

Multi-Organizational Fields and Social Movement Organization Frame Content: The Religious Pro-Choice Movement*

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As an explanatory method in studies of social movements, analyses of collective action frames have generally focused on the variable efficacy of the frames of social movement organizations (SMOs) in the mobilization of potential participants. However, this work has for practical reasons used the acknowledged analytic simplification that SMOs only target potential participants—and not opponents, elite decision makers, or the media—when constructing their frames. To incorporate multiple targets into future studies of SMO frame construction, this paper expands on the idea of a multi-organizational field. I propose that the characteristics of the targets in the field and the social structural and cognitive boundaries between them determine SMO frames. This perspective is demonstrated by analyzing changes in the collective action frames of SMOs in the religious pro-choice movement from 1967 to 1992. I argue that this perspective may explain findings where a frame fails to “resonate” with potential participants—the frame may not have been created with them in mind.

As an explanatory method in studies of social movements, analyses of collective action frames (Snow, Rochford, Worden, and Benford 1986) have generally focused on the variable efficacy of the frames of social movement organizations (SMOs). One explanation of why frame content fails in mobilization is that the contents do not “resonate” with the target group’s “cultural narrations” (Snow and Benford 1988). Another is that the three “core tasks” of the frame—the diagnosis, prognosis, and motivation for solving the problem—remain unfulfilled (Snow and Benford 1988; Gerhards and Rucht 1992).

However, while these analyses explicitly acknowledge the reality of the multiple targets of SMOs—adherents, constituents, bystander publics, the media, potential allies, antagonists, and elite decision makers—they have pragmatically limited their analysis to adherents, constituents, and bystander publics. Although recent research has examined the relations between SMOs and antagonists (Benford and Hunt 1994) and how the identities of the possible targets are constructed (Hunt, Benford, and Snow 1994), the effect on framing processes of SMOs considering the perceived characteristics of more than one target remains unexamined.

A multi-target perspective of the frame construction of SMOs may help to better explain the success or failure of frames in mobilizing collective action. For

example, the framing needs of the different targets may be different, or even contradictory, and constrain and shape the framing effort toward potential participants. This may then explain the greatest reason for the failure of a frame to "resonate" with potential participants: it may not have been constructed to maximize this target's participation, but rather with some other target in mind.

The key question is how the frame of an SMO is determined. I expand upon the idea of a "multi-organizational field" to analyze the multiple targets that influence the creation of an SMO's frame and apply these ideas by examining the framing efforts of the SMOs in the religious pro-choice movement¹ from 1967 to 1992.

An Analytic Perspective on the Content of SMO Frames

Frame Alignment and Counter-Framing with Multiple Targets

Klandermans has recently reintroduced the insight of the "multi-organizational field," defined as all of the groups in a society with which an SMO may establish a link, as a heuristic for understanding the targets of an SMO (1992; also see Curtis and Zurcher 1973). Groups can be broad categorizations of people who may never meet but are assumed to share characteristics (e.g., Southern Baptists) or smaller groups (e.g., First Baptist Church).

Furthermore, from the perspective of the SMO actors who create frames, the groups in the field can be split into an alliance system of supporters, a conflict system of opponents, and a neutral sector which contains the organizations and groups that both the alliance and conflict systems try to recruit. "The boundaries between the two systems are fluid and may change in the course of events" (Klandermans 1992, p. 95).

Adherents and constituents—the focus of previous research (but see Gitlin [1980])—are targets which are clearly part of the alliance system; bystander publics, media, and potential allies are neutral and are being courted by the alliance and conflict sectors; and antagonists/countermovements are in the conflict sector. Elite decision makers could be in any of the fields, depending on the circumstances. In the case presented below, the elite decision makers (legislators and judges) were perceived to be in the neutral field and were extensively targeted by the pro-choice and pro-life movements.

The frame literature identifies two distinct types of frame processes directed toward targets: frame alignment and counter-framing. Frame alignment processes attempt to link the interpretive orientations of the SMO with those of the target group (Snow et al. 1986). Secondly, the SMO attempts to undermine their opponents' attempts at frame alignment with contested targets through "counter-framing"—attempts to "rebut, undermine, or neutralize a person's or group's

myths, versions of reality, or interpretive framework" (Benford 1987, p. 75). If left unchallenged, the SMO's opponents' frames will eventually carry away even the targets in the SMO's alliance system (Klandermans 1992). In the multi-organizational field context then, the alliance and neutral systems of an SMO are targeted through frame alignment processes, and the antagonists in the conflict sector are targeted through counter-framing. For most SMOs these framing efforts toward multiple targets are not sequential but simultaneous (McAdam, McCarthy, and Zald 1988, p. 726).

