

RESTRUCTURING FEMINISM: A COMPARATIVE HISTORY OF WOMEN'S  
ACTIVIST AND  
SERVICE PROVISION GROUPS IN DENVER'S CAPITOL HILL AREA, 1968-1985

By

LISA HUMPHREYS-SMITH

B.A. Binghamton University, 2010

A thesis submitted to the  
Faculty of the Graduate School of the  
University of Colorado in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of  
Masters of Arts  
History Program  
2016

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This thesis for the Masters of Arts in History by

Lisa Humphreys-Smith

has been approved for the

History Program

By

Rebecca Hunt, Chair

Chris Agee,

Myra Rich

Date: December 17, 2016

Humphreys-Smith (M.A., History)

Restructuring Feminism: A Comparative History of Women's History Activist and Service Provision Groups in Denver's Capitol Hill Area, 1968-1985

Thesis directed by Senior Instructor Rebecca Hunt

### **ABSTRACT**

This research compares three female oriented groups in Denver's Capitol Hill during second-wave feminism: The Rocky Mountain Planned Parenthood, the Denver Chapter of the National Organization of Women, and Big Mama Rag. This study aims to reveal ways in which each group structured their organization and their relationship to state and community resources to provide services to local women. The goal is to compare the efficacy of the female organizations who used different strategies to navigate issues of group fracturing, political pressures, state regulations, and community need.

This form and content of this abstract are approved. I recommend its publication.

Approved: Rebecca Hunt

To

B.A.S

And

All the people who never throw anything away because it might be important later.

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

Second-wave feminism manifested in a variety of ways from differing feminist ideologies to differing organizational structuring. Some organizations fought for reform while others demanded revolution. Within these organizations, women from all walks of life fought to create change and improve women's lives. For many organizations, the way they affected change was by providing services to the women in their community like sex education, abortion referral and counseling, and rape survivor advocacy. For the purposes of this thesis, I will analyze three feminist-oriented service-provision organizations located in the Capitol Hill neighborhood of Denver during the 1970s: Rocky Mountain Planned Parenthood (RMPP), the Denver Chapter of the National Organization for Women (NOW), and the feminist newspaper collective Big Mama Rag.

My research and analysis is largely focused on how these organizations structured themselves in relationship to the State, meaning government agencies and apparatuses at a city, state, and federal level, or in relationship to the community they served. Each organization had to make important and often, difficult decisions about funding and ideology when deciding where to align their efforts. Making the decision to work within the State or within a community grassroots effort comes with defining pro and cons for each side. An important part of this analysis is seeing how a commitment to working through the State or through the community shaped the trajectory and/or agenda of the organization. It is of particular importance to see how structuring an organization to satisfy the requirements of the State or the community either helped or diminished the organization's ability to provide the services they intended to.

This study is also inherently a study about feminism. I am interested in how each organization's processes and individual makeup of women were in constant conversation with definitions of feminist thought, expression, agendas, and stigmas. I intend to see how and why organizations functioned in relationship to their intended organizational image. I will also analyze

how individuals within an organization influenced policy, trajectory, and group structure through their expression and/or repudiation of varying definitions of feminism.

Historians have used the parameters of this study numerous times in the historiography of second-wave feminism. In particular, historical work in the 1990s on feminism focused heavily on organizational structure to explain why second-wave feminism ended and why some groups failed and others succeeded. I have decided to revisit second-wave feminist organizations to examine how the intersectionality of varying women, professionals, politicians, feminists, and feminist theories facilitated previously unknown successes and failures. I chose Denver for my study because each organization belonged to the same unique space where feminists and leftist groups co-existed in the legislative, professional, and grassroots heart of the city and entire state: Capitol Hill.



## CHAPTER II

### ROCKY MOUNTAIN PLANNED PARENTHOOD AND STATE FUNDING

Rocky Mountain Planned Parenthood's origins began in the early 1920s with the formation of the Denver Birth Control League. The league was made up completely of wealthy white women, who came together under the leadership of Denver social worker Ruth Cunningham. Cunningham worked closely with Judge Benjamin Lindsey, who famously advocated for the rights of children in the Denver Juvenile Court and was connected to the national birth control movement. It is likely that Cunningham's work in the juvenile court and affiliation with Lindsey influenced her to start the Denver Birth Control League, a philanthropic organization that was focused on the alleviation of poverty and overpopulation.<sup>1</sup>

Ruth Cunningham's marriage to Thomas Cunningham, a successful Denver physician, opened new avenues for her to find cooperation and support for her birth control crusade.<sup>2</sup> She belonged to the Thursday Lunch Club at the Denver Country Club. There she laid out her plans for a birth control clinic to her friends and some of Denver's most influential women. Cunningham's experience in Lindsey's juvenile court as the first director of the Girl's Division helped her friends understand how others with economic means lived and why it was so important to be involved in this work even if it meant participating publicly.<sup>3</sup> With their support and a fundraiser that brought in \$100, the league opened the first birth control clinic in Denver in the basement of a church at 1720 Emerson Street in the Capitol Hill neighborhood.

To be sure, birth control was still a taboo subject in the 1920s. At first glance it would have been quite surprising to find high-society women discussing birth control openly and certainly in the context of becoming providers of it. However, it was actually their social status that afforded them

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<sup>1</sup> Myra Rich, *The History of Planned Parenthood of the Rocky Mountains: 1916--*, (PPRM History Project Committee: Auraria), p. 3-5.

<sup>2</sup> Myra Rich, *The History of Planned Parenthood of the Rocky Mountains*, p. 7-9.

<sup>3</sup> Myra Rich, *The History of Planned Parenthood of the Rocky Mountains*, p. 3-5.

protection against claims of impropriety.<sup>4</sup> Their positions in their churches, their community, and as wives to influential men allowed them to speak frankly about issues of family planning and birth control with relative freedom. However, they did make sure to walk the line of birth control firmly on the side of poverty alleviation and later combating overpopulation.<sup>5</sup> They did not want to be associated with any of the radical themes associated with birth control and rights to sexual freedom that were becoming intricate parts of the East Coast birth control movement headed by socialist and worker's-rights groups. The board frequently made decisions to discuss and avoid potential damaging liberal and radical affiliations to birth control issues like abortion and leftist groups.

By 1944, the group changed its name to the Planned Parenthood of Colorado (PPC) to show their affiliation with Planned Parenthood Federation of America (PPFA). They had grown more professional and gained greater support from the community and medical profession in the area. They had also expanded their services into Boulder and Greeley. In addition to providing more medical services in the clinic, they also began investing resources into public relations further establishing themselves as a vital service to the Capitol Hill area.<sup>6</sup>

However, not until the introduction of the Pill in 1961 and hiring of Sheri Tepper as executive director in 1963 did PPC start to become a professionalized healthcare organization that provided extensive, high-quality services. With the arrival of the Pill at PPC clinics, came a flood of women asking for it. The Pill was convenient not only because of its near perfect rate of effectiveness, but also because it was a form of contraception that women did not need to insert vaginally, use every time they had intercourse, or administer with the knowledge of her partner. This made the Pill user-friendly for busy mothers with little privacy and women who wanted to keep their use of birth control a secret from disapproving partners. Before the Pill, a woman's best choice to prevent pregnancies was a diaphragm, which posed logistical problems especially for working-class mothers, who had

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<sup>4</sup> Rich, *The History of Planned Parenthood of the Rocky Mountains*, p. 5-6.

<sup>5</sup> Rich, *The History of Planned Parenthood of the Rocky Mountains*, p. 7-9.

<sup>6</sup> Rich, *The History of Planned Parenthood of the Rocky Mountains*, p. 15-25.

little time and little privacy. It is also likely women felt more comfortable going to PPC clinics for the Pill instead of a diaphragm as the latter required a physician to fit the women for one through a significantly invasive examination.

To accommodate the growing number of patients, the Denver Chapter of PPC bought a house that same year at 2025 York Street in Capitol Hill to become the new Central Denver clinic. While the Denver Chapter's Board and PPC's board remained separate, the centralized power of PPC and the Denver Chapter in one location protected the Central Denver clinic and PPC from many political and financial issues. Further, they strengthened each other to make the Denver clinic one of the strongest in the country. The Denver Chapter was the main fundraising source for PPC. In fact, PPC did not fundraise at all. The Denver Chapter provided over \$60,000 in yearly dues to PPC and only kept enough money to sustain themselves the rest of the time. Other Colorado clinics gave significantly less due to fewer patients. In return, PPC helped strengthen the Denver Chapter and clinic by securing political and professional support, which included Sheri Tepper, who was the thread that brought these two boards together so well.

Tepper's influence was evident in almost every facet of PPC and the Denver Chapter during her twenty-six-year tenure as executive director.<sup>7</sup> She was the liaison between PPC and federal grant makers and the State Health Department. She coordinated with physicians, educators, lawyers, and politicians. She attended fundraising and program development workshops to educate herself on self-sustaining clinics. She evaluated property for potential clinics, negotiated realty contracts, and even had her father donate his services to build and repair clinics. She reevaluated terms of Planned Parenthood affiliation. She attended almost every PPC Board meeting, Denver Chapter meeting, and Executive Committee meeting, while making frequent appearances at various additional group meetings.<sup>8</sup> Most importantly, Tepper successfully navigated the changing tides of federal funding,

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<sup>7</sup> In 1972, they changed their name to Rocky Mountain Planned Parenthood to reflect the expansion of their services to the Rocky Mountain Region. Myra Rich, *The History of Planned Parenthood of the Rocky Mountains*, p. 4.

<sup>8</sup> Planned Parenthood, "Minutes of Regular Meeting, Board of Directors," 1966

private donations, abortion legislation, and second-wave feminism. For over two decades of tumultuous change in funding and politics, Tepper kept the organization afloat. Her leadership was undoubtedly one of the central forces that helped PPC flourish from the 1960s through the 1980s.

In the 1960s, American attitudes on family planning began to shift towards favorable acceptance due in large part to growing fears of poverty and overpopulation. President Johnson and later Nixon implemented policies to fund family planning programs to alleviate both poverty and overpopulation. In particular, Nixon allocated federal money towards family planning programs in an effort to channel funds away from welfare programs servicing low-income families. This not only served to weaken those welfare programs but to also limit the number of families in need of welfare by funding programs providing birth control and sterilization to low-income women.<sup>9</sup>

PPFA and its affiliates benefitted from the increased federal and state funds made available through this changing political and social tide. Planned Parenthood of Colorado took advantage of these new funding opportunities through the Office for Economic Opportunity (OEO) and the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare (HEW). OEO was an agency born from President Johnson's War on Poverty program. The OEO administered a number of programs to address an array of issues concerning poverty including family planning. Under Nixon's administration, OEO transferred their family planning program and funds to HEW in 1973.<sup>10</sup> By then, PPC had started to become dependent on OEO and HEW grants as they expanded services into rural areas of Colorado. In 1972, they received a \$500,000 grant from HEW through the Tydings Bill. That same year PPC incorporated Wyoming in their service area and changed their name to Rocky Mountain Planned Parenthood (RMPP) to reflect this regional control.

Once Johnson formally made OEO funds available to family planning services starting in the 1967 fiscal year, Sheri Tepper and the PPC board agreed to apply for OEO grants to fund new

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<sup>9</sup> Planned Parenthoods began offering vasectomies to men by the beginning of the 1970s.

<sup>10</sup> Desmond King and Hansen, Randall, *Sterilized by the State: Eugenics, Race, and the Population Scare: Twentieth-Century North America*, (Cambridge University Press: New York, 2013), p. 252.

outreach and education programs. However, their decision was not without concern about potential issues associated with accepting federal funding. The board wondered whether or not they would be able to maintain PPC's "private standards and/or policy"<sup>11</sup> if they accepted federal funding that potentially could influence their organization to serve the agenda of the administering agency. The board minutes suggest that members ultimately agreed that this could be avoided "so long as board membership represented the public, rather than the government."<sup>12</sup> Ensuring that board members were not affiliated with federal agencies or representatives of their agendas protected PPC from internal influences that could have shifted their mission and policies. However, this policy did not protect them from federal agencies exerting power over the board and clinics through grant guidelines.

From the onset, PPC found its identity and goals at odds with the guidelines set forth by OEO. OEO's policy to only provide funding for contraceptive services to married women disqualified PPC, which decided in 1962 to include unwed mothers in contraceptive services, a move they made to not only expand their services but to expand their mission as an organization that emphasized family planning for all women. PPC did not change their policy to fit OEO's standard. Instead they waited until 1966 to apply for grants only after Johnson's administration urged OEO to change their program to permit funding for programs that provided contraceptives to all unmarried women.<sup>13</sup>

In August of 1966, the PPC board approved an application by the El Paso County War on Poverty (WOP) program, a community program that sought affiliation with PPC as a subchapter, despite concerns over OEO's restrictive guidelines. Such guidelines significantly limited the El Paso County WOP's discretionary spending powers, which were subject to extensive monthly audits. Additionally, OEO required agency approval for any changes made to the program including hiring processes and workers' hours. However, there was a small provision that allowed grant receivers to transfer 10% of funds from one area of the program to another.

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<sup>11</sup> Planned Parenthood of Colorado, "Board Meeting" August 16, 1966, p. 2.

<sup>12</sup> Planned Parenthood of Colorado, "Board Meeting" August 16, 1966, p. 2.

<sup>13</sup> Planned Parenthood, "Minutes of Regular Meeting, Board of Directors," May 1966.

In addition to restrictive guidelines by OEO, PPC board members were concerned over the lack of governing power on how subchapter programs used OEO funds. Board member John Birmingham addressed the PPC board with concerns over subchapter misuse of OEO funds and PPC's potential liability. His main concern was the power of subchapters to administer programs funded by OEO through a contract signed by PPC as the responsible party. Tepper explained that because OEO limited applicants for family planning grants to local community action programs, PPC could not present grant applications independently but they did have legal authority to sign any contracts between OEO and PPC-affiliated community-action programs. On the other hand, El Paso County WOP was not an incorporated group and thus could not legally sign contracts with OEO. Therefore, in order to receive funding for the El Paso WOP program, the El Paso group and PPC needed to apply for OEO grants jointly.

While this may seem like a limitation of PPC's power over service programs under their umbrella, it actually served to strengthen their power over subchapter clinics and other programs. PPC's executive committee deliberately restricted subchapters from becoming corporations out of fear they would grow "unwieldy."<sup>14</sup> By holding the power to sign the contracts necessary for subchapters to run programs, PPC held a significant amount of decision-making power in not only how subchapter programs were funded but also over the details of program applications. In response to Birmingham's concerns, the executive committee also agreed to require subchapters to submit their preliminary applications for federal grants to PPC's president and executive director for approval before the executive director would sign the contract for them. In doing so, the president and executive director could require subchapters to make changes to applications they felt were necessary. They could decide how and where money would be spent with the welfare of other PPC affiliated programs in mind. This was an important discretionary power because they could control the allocation of limited OEO funding throughout the various subchapter programs in Colorado as

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<sup>14</sup> Planned Parenthood of Colorado, "Executive Committee Meeting," August 29, 1966, p. 2.

needed. This lent significantly to successfully expanding PPC throughout Colorado and into Wyoming and New Mexico.

Like OEO, HEW's grants also came with significant restrictive conditions. PPC's first attempt at acquiring HEW funding forced them to reevaluate their commitment to expanding pregnancy prevention services. In 1968, Executive Director Sheri Tepper applied for a grant from the Children's Bureau of the regional HEW office for \$240,000 to fund the Colorado Family Planning Project, an educational outreach program to cover fourteen counties in Colorado.<sup>15</sup> However, the Children's Bureau found fault with a number of details in PPC's program proposal, including the large geographical area they intended to cover and their plan to hire and train a number of outreach workers, who were essential to the program.<sup>16</sup>

Most of the bureau's concerns were actually a result of differing philosophies between itself and PPC. Although congress had previously set forth plans for HEW funds to go towards family planning programs, the Children's Bureau board still believed that "priority should be given to...maternal and infant care program centers." HEW attempted to impose their focus on PPC's program with a response to their application that not only maintained that the focus should be on maternal and infant care but also suggested that they limit the program's location to areas with high rates of infant mortality. This is likely why they also requested greater control over training outreach workers. PPC acknowledged that to adhere to these guidelines "would concentrate efforts on post-partum and parenthood education rather than the prevention of pregnancy."<sup>17</sup> This would have severely hindered PPC's agenda to prevent unintended and unwanted pregnancies.

The bureau requested that PPC resubmit a revised application, but Tepper refused to revise these basic points of the proposal. The PPC board agreed. Board minutes reported that one member felt, "nothing would be gained by prostituting our identity or efficiency merely in order to 'get' grant

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<sup>15</sup> Planned Parenthood of Colorado, "Regular Meeting Minutes," February 20<sup>th</sup>, 1968, p. 1.

<sup>16</sup> Planned Parenthood of Colorado, "Minutes of Regular Meeting, Board of Directors," February 20, 1968

<sup>17</sup> Planned Parenthood of Colorado "Regular Meeting Minutes," November 2, 1968, p. 1.

funds."<sup>18</sup> The notes indicate that other members were drawing the same conclusion that government funding should not be able to buy a controlling power through grants. They backed Tepper in her decision and refused to redraw the lines of their proposal to meet HEW's standards. PPC's 1968 application for HEW funding eventually died after months of back and forth between HEW's regional office, Sheri Tepper, and the Colorado Department of Health.<sup>18</sup> PPC stayed committed to their vision of the Colorado Family Planning Program and their mission to focus on the prevention of intended and unwanted pregnancies, a mission that PPC had been making significant steps towards expanding in the years leading up to the HEW application.

Concerned with the number of children born outside of marriage, PPC expanded its policy in 1967 to serve more at risk women. According to reports, in 1966 alone, 3115 children were born in Colorado to unmarried women. To combat this problem, PPC board members voted to amend policies so that PPC clinics could serve all women nineteen years or older regardless of marital status or previous pregnancies. They also included a special provision that permitted girls sixteen through eighteen who were self-referred to the clinic to receive contraceptive services if the attending physician deemed it necessary to their individual situation.<sup>19</sup> In 1970, PPC opened its first teen clinic despite the inherent controversy attached to providing teens with sex education and birth control.

In 1972, PPC changed its name to Rocky Mountain Planned Parenthood (RMPP) to reflect their expansion in services to the Rocky Mountain Region, which included parts of Wyoming. As they expanded, their focus to provide high-quality health services strengthened but their relationship with HEW did not. HEW guidelines restricted RMPP from decision-making powers in terms of patient criteria and future spending, requiring that any money earned through a program funded by their grants must be used to sustain those same programs. This requirement prevented RMPP to allocate federal grant money where it was needed and restricted board members from deciding the trajectory of their efforts and sources. Internally, Tepper and other board members wanted to shift

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<sup>18</sup> Planned Parenthood of Colorado "Regular Meeting Minutes," April 23, 1969, p. 1.

<sup>19</sup> Planned Parenthood of Colorado, "Policy on Services to Minors," July 18, 1967, p. 1.



their attention further towards teen outreach, service provision, and education. They were also discussing ways to get involved with abortion provision even by 1970 before the Supreme Court's 1973 *Roe V. Wade* decision. Despite their desire to move past HEW's continued commitment towards maternity healthcare, RMPP's funds were perpetually tied up in HEW regulations as the flow of money made its way out of and back into programs funded by HEW grants. So, while the funding itself and the professionalization it came with served to refocus RMPP's emphasis on medical service efficiency, it simultaneously limited RMPP's vision for growth.<sup>20</sup>

HEW regulations also restricted the number of women and girls RMPP could provide services to in the Denver and Capitol Hill area. Not only did HEW regulations prevent RMPP from shifting their service provision efforts toward younger and unmarried women, which accounted for the majority of females in the Capitol Hill area, the guidelines placed a quota on the Central Denver clinic to serve a specific percentage of Title X qualified patients. This naturally resulted in the central clinic turning away women who did not qualify, including those who only marginally missed the threshold and could not afford alternative private doctors.

