CONTROLLING HUMAN WEEDS AND LIBERATING WOMANKIND:
MARGARET SANGER’S USE OF FRAMES IN THE RHETORIC
OF THE AMERICAN BIRTH CONTROL MOVEMENT

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This thesis draws from the social movement theory of framing to identify the multiple frames and analyze the dynamic framing process Margaret Sanger used in the rhetoric of the American birth control movement. Prior research contends that social movement organizations deploy a master frame to mobilize broad support for their aims. My research challenges this notion by arguing for the existence of multiple and competing frames within a social movement organization and the fluidity of framing as a process. I use the case of Margaret Sanger and the American birth control movement to explore this question. Sanger's public writings provide an appropriate data set because historians have deemed her role as central to the movement. Historians have also criticized Sanger for shifting her views, as reflected in her public communications, in order to ally herself with more powerful members of society, particularly eugenicists and members of the eugenics movement. My analysis finds that Sanger used the following frames to justify the legalization of birth control: eugenic, alleviation of social problems, democratic, feminist, maternalist, and enhancement of marriage and parenthood. I also find evidence that Sanger's combination of both dynamic and static frames in her framing repertoire may have been less a product of her shifting alliances and more a deliberate social movement tactic. Although not all of the frames I identified and analyzed underwent change and elaboration over time, the fluidity of the framing process demands further attention by social movement scholars, especially with regard to the role of leaders in mobilizing diverse and broad audiences.
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

When Margaret Sanger coined the term “birth control” in 1915, she launched herself into a central role in the American birth control movement. As a Socialist during the very early part of her career, she perceived that all women’s lack of control over reproduction helped to perpetuate an undemocratic distribution of power. Because of her participation in the more radical segments of society, she tried to combine the goals of the women’s movement with those of the working class movement in the birth control movement (Gordon 1990 p. 207). As her career progressed, Sanger’s goals and strategies progressed along with it, although her use of multiple and sometimes contradictory ideologies as rhetorical strategies remained a constant in her public work. As early as 1920, the Birth Control Review, the newsletter published by the American Birth Control League, included articles by various experts in medicine and eugenics who proposed that birth control should be legalized in order for the United States to avoid “race suicide.” According to many advocates of eugenics and birth control, the low birth rate of the educated upper class combined with the “out of control” birth rate of the undereducated poor was a disaster waiting to happen. In addition, many articles were devoted to the idea that motherhood was a sacred institution that women were supposed to enjoy, which was impossible if they could not limit their family size according to their financial, physical, and emotional necessity. Other
writings of Margaret Sanger could be described as feminist because of their emphasis on birth control as a right that all women deserved.

Margaret Sanger, and her leadership of key social movement organizations (SMOs) within the American birth control movement, presents an important case to study how leaders frame an issue. More importantly, literature on social movements ignores the agency of leaders and rarely treats the construction and implementation of frames as a process (Benford 1997 pp. 415-418). The historical literature has mainly dealt with the leadership of Margaret Sanger in a biographical manner, while in the sociological literature, the birth control movement does not seem to have been viewed as a worthy case study in the analysis of social movements.

A social movement approach provides a new perspective on the American birth control movement. Margaret Sanger has been identified as a primary leader of the birth control movement (she held leadership positions in the ABCL, the Clinical Research Bureau, and the National Committee on Federal Legislation for Birth Control). Because Sanger was instrumental in framing birth control as a social issue, I examine her participation in the process of framing by emphasizing her attempt to mobilize diverse audiences in support of the legalization of birth control.

Social movement theory emphasizes the significance of framing, but pays little attention to leaders’ use of multiple frames, or to framing as a process. With regard to the use of frame alignment theory, the identification of multiple frames within a movement, and especially within several social movement organizations, has been vague and not centered much around empirical evidence (Benford 1997 p. 411). Rather than simply identifying the “universe of specific frames” (Benford 1997 p. 414) in Margaret Sanger’s writings, I also include analysis of the fusion of particular frames and the transformation of individual frames over time. According to Benford and Snow (Forthcoming 2000 p. 20), “the key to understanding the evolution of frames resides in
articulation and amplification processes rather than in the topics or issues comprising the frames.” Therefore, a descriptive laundry list does not contribute to our understanding of the framing process. In addition, the time element is important to the analysis of a process. Benford (1997 p. 417) calls for “studies which examine the continuities and changes in framing strategies, their forms, and the content of frames over the life of a movement, throughout a cycle of protest, or across an historical epoch.” I trace the change in the content and combination of frames in Sanger’s multiple frame strategy from 1915, when she first introduced the term “birth control,” to 1938, when contraception was federally legalized.

Why did Margaret Sanger believe that birth control was such a necessity? It is possible that she believed that the legalization of birth control was a feminist, maternalist, marital, parental, eugenic, democratic, and social cause. Whatever her personal views, it is clear that she targeted various, and sometimes even contradictory, audiences in order to gain widespread support. To change public opinion regarding birth control, Margaret Sanger utilized multiple frames in her rhetoric through speeches, articles, and pamphlets in order to attract a broader and more diverse audience to further her cause. How did Sanger sell her arguments to the public? How, and why, did she combine certain arguments, or frames, with others? Were some frames more prominent than others?

How was Margaret Sanger’s use of multiple frames and the specific combinations she incorporated into her public writings an ongoing, “interactive” (Benford 1997 p. 422), and dynamic process? How are frames processes that are socially constructed, negotiated, and transformed (Benford 1997 p. 415)? Since collective action frames are “continuously reconstituted during the course of interaction that occurs in the context of movement gatherings and campaigns” (Benford and Snow Forthcoming 2000 p. 20), how did Margaret Sanger alter her
multiple-frame strategy throughout her crusade to legalize birth control? These are the questions that will guide this analysis.

My analysis seeks to address the oversights in the current literature in a way that treats the birth control movement as both unique to and representative of social movements. In particular, the effectiveness of Margaret Sanger’s influence as an agent in social movement activity is a useful case study for the examination of the framing process. It also adds to our understanding of the origin and manipulation of multiple frames as a strategy in social movement work. Because the American birth control movement has not been adequately treated using both sociological and historical frameworks, I propose to fill this gap in the literature.
CHAPTER 2

FRAMING: A PROCESS AND
A SOCIAL MOVEMENT TACTIC

Taking a social movement approach, the perspective that organizes my investigation is frame alignment theory. The theory of frame alignment has been developed and refined by many theorists (Snow et al. 1986, Snow and Benford 1988, Tarrow 1992, Donovan 1995, Gamson and Meyer 1996, Zald, 1996, Babb 1996). In this section, I outline the role of leaders in constructing, aligning, and manipulating frames. I include a discussion of other theories compatible with frame alignment theory, which have helped me to understand how leaders link frames to a culture’s ideology and individual constituents’ personal beliefs, and as a result mobilize those constituents into collective action.

According to Snow et al. (1986 p. 464), “by rendering events or occurrences meaningful, frames function to organize experience and guide action, whether individual or collective.” In this way, frames organize how we understand the situation that has necessitated a social movement and which the social movement seeks to change. Snow and his colleagues (1986 p. 467) add that a process called frame alignment must occur to link or join an individual’s framework with the social movement organization’s framework. Using rhetorical skills, social movement leaders must “align” their audiences’ belief systems with the movement’s ideology. “[M]ovements bring potential recruits’ individual viewpoints into congruence with the
movements' emergent and collective perspectives” (Taylor and Whittier 1995 p. 167). In order to mobilize broad support, leaders need to employ certain strategies and frames in order to recruit members and mobilize them as activists.