Determining Important Targets for Alignment and Counter-Framing Efforts

Faced with the impossibility of attempting to align or counter-frame with all of the targets in the multi-organizational field, the actors who create the organizational frame consider only some of the potentially thousands of groups in the SMO's field as warranting targeting efforts. The first determinant for deciding the importance of a potential target for the SMO is its perceived influence on the goal of the organization as constructed by the current organizational frame. Positive or negative influence may include material, human and symbolic resources, or the coercive power of the state.

The second determinant of importance is the strength of the boundaries in the multi-organizational field. Stronger boundaries will make the group a less important target. There are two locations of boundaries: the boundaries between the SMO and its possible targets in the alliance and neutral sectors, and the boundaries between the possible targets in these sectors and the SMO's antagonists.

These boundaries have two components—social structural and cognitive. Social structural boundaries can be thought of in network terms. Some groups, due to geography, occupations, and various life experiences are unlikely to interact due to the lack of network links (e.g., Boston Episcopalian priests and rural Alabama Baptist pastors), making targeting unnecessary.

A cognitive boundary consists of the degree of difference between the "cultural narrations" of groups. Since a frame designed to resonate with a particular group's cultural narrative may not resonate with another group's narrative (Snow and Benford 1988), a strong cognitive boundary located between the members of an SMO and a target group will lessen the probability that one frame could resonate with both groups, making targeting unnecessary and unlikely. Similarly, a strong cognitive boundary located between a potential target in the SMO's alliance or neutral sector and an SMO's antagonist makes counter-framing efforts against the antagonist unnecessary as the antagonists' framing efforts are unlikely to succeed.

These two distinctions—perceived influence of the group on the goals of the organization and boundary strength—suggest how the SMO actors decide

which of the potentially thousands of targets are worthy of their efforts. This addition to the multi-organizational field perspective offers the framework for understanding how SMO actors create an organizational frame.

The Organizational Frame

A frame can be analytically segmented into three parts: "(1) a *diagnosis* of some event or aspect of social life as problematic and in need of alteration; (2) a *proposed solution* to the diagnosed problem that specifies what needs to be done; and (3) a *call to arms or rationale* for engaging in ameliorative or corrective action" (Snow and Benford 1988, p. 199; my emphasis). Traditional studies of SMOs as well as the recent frame literature have implicitly or explicitly assumed that SMOs have one identifiable governing ideology and general goal, which I am explicitly expanding upon and defining as an "organizational frame." SMOs are traditionally defined by their "goals" (Zald and Ash 1966), "causes" or "aims" (McAdam et al. 1988, pp. 716-717). Note that goals, causes, or aims of the SMO are included as the "proposed solution" component of the organizational frame as defined above. SMOs also have distinctive ideologies (Staggenborg 1986; Benford 1993) which are akin to the diagnosis and proposed solution components of the frame. By naming this implicit group ideology and goals an "organizational frame" I am making these assumptions explicit and simultaneously creating a perspective on the creation, change, and effect of this aspect of SMOs.

Why would we expect SMO activists generally to have only *one* organizational frame? The first reason is that, to the degree that collective identity formation (Taylor and Whittier 1992) is a tactic and not a goal, and if collective identities result from framing processes (Hunt et al. 1994), for a *collective* identity to form a unified frame would tend to be required. Highly related to this is the common sense notion that people will not join or support an SMO unless they think they know what it stands for.

A second force that encourages an SMO to create a unified organizational frame is the imprecise communications methods commonly utilized in SMOs for their framing activity, such as the media and printed literature. Instead of simply creating the best collective action frame for each target, imprecise communication channels means that communication toward one target reaches a number of different targets simultaneously. For example, a coalition of groups studied by Benford agreed that "the movement should strive to maintain consistency across proffered frames" because their frames would be carried by the media to the movement's various targets (1993, p. 692). Knowing that more than one target may receive the frame thus encourages groups to create a frame that will resonate with all groups—albeit not maximally with any one group.

A final force driving the creation of a single organizational frame is that these

frames are a general script which compensates for people's cognitive limitations. This perspective, originally formulated by the Carnegie school of organization theory (March and Simon 1958) and further developed by neo-institutional theorists (DiMaggio and Powell 1991), suggests that humans develop various shortcuts for solving problems to compensate for the impossibility of considering every event as unique. SMO workers or activists who utilize frames will develop a limited repertoire of cognitive scripts that they use to "satisfice"—they apply the same scripts to the myriad targets they encounter, regardless of whether or not they are the most effective response. This suggests that maximizing the resonance of each target with a unique frame is not possible because SMO actors will tend to respond in similar ways to the myriad-targets and situations they encounter—they lack the cognitive ability (as well as time and information) to invent a maximizing frame out of whole cloth for every target and situation.

Given the tendency for SMOs to create organizational frames, how do they decide the actual symbolic content which in turn shapes the content of the messages sent to each target? McAdam et al., summarizing previous research, state that "SMOs typically weigh the anticipated responses of these various groups and seek through their choices to balance the conflicting demands of the organizational environment in which they are embedded" (1988, p. 726). Thus, the content which would "align" best with the alliance and neutral targets, and the content which would most effectively counter-frame against the antagonist targets in the conflict system, are balanced according to the importance attributed to each considered target.