HEW's emphasis on professionalized healthcare services also helped shape RMPP's trajectory away from a social-service organization and towards becoming a high-quality healthcare provider. The timing of this shift is interesting as it happened during what could be called Planned Parenthood's ideological cleavage. From the late 1960s through the mid-1970s, Planned Parenthood changed from an apolitical organization attempting to fix large social problems through controlling female fertility to an organization active in the political arena, promoting a woman's right to choose and to access to adequate healthcare. RMPP reversed the relationship between its mission and its method. Service provision was no longer RMPP's method to create social change, service provision became the mission while social change became the method. Ironically, moving away from social

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<sup>20</sup> Rich, *The History of Planned Parenthood of the Rocky Mountains*, p. 34-35.

change as a mission helped solidify Planned Parenthood as a human rights advocacy organization, a reputation it has sustained to present day.

Furthermore, shifting emphasis towards advocating patients' rights through legislation was not atypical of a domestic-based medical organization, who traditionally stayed politically neutral. However, most medical organizations had benefited from the assumption that their services were part of a basic asexual human need. By aligning itself with experts on poverty and overpopulation early on, RMPP adopted the same asexual image throughout the 1950s and 1960s, but HEW's funding during the height of second-wave feminism and the *Roe* decision forced RMPP and Planned Parenthood on a national level to reconfigure not only the services it provided but also how it defined itself as a service provider.

By the mid-1960s, RMPP's reluctance to involve itself in politics was rooted more in the fear of losing funding than social ostracism. During her tenure, as executive director, Sheri Tepper often cautioned both RMPP and the Denver Chapter that their status as a tax-exempt non-profit organization restricted them from using any substantial amount of their funds to lobby.<sup>21</sup> The wording of the law was extremely vague. Undoubtedly, the potential for discretionary interpretation of what 'substantial' meant posed a significant threat to RMPP due to its controversial nature and its virulent and privately funded oppositions, who were sometimes free to lobby unchecked. Consequently, Tepper and the rest of RMPP's members were cautious to stay within the lines of legality especially when those lines were blurred by ambiguous legal terminology.

Although it was restricted in how much it could directly be involved in lobbying, RMPP's Public Affairs Committee's was invaluable to efforts of influencing legislation. The Public Affairs Committee mobilized members of the RMPP Board and the Denver Chapter Board to work as individuals to influence the Colorado legislature. The committee asked members to personally contact politicians and let them know about issues that dealt with abortion and family planning. The

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<sup>21</sup> Rocky Mountain Planned Parenthood, "Special Meeting," August 15, 1973, p. 1.

committee asked members to check in with politicians on a regular basis, especially during times when bills that dealt with issues relevant to Planned Parenthood's agenda were up for discussion. The committee also planned luncheons at the Central Denver clinic where Tepper hosted tours and talks with state politicians. Tepper used the visits to not only introduce politicians to the clinic and the services provided there but also for board members to introduce themselves for later networking and correspondences.<sup>22</sup>

The public affairs committee provided ways to get around lobbying restrictions and influence legislation. Bills that threatened family planning funding and stricter laws on abortion were met with the committee's efforts and individual involvement of RMPP board members. Former head of RMPP's Legal Committee, Patricia Schroeder, helped the organization's legislative efforts after she became the first female in Colorado elected as a state representative in 1973. While Pat Schroeder did not serve as a member on the RMPP or Denver Board while in office, she kept a close alliance with them throughout her political career. In fact, Schroeder was instrumental in negotiations between HEW and RMPP during a time of back-room fiscal agreements that included accusations of HEW misappropriations. She also testified on behalf of RMPP and Planned Parenthood national in 1976 when congress significantly cut HEW's family planning programs.<sup>23</sup>

Schroeder's decision to officially leave RMPP served the interest of the organization's agenda and influence in politics. She was free to lobby for Planned Parenthood and abortion rights without potentially violating non-profit laws. She could also align herself with a variety of politically-minded women and feminists without carrying a stigma to or from Planned Parenthood, especially during the years of intense criticism against the abortion and sterilization services at Planned Parenthood clinics. Also, because she was an upper-class, white politician, she could associate with radical feminists

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<sup>22</sup> Rocky Mountain Planned Parenthood, "Board Meeting," December 8, 1975, p. 1.

<sup>23</sup> United States, *Hearings before the Subcommittee on Census and Population of the Committee on Post Office and Civil Service*, House of Representatives, Ninety-fourth Congress, first and second sessions, p. 30.  
<https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt/search?q1=rocky;id=mdp.39015082048003;view=1up;seq=1;start=1;sz=10;page=search;orient=0>, accessed August 10, 2016.

without implicating herself under that label. She became a kind of liaison or bridge between local feminists and Planned Parenthood during a time RMPP tried to publicly stay away from liberal-feminist associations.

RMPP also continued to separate themselves publicly from groups with liberal labels to avoid losing funding from both federal agencies and private donors. In May 1974, Denver NOW's lobbyist Bonnie Andrikopoulos was a guest speaker at a RMPP Public Affairs Committee meeting. She requested that the board join an effort to create a questionnaire to be sent to legislators to review their stances on a variety of issues. The committee agreed that the questionnaire was a beneficial endeavor but some believed that Denver NOW had a "very liberal image." Additionally, Denver NOW was already working with the several other local leftist groups including the Denver Gay Coalition to create the questionnaire. A Public Affairs report revealed additional concerns working with these other liberal groups including what the report referred to as "the Gay Group." Sheri Tepper weighed in on the subject and suggested that RMPP forego direct participation and instead privately donate \$200 the cause to show their support.<sup>24</sup>

By the end of 1973 right-to-life conservatives and feminists were waging several battles over birth control and abortion squarely in Planned Parenthood clinics. They attached political and gendered meanings to the medical services the clinics provided. In fact, both movements used each other's attacks and claims on women's health services to fuel their own causes and constituencies. The gendered and politicized battles left Planned Parenthood with a crisis of identity. They no longer enjoyed relative acceptance (as tacit as it may have been at times) by national, state, or social institutions. This threatened Planned Parenthood's relationships with private donors, which caused local and national board members to emphasize HEW and other kinds of State funding in the event that private donors withdrew their support. Interestingly, this occurring at the same time tensions increased between RMPP and HEW.

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<sup>24</sup> Rocky Mountain Planned Parenthood, "Public Affairs Report" May 18, 1974.

HEW and PPC's relationship eventually grew tumultuous due to the philosophical differences between the two. It was the actions of individual HEW board members rather than HEW's organizational guidelines that often deterred RMPP from functioning smoothly. Beginning in 1974, members of the regional HEW office used several bureaucratic tactics to stop funding to RMPP and disrupt their clinical operations. This included something as small as sending required documentation past the due date. They also visited the Denver Central clinic several times questioning and harassing the staff. The staff reported that it seemed they were trying to "trip them up"<sup>25</sup> and make them say something that would disqualify them from the program. A HEW board member even went as far as to send a forged letter from HEW that restricted them from providing services and information on abortion. Confused by the letter, RMPP president Mary Silverstein and Executive Director Sheri Tepper called HEW's regional office to find out if the letter was accurate. No one would answer their questions. They asked congresswoman and former RMPP board member Pat Schroeder to investigate. Eventually they were able to ascertain information that a regional HEW board member wrote the letter and the contents were completely false. However, this undoubtedly caused a delay in services at the clinics.<sup>26</sup>

The HEW board member seemed to focus most of his ire for RMPP on Sheri Tepper. He frequently questioned her integrity as an Executive Director and claimed she was a tyrant that ruled over RMPP unfairly imposing her will. Ironically, he even claimed that Tepper forged a letter to HEW's regional office pretending to be President Silverstein, a claim Silverstein quickly refuted with a light-hearted joke that she was flattered he thought she wrote as well as Tepper. Silverstein rightfully characterized the battle between RMPP and HEW as a "soap opera."<sup>27</sup> However, Tepper

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<sup>25</sup> Mary Silverstein, "President's Letter," Rocky Mountain Planned Parenthood, December 15, 1975, p. 1-2.

<sup>26</sup> Mary Silverstein, "President's Letter," Rocky Mountain Planned Parenthood, December 15, 1975, p. 1-2.

<sup>27</sup> Mary Silverstein, "President's Letter," Rocky Mountain Planned Parenthood, October 21, 1976, p. 1.

seemed to always remain diplomatic as she continued to take the necessary steps to remain in good standing with HEW.<sup>28</sup>

RMPP's battle with HEW and decreasing funds forced members to focus on private funding and creative fundraising. For example, board members were repeatedly asked to engage potential donors face-to-face and discuss the need for family planning. They also held balls at the mansions of Denver elites, planned highly successful ski-a-thons, and hosted thrift sales at University Thrift in Capitol Hill. While fundraising events usually netted several thousand dollars, private donations brought in significantly more. RMPP reported an income of \$90,000 from private donors during the 1975 fiscal year.<sup>29</sup>

Additionally, Sheri Tepper worked to develop the sustaining clinics. In addition to contraceptive sales, which netted RMPP over \$300,000 in the 1975 fiscal year alone and the sales from sex-education pamphlets written by Tepper, clinics used efficiency guidelines to offset operation costs. The federal comptroller general concluded in a 1980 report that Rocky Mountain Planned Parenthood was the most successful fee-for-service systems they had encountered. According to the report, RMPP's success was largely due to their system of scheduling appointments within two days and requiring upfront payments.<sup>30</sup> By 1980, a self-sustained Denver clinic operated without Title X funding despite a patient load that was forty-seven percent below the poverty line. Sheri Tepper reported that even clients with low-incomes were willing to pay for "convenient, sensitive, and timely"<sup>31</sup> services.

Members were not complaining about the switch to emphasizing private funding. Many members of the RMPP and Denver Chapter board were increasingly unhappy with the restrictions state and federal funding put on their clinics and spending power. RMPP President Mary Silverstein

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<sup>28</sup> Mary Silverstein, "President's Letter," Rocky Mountain Planned Parenthood, August, 23, 1976, p. 1.

<sup>29</sup> Rocky Mountain Planned Parenthood, "Public Affairs Report" September 3, 1975, p. 3. .

<sup>30</sup> United States General Accounting Office, *Report by the Comptroller General*, June 19, 1981, p.39.

<sup>31</sup> United States General Accounting Office, *Report by the Comptroller General*, June 19, 1981, p. 50.

wrote in 1975, "[T]he less dependent we are on federal or state grants, the better off we are; so, I hope you are all redoubling your fundraising efforts."<sup>32</sup> There were several ups and downs in State funding throughout the 1970s. HEW alone cut RMPP's program grant by \$84,000 during the 1975 fiscal year. HEW's decision to cut funding coupled with their control over spending power and program development changed the general tone of RMPP and subchapter boards concerning State funding. Members became more incredulous about the reliability of future State funding. Moreover, they became increasingly focused on establishing autonomy over organizational spending and growth. With support from the president and other board members, Tepper refocused funding efforts towards private donations by consistently communicating financial need, State funding problems, and fundraising strategies to both the RMPP and Denver Chapters boards.

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<sup>32</sup> Mary Silverstein, "President's Letter," Rocky Mountain Planned Parenthood, October 14, 1975, p. 2.

### CHAPTER III

#### RMPP AND THE CHOICE

“The state of RMPP is really very good and becoming even better. In fact, Sheri Tepper [sic] says that ever since the ‘Shield of Roses’ started picketing the Central Denver clinic and praying for us, things have been looking up.”<sup>33</sup>

Most historical work on Planned Parenthood suggests that the organization did not address the issue of abortion until after the *Roe V. Wade* decision in 1973 because of the inherent controversial connotation attached to it. Furthermore, historians argue that Planned Parenthood did not adopt rhetoric or policies that addressed women’s rights to birth control or abortion until after the *Roe* decision instead adopting policy-based arguments like medical need and population growth concerns.

Historian Mary Ziegler argues that the *Roe* decision was one of the major pushes to end the policy-based rhetoric of population control used by organizations like Planned Parenthood to push for family planning and birth control access. Taking a nationalistic view, she argues that Planned Parenthood did not begin to adopt the rhetoric of “choice” until after the *Roe* decision and only did so as a strategy to align themselves with changing definitions of abortion services, political affiliations, and claims of racial targeting by government funded population control groups. She places the turning point in October 1973 during an impromptu strategy session for all Planned Parenthood affiliates in Denver, Colorado. According to confidential memorandums, Robin Elliott, a conference coordinator, suggested that to combat new state anti-choice bills Planned Parenthood Federation of America and affiliates should adopt a strategy with a “reaffirmation of commitment to freedom of choice in parenthood”<sup>34</sup> and draw from the terms and ideas used in the *Roe* debates that addressed rights and the choice.<sup>35</sup> Planned Parenthood of Colorado uniformly and publicly followed the same trajectory

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<sup>33</sup> Mary Silverstein, “Presidents Letter” January 22, 1976, p. 1.

<sup>34</sup> Mary Ziegler, *The Framing of a Right to Choose: Roe v. Wade and the Changing Debate on Abortion Law*, *Law and History Review*, Vol. 27, No. 2 (Summer 2009), p. 309.

<sup>35</sup> Ziegler, *The Framing of a Right to Choose*, p. 309.



closely, but this model is complicated if individual members behind the scenes of PPC are analyzed instead.

Sheri Tepper and the RMPP board were invested in creating abortion services before the *Roe* decision. Tepper and other members used State apparatuses to influence Colorado legislation towards greater access to birth control for women, which even included abortions. At times, these efforts included rights-based rhetoric. Additionally, they successfully opened up a self-sustaining abortion clinic within just nine months of the *Roe* decision.

To be certain, members like Sheri Tepper were fiercely committed to issues of over population, which undoubtedly was the main focus of their strategy, mission, and rhetoric of the time, but it was not exclusively used. In varying degrees, they continued to use choice and rights rhetoric as a complimentary argument with population control as they helped introduce new bills for liberalized birth control and abortion laws up until the *Roe* decision. These strategies helped PPC members win landmark cases that facilitated PPC's service provision growth and professionalism.

The passing of the 1965 Colorado Birth Control bill opened the door for Planned Parenthood of Colorado's social workers to not only discuss and disseminate birth control information openly, it also introduced the idea that public health agencies should pay for birth control services including devices. The success of the bill itself is not surprising, as population growth concerns at the time were prolific at both a state and federal level and public officials increasingly cited family planning as a viable solution. What is surprising is that while PPC officially and publicly opposed the bill, individual members orchestrated not only the bill's introduction but they also used it to immediately cement PPC as the go-to professional "expert" provider of public birth control services under the bill's provisional guidelines.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> United States, *Population Crisis: Hearing before the Subcommittee on Foreign Aid Expenditures of the Committee On Government Operations*, (U.S Government Printing Office: Washington, 1966), p. 718.

Despite an official vote by PPC's board against supporting the proposed birth control bill, PPC board member and chair of the legal committee Senator John Bermingham sponsored the bill with the very public support of Ruth Steel, former PPC president turned Planned Parenthood/World Population director. Bermingham also had the support of Sheri Tepper, who even spoke at a hearing on the bill in the state senate. Bermingham explained,

Planned Parenthood of Colorado considered but was opposed to the introduction of a bill on the theory that failure to pass it would be a harsh setback to progress already underway. A few of us took a contrary view, however, feeling that widespread public discussion and controversy would work in favor of the birth control movement generally, regardless of whether or not a bill passed.<sup>37</sup>

PPC's official vote against supporting the bill was in line with their commitment to stay away from anything too liberal or controversial, but some of the members knew that the bill was necessary to get legislation and public discourse moving in the direction of greater access to birth control services and more freedom for PPC to provide it. Much to their surprise the bill passed, securing a legislative victory for both PPC and PP/WP.<sup>38</sup>

As the country began questioning restrictive state abortion laws in the 1960s especially those that provided statutes that made having an illegal abortion a punishable crime, PP/WP contemplated making a public statement in support of liberalizing abortion laws. They reached out to their affiliates to vote on the measure. Planned Parenthood of Colorado's Executive Committee addressed the proposal in November 1966. Committee members agreed that while abortion laws needed to be liberalized, "any publicized effort to do so might well handicap Planned Parenthood's effectiveness in working with public officials,"<sup>39</sup> who were only recently cooperating with them. On one hand it is not surprising that PPC recommended that PP/WP should not be officially involved in abortion law

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<sup>37</sup> United States, *Population Crisis: Hearing before the Subcommittee on Foreign Aid Expenditures of the Committee On Government Operations*, (U.S Government Printing Office: Washington, 1966), p. 718.

<sup>38</sup> United States, *Population Crisis: Hearing before the Subcommittee on Foreign Aid Expenditures of the Committee On Government Operations*, (U.S Government Printing Office: Washington, 1966), p. 718.

<sup>39</sup> Planned Parenthood of Colorado, "Executive Committee Meeting," November 10, 1966, p. 1.

reform when you consider their history of steering clear of anything with a liberal stamp and with the new promise of OEO funding that came in 1966. On the other hand, their vote to avoid abortion law reform was contradictory of PPC board members who were actively liberalizing Colorado laws on birth control and abortion during the same time.

While PPC was restricted in its ability to lobby as an organization due to 501(c)3 nonprofit guidelines, several prominent board members took full advantage of their freedom to lobby and campaign as individuals. In 1967, Senator Bermingham co-sponsored the country's first successful liberalized abortion bill alongside Representative and future governor Dick Lamm, who at the time was also a member of PPC's Legal Committee. By passing the new abortion law, Colorado became the first state to legalize abortion using the standard set forth by the American Legal Institute (ALI) in 1962, which recommended that states adopt their Model Penal Code that permits abortions in cases of rape, incest, substantial physical and mental risk to the woman, and when the child would likely have severe physical and/or mental defects. The bill passed in April of 1967 just five months after PPC's executive board voted against PP/WP's public involvement in abortion reform. PPC board members again publicly acted in contradiction to PPC's official stance, which was compounded by their coordination with Ruth Steel who represented PP/WP. Regardless, the bill was a significant step for PPC as it continued to expand its service provision agenda to provide high-quality and necessary medical services as it allowed them to provide abortion and birth control counseling to a greater number of women. The legislator added a caveat that required a unanimous approval by three attending physicians. The physicians would form a "special hospital board" dedicated solely to deciding on abortion requests based on the Model Penal Code that ALI proposed.<sup>40</sup>

With the win in the 1967 abortion bill, PPC board members began to realize that the organization needed to participate more actively in politics and law in order to provide adequate

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<sup>40</sup> Harry Ziff, "Recent Abortion Law Reforms (Or Much Ado About Nothing)," *Journal of Criminal Law and Criminology*, Vol. 6 Issue. 1, 1969, p. 4.

services to their patients.<sup>41</sup> However, this was a slow process that took a back seat to constant negotiations with state and federal funding opportunities that presented themselves that same year. Tepper focused PPC's efforts on developing programs and procuring new federal grants to expand service into rural areas. Abortion was also still an unpredictable and controversial subject that was at best on shaky ground as an acceptable arena in which Planned Parenthood could participate.

Their slow movement towards investing in public policy efforts and abortion services changed in 1970 with two new federal funding opportunities: The Family Planning Services and Population Research Act and the allocation of \$382 million by Title X of the Public Health Service Act to expand their services.<sup>42</sup> The money financed PPC's expansion into rural areas of Colorado where Title X funds could serve the predominately poor population. With new financial stability and an increased patient load, Tepper and other board members could begin addressing issues concerning abortion and other forms of birth control in the Colorado legislature.

In January of 1971, the board reevaluated their priority statements and contemplated increasing the value they placed on the "Public Policy, inform officials," objective.<sup>43</sup> The board agreed to increase "Public Policy" emphasis from a level six priority to a level one, which included developing an active Public Affairs Committee with an equal effort to "stimulate other local agencies to become more involved in expansion of programs."<sup>44</sup> This continued to place a greater emphasis on using individuals and agencies publicly unaffiliated with PPC to push their law reform agenda and negotiations with the state apparatus to expand family planning programs. Meanwhile, the Public Affairs Committee led by board members Rhonda Grant and Pat Perry worked within PPC to monitor relevant legislation bills and coordinate mailing events that prompted PPC members to individually contact state officials urging them to vote in favor of family planning service expansion.<sup>45</sup> This

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<sup>41</sup> Planned Parenthood of Colorado, "Regular Board Meeting," March 9, 1968, p. 1.

