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Pro-Understanding: Understanding the Pro-Choice Catholic

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Pro-Understanding: Understanding the Pro-Choice Catholic



Honors Thesis

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Department: Sociology, Anthropology, and Social Work

Advisor: Dr. Holcomb, Associate Professor and Department Chair

April 2022

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Abstract

Abortion is a widely debated and polarizing topic in the United States. While many Catholic leaders and members tend to hold beliefs against abortion, some Catholics are pro-choice. This study explores the perspectives and experiences of this often-under-recognized group. Mixed methods research was conducted to analyze 1) how perspectives towards abortion are changing among Catholics in the United States (using data from the General Social Survey from 1977-2018), and 2) the experiences of college students at a private, predominately white, Catholic university in the Midwest who identify as pro-choice and Catholic. Quantitative analysis shows that Catholics' attitudes towards abortion are becoming more pro-choice as time goes on. Qualitative interviews highlight polarizing education and political experiences, feeling Catholic shame and guilt, and a desire for open dialogue as well as for pro-life to encapsulate all life, such as care for immigrants and climate change, and not only anti-abortion.

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Introduction

I grew up in Tennessee attending Catholic school. I have always loved and been extremely involved in my faith. I was the president of the Power of Prayer club. I won a main faith award when I graduated high school. Alongside my dedication to the faith, I became dedicated to the pro-life mission. I was the president of the pro-life club at my high school and the vice president of the pro-life club for one year at my university. At some point during my vice presidency, I realized how the pro-choice side had always been demonized to me growing up. I had envisioned people with pro-choice beliefs as being humans with bad morals. Part of this was due to what I had been taught, and another part was due to the fact that I had never challenged and thought critically about the different beliefs towards abortion. Once I had this reckoning, pro-choice members started becoming humanized in my eyes, and I started questioning and changing the beliefs I held formerly.

I now understand that this is a complex topic and that it is important to listen to and understand where both sides are coming from. Therefore, I have worked to acknowledge my biases and to be reflexive throughout the research process. This issue polarizes the nation deeply, and there is often deep hatred evident for the opposite side. At my core, I am a peacemaker and strive to bring people together in a way that acknowledges differences and fosters a feeling of acceptance that serves as a mechanism to let people speak their truth. I strive to let the research speak about the perspectives and lived experiences of pro-choice Catholics.

To explore this intersection of pro-choice attitudes and Catholic affiliation in more depth, this project utilized a mixed methods approach. First, data from the General

Social Survey (1977-2018) was analyzed to examine attitudes related to abortion among Catholics and how those attitudes may have changed over time. Second, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 17 participants from a private, Catholic university in the Midwest who identify as pro-choice and Catholic. The study was approved by the university IRB.

Results from the national quantitative data indicate that a growing number of respondents who identified as Catholic also support a women's right to access abortion. Analysis of a question that asked if a woman should be able to access abortion for any reason indicates that attitudes among both non-Catholic and Catholic respondents have become more favorable toward a woman's choice to have an abortion. Qualitative interviews highlighted some of the challenges and nuances of identifying as both Catholic and pro-choice. The overarching pattern was polarization, and within that pattern, the three main themes emerged: polarizing educational experiences, polarizing political experiences, and Catholic shame and guilt. Participants also often voiced a want for pro-life to include all life, such as care for immigrants and climate change, and not just anti-abortion. Interviewees offered two main suggestions to decrease the polarization they have felt: a more objective, age-appropriate, and nonjudgmental education and open dialogue that is aimed towards understanding instead of a shaming debate.

This research is important to shed light on a group of people with a perspective that is not often heard from. Prior research on this perspective is limited; there is not much research on people with this set of pro-choice and Catholic beliefs. This study does not argue if abortion is morally right or wrong, but rather, studies the perspectives and experiences of this often-under-recognized group: pro-choice Catholics. The abortion

conversation is often heard as a black and white topic in Catholicism, and this research exposes the gray area.

Literature Review

Abortion Background

According to the World Health Organization, an abortion is defined “as pregnancy termination prior to 20 weeks’ gestation” (Cunha, 2021, para. 2). Medical editor for an *eMedicineHealth* article, Cunha, describes the different types of abortion from spontaneous abortions, also known as miscarriages, to various medical procedures. There are different methods for a legally induced abortion. The types of medical abortions include medication-induced, suction curettage (aspiration), dilation and evacuation, induction of labor, and hysterotomy/cesarean delivery (Cunha, 2021).

Planned Parenthood details when women most often get an abortion (2015). Planned Parenthood states, “The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) estimates that 65 percent of legal abortions occur within the first eight weeks of gestation, and 91 percent are performed within the first 13 weeks. Only 1.4 percent occur at or after 21 weeks” (2015, para. 4). Most women who receive abortions after the first trimester have voiced that they would have preferred it earlier. Common reasons for the delay include the following: geographic access, economic factors, laws, and age. There are not always abortion clinics nearby, so thus, this is an obstacle for abortion access. According to 2011 data, abortion providers are lacking in 89 percent of US counties. Additionally, the cost of the abortion is a substantial issue when first-trimester abortions can be almost \$500, and second-trimester abortions average around \$1,500. Laws can also cause delays, such as parental consent requirements and “laws that impose required waiting periods”

(Planned Parenthood, 2015, para. 10). Medical concerns may increase during the pregnancy period as well, causing situations where one might be recommended an abortion during the second or third trimester. Situations with one's partner also contribute, such as lack of emotional support or death. Finally, adolescents more often receive abortions after the first trimester: "Among women under age 15, one in five abortions is performed after 13 weeks' gestation" (Planned Parenthood, 2015, para. 21). Reasons for this include "fear of parents' reaction, denial of pregnancy, and prolonged fantasies that having a baby will result in a stable relationship with their partners" (Planned Parenthood, 2015, para. 23). All in all, most abortions take place in the first trimester, but there is a plethora of reasons for second and even third-trimester abortions, including lack of financial resources, providers, and abortion clinics.

In addition to when abortions typically happen during the pregnancy process, there are various reasons as to why women get abortions. Chae et al. conducted a study to analyze the reasons for women obtaining abortions across 14 countries (2017). Chae et al. utilized nationally representative data in three forms: "official statistics, population-based surveys of reproductive-age women (15-49 years) and facility-based data collected from abortion patients" (2017, pp. 234). In the United States specifically, the 2008-2010 data indicated: "The top three motivations for seeking an abortion were not being financially prepared (40%), not the right time for a baby (36%), and partner-related concerns (31%)" (2017, pp. 236). Chae et al. concluded that financial concerns heavily influence women's abortion decisions. Nonetheless, finding only the main reason can be limiting and overly simplistic as there are many reasons that go into the decision to have an abortion.

Abortion History

McBride (2008) describes the history of abortion prior to and after the monumental court cases of *Roe v. Wade* and *Doe v. Bolton* in 1973. McBride is an Emeritus Professor at Florida Atlantic University in Political Science, founded their women's studies program, and is "a specialist in the comparative study of women and public policy" (Washington State University, para. 3). History has shown that women will always get abortions whether they are legal or not. In the first half of the 19th century, abortions were easily accessible and considered "women's business" (McBride, 2008, pp. 4). However, abortion became criminalized in the second half of the 19th century, as doctors saw it as their duty to save the babies' lives. Considering the "abortion triad" which compares power among the government, doctors performing safe abortions, and women wanting abortions, empowerment left the women and was given to the government and doctors after this switch of policies (McBride, 2008, pp. 9). In the 1930's, 17,000 out of 800,000 women who sought abortions died annually (McBride, 2008). As a result, police forces targeted doctors performing illegal abortions. In the second half of the 20th century, McBride describes the result of the rise in feminism: "They shifted the terms of debate from a contest between doctors and the government to a rebellion of women against the medical/government establishment that controlled their reproductive capacity and their bodies" (2008, pp. 15). In early 1973, 57% of Americans, and 54% of Catholic Americans, believed that abortion should be decided upon between the woman and her doctor. Nonetheless, following the court cases of *Roe v. Wade* and *Doe v. Bolton* in 1973, Catholic leaders took a more active stance on the pro-life matter.

Birth control being considered a private matter foreshadowed abortion being regarded as the same in 1973. Walker (2009), who was a professor of political science at

Wright State University, writes about the history of birth control. In 1873, the Comstock Act censored birth control communication, considering it immoral (Walker, 2009). The 1960's oral contraceptive changed many opinions, but some religious groups, such as the Catholic Church, still opposed birth control. In 1965, Walker details the *Griswold v. Connecticut* case that “ruled that the state must have compelling reasons for outlawing birth control, finding that there was a fundamental right to privacy, which included the right of married couples to control their fertility” (2009, para. 5). Furthermore, Walker writes about the 1972 court case *Eisenstadt v. Baird*, “The Court further extended the right to birth control by striking down on equal-protection grounds a Massachusetts law criminalizing the distribution of birth control to unmarried persons” (2009, para. 6). Finally, Walker states, “In *Carey v. Population Services International* (1977), the Court extended First Amendment protection to advertisements of contraceptives” (2009, para. 7). By attributing birth control to one's right to privacy, this foreshadowed the right to privacy concluded in the abortion-related court cases of 1973.

The cases of *Roe v. Wade* and *Doe v. Bolton* in 1973 contributed to the legalization of abortion. *Roe v. Wade* concerned a woman, Norma McCorvey under the alias of Jane Roe, who wanted an abortion because she could not financially raise a child. McBride writes that this case “was a challenge to the constitutionality of the criminal law that Texas enacted in the 1850s. The law prohibited anyone to ‘procure’ or ‘attempt’ an abortion except, based on medical advice, ‘for the purpose of saving the life of the mother’” (2008, pp. 16). *Doe v. Bolton* involved a woman, Sandra Bensing under the alias of Jane Doe, who was a victim of domestic violence and “could not take care of another child” (McBride, 2008, pp. 17). McBride states that this case “was a challenge to

Georgia's 1968 reform that criminalized abortion except when the pregnancy endangered the life of the mother, there was a grave fetal deformity, or the pregnancy was the result of rape" (2008, pp. 17). Even more, women seeking abortions under this Georgia reform law had to have their case be approved by a committee as well as pass medical judgment from two doctors and the woman's own doctor. These two court cases were treated "as a single decision," and the justices concluded that privacy is a fundamental right and that the government cannot overstep and interfere in a woman's privacy of abortion (McBride, 2008, pp. 17). Nonetheless, McBride states:

After the beginning of the third trimester, the 'State in promoting its interest in the potentiality of human life may, if it chooses, regulate, and even proscribe, abortion except where it is necessary, in appropriate medical judgement, for the preservation of the life or health of the mother.' (2008, pp. 18)

Thus, states can still impact access to abortion, placing limitations particularly on abortions in later stages of pregnancy and requiring that abortions in this later stage are necessary for the mother's health.

Abortion Access

Since *Roe v. Wade*, there have been many laws and regulations passed that restrict abortion access, with some estimates indicating that over 1,000 different regulations have been enacted across the U.S. (Perreira et al., 2020). In part, this is due to the Planned Parenthood of Southeastern *Pennsylvania v. Casey* case in 1992 that stated, "States have broad authority to impose regulations on access to abortion so long as regulations do not pose an 'undue burden' to the woman seeking an abortion" (Perreira et al., 2020, pp. 1043). There has been political discourse among state leaders deciding what is

technically considered an “undue burden.” These laws include preabortion counseling, a waiting period, and regulation on who can perform an abortion and where, among other restrictions (Perreira et al., 2020). In addition, other states specify time frames during which abortions can occur, with some states, such as Georgia and Mississippi, effectively banning abortion after six weeks. Utilizing data from the 2018 Survey of Family Planning and Women’s Lives, in states with four or more limiting laws, the women were more likely to perceive abortion access as difficult. Also, Perreira and colleagues study “how Republican control of state government and the proportion of the state population identifying as Evangelical shaped the abortion policy context and women’s perceptions of access” (2020, pp. 1042). They find that women perceive abortions to be more difficult to access in states controlled by Republican governors and legislatures as well as with a higher population of Evangelicals.

Abortion rates have been changing in the United States due to a variety of factors. Jones and Jerman assess these changes between 2008 and 2014 (2017). Jones and Jerman found, “Between 2008 and 2014 the national abortion rate declined 25%, from 19.4 to 14.6 abortions per 1000 women aged 15 to 44 years” (2017, para. 20). However, Jones and Jerman detail the varying rates of abortion among women in different groups, including social class, age, and other demographic information. In terms of social class, Jones and Jerman state “In 2014, 49% of abortion patients had family incomes below 100% of the federal poverty level, a significant increase from 42% in 2008” (2017, para. 6). Adolescents decreased from 18% to 12% of the women who get an abortion. Research suggests this is due to contraceptive changes, such as “increased reliance on long-acting reversible contraception (LARC)” as well as improvements in the “typical use failure

rates for condoms” (Jones and Jerman, 2017, para. 31-2). In 2014, women between the ages of 20 and 24 “had the highest abortion rate: 28.0 per 1000” (Jones and Jerman, 2017, para. 21). When looking at marriage and cohabiting factors in 2014, never married women had the largest share in the abortion rate: 45.9% (Jones and Jerman, 2017, para. 22). Jones and Jerman explain the racial disparities among 2014 data: “White women accounted for the largest share of abortions among the 4 racial and ethnic groups examined (38.7%), although they had the lowest abortion rate: 10.0 per 1000. Black women were overrepresented among abortion patients and had the highest abortion rate: 27.1 per 1000” (2017, para. 23). It is notable that there were large decreases from 2008 to 2014 among minoritized racial groups: a 39% decrease for women who were Non-Hispanic other, 36% for Hispanic women, and 32% for Non-Hispanic Black women, whereas Non-Hispanic White women had a 14% decrease. Women who are a college graduate or more have the lowest rate of abortions: 10.3 per 1000. Finally, Jones and Jerman write about this pattern if it continues:

Women aged 40 years and older had a cumulative first abortion rate of 236.7 per 1000, meaning that an estimated 23.7% of women aged 15 to 44 years in 2014 will have an abortion by age 45 years if the 2014 abortion rates continue throughout their reproductive lives. (2017, para. 29)

Certain groups, particularly low-income women, are overrepresented in the share of women who get abortions and are also disproportionately impacted by laws that restrict abortion access (Jones and Jerman, 2017).