Leaders as rational agents

What has not been emphasized in the literature is the importance of leaders—those who construct the frames that movements adopt and publicize. In many cases, theories are concerned with the effects of frames and the use of frames as strategies in social movement activism, but outline the actual construction of frames in vague terms, without identifying where frames come from or who is creating them. In this way, leaders have largely been ignored in the social movement literature and the role of agency in frame construction, alignment, and manipulation has not been emphasized.

Tarrow (1992) points out that leaders and movement organizers make conscious and strategic decisions to link their frames or arguments to ideas popular in the dominant culture in order to make them more easily palatable. According to Tarrow, leaders are “both consumers of existing cultural meanings and producers of new meanings, which are inevitably framed in terms of organizers’ readings of the public’s existing values and predispositions. Collective action is thus the stage in which new meanings are produced, as well as a text full of old meanings” (Tarrow 1992 p. 189). In this way, we can see that the identification of public opinion, or the attitudes of the dominant culture, is subjective and defined uniquely by each movement leader/organizer. In addition, the way in which a particular frame of a movement is set up as complementary to or in opposition to the dominant belief system is unique to the way that leaders define or judge the idea to which their frame is being compared.

Important to social movement leaders’ success and management of a career as a leader is their audience’s perception of them and their position. Leaders must be motivational, a
characteristic for which charisma is key. Integral to this perception is the audience’s recognition that the leader is credible to more than just a small core of activists, but to a broader range of potential constituents. “It is a well-established fact in the social psychology of communication that speakers who are regarded as more credible are generally more persuasive.” Leaders build on their credibility by providing empirical evidence and through their status and knowledge (Benford and Snow Forthcoming 2000 pp. 14-15).

Leaders’ Alignment of Frames with Popular, Cultural, and Personal Ideology

An important distinction to draw at this point is that between a frame and ideology. “[F]rames are more flexible and situationally influenced constructs than formal ideological systems and are more easily and rapidly communicated to target groups, adapted to change, and extended to blend with other frames” (Tarrow 1992 p. 190). In this way, it is easier for frames to change and transform as it becomes necessary, in order for the movement to maintain consensus among its members and to keep them mobilized.

What is integral to the construction of collective action frames is how “purposive ideological symbols of social movements interact with broader social mentalities and political cultures” (Tarrow 1992 p. 187). In this way, leaders create frames and utilize a multiple-frame strategy to link their own social movement to the broader culture. The purpose of frames is to make not only the potential and real members, but also the opponents, of the movement aware of its goals. “[I]deology serves as an economizing device with which leaders signal a movement’s goals to their adversaries, make a complex universe comprehensible to ordinary people, communicate messages among leaders, supporters, and outsiders, and provide movements with the solidarity that enables them to maintain themselves and expand their influence in the face of repression, cooptation, or indifference” (Tarrow 1992 p. 187).
Snow and Benford (1988) outline the three components of belief systems and their relation to the construction of frames. First is the centrality of the beliefs supported by the frame compared to those of the larger belief system of the culture or society. In other words, if the frame advocates beliefs that are hierarchically less prominent than those in the larger society, creating consensus is more difficult. The second component concerns the range of the central ideas composed within the frame and their relevance to the lives of the individuals who could be potential activists, and the third characterizes the degree to which the various ideas within the frame are interrelated. What movement activists can do to gain acceptance for their frames, or popularize their frames, is expand the ideas included in the frame to encompass ideas that may not have seemed that important to the activists, themselves, but have presented themselves as important to recruits. It is important for frames to change and expand and for current leaders and activists to refrain from creating strict and limited boundaries around their frames (Snow and Benford 1988 pp. 205-206).

In discussing the public narration involved in social movements, Gary Fine (1995 pp. 128-130) points out that a social movement is like a “bundle of narratives” and compares the interaction between actors in a movement and (potential) actors to a play, or “staging area.” According to Fine, both the speaker and the audience members who are engaging in this interaction or stage program have certain roles and expectations to fulfill. As Fine points out, the texts depend on the particular audience and its culture, and on the interaction between the speaker and potential recruits. The speaker must recognize that each audience should be treated uniquely and must identify the best way to gain support from or legitimization by a particular audience, using various frames.

Public opinion and the popular culture serve as the building blocks of movement frames. Movement leaders must be able to effectively and successfully sample applicable symbols from
the political culture for use in their frame development, in order to promote collective identity (Tarrow 1992 p. 177). In this way, although movement leaders may use those symbols in ways that oppose or question the dominant political culture, those predominant symbols from politics aid in the construction of influential frames that seek to compete in the power struggle in contemporary politics. Fine (1995 p. 130) defines the activated context as the requirement that the rhetoric used by a social movement leader be congruent with the contemporary morals of the society, or culture, that comprise the audience. In this way, legitimization depends on whether or not the presented text or frame is in alignment with public expectations or norms.

Steps in the framing process

According to Marullo, Pagnucco, and Smith (1996), frames have three components. The first is diagnosis, the stage in which a leader or activist identifies some social problem or political issue that needs to be addressed so that positive action can be taken to remedy the situation and identifies the origin of the cause. The prognosis is the next component, in which strategies and institutions, or individuals, which will be targeted are outlined. The third stage is frame resonance, in which the leader or activist determines the best way to gain support for the issue or problem in order to mobilize those advocates (Marullo et al. 1996 p. 2). The first two stages emphasize the importance of a common understanding that needs to be established among activists and potential supporters. The last stage highlights the necessity of mobilizing supporters into action once a common consensus has been determined among them (Snow and Benford 1988 p. 199). In his comparison of the frames used by both the Woman's Christian Temperance Union and the Anti-Saloon League, Brian Donovan (1995 p. 153) asserts that the prognostic or strategic stage deserves a prominent emphasis in the analysis.

Although action is what causes change, Klandermans and Goslinga (1996 p. 328) emphasize that “participation in collective action depends on the extent to which an individual
adheres to a collective action frame.” This is where the role of the leader in effecting social movement change becomes most important. Without a change or reorganization of individuals’ beliefs in a way that makes them understand the social problem or issue in a manner complementary to the movement’s frame(s), mobilization towards action is less likely to occur.

Leaders’ manipulation of frames through frame alignment processes

Snow et al. (1986) also discuss four types of frame alignment processes: frame bridging, frame amplification, frame extension, and frame transformation. Some of these are useful in understanding the linking of frames that occurs within the movement, between two or more organizations, and with potential recruits/audience members. Two of them—frame bridging and frame extension—are relevant to my analysis. The first, frame bridging, refers to “the linkage of two or more ideologically congruent but structurally unconnected frames regarding a particular issue or problem” (Snow et al. p. 467). Frame extension occurs when a social movement “may have to extend the boundaries of its primary framework so as to encompass interests or points of view that are incidental to its primary objectives but of considerable salience to potential adherents” (Snow et al. 1986 p. 472).

The fluidity of the framing process

In contrast to the prevalence of master frames in social movement literature (Snow and Benford 1992), Gamson and Meyer (1996) disagree that we can identify and define one overall master frame for each social movement. SMOs are too unique to allow such a simplification of frames. “A movement is a field of actors, not a unified entity. Convenience of language tends us to treat it as a single actor when distinctions are unnecessary.” According to Gamson and Meyer, leaders, organizers, and activists are what make SMOs unique and difficult to classify by master frames. Gamson and Meyer contend that it is a rare occurrence to find “unified and consensual frames within a movement,” making identification of a master frame difficult and contrary to the
reality of what is actually happening to the leaders and activists (Gamson and Meyer 1996 p. 283).