<sup>42</sup> Rich, *The History of Planned Parenthood of the Rocky Mountains*, p. 3-5.

<sup>43</sup> Planned Parenthood of Colorado, "Regular Meeting Minutes," January 27, 1971, p. 2.

<sup>44</sup> Planned Parenthood of Colorado, "Objectives and Priorities," February 15, 1971, p. 3.

<sup>45</sup> Planned Parenthood of Colorado, "Objectives and Priorities," February 15, 1971, p. 3.

included attempts to both liberalize abortion laws and to defeat right-to-life legislation that threatened abortion access. Again, this freed up PPC from potential 501(c)3 lobbying violations and it allowed them to focus long-term plan to develop an abortion service program.

According, to RMPP board minutes, Tepper and other board members had been preparing to open an abortion clinic since 1971, two years before the *Roe* decision in order to provide more adequate and necessary health services. Instead of attempting to establish an in-house abortion service program, RMPP reached out to local Capitol Hill and neighboring hospitals such as General Rose, Florence Crittenton, and Presbyterian and St. Luke's. Due to differences in how RMPP, hospital personnel, and individual physicians thought services should be handled, they were never able to establish a program at any of the hospitals.<sup>46</sup>

By 1973, local hospitals were still not favorable sites for a cooperative abortion service program. Denver General had recently placed a limit on the number of abortions they would perform within a given time frame. Limitations like these forced the Denver Board and the RMPP board to reject terms set by the hospitals. However, the Denver clinic was already overcrowded and the number of women seeking abortions put pressure on the clinic and boards to find a more viable solution.<sup>47</sup>

The Denver Pregnancy Center Clinic, which was located at the Denver clinic, turned to Sheri Tepper to express their frustration and concerns about the mounting demand for abortions. In July of 1973, seven months after the *Roe* decision, Regan Eberhart of the Denver Pregnancy Counseling Program (DPCP) wrote to Tepper to convince her of the need and plausibility of a Denver abortion clinic at the 20th Ave. Planned Parenthood clinic in Capitol Hill. "We have the potential to provide a much needed service; a service that would treat women with dignity, that would provide equality in

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<sup>46</sup> Rocky Mountain Planned Parenthood, "Special Meeting," August 15, 1973, p. 1.

<sup>47</sup> Rocky Mountain Planned Parenthood, "Special Meeting," August 15, 1973, p. 1-2.

medical care, and one in which RMPP could take pride."<sup>48</sup> Eberhart's letter to Tepper addressed three central issues: financial viability, medical need, and bureaucratic delays.<sup>49</sup>

At the forefront of Eberhart's letter was her concern for women seeking abortions. Countless women were turned away from Planned Parenthood and the program because they did not provide abortion services. They received nearly 1600 requests for abortion referrals and information between January and July of that year.<sup>50</sup> Because the physicians DPCP trusted were overwhelmed with women seeking abortions, the counseling program was forced to refer women to physicians they were not confident would provide adequate and compassionate care. Insomuch, they were not able to control the quality of care provided to their patients or ensure those women were receiving fact-based information during contraception counseling. The latter was a common issue women encountered with their private physicians. Often physicians exclusively recommended the use of unreliable foams that undoubtedly resulted in unwanted and unintended pregnancies.<sup>51</sup>

Opting for an in-house abortion clinic also helped the Denver Clinic and RMPP to gain a greater control over the quality of care their patients received. Patients reported mistreatment and misinformation by some of the referred physicians. According to meeting reports, Dr. Bigler believed that an in-house clinic would be the "most humane" way to provide abortion services. "The girl would be coming to the same place, seeing the same people, etc., and this should make her experience very positive."<sup>52</sup> By controlling every step of this process, which included patient contact, consultation, procedure, and aftercare, the Denver clinic could assure quality care throughout the patients' visits.

Because the Denver clinic had become self-sufficient with a strong infrastructure through the power centralized by the RMPP and the Denver Board, the clinic was a prime location for Denver's first abortion clinic. Board members had already established close working relationships with

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<sup>48</sup> Rocky Mountain Planned Parenthood, "Special Meeting," August 15, 1973, p. 5.

<sup>49</sup> Rocky Mountain Planned Parenthood, "Special Meeting," August 15, 1973, p. 5-7.

<sup>50</sup> Rocky Mountain Planned Parenthood, "Special Meeting," August 15, 1973, p. 4.

<sup>51</sup> Rocky Mountain Planned Parenthood, "Special Meeting," August 15, 1973, p. 1.

<sup>52</sup> Rocky Mountain Planned Parenthood, "Special Meeting," August 15, 1973, p. 2.

physicians willing to work with the clinic. One of which was a long time RMPP board member Dr. Bigler. Dr. Bigler provided invaluable insight into the logistics of establishing a viable clinic, networking connections with other physicians and medical agencies, and a professional image for RMPP to establish a reputable program. By August of 1973, two months before the opening of the clinic, Dr. Bigler reported that thirteen ob/gyn physicians were committed to helping the proposed clinic.<sup>53</sup>

Because Dr. Bigler and all thirteen committed ob/gyns were male and part of the medical profession, the focus of abortion services differed from the way Denver NOW and BMR approached abortion services. Dr. Bigler spoke of abortion through the scope of a male medical provider. He was concerned with the quality of services to be sure, but he does not mention the female patient as an active agent in these services. Instead, Dr. Bigler reports to the board about patients as if they were passive characters that were to be treated and handled one way or another. The minutes suggested that he believed they could make the experience "positive" for the patients. This is a clear disconnect with reasons why women sought abortion services. For example, many women sought abortion services as a result of sexual assault or extreme poverty. In all of the discussions had by Dr. Bigler and the board, there was no mention of understanding the individual reasons behind women seeking abortions. Nor did they address the experience of women throughout the process other than a few logistical considerations. Instead, there were talks about scheduling, proper medical care, and affordability, but there was no attempt to understand the female patients as individuals or people with choices.<sup>54</sup>

The board conducted an abortion study to research the viability of a clinic. The study concluded that the financial risk was low and self-sustainment could be achieved within six months. It also concluded that within that timeframe the clinic could amortize the cost of any necessary medical equipment. This was important to their decision to go forward as it convinced members that the risk

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<sup>53</sup> Rocky Mountain Planned Parenthood, "Special Meeting," August 15, 1973, p. 1.

<sup>54</sup> Rocky Mountain Planned Parenthood, "Special Meeting," August 15, 1973, p. 1-3.

of starting the clinic would not put the board or the Denver clinic in financial risk if the it went under.<sup>55</sup>

The RMPP and Denver Board agreed to charge for abortion services based on a plan to become self-sustaining. At the opening of the clinic, an early abortion procedure within the first ten weeks of pregnancy was \$125 which the patient had to pay in advance. Although the policy for payment in advance did help ensure the survival of the clinic, it also undoubtedly deterred many women in need of the procedure from going to the clinic. This meant women were not receiving necessary services or birth control counseling. However, the Central Denver Clinic's success and ability to serve as many women as it did rested in large part with their policies on expedited scheduling and upfront payment policies.<sup>56</sup>

In October of 1973, the Denver Clinic opened an abortion clinic that provided services twice a week for women pregnant up to ten weeks but it was not geared towards all women. RMPP and the Denver clinic had to adapt their services to the needs of the women around them. This meant that they had to define their scope of services in respect to how other medical and governing agencies affected service provisions in their area. Because Denver General, the premier local Capitol Hill hospital, prioritized patients with no funds, women who had limited funds but could not afford the high prices of private physicians were slipping through the cracks. In fact, because of this discrepancy, it was common practice for women in Colorado to fly out to places like California for abortion procedures because they could not receive early abortion surgeries past the ten-week mark in Colorado. Private physician fees in Colorado for abortions were often so high that the cost of airfare to the West coast and subsequent medical fees were cheaper. By July, the Pregnancy Counseling Service was referring

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<sup>55</sup> Rocky Mountain Planned Parenthood, "Current Status of Abortion Services in and Around Denver," August 7 1973, p. 1.

<sup>56</sup> Rocky Mountain Planned Parenthood, "Special Meeting," August 15, 1973, p. 2.



20% of their patients to out-of-state providers.<sup>57</sup> Consequently, RMPP and the Denver Chapter agreed to prioritize this group of women for abortion services.<sup>58</sup>

Undoubtedly, some of the RMPP board members were concerned about how an in-house abortion clinic would affect their relationships with private donors and cooperative agencies. Board members were concerned about losing donors while gaining public ire. It was clear for some members of the RMPP board that the choice to provide abortion services was an uncomfortable one for good reason. They pointed to cases in New York where Planned Parenthood abortion clinics attracted protests and subsequently lost the support of private donors. A board member suggested to that RMPP pre-emptively explain to its donors the reasons behind the decision to open the clinic. "Mr. Nagel felt we should take care with our public relations, and a make sure our donors know what our decision is, why we made it, and where the money is coming from."<sup>59</sup> In reality, the member was suggesting that RMPP continue to put forth an apolitical message attached to abortion. Internally, Planned Parenthood had slowly started cultivating an organizational rights-based theme in their approach to abortion, but publicly, Planned Parenthood still addressed abortion as an issue of medical necessity rather than a civil right for women.

Nagel also suggested that RMPP keep a low profile about the abortion clinic to prevent public backlash. However, to keep a low profile would be to restrict the amount of women they informed about the abortion clinic. Unlike NOW and BMR, who publicized abortion referral services for the convenience of women, Nagel's suggestion put the welfare of the organization above the welfare of the patients. Regardless, Nagel's concerns were in part understandable. The board still believed that RMPP and its clinics could survive without an abortion clinic, but it was unclear if it could survive after including one. After all, the *Roe* decision was less than a year old. The political tides were uncertain and there were still other options to establish a Denver abortion clinic in local hospitals.

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<sup>57</sup> Rocky Mountain Planned Parenthood, "Special Meeting," August 15, 1973, p. 5.

<sup>58</sup> Rocky Mountain Planned Parenthood, "Special Meeting," August 15, 1973, p. 2.

<sup>59</sup> Rocky Mountain Planned Parenthood, "Special Meeting," August 15, 1973, p. 2.

However, Tepper was quick to point out that donations had fluctuated since *Roe* but nothing that caused concern. Additionally, the Denver clinic had dealt with protestors for some time already. Another member mentioned that RMPP already had the reputation of an abortion clinic because it already offered abortion counseling services throughout Colorado.<sup>60</sup> Ultimately, RMPP's first abortion clinic offered cost-effective, safe and accessible abortions.

Private donor money was not the only funding source RMPP's choice to become an abortion provider affected. After intense backlash by right-to-lifers, U.S Representative Henry Hyde successfully pushed for an amendment to Medicaid appropriations that restricted funds from covering any abortion procedure including one in cases of medical emergencies. In September 1976, the amendment went into effect and organizations like RMPP were forced reconfigure payment options and policies for abortions.<sup>61</sup> Luckily, RMPP had already put into place several policies that kept them relatively safe from this sort of federal funding change.

Choice, civil rights, and women's healthcare freedom became indoctrinated in RMPP and PPFA over the next few years. RMPP's newsletter was entitled *The Choice* from the mid-1970s up until 1981. RMPP increasingly took to public forums to denounce anti-abortion pressure and rhetoric. They began to embody the feminist stance of a woman's right to control her healthcare and her body as both the political and the personal. The exam table after all was one of the most salient places where the political and personal met, and RMPP under the leadership of Executive Director Sheri Tepper held steadfast in their promise to protect every woman's right that walked into their clinics.

Tepper and the RMPP board worked through the State to create legislative change for greater access to birth control and abortion for women. In turn, this gave them greater freedom to develop more comprehensive healthcare programs. However, their participation in the legislative process was complicated by their affiliation with PP/WP and their own organizational policies to stay apolitical.

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<sup>60</sup> Rocky Mountain Planned Parenthood, "Special Meeting," August 15, 1973, p. 3.

<sup>61</sup> Rebecca Kluchin, *Fit to Be Tied: Sterilization and Reproductive Rights in America, 1950-1980*, (Rutgers University Press, New Brunswick: 2011), p. 211-212.

Efforts towards legislative change were characterized more by individual effort than by a public effort by RMPP. This allowed RMPP to push its agenda to provide more services to women and to establish an abortion service program while maintaining an apolitical image. However, because they could not agree to terms with local hospitals, they had to make the decision to create an in-house abortion program, which ultimately launched them into the political arena as champions of abortion rights complicating their relationship to State funding.

## CHAPTER IV

### SHERI TEPPER'S FEMINIST PAMPHLETS AND STATE SEX EDUCATION

In 1986 Tepper retired from her position of executive director of RMPP to start a career as a writer. She became a well-known and accomplished feminist science fiction writer known for having an ecofeminist angle. She wrote over twenty novels, some of which won major literary awards. In 2015, she received a World Fantasy Life Achievement award. Her public identity as an ecofeminist and her overt expression of ecofeminism in her work does not fit the historical narrative of Planned Parenthood executive directors or Planned Parenthood agendas. Historians have repeatedly denounced the notions that women working within Planned Parenthood organizations would have considered themselves feminists nor did they attach the work they did with feminist ideology.

Historian Linda Gordon's book *Moral Property* remains one of the touchstones of the history of U.S birth control movements. She argues that Planned Parenthood was not a feminist organization. She maintains that it actually violated women's human rights and subjugated them sexually, especially women of color. She looks to the organization's early history and emphasis on population control and alleviation of poverty as evidence. She comes to this conclusion by analyzing Planned Parenthood's activities and attitudes on a national level through a feminist framework. This analysis is problematic because it stops short of the late 1960s and skips the 1970s entirely. It ignores the epicenter of second-wave feminism and the burgeoning relationships between Planned Parenthood and feminist organizations. It is during this crucial time that Planned Parenthood changed internally. The very makeup of its structure and membership was taking on a new face and a new understanding of their service provisions in relationship to politics, women, and ideology but seeing it sometimes requires a smaller scope.

Sheri Tepper's time as executive director of RMPP was also a time of personal feminist development and expression. It was during this time that her eco-feminism was fostered by her position with RMPP and her relationship to State support to combat overpopulation and poverty. It

was through both working with the State and working to separate from the State that Tepper's eco-feminism developed from and lent to RMPP's growth and ironically, its detriment.

Sheri Tepper's career as an ecofeminist sci-fi writer started around the same time as her career with RMPP took off. Her first published work was a sci-fi poem that appeared in the magazine *Galaxy Science Fiction*, which featured sci-fi literary works that focused on social issues. The magazine published two more of her poems in 1963 and then again in 1964. Her 1963 publication "Lullaby 1990" was a short poem that touched on the issue of overpopulation, which was one of the major focuses of her ecofeminist ideology. "Lullaby 1990" subtly framed the issue of overpopulation as a result of forced fertility by a society ruled by male-dominated authoritarianism, a system that she intensely repudiated throughout her life's literary work.

Sleep now, little one, fortunate child.  
(Summer follow spring and winter follow fall.)  
When you were born the kind gods smiled.  
Sleep, perfect little one, superior to all.

Some have three eyes and some have one.  
(Dawn follow dark and dark follow day.)  
Some have many legs and others have none;  
Some live a little while and then waste away.

Some are hair covered, head to toe.  
(War follow hate and the bomb follow after.)  
Some are giants and some never grow.  
Sleep, perfect little one, to your mother's laughter.

Some eat flesh and some eat grasses  
(Men still love and still get married.)  
Tentacled lads and two headed lasses<sup>62</sup>  
Lie in the alley-ways, yet unburied.

Sleep now, little one, fortunate child.  
(Summer follow spring and winter follow fall.)  
When you were born the kind gods smiled.  
Sleep, little one, who will never wake at all.  
-Sheri Eberhart (Tepper)<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> "[T]wo headed lasses," may refer to the death of the mother and the death of the fetus. Rhetoric surrounding early criticism of denying women safe and legal abortions sometimes referred to the tragedy of two deaths, the mother and the fetus. This was rarely seen in 'choice' rhetoric in the 1970s when feminists started to debate using scientific rhetoric that questioned when life started.

<sup>63</sup> Sheri Tepper, "Lullaby 1990," appeared in *Galaxy Science Fiction*, December, 1963, p. 121.

Tepper bordered her poem at each end with the beginning stanza and the ending stanza that seemed to signify the lie of procreation: All babies are “fortunate” to have been born. The “kind gods” hinted to the condescension of patriarchal authoritarianism approving forced fertility under the guise of protectors of innocent babies and morality. Later in life, Tepper strongly criticized religion as a perpetrator of forced fertility in its treatment of women. This mistreatment had ecological consequences like overpopulation and unsustainable environments. When she referenced gods or divine figures in her work they almost always represented oppressive authorities that stymied personal and/or collective progress.<sup>64</sup>

The middle stanzas revealed what she attitudes about procreation and forced fertility. The contrast between words like ‘perfect’ and ‘superior’ with the revelations of deformities like extra or missing eyes speaks to a theme of eugenics, a constant theme in Tepper’s later work that often manifested in declarations reminiscent of Hubert Spencer’s Survival of the Fittest theory. There are two very important lines that tie directly to RMPP’s mission in the 1960s.<sup>65</sup> “Some eat flesh and some eat grasses” likely refers to a disparity in wealth. Planned Parenthood from its conception sought to reduce the number of babies born into poverty even against the will of the federal government that outlawed contraception and religious groups that believed preventing conception was a sin. This led to many poor and desperate women seeking illegal and unsafe solutions to end their pregnancies.

The most conspicuous nod to the issue of forced fertility her reference to deformed children who “lie in the alley-ways, yet unburied,” making a clear reference to ‘back-alley abortions.’ Although the term ‘back-alley’ in reference to illegal abortions did not gain nationwide popularity until the seventies when it became a battle cry for feminists demanding safe and legal abortions, ‘back-alley’ was an established idiom frequently used to describe the place where illegal and unsafe activities occurred. The 1960s saw several cases of women dying from complications of an illegal

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<sup>64</sup> Sheri Tepper, interview by Neal Szpatura, “OF PREACHERS AND STORYTELLERS: AN INTERVIEW WITH SHERI S. TEPPER,” *Strange Horizons*, Issue 21, July 2008.

<sup>65</sup> Sheri Tepper, *Family Tree*, (Harper Collins, 1997).

abortion that occurred in unfamiliar and anonymous spaces. In part, those spaces started conversation about why abortions were not allowed legally in the safety of a physician's office. The famous 1964 death of Geraldine Santoro was caused by a botched abortion that occurred in a motel. Santoro was found face down and naked on the floor of her motel room. Her knees were tucked underneath of her and towels were piled underneath her buttocks soaked in blood. Santoro's death was made famous by *Ms Magazine* in 1973 when it printed a previously unpublished crime-scene photo of Santoro with the tagline "NEVER AGAIN."<sup>66</sup> While the picture and some of the gory details ascertained by viewing the picture were not available to Tepper or the public in 1964, Santoro's death was indicative of the deaths that occurred in the 1960s due to botched abortions and the impact they may have had on people who read about them. It is also likely that Tepper would have had access to even more personal stories of injury and death due to botched abortions considering her work with RMPP which she started a year before *Galaxy Science Fiction* published "Lullaby 1990."