Additional research explores connections between abortion and sociodemographic characteristics. Dehlendorf and colleagues analyze the root causes of the disparities

among Black, Hispanic, and lower-income women with a focus not on whether abortions are moral but rather on helping women “achieve their personal fertility desires” (2013, pp. 1772). Dehlendorf and colleagues state the following: “Understanding the systemic nature of these disparities and their relationship to health outcomes provides an essential context to the consideration of disparities in abortion rates” (2013, pp. 1773). According to the 2008 National Survey of Family Growth, 70% of Black women and 57% of Hispanic women who were pregnant had unintended pregnancies compared to their white counterparts, among whom 42% of pregnancies were unintended. Related to socioeconomic status, 64% of low-income women who were pregnant had unintended pregnancies compared to their “income of more than 200% FPL” counterpart of 37% (Dehlendorf et al., 2013, pp. 1773). Dehlendorf and colleagues summarize some relationships:

Disparities in abortion rates are related to disparities in unintended pregnancy, and associated disparities in contraceptive use. Structural factors, including economic disadvantage, neighborhood characteristics, lack of access to family planning, and mistrust in the medical system underlie these findings. (2013, pp. 1775)

There are social systems in place that oppress certain groups, such as minoritized races and ethnicities as well as lower-income populations, and these systems lead to a wide range of disparities, including in the prevention of unintended pregnancies. Overall, the reasoning for a higher percentage of abortions among minoritized racial groups and groups of lower socioeconomic status is due to the structural problems that lead to more unintended pregnancies in these groups.

Pro-Life and Pro-Choice Ideologies

Following the monumental court cases of *Roe v. Wade* and *Doe v. Bolton*, the Pro-Life and Pro-Choice Movements increased in vibrancy. The Catholic Church also became more politically active against abortion, especially with Pope Paul VI's *Humanae vitae* encyclical, which is a letter written by the Pope and sent to all Bishops. At the same time, McBride (2008) describes how there was no consensus among Catholics on how to go about being in the Pro-Life Movement or even if they should become politically active. In the late 1970's, a study on Californian pro-life activists found that many had only considered that it was possible for life to begin at conception and that many of the activists were women with traditional marriages who did not work outside the home and put their children's care above their own (McBride, 2008). At this same time, the Republican Party decided to add the pro-life stance to their ideology in order to gain support from individuals who may not otherwise have voted. With this shift, religion became a more central factor in the political landscape.

Generally, the pro-life arguments include the following: God created life which begins at conception with the sperm and the egg; killing is wrong, so therefore, abortion is wrong; a baby has a right to life; sometimes people who have pro-life beliefs argue that abortion is actually a threat to women; and the government is unjustly allowing for these "individual rights" just like "when it said slavery was okay because people had a right to own slaves and do what they wanted" (McBride, 2008, pp. 23). All in all, pro-life members focus on the "unborn child" (not saying the "fetus" or "embryo") and the womb (not necessarily the "mother" or "woman") (McBride, 2008, pp. 23-4).

On the other hand, original advocates for abortion in the Pro-Choice Movement were "doctors, lawyers, and professionals associated with population control and family

planning” (McBride, 2008, pp. 24). Then, the women’s liberation movement mobilized everyday people to fight for access to abortion.

The pro-choice arguments include the following: Abortion affects women, so therefore, they should be able to make and are capable of making the decision; the main goal is to raise happy and healthy children who are wanted instead of focusing only on legalizing abortion; laws against abortion do not eliminate abortions; and the Catholic Church says sex, assuming heteronormative vaginal-penile penetration, should not involve contraception and is only for procreating. Therefore, through criminalizing abortion, they are furthering their agenda “to attack contraception and, ultimately, sex itself” (2008, pp. 27). More specifically for the arguments, McBride writes, “It is not just a question of legal abortion; it is a matter of reproductive freedom and liberty... the overall goal has a much broader context of bearing wanted children and raising them to be happy and healthy citizens” (2008, pp. 25). Also, history has shown that women will still seek abortions, and this fact could make it all the more dangerous to their health since the abortions might not be conducted in a safe manner. Overall, the pro-choice side avoids using terms like “baby or unborn child” when speaking of abortions and rather, “use medical terms like zygote, embryo, and fetus” (McBride, 2008, pp. 27). All in all, the pro-choice side views the pro-life side in the following manner: “[Their] primary goal: [is] to force women to be dependent, to limit their lives to bearing children, and to control women’s lives and choices” (McBride, 2008, pp. 27). As McBride indicates, these two perspectives have taken very oppositional stances.

The Catholic Church

The Catholic Church is well-known for being heavily involved in the abortion topic. Holman and Shockley (2017) detail the Catholic Church's hierarchy and their involvement in politics. Ultimately, the Pope is the highest position of authority in the Catholic Church who resides in Rome at the Vatican. Then, Bishops work to "shape political behavior" in their smaller, more specific environments (Holman and Shockley, 2017, pp. 842). The Catholic Church is mainly involved politically in two manners. Primarily, Holman and Shockley write, "American bishops lobby the national government on policies of central importance to the Catholic faith such as social justice, reproductive rights, and the more general notion of the dignity of life" (2017, pp. 843). At the same time, not all people in leadership positions in the Catholic church agree politically, such as about the salience of certain topics. Secondly, the Catholic Church mobilizes the general Catholic population to become politically involved with the Church's goals and missions in mind. Holman and Shockley detail the Church's ability to do so, stating, "This hierarchical structure and political history point to a more effective organization for political activism than other denominations" (2017, pp. 845). The Catholic Church's political involvement and hierarchy facilitate the spread of messages of belief and exercise influence.

Although there is a clear hierarchy of leadership positions in the Catholic Church, that does not necessarily mean beliefs are handed down and believed by all members. Holman and Shockley find that the local levels of the Catholic hierarchy do not exactly follow the messages they are told from those above them in the Catholic hierarchical structure: "Despite the efforts of the USCCB [United States Conference of Catholic Bishops], the FCCB [Florida Conference of Catholic Bishops], and the diocese in the

state– reaffirms that even in a denomination with more rigid doctrinal control, parishes deviated in how or whether they complied with hierarchical dictates” (2017, pp. 856). As messages trickle down the hierarchy, they can be influenced by the priests’ personal beliefs and political viewpoints, and church members can disagree based upon their own beliefs. Holman and Shockley state, “Our results suggest that despite the efforts on the part of the Catholic Church to present homogeneous information to parishioners, it behaves very similarly to other denominations in the United States” (2017, pp. 842). Therefore, the local religious context seems to be more politically influential compared to the global Catholic messages from those high up. Holman and Shockley conclude, “Catholic voters, as they struggle to form their own consciences take the multiple and at times conflicting cues provided by the Church and just as their Church calls them to do, become faithful citizens with well-formed consciences” (2017, pp. 858). Despite the church’s efforts to disseminate consistent messages regarding church teaching, interpretations of Catholicism vary among local contexts, and members can choose to follow certain interpretations or make their own.

Catholic Church History with Birth Control and Abortion

Fourth Century to the First Half of the 20th Century

Three academics write about the history of the Catholic Church regarding birth control and abortion: Ruether (2008), Williams (2016), and Fehring (2019). Ruether is a feminist church historian and theologian with a Ph.D. in classics and patristics at Claremont Graduate School (Your Dictionary, n.d.). She commonly critiques Catholicism: “Active beginning in the early 1960s in civil rights and peace movements, and later in the feminist movement, Ruether was thoroughly Catholic and radically

reformist in her scholarly approach to various topics essential to contemporary religious discussions” (Your Dictionary, n.d., para. 1). In her journal article, “Women, Reproductive Rights and the Catholic Church,” Ruether describes Catholic opposition to reproductive rights as well as the rebellious Catholics who are fighting for reproductive rights (2008). In addition, Williams writes about the Catholic Church’s complicated history against abortion and contraceptives (2016). Williams is a history associate professor at the University of West Georgia who studies American religion and politics. He has written *Defenders of the Unborn: The Pro-Life Movement before Roe v. Wade* and *God’s Own Party: The Making of the Christian Right* (Berkley Center, n.d.). Finally, Fehring clarifies that he writes through a lens of “the Linacre Quarterly, the official journal of the Catholic Medical Association” that deals with medical ethics, and he explicitly states he is on the pro-life side (2019, pp. 187). Fehring (2019) describes the ten years before and after the transformative encyclical by Pope Paul VI: *Humanae vitae* as a significant turning point that intensified the pro-life movement. Overall, these three authors explain the history of the Catholic church, regarding birth control and abortion.

Ruether begins by tracing a core Catholic thinker from the late fourth and early fifth centuries, St. Augustine, who believed women are made in the image of God but are subordinate to males. In the thirteenth century, Thomas Aquinas furthered this inferior view of women “being produced biologically as incomplete human beings” (Ruether, 2008, pp. 185). In this perspective, this is why Jesus was not a woman and why there are no women in leadership positions that involve being ordained. St. Augustine viewed sex as a sin if there was any sexual pleasure involved; in marriage, it was forgiven or allowed in order to procreate. During the Women's Suffrage Movement later on, Catholic leaders

were against women's emancipation. They believed that voting was too masculine, and a woman's place should be in the house, obedient to her husband. However, with the success of the movement, Catholic leaders had to adjust and thus, mobilized Catholic women to fight against these progressive topics as well. In her book, McBride debunks the common thought that abortion has always been in Catholic teaching: "It is more accurate to say that, like others, Catholic theologians wrote tracts about abortion, but there was no official church doctrine" (2008, pp. 7). Rather, Pope Pius IX made this declaration in 1869: "The embryo was a being with a soul from conception and abortion was a sin leading to excommunication" (McBride, 2008, pp. 7). This declaration often forms the basis on the Church's foundation on the abortion viewpoint.

Williams describes the history starting in the 1920's when an Archbishop proclaimed at a Christmas event, "In the first instance [abortion], the body is killed, while the soul lives on; in the latter [birth control], not only a body but an immortal soul is denied existence in time and in eternity" (2016, pp. 81). Abortion and birth control both were viewed as immoral in the Catholic community. In the 1930's, natural birth regulation methods began, and members of the Catholic Church were advised to talk with their priest and physician about using this natural method— only in serious situations (Fehring, 2019). However, Catholics were still against birth control believing that it creates a mentality that hates birth and that more birth control usage would lead to more abortions, in the chance that their contraceptives fail (Williams, 2016). Catholics share similarities with the views of Protestants at the time of the 1940's and 50's believing that abortion and birth control are "refuges of 'immoral' women" (Williams, 2016, pp. 79). Following World War II, there was a baby boom and not enough resources, so thus, Pope

Pius XII promoted “natural birth-regulation methods” (Fehring, 2019, pp. 192). Then, the United Nations began the creation of the Declaration of Human Rights, and Catholics took this as a means to further their pro-life cause with the “right to life” (Williams, 2016, pp. 83).

Second Half of the 20th Century to Current Time

In the 1950’s, the first hormonal birth control pill was created by a group of scientists and physicians that was funded by Sanger and philanthropist McCormick (Fehring, 2019). As background, Margaret Sanger was one of the beginning advocates for birth control who, in 1921, started The Birth Control League that eventually became Planned Parenthood. In 1958, Pope Pius XII declared the pill could be used to treat medical conditions but disagreed with it being used as a contraceptive. However, the lines blurred when women often used it for contraception, saying it was for medical conditions.

The 1960’s were a monumental time period that heavily influenced the Church. In 1963, Pope John XXIII wrote an encyclical in his pontificate *Pacem in Terris* that states, “Women have the right to equal inclusion in all the rights of the human person in society and entrance into public life, work and politics” (Ruether, 2008, pp. 186). During the sexual revolution, women were fighting for reproductive rights, equal employment, etc., and even more, some Catholic women were fighting for more liberal topics, such as ordained women in leadership positions of the Church (Ruether, 2008).

Dr. John Rock and Dr. Celso Garcia received approval for the first birth control pill which led to the sexual revolution, and “use of the natural methods dropped to around 2% of users of family planning methods in the U.S.” (Fehring, 2019, pp. 195). Catholic

lobbyists tried to block laws that allowed the sale of contraceptives in supermarkets declaring that it promoted indulging in sex (Williams, 2016). There was a fight for power between many legislators who believed birth control was a private, relative matter in which the government has no right to decide what is moral and Catholics who believed it was their duty to stand for what is moral.

Pope John XXIII started the Second Vatican Council which lasted from 1962 until 1965 and modernized aspects of the Church (Fehring, 2019). The Catholic Church was getting criticized for its promotion of the rhythm method instead of contraception, as this natural family planning method often failed and caused stress (Ruether, 2008). Fehring writes about how Vatican II addressed the topic of birth control, “Archbishop Suenens from Belgium convinced the Pope to take the issue of birth control out of the jurisdiction of the Council and to appoint a special commission to study the question of birth control and population” (2019, pp. 195). Even though Pope John XXIII followed through with this Birth Control Commission, his predecessor, Pope Paul VI, ordered that only he could see their findings (Ruether, 2008; Fehring, 2019). However, the findings were leaked, and internationally, people knew of this commission that ultimately tried “to change Church teaching on the matter of birth control” (Fehring, 2019, pp. 195). Pope Paul VI did not approve of their conclusion that was in favor of birth control within the context of a marriage that anticipated having some children, so he wrote the encyclical *Humanae Vitae* that re-emphasized the traditional Catholic stance on the matter (Ruether, 2008).

With Vatican II, Catholics increased their favor of contraceptives; at that time, over three-quarters of American Catholics favored birth control. In 1965, a survey concluded that 53% of Catholic women who could have children were using birth control

(Williams, 2016). With this shift towards more acceptance of birth control, Williams writes, “Catholics who opposed abortion realized that they had to do more to differentiate the right-to-life cause from the Church’s failed campaign against contraception” (2016, pp. 89). The question— is birth control a form of abortion or a preventative measure?— remains in the gray area with no definitive answer. Williams states:

In the end the NRLC [National Right to Life Committee] chose a course of silence on contraception, a stance that allowed them to retain a larger coalition of allies but that continued to cause them trouble with a sizeable faction of theologically conservative Catholics in the movement. (2016, pp. 99)

As Catholics started to see support for their position on birth control dwindling, there was a shift into focusing more on abortion.