According to Clemens (1996), organizational models may be categorized as appropriate for a particular group, or in this case, a particular audience. She further explains that “[c]ombinations of models within categories are likely to provoke little resistance, but at the same time offer little potential for institutional change. Combinations across oppositional categories—such as male and female—will meet with resistance, perhaps repression” (Clemens 1996 p. 208).

Another question arises as to the role/existence of conflict within a single branch of a social movement—among the activists, among the constituents, and/or between the activists and constituents. In her analysis of the U.S. labor movement, Sarah Babb (1996) posits that “a social movement could have two separate frames operating simultaneously—the official one endorsed by its leaders and the unofficial one that is more attractive to constituents. The discrepancy between these two frames could eventually lead to conflict within a social movement when leaders fail to use tactics or pursue ends that are important to constituents, or when leaders disapprove of constituents’ behavior” (Babb 1996 p. 1046). Similarly, Zald (1996) posits that both “different movement organizations and segments of a movement engage in an intramovement contest over tactics and goals. This intramovement process leads to changes in the dominant frames of a movement and a succession in [movement organization] power and influence” (Zald 1996 p. 270). Conflicting frames may be an effective tool in mobilizing broad and diverse audiences into action/activism to bring about the same, common end (Marullo et al. 1996 p. 3).

Using the concept of frame alignment to organize my analysis, I identify, code, and synthesize the multiple frames that Margaret Sanger used in her public communications, including speeches, articles, and pamphlets. I determine the multiple frames and their
combinations that were central to her role as an influential social movement leader in several leading birth control organizations that were part of the American birth control movement. I also trace the development of frames that Margaret Sanger used over time by treating the creation and manipulation of frames as a fluid process.
CHAPTER 3

THE RISE OF THE AMERICAN BIRTH CONTROL MOVEMENT
AND THE ROLE OF MARGARET SANGER

The American birth control movement must be understood as a part of the rise of bohemianism and the sexual revolution, which were occurring during the early part of this century. According to Linda Gordon, feminism and sex liberation theory have developed as issues within the class struggle of many revolutions (the French Revolution, the European Revolutions of 1848, and the Russian Revolution). But the sexual revolution that occurred in the United States was “attacking the family system that was a material prop of capitalism” (Gordon 1990 p. 199). What made this revolution so integral to the history of America was the fear of moral decline. Part of this was linked to women’s change in attitudes and behavior regarding the expression of their newfound freedom within the institutions of labor, medicine/health, the family, and daily culture.

Margaret Sanger coined the term “birth control” in 1915 during the early part of the movement in the United States when it was led by feminists and socialists. Until 1914 Sanger identified herself with the Socialist Party and was an active member writing for the New York Call (a Socialist paper), organizing for the Women’s Commission of the Socialist Party and acting as secretary for the Harlem Socialist Suffrage Society. Two of her most notorious pamphlets—“What Every Mother Should Know” and “What Every Girl Should Know”—were
originally published in the *Call*. It was these pamphlets that began Margaret Sanger’s fight against the U.S. government for the repeal of what she recognized as the unreasonable and dated Comstock law. Anthony Comstock, as head of the Society for the Suppression of Vice, championed the passing of a group of statutes in 1873 which were supposed to “protect sexual purity, and allegedly, to suppress quack medical advertisers” (Kennedy 1970 p. 23). These laws, passed by Congress, prohibited the mailing, transporting, or importing of “obscene, lewd, or lascivious” articles and specified that material that mentioned the prevention of conception fell under these categories (Kennedy 1970 p. 24).

Because of the two pamphlets’ frank discussion of venereal disease, the Post Office declared issues of the *Call* unmaillable in 1914. Ironically, the two pamphlets were reprinted and distributed by the U.S. government to troops during World War I (Gordon 1990 pp. 213-214). Also in 1914 after Sanger had exiled herself in Europe, her husband, William Sanger, was arrested for distributing another of her pamphlets “Family Limitation.” He chose a jail sentence of 30 days rather than pay a $150 fine.

While Margaret Sanger was in Europe, other birth controllers were attempting to publicize the issue across the country. Emma Goldman went on a national speaking tour to primarily radical audiences. The National Birth Control League was established with Mary Ware Dennett as the director. Sanger was opposed to the League’s tactics and to its organizational goal to amend state and federal laws that considered birth control obscene (Kennedy 1970 p. 76). Margaret Sanger herself traveled across the country, starting in the spring of 1916, giving motivational lectures similar to Goldman’s earlier ones. She too spoke to mainly radical audiences. But her strategy and style was very different from those birth control speakers who had come before her. “Her forensic technique was not to harass and harangue, in the manner to which her radical auditors were accustomed.” She detailed her experiences as a nurse with poor
and working class women who had no hope, she encouraged a more liberal set of morals that would promote the dissemination of sexual knowledge, she called for the right of women to choose motherhood and children, and she emphasized the need for a solution to social problems other than charity (Kennedy 1970 p. 81).

Because of her need to control what she felt she had started, Margaret Sanger made it her mission to rise to the forefront of the American birth control movement in the last years of the nineteen tens. In October 1916 she opened a birth control clinic with her sister who was a nurse, and another woman in Brownsville, Brooklyn. In that same year, she published the first issue of the Birth Control Review with Frederick Blossom, former head of the Cleveland Associated Charities. Along with Frederick Blossom and other supporters, she founded the New York Birth Control League in December 1916. The league had a three-part goal: "to help Margaret Sanger in her legal fight; to amend the state and federal laws to allow physicians to give scientific instruction in birth control; and to advocate birth control as a means of protecting maternal and infant health and promoting the social welfare" (Kennedy 1970 p. 90).

It was during the 1920s and 1930s that Sanger's establishment of various birth control organizations really grew. In 1921 she founded the American Birth Control League, which became her national organization, and planned her second clinic for the purpose of studying contraception with patients as research subjects. The clinic saw 1,655 patients in 1925 with an average of three visits. In 1925, in order to please the eugenicists with whom she had allied herself, Sanger modified the format of the clinical records to include background information on the nationality, heredity, religion, occupation, and trade-union affiliation of the clinic patients. What is interesting about the ABCL is that it would only give birth control information to women who were members of the league. In order to abide by the Comstock laws, the information the league gave was limited to where women could obtain an examination by a physician, who could
then provide them with instruction of methods and prescription for birth control. By 1930 the legalization of birth control had truly become a national issue, as there were 55 clinics in 23 cities and 12 states. Because of differences of opinion and strategy, in 1928 Sanger withdrew her clinic from the ABCL and left in 1929 after she had lost control of the league and the *Birth Control Review*. That same year she established the National Committee for the Federal Legislation of Birth Control, which became her prominent tool for lobbying with the federal government.

The schism between the competing organizations of the American birth control movement can be traced to each group’s identification of the best way to frame the amendment of the law and the most efficient strategy to achieve the change in law. “The difference between Sanger and Dennett began in 1916, when Dennett criticized Sanger’s strategy of flamboyant lawbreaking and argued that a more effective and ethically defensible tactic would be to lobby for amendment of state and national Comstock laws” (Reed 1995 p. 32). Although it is true that Sanger was critical of Dennett and the National BCL because their focus was solely legislative (Kennedy 1970 p. 90), it is ironic that her NYBCL specified legislative amendment as one of its organizational goals.