The primary importance of an organizational frame in the analysis of an SMO is due to fact that, because the field is considered in its construction, the characteristics of one target affect framing toward another. This constraint is exemplified by an event in the history of the primary SMO in the case study below, where one of its state affiliates attempted to publish an advertisement that framed the upcoming visit of the Pope in a controversial manner in order to mobilize potential participants. The national office, concerned that the advertisement (and the frame it was derived from) would also be received by other target groups such as the press and elected officials, forced the state affiliate to remove the advertisement on the grounds that it was incongruent with the existing organizational frame of the SMO. The national SMO subsequently required that it approve all state affiliate-printed material to "ensure that the beliefs of a member group . . . are not violated by an affiliate" (State Affiliate Manual, n.d., RCAR Papers).

In sum, the structure of the multi-organizational field, the characteristics of the groups in the field, and the social structural and cognitive boundaries between the groups in the field combine to shape the organizational frame. The result of this process is that framing efforts toward one target affect another through the organizational frame.

Method

I will demonstrate this process of organizational frame construction by examining how activists' perceptions of different constellations of targets—and their importance—in the multi-organizational field of religious pro-choice SMOs resulted in particular organizational frame changes. Following the perspective outlined above, these organizational frame changes occurred when the field changed to such a degree that a new organizational frame was perceived to more effectively balance the targets. These organizations offer great clarity in the illustration of this process because the organizational frame did not change often and was explicitly reconstructed only after complaints that the current organizational frame was limiting. As will become apparent, potential participants, although always a target, were often a secondary consideration in frame construction.

The data presented below are archival. All board minutes, program planning documents, literature, and annual reports of the Religious Coalition for Abortion Rights (RCAR) from 1973 to 1992 were obtained, and correspondence of the executive director and staff was examined (RCAR Papers). Data for the Clergy Consultation Service on Abortion (CCSA) are from other scholars' analyses and from published descriptions of the movement from participants. The creation of organizational frames was identified by finding situations where the main message of the organization was debated. With the RCAR this happened at board and program planning meetings. Field pressures were determined by following references to concerns/motivations in the debates back to their origins through archival research.

These data are a part of a broader project that examines changes in public discourse about bioethical issues from the mid-1960s to the present. Readers should be aware that I was a program director of the RCAR from 1990 to 1992. Although this may raise unresolvable epistemological questions for some readers, it has also given me an insider's knowledge not generally available to other scholars.

The Religious Pro-Choice Movement: 1967 to 1992

For heuristic purposes I will break the organizational frames in the religious pro-choice movement into three periods of analysis; 1967–1973, 1973–1980, and 1980–1992. For each era I give a short description of the organizational form of the SMO, followed by a description of the change in the organizational frame from the previous era. This description is followed by a summary of changes the activists perceived in the SMO multi-organizational field and how these led to a frame change.

The Clergy Consultation Service on Abortion (CCSA), 1967–1973

By the late 1960s many liberal Protestant and Reform Jewish clergy had become aware of the extent of women's suffering due to illegal abortions (Garrow

1994; Luker 1984). In early 1967 a group of clergy in New York City, led by American Baptist pastor Howard Moody, set up a referral system to connect women with safe yet illegal abortion providers named the Clergy Consultation Service on Abortion (Carmen and Moody 1973). Similar groups soon appeared in other states, led by the New York group, eventually involving 1,400 clergy. These clergy primarily referred women to illegal abortion providers in other states and countries previous to 1970, and to New York after its laws were essentially repealed in 1970 (Garrow 1994; Gourney 1989).

The primary impetus in this SMO for creating a unifying organizational frame was the perceived inability to limit the framing activity to particular targets. Knowing that they had to publicly announce the formation, goals, and rationale of the CCSA, the activists "were apprehensive about the reaction this announcement might bring from . . . the public at large, . . . law enforcement agencies," their own congregations, state legislators, other clergy, and particularly the women they were trying to help (Carmen and Moody 1973, pp. 33-35).

The Selected Organizational Frame. The selected organizational frame, announced on the front page of the *New York Times* (Fiske 1967), was credited by the activists as "responsible for setting the tone" for the CCSA (Carmen and Moody 1973, p. 34). Its *diagnosis* was that the unavailability of abortion was causing health problems and death among poor women. The primary *solution* was to refer women to illegal yet safe abortion providers. The *rationale* for action was that if the actor does not mobilize, women will die. The announcement in the *New York Times*, which painted a grim picture, is worth quoting at length:

The present abortion laws require over a million women in the United States each year to seek illegal abortions which often cause severe mental anguish, physical suffering, and unnecessary death of women. . . . [and] compel the birth of unwanted, unloved, and often deformed children. . . . Therefore we pledge ourselves as clergymen to a continuing effort to educate and inform the public to the end that a more liberal abortion law in this state and throughout the nation be enacted. In the meantime women are [facing] the underworld of criminality or the dangerous practice of self-induced abortion. . . . Therefore, believing as clergymen that there are higher laws and moral obligations transcending legal codes, we believe that it is our pastoral responsibility and religious duty to give aid and assistance to all women with problem pregnancies. (Carmen and Moody 1973, pp. 30-31)

Field Configuration Effects on Organizational Frame Construction. In this "reform" stage of the broader pro-choice movement, restrictive abortion laws were only considered a problem because they resulted in a public health crisis (Luker 1984; Lader 1973), not because they violated rights. It is not surprising that the CCSA frame was highly influenced by the emerging pro-choice groups in the CCSA's alliance sector, with which the CCSA was highly integrated. Although there were many potential organizational frames that would have been consistent

with the social justice "cultural narrations" of the members of the CCSA, some of these being later adopted by the movement, this frame was selected at that time due to the structure and characteristics of the remainder of the multi-organizational field.

Beyond the nascent pro-choice organizations, the alliance system of the CCSA consisted of only the clergy networks, although some denominational agencies were supportive (Staggenborg 1991). The most important potential participant targets during this era were liberal Protestant and Jewish clergy who could provide local reference to an abortion provider. State legislators, elites who could legislatively enact the goals of the CCSA, were secondary targets to their "chief goal" of referring women (Moody 1971, p. 30). An organizational frame was needed to convince women to use the service, legislators to change the law, and religious leaders to break the law by making referrals. Yet it needed to be broadly resonant with the "secular" movement and could not endanger their goals with regard to public opinion or the police.²

Framing considerations could be focused on these targets due to the strong boundaries located between the antagonist and the CCSA target groups, which made counter-framing less important. The strong boundary located between the main antagonist to abortion reform, the Roman Catholic Church, and the religious pro-choice movement's targets, liberal Protestants and Jews, was the result of differing social networks and different cultural narrations regarding women's roles and sexuality.

Although evangelical Protestant clergy satisfied the first determinant of importance in assessing possible alliance targets because they could have referred women from southern states and rural areas (where liberal Protestant clergy and Reform rabbis were rare), evangelicals at this time had separate institutions from liberals and little interaction with them. Thus the social structural boundaries limited the chances of sharing the frame. The cognitive boundary was even stronger—activists probably never considered evangelical clergy as targets because they knew that evangelical cultural narrations about women's roles and sexuality were incompatible with theirs. The liberal religious clergy who *were* targeted by these activists (e.g., American Baptist college chaplains) had a similar ability to influence the goals of the SMO but shared social structural space with the activists (ecumenical councils, etc.) and, perhaps more important, had similar understandings of women's roles and sexuality.

Faced with the framing challenges of mobilizing reluctant groups of potential participants, convincing state legislators, educating the public, and avoiding the police, the rationale for action component of the organizational frame of the CCSA was selected which would resonate most powerfully with the targeted groups. The rationale of saving women from suffering and death resonated powerfully with targeted liberal Protestant and Jewish clergy and was also perceived

as the best justified "extension of pastoral responsibility" both legally and in the public's mind (Carmen and Moody 1973, p. 35). Most important, the diagnosis and solution components of the organizational frame needed to encourage the "frame transformation" (Snow et al. 1986) of pregnant women who, the CCSA activists perceived, believed that "the role of clergy . . . would have been to talk them into having the baby" (Carmen and Moody 1973, p. 23). Although the assembled organizational frame was well-suited for these targets, future shifts in the multi-organizational field would require changing the organizational frame during the next phase of the religious pro-choice movement.

The Religious Coalition for Abortion Rights, 1973–1980

The *Roe v. Wade* and *Doe v. Bolton* cases, decided in January 1973, declared abortion to be constitutionally protected based on a woman's right to privacy. The response by the Roman Catholic Church, the primary organized opponent of abortion, was rapid and strong, "calling for complete and total rejection of the decision" (Epstein and Kobyłka 1992, p. 209). The Catholic Church hierarchy and the organizations it had created (e.g., the National Right to Life Committee) made passing a constitutional amendment to overturn *Roe* the "focus of their utmost attention" (Epstein and Kobyłka 1992, p. 210).

The national leaders of the liberal and moderate Protestant denominations and Jewish organizations, which had adopted widely varying statements of support for abortion law reform or repeal, perceived that if any of the proposed constitutional amendments passed, women's reproductive decisions based on their religious teachings would be illegal (RCAR Board Minutes, 1973). In response, they created the RCAR to coordinate and unite the activity of the denominations against these amendments.³

Changes in the Organizational Frame. Despite the apparent effectiveness of the CCSA organizational frame in facilitating the growth of the clergy movement, a change in the composition of the multi-organizational field necessitated that it not be used. In an amicus brief to the *Roe* case in 1971, a few of the religious organizations that would later found the RCAR argued that restrictive abortion laws were unconstitutional because they established one religious viewpoint of the moment when a fetus becomes a person into public law—violating the establishment clause of the First Amendment (Epstein and Kobyłka 1992, p. 176). This was the first articulation of what would become the "first amendment religious liberty" organizational frame of the RCAR (later expanded to include a free exercise clause claim as well).