In 1968, Pope Paul VI wrote an encyclical named *Humanae vitae* that condemned birth control and abortion (Fehring, 2019). Several younger physicians, Catholic universities, and even many bishops and theologians disagreed. Pope Paul VI strongly supported natural family planning. He believed abortion and birth control were both morally wrong. Fehring writes that this encyclical “became a stimulus for efforts to promote NFP [Natural Family Planning] and the pro-life movement in the U.S. and around the world” (2019, pp. 201).

The Catholic Church was not always against abortion, but rather, ended up there. There is a complicated history of defining when a person is a person:

Medieval scholasticism did not define the fetus as a full human person until the fourth month... In the late nineteenth century, partly inspired by the acceptance of the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception of Mary, this changed to defining the

embryo as fully human from the first moment of conception. (Ruether, 2008, pp. 187)

During his position of power from 1978 to 2004, Pope John Paul II led a movement among Catholics that continued traditional viewpoints against women's ordination, birth control, and abortion.

During the AIDS epidemic, there was division among Catholic leaders concerning the use of condoms to prevent the spread of AIDS. Some leaders spread false information that it does not help prevent the spread, and others supported condoms in order to prevent more deaths from AIDS. Around this same time in 1995, a Salvadorian archbishop appointed by Pope John Paul II introduced a bill to ban abortion without exception, and it was passed. Ruether details the consequences of an abortion, "The abortion provider faces a prison term of 6-12 years, those who help her/him 2-5 years and the woman herself 2-8 years in the first trimester and 30-50 years if the abortion occurs after the first trimester" (2008, pp. 192).

In response to these restrictive actions of Catholic leaders on women's reproductive rights, there are Catholics who disagree and are often viewed as rebellious. Catholics for a Free Choice is a Washington D.C. organization with partnering global organizations that works to "decriminalize abortion and make contraception and sex education available in their countries" (Ruether, 2008, pp. 193). There are Catholics, such as members of this group, who defy the norm of being pro-life as a Catholic, and they work on a political level for reproductive rights.

Abortion in Ireland

Ireland is an example of a very Catholic country that made the switch from a pro-life to a pro-choice public majority. In 1983, Ireland passed the Eighth Amendment which made “the right to life of a fetus [equal to]... that of a pregnant person” (Carnegie and Roth, 2019, pp. 109). This amendment caused women to resort to dangerous and/or international methods to abort (Carnegie and Roth, 2019, pp. 109). As a result, the Abortion Rights Campaign began a grassroots effort to fight these restrictive laws. In Ireland, referendums were added to the Eighth Amendment outlining a select few exceptions in which one can obtain an abortion. The 1992 X Case involved a 14-year-old girl who wanted to leave the country to get an abortion because she was raped. The Irish High Court did not allow her, but at a higher level, the Irish Supreme Court decided to allow her and thus, “prompted a referendum that inserted into the constitution an explicit provision on freedom to travel” (Carnegie and Roth, 2019, pp. 111). This case shows the economic disparities of abortion access, since one has to have the means to leave the country in order to get an abortion. Also, 31-year-old Savita Halappanavar was denied an abortion for her incomplete miscarriage, and she died “from medical mismanagement of her condition [of sepsis]” (Carnegie and Roth, 2019, pp. 111). Her death sparked an additional referendum that was aimed toward making Ireland define when women can legally obtain an abortion. Later, in 2013, the Protection of Life During Pregnancy Act was passed through an intense manner in which “anti-choice activists harassed and threatened elected officials in a way that was not common in Irish politics on issues other than abortion” (Carnegie and Roth, 2019, pp. 112). This law declared it was legal to get an abortion if the mother’s life was at risk or if there was the risk of suicide. Ireland’s intense polarization on the topic of abortion is similar to the United States.

The Abortion Rights Campaign (ARC) in Ireland created effective regional networks that spread awareness about abortion. The general public began transitioning towards a pro-choice majority with an average of 63% of the nation voting to repeal the Eighth Amendment, but the government remained against abortion (Carnegie and Roth, 2019, pp. 112). The ARC raised awareness of this situation to the UN Human Rights Committee who, in turn, “ruled that Ireland violated the rights of individuals who had no choice but to travel to access abortion care” (Carnegie and Roth, 2019, pp. 113). As a result of the pressure that this increased awareness and work put on the government, the Irish Parliament made a Citizens Assembly with randomly selected participants to discuss different topics, such as the Eighth Amendment (Carnegie and Roth, 2019). The ARC was hesitant about this tactic at first because it put “human rights... [to] depend on public opinion” and “had no clear objectives and was not transparent about how speakers were to be selected” (Carnegie and Roth, 2019, pp. 113). Nonetheless, the ARC joined the process in which the assembly members were said to be impartial. Carnegie and Roth describe the pro-choice conclusion of the assembly, “They [members] came to recognize the need for significant changes to increase access to abortion and advocated for these in their robust slate of recommendations” (2019, pp. 114). This assembly, along with the Together for Yes grassroots group, caused the government to enact “larger-scale reform” (Carnegie and Roth, 2019, pp. 114).

In 2018, the Eighth Amendment was repealed, and Ireland passed a bill to make abortion free. However, there were still restrictions, such as a mandatory waiting period. Carnegie and Roth explain the downsides for the pro-choice side, “It... establishes a needlessly cumbersome system that remains grounded in a chilling criminal law

framework, heavily restricts abortions after the first trimester, and erects barriers that serve no legitimate purpose” (Carnegie and Roth, 2019, pp. 115). This law still lets abortions be criminalized outside of certain exceptions. In conclusion, Ireland is an example of a very Catholic country that came to have a pro-choice majority. The general public pressured the government which caused an assembly to form, and legal, pro-choice change was visible.

Current Situation of Abortion in the United States

Currently, the topic of abortion is an extremely controversial issue that has increased division and polarization in the United States. On one hand, *Roe v. Wade* and *Doe v. Bolton* legalized abortion, but on the other, many states have been enacting restrictions. Most notably, Texas recently passed strict state legislation that bans “abortions as early as six weeks” (Najmabadi, 2021, para. 1). Whole Woman’s Health clinics are located at four different locations in Texas, and Najmabadi writes, “About 90% of women who come to Whole Woman’s Health clinics are more than six weeks into their pregnancy” (2021, para. 42). Moreover, the bill allows private citizens to sue people getting, helping obtain, or giving abortions after this six-week marker, and “people who sued would be awarded at least \$10,000, as well as costs for attorney’s fees, if they won” (Najmabadi, 2021, para. 22). With this strict bill, it is expected Texas will negatively impact women’s access to reproductive health care and prevent many abortions from happening.

Another instance of abortion being a contentious issue is the Bishops’ unsuccessful vote to deny President Biden, and other pro-choice or pro-choice-leaning Catholic officials the Eucharist, a sacrament in Catholicism. In a similar manner, Ruether

details one instance of Catholics in the Philippines in 2006. There, the Catholic Bishops Conference threatened to “deny baptism, communion, confirmation, weddings or burials to anyone who supports or uses contraception” (Ruether, 2008, pp. 189). In the United States, the rationale is due to Biden being a practicing Catholic who is in favor of abortion rights. McCammon describes the divided stances: “About two-thirds of American Catholics believe Biden should be allowed to receive Communion, according to a survey by the Pew Research Center released in March,” but at the same time, “More than half of Catholics who also identify as Republicans said Biden should not be allowed to receive the sacrament because of his views on abortion” (2021, para. 16). All in all, abortion is a topic that starkly divides the United States, evident with the question of the President of the United State receiving the Eucharist due to his abortion beliefs.

Purpose of this Research

Abortion is an extremely polarizing topic, especially in the Catholic Church. It is often assumed that if one is Catholic, then they are also pro-life. However, that is not always the case. There is a gap of research about pro-choice Catholics, and this research will contribute to filling in that gap. The quantitative data analyzing attitudes towards abortion from 1977 until 2018 shows the changing nature of attitudes towards abortion among Catholics. Based on literature, the hypothesis is that the General Social Survey data will show an increase in Catholic acceptance of abortion over time. Additionally, the interviews of pro-choice and Catholic students at a private, Midwest Catholic university shed light on this perspective that is often not heard from. The expectation is that a theme among the interviews with pro-choice Catholics will include them talking about making their own moral decisions based on loving and accepting people in a way that respects

other's abilities to make decisions for themselves. This research can help the Catholic Church and general public better understand the perspectives and experiences of people who are pro-choice and who identify as Catholic.

Methods

Quantitative and Qualitative methods were the basis for this research. For the first part of the research question, "Based on General Social Survey data, how have attitudes towards abortion changed among Catholics since 1977?," secondary survey data analysis was conducted with the latest data from the General Social Survey that has data regarding abortion from 1977 to 2018 with 64,000 participants. The GSS includes "interviews administered to NORC [National Opinion Research Center] national samples using a standard questionnaire" (GSS Codebook, viii). For the first survey in 1972, about 105 sociologists and social scientists revised the questionnaire. Some of the grants and funders include the Russell Sage Foundation and the National Science Foundation. The data from these interviews was analyzed with NORC standard procedures.

The National Science Foundation describes the sample: "26 in-person, cross-sectional surveys of the adult household population of the U.S." (*An Overview of the General Social Survey*, n.d., pp. 11). With higher than a 70% response rate and because "the 1972-74 surveys used modified probability designs and the remaining surveys were completed using a full-probability sample design," this data is a "high-quality, representative sample of the adult population of the U.S." (*An Overview of the General Social Survey*, n.d., pp. 11). Furthermore, the NSF describes the interviews:

The basic GSS design is a repeated cross-sectional survey of a nationally

representative sample of non-institutionalized adults who speak either English or Spanish. Subsampling of nonrespondents is done to limit survey costs while maintaining a nationally representative sample. Each GSS formally includes an A sample and a B sample. The preferred interview mode is in-person interviews; however, a few interviews will be done by telephone in the event that an in-person contact cannot be scheduled. (An Overview of the General Social Survey, n.d., pp. 11)

All in all, the GSS is a rigorous survey that encapsulates a significant amount of responses, so generalizable conclusions are able to be reached. The large sample size of the GSS is conducive to analyze shifts in attitudes towards abortion over time.

Bivariate data analysis was conducted between Catholics and attitudes towards abortion, specifically among dependent variables concerning abortion and independent variables including Catholic or not and Year. Utilizing SPSS software, crosstabs were created, and Chi-Square tests were run between the variables to see the relationship and if the relationship is statistically significant. The data was put into Google Sheet graphs to create visual representations.

For the second part of the research question, “How have pro-choice attitudes influenced identification with the Catholic Church?,” 17 semi-structured interviews were conducted with students who identify somewhat as pro-choice and Catholic at a private, Catholic, predominately white university in the Midwest and analyzed using Nvivo software. The research proposal was developed and received IRB approval. Purposive and snowball strategies were utilized. Personal contacts were emailed, and the Department of Sociology and Women’s and Gender Studies Program emailed out the

Invitation to Participate. Of the 19 responses received, 17 interviews were completed. All interviews took place on the university's campus in November 2021. The interviews lasted anywhere from about 15 to 50 minutes. Participants reviewed the Invitation to Participate in Research form, verified they were not experiencing any Covid-19 symptoms, and completed a demographics sheet. They were asked if they were okay with the interview being recorded on a voice recorder. Interview questions focused on religious upbringing and current views, beliefs on abortion and opinion on pro-life and pro-choice sides, how religious and abortion beliefs intersect, and other related topics. Specific questions asked and other related information to the interviews can be found in Appendix A: Interview Guide. They were thanked for their participation through speaking as well as thank you cards, and they were invited to talk further if something else came to mind.

Following the interviews, the voice recordings were uploaded and transcribed utilizing the Nvivo software program feature. Identifying information was removed, and the transcripts were placed under their pseudonyms in Google Docs as back-ups. Names mentioned are pseudonyms. Then, the transcripts were edited for accuracy, and a running list of themes and subthemes was created, using a grounded theory approach to identify key themes. The transcripts were printed and coded with the following recurrent themes: General Childhood/ Family, Turning Point in Belief, Pro-Life Inclusion of All Pro-Life Topics, Shame/Guilt, Open Dialogue, Personal Beliefs on Abortion, Politics, Education, Other Social Justice Issues Disagree with Church, Good Quote, and Miscellaneous. Specific categories were coded for in an open and focused manner, with colored pens on all the printed transcripts in a binder, and memos were written (Esterberg, 2002). The

codes and some memos were transferred to Nvivo. Reappearing themes were recorded. In reporting quotes in the results, identifying information is removed. Quotes have been edited for clarity where necessary, removing filler words such as “like,” “um,” and “you know,” but not changing respondent’s wording or intended meaning.

The combination of the quantitative and qualitative data analysis yields a well-rounded picture of changing ideology among Catholics concerning abortion. Since the General Social Survey has a large sample size and a lengthy range of years, the results and findings of the secondary survey analysis were more able to be generalized compared to the qualitative data analysis. Also, this method was less time-consuming than analyzing the interviews. This quantitative side of the research allows for more macro-level research. However, there were limitations with the quantitative data, such as not being able to explore the answers which the qualitative data was able to go into more to some extent.

At the same time, there are limitations with the interviews. To start, the interviews were conducted at a predominately white institution. There was minimal diversity among age, gender, race and ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and place of primary residence. A drawback was the time-consuming data collection method of transcribing and coding. The Nvivo software program significantly helped speed up the process. Moreover, the sample size was not very large. Thus, the findings from the interviews were not able to be generalizable. However, there were identifiable similarities or patterns among the interviews, and the interviews allowed the participants to speak from this perspective not often heard from. Moreover, the qualitative side of the research allows for a more micro-level, in-depth view of the topic. While follow-up questions could not be asked that arose

during the secondary survey analysis, they were able to be asked during the interviews. Thus, the interviews allowed for a more in-depth view of the research, and the surveys allowed for more generalizable, cumulative statements.