The great difference in their definition of the problem, which led to each leader’s particular frame development, originated in each group’s emphasis on different sections of the law regarding the practice of birth control. Section 1142 of the New York Penal Code made it a misdemeanor to distribute (regardless of whether or not you received money for the transaction) “any recipe, drug or medicine for the prevention of conception.” Section 1145 made the transaction legal if the one distributing or prescribing the treatment was a physician and if the reason for the prescription or advice was to cure or prevent disease (Kennedy 1970 p. 84). Mary Ware Dennett and the National BCL promoted the removal of the clause “for the prevention of conception” from the list of illegal methods specified in Sections 1142 and 1145. Margaret
Sanger and the NYBCL chose to support the right of physicians to prescribe birth control as long as the phrase "for the cure and prevention of disease" was eliminated from Section 1145. Without this phrase, women would be able to receive birth control in order to prevent not only the spread of disease but, more importantly, pregnancy.

In 1938 Margaret Sanger designed and conducted a test case to draw attention to the participation of customs officials, who were more rigid than the post office in the prohibition of the dissemination of birth control information. Sanger arranged to have a package of diaphragms sent to a doctor at her New York Clinical Research Bureau from Japan. As she was hoping and expecting, customs confiscated the package. When the case went to trial, a Supreme Court Judge proclaimed birth control federally legal and admitted that birth control was not obscene, but was rather a medical tool. The judge based his claim on the opinion that "at the time of the passage of the Comstock law, information on contraception was poor, and that Congress would not have considered contraception immoral had it understood all the facts" (Gordon 1990 p. 321). It was not until the early 1940s that birth control was declared legal at the state level.
CHAPTER 4

METHODS

This analysis is based on the speeches and writings of Margaret Sanger. The documents used in my analysis were obtained from one section of a microfilm collection at the Library of Congress entitled The Papers of Margaret Sanger. It is a set of 145 microfilm reels divided into subsections. These are arranged into collections of Margaret Sanger’s diaries, personal correspondence, general correspondence, conference files, the speeches and writings file, and professional files (organizational files from the American Birth Control League, the Birth Control Clinical Research Bureau, the National Committee on Federal Legislation for Birth Control, the Birth Control Federation of America, the Margaret Sanger Research Bureau, and the Planned Parenthood Federation of America). The time span of the collection covers the period 1900 to 1966, although the material is concentrated on the period 1928 to 1940.

The Speeches and Writings File, from which my data is collected, spans the years 1912-1960, although it too is concentrated on the period from the late 1920s through the 1930s. It contains only documents written by Margaret Sanger, including: handwritten drafts, typewritten drafts, and also a few reprinted copies from newspapers or magazines of editorials, speeches, lectures, and pamphlets. Although I am including some unpublished and unidentified material that was clearly a speech or article, I am not including documents that are undated because I cannot be sure whether they were written during the period that I have defined for my sample. I
have also decided not to use the notes or correspondence related to these pieces, as they are not as important as the final copy. I limit my selection of documents to the period of 1912 to 1938. I stop at 1938 because birth control was federally legalized in 1938 and there would not be much need to frame arguments for its legalization after that.

I primarily use techniques of historical analysis to examine the archival sources that serve as my data. In coding the data, I rely on central tenets of framing theory in the social movement literature. Within each piece of evidence, I looked for language used as an argument, which linked it to a particular frame. From the analysis, I inductively derive the different frames or different variations of particular frames, which Margaret Sanger used when she was speaking in public or preparing an article or pamphlet to convince the public to support legalized birth control.
CHAPTER 5

THE EVOLUTION OF FRAMES AND MARGARET SANGER’S USE OF A MULTIPLE-FRAME STRATEGY

The six frames which I have identified as comprising Sanger’s multiple-frame strategy are democratic, eugenic, alleviation of social problems, maternalist, enhancement of marriage and parenthood, and feminist. Each piece was coded as representing not only one frame, rather each piece could contain as many frames as were incorporated into the overall argument.

Frames as Individual Units

Democratic Frame

What distinguishes the democratic frame from the feminist frame is its emphasis on the importance of the availability of birth control to both men and women. Also, Margaret Sanger frames the movement to legalize birth control as every American’s duty to the country. Referring to the men and women who are ignorant of the methods of birth control and legally denied the right to obtain it, Sanger attempts to mobilize with these words: “We must disentangle their lives. We must release them from ignorance and fear. We must free them from tyrannical laws. We must direct our own efforts and our own energies into settling questions that we know

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so well and in order to enlarge and explore the sphere of the unknown, the sphere of real life.”¹

In this way, Sanger argues that it is our democratic duty to free those who do not have knowledge of birth control from the consequences that result from ignorance. What is important about this speech is that it was given as an address to the American Woman’s Association, which was a women’s organization concerned with social action and philanthropic activities. The dinner at which Sanger delivered this address was given in her honor and conferred upon her some kind of medal for her accomplishments as an activist in the birth control movement.

Similarly, in another speech, Margaret Sanger received some kind of honor or award [the details are not included on or near the document in the collection] and gave a speech in which she repeatedly highlights the importance of birth control as a basic freedom that we all deserve. “Freedom—that word which has been ringing down the ages, chased from place to place, from country to country, round and round the globe. Freedom—so difficult to get, but far more difficult to hold. Freedom for the individual, but also for the human family—the Community. Thus in fighting for this spiritual quality we link our own personal efforts with the great aim of fulfilling human destiny and thereby broaden our own lives and enrich our own experience.”²

Not only is the right to birth control a human freedom, but it is a liberty which is an integral part of what our country was founded upon, as described in the Declaration of Independence. “[Birth control] is immediate and practical because it can be taught—indeed it is already taught—to the individuals involved without prohibiting their enjoyment of life, without interrupting ‘life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.’”³ In fact, it can also be argued that birth control can increase our experience of “life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.” It seems that what Sanger is attempting

¹ Address by Margaret Sanger: Testimonial Dinner at the A.W.A Clubhouse, New York City on April 20, 1932.
² Address by Margaret Sanger: Town Hall (?) on January 15, 1937.
³ Address or article? By Margaret Sanger dated April 25, 1928.
to accentuate here is that birth control would not interfere with individuals’ appreciation of other lifelong pursuits, aspirations, or rights.

Not only did Margaret Sanger advocate birth control as a right that American citizens should demand, but she also argued that use of birth control is a patriotic duty, which individuals should practice as upstanding citizens of the United States.

“In [the] U.S.A. we want healthy vigorous manhood and womanhood. We want men and women who can physically and mentally hold their own in the battle of life with any other nation. In order to build up the health of the Nation we must begin to cut down vigorously on the birth rate of the unfit. The Government should ask that no couples marry without health certificates.”

In this way, we can see that Sanger envisioned very stringent prescriptions for the alleviation of the population problem or “race suicide” that the United States was experiencing. She makes quite a strong recommendation that birth control should be viewed as a practice that we owe to our country because of the consequences that affect our country’s well-being in its absence.

A similar argument is echoed in another speech that Sanger delivered at a birth control conference when she emphasized that all American citizens are affected by the lack of control that certain segments of society have over their family size. “I do maintain as a citizen that they have no right to bring children into the world for me to maintain and take care of. There is where I have a right to object and I also claim that while there is no law against any individual having as many children as the individual desires they have no right to keep us from having laws in which we have the same right not to have more children than we desire to have.”