The restrictions of time and space prevent me from adequately analyzing the threads of ecofeminism and family planning activism that are undoubtedly woven throughout Tepper's dozens of sci-fi novels and her time as RMPP's executive director. However, a rudimentary analysis of her novels reveal common themes of dystopias that were caused by overpopulation, the subjugation of women as sexual possessions, and environmental crises as a result of patriarchal systems. In conjunction, she used themes of sterilization and other restrictions of fertility as solutions to social issues. *The Gate to Women's Country* (1988) is one of her most well-known novels, which bolstered praise from both the science fiction and literary feminist communities. It depicts a post-apocalyptic world split in two between a utopia of only women and a dystopia of mostly men suffering from the genetic consequences of continued inbreeding, a symptom of their kept tradition of having multiple wives. Tepper's novel *Family Tree* (1997) drew even clearer lines to her real-life expression of ecofeminism in her work with Planned Parenthood. She depicted the ramifications of destroying the

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<sup>66</sup> *Ms. Magazine*, "Never Again: Death Politics, and Abortion," April, 1973, p. 193.

environment with waste and overpopulation. The environment started to turn against humanity starting with the murder of three geneticists. She blamed social beliefs surrounding procreation, morality, and patriarchy for the destruction of the Earth. She explained their resulting effects,

Long ago, they used machines and drugs to keep the unhealthy and unfit ones of us alive. In that past time it was believed that all persons must have children. It was a right deemed so precious that it was forced upon even those who did not value it or should not have had it. If one of our people became pregnant, our people used all their knowledge to assure the young would be born, no matter how sick or disabled. Then, if the young lived, they injected them and dosed them and radiated them and transfused and transplanted them, to keep them alive, and then, when they were grown, they used all their skills in assisting them to have children of their own.<sup>67</sup>

It is easy to read some influence of Spencer's Survival of the Fittest theory, but this passage is also indicative of her belief that people should have the right to choose whether they procreate or not. It also seems she was more invested in giving people the knowledge to decide for themselves with the belief they would choose correctly, which is fundamentally not Spencer's Social Darwinism. However, it was and still is fundamentally Planned Parenthood's edict.

The expression of her ecofeminism in her body of literary work sheds new light on her role in RMPP's success and the role of feminism in Planned Parenthood as an organization. A commitment to combating overpopulation, the very thing historians pointed to to discredit claims that Planned Parenthood was a feminist organization, was the medium in which Tepper expressed her feminism. She lived her art and her feminism through developing RMPP into a comprehensive and expanding healthcare organization that implemented programs to combat overpopulation, created greater access to birth control, provided quality sex-education, and fought to develop women's reproductive freedoms. She fulfilled her personal feminist agenda of working towards environmental sustainability through breaking down systems of patriarchy and female sexual subjugation. During an interview in 1998, she was asked if her time at Planned Parenthood informed her fiction. She replied, "Planned Parenthood didn't contribute to my fiction. My fiction (in embryo) contributed to my desire to work

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<sup>67</sup> Sheri Tepper, *Family Tree*, (Harper Collins, 1997), p. 304.



for those people, at least initially.”<sup>68</sup> Ultimately, because Tepper was the most influential person in the decision-making process, the trajectory of RMPP and of the Denver chapter from the 1960s until 1986 was undoubtedly shaped by strong ecofeminist ideology and vice versa.

Tepper also used her feminist writing to make RMPP a significant amount of money and in turn, helped the organization avoid total reliance on State funding. Tepper started to author sex-education pamphlets for RMPP in 1967. The RMPP board not only endorsed her writings they even published them under their own name which turned out to be a financially sound decision. In 1974, the board reported that the pamphlets earned the organization over \$100,000 making Tepper's pamphlets as important to the sustainment and expansion of RMPP as some federal grants.<sup>69</sup> In fact, by 1973, during the same time RMPP released Tepper's most successful pamphlet, *So You Don't Want to be a Sex Object*, RMPP Board members were raising issues about the restrictions of federal funding and the need for fundraising and self-sustainment.<sup>70</sup> That same year, RMPP meeting minutes showed that Tepper's pamphlets not only subsidized clinic funding but also covered the full cost of RMPP's monthly newsletter, *The Choice*.<sup>71</sup>

However, for all of Tepper's successes in bureaucratic diplomacy, her RMPP publications were the opposite. Her pamphlets were mostly geared towards teenagers and young adults, but the content also provided basic anatomy and birth control information. Tepper's tone and blunt approach towards sex did not adhere to RMPP's policy of off-the-radar advocacy or disassociation with sexual liberalism. Her pamphlets included flippant remarks about male sexuality, dominance, and sexual violence, while promoting female sexual freedom, masturbation, and personal responsibility.

From the beginning of Tepper's tenure, she was interested in developing a sex-education program for teens and a job training program for teen mothers that provided free childcare.<sup>72</sup> PPFA

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<sup>68</sup> Sheri Tepper, interview, “Speaking to the Universe,” *Locus Magazine*, September 1998.

<sup>69</sup> Rocky Mountain Planned Parenthood, “Special Meeting,” August 15, 1974, p. 1.

<sup>70</sup> Rocky Mountain Planned Parenthood, “Executive Committee Meeting,” May 11, 1973, p. 1.

<sup>71</sup> Rocky Mountain Planned Parenthood, “Board Meeting,” August, 1973, p. 1.

<sup>72</sup> Planned Parenthood, “General Meeting Minutes,” October 3, 1967, p. 2.

and countless other affiliates had traditionally stayed away from incorporating teens into their services. By the 1970s, second-wave feminists began openly criticizing Planned Parenthood for their exclusion of such a program. However, Tepper and RMPP were ahead of the curve in many ways. By 1967 they changed their policies to include all women regardless of marital status or previous pregnancies age nineteen and up access to their services. That same year Tepper suggested opening a home for teenage mothers to encourage economic prosperity by providing training and free education. Tepper used access to State funding to help develop teen programs once HEW funds became available. She also began opening lines of communication between RMPP and school boards, which became invaluable when she began producing pamphlets. By 1970 RMPP and the Denver Clinic had a solid relationship with local high schools including Central High School in Capitol Hill. They began incorporating sex-education curriculum in the schools with lessons on changing gender roles, a hallmark of radical feminism.<sup>73</sup>

Tepper's literature did not just depart from RMPP's apolitical image, she clearly drew some of her influences from the feminist movement and its ideologies. Like many feminists in the 1970s, she addressed sexual equality in the context of changing gender roles. This is evident in *So You Don't Want to be A Sex Object*<sup>74</sup> and *You've Changed the Combination*.<sup>37</sup> These pamphlets were geared towards young women and men respectively. *So You Don't Want to be A Sex Object* advertised information on how women could engage in sexual activity and lead productive lives while avoiding unintended pregnancies and exploitation. The front cover displayed a cartoon drawing that depicted two contrasting images of women. One is only clothed in fish-net stockings and a garter belt as she peers over her shoulder. Long hair and a scarf cover the top of her breasts while the bottom remains exposed. Her body is melded into the second figure that is dressed in a masculine-style women's

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<sup>73</sup> Rocky Mountain Planned Parenthood, "Executive Committee Meeting," June 19, 1970, p. 1.

<sup>74</sup> Sheri Tepper, *So You Don't Want to be a Sex Object*, (RMPP Publications: Denver, 1973).

business suit complimented by a briefcase.<sup>75</sup> This picture was meant to show that these two women could coexist within the same woman. It showed that a woman could be a successful, respected, and sexual individual. The introduction read, "The old rules are no good -- maybe they never were. There doesn't seem to be any new rules." It continued, "You don't want to be a sex object -- but how do you avoid it?" She concluded,

Don't diddle around with sex. Decide how you feel about it, what you want from it, whether you want it and with whom, and then be honest about it. What kind are you interested in? Don't expect the man to have a condom, you carry them.<sup>76</sup>

Tepper was expressing ideas fundamental to the second-wave feminist movement. She suggested that there was a new system in which men and women engaged in sex. In that system, women could make decisions based on their desire and personal life choices and not just by social expectations. She also suggested that women should take responsibility for their fertility and sexual safety. They should carry condoms.

Tepper wrote two more pamphlets that taught lessons about shared responsibility between men and women for the use of contraception titled *Stop Kidding Yourself!* and *She Will Always Remember You* (directed towards teenage boys and young men). Over 500,000 pamphlets were sold of those two titles alone. Tepper was suggesting a shift in the power relations between men and women that gave women a greater sense of responsibility and authority in sexual encounters with men.

Tepper wrote *You've Changed the Combination* for young men to navigate new gender roles as well, but took them to task for unacceptable but common exploitative sexual relationships with women. Tepper stressed the importance of a sexual relationship based on respect and mutual satisfaction.

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<sup>75</sup> Sheri Tepper, *So You Don't Want to be a Sex Object*, (RMPP Publications: Denver, 1973), coverpage.

<sup>76</sup> Sheri Tepper, *So You Don't Want to be a Sex Object*, (RMPP Publications: Denver, 1973), 2-5.

Don't lie to yourself. Decide honestly what you want from your relationships with women. Do you want a convenient warm body? Buy one. That's right. There are women who have freely chosen that business by one. Don't ever brag to your friends 'I've never had to pay for it,' when you've lied, threatened, and coerced your way through sex. You've paid for it. You just don't know it.<sup>77</sup>

Like many 1970s feminist, Tepper framed gender hierarchy within a capitalistic structure. Women's bodies and services were up for sale within pre-existing gender structures. Men bought virgins and cooks through marriage, a contractual exchange for services and economic security. But, obviously marriage was not the only way through which men and women engaged in coitus, and Tepper used the changing tides of the seventies to shine a light on how sex could be free from a show of dominance or patriarchy. She concluded,

Do you want a woman to abuse and dominate in order to make you feel like a 'man?' Buy one. Buy yourself a full size plastic model, and when you've broken that, admit you're a sickie and buy a psychiatrist. Watch for the symptoms: You got furiously angry when a woman says 'no.' You are tempted to use force or do use force on women. You consider the sexual act to be a 'score.' You think that if a girl gets raped, 'She probably asked for it.'<sup>78</sup>

This section of her pamphlet pointed to a theme in feminist theory concerning men who rape women developed in the 1970s. Second-wave feminists who addressed the issue of rape and rape reform began to look at rape critically through new lenses of feminist theory that addressed power structures between men and women. During that time, feminists began to address the social problems that caused rape and demanded that the federal and state governments stop defining rape as a natural condition of male virility and start addressing how existing social structures that subjugated women to male authority perpetuated a rape culture. In this passage, Tepper was mocking men who forced women into sexual relationships and acts by challenging their mental health. Moreover, Tepper suggested that men who raped could easily replace a real woman with a plastic mannequin. Like second-wave feminists, Tepper was suggesting that rape was not about sex, but rather domination over an object. This forced the reader to face the issue of rape within the frameworks of feminist

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<sup>77</sup> Sheri Tepper, *So You've Changed the Combination*, (RMPP Publications: Denver, 1976), p. 3.

<sup>78</sup> Sheri Tepper, *So You've Changed the Combination*, (RMPP Publications: Denver, 1976), p. 3.

theory. It put forth a critique of male mental illness and male dominance without a female victim on which to place blame.

In addition to educational pamphlets, Sheri Tepper also distributed coloring books that used radical feminist rhetoric. A book of male cartoon images titled "Color You: Male Chauvinist Pig's Coloring Book," was available at participating Planned Parenthood's across the country to patients waiting in reception and even in some primary schools. A reporter in Las Vegas writing for a local student newspaper found the coloring book along with three other pamphlets by Tepper while doing a story on services provided by the local Planned Parenthood. "There is also the 'Male Chauvinist Pig's Coloring Book,' gloriously illustrated, which Dad would do well to peruse as would his son before it is too late."<sup>79</sup> The reporter wrote positively of Planned Parenthood and its activism for women's right to choose. The journalist understood the book in connection to changing gender roles and sexual equality as she recommended both father and son heed its message to stay with the changing times. It is also impossible to miss Tepper's deliberate use of a term coined by radical feminists in the 1970s. "Chauvinist pig" is not only aggressive and exclusionary, but also overtly feminist.<sup>80</sup>

Not only did the pamphlets make the organization a lot of money, they also put RMPP on the national map. Planned Parenthood groups across the country bought and distributed thousands of pamphlets. Schools and other family planning agencies also bought and sold the material at the suggestion of various government and social agencies. Tepper was the major force behind teen-sex education from within Planned Parenthood and again, RMPP endorsed the effort. Other Planned Parenthood groups followed suit by creating their own matter-of-fact sex-education material targeting a younger population.

With the intense success Tepper's overtly feminist pamphlets brought RMPP, they were also a source of intense criticism. By the beginning of the 1980s, Tepper's pamphlets began to lose favor.

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<sup>79</sup> Barbara Scarantino, "Planned Parenthood: Not an Abortion Mill," *Rebel Yell*, October 20, 1976, p. 17.

<sup>80</sup> Barbara Scarantino, "Planned Parenthood: Not an Abortion Mill," *Rebel Yell*, October 20, 1976, p. 17.

Federal committee hearings on family funding appropriations or education no longer lauded her pamphlets for their use in educating youths about safe and responsible sex, but rather became open forums for individuals and groups to attack Planned Parenthood as a national organization. In 1981, Susan Roylance, the vice president of United Families of America Regarding Federal Funding of Family Planning Services, took several of Tepper's pamphlets to task during an Oversight of Family Planning Programs hearing before the U.S Committee on Labor and Human Resources. United Families of America (UFA) was a relatively small pro-family group that lobbied in favor of abstinence-based sex education for teenagers as a direct response to the federal funding of Planned Parenthood.<sup>81</sup> In 1981, a member described the organization as a grassroots group with about 50,000 members who were "interested in the formation of public policy and its impact on the family."<sup>82</sup> The UFA was similar to most pro-family groups born in the New Right Era who attacked sex education for allegedly espousing immoral and deviant ideas to America's youth and perpetuating sexual delinquency. Susan Roylance argued that the pamphlets were offensive and inappropriate for children because they, "condoned masturbation and prostitution...discussed homosexuality as an experimental stage of development, and described abortion as a routine, simple medical procedure."<sup>83</sup> She concluded that the Planned Parenthood pamphlets were a source of permissive sexual advice to children instead of valuable education to help curb pre-marital sex.<sup>84</sup>

The criticism of Tepper's pamphlets became widespread and were discussed as a product of Planned Parenthood as a national organization despite the fact that the dozens of publications were

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<sup>81</sup> Selection Committee on Children, Youth, and Families, *Teen Parents and Their Children: Issues and Programs*, (United Government Printing Office: Washington, 1984), p. 288.

<sup>82</sup> United States Congress, *Selection and Confirmation of Federal Judges*, 1981, p. 355.

<sup>83</sup> United States, *Oversight of Family Planning Programs: Hearing before the Committee on Labor and Human Resources, United States Senate, Ninety-seventh Congress, First Session, on Examination on the Role of the Federal Government in Birth Control, Abortion Referral, and Sex Education Programs*, (U.S G.P.O: Washington, 1981), p. 239.

<sup>84</sup> United States, *Oversight of Family Planning Programs: Hearing before the Committee on Labor and Human Resources, United States Senate, Ninety-seventh Congress, First Session, on Examination on the Role of the Federal Government in Birth Control, Abortion Referral, and Sex Education*

authored by one individual and published by a regional affiliate. In part this was likely because local and state Planned Parenthood's stamped their organization's name on the back of the pamphlets likely leading people to believe that the pamphlets were either printed by them or were part of an effort by PPFA to circulate the pamphlets nationwide. Certainly later criticism in the 1990s and on conflated Tepper's pamphlets with the national agenda of Planned Parenthood and almost never mentioned Rocky Mountain Planned Parenthood or Tepper by name when lambasting the pamphlets' messages. Even today, pro-life organizations that attack Planned Parenthood often take lines from Tepper's pamphlets to either accuse Planned Parenthood of performing abortions to stave off overpopulation or promoting sexual deviancy and even child molestation.

Tepper's pamphlets eventually became part of a larger story of the New Right's push against sex education using allegations of sexual impropriety and even sexual exploitation of minors. Dr. Judith Reisman's spent over thirty years accusing Alfred Kinsey and his team of researchers of committing child molestation during their famous study in the late 1940s. She maintains that Kinsey's reports directly influenced America's direction towards sex education by infusing sex-education curriculum with lessons that promoted childhood sexuality and adult sex with children. She specifically cites Planned Parenthood in this charge and argues that Kinsey's study perpetuated lies that claimed children had the capacity to express and enjoy sexual experiences. According to Reisman, these conclusions informed Planned Parenthood's sex-education agenda towards open and permissive discussions of sex to children. To prove her connection, she cited Sheri Tepper's pamphlet *You've Changed the Combination* consistently over a span of at least twenty years. She claims in her book *Kinsey: Crimes and Consequences*<sup>85</sup> that the pamphlet, "*You've Changed the Combination* typifies the organization's [Planned Parenthood] use of the Kinsey Model in sex education."<sup>86</sup> She used the following passage to connect its message to child molestation:

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<sup>85</sup> Judith Reisman, *Kinsey: Crimes and Consequences*, 4<sup>th</sup> ed., (Institute for Media Education, 2012).

<sup>86</sup> Judith Reisman, *Kinsey: Crimes and Consequences*, 4<sup>th</sup> ed., (Institute for Media Education, 2012), p. 177.

Do you want a warm body? Buy one. That's right. There are women who have freely chosen that business, buy one...Do you want a virgin to marry. Buy one. There are girls in that business too. Marriage is the price you'll pay, and you'll get the virgin. Very Temporarily.<sup>87</sup>

Reisman provides no further detail about the pamphlet or contextualization of the passage and as a result, Tepper's expression of feminist ideology and gender equality in sexual relationships became pseudo-evidence that Planned Parenthood recommended that children have sex.

While Reisman fails to draw a direct connection between feminist ideology and Planned Parenthood's promotion of child sex in this publication, in early publications she argues that Planned Parenthood's involvement in sex education starting in the 1960s was part of a greater "Kinsey Agenda."<sup>88</sup> This agenda sought to promote heterophobia through sex education initiatives, which used groups with pro-feminist ideology and included sex education material that taught children that homosexuality was normal. She directly implicated Planned Parenthood in espousing heterophobia through their sex education. As the years went on, Reisman was more careful to not conflate feminism with child-sex exploitation likely because it ostracized countless potential followers of her message, but the foundation of her claim was clear, Planned Parenthood via Tepper's pamphlets used pro-feminist and heterophobia literature to promote childhood sexuality.

It is easy to dismiss Reisman's arguments as paranoia and the rantings of a political outcast, especially when examining Tepper's pamphlets without relying on Reisman's heavy editing. However, Reisman found significant support for her Kinsey exposés, especially among conservative Republicans. From 2000 to 2004, she served as the scientific advisor for the American Legislative Exchange Council's Education Task Force's "Subcommittee on Junk Science."<sup>89</sup> The American Legislative Exchange Council represents over 2,000 state legislator members. Also on the subcommittee were three republican state representatives, three republican senators, and two

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<sup>87</sup> Judith Reisman, *Kinsey: Crimes and Consequences*, 4<sup>th</sup> ed., (Institute for Media Education, 2012), p. 180.

<sup>88</sup> Edward Eichel, and Reisman, Judith A., *Kinsey, Sex, and Fraud: The Indoctrination of a People*, ed. by John H. Court and Gordon Muir, (Lochinvar Inc.: Lafayette, 1990), p. 157.

<sup>89</sup> Linda Jeffrey, *Restoring Legal Protections for Women and Children: A Historical Analysis of the States Criminal Codes.*, American Legislative Exchange Council, April, 2004.



republican delegates. Reisman successfully used State powers to investigate government sex education programs and Planned Parenthood on the charge of potential child sex exploitation based in part on Sheri Tepper's pamphlets.