There were ethical considerations, mostly with the interviews. An ethical consideration that arose was letting myself influence how participants responded. I wanted to truly allow my participants to voice what they believe, so while I validated what they were saying, that could seem as agreeing with them. I wanted to remain neutral, acknowledging my biases. I worked to be reflexive in the qualitative analysis process. Also, this topic is a sensitive one in which many of the research participants may be uncomfortable sharing their perspectives with the general public. Therefore, informed consent and confidentiality were very important. Their information, such as full name and email address, was kept in a password protected file. Their identifying information was removed from the interview transcripts, and they were given pseudonyms. Only the researcher and thesis advisor have access to the interview transcripts with the identifying information taken out. Overall, confidentiality was particularly important because this research could have been a sensitive subject for the participant.

Results

Secondary Survey Analysis

Four dependent variables regarding abortion were analyzed with the independent variable of Catholic or not as well as year, when applicable. ABANY includes cumulative data since it was asked from 1977 until 2018. ABANY is the mnemonic for “Abortion if woman wants for any reason.” The variable includes the question “Please tell me whether or not you think it should be possible for a pregnant woman to obtain a

legal abortion if... READ EACH STATEMENT, AND CIRCLE ONE CODE FOR EACH” (Smith et al., 1977-2018, pp. 473). The statement for ABANY is “The woman wants it for any reason?” The responses are 1: Yes, 2: No, 8: Don’t know, 9: No answer, and 0: Not applicable. The question was asked in the range from 1977 until 2018; the specific years it was asked are the following: 1977, 78, 80, 82, 83, 84, 85, 87, 88, 89, 90, 91, 93, 94, 96, 98, 00, 02, 04, 06, 08, 10, 12, 14, 16, 18. This shift created a smaller sample size because not everyone who took the survey received that question.⁶

ABANY was the main variable used for quantitative data analysis. This is mostly due to the year range it was asked which allows for a cumulative view on public opinion on abortion. At the same time, there are limitations. For one point, public opinion is unavailable for before, during, and right after *Roe v. Wade* and *Doe v. Bolton* court cases in 1973. Also, this question is limiting in the way that people who are somewhat pro-choice or somewhat pro-life but not in every situation might feel forced into a “Yes” or “No” response. The limited response categories prevent more in-depth exploration of possible nuances and complexities in perspectives. Therefore, the interviews prove helpful in exploring attitudes in more depth.

In addition to ABANY, ABLEGAL was studied with the data from 1977 and was compared somewhat to the data from the variables conducted in 2018: ABFELEGL and ABMELEGL. The variable ABLEGAL stands for “should abortion ever be legal.” The question asked was “Do you think abortions should be legal under any circumstances, legal only under certain circumstances, or never legal under any circumstance?” The response categories were 1: Under any circumstances, 2: Under certain circumstances, 3: Never legal, 8: No opinion, 9: No answer, and 0: Not applicable.

The variable ABFELEGL stands for “women only: women should be able to have legal abortions.” The question asked was “Leaving aside what you think of abortion for yourself, do you think a woman should continue to be able to have an abortion legally or not, or would you say it depends?” The response categories were 1: Should, 2: Should not, 8: It depends, 9: Don’t know, 9: No answer, and 0: Not applicable. The variable ABMELEGL stands for “men only: women should be able to have legal abortions.” The question asked was “Leaving aside what you think of abortion for those close to you, do you think a woman should continue to be able to have an abortion legally or not, or would you say it depends?” The response categories were 1: Should, 2: Should not, 8: It depends, 9: Don’t know, 9: No answer, and 0: Not applicable. For both ABFELEGL and ABMELEGL, they were asked on ballots A, B, and C, but not D.

These variables were chosen for various reasons. The variable ABLEGAL gauges respondents’ opinions on if abortion should be legal. However, it was only asked in 1977. Therefore, it is limited in the way that it does not cover a cumulative range of years. At the same time, the responses to ABANY are able to capture a longitudinal perspective. ABLEGAL can capture public opinion during an earlier time whereas ABFELEGL and ABMELEGL capture a perspective that is 41 years later. However, these are separate variables with different response categories which should be noted. The latter two variables were chosen because they are very interesting in the way that they separate male and female perspectives.

Bivariate data analysis was conducted with the aforementioned dependent variables with the independent variable CATHORNO. The variable RELIG, which stands for R’s religious preference, was re-coded. The response categories are 0: IAP, 1:

Protestant, 2: Catholic, 3: Jewish, 4: None, 5: Other, 6: Buddhism, 7: Hinduism, 8: Other Eastern, 9: Moslem/Islam, 10: Orthodox-Christian, 11: Christian, 12: Native American, 13: Inter-nondenominational, 98: DK, and 99: NA. Many people of other religions were clumped into “Other” before 1988. The variables were re-coded into 0: not Catholic, 1: Catholic, and 9: Missing. In RELIG, 0 (IAP), 98 (DK) and 99 (NA) became 9 (Missing); 2 (Catholic) became 1 (Catholic); and the rest of the religions became 0 (not Catholic).

Through SPSS software, a bivariate crosstab was created with ABANY and CATHORNO, and a graph was created utilizing Google Sheets. Also, a Chi-Square test was run between these two variables to assess the significance of relationships between the variables. Then, crosstabs, Chi-Square Tests, and Google Sheet graphs were conducted with all the following variables: ABLEGAL, ABFELEGL, and ABMELEGL as dependent variables and CATHORNO as the independent variable.

Attitudes toward Abortion Among Catholics and Non-Catholics from 1977 to 2018

Attitudes towards abortion tend to yield pro-choice over time, evident in the GSS data from 1977 to 2018 for the dependent variable ABANY with the independent variable CATHORNO. Evident in Figure 1, for the most recent data in 2018, Catholic respondents are approaching a 50/50 divide in response to if women should be able to have an abortion for any reason. Although opinions among Catholic respondents have moved in pro-choice directions, the majority— although only by 7.6%— of Catholics report that a woman should not be allowed to receive an abortion for any reason. As shown in Figure 2, for the most recent data available in 2018, 46.2% of Catholics responded that a woman should be able to choose an abortion for any reason, compared to 51.1% of non-Catholics.

Referencing Figure 2, attitudes among both non-Catholic and Catholic respondents have become more favorable toward a woman's choice to have an abortion for any reason. Figure 2 separates out the pro-choice respondents within Catholic and non-Catholic groups. Therefore, the red line is a percent of Catholic respondents, and the blue line is a percent of non-Catholic respondents. In 1977, 39.4% of non-Catholics were in favor of abortion if she wants it for any reason. However, in that same year, 32.1% of Catholics held the same opinion. In 1978, Catholic respondents dropped to 25.7% in support, which was the most pro-life percentage of Catholic respondents in any recorded year. Also in 1978, the lowest percentage of non-Catholic respondents for this pro-choice response category was 35.9%, as seen in Figure 2. Following 1978, there are two more mentionable drops in support of abortion. Non-Catholic respondents dip from in 1980 44.3% to in 1983 36.3% in support of an abortion if a woman wants it for any reason. Likewise, Catholic respondents have two dips: one from in 1982 38.1% to in 1983 29.2% as well as another from in 1984 33.9% to in 1985 27.8%.

From 1977 to 1990, attitudes fluctuated for both non-Catholic and Catholic respondents with many dramatic falls and climbs, evident in Figures 1, 2, and 3. Evident in Figure 2, starting in 1991, the non-Catholics move more smoothly in the pro-choice direction. On the other hand, Catholic respondents experienced quickly progressing pro-choice responses and then quickly progressing pro-life responses, creating an inconsistent trend, from the time span of 1990-2000. In 1990, 34.1% of Catholic respondents agree that a woman should be able to have an abortion if she wants it for any reason. In 1994, that percentage rose to 45.2%. Then, in 2000, that percentage dropped to 33.3%. Following 2000, Catholic respondents remained steady towards the pro-choice direction

ending in 38.5% in 2016 and 46.2% in 2018 in favor of a woman receiving an abortion if she wants it for any reason.

Bivariate analysis was conducted through Chi-square tests which assessed the relationship between religious affiliation and attitudes toward abortion. One test was run using the cumulative GSS file, with data from 1977 to 2018, evident in Figures 1, 2, and 3. The specific data for these graphs can be found in a crosstabulation made in SPSS in Appendix B: Table 1 Variable ABANY Data. In this test, the p-value is .00, so the null hypothesis can be rejected. There is a statistically significant relationship between ABANY and CATHORNO from the time frame of 1977 to 2018. When examining specific years, the p-value between ABANY and CATHORNO with data from just 1977 is .013, so there is also a significant relationship between ABANY and CATHORNO in 1977. However, the p-value for the data from just 2018 is .129 which shows there is not a significant relationship between ABANY and CATHORNO in 2018. Therefore, the null hypothesis for 2018 cannot be rejected. In this year, 51.1% of non-Catholic and 46.2% of Catholic respondents favor abortion if she wants it for any reason. As shown in Figure 1, pro-choice and pro-life perspectives are approaching an equal 50% among Catholic respondents. Over time, the relationship between religious affiliation and perspectives on abortion has weakened, evident in an insignificant p-value for 2018 compared to a significant p-value for 1977.

Figure 1

Catholic Attitudes toward Abortion if Woman Wants for Any Reason, 1977-2018

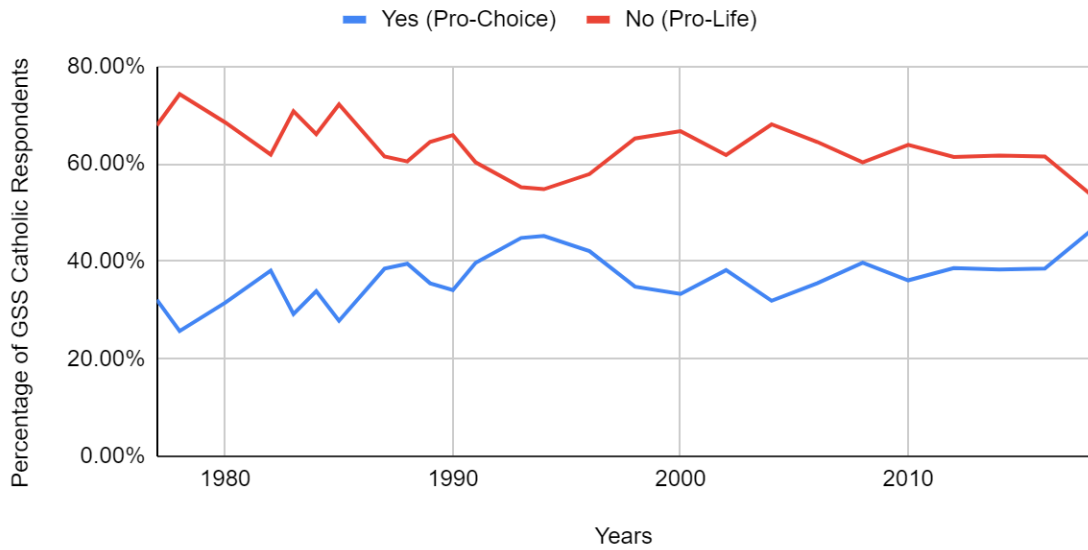


Figure 2

Pro-Choice Attitudes toward Abortion if Woman Wants for Any Reason, 1977-2018

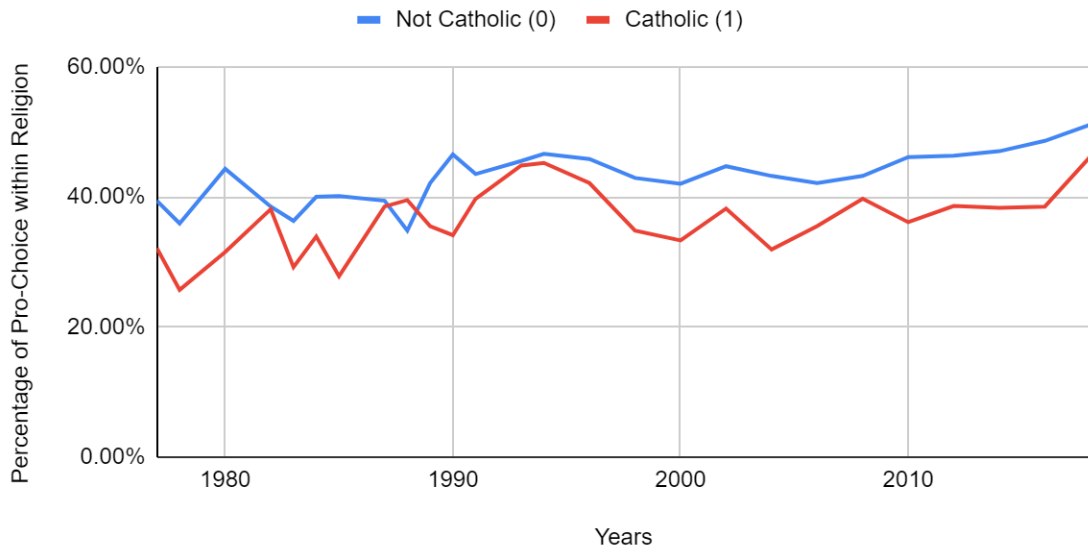
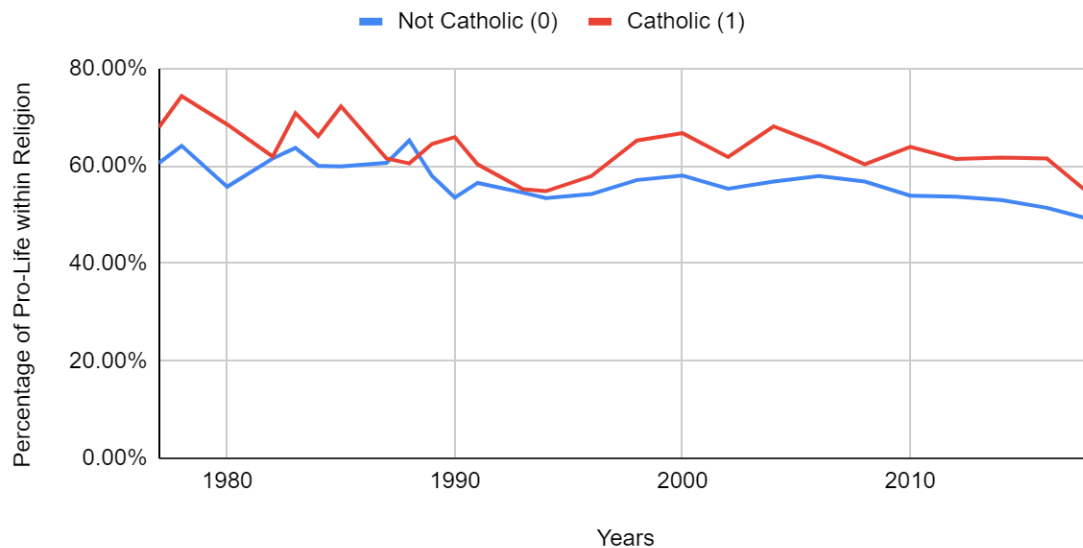