The *diagnosis* of the previous era, the risk to women's health, largely disappeared from the discourse of the SMO, despite its continuing relevance if *Roe* were to be overturned. The diagnosed problem for the RCAR was the efforts to

overturn the *Roe* decision (Board Minutes 9/13/73, RCAR Papers). The *solution* was simply to defeat the constitutional amendments circulating in Congress. The dramatic shift in the *rationale* for action component of the organizational frame from that of the CCSA is clear in the initial RCAR "rationale" statement. While raising the specter of criminal abortion as a motivating force as had the CCSA, criminal abortion was now a motivating problem *not* because it destroyed women's health but because criminal abortion impinged on women's religious liberty:

All those concerned with religious liberty can join in opposing any attempt by constitutional amendment or legislation to take us back to the era of criminal abortion which legally denied to all, but in practice particularly denied to the poor, *the right and responsibility to make their own decisions.* (Board Minutes 9/13/73, RCAR Papers; my emphasis)

This organizational frame strongly influenced framing efforts toward all specific targets. For example, in testimony before Congress regarding the constitutional amendments in 1976, both representatives of the RCAR (a Methodist minister and a Reform rabbi) began by reading the religion clauses of the first amendment and generally linking their sub-arguments to this theme (U.S. House Committee on the Judiciary 1976). In that same year, of the RCAR's eight publications that were sent to all targets, one was called "Abortion and Religious Freedom" and another "Religious Freedom and the Abortion Controversy" (RCAR Papers). Finally, the placards used at press conferences, denominational meetings, congressional briefings, and rallies contained the condensation symbol phrase "Religious Freedom."

Field Configuration Effects on Organizational Frame Construction. This new organizational frame was the result of perceived shifts in the multi-organizational field. The board members during this time were employees of their denominations and were supposed to represent the position of the denomination to the RCAR. An organizational frame could clearly not be at odds with any of these positions. Therefore, any organizational frame would have a diagnosis and prognosis that resonated with this group's reason for organizing—they believed that *Roe* was threatened (*diagnosis*) and that they must defeat these threats (*prognosis*). Furthermore, from the beginning the RCAR worked closely with secular pro-choice groups in its alliance sector. These groups' emphasis on the rights and autonomy of women (Luker 1984; Staggenborg 1991) clearly set the tone for the broader movement of which the RCAR was a part. However, within the constraints of aligning with the board members and the broader movement, the *rationale* component of the frame was a function of the character of the remainder of the multi-organizational field.

The official abortion policy statements of the denominations represented on the board during the creation of the frame generally reflect a social justice the-

ology "cultural narration" similar to that of the CCSA advocates. The documents reveal a wealth of possible *rationales* that could have been incorporated into the organizational frame, including the women's health justification, women's freedom of conscience, overpopulation concerns, the suffering of unwanted children, and justice for the poor who cannot go to other countries for safe abortions ("How We Stand" 1974, RCAR Papers). Although some statements mentioned women's freedom of conscience, this was not connected to first amendment constitutional rights as in the selected frame. In the weighing process which creates the organizational frame, potential participants were still considered in their deliberations, but they were clearly no longer the primary target.

In the debates at the first RCAR meetings concerning the content of the organizational frame, it is clear that Congress was perceived to be the most critical new target. The group seemed to agree with the Methodist representative who saw the group's deliberations about the RCAR's statement of purpose as actually about their "strategy . . . to persuade more than one third of the Senators and Congressmen" to vote against a Constitutional amendment (Board Minutes 8/9/73, RCAR Papers). The group, acknowledging the power of the "rights" arguments, seemed to feel the need for their own "rights" claim for the upcoming congressional debates.

While the activists needed a "rights" argument to align with the secular components of the alliance sector and for congressional debates, they also needed to counter-frame against the conflict sector target—the Roman Catholic Church. By the early 1970s the Roman Catholic Church began to countermobilize, helping to overturn the liberalized New York abortion law in the legislature and blocking repeal efforts in other states (Lader 1973). The RCAR did not need to be concerned that the Catholic Church would steal away contested potential participant target groups—the boundaries were still strong. However, the Roman Catholic Church was framing toward targeted elites in Congress to encourage the passage of a constitutional amendment. The potential for the success of this framing effort was high because the Congress has constitutionally guaranteed permeable boundaries through the right of citizens to lobby and vote.