To be sure, Kinsey's reports on human sexuality were controversial and raised serious questions of human-subject exploitation and impropriety especially in chapter five of his book *Sexuality in the Human Male*. Chapter five detailed in a series of tables quantitative data about sexual encounters with pre-pubescent boys as young as two-months old, but the information gathered for these tables was not the result from studies performed by Kinsey or his team on child subjects. Kinsey gathered the data from the personal diary of a serial rapist and pedophile named Rex King.<sup>90</sup>

However, Reisman's attack levied on Planned Parenthood had little to do with Kinsey's report itself and more to do with the matter-of-fact and cavalier language used in Tepper's pamphlets. The connection she makes between Kinsey and Tepper's booklets is based on association but no evidence of influence. She blames the pamphlet's contents on the working relationship between Alfred Kinsey and Alan Guttmacher, the president of PPFA from 1962 until his death in 1974.<sup>91</sup> These years incidentally coincided with Tepper's start with Planned Parenthood of Colorado in 1962 and the publication of her most popular pamphlets *So You Don't Want to be a Sex Object* and *You've Changed the Combination* in 1974, with several other pamphlets published in between. Because Reisman and many critics of Tepper's booklets failed to understand the individual discretion Tepper exercised by authoring the pamphlet's and using RMPP as an in-house publisher. There is no evidence to suggest Tepper took direction from Planned Parenthood national or Alfred Kinsey himself to write the pamphlets. Available evidence suggests that Tepper used the pamphlets as a means to express her ecofeminist ideology while securing private funding for RMPP during times of financial crisis.

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<sup>90</sup> This relationship was highly controversial.

<sup>91</sup> Dennis Jarrard and Reisman, Judith, *R.S.V.P. America.*, (First Principles Inc.:Crestwood, 1996), p. 16.

As Reisman and other critics distorted Tepper's expression of feminism in the sex education pamphlets to their own ends, a narrative started to emerge of how feminism and even radical feminism had much farther reaching influences on RMPP and Planned Parenthood Federation of America than historians have ever been willing to acknowledge. It was an ecofeminist in the very leadership of Planned Parenthood that both launched RMPP and PPFA into the position of sex education experts and then into the spotlight as peddlers of immoral and dangerous sex exploitation. PPFA and affiliated chapters are still to this day dealing with both sides of that coin. Additionally, State sex-education programs and recommendation directories provided Tepper and RMPP a significant channel of influence and funding outside of State control.

## CHAPTER V

### DENVER NOW'S TASK FORCE PROBLEM

A group of women led by Dr. Charlotte Wolf established the Denver chapter of NOW in March of 1970 as Colorado's first NOW chapter. Dr. Charlotte Wolf was the first of a slew of presidents throughout the 1970s. The mission of NOW and its affiliate chapters was to advance the position of women socially, politically, and economically. NOW's 1966 statement of purpose declared, "The purpose of NOW is to take action to bring women into full participation in the mainstream of American society now, exercising all the privileges and responsibilities thereof in truly equal partnership with men."<sup>92</sup> NOW national and Denver NOW were organizations built around liberal-feminist ideology of reform and cooperation with established systems in society including the State.

NOW's organizational structure from the beginning used modes of bureaucratic procedures and policies to delegate authority and responsibility by implementing a board of directors and a number of task forces aimed at general organizational tasks such as public relations. However, NOW's primarily white middle- and upper-class board struggled to incorporate and address a variety of women's issues like lesbian, minority, and working-class social and economic problems. For the most part, their solution was to add a continuous stream of task forces, which were increasingly more specific and nuanced. They delegated women who fit the task force demographic description to work separately on the specific agendas. In doing so, they decentralized decision making power and idea sharing. The task forces were disjointed and separated by such nuanced focuses that NOW members had little cooperation between one another because they had very little in common in their feminist agenda and responsibilities. This translated into the relationship between top NOW members who were at first largely preoccupied with legislative reform.

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<sup>92</sup> Betty Friedan, *Statement of Purpose*, October 29, 1966, <http://now.org/about/history/statement-of-purpose/>, accessed August 10, 2016.

Coupled with a weak national office and weak chapter leadership, the task forces became even more disconnected and fractured. One of the constant complaints heard by the group was that monthly meetings were too inefficient in both frequency and quality to create unity or idea sharing amongst the different task forces.<sup>93</sup>

To supplement the support, they were lacking from their own organization, members began building closer relationships with outside feminist and liberal groups for coalition building and cooperation. In fact, Denver NOW suffered from disjointed membership and internal contention over the group's goals so much that it closed its office for a short time in 1976 for "restructuring." There were also frequent articles throughout the 1970s bemoaning power struggles between feminists and unnecessary bureaucratic delays that hindered their agenda. These articles were usually accompanied by new plans of restructuring.<sup>94</sup>

For the most part, it seemed that Denver NOW had little success in its activities outside of legislation. Its efforts in helping passing the ERA in Colorado was one of Denver NOW's most notable successes, but it certainly was not its only. NOW members had a significant influence in advocacy for female rape survivors in Capitol Hill in addition to providing an abortion referral service.

Its location in Capitol Hill is partly why Denver NOW is unique. Its proximity to the Capitol Building, politicians, major hospitals, the Denver Planned Parenthood clinic, and a number of grassroots feminist and community groups allowed Denver NOW members to extend outward for support, cooperation, and idea sharing without leaving the organization. To understand more completely what Denver NOW members did its necessary to look at how they interacted with these other surrounding groups like Big Mama Rag, the High Street Center, and Denver General Hospital. If these relationships are ignored, a significant amount of NOW's activities would be lost.

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<sup>93</sup> *National Organization for Women Newsletter: Denver, CO*, April 13, 1975, p. 6.

<sup>94</sup> *National Organization for Women: Denver Colorado*, October 1976, p. 7.

Historical work on Denver NOW has missed some of the important efforts and success' of the group's direct involvement in professional and community based rape-crisis programs and other community service provision activities. Historian Melissa Blair argues in her book *Revolutionizing Expectations*<sup>95</sup> that Denver's NOW chapter avoided adopting a radical feminist agenda because of their focus on legislative lobbying spearheaded by prominent Republican members like Bonnie Andrikopoulos, Denver NOW's lobbyist.<sup>96</sup> In doing so, NOW's Republican leaders could establish working relationships with groups and politicians that would be otherwise hesitant to align themselves with a group too controversial or radical.

Furthermore, she argues that the Denver Chapter and Denver feminists in general stand out amongst most feminist groups of the 1970s because they trusted established public institutions such as hospitals and governmental channels to effect change in line with their feminist agenda.<sup>97</sup> She argues that Denver NOW's participation in creating a rape hotline started and ended with their agreement with Denver General Hospital to establish an in-house hotline. She contends that once this hotline was in place, NOW left Denver General to operate and manage it while they pursued legislative change. "NOW did not choose to open its own hotline but instead attacked the problem by first urging the creation of a hotline at a public hospital and then by seeking changes to rape laws."<sup>98</sup>

While Blair's analysis of Republican leadership in Denver's NOW chapter is in part correct in the assertion that the group made efforts to avoid a radical label, her argument is flawed on three significant fronts. First, NOW's agreement with Denver General to establish a rape hotline never came to fruition not because NOW preferred to leave rape crisis services to established and public institutions but rather because the federal funding they anticipated never came through due to the State's favoritism of professionals and professionalized agencies and what NOW considered overt

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<sup>95</sup> Melissa Blair, *Revolutionizing Expectations: Women's Organizations, Feminism, and American Politics, 1965-1980*, (University of Georgia Press: Athens, 2014).

<sup>96</sup> Blair, *Revolutionizing Expectations*, p. 121.

<sup>97</sup> Blair, *Revolutionizing Expectations*, p. 121.

<sup>98</sup> Blair, *Revolutionizing Expectations*, p. 123-124.

sexism of a patriarchal State. Second, a closer reading of NOW's newsletter reveals that they not only established an active cooperation with a longstanding and local rape crisis center after the attempt at Denver General failed, but they also continued to work as victim advocates gaining access to Denver Generals ER. Furthermore, they operated a 24/7 rape hotline out of their Capitol Hill office for several years leading up to and after the state funding debacle.

Lastly, Blair's contention that Denver NOW's Republican leaders stifled radicalism in NOW's agenda is not completely accurate. Throughout the country NOW was known for preferring to use the channels of legislation to create change and provide services to women in their community. One of NOW's and Denver NOW's much successful legislative efforts was the passing of the ERA, which they viewed as a victory for advancement for all of the women in their community and Colorado. But radicalism in Denver NOW was bubbling just underneath the surface of these public legislative victories and the Republican leaders were not completely separate from its cultivation.

Like most feminist organizations in the 1960s and 1970s, Denver NOW had a healthy interest in the legislative process. In tandem with National NOW, Denver NOW worked with the impressive cohesion through their legislative efforts. They consistently disseminated information to their members through a monthly newsletter concerning current information on proposed or pending bills, the contact information for representatives, and other ways to get involved with the legislative process. Like RMPP, NOW strongly urged members to take a personal initiative in the state political apparatus by contacting politicians as independent citizens but with views in line with Denver NOW's agenda.<sup>99</sup>

Denver NOW also offered programs on how to become more politically involved. In February 1975, Bonnie Andrikopoulos teamed with Marci Bowman, the head of the Political Action Task Force, to offer a program called, "How to get Political Clout" in an effort to "acquaint members with

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<sup>99</sup> "How to Write Your Legislator," *National Organization for Women Newsletter: Denver Colorado*, February 1974, p. 10.

the need and the ways to influence political and legislative action.”<sup>100</sup> The program came in response to heavy opposition to the ERA and efforts by various Colorado groups to get it repealed. Sue Bowman, the Denver ERA Chairperson for the League of Women Voters, spoke at the program urging the women to write to their representatives to offset the barrage of letters in opposition to the ERA. Groups like the League of Housewives who launched the push to repeal the ERA had been bombarding Colorado representatives with letters repudiating the ERA for what they considered anti-family properties.<sup>101</sup>

NOW leaders also frequently met with city and state officials at Denver NOW’s general meetings and informally. They used these opportunities to not only push their agenda but to also help position women for future spots in city and state political agencies. For example, in March of 1975, they held a “Meet the Candidates” general meeting. The city council and mayoral candidates attended. On the surface, this meeting served as a way for the city council and mayoral candidates to show they were open to hearing feminist input and concerns. However, the meeting served a more important purpose for NOW feminists. They could become familiar with government faces, procedures, and possibly the most important, political discourse. The meeting also served to show NOW women and the exclusively male city council that Denver was in need of female representation. The political atmosphere was ripe for feminists to prepare themselves to enter into professional politics and policy making especially with Patricia Schroeder’s win in 1973 as a Colorado state representative. Bonnie Andrikopoulos said of Pat Schroeder’s win,

We had a lot of qualified women who should have been running a long time ago, but they’ve gone to the leadership and the leadership has always said, ‘Oh, it isn’t time yet; don’t ruffle the waters. We’ll run a man.’ I think that from the success that we had in Colorado, that hopefully women won’t believe that anymore.<sup>102</sup>

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<sup>100</sup> *Denver National Organization for Women: Denver Colorado*, March 1975, p. 7.

<sup>101</sup> *National Organization for Women: Denver Colorado*, March 1975, p. 7.

<sup>102</sup> Martin Tolchin and Tolchin, Susan, *Clout Woman: Power and Politics.*, (Capricorn Books: New York, 1976), p. 67.

Bonnie Andrikopoulos and other Denver NOW members were creating an organization with a trajectory into formal policy making across party lines and surely did help customize the group's agenda to work within and with the state.

Denver NOW lobbyist Bonnie Andrikopoulos was one of the most visible and active members in Colorado politics. She frequently met with politicians to push NOW's feminist agendas and worked closely with representatives like Pat Schroeder to push bills through the Colorado legislature. She also co-organized the Western Regional Conference on Abortion with Dr. Warren Hern, who she co-wrote an often-cited report detailing the activities of the conferences.<sup>103</sup> Andrikopoulos also acted as a bridge between Denver NOW and the Colorado Republican Women's Political Caucus and acted as the representative of Denver NOW in the National Women's Political Caucus.<sup>104</sup>

Efforts by Republican feminists in Denver NOW to avoid a radical feminist label were not completely successful by any means. Not only were other Denver NOW activities gaining attention for their radicalism and overt liberalism, the very efforts by Republican feminists like Bonnie Andrikopoulos in the legislative process were too liberal and radical for other organizations with which to align themselves. Despite Andrikopoulos personally requesting cooperation, Rocky Mountain Planned Parenthood board decided against coordinating with Denver NOW on at least two separate occasions because of the liberal connotation of the organization.<sup>105</sup>

Denver NOW invested much of its time and effort into the legislative process and subsequently, it enjoyed important victories on that front. However, its efforts to affect state and State policy were coupled with grassroots and community-based activities. Among these activities were an in-house rape hotline, an in-house abortion referral service, and a heavy focus on consciousness raising.

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<sup>103</sup> Dr. Warren Hern and Bonnie Andrikopoulos co-authored *Abortion in the seventies: proceedings of the Western Regional Conference on Abortion, Denver, Colorado, February 27-29, 1976*.

<sup>104</sup> "Caucus Started," *National Organization for Women Newsletter: Denver Colorado*, June 1973, p. 1.

<sup>105</sup> Rocky Mountain Planned Parenthood "Board Meeting," July 10, 1974, p. 2.



From early on, Denver NOW showed an interest in consciousness raising as a primary focus of the organization. They adopted the tagline, “Now that your consciousness has been raised are you ready for a little action?”<sup>106</sup> as early as 1972. By June of that year, Denver NOW created a C-R task force to spearhead the objective. It did not take long for the group to invest time and energy into consciousness-raising (C-R) events and programs. Just a year later they announced in the June newsletter that the C-R task force had created five different C-R groups for women to join. C-R taskforce leader, Doris Sloan, said of the C-R groups’ importance: “Trying to separate our individual selves from our social conditioning can prove to be quite difficult and consciousness raising groups provide the type of support and encouragement that women need.”<sup>107</sup> For members like Sloan, C-R groups were vital to the development of feminist thought and its evolution throughout the feminist community, which is why NOW C-R groups were always open to the public. Women interacting with women was an important facet to a successful feminist organization and was often the precursor to more formalized feminist activities like policy making by allowing women to understand themselves as worthy.<sup>108</sup>

Denver NOW’s commitment to consciousness raising only increased throughout the seventies. By November 1975, Doris Sloan and co-chair of the C-R task force, Berkie Harris, decided to open a C-R institute due to the overwhelming success of their groups. Although they proposed to work as an independent institution they agree that it would still serve the feminist agenda of Denver NOW and work closely with the chapter.<sup>109</sup> Denver NOW quickly filled the women’s spots to ensure continued operation for the C-R task force.

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<sup>106</sup> *National Organization for Women Newsletter: Denver Colorado*, August 1973, p. 6.

<sup>107</sup> “C-R Meets Needs,” *National Organization for Women Newsletter: Denver Colorado*, June 1973, p. 2.

<sup>108</sup> “C-R Meets Needs,” *National Organization for Women Newsletter: Denver Colorado*, June 1973, p. 2.

<sup>109</sup> “New Proposal: C-R INSTITUTE,” *National Organization for Women Newsletter: Denver Colorado*, November 1975, p. 8.

In addition to providing C-R groups as a service to organization members and women in the public, Denver NOW provided two very important services to local women: abortion referrals and a twenty-four-hour rape hotline and victim advocacy program. Both services were located at Denver NOW's office in Capitol Hill. A Denver NOW office manager bragged, "[O]ur office in the Unitarian Church is truly the hub of the Denver chapter, providing absolutely essential services, not only for the chapter but in a community outreach of paramount importance."<sup>110</sup> The services they provided out of their office were an essential function of the group's feminist agenda.

In January of 1974, Denver NOW moved into its first official headquarters in the Capitol Hill neighborhood of Denver at 1400 Lafayette Street in the basement of the First Unitarian Church. They shared the office space with an established abortion referral and counseling program called ARCS that serviced mostly local Denver-Metro women but were open to all Colorado women. Dr. Warren Hern helped Denver NOW acquire the office space. It is likely that Bonnie Andrikopoulos used her connections with Dr. Hern to secure funding from him especially since the move into the same office as ARCS helped staff the referral service.<sup>111</sup>

Although the abortion referral service and Denver NOW had separate phone lines, that and name were the only things that separated them. Denver NOW member Kathy Saltzman established ARCS as a non-profit organization in 1973 that provided not only information to women about abortion services including price, location, information on what to expect and psychological support, but they also provided financial and legal assistance, child-care, transportation, and temporary housing for rural women when possible.<sup>112</sup> In addition, Denver NOW members volunteered their time to answer calls and train other volunteers on abortion counseling. Bonnie Andrikopoulos was the

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<sup>110</sup> "To All NOW Members," *National Organization for Women Newsletters: Denver Colorado*, March 1976, insert.

<sup>111</sup> "NOW Opens New Office," *National Organization for Women: Denver Colorado*, February 1974, p. 1.

<sup>112</sup> "Abortion Referrals Made," *National Organization for Women: Denver Colorado*, September 1973, p. 3.

director of ARCS in 1977, and Denver NOW office manager Tori Ayers became one of ARCS's leaders shortly after NOW's move into 1400 Lafayette Street.<sup>113</sup>

It is likely that ARCS and Denver NOW stayed separate because of ARCS non-profit status. It would have been difficult to secure funding for ARCS's without tax-exemption and Denver NOW was still committed to their lobbying and candidate support efforts that disqualified them for 501(c)3 classification.<sup>114</sup> This is evidenced by the articles about ARCS in the Denver NOW newsletter that speaks of the service as a completely separate entity. Although Denver NOW sought approval at the Colorado NOW State Convention to support ARCS, newsletter articles did not mention that a Denver NOW member founded and directed the ARCS program.<sup>115</sup> Because Denver NOW women worked with so many other local organizations, Denver NOW's efforts to create and support community programs was obscured. However, a deeper look into the individual women of the organization's ranks and leadership reveals that Denver NOW's agenda was far more invested in community outreach and grassroots feminism than previously thought.

Denver NOW's commitment to working within established institutions and State apparatuses was the driving force behind its formal infrastructure and agendas. While members were successful with this approach in their legislative efforts, community involvement in service provision was most successful on a grassroots and community level. This is due in large part because of Denver NOW's proximity to several leftist groups that worked outside of State and established institutions that ultimately denied Denver NOW funding. It was also advantageous for Denver NOW to work on a grassroots level that hid member affiliation to the organization to avoid violating 501(c)3 laws. Funding for programs like the abortion referral depended on this kind of disassociation.

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<sup>113</sup> *National Organization for Women: Denver Colorado*, August 1974, p. 8.

<sup>114</sup> In 1979, National NOW applied and received tax-exemption under IRS code 501(c)4, which allowed them lobbying freedom and tax exemption.

<sup>115</sup> "Abortion Referrals Made," *National Organization for Women: Denver Colorado*, September 1973, p. 3.

## CHAPTER IV

### THE PROMISE OF FEDERAL FUNDING

On January 21, 1975, Denver Mayor William McNichols stood on the corner of 20th Avenue and Downing Street and declared, "Let there be light."<sup>116</sup> Mayor McNichols along with high-ranking city officials and established members of the community stood on a more affluent corner of Capitol Hill that cold morning to celebrate the commencement of the new \$580,000 "Street lighting Crime Prevention Project."<sup>117</sup> The streetlight project was part of a \$20 million grant Denver received from the Law Enforcement Assistance Administration (LEAA), a federal agency established by the Omnibus Crime Control and Safe Streets Act of 1968 to provide funding to government agencies, private organizations, and educational institutes as part of a national fight against crime. Denver was among eight cities in the country to receive funding for crime prevention. The project called for the installation 1,305 light poles, which would hold new high-intensity 400-watt sodium vapor lamps.<sup>118</sup>

The LEAA placed the Denver Anti-Crime Council (DACC) in charge of developing a program using LEAA funds to combat crime in a high-impact area of Denver. The DACC believed that the streetlight project would reduce the frequency of the five "impact crimes" they recognized as plaguing Capitol Hill: Homicide, rape, burglary, robbery, and assault. The DACC planned to install the high-intensity lighting fixtures in the area covering from Broadway to York Street and from 6th Avenue to 23rd street. 23.3 percent of Denver's rapes occurred within this relatively small area.<sup>119</sup> The DACC hoped that by eliminating shadowy areas, the new streetlights would reduce the rate of "stranger-to-stranger" rape by five percent in two years.<sup>120</sup>

The LEAA also allocated \$478,000 to Project ESCORT (Eliminate Street Crime On Residential Thoroughfares). The project provided twenty motorbike police patrols to cover the same

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<sup>116</sup> Denver Anti-Crime Council, "Denver Crime Reduction Bulletin" November 1, 1974, p. 2.