Figure 3

Pro-Life Attitudes toward Abortion if Woman Wants for Any Reason, 1977-2018

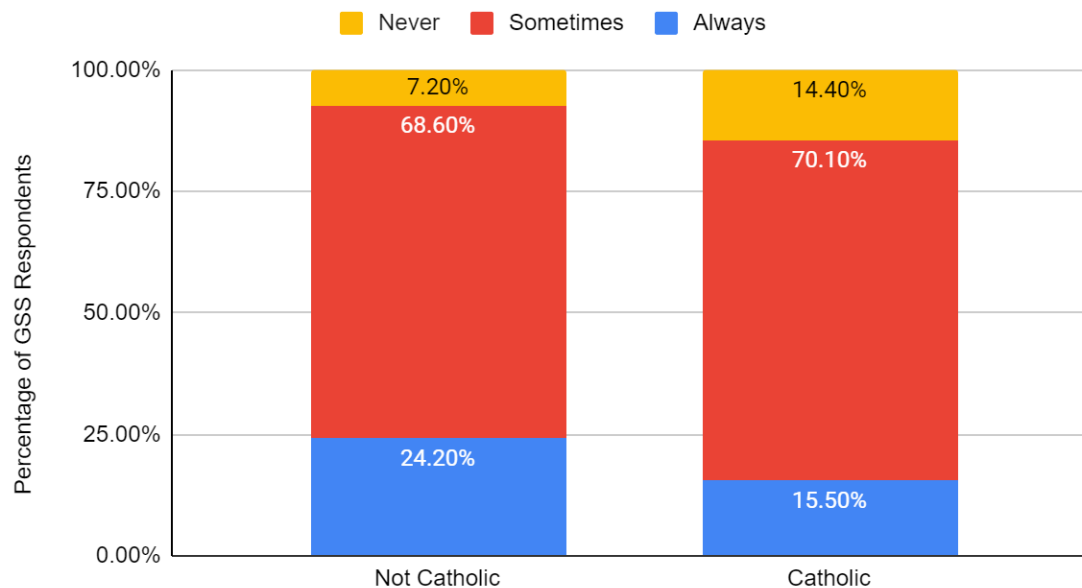


Attitudes toward the Legalization of Abortion Among Catholics and Non-Catholics in 1977

In 1977, GSS respondents were asked: “Do you think abortions should be legal under any circumstances, legal only under certain circumstances, or never legal under any circumstance?” Figure 4 depicts this test of the dependent variable ABLEGAL with the independent variable CATHORNO. More of the non-Catholic respondents said Always: 24.2% compared to their Catholic counterparts of 15.5%. Slightly more Catholic respondents said Sometimes: 70.1% compared to their non-Catholic counterparts of 68.6%. Double the amount of Catholic respondents said Never: 14.4% compared to their non-Catholic counterparts of 7.2%. The p-value is .00, so the null hypothesis can be rejected. There is a statistically significant relationship between if a person believes abortion should be legal and being Catholic or not in 1977.

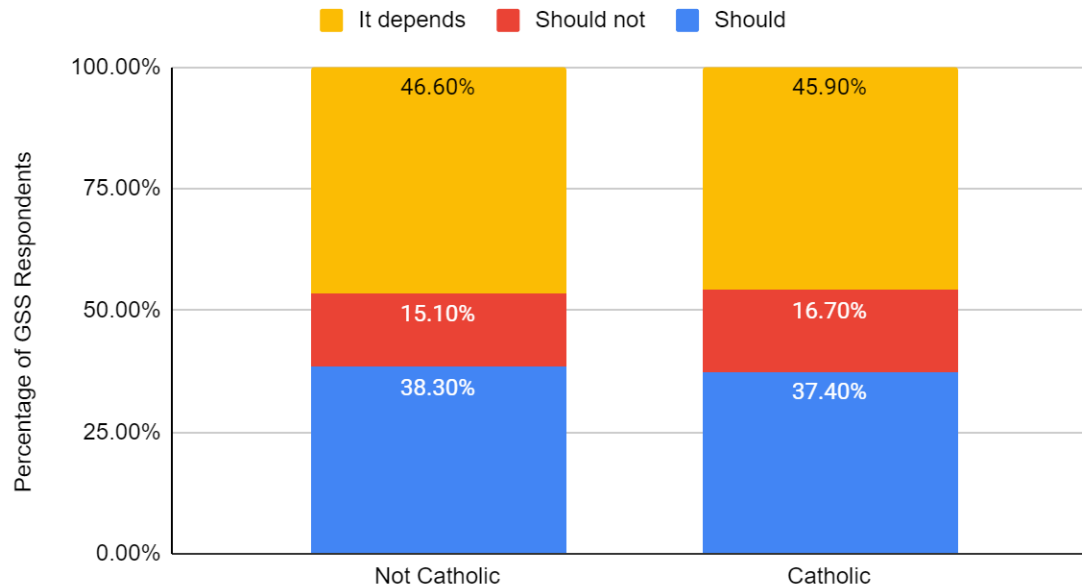
Figure 4

Attitudes toward Legalization of Abortion, 1977



Attitudes toward the Legalization of Abortion Among Catholic Women and Non-Catholic Women in 2018

When only women were asked in 2018 if they think women should be able to have legal abortions for the dependent variable ABFELEGL with the independent variable CATHORNO, there was not much difference between the non-Catholic and Catholic respondents, evident in Figure 5. The p-value for the Chi-square test is .822, so the null hypothesis cannot be rejected. There is not a statistically significant relationship between whether women believe women should be able to have legal abortions and whether they are Catholic or not. The difference between Catholic and non-Catholic respondents for each response category of Should, Should not, and It depends is about 1 percentage point. Among female respondents to the 2018 survey, being Catholic or not was not associated with attitudes toward legal access to abortion at a statistically significant level.

Figure 5*Women Attitudes toward Legalization of Abortion, 2018**Attitudes toward the Legalization of Abortion Among Catholic Men and Non-Catholic Men in 2018*

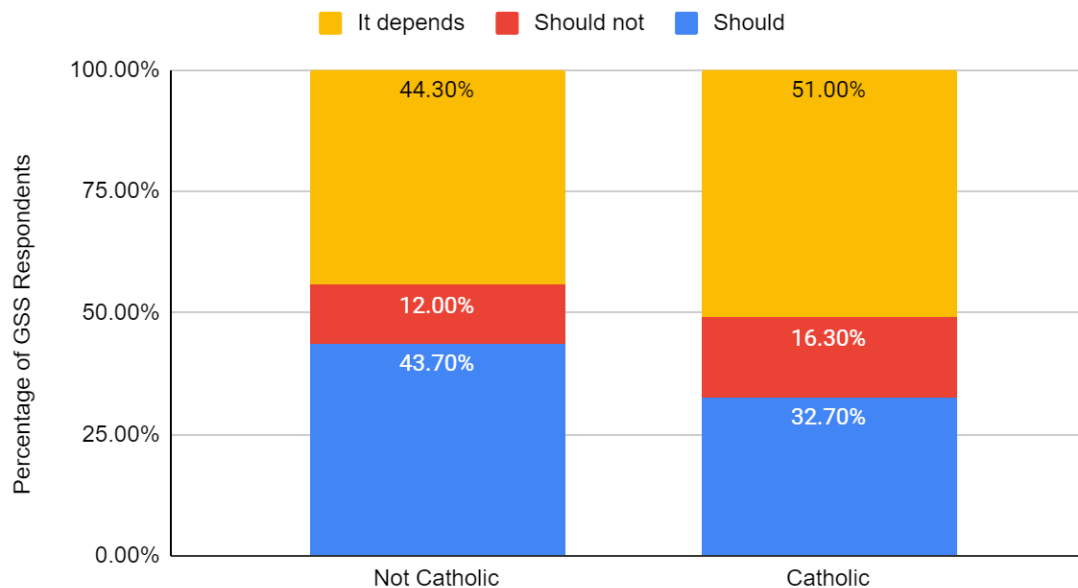
When only men were asked in 2018 if they think women should be able to have legal abortions for the dependent variable ABMELEGL with the independent variable CATHORNO, there was a difference between the non-Catholic and Catholic respondents, evident in Figure 6. The p-value is .012, so the null hypothesis can be rejected. There is a statistically significant relationship between whether men believe women should be able to have legal abortions and whether they are Catholic or not. Among non-Catholic respondents, 43.7% agreed that women should be able to have legal abortions, compared with 32.7% of Catholic men who responded. Also, 12.0% of non-Catholic respondents and 16.3% of Catholic respondents said women should not be able to have legal abortions. Finally, 44.3% of non-Catholic respondents and 51.0% of Catholic respondents

said that it depends on if women should be able to have legal abortions. The majority by far of Catholic respondents fall into the It depends category. A slight majority of 44.3% of non-Catholic respondents fall into this same category, with 43.7% of non-Catholic respondents in the Should category. All in all, the GSS Survey respondents who are most supportive of legal abortion from 2018 are non-Catholic men, and the least supportive of legal abortion are Catholic men. Non-Catholic and Catholic women fall in between the two with no significant relationship tying their religious and abortion beliefs together.

The dependent variable data of ABLEGAL can be compared, somewhat, with that of ABFELEGL and ABMELEGL. There are different questions asked between these with different response categories. However, both measure attitudes toward legal access to abortion. ABLEGAL gives the response categories of Never, Sometimes, and Always. For the sake of comparing the data, Never can correspond to Should not, Sometimes to It depends, and Always to Should. Comparing the graphs this way, 24.2% of Non-Catholic and 15.5% of Catholic respondents said Should in 1977. In 2018, 38.3% of Non-Catholic women, 37.4% of Catholic women, 43.7% of Non-Catholic men, and 32.7% of Catholic men respondents said Should. Similarly, the amount of 1977 respondents saying It depends is about 20% higher than the 2018 respondents. Attitudes towards abortion have changed over time in a pro-choice direction, evident in this comparison of attitudes toward the legalization of abortion 41 years apart.

Figure 6

Men Attitudes toward Legalization of Abortion, 2018



Interviews

The 17 semi-structured interviews were analyzed utilizing a grounded theory approach. After the interviews were conducted, they were transcribed through the Nvivo software program feature and then edited for accuracy. There was a running list of themes that came from the data during this stage of research. A refined list of codes arose from the data including General Childhood/ Family, Turning Point in Belief, Pro-Life Inclusion of All Pro-Life Topics, Shame/Guilt, Open Dialogue, Personal Beliefs on Abortion, Politics, Education, Other Social Justice Issues Disagree with Church, Good Quote, and Miscellaneous. After hand-coding, these codes and most memos were transferred into Nvivo. Participants' demographic information was also in Nvivo. Through the features of Nvivo, it was possible to look at different interviewee's transcripts and certain codes with the responses from all interview participants. In addition, Nvivo states how many times a code is used. The codes Politics and

Shame/Guilt were in the top three most recorded codes, in addition to Open Dialogue. Therefore, all the responses to Politics and Shame/Guilt were printed and organized to gain a better picture of them and identify any possible sub-themes. Once the main themes were identified, quotes were used to represent these main themes as well as statistics of how many participants mentioned these main themes.

Through their interviews, the participants indicated that, in their experience, abortion is a very polarizing and politicized issue, in which being Catholic and pro-choice seem to be incompatible stances. Life experiences had instilled in them that to be Catholic also meant to be against abortion, which was also affiliated with more conservative, Republican political affiliations. Main themes that arose as to how this perspective developed are polarizing educational experiences and polarizing political experiences involving the topic of abortion. Participants voiced frustration with pro-life just being anti-abortion, instead of also helping immigrants, climate change, and other pro-life issues. Furthermore, most interviewees have experienced some form of shaming or silencing and are not comfortable sharing their own views. Participants offer various suggestions to decrease polarization, mostly including open dialogue and a comprehensive education.

Demographics

Participants come from various backgrounds, with some similarities. In Appendix C, there is Table 2 Demographic Information that shows the interviewees' demographic information based on their responses to the demographic sheet that were simplified into categories, such as liberal, democratic, and democrat being simplified into Democrat. Table 3 Religious Beliefs, found in Appendix D, shows religious beliefs as determined

throughout the interviews. It is notable that 94% of the participants are female, and 88% of the participants responded that they are white whereas 6% are male and 6% are Black. Regarding age, 94% of respondents are 23 years old or younger. Concerning socioeconomic status, 88% of respondents wrote that they are of Middle Class or Lower-Middle Class; they were not required to give a specific household income which is a limitation as some interviewees may have a different interpretation of definitions, such as of middle class. Participants were born across the country, such as New York, Texas, and Georgia. There was minimal diversity among gender, race and ethnicity, age, socioeconomic status, and place of primary residence.

Regarding political party identification, the majority, 71%, are Democrat with 12% Independent and 6% Republican. As for religious affiliation, all are or were Catholic in some form: 76% Catholic, 12% Formerly Catholic, and 12% Catholic/Christian. After analyzing the data, their religious beliefs were further categorized. The majority of 82% are still somewhat Catholic: 35% Practicing Catholic, 35% Catholic Identifying but not Practicing, and 12% Catholic Questioning. Interviewees expressed a range of experiences in their families of origin, with a range of political affiliations, perspectives on abortion, and adherence to Catholic teachings.

