers. He distinguishes between "doing activism" and "being activist," and my findings suggest that this "doing" may not be always considered "doing activism" by individuals who are not involved with a social movement group (see Figure Two). Rather, some clergy consider this "doing" to be "doing ministry" or "doing local work" instead of "doing activism."

My research also complicates the notion of risk for social movement participants. Past scholarship takes for granted the definition of risk and does not leave room for risks to be experienced in multiple contexts and perceived in multiple ways. Scholars understand that various activities are associated with multiple risks, but they perceive the activities as changing, not the risks themselves (see McAdam 1984; Nepstad 2008). Even though social movement literature acknowledges that risks can be social, legal, financial, occupational, or physical, physical risk is by far the most often studied form of risk. I focus on risks associated with one's occupational status and social standing, which are perhaps more common for most American social movements. Instead of treating risk as a one-dimensional category, my data shows that risks are multi-layered, overlapping, and dependent upon perception. Figure two shows how my conceptualization of risk differs from that of past research.

To best explain the actions of those who do choose to participate in P4MC, I draw from the interdisciplinary concept of “whistleblowing.” I advocate an extension of this term’s use because it most appropriately describes how P4MC members navigate risks associated with their visible pro-choice positions. This concept is useful for social movement studies, especially for scholars who attempt to bridge the dichotomy of either “institutional” or “extra-institutional” politics (see Staggenborg 1991). In order for an act to be considered whistleblowing, it must begin within an institution and then be directed outside of the institution to a public audience. Activism not only takes place within and outside of institutions, it sometimes does so simultaneously. Further, the concept of whistleblowing allows for the analysis of high-risk activism to focus on activists’ agency, showing how they actively navigate their positions.

My findings are in some way unique to my case of South Dakota pro-choice clergy. Clergy, unlike the general population, are in a unique position to act as whistleblowers because of their placement within the religious community. Their confrontation of multiple levels of risk is also unique to their specific location as religious authorities. However, the model presented in Figure 2 may be applied more broadly to other individuals who identify as activists, and/or individuals involved in social movement-related activities. I speculate that these distinctions are important ones for many social movements, where the same activity could be defined very differently depending on the actor. Further, I speculate that perceptions of risks, dependant upon context, influence how activities are defined, how individuals self-identify, and whether or not they join formal social movement groups. Social movement literature would benefit from reconsidering the predominant model of social movement participation and activist identity in light of these findings.

Finally, the case of pro-choice clergy in South Dakota sheds light on contemporary politics and religion in the United States. It is clear that the abortion debate has not been settled, and in states like South Dakota, women's reproductive rights are far from secure. Mainstream media, and indeed many social movement scholars, portray religion as being most often invoked to defend a conservative agenda; however networks of progressive clergy and religious lay people exist throughout the country and are gradually becoming more visible. This study acknowledges some of those individuals in hopes that the religious left will continue to gain recognition from the scholarly community.

APPENDIX A
RECRUITMENT EMAIL

Dear Reverend [Name]

My name is Kelsy Burke and I am a graduate student at the University of Pittsburgh (and former resident of Sioux Falls). [Name of P4MC lay organizer] told me that you are willing to be interviewed by me and gave me your name and contact information. First of all, thank you for agreeing to participate in my master's thesis study on pro-choice clergy in South Dakota. Very broadly, I am interested in learning how you came to participate in reproductive rights activism. I'd be happy to give you more details on my study when we meet in person.

The interview should last approximately one hour. With your permission, I would like to record it. Please note that no identifying information, such as your name or your church name, will be recorded or included in anything I write. The audio recording of the interview and the written transcript will be kept on my password protected personal computer. If you have any other questions regarding confidentiality or anonymity, please let me know.

I would like to arrange an interview that accommodates your busy schedule. I am free during any time on any day between Monday, May 5 and Saturday, May 17 (unless an interview has already been scheduled). We can meet at a location that is most convenient and comfortable to you, and I am happy to travel outside of Sioux Falls if needed. Please email me a few dates and times when you are free, and let me know where you would like to meet.

Finally, I would also like to interview other pastors who support reproductive rights but who may not be involved in P4MC. If you know of anyone who would be willing to talk with me, please forward this email to them or email me their contact information.

I look forward to hearing from you and thank you again for your participation.

Best,

Kelsy Burke
Sociology Department
WWPH 2400, University of Pittsburgh
412-404-2805
Kcb17@pitt.edu

APPENDIX B

STRUCTURED INTERVIEW TEMPLATE

Because your participation in this interview is completely voluntary, you don't have to answer any questions if you don't want to. You also need to know that any identifying information that you share with me, such as your name and your church name, will remain confidential.

Date/time:

What religious denomination are you affiliated with?

What seminary did you attend?

How many years have you been a minister?

How many years have you been a minister in this church?

What's the size of your congregation?

How would you characterize your congregation in terms of:

Age:

Gender:

Class:

Ethnicity:

How long have you lived in South Dakota?

How many other churches have you served? (probe for description)

How old are you?

Are you married or do you have a partner?

Do you have any children? How many? What ages?

What is your highest level of educational attainment?

Are you a member of a political party? Which one?

Note: race/sex:

APPENDIX C

SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW TEMPLATE

Personal History

Do you remember the first time you heard about abortion? Tell me about it. What was your first reaction to this issue?

Probe: Was there a particular individual or event that influenced how you think about reproductive rights?

When you were growing up, did anyone in your church talk about reproductive rights? If so, what views did they express?

Faith and Action

Of all the social issues that exist –e.g. poverty, racism, the war, etc. – why have you chosen to devote time and energy to the issue of reproductive rights?

Does your faith serve as a motivation to act? How?

The Group Itself

(For members)

Tell me about how you heard of P4MC and why you decided you join.
Has your life changed since you became involved with P4MC? How?

(For nonmembers)

Have you heard of P4MC? How did you come to hear about it?
Are you involved with P4MC? Why, why not?

Reactions: Support and Opposition

Has your church ever lent support to reproductive rights activists, for example by offering meeting space in the church? Printing announcements in a church newsletter?

Have you received any reactions – either positive or negative – from those in your church? From the community? Friends and family?

Has your stance on reproductive rights ever caused obstacles to your religious work? Explain.

I've read some really negative comments about P4MC from local anti-abortion clergy blogs. Have you ever faced harassment because of your views?

Has anyone ever threatened you for your stance on reproductive rights?

Have you ever worried about losing your job because of your views?

Other Types of Activism

Are you involved in any other groups that promote social/political issues? Explain....

Probe:

Have you been involved in other social movements?

Have you ever taken a public stand on other political issues?

What types of social or political organizations do you hold memberships in?

APPENDIX D

P4MC MEETING OBSERVATION TEMPLATE

Where _____

Number/composition of Attendees _____

Conflicts (inside group):

Conflicts (outside group):

“Us” or “Enemy” talk:

Emotions Invoked or Displayed:

Other Notes:

APPENDIX E

FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEW TEMPLATE

South Dakota has some of the most restrictive reproductive rights laws in the country. Has P4MC made any gains?

What is the effect of P4MC on the public? On the religious community?

Are there cohesive goals? What are they?

Talk about the extremely negative reaction to the group by some anti-abortion clergy (Voices Carry blog). Is this reaction common? How do you deal with that? Does this influence supportive clergy to not get involved?

Is it difficult to retain members?

Do you have conflicts with your congregation? Friends and family? Other clergy from your denominations?

Expanding issue base: why? How? Does the heightened publicity on the abortion issue impede on this expansion?

What is unique about South Dakota that makes it such a ripe place for abortion restrictions?

What else do you think I should know?

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