<sup>117</sup> Denver Anti-Crime Council, "Denver Crime Reduction Bulletin" November 1, 1974, p. 1.

<sup>118</sup> Denver Anti-Crime Council, "Denver Crime Reduction Bulletin" November 1, 1974, p. 1-3.

<sup>119</sup> Denver Anti-Crime Council, "Denver Crime Reduction Bulletin" November 1, 1974, p. 2.

<sup>120</sup> Denver Anti-Crime Council, "New Release" Thursday July 9, 1973

designated area of Capitol Hill as the streetlight project. The Denver Police Department was in charge of recruiting and training patrol officers to fill the new positions. The DACC believed that the coupling of improved lighting and increased police presence would not only reduce crime but also create a positive rapport between the residents of Capitol Hill and the police. It believed that police on motorbikes seemed more accessible to the public and eventually residents would identify the police with “safety” and “trust.”<sup>121</sup>

In the commencement ceremony dubbed “Hole Diggin’ - Pole Plantin’,” Mayor McNichols expressed his hope for the light’s positive effect on reducing crime and increasing residential safety. He stated that light “meant knowledge, understanding, peace, tranquility and when used as opposed to darkness it frequently means ‘safety’.”<sup>122</sup> According to the mayor and the DACC, increased visibility of residents and law enforcement was the answer to Capitol Hill’s nefarious reputation.

As McNichols broke ground for the project and shined a light on Capitol Hill, most neighborhood feminists felt left in the dark. The Denver NOW chapter’s Rape Task Force led by Shirley McDermott worked restlessly to promote their goals to the DACC. They attended public DACC meetings concerning rape and requested involvement in the project, amendments to the criminal code, and cooperation with neighborhood patrol officers. They also sent formal proposals to the council detailing their plan for a twenty-four-hour rape hotline and victim advocacy program.<sup>123</sup> They worked with Dr. James Selkin, who presented his medical expert opinion for the DACC’s rape workshop.<sup>124</sup> Despite NOW’s best efforts, the DACC and the LEAA denied its request for involvement and funding.

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<sup>121</sup> Denver Anti-crime Council, "Denver Crime Reduction Bulletin" November 1, 1974, p. 2.

<sup>122</sup> “Hole Diggin’ - Pole Plantin’ Ceremony For the Street Lighting Crime Prevention Project,” William McNichols Collection, Box 117, Folder 8, Denver Public Library.

<sup>123</sup> *National Organization for Women*: Denver Colorado, October 1976, p. 4.

<sup>124</sup> *National Organization for Women*: Denver Colorado, October 1976, p. 4.

Sociologist Nancy Matthews points out that national LEAA funding and guidelines forced many anti-rape feminist groups to deny funding or follow guidelines that were antithetical to their feminist ideologies, including requiring all rape victims seeking help from LEAA-funded crisis centers to report the assault to police. According to Matthews, this created a rift in some feminist organizations whose members struggled with the dilemma and split due to their differences in opinion. Specifically, in Denver, the NOW Denver Chapter found itself restructuring efforts and redirecting their goals during even the preliminary stages of LEAA planning.<sup>125</sup>

McDermott structured the Rape Task Force and its plan for a rape crisis center on the hope of LEAA funding, and by doing so, LEAA's definition of crime and rape-prevention defined the trajectory of their agenda and focus. Shirley McDermott initially saw the task force as encompassing the surrounding suburban areas of Denver, but LEAA funding was exclusively for crime prevention in Denver. Specifically, the LEAA and DACC focused primarily within Capitol Hill, which served as a road map for McDermott's plans for a rape-crisis center. Because McDermott wanted to make sure the program functioned within the parameters set forth by the LEAA, she concentrated the task force's efforts and resources squarely in Capitol Hill. She began coordinating with Denver General Hospital to house Denver NOW's proposed rape-crisis center.<sup>126</sup>

Additionally, because McDermott invested all of the Rape Task Force's efforts in the hopes for funding and potential coordination with Denver General and the Capitol Hill motorbike escort officers, the members of the task force did not cultivate community ties with like-minded residents of Capitol Hill with available resources. McDermott and the task force continued to pursue this avenue when it joined the Denver Coalition on Sexual Assault (DCSA) in April of 1974 after LEAA denied them direct funding. Local professionals, especially medical professionals created the DCSA in

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<sup>125</sup> Nancy Matthews, *Confronting Rape: The Feminist Anti-Rape Movement and the State*, (Routledge, 2005) p, 3-5.

<sup>126</sup> *National Organization for Women: Denver Colorado*, March 1974, p. 3.

response to LEAA's request for professional agencies to oversee and implement anti-rape programs in Denver and surrounding municipalities.<sup>127</sup>

Local professionals and medical experts directed the DCSA during its short stint in 1974. Interestingly, Denver NOW member, Dr. Kathy Saltzman of Denver General, was part of the group of medical experts that directed the coalition's steering committee.<sup>128</sup> Shirley McDermott argued that the Rape Task Force joined the DCSA to avoid duplicate efforts. Although that may be the part of the reason they joined the coalition, it was likely an organizational strategy.<sup>129</sup>

It was clear to Denver NOW and the national organization that receiving federal funding required a professional image.<sup>130</sup> Other professional and city sponsored rape-prevention organizations in the area did receive LEAA funding. In a 1975 article of the *Feminist Alliance Against Rape Newsletter*, Mary Largen wrote, "The on-going NOW National Rape Task Force investigation of LEAA spending on rape-related projects has also uncovered information pointing to a bias against private women's groups, inefficient and ineffective rape reduction programs, and possible misuse of appropriated funds."<sup>131</sup> The membership of the coalition provided a professional facade that strayed away from a "private women's" group image.

In the DCSA, the members of NOW found themselves again shut out of decision making. By August 1974, in just four short months, NOW members left the Denver Coalition on Sexual Assault. An article in the NOW newsletter announced the split and maintained that the two organizations agreed to support each other going forward. Although NOW did not criticize the coalition, it seems that the amicable announcement was purely for the purposes of diplomacy. A writer for BMR interviewed a former DCSA member who gave a more frank explanation of the split. They recounted

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<sup>127</sup> *National Organization for Women: Denver Colorado*, April 1974, p. 5.

<sup>128</sup> *National Organization for Women: Denver Colorado*, August 1973, p. 5.

<sup>129</sup> *National Organization for Women: Denver Colorado*, August 1973, p. 5.

<sup>130</sup> Mary Largen, "LEAA Funding Review," *Feminist Alliance Against Rape Newsletter*, September/October 1974.

<sup>131</sup> Mary Largen, "LEAA Funding Review," *Feminist Alliance Against Rape Newsletter*, September/October 1974.

of the DCSA, “The attitude was that you had to have a PhD or at least bow to one to be listened to.” The interviewee continued, “We wanted to help women, not just talk about studies and statistics at luncheons....[W]e couldn’t even function anymore because of the hierarchy in the coalition.”<sup>132</sup> The feminists of the Rape Task Force again found themselves bogged down by bureaucratic power structures that placed professionalism above action. If the Rape Task Force wanted to move forward, it would have to change the way it defined power and support within their community.

By September 1974, the Rape Task Force reassembled and began to take part in grassroots feminism and activism in Capitol Hill. At first, they functioned as an autonomous organization depending on volunteers to staff the program. Eventually, membership of the Rape Task Force (later named the Sexual Assault Task Force) started to cross with a grassroots anti-rape program in the neighborhood called High Street Rape Awareness and Control, which was part of the long-established High Street Community Center.<sup>133</sup> Judy Niagarus, a member of the Sexual Assault Task Force, directed the program. The Rape Awareness and Control program, like NOW, offered a twenty four-hour rape hotline. They also offered counseling and rape defense classes. By August 1975, the two groups worked in conjunction to offer local women counseling and self-defense classes.<sup>134</sup>

At the start of NOW’s Rape Task force, they also relied on their relationships with other professional external agencies like local hospitals to provide services to rape survivors. One of the early initiatives of NOW’s Rape Task Force was to work with local hospitals to gain access to the emergency rooms to act as advocates for rape survivors. The task force acknowledged that female rape survivors may have wanted another woman with them as they endured the considerably uncomfortable rape-kit examination. Many women expressed a feeling of violation during the exam and a preference for another female to attend with them. The task force also wanted to provide on-site

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<sup>132</sup> *Big Mama Rag*, January 1975, p. 9.

<sup>133</sup> *National Organization for Women: Denver, Co*, October 1974, p. 3.

<sup>134</sup> “Sexual Assault,” *National Organization for Women: Denver, CO*, August 1975 Rape, p. 7.



support to the women by educating them on their legal rights. One task force member stated that she was in the emergency room so that the victims go through “the minimum amount of general shit.”<sup>135</sup>

Additionally, police officers notoriously tried to discredit rape claims. They frequently forced women to take polygraph tests during their initial interview, which likely occurred at the hospital. In a NOW newsletter editorial, a woman living in Capitol Hill gave her experience at Denver General Hospital, where she laid stretched out on a table for an hour wishing that someone was there to “hold her hand.”<sup>136</sup> She recounted later that the police forced her to take a polygraph test. They informed her that the test revealed that she was keeping a secret from them. She could not imagine what it was.<sup>137</sup> Task force members wanted to be there as a buffer between the survivors and male police officers who were not only untrusted to treat a woman's claim of rape with unbiased professionalism, but they were also quite obviously erroneous in their attempts to use a polygraph test on anyone who had just been raped.

Gaining access to emergency rooms in the Great Capitol Hill area was not an easy feat for the Rape Task Force. The bureaucracy of professionalized medicine created roadblocks. These were untrained women demanding access to patients as rape counselors in a setting where male authority, standard procedures of operation, and credentials ruled. To traverse the bureaucratic obstacle course, they decided to link their anti-rape goals to relationships with professional experts. They turned to medical professionals in Denver General. However, by doing so, they surrendered a degree of their authority on rape. They acquiesced to bureaucratic pressure, but this is not to say that they became part of the machine and lost their agency. By surrendering some claim to their authority on rape-victim advocacy, these women were able to work within medical and state apparatuses to disrupt legal and medical procedures they as an organization deemed unjust or inadequate.

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<sup>135</sup> *Big Mama Rag*, August 1974, p. 12.

<sup>136</sup> *National Organization for Women: Denver Colorado*, April 1973, p. 4.

<sup>137</sup> *National Organization for Women: Denver Colorado*, April 1973, p. 4.

NOW found two distinctive allies in the local medical profession. Dr. James Selkin, the same Dr. Selkin who was on the Rocky Mountain Planned Parenthood board of directors. He also directed the Rape Research project at Denver General Hospital. The second was Dr. Hanna Evans, a clinical psychologist at Denver General who previously expressed interest in working closely with NOW's Rape Task Force. In February of 1973, Selkin participated in a NOW panel on rape with District Attorney Peter Borenstein and Denver Police Detective Rand Hendrickson. All three offered their expert opinion on the rape crisis in Denver. By June of 1973, Selkin, who was at the same time working with the Denver Anti-Rape Council in regards to the LEAA grant, offered to work with the Rape Task Force in getting a crisis hotline set up in the Denver General emergency room. This offer was contingent on DACC allocations of LEAA grant money.<sup>138</sup>

Head of the task force, Shirley McDermott, prematurely wrote in the July 1973 newsletter of NOW, "Crisis Line Established."<sup>139</sup> The Rape Task Force would never see that money and the hotline would never make it to the emergency room. However, through their relationship with Dr. Selkin and their willingness to defer to his expert opinion, the task force was able place volunteers in the Denver General emergency unit as rape-victim advocates by June of 1974.<sup>140</sup> Additionally, when the NOW Rape Task Force joined the Denver Coalition on Sexual Assault, Dr. Evans volunteered to train the women as counselors.<sup>141</sup> By receiving professional training by a licensed doctor, the feminists obtained a degree of legitimization even after their split from the Denver Coalition. NOW feminists also continued to cultivate their relationship with Dr. Evans after they left the DSCA, which further legitimized their presence in the hospital and their interactions with rape survivors.

From August 1974 until March 1976, the Sexual Assault Task Force remained an entity of Denver NOW until finally, they decided to disaffiliate themselves from the organization to better

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<sup>138</sup> *National Organization for Women: Denver Colorado*, October 1974, p. 3.

<sup>139</sup> *National Organization for Women: Denver Colorado*, October 1974, p. 3.

<sup>140</sup> "All Sorts of News," *National Organization for Women: Denver Colorado*, June 1974, p. 10.

<sup>141</sup> *National Organization for Women: Denver Colorado*, October 1974, p. 3.

serve the community.<sup>142</sup> The split seemed amicable but it was noted by other members feeling ostracized by the lack of involvement and resources by the leadership as similar to the Sexual Assault Task Force split.

The failure to establish an official NOW rape crisis center was in part the result of NOW feminists shaping the trajectory of the Rape Task Force by definitions set forth by State agencies and their agendas. The State agencies ultimately shut NOW feminists out in an effort to professionalize and institutionalize rape prevention and victim advocacy. However, Denver NOW feminists still made impressive strides to provide advocacy and counseling to women sexual assault survivors through community based programs by fostering relationships with different feminists including those of the radical variety.

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<sup>142</sup> “Sexual Assault Task Force,” *National Organization for Women: Denver Colorado*, March 1976, p. 7.

## CHAPTER VII

### BIG MAMA RAG COLLECTIVELY SAYS NO TO THE ESTABLISHMENT

Capitol Hill radical grassroots feminists created Big Mama Rag, a monthly underground feminist newspaper from 1972 to 1983. According to the Maureen Mrizek, an original founder of the newspaper, the song “Rag Mama Rag” played over the radio during the collective’s first meeting. The women agreed that they liked the name of the song and the “bluesy, deep, down to earth feeling,” it had.<sup>143</sup> One member suggested altering the title slightly and naming the paper Big Mama Rag to adopt the sense of pride they felt when they listened to the song. The others agreed. Years later, another original member of BMR, Jackie St. Joan, said that she loved the name so much because “Rag” suggested both a woman’s menstrual cycle and an underground newspaper.<sup>144</sup> The story behind the newspaper’s name reflects the young organizers’ idealism and their love for music, art, literature, and freedom. They were a mostly all-white group. Many of them identified as lesbian and joined the paper to express their sexuality and ideas of equality. Some moved to Capitol Hill from across the country for acceptance. Others were natives and grew up in Capitol Hill’s “Hippie Haven.”<sup>81</sup>

BMR feminists established their underground newspaper as a collective. They did not believe in hierarchy within the group. They wanted women to feel free to express their opinions and choose as a group what issues to address in the paper. Over the years, the core group of women changed several times, but the group largely remained true to their collective model. It relied on community outreach and a neighborhood collective of feminists and other like-minded residents to construct and propel their anti-rape, reproductive freedoms, and separatist agendas.

BMR’s overall success as a feminist group was rooted in its repudiation of the State and its established systems. Because they refused to work with the State or turn to the State for support, BMR members cultivated working-relationships with their community and other women to create a

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<sup>143</sup> *Big Mama Rag*, Vol. 1 No. 2, p.2.

<sup>144</sup> *Big Mama Rag Panel*, 2002, Big Mama Rag Collection, Auraria Library, University of Colorado Denver.

women's community. This women's community would serve as a safe haven and a support system for them in times of financial need and support. It also provided them with a space to provide services to women and push their feminist agenda. However, a women's community was a difficult system to create and maintain. BMR feminists were committed to an egalitarian newspaper and community, both of which suffered from lack support and funding.

Big Mama Rag put into place a collective structure to resemble a functioning women's community as an alternative to what they considered an inequitable and malfunctioning patriarchal system. It was in an opposing view of this male-controlled culture that they laid the foundation of BMR. They condemned hierarchal structures because it simulated the established capitalist system which placed women in low-paid and menial positions. Instead, they sought to establish equality amongst varying women's voices and acknowledge the worth of each woman's work.<sup>145</sup>

Big Mama Rag used these categories openly as a means of establishing positions of power for women to claim authority and to express how they individually framed their feminism. Because this was a newspaper collective, delegation of power played out on its pages. Most editions featured far -ranging articles that represented an array of feminist models from Lesbianism to motherhood to artistic expression. This was also necessarily coupled with a denial of these categories. In theory at least, the feminist mother was equal to the feminist having an abortion and the lesbian was equal to the heterosexual wife. It was inevitable as well that defining categories intercrossed with one another and from one article to the next as feminists found new allies through (un)expected shared experiences.

However, the gendered positions of authority within BMR's organizational structure also created areas of hierarchal contention that the collective was unable to avoid. It was a common theme in second-wave feminist organizations that working-class women with obligations outside of the group i.e. children, husbands, work, found themselves unable to participate as much as women

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<sup>145</sup> *Big Mama Rag*, Vol 1. No. 1.

untethered to such commitments. Often times, this was enough to push women out of decision-making positions or out of the organization altogether.<sup>146</sup> In this case, BMR was in large part controlled by a group of cohabiting lesbians, who were childless, unattached to relationships that may have discouraged participation, and able to work side jobs that supplemented their main work for the newspaper. They could commit completely to the paper and develop its ideology, unlike some of the other staff members with extenuating obligations.

Eventually, the homogenous leadership of *BMR* made other members worry that the newspaper was becoming exclusive and too oriented towards the lesbian perspective. This was especially true when low membership and low funds forced the group to go through restructuring and membership outreach that put into place new bureaucratic systems of hierarchy. For example, in January 1974, the remaining staff of eight made a call for new members. As many as forty women responded eager to get involved and lend their voices. For the first time, the *BMR* staff decided to create an editorial board in addition to paid member staff positions. They also assigned tasks to new members to help alleviate the burden of responsibility that staff members felt overwhelmed with. However, control from the top over article assignment was an obvious contradiction to their collective promise, and it had repercussions. *BMR* editorial column addressed these consequences openly.<sup>147</sup> "Charges of elitism, Lesbian-overkill, and editorial authoritarianism were made both face-to-face and behind people's backs."<sup>148</sup> They found that abandoning the collective structure at least in part made some members feel that they were left out of decision making and a representative voice in the newspaper's articles.

The heavy theme of lesbianism and a lesbian community in the monthly editions caused even more accusations of exclusivity and hierarchy. Readers argued that the newspaper's lesbian theme did

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<sup>146</sup> Joan Acker, "Feminist Goals and Organizing Processes," in *Feminist Organizations: Harvest of the New Women's Movement*, ed. By Myra Marx Ferree and Patricia Yancey Martin, (Temple University: Philadelphia, 1995), p. 138-139.

<sup>147</sup> *Big Mama Rag*, "Where We're At," May 1974, p. 1.

<sup>148</sup> "Where We're At," *Big Mama Rag*, May 1974, p. 1.

not address issues pertaining to women of the working class. This is not surprising as the BMR staff was almost exclusively made up of white lesbians from middle-class backgrounds. Regardless, members took these accusations head on and openly discussed them in their column "Where We're At" and other special editorials. Sometimes this came in the form of indignation and a defense of lesbian themes. An original founder of *BMR* and lesbian poet, Chocolate Waters,

Does the Lesbian content of BMR alienate working class women? It may alienate some. It may attract others. The point is that sexism is as rampant in the working class as it is in the ruling class, and that no Feminist paper will ignore or cater to people's prejudice against Lesbians, in order to attract more readership. We have said goodbye to dishonesty of hiding our personal and political lives to 'organize the people.' We want a newspaper which will attract a large number of women because it has something to offer them."<sup>149</sup>

In this example, the writer for BMR framed lesbian content as an issue of sexism, strategically failing to address the frequent articles on lesbian community building and cooperative living as well as an Arts and Culture section that generally focused on lesbian artists. By doing so, they were trying to create a common thread among all feminists, but this fell short of addressing how to prevent further alienation or addressing how race, sexuality, and economy affected gender hierarchy among feminists.