Polarizing Educational Experiences

Out of the 17 interviewees, 14 mentioned attending Catholic school whereas one went to public school all throughout, and two did not mention their type of schooling. Since most of the participants went to a Catholic school, pro-life ideology was embedded in various ways into their education. Common themes that arose were graphic ways of teaching what an abortion is as well as this molding of a pro-life student through

voluntary class trips to the March for Life and class activities that only focus on the pro-life side and do not explore the pro-choice rationale.

As many interviewees voiced, educational experiences where abortion was discussed often included graphic and age-inappropriate imagery and language. People came to Mariana's high school and spoke about how an abortion happens "and how they would go in and crush [hits her fist in hand to make a noise] the skull of the baby and pull it out." Abortion was often taught in an aggressive manner with an almost scare tactic. Alicia describes how in fifth grade, her faith formation group went on a field trip to a pro-life organization, and the speakers were against abortion:

I just remember one of the speakers was an abortion is when a talented doctor uses their talents for evil... I just remember the word vacuum coming out and sucking the baby from the mother's womb... I'm in fourth or fifth grade. Like, I don't need that imagery... That memory feels very sharp in my mind.

In a similar manner, during Matt's eighth grade year, he recalls his "very pro-life" religion teacher who, he said, "explained to us all the different ways that children get aborted. And it was very graphic and it's very disturbing. And so that was kind of like my first encounter with it." Maya describes her graphic memory from school, "I think being in third grade and going to a presentation where there's slides of pictures of dead fetuses on- that's too much. That's- I think that's traumatizing... It's fear rather than you shouldn't do this because life is precious... And it's threatening rather than loving."

According to some interviewee's experiences, tactics to teach about abortion in Catholic schools often involve fear with overly graphic and sometimes traumatizing experiences.

In addition to the manner of teaching about abortion in a Catholic school setting, there were many pro-life activities throughout school, some required and some voluntary. When Claire was in eighth grade, she was assigned to write a required pro-life essay on why women should not get abortions. Maya describes a similar situation, “Every year of my education, we had to write a pro-life essay and enter them to the dioceses and it was a whole thing of pray to end abortion.” At Isabella’s high school, there was one day a year when students could voluntarily get a piece of red tape in the morning to put over their mouths and not talk for the whole day “to represent all the the babies who weren’t born and who never had a voice.” Mariana recalls a capstone project from graduating seniors at her high school that “showed a diagram... of how they do an abortion of crushing the baby and pulling out all the bones or parts.” Amelia describes the pro-life club at her grade school and how it was the “cool thing to do,” so she joined. However, she did not quite understand what was going on, and looking back, she describes it as “on the side of brainwashing.” In this club, she says, “[The group] framed everything as murder and like terms that really have such strong negative emotional connotations that... scared me and made me think a certain way.” All in all, with the anti-abortion-centered educational experiences that many of the research participants vocalized, there was a theme of discomfort in the approaches to teaching about abortion and a recognition that these educational experiences were rather one-sided.

Polarizing Political Experiences

Research participants also discussed the intersections of political and religious identification. They often perceived an expectation that as a Catholic, they would also be pro-life, and as a result, politically conservative. However, the research participants often

go against this norm. Jasmine contradicts being constricted to one political party saying, “I’m Catholic to my core. I’m going to try to do what Jesus did, because that is our God. So it’s not about worshiping political leaders, it’s about worshiping Jesus.”

Participants voice struggles being in this gray space where political and religious affiliations intersect.

A key example of Catholicism being politicized is involvement in the March for Life, an annual event in Washington, D.C. that draws attendees (many of whom are school children) from across the country. Without being specifically asked about it, ten participants explicitly mention the annual D.C. march. Of the ten, two mention having attended. Jasmine went in high school, as did her siblings, and Brie went with her family growing up. Seven explicitly mention the trip being tied to their school, six in high school and one in college. Amelia, Annabella, and Josie discuss being asked by friends if they were going. Amelia states:

In high school... I became friends with some people who were really active in their faith. And I was too. But I always kept my pro-choice beliefs, but I felt like I really had to hide that... And then people... assumed that I was pro-life and asked me to go on a march for life... And I would just say, oh, I’m busy.

Annabella describes her experience in which she felt isolated when asked by friends if she was attending the march. At the same time, Josie does not mention there being contention in not going. When her friends asked if she was going on the March for Life in college, she says “There’s never that anti-pro-choice around me, I feel like, because like I said, all my buddies went to the pro-life march, but it wasn’t like, oh she’s not coming. It was just like, okay, we’ll be back on Sunday.” Since there are many different beliefs on

her college campus, she feels more comfortable and secure with her viewpoint that goes against the expectation of Catholicism. Brie and Matt mention hearing from others about how the march was not necessarily pro-life. Brie says, “My brother went... and he said they got to D.C. and got off the bus and everyone pulled out Trump hats and it became a Trump rally, like it wasn’t even about the issue.” Matt states, “Quite a few of my friends... have [attended the march] and they say that that’s basically all it is, is just anti-abortion.” Finally, Mariana mentions an interesting comparison of her high school turning down a person’s request to also send a group to the Women’s March in D.C. that is the same week as the March for Life: “Why couldn’t there be support for both the Women’s March and the March for Life?... It’s like, do you not support women?” All in all, the March for Life inclusion in Catholic schools illustrates the political involvement of the Church, specifically in an anti-abortion manner.

Apart from March for Life experiences, participants discussed other experiences involving the political nature of abortion. Amelia details working the polls for the 2016 election. She asked her AP U.S. Government teacher if it was okay if she put herself down as a Democrat because she felt surrounded by Republicans at her Catholic high school, and her teacher responded affirmatively. An older lady approached her at the polls and said, “If you’re Catholic, why are you a Democrat?” Amelia defied the norm of being conservative as a Catholic, and she was made very aware of this transgression when she was called out. Brie talks about her experience as a member of a Black family in her church, “We’re standing in church with the same people, holding hands, praying the Our Father with the same people who are on Facebook saying Blue Lives Matter. And in the comments of posts that my parents would put up about Black Lives Matter, saying

negative things about that.” Apart from being evident in the abortion conversation, Brie states her experiences with Catholicism leaning conservative in other areas as well, such as concerning race and ethnicity. Even more, Jasmine expands on how the church needs to fight for liberal topics that are in accordance with the faith but will not for fear of politically conservative backlash: “I think there’s a conference going on right now... Pope Francis called them [US Catholic bishops] out about not doing enough or saying enough about climate change. And the reason that they held back is because they wouldn’t get support from conservative politicians.” Participants voiced various political experiences, specifically feeling the pressure to be conservative and Republican that stems in-part from the expectation of being pro-life as a Catholic.

Related to the avoidance of conservative pushback, participants often critiqued the pro-life side for not encompassing all pro-life issues, such as care for immigrants and about climate change, and rather just being anti-abortion. Jasmine summarizes the many different pro-life topics that various interviewees also mentioned:

From a broad view, if... you're just seeing what the general populations believe, I think that people think pro-life is anti-abortion and pro-choice is pro-abortion. However, I believe in something different. And I believe that pro-life includes anti death penalty. It includes [...] human rights issues and supporting people and that [inaudible] it's end of life issues and especially like taking care of the elderly. I think that's not talked about a lot. But abuse to the elderly, that's something that's not pro-life and then also euthanasia. [Or...] immigration rights. It's also what I like to say is like the climate change is the biggest underrated pro-life issue because it impacts literally every single person and especially the most

vulnerable. And as a Catholic, we are kinda like we, we say that we are called to care for the most vulnerable in our populations. And climate change is impacting those people currently and has been. And so that is included in what I believe is pro-life. And it's just like every life matters from, I believe, conception until natural death. And that is a Catholic statement from conception until natural death. And I do believe in that. However, that's not what politically pro-choice or pro-life means.

Jasmine describes how American politics have put a divide in what it means to be pro-life, so conservative pro-life rationale is moreso anti-abortion and does not also focus on caring for the elderly, immigrants, and climate change as Jasmine mentions. In a similar manner, Maya talks about the limiting nature of being anti-abortion. She says:

There are a lot of issues currently that I consider to be pro-life issues, but are not addressed in the pro-life sector like foster care and like private adoption and surrogacy... and also rape laws... I think that should also be addressed and it's more ignored in the more extreme pro-life area.

Paige even says that this pro-life inclusion of all pro-life topics could gain members for the pro-life side, "I think that if the Catholic Church...[was] more widespread about the idea that being pro-life means more than just being anti-abortion, I think they would gain a lot more traction with our generation. I think that that's a really good talking point."

Brie speaks in a similar way for herself personally, "I think society believes pro-life is just the fetus and the baby and doesn't worry about other issues like racism, adoption, environmental stuff, all those extra things that play into someone's life... I think if it was all encompassing of those things, I think I'd consider myself to be more pro-life."

Participants expressed a want for the pro-life movement to be more expansive of pro-life topics, not only focusing on being anti-abortion. Overall, interviewees shared experiences of not fitting into this expectation that if one is Catholic, then they are also anti-abortion, and as a result, politically conservative.

Catholic Guilt and Shame that Silences

Among the interviewees, a common thread that emerged was feeling Catholic guilt and shame for believing what they do. The interview participants were asked the question, “Have you ever felt like an outcast in your religious community for your stance on pro-choice or pro-life issues?” Of the 17, nine participants answered yes, three answered yes and no, and five said no. Still, even for those who might have said no, a common theme among all the participants is the lack of bringing this topic up or the avoidance of this topic altogether.

Participants voiced experiences that left them feeling shamed for their perspective and consequentially, avoiding the topic for fear of being shamed again. Aforementioned, Amelia was approached by a woman at the polls calling her out for her political stance due to her known religious beliefs. As a result of that “very off-putting” experience, she describes the repercussions, “That always stuck with me, I think. And I had it in my mind I couldn’t tell my best friend who was very Catholic, very faith-filled. I never told her that I was pro-choice just cuz I felt like I wouldn’t be accepted, or I would be judged for my views.” This experience at the polls negatively impacted Amelia, and she later felt unable to share her perspective with her best friend. Cindy describes attending Catholic programs or retreats “where obviously the people’s opinions are going to be more pro-life.” She says:

I would kind of speak up and say something that kind of would spark an argument and that was definitely divisive. And I was very much the minority in that stance, which is hard because it's hard enough to defend yourself against a bunch of people when you're the only person with like one of that opinion.

Cindy says that now she is less likely to speak up in some situations, and she is more likely to blend in with the people she is around. She also has felt like an outcast "in subtle ways" in which her pro-life friends and family post on social media, and she stays quiet about how she disagrees. Similarly, Paige talks about not speaking her beliefs in part due to a divisive moment. Growing up with a family very active in the pro-life movement, she says:

I usually just don't talk about it just because I know it's such an emotional topic for so many people in my community, that even if I have- the times that I have talked about it, I've been literally screamed at like berated because of it. So, I just don't bring it up anymore.

She also describes how it can become emotionally driven on the pro-choice side as well. Participants have experienced very divisive moments in which they have been harshly shamed for their beliefs.

Some participants do not mention having experienced an episode of shaming, but rather, they stay quiet in fear of having that experience. Maya describes her white, traditional, conservative church. She says, "I think that there are a lot of people in the church that have similar viewpoints that I do. But it's almost like you're scared to say something because it's like all these people that you grew up with... are going to think you're the devil." Even more, she does not make a public statement about her beliefs for

fear of this backlash towards others, such as her family. Some participants describe being extremely particular about who they voice their, or some of their, beliefs to. Laura describes how she is able to talk with her best friend about politics, but she also says, “I know that if I were at home and I actually went to church, I would not bring it up, cuz not only is it a Catholic church which already has its stance, but, my hometown is very conservative... It's a lot of people saying you're wrong. And I don't think I would ever wanna bring that up.” Laura avoids engaging in this conversation when she expects to be immediately shut down and shamed for her viewpoint. In a similar manner, Matt explains how he does not get involved in certain groups in the church or on campus with different beliefs because he’s “not going to cause problems.” When he is involved in pro-life settings, he talks about not voicing his full set of beliefs and how he internally feels like an outcast:

I would be able to go into those [pro-life] situations and have those conversations and present in a pro-life way. But I know that I just wouldn't say specific things like, oh well, like what about X, Y, or Z? And I think me personally would feel a little more like an outsider, just like in my own mind and like how I felt rather than specifically being called out as someone who doesn't hold the same beliefs as them.

He often does not voice his entire viewpoint to neither fully pro-life nor fully pro-choice groups. Destiny, a nontraditional older student working at the university, describes how she does not bring up this topic, so she does not know how her colleagues would react. She says, “I would like to think that the people that I am around on a daily basis would not treat me any different or ostracize me or anything like that. You know, they would

they would understand and accept me for for my own views.” Destiny does not engage in this conversation at work and hopes that she would not be ostracized if she were to. Some participants voice staying quiet about or altering how they express their personal beliefs, based on their experiences with and perceptions of possible negative responses.

There were two notable exceptions. Firstly, Alicia describes how she has not felt like an outcast, even though she responds to if she has ever felt like an outcast with a yes and a no. She does not argue about this with her family, and her immediate family is pro-choice. She states, “I don’t think that I’ve ever because of my beliefs on abortion, I don’t think that I’ve ever felt like an outcast. I think I’ve always been able to communicate with others.” Alicia discusses how she has been able to communicate with others with different perspectives, which is different from other interviewees’ experiences. Secondly, Isabella has not felt outcasted in any way and did not mention that she avoids talking about abortion. She also no longer identified herself as Catholic, but instead says that she is spiritual. She states, “I don’t know if I ever really felt a part of a religious commun[ity]- I was obviously, but I didn’t feel like I had that strong backing where I would feel judged if I went a different way or did something different or believe something.” This demonstrates the diversity of experiences related to shame and community among pro-choice Catholics.