From this example of Sanger’s justification for legalized birth control, it is obvious that she sees the uncontrolled fertility of certain ethnic and class segments of society as a burden on her, as impinging on her rights as a fellow citizen. Sanger framed the problem of a lack of birth control as encroaching

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4 Outline of Address by Margaret Sanger at the Kiwanis Club (in Beacon?) in 1928.
upon not only the rights of the individual, but also the rights of other citizens who must pay taxes to support the various social welfare agencies/projects. In addition to the increase in immigration that was occurring during this time, many Americans were also concerned with the physical health of the American population, especially after World War I. In this way, the rhetoric that the usage of birth control was a patriotic duty is closely tied to the eugenic argument because many Americans were uneasy not only about the increasing numbers of our population, but also the declining quality of that same population.

In the same way, Sanger saw that democracy was being threatened by the very freedom of the right to vote. Sanger, more severely than in other debates, contended that the universal right to vote by all American adult citizens—which had so recently been a right that she herself, as a woman, did not have—could be detrimental to the progress of America. “Is America, then safe for democracy? In this country, the feebleminded, if they are twenty-one years of age, have the power to vote and their vote is just as good as that of the fifteen percent who are intellectuals. Isn’t it time to do something about this?” 6 It seems contradictory that in one place, Sanger would herald birth control as a freedom that American citizens deserve, and in another would posit that those same individuals, who should not be denied freedom to control their personal life, do not deserve the privilege of voting.

*Eugenic Frame—including “Population Problem” and “Progress of Civilization” Rhetoric*

Margaret Sanger’s alliance with the eugenics movement and with medical physicians was a strategy to gain support from “experts,” largely men, and the only way that she perceived the birth control movement would receive acceptance from the general public. 7 It seems that Margaret

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5 Untitled Speech delivered by Margaret Sanger at the Birth Control Conference on February 27, 1929.
6 Untitled Speech by Margaret Sanger dated February 19, 1932.
Sanger’s use of the eugenic frame was a strategy to gain support from male-dominated institutions—medicine and academia, particularly science. But she not only used frames that were appropriate for just one category, or audience, she also combined frames that were directed at winning support from opposing groups.

Using the strategy of frame extension, Margaret Sanger worked under the assumption that public opinion would be swayed if doctors and eugenicists were able to give credibility to the movement using their status in society as “experts.” “Stopes [the leader of the British birth control movement] and Sanger fit comfortably then into the pattern of dominant and muted groups. In order to make their ideas known they had to articulate them in a form acceptable to the men of their class. They therefore retained the basic social classification system and manipulated it, without violating it” (Bacchi 1988 p. 47). Both women realized that they could not achieve success alone. Margaret Sanger was criticized by contemporaries and even colleagues within the birth control movement because she advocated “doctors only” legislation. Mary Ware Dennett—the leader of the Voluntary Parenthood League—was one of Sanger’s strongest critics and “called for a clean repeal of all prohibitions on contraception” (Reed 1995 p. 32). Most critics condemned Sanger for relinquishing control of the movement to the medical profession, which was dominated by men.

As Margaret Sanger sought to ally the birth control movement with the eugenics movement by means of her own organizations, she took advantage of the fear of “race suicide” that had become prevalent first in scientific, political, and international opinion and then, in popular opinion. “The Population question is one which today is attracting the attention of the entire scientific world. It is bound to become of International importance because of the growing entanglements of questions of most enlightened statesmen and scientists that population must be
controlled.” Although her language was not always as strong as it was in some pieces, particularly addresses or speeches that she gave at conferences, most of her writing mentions the decreasing birth rate of the upper, educated classes and the increasing birth rate of the uneducated poor and working classes. What permeates her rhetoric on this subject is her emphasis on the declining quality of the race that was occurring as a consequence of these differential birth rates. It is not clear whether she means race as we understand it today, or if what she really means is the differential birth rates of the varied social classes or the numerous ethnicities in the United States.

The population problem was one that Margaret Sanger admits was defined differently by varied experts. Although the Malthusians defined it one way, Sanger herself provides her own definition of the problem, and their opponents have a distinct understanding of the causes of overpopulation. “Opponents of the Malthusian thesis may be right in their contention that the world is physically able to support a far greater population than at present lives upon it. But any such rapid increase of population would be maintained only by lowering the standard of living both physically and spiritually.” What Sanger alleges is that there is an important distinction made between overpopulation in numbers and the declining quality of the population, which she maintained was happening throughout the world, most importantly in the United States.

What stands out in Margaret Sanger’s speeches and articles is the racist, ethnocentric, and classist language that she employed in her public rhetoric. Regardless of whether or not Sanger really believed what she preached, she borrowed her eugenic argument from the eugenics movement, which had found support in the American public because of its advocacy by physicians and scientists. “It is not only inevitable, but it is right to control the size of the family

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7 Outline of Address by Margaret Sanger at the Kiwanis Club (in Beacon?) in 1928.
8 Article/Speech? By Margaret Sanger dated April 25, 1928 and entitled “The Need for Birth Control.”
for by this control and adjustment we can raise the level and the standards of the human race."9
In this case, Sanger sees birth control as improving the entire human race, not only the individuals who comprise the American population. She also implies that it is natural and right for human beings to control their own destiny.

Margaret Sanger also jumped on the bandwagon of public opinion, which stated that the United States was being overrun by immigrants. At the same time, she contrasted the laws governing entry into the United States by immigrants who sought to become American citizens, with the lack of laws governing the entry of "lower quality" native-born Americans into citizenship.

"While the United States shuts her gates to foreigners, and is less hospitable than other countries in welcoming visitors to this land, no attempt whatever is made to discourage the rapid multiplication of undesirable aliens—and natives—within our own borders. On the contrary: the Government of the United States deliberately encourages and even makes necessary by its laws the breeding—with breakneck rapidity—of idiots, defectives, diseased, feeble-minded and criminal classes."10

From this assertion, we can see the powerful, yet brutal, terms Sanger used to describe those elements of society whose fertility was uncontrolled. Implied in this also seems to be the assumption that birth control is the only way to control those segments of society.

Sanger could be quite blunt in her discussion of the quality of the population. "Any intelligent analyst must admit that today there are too many of the wrong kind of people in our world, and too few of the right kind. Even the most compassionate and least snobbish of observers must admit the truth of this fact."11 Here it seems likely that she was using an argument that her audience would understand and voicing concerns to which they would relate. In

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9 Address by Margaret Sanger delivered at the Park Theatre on November 18, 1921 entitled "The Morality of Birth Control."
10 Address of Welcome at the Sixth International Neo-Malthusian and Birth Control Conference by Margaret Sanger on March 25, 1925.
describing the different groups of which society is comprised, Sanger classifies three categories.

The first is:

“[t]hose intelligent and wealthy members of the upper classes who have obtained the knowledge of Birth Control and exercise it in regulating the size of their families... The second group is equally intelligent and responsible. They desire to control the size of their families, but are unable to obtain knowledge or to put such available knowledge into practice... The third are those irresponsible and reckless ones having little regard for the consequences of their acts, or whose religious scruples prevent their exercising control over their numbers. Many of this group are diseased, feeble-minded, and are of the pauper element dependent entirely upon the normal and fit members of society for their support.”12

This quote exemplifies her prejudice and judgment as one of the “intellectuals” of society who had access to birth control but who did not need it as much as the “irresponsible” segments of society. As much as Sanger believed that every individual has the right to control the number of children in their family, her assertions also imply that she believed that the more responsible, intelligent members of society should control the fertility of the “less desirable” citizens, through accessibility of birth control. It was also a necessary duty that these more responsible and intelligent citizens carry on the tradition of the best and “most fit” characteristics of the race.