BMR was never able to avoid future accusations of this nature, but that is not say that staffers did not try. Despite times of half-hearted bureaucratic restructuring, BMR remained committed to having a collective newspaper that represented a wide-range of feminist voices and concerns. They invited community input through open-door "rap sessions," continued to present a wide variety of articles and editorials, and presented core women's issues as all women's issues to draw lines connecting feminists through shared experience. This is especially true in the case of rape in which they presented the issue as a symptom of a male-dominated society that subjugated women sexually to sustain gender hierarchy.<sup>150</sup> By doing so, they framed rape as an issue for all women not just

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<sup>149</sup> "Lesbian Baiting!" *Big Mama Rag*, August 1976, p. 22.

<sup>150</sup> *Big Mama Rag*, August 1974, p. 1.

exclusive to those who were heterosexual, lesbian, single, married, modest, adventurous, black, white, or Hispanic.

This theme is also played out in articles about lesbian motherhood, abortion activism, do-it-yourself sexual healthcare, and worker's strikes. They also attempted to provide frequent articles on minority groups and even foreign feminist issues, but the white perspective of these issues was not an adequate way to address them regardless of how much the staff tried to argue otherwise.

Big Mama Rag's opposition to State funding came from both a fundamental distrust of the state as an oppressive arm of patriarchy and their counterculture approach to affecting social change and equality for women. BMR staffers understood the state as a male-dominated institution that sustained systems of power over women. The State did so through legislation, policing, and capitalism. To cooperate within any function of the State apparatus would have been to not only approve of these patriarchal functions but to also sustain them.<sup>151</sup>

It became apparent to most feminist organizations by the 1970s that seeking state funding for their organizations and service provisions came at a cost to their autonomy. Stronger systems of bureaucratic control implemented in the 1960s by the Johnson administration, burdened many nonprofit and service provision organizations with guidelines that seized spending power from autonomous groups receiving federal funding. BMR feminists were aware of these implications and openly rejected participation in state funding on these grounds.<sup>152</sup> A BMR writer argued,

Government agencies and corporations provide funding for feminist projects for two basic reasons: one, they don't consider the work of the project to be politically threatening and giving money away to 'worthy causes' is good public relations, or two, they DO consider the work to be politically threatening and grant monies have herstory [history] disruptive and cooptive to feminist projects.<sup>153</sup>

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<sup>151</sup> *Big Mama Rag*, Vol. 1 No. 2, p. 4.

<sup>152</sup> *Big Mama Rag*, Vol. 1 No. 2, p. 4.

<sup>153</sup> Woman to Woman Bookstore Collective, "Cooptive Dangers of Outside Funding," in *Big Mama Rag*, December 1976, p. 7.



As expressed in a few of their articles, members of the newspaper felt that federal funding was a way for the government to control feminist groups and restrict their ability to make real changes. This was especially true in the case of rape reform and rape crisis centers. This is not surprising as BMR members framed their opposition to state funding through gendered ideas of power relations. They viewed the state as a male-controlled vehicle of power and domination. The state instituted policies both legal and social that placed women in positions of subordination and dependence. Not only did this create a patriarchal relationship between men and women that encouraged rape as an expression of power but it also allowed men in positions of power to institute and maintain legal policies that placed the blame away from male offenders and onto female "victims."<sup>154</sup>

According to BMR members, the word "victims" was a deliberate term law enforcement and the agencies of the state used to define female sexual assault survivors to perpetuate ideas of female dependence on male protective authority. It is not surprising then that BMR staffers understood state funding as more than a controlling force in their organization structure but also as part of the social problems they aimed to fix.<sup>155</sup>

*BMR's* commitment to a collective structure was challenging and forced members to rethink ways that the logistics of a newspaper's viability and their own feminist ideology conflicted. It was not the inclusive system they intended, as many women felt excluded from the narrative and the creative process. However, their commitment to the collective structure forced them to acknowledge these issues and address them openly. In turn, this helped the newspaper continue to gain support and participation. Additionally, *BMR's* criticism of the State and its system, was the foundation of the newspaper's feminist ideology. It helped spur conversations and create consciousness-raising for members and readers.

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<sup>154</sup> "Rape: The All American Crime," *Big Mama Rag*, August, 1974, p. 3.

<sup>155</sup> "Rape: The All American Crime," *Big Mama Rag*, August, 1974, p. 3.

## CHAPTER VIII

### "THE 'RADICALS' TURNED OUT TO BE THE ESTABLISHMENT.": BIG MAMA

Historian Phil Goodstein wrote that by the 1970s the Capitol Hill neighborhood of Denver had become a “Hippie Haven” because of the increasing number of grassroots political groups, self-help groups, bead stores, head shops, and record shops that lined the area’s streets.<sup>93</sup> Various political and leftist bookstores called the area home, including the BMR's Woman to Woman bookstore at 2023 E. Colfax. The large number of liberal groups that participated in the bohemian lifestyle allowed for people of varying backgrounds and ideologies to come together and exchange ideas and support. Capitol Hill was in some ways a petri dish for political awareness, ideological development, and organizational cooperation.

To analyze how BMR related to the community of Capitol Hill as feminist separatists, I have used Nancy Fraser's theoretical framework of 'subaltern counterpublics' or in other words, a public space made up of separate alternative communities of subordinated groups called ‘counterpublics’, i.e. women, gay men, lesbians, ethnic minorities, and laborers. These communities or structured organizations consciously worked outside of the State in collaboration with one another in varying degrees of willingness and success to establish definitions of identity, interests, and community need to advance their agendas.<sup>156</sup> The latter category 'needs' is the main focus of this study, as the discourse about needs between each counterpublic helped shape the way in which feminist and women's service groups provided services to women within their own community constituency. Furthermore, it shows how discourses debating need shaped organizational structure and strategies.

Big Mama Rag staffers were the most active participants in Capitol Hill's counterpublic space in both its acceptance and active rejection of its intersectionality and balances of power. From the beginning of their newspaper, BMR feminists rejected involvement with state powers and other

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<sup>156</sup> Nancy Fraser, "Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy." *Social Text*, 25/26, Duke University Press: 1990.

established public agencies as they represented the fundamental problems with society: sexism, capitalism, and hierarchy. The bohemian and coopted lifestyle of Capitol Hill provided a community and the kind of financial opportunity that better fit their ideas of a woman's space, egalitarian social structures, and ecofeminism.

Big Mama Rag's office was at 1724 Gaylord Street, in the east of the Great Capitol Hill neighborhood. According to the 1970 census records, in the area they lived and worked 43.61 percent of residents were between the age of 18 and 34, 39.99 percent of owned households had a female head individual and 91.24% of all housing was rented and occupied.<sup>157</sup> It was a place where people moved in and out of and where different structures of life and family coexisted. Their anti-rape and social programs seemed to focus squarely within the boundaries of Capitol Hill, as many of them called the area home. When they used the term “community” to refer to their meetings and fellow feminists they also seemed to be referring to women within an immediate vicinity of them. This could be because many of the women they were attempting to elicit participation from lacked transportation and financial means.

*Big Mama Rag* was easily accessible to Capitol Hill residents. Readers of *BMR* could subscribe to the newspaper for thirty-five cents, or pick up a copy at several Capitol Hill and other Denver area businesses and organizations. *BMR* feminists used the community around them to spread their word and their publication. Bead stores and feminist bookstores lined the streets of the neighborhood. Artisans sold their wares and peace protesters marched through the area up to the Capitol. The Denver Free University sponsored free education and free thought. The Gay Coalition owned a coffee shop down the road. The community as a whole had a reputation for housing groups geared towards social change and the feminists of *BMR* found a home there.<sup>158</sup>

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<sup>157</sup> *Social Explore*, <http://www.socialexplorer.com/6f4cdab7a0/explore>, accessed April 15, 2015.

<sup>158</sup> Big Mama Rag Panel, 2002, Big Mama Rag Collection, Auraria Library, University of Colorado Denver.

The heterogeneity of left leaning political groups in Capitol Hill served to benefit the women of BMR. Like-minded and sympathetic organizations and individuals spatially surrounded them. These groups and individuals often organized through community cooperation. The Denver Free University located at 17th and Park Ave., a local organization that provided free education and material to residents, the Denver Gay Coalition located at 1450 Pennsylvania, and the Militant Bookstore owned by the Socialist Workers Party located at 1203 California all cooperated with BMR on various projects and frequently sold their publication.<sup>97</sup> Other groups like the Grey Panthers, a local group that fought ageism and the High Street Community Center, a neighborhood organization dedicated to community safety both called the area home.<sup>159</sup> These various groups often worked together in the pursuit of social, gender, and race equality. However, BMR learned quickly that this was not always the case.

Big Mama Rag experienced frequent financial crises. It turned to a few different community-oriented groups for support including the Denver Sustaining Fund (DSF), a Capitol Hill group committed to providing financial assistance to local liberal groups. Although DSF board members varied in gender, race, and movement affiliation, the DSF denied BMR funding in 1976 because male board members believed BMR's focus on women's equality was a peripheral issue. Additionally, they believed that BMR did not connect to the working class and therefore did not meet the focus of their funding agenda.<sup>160</sup> BMR staffers Carol Hansford and Kate Sharp refuted this claim, "[W]orking class can be defined as living from paycheck to paycheck. This definition applies to many of the women who read *Big Mama Rag*." To Hansford, Sharp, and the rest of the BMR staff, women's issues were part of every facet of life, which included socioeconomics. To believe that they did not have connections to the working class was to say that working class and women's issues were exclusive,

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<sup>159</sup> *Big Mama Rag*, May 1974 p. 3.

<sup>160</sup> *Big Mama Rag*, Vol. 3 No. 2, p. 4.

when in fact BMR feminists were quite invested in creating financial independence for working-class Denver women.

Ironically, the DSF came to this decision through what they considered an ungendered agenda. That is to say they maintained that other areas of the movement that did not narrowly address issues of gender were more important to support first. However, the "gender-neutral" issues they decided were worthy of funding like the SWP and the Gay Liberation movement were decidedly male in their trajectory and agenda. This did not go unnoticed by BMR feminists. A BMR writer said of the DSF fallout: "The underlying conflict was the leftist male analysis and with it their priorities which are the male-defined community and a class analysis which excludes the real status and experience of women in a sexist society."<sup>161</sup>

By July 1976, BMR members decided to withdraw their membership from the DSF after the board denied their application for funding for the third consecutive time. In June 1976, BMR requested \$3500, which the DSF swiftly denied it. It reapplied a day later asking for \$1500, but again it was denied. In a move BMR characterized as patronizing, the DSF awarded it \$250 after the third attempt to re-apply for an adequate grant was declined. On July 14, BMR formally withdrew from DSF declaring, "The 'radicals' turned out to be the Establishment."<sup>162</sup> It argued that the DSF functioned on notions of male authority. It also accused them of being venture capitalists masquerading as counter-culture radicals. A BMR feminist said of the DSF, "The boys on the left'...were more concerned with whether BMR could show a profit...than with whether BMR could continue to exist in the community without DSF support."<sup>163</sup> Several other members echoed her sentiment. Chocolate Waters, one of the staunchest proponents of feminist and lesbian separatism in

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<sup>161</sup> *Big Mama Rag*, Vol. 3 No. 2, p. 4.

<sup>162</sup> *Big Mama Rag*, Vol. 3 No. 2, p. 4.

<sup>163</sup> *Big Mama Rag*, Vol. 3 No. 2, p. 11.

the BMR staff simply wrote, "I hate to say I told you so but..."<sup>164</sup> Clearly, not everyone was surprised BMR's relationship with the DSF ended poorly.

BMR's fallout with the DSF prompted a lot of discussion about refocusing the group's agenda towards a woman's space. In many ways this seemed to be in response to DSF's failure to live up to the counter-culture utopia Capitol Hill promised. BMR feminist Maureen Mrizek wrote in response to BMR's withdrawal that she had been wrong to believe that the DSF was a "counter culture community here in Denver" and that having analyzed it more critically she realized "the member groups [of DSF] do not seem to represent any kind of broader community."<sup>165</sup> Along with other BMR feminists, Maureen used the DSF issue as a springboard for newer and deeper dialogues about financial independence and strategies towards a sustainable women's community. She concluded "We have a large and growing women's community here in Denver that is visible and supportive and ready to move. This is the area we should concentrate on."<sup>166</sup> Others echoed her sentiment: "We will be working with the women's community to raise the money we need to continue."<sup>166</sup> However, working with the women's community did not always live up to the rhetoric of feminist separatism they were increasingly adopting.

In the pursuit of establishing a separate feminist economy and gain financial independence outside of both the State and hierarchy of Capitol Hill's leftist community, a group of Colorado Springs and Denver feminists led by feminist Jackie St. Joan, a BMR staffer and founder, established the Colorado Federal Feminist Credit Union (CFFCU) located in Capitol Hill at 1458 Pennsylvania Ave. in March 1976. It was operational by August. While founding members intended for the credit union to serve women in Colorado Springs and eventually all over the state, their initial focus was to

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<sup>164</sup> *Big Mama Rag*, Vol. 3 No. 2, p. 4.

<sup>165</sup> *Big Mama Rag*, Vol. 3 No. 2, p. 4.

<sup>166</sup> *Big Mama Rag*, Vol. 3 No. 2, p. 4

strengthen the Denver branch. However, they did send a loan officer to Colorado Springs twice a week to review loan applications.<sup>167</sup>

The founding feminists intended the CFFCU to serve women based on women's need. The CFFCU declared in their newsletter, "We can invest our savings in loans to our sisters, instead of in male-owned and controlled banking institutions with sexist lending policies and employment practices." "[W]e can be honest about why we want a loan -- whether it be for a divorce [or] an abortion."<sup>168</sup> They were offering to provide money to women for needs specific to women's lives and without sexist lending policies or judgement.

However, because the credit union was federally regulated, they were required to follow federal guidelines which tended to restrict their feminist agenda and growth. For example, federal guidelines required the CFFCU to submit applications for the addition of any member group to their union for their approval. By 1977, the Feminist Credit Union had four membership groups: NOW (including the Denver Chapter), the Colorado Women's Political Caucus, the Colorado Commission on the Status of Women (only those appointed by the governor), and the Colorado Springs Women's Health Service clinic. They applied for eight additional group members in early 1977 but the National Credit Union Administration denied their request. Donna Good, a staff member of the credit union, told BMR that she suspected that the federal administrators denied their request just to stymie their growth.<sup>169</sup>

The CFFCU's growth was not the only thing up for stake when the NCUA denied their request. They were not able to provide loans to a large number of Denver and surrounding cities feminists in need, as many feminists were unlikely to belong to the existing group members with the exception of NOW. This was a substantial restriction considering that local women turned to the CFFCU for abortion service loans, especially since most abortion services in Capitol Hill and Denver

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<sup>167</sup> "Colorado Credit Union Opens Its Doors," *Big Mama Rag*, Vol.4 No. 4, p. 12.

<sup>168</sup> "Colorado Credit Union Opens Its Doors," *Big Mama Rag*, Vol.4 No. 4, p. 12.

<sup>169</sup> "Colorado Credit Union Opens Its Doors," *Big Mama Rag*, Vol.4 No. 4, p. 12.

required upfront payment. Consequently, because the NCUA seemed to exercise complete discretion over the credit union's membership, it was able to exercise some control over the access to abortion services in Denver. Membership of the Colorado Women's Political Caucus, the Colorado Commission of the Status of Women, and the Colorado Springs Women's Health Service clinic were largely middle to upper-class white women, who most likely did not need to turn to the credit union for loans concerning health services. Moreover, the NCUA could and by all accounts did exclude more grassroots feminist groups with working-class membership, effectively blocking their members from lending services and abortion services.<sup>170</sup>

Internal decisions made by the CFFCU also restricted women's access to its services. To combat loan delinquency, it required that all potential loan applicants be a member of one of the four group members for at least three months. This new procedural restriction also came into conflict with women who needed to apply for abortion service loans. Women seeking loans for these services obviously could not observe the three-month waiting period. Even a slight delay of a few days could mean that the applicant missed their opportunity to receive the abortion she needed. Capitol Hill doctors, for example, often limited the amount of abortions they performed in a week. Once they reached their quota, they refused to treat any more women. Additionally, the further along the pregnancy progressed, the more complicated the procedure became and the less doctors were available to perform them.<sup>171</sup> For a credit union that claimed it existed to meet the specific needs of women, its bureaucratic procedures came in direct conflict with the day-to-day lives of women and their physiology. Its attempt at feminist separatism started to resemble the bureaucratic systems of the State that they repudiated.

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<sup>170</sup> "Colorado Feminist Credit Union Gets Off the Ground," *Big Mama Rag*, Vol.4 No. 8, p. 6.

<sup>171</sup> "Colorado Feminist Credit Union Gets Off the Ground," *Big Mama Rag*, Vol.4 No. 8, p. 6.



Given BMR's stance on federal and other establishment funding, it is surprising to find one of their prevalent staffers, Jackie St. Joan, spearheading a federally controlled feminist credit union. It is also surprising to find mostly positive and encouraging commentary on the CFFCU in BMR articles at the credit union's inception. However, at the crux of BMR's ideology and strategies towards a women's community was the pursuit of economic independence. A BMR contributor wrote: "[F]eminist business 'must be controlled by women to meet women's needs in the community and facilitate social change."<sup>172</sup> BMR feminists not only saw economic independence as necessary to establish a cooperative women's community but also to make social changes in mainstream society. This is a noticeable lag in their shift towards feminist separatism, which became the accepted narrative of BMR by the end of the 1970s.

However, it is likely that the shift towards separatism pushed BMR feminist towards accepting the CFFCU as an acceptable feminist institution. BMR had been struggling financially from the beginning, and unlike other formal feminist organizations, the financial struggle of the group meant the financial struggle for individual members. The credit union opened its doors in August 1976 just one month after BMR withdrew its membership from DSF. It was desperate. It was surviving through small individual contributions and performing sporadic side jobs as handywomen.<sup>173</sup> It is likely that constant fiscal crises and failed relationships with other community funding options helped push some BMR staffers to start looking at systems of the state apparatus as viable solutions. The credit union offered those willing to bend the rules of zero cooperation with the state an ideological loophole, as the CFFCU promised their participation within the state apparatus of credit union banking would be met with challenges to sexism and promotion of female independence.<sup>173</sup>

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<sup>172</sup> "Colorado Feminist Credit Union Gets Off the Ground," *Big Mama Rag*, Vol.4 No. 8, p. 6.

<sup>173</sup> "Colorado Feminist Credit Union Gets Off the Ground," *Big Mama Rag*, Vol.4 No. 8, p. 6.

Additionally, Jackie St. Joan's leadership in creating the CFFCU was similar to the informal structure of the BMR collective. Members were not forced to adhere to bylaws or adopt specific mission statements like more formal and bureaucratic groups such as NOW. The collective structure permitted members to act independently both inside and outside of the group. While BMR staffers exercised some control over which articles were included in the newspaper, the collective structure permitted constant dissent amongst BMR feminists that played out on the pages of the newspaper.

Surprisingly, the frequent dissent and even ideological contradictions between the feminists and their articles served to strengthen the newspaper's content. Historians of second-wave feminism frequently characterize the period as full of strife and fractures that ultimately ended organizations and disrupted feminist agendas. However, dissent particularly in the case of funding and involvement in mainstream society in many ways allowed BMR staffers to develop more complex arguments in feminist theory. It facilitated deeper and often times more thought-provoking analyses of feminism, patriarchy, and feminist strategies to navigate systems of power that restricted them.