Some interviewees have been made to feel like they are not even Catholic. Laura describes forming her own beliefs in high school and then solidifying her pro-choice beliefs in college, “In high school, definitely, I felt like I was kind of not a real, not a real or true Catholic because of what I was believing, because I had been taught that God was one way and that he told us to respect life.” She felt like she was not a real or true

Catholic because her beliefs started to go against a teaching so central to what she had been taught. Mariana has stayed quiet about her current pro-choice beliefs when the topic has been brought up and talks about her internal dilemma:

There are pro-choice Catholics in the world and in this community and that- it's a tough situation to be in... I feel like I'm contradicting a lot of everything I've been taught. And I feel like there's a lot of stigma. And, the shame of being what could be considered a traitor..., or not truly a Catholic.

Mariana feels the contention of the stigma around her beliefs. Even more, she says that the first time she has ever vocalized that she is pro-choice might have been in this interview.

Participants voice how, in their perspectives, the shame and guilt is not helpful. For instance, Jasmine discusses how she used to be strictly on the pro-life side and how those approaches were not effective, "Because I used to be so cut and dry, I used to like, I would criticize more than anything. So now I see that that's not effective... we need support...That's how I kind of transitioned... taking the approach of care instead of judgment has been the biggest thing." Jasmine now sees empathetic approaches, rather than judgmental, being more effective. Destiny recalls accompanying an acquaintance to get an abortion– even though she personally disagreed– and experiencing judgment on the way into the clinic:

If somebody has been raped or is a victim of incest, we don't want them going into a clinic and being harassed... from the time they pull into the parking lot... in their car till the minute they walk back out after their procedure being made to feel less than a human. That... is what impacted me the most when I accompanied

the person that I was trying to support, was seeing how they were treated. That broke my heart because they didn't know her her situation.

Many approaches that involve judgment exclude imagining the situation of the person receiving the abortion. Victoria talks about the importance of helping the woman instead of shaming her after receiving an abortion: "Really in the point of view of the Catholic Church, she deserves more love and effort to you know, if you view her as a sinner, help her out, take her in." All in all, many research participants have been called out, yelled at, and shamed for their beliefs that seem to go against the grain. Some interviewees feel as if they are not a true Catholic with this stigma towards pro-choice Catholics. Participants express a want for anti-abortion members to stop these de-humanizing methods of judgment and instead, take a more caring approach.

Interviewees' Suggestions

Research participants offered suggestions to decrease the polarization they have felt, with most of the interviewees focusing on a comprehensive education and the need for more open dialogue on this topic. Participants voice a want for more objective, age-appropriate, and nonjudgmental education, which is in opposition to earlier aforementioned educational experiences. Recalling when she was taught about abortion in a graphic way, Alicia wants education about abortion to be more age-appropriate, "Going back to when I first encountered what the word abortion meant... I don't know what aspect of the church teaching that is that at this age, we need to teach these kids about this. I do think that it needs to be looked at again. There are different ways that you can talk about it." Alicia suggests the teaching methods on abortion be re-evaluated. Cindy also vouches for a comprehensive education, "I think education is a huge thing. I

think a good next step is good, unbiased, strictly objective education on what abortion is and the process of it and how and what women go through. I think that would change a lot of people's perspectives, even fo- in either direction. That could have big effects.”

According to Cindy, teaching abortion in an objective and nonjudgmental way does not mean all students will become pro-choice, but rather, it gives the students an opportunity to have a full, comprehensive education on the topic. When asked what would be some good next steps, Maya responds similarly:

Changing the approach of education for Catholic children, because, as I mentioned, I think the way I was taught about it was very inappropriate and traumatizing, and ... changing the approach would- you'd sti- probably still get the same outcome of kids are going to be pro-life or whatever the end goal is, but there's not going to be such... an intensity to it. I think you can still be- you can still hold beliefs without being extreme about it.

Maya describes how a Catholic school can still teach with their values, but they need to take an approach that is not traumatizing students. Evident in these interviewees' perspectives, there is the desire to improve how abortion is taught in Catholic schools, such that it is comprehensive, objective, and less traumatizing with graphic images and aggressive language.

In addition to the want for a comprehensive education, most participants voiced wanting to be able to have a conversation about this, hearing from both sides, and *understanding* both sides. Without being prompted about dialogue, 15 of the 17 interviewees mentioned a desire for open dialogue. When specifically asked, “What do you think are some good next steps?,” 11 participants responded with open dialogue.

Apart from those 11 interviewees, four mentioned dialogue being a good next step at another point in the interview. Some responses include the following. Amelia says, “I think dialogues, just no debate, not trying to win a conversation, just truly seeking to understand why the other side believes what they believe.” Claire says, “I think the first steps gotta be a willingness to listen on both sides, because I think that there's a lot of polarization that happens and an unwillingness to even understand the other side's point of view.” Paige states, “I generally wish that the pro-life movement slash pro-choice movement would be more open to talking to each other about things.” Laura confirms, “I think that [university name] is a really great place to kind of talk about those ideas and discuss them and have positive debates. And those kind of discussions, not like criticisms, but people are able to talk about their own standpoints and hear from others about maybe opposing standpoints, but also do so in a respectful way.” Respectful dialogues truly listening to each other are hard to have, but there can be so many benefits when people feel able to voice their beliefs. Finally, Brie claims:

If young people see priests talking about these different aspects and other leaders in their church talking about these things, I think that opens the floor for good conversation and the possibility of being accepting of people who don't necessarily agree with like the same path, because like I said, I don't think there's one path and one way to be Catholic.

Participants voiced the want to hear from both sides to *understand* both sides and possibly accept each other's beliefs, some highlighting the need for those in leadership positions in the Catholic Church to engage in that dialogue. The following is an interesting testimony from Amelia which shows the first-hand benefits of open dialogue:

I did that exercise on a retreat and I was on the pro choice side. Everyone automatically put me on the other side and I was like, no, no, no, wait, I'm on the other line. But let's- I want to talk about it with you all and that. I had a great experience with that, even with some people I went to high school with who were very, very much pro life, like on the opposite end. But we just had a genuine conversation. I think I got to understand a little bit more from the other side. I remember one girl was explaining how she thinks [pro-life] is about empowering the woman like she always, like she said, she thinks that sometimes, a pro-choice argument is that it's not giving any choice to the women or power to the woman. She was saying that she believes if a woman can go through giving birth under extreme circumstances, then that is power to the woman. And I was like, oh, I had never considered that... It was very eye opening. It didn't change my views, but it did help me understand a little more where the other side was coming from. So I think just the next step for everyone. It's hard to be able to be vulnerable like that and to just try not to feel any negative emotions towards it, cuz it's very easy to do that. But I think just if people could sit down and just talk with each other openly about what they believe and listen with the same intent.

Opening oneself up for dialogue can prove beneficial in understanding one another and lessening the sharp polarized divide. Pro-choice Catholic participants have had first-hand experiences with this intense polarization, and many express wanting a space to be able to communicate their beliefs that have often been shamed and silenced. In conclusion, two recurrent suggestions among participants were the desire to improve how abortion is

discussed in schools as well as the desire for more open dialogue that is aimed towards understanding, not judging and shaming.

Discussion

In conclusion, quantitative data indicates that almost half of Catholics in the United States report that a woman should be allowed to receive an abortion for any reason, and that religious affiliation and abortion attitudes no longer have a statistically significant relationship. When asked specifically about legal access to abortion, Catholic men are the most opposed to legal access to abortion, and there is no statistical significance between religious affiliation and attitudes toward legal abortion access among women. Interviews provide supportive data while also highlighting the complexities of having this perspective, such as having very polarizing experiences in education and politically as well as feeling Catholic shame and guilt. As for limitations, the cumulative variable ABANY measuring public opinion on abortion does not have data for before, during, and right after the court cases that legalized abortion in 1973. Also, there was minimal diversity among interviewees regarding race and ethnicity, gender, age, and socioeconomic status.

Past research has highlighted how the clear hierarchy and messages of belief of the Catholic Church do not always trickle down to the members exactly, and members can interpret the church teachings how they desire (Holman and Shockley, 2017). Echoing this, the research participants in this study describe interpreting their faith with their conscience and critical thinking, instead of believing exactly what the leaders in the church say about abortion. Also, church leadership has had and continues to have this dichotomy of progressive and traditional styles of thinking. For example, Pope John

XXIII started the Birth Control Commission during Vatican II to open the conversation around birth control (Ruether, 2008; Fehring, 2019). Then, his predecessor, Pope Paul VI, did not approve of the commission's conclusion in favor of birth control in certain situations, so he re-emphasized the traditional Catholic stance with his encyclical *Humanae Vitae* (Ruether, 2008; Fehring, 2019). These shifting positions also appear in interviews and survey analysis. Participants discuss qualms with the politics of the Church and on this certain issue of abortion which is adjacent to that of birth control. Reflected in the past, Catholics increased their favor of contraceptives with Vatican II; at that time, over three-quarters of American Catholics favored birth control (Williams, 2016). Today, as demonstrated by the GSS data analyzed in this study, almost half of Catholics in the United States support that a woman should be allowed to receive an abortion for any reason.

For future research, it would be valuable to explore Catholic male perspectives on abortion, both pro-choice and pro-life. Another opportunity of future research would be to analyze methods of Catholic schooling. Areas of judgment and shame, as well as the involvement of Catholic Social Teachings or other methods of including all pro-life issues, not just anti-abortion, could be identified and evaluated. Specific labels often failed to capture the complexities of perspectives on this topic. Participants often voiced a difference with being pro-choice and pro-abortion as well as being pro-life and anti-abortion. Future research could explore these terms and nuances in more depth. Regarding the significance, this research addresses the gap in academic knowledge about pro-choice Catholics. This mixed-methods analysis highlights that this is a common

perspective and encourages conversations with less shame and judgment and more empathy and understanding.

This research can assist the Catholic Church in better understanding and approaching conversations with people who hold pro-choice and Catholic beliefs. Participants voiced feeling much Catholic guilt and shame as well as not speaking about their perspective much, if at all. For the Catholic Church to truly be universal, opening up the floor to engage in this hard and complex topic— without casting stones at people with beliefs that seem to go against the grain— could result in their members feeling heard instead of silenced, understood instead of immediately shut down, and valued as a child of God with their own conscience and critical thinking skills.

Epilogue

When I first declared my honors thesis topic, I was nervous. For the two days prior, I had been writing an extensive list of other topics that were still interesting to me and, more importantly, much less controversial. However, I kept coming back to studying the perspectives and experiences of pro-choice Catholics because I truly felt, and continue to feel, that this is such important research. I am so grateful that I took the risk and engaged in this controversial and important topic.

I expected protests against this research. I expected hateful direct messages on Instagram. I expected people to read nothing about my actual study, but rather, just see the title or topic and come at me. I was preparing myself for the worst, and I knew that I had support from Dr. Holcomb and the University.

I have met none of that. There have been slight disagreements, and there still could be many more, some larger-scale. However, I have been straight flabbergasted by

the amount of support I have received for my topic. I have been working hard, at what some have told me is a Master's level, so as to increase the project's validity and decrease others' abilities to point out faults and misconceptions in my work. What I have constantly received is people expressing their genuine interest in my topic, fascination with my graphs, and relating to stories from my interviews.

When I have told people about my topic, the majority— from friends to college students to old and current bosses to professors in different departments and all in between— have been extremely interested, want to know more, and ask when I am presenting. People have also heavily related to different aspects of the interview results. One attendee at the North Central Sociological Association was very actively listening, asked some questions at the end, and had a conversation afterward with me. She said she wished that she thought of studying this topic. She described how her mother is a very pro-life Catholic whereas she is a pro-choice Catholic. I fondly recall telling a few professors about my research at a professional networking event in D.C., and then they all shared stories about their experiences with the topic and were really interested in the results. Because of my want to spread my research and the helpful guidance of my thesis advisor, I have had many opportunities to present.

I presented alongside many distinguished professors at the University of Dayton, such as at the Catholic Intellectual Traditions Symposium, a facilitated dialogue titled “Reproductive Justice and the Ethic of Life,” and to my Sociology capstone class as we prepared for the Stander Symposium. I used to have public speaking difficulties, and through talking about research that I am knowledgeable about, I hardly feel the jitters. Additionally, I had the opportunity to present at the North Central Sociological

Association in Indianapolis. I submitted my research to be published in the *Journal of Health Politics, Policy and Law Proposal*. I was rejected, but they called me Dr. Eilerman in the email. So that was something fun. I will continue trying to get published and share my results with a larger crowd.

In addition to what I expected, what I received, and the mechanisms I have so-far shared my research through, I also learned a great deal through data collection and analysis. The quantitative data analysis was rather straightforward. I ran the tests through SPSS and analyzed what the numbers meant. Still, the results were fascinating, particularly the graph separating out gender attitudes toward the legalization of abortion in 2018. I remember bringing the results into Dr. Holcomb's office and us discussing the statistics, both fascinated by the meaning behind those numbers.

On the qualitative side, I was grateful and shocked by the number of people who agreed to an interview. I expected five, ten if I was lucky, and I had about 19, 17 successfully completed. I really enjoyed conducting the interviews, especially giving the participants a safe space to talk about their beliefs which often was not a common occurrence for them. Several expressed gratitude for me bringing light to this topic, and I am grateful to them for engaging in this research! Throughout it all, I worked to be reflexive and truly let the participants speak their truth. I was fascinated by the similarities and patterns among the interviews. From taking classes about qualitative research methods, I knew that identifying patterns is the point of qualitative research, but to see it first-hand was incredible. I remember asking the question, "What do you think are some good next steps?," and time after time, participants said open dialogue. While I was trying not to make a super excited face, I was taking a mental note that this was

definitely going to be a big pattern that made it to the Results section. Even more, I found it disheartening, yet not surprising, when interviewees mentioned countless instances of being shamed and made to feel like a false Catholic.

In conclusion, I am glad that I chose to engage in this topic for my honors thesis and sociology capstone. Personally, I have taken away a lot from it. I have been able to meet with my thesis advisor weekly, otherwise known as a regular highlight of my week. I have reflected on my beliefs growing up and how they have changed. I have learned that I rather enjoy the research process. I have learned a great deal about the sociology research process and how it can be used for social change. I hope that this research helps others critically think about their beliefs and not immediately judge those whose perspectives might be different than their own.