After the federal law was passed making birth control legal, Sanger posited that “It makes possible the creation of a new race; a new generation brought into this world consciously conceived. It makes possible the breeding out of human weeds—the defective and criminal classes—the breeding in of the clean, strong and fit as instruments to carry on the torch of human destiny.”13 Her analogy comparing the less intelligent and poorer individuals of society to weeds is insensitive, but makes her point that birth control is necessary to the progression and improvement of humanity. In order to mobilize her audience, the speech is meant to inspire her

11 Speech by Margaret Sanger given on April 25, 1928 entitled “The Need for Birth Control.”
12 Address by Margaret Sanger delivered at the Park Theatre on November 18, 1921 entitled “The Morality of Birth Control.”
listeners and to convince them that perfection is possible. “Let us who desire to live richly—dangerously—dedicate ourselves to these great aims—the Enlightenment and Enrichment of Life in the deepest as well as the broadest sense of these words, in consecrated service to the fulfillment of the realization and perfection of the Human Race.”

In this excerpt, the goal that Sanger outlines is not so much the prevention of “race suicide” in the United States, but more broadly and more importantly, the improvement of the whole human race.

Sanger also implies that it is an unarguable fact that the poorer and less intelligent members of society cannot be helped—that all they can be is controlled, by birth control. “Time after time it has been demonstrated in all the countries of Western civilization, that as we descend the social scale the birth-rate increases. Dependent, delinquent, and defective all tend to become more prolific than the average normal and self-dependent stratum of society.”

Not only does Margaret Sanger give the impression that it is inevitable and must be expected that certain segments of society will have a higher birth rate than other segments, she also seems to have little hope that the situation can be remedied by anything other than birth control. She also uses a vague definition of “normal” which does not include those classes of society who have higher birth rates. It is not clear what she means by normal but she sets it in opposition to “dependent, delinquent, and defective” individuals.

According to Margaret Sanger, birth control was complementary to the accomplishment of social darwinist goals—or the idea that only the strongest and most fit survive and procreate. Just as nature selects out the unfit, so too can civilization by the means of birth control. “Our History supports the fact that populations have been held in check in the past by disease, famines,

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13 Untitled speech at the Town Hall on January 15, 1937.
14 Untitled speech delivered by Margaret Sanger at the Town Hall on January 15, 1937.
floods, and wars. Here we see that Nature was the most ardent advocate of birth control. She thrust to the wall mercilessly all those sickly, diseased or feeble individuals who could not compete in the struggle for their existence. In this way she perfected and strengthened her type.” 16 Although Sanger’s argument is clear, that we need to select out as nature has—through the widespread use of birth control—it is not apparent why Nature can no longer be trusted to do the same. One explanation is given in another speech. “[W]e no longer control the population through nature’s method of increased death rates. Civilization has progressed beyond that. With the advance of Christianity; with the organization of Charity and development of Humanitarianism, we have thrust aside the hand of nature, we have interfered with nature’s methods, we will not allow these methods to operate.” 17 In another article, Sanger expounds on this explanation of the need for legalized birth control. “We have attained high standards of life, and along the lines of science we conduct such control. We must begin farther back and control the beginnings of life. We must control conception. This is a better method, it is a more civilized method, for it involves not only greater forethought for others, but finally a higher sanction for the value of life itself.” 18 Again, Sanger affirms that because Nature no longer controls for the quality of life that continues to populate, the more fit and responsible elements of society must see to it that civilization continues on in a positive manner. The common theme that runs through both statements is the fact that we as human beings, and more specifically intelligent human beings, must control the quality and quantity of population growth in order for society to progress.

16 Outline of Address by Margaret Sanger at Kiwanis Club (in Beacon?) in July 1928.
17 Untitled address by Margaret Sanger on February 19, 1932.
18 Address delivered by Margaret Sanger at the Park Theatre on November 18, 1921 entitled “The Morality of Birth Control.”
One of the other important ways that Margaret Sanger framed the issue of birth control was her argument that it was necessary to the improvement of civilization. Birth control was also used by civilized people who were concerned for the continuation of the race and who took responsibility for seeing it advance appropriately. In many of her speeches she refers to the “important place the idea of birth control is taking in the social programme of all civilized peoples.”\textsuperscript{19} In this assertion, she is also advocating that birth control fall under the umbrella of social programs and that social policy should be instituted regarding its necessity. Along with the idea that women were creating a new race through responsible control of fertility, was Sanger’s argument that birth control would create a new generation, or a new civilization.

\textit{Alleviation of Social Problems Frame}

According to Sanger, “civilization is confronted with two problems, that of the pressure of population upon the food supply and humanitarian efforts with race improvements.” She reminded her audience of the “tremendous amount that is spent on social welfare, on humanitarian efforts, and so far all of this has not meant a racial improvement, and to me birth control is the key to both of these problems.”\textsuperscript{20} Here Sanger contends that birth control is the solution to the world’s biggest problems. At least we know that she has faith in the methods that she advocates. We also can see how she defines the population problem, as one that is concerned with the complementary consequences of overpopulation in sheer numbers and the declining quality of the population.

Regarding the problems that our own country was facing at the time, Sanger defined different and distinct national social problems that birth control could mitigate. “Billions of

\textsuperscript{19} President’s Opening Address given by Margaret Sanger at the International Conference in Zurich on September 15, 1930.
dollars are expended by our state and federal governments and by private charities and philanthropies for the care, the maintenance, and the perpetuation of these [idiots, defectives, diseased, feeble-minded and criminal] classes...More than one quarter of the total incomes of our States is spent upon the maintenance of asylums, prisons, and other institutions for the care of the defective, the diseased and the delinquent." 21 Here Sanger blames the increasing and uncontrollable growth of undesirable segments of the population for the greatest problems facing the nation during the inter-war period. By bringing an economic argument into the discussion, she was hoping to persuade her audience that although this seemed like an uncontrollable problem, it could be checked with the accessibility of birth control. In addition, Sanger distinctly links a social problem with the unavailability of birth control. Referring to the poor of society, she affirms that “Here we find that poverty and lack of birth control go hand in hand...It is in this group that we have almost all the great social problems of the day. You have slums, overcrowding, high maternal and infant mortality, child labor, illegitimacy, illiteracy. Many in this group are not only unemployed but unemployable.” 22 Again, Sanger defines the unavailability of birth control as a social problem and also highlights the fact that the responsible members of society must become accountable for the irresponsible citizens.

Possibly giving access to birth control more credit than it deserves Margaret Sanger proposed that control over fertility would assuage even those seemingly unfixable problems, which could not be lessened by charity or philanthropic work. “The first great need of modern society is the encouragement of Birth Control education among potential parents of those poorer strata of society where poverty is correlated with disease, poor health, and physical or mental

20 Speech by Margaret Sanger at the Birth Control Conference on February 25, 1929.
21 Address of Welcome delivered by Margaret Sanger at unidentified conference on March 25, 1925.
22 Untitled speech given by Margaret Sanger at unidentified meeting/conference on February 19, 1932.
defect.”23 Related to the concern for the progress of civilization is the declaration in this statement that birth control is the panacea that modern society needs as it embarks on a new, and changing, era. Similarly, birth control would allow this new era to proceed and shed the problems that had plagued it in the past. “[W]e would be lightening the economic and social burden now hindering the progress and increase of the fit, and would be taking the first sensible step toward the solution of one of the most menacing problems of the American democracy. It is not too late to begin.”24 Sanger avowed that lack of birth control has economic and social consequences and is holding back the very people who have the power and responsibility to control the progress of modern society.