Staying true to an egalitarian structure, which promised freedom to express thoughts and ideas without reprisal, some BMR feminists criticized the CFFCU for acquiescing to state power at the cost of their feminist sisters. Others interpreted the credit union as a challenge to sexism in the American capitalist system and the state agencies that controlled it. In a BMR editorial by a contributor named "Woodwoman," the CFFCU shined brightly as an opportunity to bring prosperity to Denver feminists. She wrote:

[T]here are many contradictions inherent in the concept of a feminist credit union....What makes the CFFCU unique is that it recognizes these contradictions and works toward resolving them."<sup>174</sup>

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<sup>174</sup> "Colorado Feminist Credit Union Gets Off the Ground," *Big Mama Rag*, Vol.4 No. 8, p. 6.

Woodwoman praised the credit union's activity within the state apparatus of credit union banking because the CFFCU promised to use the inherent contradictions between feminism and the American banking system to challenge sexist policies.

The irony in Jackie St. Joan's participation in establishing the CFFCU and BMR's tentative approval was that BMR was not a group member. Therefore, BMR feminists could not participate in CFFCU's lending services. Moreover, if they wanted to they had to belong to a more bureaucratic if not State-controlled feminist organization like the CCFW. So while the feminist credit union promised to provide alternative means of funding to Capitol Hill women who struggled within more traditional modes of community and bank funding, CFFCU's policies actually necessitated bureaucratic feminist organizational structure and even State cooperation. Ironically, they forced the women they sought to serve into the systems of bureaucratic State control they promised to challenge.

This is not to say that BMR feminists ran to organizations like NOW to gain access to CFFCU funds. It is more than likely that some feminists in Denver joined or attempted to join NOW to either fund their external groups or to at least secure a financial safety net in case they needed funding in the future for a variety of things including abortion services. Admittedly, it is likely that the latter weighed less on the decisions of BMR lesbians whose day-to-day lives were far less influenced by the threat of pregnancy than their heterosexual feminist sisters. Regardless, this is a far cry from BMR's declarations that they would focus on investing their time and resources into a women's community, a declaration they made only a month before.<sup>175</sup>

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<sup>175</sup> *Big Mama Rag*, Vol. 3 No. 2, p. 4.

## CHAPTER IX

### A WOMAN'S SPACE

Big Mama Rag members continued to work outside of State apparatuses with other local feminist groups that sought to provide a community and protection for women.<sup>176</sup> Some worked with the Women in Transition House. Located at 1895 Lafayette and established in the fall of 1973, it was a place where local women in need of a safe space could find shelter. It also provided free transportation for women without vehicles and a twenty-four-hour crisis line.<sup>177</sup> BMR contributor Kim Branscombe, moved into the house in the 1974 and helped staff it. The organization was instrumental in providing a safe space for Capitol Hill women and increased mobility throughout the neighborhood. When the WIT house was suffering financially, *BMR* published stories about the house and urged readers to donate their time, money, or supplies like blankets to help keep them afloat.<sup>178</sup> Again, it did not turn to state agencies seeking money or even other Capitol Hill male-oriented groups. Instead, they turned to their community of feminists for assistance.

Several BMR contributors helped establish and run the feminist collective/bookstore Woman to Woman located at 2023 E. Colfax. Established in August 1975, Woman to Woman provided what the founders called “a woman’s space.”<sup>179</sup> Mostly white young lesbian feminists made up the staff of the collective. However, they attempted to create a space that was open to all women of every background, race, and age to express feelings, share information, and build networks of support. It was also a free resource of feminist literature that was intended to raise feminist consciousness awareness and encourage women to apply those feminist analyses to effecting change in Denver.

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<sup>176</sup> *Big Mama Rag*, Vol. 1. No 4.

<sup>177</sup> *Big Mama Rag*, Vol. 1. No 4.

<sup>178</sup> *Big Mama Rag*, Vol. 1. No 4.

<sup>179</sup> *Big Mama Rag*, September 1976, p. 14.

The Woman to Woman Bookstore also housed the Feminist Switchboard. The switchboard offered telephone information and referral services to local women. It also functioned as a “rap line” for women who wanted to join in on the feminist conversation. The line was open Tuesday through Saturday from 10am-8pm. They provided information about emergency housing, birth control and abortion, feminist attorneys, organizations, medical services, welfare, and childcare.<sup>180</sup>

The monthly edition of *BMR* offered community information and help to women in a variety of ways. Every issue included a “Help Services” list. The list included local referrals for birth control services, feminist communication, community resources, a rape and help line, employment services, health services, legal services, literature, pregnancy counseling, and women’s groups.<sup>181</sup> *BMR* feminists wanted to give a comprehensive list of local services for women to live in the community safely and successfully. By offering a helpful guide to women, they were creating a feminist community or what they often referred to as a woman's space. Providing sexual healthcare information and services to women readers and women in their community was important to *BMR* staffers. Issues frequently included articles about medical issues from a female and feminist perspective. This included articles about midwifery, gynecology, sex education, and psychology.

*BMR* ran frequent health articles to provide basic information about the female anatomy, vaginal candidiasis, and bacterial vaginosis. They explained the speculum and self-examination. Generally, this promoted better health for women by providing information about how they could take better care of their bodies.<sup>122</sup>

*BMR* members also hosted self-examination parties. Women who attended these parties received instructions on how to use a speculum at home and examine themselves using a handheld mirror. They also encouraged women to work together in this regard and examine each other when

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<sup>180</sup> *Big Mama Rag*, May 1977, p. 2.

<sup>181</sup> *Big Mama Rag*, January 1974, p. 31.

necessary. This allowed women to identify issues without doctors and even avoid misdiagnoses.<sup>182</sup> It also allowed women to become more familiar with their bodies in general. For the first time for many women, they were able to view what their own vagina looked like. It was in itself a liberating experience from their dependence on physicians to relay even the description of their own body.

Other parties that promoted sexual health awareness included classes on sexual experiences and the female body. For example, BMR hosted classes for women who had never had an orgasm. The purpose of the class was to help them understand their bodies in a way to not only achieve an orgasm but to understand the sexual potential of the female body. Of course, this was partly predicated on the theme of female sexual independence. Orgasms, self-examination, and the shared experiences at the parties were all part of the woman's place BMR promoted as a preferred and viable alternative to the mainstream system of patriarchy.<sup>183</sup>

Carol Lease, a feature editor for BMR, bravely recounted the story of her rape in the August 1974 issue. Alone in her home, Carol noticed that her phone had disconnected while she was talking to a friend. When she followed the phone cord to find the problem, she discovered that it was severed. While looking for tape to fix it and thinking that her cat must have been the culprit, Carol caught the first glimpse of her rapist. She described a “young, scruffy hippie” who wore a jean jacket and had long hair.<sup>184</sup> She remembered that he did not fit the image she had of a rapist: He looked like a normal person to her. In fear for her life, she pleaded with him to let her live. He responded, “I don’t want to hurt you. I want to love you. Relax, baby you’ll love it, baby.”<sup>185</sup> She did not physically resist. She reasoned to herself that she had no way out. There was no one to help her and no one to hear her screams. The man took her to the bedroom and raped her.<sup>129</sup>

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<sup>182</sup> *Big Mama Rag*, Vol. 2 No. 4, p.2

<sup>183</sup> *Big Mama Rag*, Vol. 3 No. 4, p. 11.

<sup>184</sup> *Big Mama Rag*, August 1974, p. 14.

<sup>185</sup> *Big Mama Rag*, August 1974, p.14.

Carol's experiences with the police and doctors following the attack were telling of how the legal and medical systems treated female rape victims. She requested a policewoman to take her statement. A male police officer informed her that there were no policewomen on duty at the time. She would have to settle for a male officer. She also did not want to go to Denver General Hospital. She preferred Rose Memorial, but it refused to admit her to the emergency room. Finally, she found a private gynecologist. The male doctor uttered one word during the entire examination and visit. He simply said, "Disgusting."<sup>186</sup>

Carol Lease's critique of the state was in line with BMR's overall critique of rape prevention in Denver. The women of BMR largely believed that rape and violence against women were symptoms of patriarchal structures within American culture and politics. A few BMR contributors wrote editorials that accused state agencies, the medical profession, and the media of perpetuating rape through misogynistic practices, policies, and rhetoric. BMR member Fran Day wrote, "Rape is the inevitable consequence of a patriarchal society." She added, "Rape is an integral part of the entire social matrix which degenerates being female."<sup>187</sup>

Unlike members of NOW, the feminists of BMR refuted the claims of the DACC that rape largely happened on the street. They rightfully argued that rape often happened in the homes just as it did the Carol Lease's case. They believed the fundamental problem of rape and the state's anti-rape prevention programs lay within its own system of patriarchy. For BMR feminists, preventing rape meant deconstructing this patriarchal system by first refusing to define themselves as victims in need of male protection and then through cultural. Additionally, they fought issues of rape through social reformation like protesting mediums of violence against women such as the media and pornography. They argued that state and police paternalism caste women as children in need of protection, which

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<sup>186</sup>*Big Mama Rag*, August 1974, p. 14.

<sup>187</sup>*Big Mama Rag*, August 1974, p. 14.

was a policy that relied on women becoming victims. They argued that this is why the state funded projects like police patrols and rape hotlines. According to one BMR contributor, rape hotlines only served to protect women after the rape had occurred. By funding these projects, the state was continuing to perpetuate female rape victims and after-the-fact male protection.<sup>188</sup> This also helped to place blame on the female for being raped. If they had existed within the parameters of the patriarchal system set forth by male authority, they would have been safe from rape and harassment. This included avoiding public spaces after dark, dressing modestly, and living a heterosexual life so that a male protector was available.<sup>189</sup> Because BMR feminists understood rape as a symptom of this system, they sought to reclaim authority over their own protection and self-defense. The first step was to claim ownership over their community.

In keeping with the collectivist motif, BMR feminists turned to community meetings to create an open dialogue between themselves and their feminist community. This included funding issues, the trajectory of the paper, community building, and discussing how to prevent violence against women. They held frequent community meetings in at Woman to Woman to discuss strategies to prevent rape and violence. It was in the basement of Woman to Woman where local feminists and BMR members established the Denver chapter of Women Against Violence Against Women (WAVAW).<sup>190</sup>

Members of BMR such as Kathy Reilly and Janelle Lemken joined with other local feminists to establish a Denver coalition of Women Against Violence Against Women

(WAVAW).<sup>135</sup> WAVAWs began popping up across the country in response to the 1976 film *Snuff*, a fictional movie that depicted a rape and murder of woman in the ending scene and promoted by producer Allen Shackleton as real. Once the movie had made its way around the film circuit and to New York City, noted feminists like Gloria Steinem and Susan Brownmiller pressured Manhattan's

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<sup>188</sup> *Big Mama Rag*, August 1974, p. 10.

<sup>189</sup> *Big Mama Rag*, August 1974, p. 10.

<sup>190</sup> *Big Mama Rag*, Vol. 7 No, 5, p. 17.



District Attorney Robert Morgenthau to investigate the claims that the rape and murder were real. Morgenthau's investigation revealed that the film was indeed fake and that the actress was alive and well.<sup>191</sup> However, Snuff started a national conversation amongst feminists about ways in which pornography perpetuated violence against women and Denver feminists wanted to join in.

On October 31, 1977, four local Denver feminists Crystal Arp, Judy Barlow, Lori Bradford, Pandora Carpenter, and Bobbe Ross were arrested near the Bluebird Theater, a porn movie house located at 3317 E. Colfax.<sup>192</sup> BMR affectionately dubbed them the “Bluebird 5.”<sup>193</sup> BMR also listed Judy Barlow, Pandora Carpenter, and Bobbe Ross as official contributors to the paper, (Carpenter and Ross often wrote the BMR articles on the group themselves.)<sup>139</sup> Police believed that they were responsible for spray painting and plastering the theater with leaflets, which declared, “We are Women Against Violence Against Women.” The leaflet explained their stance on pornography as a perpetuator of rape and violence against women. “Pornography is the visual portrayal of the humiliation and physical, mental and economic violence against women.”<sup>194</sup> It added “[R]ape is war: WOMEN, FIGHT BACK.”<sup>141</sup> They were drawing a clear line between the presence of pornography within their community and prevalence of rape and violence against women that plagued the Capitol Hill area. The night before the arrests a group of masked feminists had also made their way to several other porn theaters and bookstores on

East Colfax and South Broadway pounding on booths and chanting, “Double Bubble, Toil and Trouble. When you mess with women, you're in trouble.”<sup>195</sup> The “Bluebird 5” never denied that they were responsible. Their defense rested on their feminist demands that pornography as a

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<sup>191</sup> Carolyn Bronstein, *Battling Pornography: The American Feminist Anti-Pornography Movement, 1976–1986*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press: 2011), pg. 88.

<sup>192</sup> *Big Mama Rag*, Vol. 6. No. 1, pg. 2.

<sup>193</sup> *Big Mama Rag*, Vol. 5. No. 11, pg. 2.

<sup>194</sup> *Big Mama Rag*, Vol. 5. No. 11, p. 2.

<sup>195</sup> *Big Mama Rag*, Vol. 5. No. 11, p. 2.

perpetuator of rape and violence against women had to be removed from their community. Therefore, they argued that their actions were cases of civil disobedience.<sup>196</sup> Although they did not use the case of self-defense in court, it is also clear that the feminists understood pornography as a direct threat to their welfare, as well as the welfare of all women within the vicinity of it. These were acts of self-defense in the sense that they believed this was the way to prevent crimes against women within their community.

Organization leaders feared that an all-out war against pornography would lead to sexual repression and censorship, and that it would distract attention from the intended focus on mainstream media portrayals of violent behavior.<sup>197</sup> This fear lent itself to the idea that being anti-pornography meant allying with right-wing conservatives.<sup>198</sup> However, the “Bluebird 5” of the Denver WAVAW did not fit within this model. They very clearly sought to draw a direct line between pornography and violence against women without differentiating between acceptable and unacceptable forms. However, snuff films were obviously the most reprehensible to them.

There are two possible reasons for this difference in ideology. First, because the WAVAW was made up of several BMR members who believed in political separatism and often sought change through social reform rather than through political affiliations, fear of allying themselves with right-wing conservatives was not an issue they struggled with. Kathy Reilly a BMR contributor and WAVAW member wrote, “In Denver, pressure for enforcement of anti-porn laws has not been coming from feminists.”<sup>199</sup> She added, “[A]ny feminist group choosing to enter the struggle for changes in the law will find itself next to some unlikely allies: moralists, whose argument is basically

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<sup>196</sup> *Big Mama Rag*, Vol. 5. No. 11, p. 2.

<sup>197</sup> Carolyn Bronstein, *Battling Pornography: The American Feminist Anti-Pornography Movement, 1976–1986*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press: 2011), p. 3.

<sup>198</sup> Carolyn Bronstein, *Battling Pornography: The American Feminist Anti-Pornography Movement, 1976–1986*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press: 2011), p. 3-4.

<sup>199</sup> *Big Mama Rag*, Vol. 5. No. 9, p. 6.

a puritan sexual ethic, and community groups who focus on property values and landlords' 'civil spirit.'"<sup>200</sup> She concluded, "[T]he law is not going to be a promising area for feminists to work in. Other strategies need to be considered."<sup>201</sup> Instead, the feminists of BMR and the WAVAW focused on taking control of their immediate space through occupation and reformation.

Second, the Denver WAVAW was not solely media focused like most WAVAWs.<sup>202</sup> They wanted to focus on all aspects of violence against women, which included the actual acts within their community. Kathy Reilly reflected on the ideas of the Denver WAVAW, "[B]asically we were hoping to form some kind of feminist resistance to the many forms of violence against women that we saw around us."<sup>203</sup> Although members did discuss the muddled issue of anti-pornography and First Amendment violations of free speech, it seemed that their greater focus on preventing actual rape and violence outweighed the conflict of interest. By not focusing solely on the media, they were able to skirt the issue, putting the lives of women at the forefront of their demands.

In the end, the charges against the "Bluebird 5" were dismissed. BMR attributed this to the mass support local feminists provided the group by creating a "community bail fund" for the women, packing courtrooms, and performing media blitzes putting the word out about why the women committed the acts.<sup>151</sup> While the support of the Denver feminist community surrounding the "Bluebird 5" undoubtedly played a role in the dropped charges, the feminists of WAVAW had been applying pressure to District Attorney Dale Tooley in the weeks leading up to the Bluebird incident. They effectively prevented the showing of Snuff at the Evans Drive-In Theater at 2705 W. Evans in Denver by protesting its release at the theater and in Tooley's office. Tooley had been under pressure

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<sup>200</sup> *Big Mama Rag*, Vol. 5. No. 9, p. 6.

<sup>201</sup> *Big Mama Rag*, Vol. 5. No. 9, p. 6.

<sup>202</sup> Carolyn Bronstein, *Battling Pornography: The American Feminist Anti-Pornography Movement, 1976–1986*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press: 2011), p. 3.

<sup>203</sup> *Big Mama Rag*, Vol. 7. No. 5, p. 17.

for neglecting to properly enforce anti-obscenity laws from other community groups like the Park Hill Association and the Denver chapter of Citizens for Decency through Law.<sup>152</sup> These compounding pressures may very well have played a role in the dismissed charges.

*BMR* and its members developed a community and a platform to fight against State systems they believed forced women into subjugation. They used their criticism of the State as a foundation to develop these programs, services, and consciousness-raising conversations. Because they positioned themselves against the State, they were able to root their organization in a specific ideology that helped them foster a women's community. For much of the 1970s that community flourished. However, constant financial struggles for both the newspaper and individual members along with a growing disinterest of supporters forced *BMR* to shut down in 1982. Because they relied almost solely on community support and they refused to seek support from establish institutions, once community support dwindled, *BMR* could not survive.

## CHAPTER X

### CONCLUSION

RMPP's strategy to work within the state apparatus of federal grants facilitated its growth into a professionalized healthcare organization. HEW grants in particular allowed RMPP to expand its services and the number of women it could serve in Denver. However, it also restricted how it could use not only grant money but money earned through funded programs. Levying that kind of control restricted RMPP to expand programs outside of HEW's agenda.

RMPP's decision to become self-sustained was the driving force that kept them strong throughout the 1970s and into the 1980s when federal funding became scarce and unreliable. Additionally, they could expand services including an abortion clinic almost immediately after the *Roe* decision despite the financial risks involved.

The most surprising factor that lent to RMPP's efficacy was Sheri Tepper's feminist pamphlets. Pamphlet sales both provided much needed funds to RMPP programs. They also made RMPP a national influence on family planning services. Tepper was able to reach countless patients, teens, parents, and teachers with her messages of safe and responsible sex. Moreover, Tepper's pamphlets and her career at RMPP were outlets for her to express her ecofeminism through education and creating greater birth control access for women.

Denver NOW's organizational structure was a very limiting factor in their ability to affect local change. Too many nuanced task forces, and a weak board created fractures in the group over issues of race, sexuality, and socioeconomics. However, the task force structure did allow Denver NOW feminists autonomy to act without needing direct approval from the board. This allowed members of the Rape Task Force to be involved in different mediums of rape survivor advocacy.

NOW's hopes for federal funding did not come to fruition and for the most part, they delayed NOW's mission to create a rape-crisis center. However, it did put them into contact with healthcare professionals who later helped them gain approval to work with survivors in the Denver General emergency room.

Big Mama Rag's services to women were plenty and varied. However, so were their financial issues. Because BMR was not able to find a sufficient means of funding for most of their run, they were frequently forced to delay their plans, publications, and services to women. However, the commitment to a woman's place offered means of helping other women through collective living, female cooperation, and idea sharing.

Their criticism of the State and its systems helped them to develop feminist ideology foundation. They used this foundation as a springboard to create consciousness-raising, ask pertinent questions, and develop a community that served their agenda and needs. It also helped them serve other women. However, they could not always avoid issues of hierarchy in their own collective or the reach of the State. Ultimately, the newspaper disbanded due to feminist disinterest as many members decided to work within the system for financial reasons like steady wages and retirement planning.

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