Although the RCAR could have used the privacy rights arguments articulated in *Roe* and by secular groups, the best way to counter-frame against the Catholic Church was to frame its effort in Congress as another attempt to tear down the wall of church and state and violate individuals' religious liberty. This had been effective in previous debates over state aid to parochial schools (Carmen and Moody 1973) as well as efforts to legalize contraception decades earlier (Garrow 1994). The RCAR's initial organizing statement was that "in a pluralistic society the state should not embody in law one particular religious or moral viewpoint" (Board Minutes 9/13/73, RCAR Papers). It is unambiguously the Catholic Church that is advocating for that one viewpoint. Similarly, in testimony before

Congress in 1974, Bishop Armstrong of the United Methodist Church, representing the RCAR, stated that "we [the nation] are being asked to write the views of that particular religious community [the Roman Catholic] into the laws of the land. That is not what our forefathers envisioned as they defined a 'wall of separation' between Church and State" (U.S. Senate Committee on the Judiciary 1974, p. 256).

Finally, the group thought that to mobilize diverse target groups of potential participants around a common cause required an organizational frame that would resonate with the different potential participant groups simultaneously. The "first amendment religious liberty" organizational frame could successfully unite the groups, each of which had different "cultural narrations" about abortion, but with the same solution to the problem. The frame was designed so that the morality of particular abortion decisions was not to be part of public law, and each denomination would be legally free to teach its adherents their own abortion theology:

While recognizing that each religious body has its own perspectives and perceptions concerning this issue, [the RCAR] seeks to maximize the effectiveness of those religious groups which support the common purpose of the coalition by coordinating their efforts to safeguard the legal option of abortion. (Board Minutes 9/13/73, RCAR Papers)

The unifying function of this organizational frame is exemplified by an early attempt to promote a separate (and more effective) framing effort toward a particular target group. At the third meeting of the organization, the United Presbyterian Church representative suggested developing a group theological position on abortion in order to help mobilization efforts: "some sort of a policy" regarding the "dilemma of conscience as opposed to the civil liberties aspect of abortion." After a warning from the rabbi representing the Reform Movement that "involving the differing theologies represented in the RCAR could fragment the group" the idea was dropped and the religious freedom frame reasserted (Board Minutes 8/28/73, RCAR Papers).

Analysis of the RCAR's first meetings suggests that the "first amendment religious liberty" organizational frame was created by RCAR to simultaneously meet the diverse framing needs of (1) aligning with the secular pro-choice groups; (2) making a "rights" claim for Congress; (3) counter-framing against the antagonist target—the Catholic Church; and (4) mobilizing a number of disparate potential participant groups. This organizational frame, which shaped all framing activity, was clearly not designed to mobilize a particular group of potential participants (e.g., United Methodist women).

Religious Coalition for Abortion Rights, 1980–1992

Changes in the Organizational Frame. The diagnosis and solution components of the organizational frame during this era carry over from the 1970s. However, beginning in the early 1980s the rationale component began a slow, subtle trans-

formation. The 1970s rationale, where abortion should be legal to protect a woman's right to make moral and theological decisions, changed to a rationale where the right to make moral and theological decisions *which she is capable of doing responsibly* is emphasized.⁴

This slow shift is evident in RCAR program planning documents. From 1977 to 1981, each plan included the goal of

[educating] the general public on the importance of maintaining every woman's right to choose abortion, giving particular emphasis to its significance in the preservation of religious freedom. (RCAR Papers)

In 1982 the goal was amended to

[educating] the religious community and the general public on the importance of maintaining the right to choose abortion, giving particular emphasis on the preservation of religious freedom and the right of individual moral decision-making. (RCAR Papers; my emphasis)

In 1986 a new goal appeared in the program planning process, which was

to promote a climate within the religious community which affirms women as moral decision-makers; which preserves the First Amendment guarantee of religious freedom; and which assures equal access to comprehensive reproductive health care for all women. (RCAR Papers; my emphasis)

By 1992, the previously emphasized religious liberty rationale of the organizational frame had fallen back to third mention, and women not only were capable of wise decisions, but the decision to have an abortion could be morally correct:

RCAR speaks for millions of Americans, Americans who, while diverse in their faiths, are united in three beliefs; *abortion can be a moral choice; individual women are capable of making that decision*, informed by their own faiths and supported by their families, doctors, and clergy; because each religion has its own position on abortion, legislation dictating reproductive decisions threatens religious freedom. This is the message that . . . underlies all of RCAR's work.⁵ (Annual Report 1992, RCAR Papers; my emphasis)

The overall trend is clear. The rationale component of the organizational frame that a woman had the right to make abortion decisions due to her religious liberty shifted to a rationale—specifically targeted at religious groups—where a woman's *ability* to make these decisions *wisely and responsibly* is emphasized. This new organizational frame influenced framing activity toward all of the targets. For example, there was a change in the RCAR literature away from pieces that reference religious liberty toward titles such as "How Good Women Make Wise Choices" and "Respecting the Moral Agency of Women" (RCAR Papers). The placards used at public events are again instructive. Beginning in 1990 the "religious freedom" phrase was replaced by "prayerfully pro-choice," reflecting the new emphasis on the moral reflection of women and abortion rights advocates.