With regards to the problems the nation was facing, Sanger maintained that women bore most of the brunt of these problems. “Woman is bearing the result of her ignorance of Birth Control. She is bearing it in the fact of poverty, in the fact of unemployment, in the fact of emigration, in the fact of maternal and infantile mortality.”25 Not only did this assertion point out the reality of the consequences of birth control for the mothers who could not limit their family size, although they desired to, but it was also meant to arouse compassion for the countless women who suffered economically, socially, physically, and sometimes fatally from the lack of birth control.

*Maternalisi Frame*

Margaret Sanger saw herself as the spokesperson for the victims of uncontrolled fertility. Having worked as a nurse in the slums of New York City, she was begged numerous times by women who did not have the knowledge of, or access to, birth control. Once she became an

23 Speech given by Margaret Sanger on April 25, 1928 entitled “The Need for Birth Control.”
24 Address of Welcome delivered by Margaret Sanger to unidentified conference on March 25, 1925.
activist in the birth control movement, she also received hundreds of letters (some that she published in order to bring attention to the problem and to arouse sympathy for its solution).

Regarding these women for whom she fought. Sanger wrote “The suffering, the mental agony, the damaged bodies, the needless sacrifice of women’s lives aroused my determination to ‘speak out’ for these mute mothers, too inarticulate to speak for themselves.”26 Similarly, Sanger wanted to publicize the suffering that less fortunate mothers were experiencing. “The mothers of the poor, particularly the mothers in the millions of families on relief are the forgotten women.”27 Sanger emphasized that she had not forgotten, and that others should not forget also.

Since women have always been entrusted with the primary care of children and the primary task of raising good citizens for the nations of the world, Margaret Sanger broadened the scope that birth control would reach through motherhood. “[T]he intelligent mother cannot and will not confine her attention and interest merely to her own home. It is to her interest that all the children of the families of her community, and country be endowed with the birthright of health and happiness.”28 The improvement of the institution of motherhood would be universal, and would allow women to see each other as common protectors of children and creators of this new civilization called modern society. “But on the basis of the eternal dignity of motherhood, in the interests of the children, you will find that there is a strong bond between all mothers...Is it not possible that out of this spirit of cooperative motherhood, there may grow up a great power among women which can so be organized as to prevent the repetition of all the menaces to the next generation?”29 It seems that Sanger was trying to mobilize mothers by encouraging them to

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25 Article/speech written by Margaret Sanger while in Queens County Penitentiary, 1917.
26 Speech given by Margaret Sanger at the Town Hall (?) on January 15, 1937.
27 Radio Talk by Margaret Sanger at Station W.A.B.C. in New York on April 11, 1935, entitled “Family Planning.”
28 Article published (in Physical Culture?) by Margaret Sanger entitled “Mobilizing for Motherhood,” published January 5, 1921.
29 Ibid.
see each other as fellow victims (across culture, class, religion, and race) because of a lack of control over their own bodies. At the same time, she emphasizes that birth control is not only a selfish need—because mothers are not supposed to be selfish—but also one which will serve to change the problems of the present generation and ensure a better future for their children, and grandchildren, and so on.

What is interesting about Sanger’s rhetoric surrounding motherhood is that although she at times advocated its legalization as part of a feminist freedom for all women, in reality she believed that birth control should only be used within the institution of marriage. “We claim that every mother in this country, either sick or well, has the right to the best, the safest, the most scientific information. This information should be disseminated directly to the mothers through clinics by members of the medical profession, registered nurses and registered midwives.”

Sanger envisioned birth control as a way for women to become better mothers. Birth control was seen as a way of improving the institution of motherhood and adding to the positive influence that a mother has over her children. “[Y]ou can never tell me that motherhood is beautiful for the woman who has nine or ten children, one every year. That woman is anxious and troubled and she cannot have great joy in motherhood and motherhood becomes a horror to millions of women...[A]bout 98% say the reason they want information to control conception is because of the love they have for their children, to love their children and to bring them up decently.”

What is interesting in all the discussion of motherhood is the underlying but unspoken assumption that all women want to be, and should be, mothers.

While birth control is seen as allowing women the freedom to be the best mother they can be to the desired number of children they choose to have, it is also a personal right that women

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30 Address delivered by Margaret Sanger at the Park Theatre on November 18, 1921, entitled “The Morality of Birth Control.”
deserve. "The world is full of undesired babies and every undesired baby represents a terrible infringement of the personal rights of a mother."32 Even though it is usually assumed that mothers are selfless and sacrifice themselves for their children, Sanger took a more feminist viewpoint in this case, and argued that birth control was one of the few selfish rights to which mothers are entitled.

Enhancement of Parenthood and Marriage Frame

Much of Margaret Sanger’s arguments for the necessity of birth control focused on how it would enhance marriage and parenthood. Less of Sanger’s speeches and publications emphasized motherhood than I expected. Rather than highlighting how birth control would improve the role of motherhood in their own lives and the lives of their children, much of Sanger’s public writings and speeches pointed out how the use of birth control could strengthen the bonds of marriage and make both men and women better parents. “One other kind of planning, the most important of all, must not be overlooked, if a family is to have health and security, is to bring up happy children to become useful citizens.”33 While it has usually been the mother who is charged with the nurturing of the children into productive citizens of society, Sanger posited this duty as something for which both parents were considered accountable. “Parenthood, when it is responsible, can be a noble trust, a proud commission, an honored assignment.”34 In fact, Sanger takes her declaration one step further and explicitly reasoned that birth control is just as important to men as it is to women. “Every father has a right to knowledge

31 Speech by Margaret Sanger at the Birth Control Conference on February 27, 1929.
32 Speech/article? Written by Margaret Sanger while in the Queens County Penitentiary, 1917.
33 Radio Talk by Margaret Sanger at Station W.A.B.C. in New York on April 11, 1935 entitled “Family Planning.”
34 Article by Margaret Sanger entitled “Planning Your Children,” in Voice of Youth June 1936.
which will permit him to plan his family in accordance with how many children he can support.\textsuperscript{35} Unfortunately, Sanger then contradicts what she has advocated repeatedly—that mothers deserve the right to plan their families—and places the decision-making power in the hands of men.

Sanger stressed not only the delights and satisfaction of motherhood, but more broadly those of parenthood. “The joys of parenthood are joys which every married couple want to experience.”\textsuperscript{36} As with motherhood, Sanger seems to have assumed that all men and women want to get married and also want to have children. Although she confers upon them the right to demand birth control, she also expects them to fulfill their duty as parents. Sanger detailed three considerations that should be made when deciding the number and timing of children.

\textit{“First, the mother’s health.} No mother should attempt to bring a baby into the world if she is suffering from tuberculosis or a heart or kidney disease...\textit{Second, the father’s earning power.} This is a very obvious consideration, and yet millions of parents today who are on relief rolls and are unable to provide for the children already born, cannot get information about how to control the number of their children...\textit{Third, child spacing.} Even a healthy mother should space the births of her children at intervals of not less than two years, preferably three....\textit{Maternal mortality rates also show the dangers of too many pregnancies and too closely space childbirths.”}\textsuperscript{37}

The first recommendation is important for health reasons, the second for economic reasons, and the third for both health and economic reasons. In this case, it seems that Sanger’s purpose was to dispense some of her more practical advice to young families thinking about marriage and child-rearing.

Sanger assumed that not only child-rearing, but also marriage was a reasonable expectation of young men and women. “[Birth control] can be applied in three ways: First, by continence—not marrying. This however, should not be recommended because it implies the

\textsuperscript{35} Radio Talk on April 11, 1935.
\textsuperscript{36} Radio Talk April 11, 1925.
\textsuperscript{37} Radio Talk on April 11, 1935.
abandonment of the natural marriage relationship." Just as control over the size of one’s family is natural, so too is the desire to marry and procreate, according to Sanger. In the same way, remaining single/unmarried and childless is not natural.