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Appendix A

Interview Guide

Here is the starter email that was sent out to all the participants:

Hi everyone,

First off, thanks for agreeing to participate in my honors thesis/senior capstone! If you have decided to not participate anymore, let me know. That is okay, no worries.

I would like to start scheduling interviews for the time frame of 11/11-11/18. If you could get back to me by this Friday (10/15) about when during that time window works for you, that would be great. Also, I was thinking about doing the interviews in a reserved room in KU. If you prefer somewhere else, let me know.

Have a great fall break!

Natalie

For the interviews, base-line questions were first asked and then open-ended questions.

Also, follow-up questions were asked about their experiences, and if new patterns started developing, questions pertaining to those new topics were asked as well.

Demographic Sheet Information: Gender, Race, Hispanic or not Hispanic, Age,

Socioeconomic status, State Born in, Religious Affiliation, and Political Party

Identification (Their pseudonym was written on the sheet after the interview.)

Interview Questions:

- Could you describe for me your religious upbringing, such as denomination, if you went to a mass or service, etc.?
- What are your current views and participation in a certain religion(s)?
- What does it mean to be pro-life and pro-choice?
- How do you view both sides?
- What do you think about the pro-choice, pro-life divide?

- What are your current views on abortion, and how might have these views changed over time?
- Do you think empathy plays a role in why you believe what you believe?
- How have your views on abortion been influenced by family members, friends, media, and/or institutions, such as a Catholic high school? Have you broken away from these influences or stuck with them?
- Have you ever felt like an outcast in your religious community for your stance on pro-choice or pro-life issues?
- What are your perceptions of the Catholic church, specifically pro-life teachings? If you'd like to talk about any other aspects of the Catholic Church, feel free to.
- How do you imagine the future of the Catholic church, such as attendance, participation, attitudes towards abortion, etc.?
- In light of all you have told me, how have you felt on a Catholic Campus? Also, why did you choose a Catholic University?
- What do you think are some good next steps? (open-ended)
- Is there anything else on this topic you would like to share?

Appendix B

Table 1 Variable ABANY Data

| ID | Catholic or Not Catholic | Abortion if woman wants for any reason | YES | Count | 1977 | 1978 | 1980 | 1982 | 1983 | 1984 | 1985 | 1987 | 1988 | 1989 | 1990 | 1991 | 1993 | 1994 | 1995 | 1996 | 1998 | 2000 | 2002 | 2004 | 2005 | 2008 | 2010 | 2012 | 2014 | 2016 | 2018 | Total | | |
|-------|--|--|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|-------|---------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | OSS year for this respondent | |
| | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | % within OSS year for this respondent | % within OSS year for this respondent |
| 1.00 | Abortion if woman wants for any reason | YES | Count | 437 | 399 | 469 | 528 | 388 | 420 | 436 | 539 | 238 | 306 | 308 | 312 | 356 | 672 | 636 | 573 | 603 | 672 | 300 | 289 | 619 | 432 | 434 | 441 | 544 | 673 | 618 | 11880 | | | |
| | | % within OSS year for this respondent | 38.4% | 35.9% | 44.3% | 38.5% | 36.3% | 40.0% | 40.1% | 39.4% | 34.8% | 42.1% | 46.5% | 43.5% | 45.5% | 46.6% | 46.6% | 46.6% | 42.9% | 42.0% | 44.7% | 42.2% | 42.2% | 42.1% | 43.2% | 45.1% | 45.3% | 47.5% | 46.6% | 51.1% | 42.0% | | | |
| 1.00 | Abortion if woman wants for any reason | NO | Count | 672 | 712 | 569 | 842 | 609 | 631 | 650 | 829 | 445 | 420 | 355 | 405 | 427 | 769 | 753 | 762 | 778 | 311 | 368 | 600 | 607 | 607 | 607 | 512 | 671 | 711 | 582 | 15887 | | | |
| | | % within OSS year for this respondent | 60.6% | 64.1% | 55.7% | 61.5% | 63.7% | 60.0% | 59.9% | 60.6% | 65.2% | 57.9% | 53.5% | 56.5% | 54.5% | 54.5% | 53.4% | 54.2% | 57.1% | 58.0% | 56.3% | 58.8% | 57.9% | 58.8% | 57.9% | 53.9% | 53.7% | 53.0% | 51.4% | 48.9% | 57.0% | | | |
| 3.00 | Abortion if woman wants for any reason | YES | Count | 1109 | 1111 | 1058 | 1370 | 1097 | 1051 | 1086 | 1388 | 683 | 726 | 663 | 717 | 783 | 1441 | 1389 | 1335 | 1341 | 671 | 648 | 1468 | 899 | 841 | 853 | 1365 | 1364 | 1210 | 27867 | | | | |
| | | % within OSS year for this respondent | 100.0% | 100.0% | 100.0% | 100.0% | 100.0% | 100.0% | 100.0% | 100.0% | 100.0% | 100.0% | 100.0% | 100.0% | 100.0% | 100.0% | 100.0% | 100.0% | 100.0% | 100.0% | 100.0% | 100.0% | 100.0% | 100.0% | 100.0% | 100.0% | 100.0% | 100.0% | 100.0% | 100.0% | 100.0% | | | |
| 3.00 | Abortion if woman wants for any reason | NO | Count | 247 | 275 | 227 | 226 | 292 | 228 | 282 | 220 | 152 | 187 | 130 | 141 | 122 | 287 | 249 | 302 | 304 | 139 | 139 | 292 | 129 | 182 | 180 | 225 | 257 | 182 | 4686 | | | | |
| | | % within OSS year for this respondent | 67.9% | 74.3% | 68.5% | 61.5% | 70.8% | 66.1% | 72.2% | 61.5% | 60.9% | 64.5% | 65.9% | 60.3% | 55.3% | 54.5% | 57.2% | 62.2% | 60.7% | 60.7% | 61.8% | 61.8% | 64.5% | 60.3% | 63.9% | 61.8% | 61.7% | 61.5% | 53.8% | 63.8% | | | | |
| Total | Abortion if woman wants for any reason | YES | Count | 117 | 95 | 109 | 145 | 121 | 122 | 109 | 138 | 100 | 92 | 72 | 93 | 100 | 220 | 181 | 151 | 142 | 86 | 65 | 164 | 117 | 103 | 113 | 146 | 161 | 140 | 2022 | | | | |
| | | % within OSS year for this respondent | 32.1% | 25.7% | 31.5% | 38.1% | 28.2% | 33.9% | 27.8% | 38.5% | 39.5% | 34.1% | 38.1% | 44.8% | 45.2% | 42.1% | 34.8% | 33.3% | 38.2% | 31.9% | 35.5% | 39.7% | 38.1% | 38.8% | 38.3% | 38.5% | 46.2% | 34.4% | 30.3 | | | | | |
| Total | Abortion if woman wants for any reason | NO | Count | 344 | 370 | 346 | 381 | 414 | 360 | 392 | 358 | 253 | 259 | 211 | 234 | 223 | 487 | 430 | 434 | 426 | 225 | 204 | 432 | 295 | 295 | 293 | 381 | 418 | 303 | 8868 | | | | |
| | | % within OSS year for this respondent | 67.9% | 74.3% | 68.5% | 61.5% | 70.8% | 66.1% | 72.2% | 61.5% | 60.9% | 64.5% | 65.9% | 60.3% | 55.3% | 54.5% | 57.2% | 62.2% | 60.7% | 60.7% | 61.8% | 61.8% | 64.5% | 60.3% | 63.9% | 61.8% | 61.7% | 61.5% | 53.8% | 63.8% | | | | |
| Total | Abortion if woman wants for any reason | YES | Count | 4 | 0 | 0 | 5 | 0 | 0 | 6 | 2 | 2 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 3 | 2 | 4 | 4 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 2 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 6 | 3 | 6 | 52 | | | |
| | | % within OSS year for this respondent | 66.7% | 0.0% | 0.0% | 55.6% | 0.0% | 60.7% | 66.7% | 50.0% | 25.0% | 33.3% | 75.0% | 66.7% | 50.0% | 50.0% | 50.0% | 50.0% | 44.4% | 0.0% | 20.0% | 100.0% | 22.2% | 20.0% | 20.0% | 0.0% | 0.0% | 60.3% | 37.8% | 54.6% | 42.7% | | | |
| Total | Abortion if woman wants for any reason | NO | Count | 2 | 3 | 2 | 4 | 4 | 3 | 1 | 2 | 2 | 3 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 3 | 0 | 5 | 5 | 1 | 3 | 0 | 7 | 7 | 3 | 4 | 2 | 1 | 5 | 5 | 67 | | |
| | | % within OSS year for this respondent | 33.3% | 100.0% | 100.0% | 44.4% | 100.0% | 33.3% | 33.3% | 50.0% | 75.0% | 66.7% | 25.0% | 33.3% | 50.0% | 50.0% | 50.0% | 0.0% | 55.6% | 100.0% | 75.0% | 0.0% | 77.8% | 75.0% | 75.0% | 100.0% | 100.0% | 14.3% | 42.5% | 45.5% | 56.3% | | | |
| Total | Abortion if woman wants for any reason | YES | Count | 6 | 3 | 2 | 9 | 4 | 9 | 3 | 4 | 4 | 3 | 4 | 3 | 3 | 4 | 4 | 3 | 3 | 2 | 4 | 3 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 2 | 7 | 8 | 11 | | | |
| | | % within OSS year for this respondent | 100.0% | 100.0% | 100.0% | 100.0% | 100.0% | 100.0% | 100.0% | 100.0% | 100.0% | 100.0% | 100.0% | 100.0% | 100.0% | 100.0% | 100.0% | 100.0% | 100.0% | 100.0% | 100.0% | 100.0% | 100.0% | 100.0% | 100.0% | 100.0% | 100.0% | 100.0% | 100.0% | 100.0% | 100.0% | | | |
| Total | Abortion if woman wants for any reason | YES | Count | 559 | 484 | 578 | 678 | 519 | 548 | 447 | 679 | 338 | 389 | 381 | 405 | 459 | 895 | 819 | 728 | 705 | 387 | 346 | 734 | 560 | 537 | 524 | 746 | 837 | 764 | 15234 | | | | |
| | | % within OSS year for this respondent | 37.7% | 33.3% | 41.1% | 38.5% | 34.3% | 36.9% | 39.2% | 38.1% | 42.3% | 43.4% | 42.3% | 45.5% | 46.6% | 46.6% | 46.3% | 40.9% | 39.9% | 40.0% | 40.8% | 40.8% | 40.8% | 40.8% | 42.4% | 42.4% | 44.1% | 45.1% | 46.2% | 50.1% | 41.4% | | | |
| Total | Abortion if woman wants for any reason | NO | Count | 821 | 900 | 828 | 1082 | 986 | 872 | 934 | 1031 | 598 | 590 | 496 | 446 | 446 | 522 | 1039 | 1002 | 1050 | 1003 | 513 | 507 | 1155 | 748 | 693 | 684 | 907 | 973 | 760 | 21560 | | | |
| | | % within OSS year for this respondent | 62.3% | 66.7% | 58.9% | 61.5% | 65.7% | 61.4% | 63.1% | 60.8% | 63.8% | 58.7% | 56.6% | 57.4% | 54.7% | 54.7% | 53.7% | 55.0% | 59.1% | 60.1% | 57.0% | 59.4% | 59.6% | 57.6% | 56.3% | 55.8% | 54.9% | 53.8% | 49.9% | 58.6% | | | | |
| Total | Abortion if woman wants for any reason | YES | Count | 1429 | 1444 | 1406 | 1780 | 1515 | 1420 | 1481 | 1720 | 936 | 899 | 877 | 851 | 1010 | 1924 | 1821 | 1778 | 1768 | 800 | 820 | 1939 | 1298 | 1230 | 1248 | 1453 | 1810 | 1524 | 36734 | | | | |
| | | % within OSS year for this respondent | 100.0% | 100.0% | 100.0% | 100.0% | 100.0% | 100.0% | 100.0% | 100.0% | 100.0% | 100.0% | 100.0% | 100.0% | 100.0% | 100.0% | 100.0% | 100.0% | 100.0% | 100.0% | 100.0% | 100.0% | 100.0% | 100.0% | 100.0% | 100.0% | 100.0% | 100.0% | 100.0% | 100.0% | 100.0% | | | |

Abortion if woman wants for any reason - OSS year for this respondent - Catholic or Not Catholic Crosstabulation

Appendix C

Table 2 Demographic Information

| Responses | Percentage of Interview Participants (n=17) |
|---------------------------------|--|
| Gender | |
| Female | 94 |
| Male | 6 |
| Race | |
| White | 88 |
| Black | 6 |
| Prefer Not to Say | 6 |
| Hispanic or not Hispanic | |
| Hispanic | 0 |
| Not Hispanic | 88 |
| Prefer Not to Say | 12 |
| Age | |
| 20 | 6 |
| 21 | 47 |
| 22 | 35 |
| 23 | 6 |
| 25+ | 6 |
| Socioeconomic Status | |
| Lower-Middle Class | 12 |
| Middle Class | 76 |
| Upper-Middle Class | 12 |
| State Born in | |
| Ohio | 65 |
| Illinois | 12 |
| Texas | 6 |

| | |
|---------------------------------------|----|
| Georgia | 6 |
| New York | 6 |
| Pennsylvania | 6 |
| Religious Affiliation | |
| Catholic | 76 |
| Formerly Catholic | 12 |
| Catholic/Christian | 12 |
| Political Party Identification | |
| Democrat | 71 |
| Independent | 12 |
| Republican | 6 |
| None | 6 |
| Prefer Not to Say | 6 |

Appendix D**Table 3** *Religious Beliefs*

| Categories | Percentage of Interview Participants (n=17) |
|---|--|
| Practicing Catholic | 35 |
| Catholic Identifying but not Practicing | 35 |
| Catholic Questioning | 12 |
| No Longer Catholic but another Christian Religion | 12 |
| No Longer Catholic but Spiritual | 6 |