Field Configuration Effects on Organizational Frame Construction. The potential participants of the RCAR and the secular pro-choice organizations in the alliance sector, generally remained the same as the previous era. Although Congress, and to a growing extent state legislators, remained the primary target, perceived shifts in the antagonist sector of the field resulted in regular reassessments of the organizational frame.

Prior to the late 1970s evangelical Protestants, while more opposed to abortion than the remainder of the population, were largely uninvolved with politics. Beginning in the late 1970s evangelical Protestant groups and denominations became involved in American politics over social and moral issues such as abortion (Wuthnow 1988), eventually joining Roman Catholic groups in the pro-life movement. For example, the Southern Baptist Convention, whose Washington representative had assisted in founding the RCAR in 1973 and which had a position supporting abortion law liberalization during the early 1970s, took a conservative turn in 1980 by passing a resolution calling for a constitutional amendment to ban abortion (Melton 1989). The Moral Majority and other evangelical and fundamentalist organizations also brought great attention to the new involvement of conservative Protestants in the issue (Program Plan 1979, RCAR Papers).

It was not only denominations and organizations traditionally associated with American evangelicalism that began advocating against abortion. Liberal and mainline denominations that were members of the RCAR, never homogeneous in their political or theological views (Wuthnow 1988), had many "evangelically oriented" congregations, regional governing bodies, and nonofficial associations within them. With the rise in activism of evangelicals, many evangelicals in liberal and mainline denominations began to challenge the pro-choice positions of their denominations—and particularly their membership in the RCAR—by either founding new organizations or reinvigorating old ones. These organizations, all separate from the institutional denominations they attempted to influence, included the National Organization of Episcopalians for Life, the Good News (United Methodist), the Methodist Task Force on Abortion and Sexuality, the Presbyterian Lay Committee, Disciples for Life, United Church People for Biblical Witness, Presbyterians Pro-life, and Baptists for Life (RCAR Papers).

The evangelical groups were perceived to be important targets for counterframing because the boundary located between the evangelical groups in the conflict sector and the mainliners in the alliance and neutral sectors was very permeable compared to the strong boundary that existed between the mainliners and the Roman Catholic Church. This permeability was a function of two factors. First, the cognitive boundary located between these new antagonists and the RCAR's potential participant targets was very weak—they shared similar "cultural narrations." For example, unlike Catholic natural law speaking to a Prot-

estant theology which rejects such arguments, both evangelical pro-life Methodists and liberal pro-choice Methodists use the same Wesleyan theological heritage.

Second, the social network overlap between the mainliners and the evangelicals, through ministerial associations, seminaries, and ecumenical councils, was high in many parts of the country. For example, Baptist churches along the American North-South divide have "dually aligned status"—that is, they are members of both the American Baptist Churches U.S.A. and the Southern Baptist Convention (pro-choice and pro-life, respectively, in this era). Perhaps more important, evangelicals within the mainline denominations had an even tighter interaction with non-evangelical mainliners through attending the same meetings, setting up organizations within the denominations, and gaining access to existing networks to disseminate their frames.

For the first time, the religious groups in the RCAR's alliance system and in its "neutral" system were being targeted by framing efforts of evangelical groups in the pro-life movement. Program planning documents for the RCAR make clear that in only a few years the group realized that, in Klandermans's words, their target groups were "being carried away by the stream of counter-arguments" (1992, p. 90) due to the newly permeable nature of the borders in the multi-organizational field.⁶ The American Baptist Churches (an RCAR founding member) ended its membership in 1985. Numerous votes at national meetings during the mid-1980s challenging the pro-choice positions of the United Methodist Church, Episcopal Church, Presbyterian Church, and Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)—some of them very close—emphasized the framing task for the RCAR activists.

Given that the remainder of the field remained the same, the changes in the RCAR's organizational frame were largely determined by the content of the newly successful evangelical frames which needed to be framed against. Unlike the more abstract arguments about the definition of human life used by the RCAR's Roman Catholic adversaries of the 1970s, the frames of the evangelicals were focused on what most persons considered immoral abortion decisions by women: abortion for "convenience," gender selection, and "birth control," and abortion performed during the third trimester (RCAR Papers).

The existing rationale component of the RCAR organizational frame—which was intentionally designed not to discuss the moral justifications of particular abortion decisions—allowed pro-life advocates to define the moral problem as women not being responsible decision makers. Under pressure from antagonists, statements which the RCAR perceived as questioning women's ability to be responsible were inserted into the official abortion policy statements of three of the most important denominations in the RCAR's "neutral field" (including the Methodists who helped found the RCAR)—essentially writing the conflict field's frame into all denominational publications on the subject. Seeing their

targets accepting their opponents frames, a new frame was called for that addressed the morality that was clearly central to most people's understanding of abortion.

At a board retreat in 1982 designed to assess the need for changes in the organization in light of the above developments, most member groups reported that the issue of third-trimester abortions was becoming "a big problem" within their groups and that the current organizational frame was hampering efforts. It was felt that in order to "enable the groups to move forward politically," the RCAR had to "focus more on educating the faith groups on the moral aspects" of abortion (Board minutes 3/5/82, RCAR Papers). By 1986 the RCAR was training denominational activists—armed with the new frame—to counter "anti-abortion attacks from within" (Program Plan 1986, RCAR Papers).

In sum, in the 1980s the RCAR's field changed as evangelical Protestants entered their conflict system and began framing efforts toward the RCAR's member groups. Faced with this new constellation of targets and opponents, the RCAR created a new frame that posed a counter-frame to the evangelical efforts while attempting to maintain alignment with the alliance sector. Contrary to the evangelical frame, abortion decisions were framed—placed in a "schemata of interpretation"—where difficult abortion decisions are made by responsible and wise women. This organizational frame, generally the basis for specific target frames, while not incompatible with the alliance system targets, was not entirely designed with their resonance in mind.

Discussion and Conclusion

The SMOs in the religious pro-choice movement demonstrate that SMOs create organizational frames through weighing the alignment and counter-framing needs of the targets they perceive to be important in their multi-organizational fields. Perceived importance is a function of the strength of the social structural and cognitive boundaries of the field. These organizational frames, which influenced all of the framing activity toward particular groups, were only in the beginning optimally designed for alignment with potential participants. After this point, alignment and counter-framing needs of other targets drove the creation of new organizational frames—although potential participants were still targeted.

This perspective offers an elaboration of the multi-organizational field perspective that may increase its analytical power. In its original exposition, like-minded organizations in the multi-organizational field were linked through a presumably preexisting and static ideology which then led to mobilization opportunities through the links (Curtis and Zurcher 1973). Klandermans added opponents to the analysis and suggested that the structure of the field will affect the construction of meaning—but he does not suggest which characteristics of the field should have which effects (1992). The perspective outlined in this paper

offers a number of field characteristic variables that affect this construction of meaning.

As stated at the onset, much of the framing literature has been concerned with assessing the mobilization capacity of frames and, by extension, the mobilization capacity of SMOs. The above perspective not only clarifies this task by stressing the question of which target's mobilization should be measured but also could lead to some hypotheses regarding how structural preconditions in the multi-organizational field constrain or encourage mobilization. For example, the failure or weakness of an SMO may be partially due to the heterogeneity of targets it considers important in its multi-organizational field leading to a necessary balance that resonates poorly with all targets. Attention to these structural factors of SMOs may help further our understanding of their cultural processes which have been so fruitful for recent analyses.

ENDNOTES

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¹The self-identified titles of the opposing abortion movements are "condensing symbols" for their organizational frames (Edelman 1988, p. 22). Since these frames and titles have changed over the period under study, I will use the terms pro-choice and pro-life, acknowledging that these terms somewhat obscure these changes.

²Participation in the CCSA was perceived as risky to a cleric's career. Although only two clergy members were actually arrested, fear of arrest—and of a disapproving congregation—was ubiquitous (Carmen and Moody 1973; Gourney 1989). In 1967 these fears were justified, as activist Bill Baird had recently been imprisoned for distributing *contraception* (Garrow 1994).

³The CCSA disbanded shortly after the *Roe* decision, and many of the clergy activists joined the RCAR, founding many state chapters. The early members of the RCAR were the social action agencies of the United Methodist Church, United Church of Christ (UCC), Presbyterian Church in the U.S., United Presbyterian Church, American Baptist Churches, Episcopal Church, Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), Unitarian Universalist Association (UUA), Conservative and Reform Jewish Organizations, and Humanist organizations ("How We Stand" 1974, RCAR Papers). From 1973 forward, only the UUA, UCC, and the Jewish groups had enough consensus to be considered part of the alliance system. The other member groups, despite the RCAR's efforts and their own official abortion rights policies, never reached enough consensus for consistent mobilization and are considered part of the neutral field. The RCAR is one of only two single-purpose abortion rights organizations that have existed from 1973 to 1992. Its budget was approximately a third of a million dollars in the late 1970s and 1.4 million in 1992 (Annual Reports, RCAR Papers).

⁴Societal attitudes regarding women's roles liberalized dramatically during this period (DiMaggio et al. 1996). Thus, we should expect that the organizational frames of the religious pro-choice movement would become more supportive of liberalized gender roles because the "cultural narration"

of every group in the field has changed. More specific changes in the field explain the specific content of the organizational frame, beyond the general changes.

⁵The primary mission changed in 1993 to making "clear that abortion can be a morally, ethically, and religiously responsible decision" (RCAReporter, 10/20/93, RCAR Papers).

⁶The effect of this is reported by DiMaggio et al. (1996) who find that liberal religious groups become more internally polarized over abortion between 1977 and 1994.

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