Sanger also created strict guidelines for the planning of a family by a married couple. These recommendations were designed not only to make them better parents, but also better spouses, which was a pretty radical assertion. “While early marriage has its advantage, early parenthood is no longer considered advantageous or advisable. Consequently young people are advised to wait two years after marriage before taking up the responsibilities of parenthood. This gives them time and opportunity to get acquainted with each other and to strengthen and cement the bonds of love before taking up the complex duties of a family. A woman should be at least 22 years old and the man 25 before they become parents.”

At this time, although a sexual revolution did occur during the 1920s, marriage was most often viewed as primarily an economic contract and an institution in which to procreate. Emphasizing that a happy and stable marriage was important for the man and woman involved—not only for the children—was a break with tradition.

_Feminist Frame_

Margaret Sanger implemented the strategy of frame extension when she appealed to all women to support the birth control movement. Although her movement was not initially directed at all women, but poor and working class women who did not have access to birth control, the movement was extended to encompass a feminist cause. In this way, the “feminine spirit” was

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38 Untitled speech given at [conference on February 19, 1932.
39 Outline of Address at Kiwanis Club (in Beacon?) in July 1928.
meant to include not only mothers who wanted to limit the number of children to whom they gave birth, but also women who chose not to have any children at all.

It is important to realize that Margaret Sanger used feminist language and to understand how this rhetoric related to her other frames, particularly the maternalist frame. Although much of the maternalist rhetoric that she used to gain support for birth control is more traditional, the fact that she even mentioned but also emphasized the effect that birth control would have on both parents and the marital relationship is modern thinking for her time. In describing the history of the Comstock laws that made birth control illegal—by including it under the umbrella of obscene material—Sanger said: “The originator of these laws has long since passed from public notice but his work remains, forty years after, a living monument to ignorance and oppression seemingly to wreak out vengeance upon womankind.”

Although previously I have indicated that Sanger focused on birth control as a necessity and right of only mothers, it seems that she contradicted herself—sometimes within the same piece—and used interchangeably the terms “mother” and “woman.” For the most part, it seems safe to assume that Margaret Sanger really meant that birth control should be used only by married women—particularly those in young couples who were taking their two-year bonding period—or mothers who were spacing the births of their children, or completing their family at two or three.

At the same time, in one of her speeches, Sanger affirmed that: “We stand on the principle that Birth Control should be available to every adult man and woman... We claim that woman should have the right over her own body and to say if she shall or if she shall not be a mother, as she sees fit.”

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40 Speech/article? Written by Margaret Sanger while at the Queens County Penitentiary, 1917, entitled “Voluntary Motherhood.”
41 Address by Margaret Sanger at the Park Theatre on November 18, 1921, entitled “The Morality of Birth Control.”
contend that women should not have to bear children if they do not want to. It seems to be an implicit assumption that every woman would want to be a mother. Many birth control clinics, even by the 1930s, would only provide birth control to women who were already mothers, and most, if not all, required that you be married. What is most radical about Sanger’s assertion is the language that she uses regarding women’s right to control their own body, which later became and still is today an integral part of the rhetoric used by the abortion rights movement.

It is in the closings of Sanger’s speeches and addresses where much of the feminist influence is most apparent. Here it seems to be meant to mobilize support and encourage potential recruits that that public opinion and law could be changed. At an address of welcome at a Neo-Malthusian and Birth Control Conference, Sanger hailed the veterans of the birth control movement by saying: “[Y]ou delegates from older and wiser countries than this—you do not wear decorations or medals. But I know that all of you hide the scars of wounds won in this warfare for the emancipation of womankind.”42 Similarly, in a speech written in gratitude for a medal that was bestowed upon Margaret Sanger by the American Women’s Association, she closed with: “This medal, this award shall be the pledge to bind us together and to spur us on to the continuation of our fight for the liberation of womankind.”43 In both conclusions, Sanger described the fight for the legalization of birth control as a war, or battle, perhaps to give the movement more legitimacy as one that required conflict and which would be won only through hard work. She also characterized the millions of women, and particularly mothers, who did not have access to or knowledge of birth control as being enslaved by their ignorance—and who must be “liberated” and “emancipated” by the dedicated birth controllers.

42 Address of Welcome by Margaret Sanger at the Sixth International Neo-Malthusian and Birth Control Conference on March 25, 1925.
43 Address by Margaret Sanger, Testimonial Dinner at the A.W.A. Clubhouse on April 20, 1932.
Although I have contended that Margaret Sanger used the terms "woman" and "mother" synonymously—which assumes that all women want to be mothers—in one piece she did posit that women are equal to men, which is rhetoric that she seems to have borrowed from the women's suffrage movement.

"Only through the emancipation of woman's creative energies, the liberation of her sex force, can humanity redeem itself... mankind cannot choose the road upward to the fulfillment of its true destiny until the other half of itself—woman—is released, emancipated. Emancipated? I hear you say. Has she not the right to vote? To work? The right to engage in any activity where man goes? Yes, and she has fought for these activities and shown an equal ability in her undertakings, but I do not consider such superficial rights as sufficiently important to be called emancipation."  

This excerpt from a pamphlet is the most feminist piece of writing that I have come across in the collection of writings in my sample. Not only would it be considered feminist in our contemporary society, but it would be considered almost radically feminist for the 1930s. What distinguishes it from other pieces by Sanger, which I have defined as feminist, is the declaration that woman is the other half of "mankind" and, moreover, is equal to man and ought to be treated as such. According to Sanger, lack of control over their bodies and family size because of the prohibition of birth control does not allow women the freedom to be equal to men and places women in a position that cannot possibly be equated to men. What makes this piece unique to the rest of her public writings and speeches is Sanger's allusion to the women's movement and her charge that if women deserved the right to vote, did they not also deserve the right to limit their family size, through birth control?

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44 Pamphlet entitled "Margaret Sanger—Woman of the Future" printed by the Birth Control International Information Centre in London, first published December 1934.
The Tactic of Frame-Combination

What is interesting about Margaret Sanger’s use of frames is that she regularly used certain combinations of frames in order to make her argument more effective. Sometimes the frames used in particular combinations just seem to go together naturally. At other times, the combinations used are actually contradictory. But taking into account the social conventions of the time period and her influence as a leader, they must have made sense to her audience. The following combinations are those that I will discuss: feminist and materalist, eugenic and materalist, eugenic and alleviation of social problems.

The first is the combination of the feminist and materalist frames, and what is interesting about this combination is that Sanger’s feminist and materalist arguments are many times difficult to distinguish from each other. Because she often used the terms “mother” and “woman” synonymously in her speeches and articles, it seems likely that Sanger had assumed that all married women would have children, or at least want children. In that case, all women would want birth control purely for family limitation purposes. But Margaret Sanger’s assumption that all women would want to be mothers makes these arguments contradictory. In order to mobilize women for motherhood, Sanger recommended that the teaching of the importance and duty of motherhood be taught at a young age to all girls. “[O]ur girls must be brought up to realize that Motherhood is the most sacred profession in the world, and that it is a profession that requires more preparation than any other open to women.”4 I think it was revolutionary, at that time, for Sanger to define motherhood as a career. Although it had historically been the case for a majority of women, it had never been given the prominence of a

45 Article published (in Physical Culture?) by Margaret Sanger entitled “Mobilizing for Motherhood,” January 5, 1921.
career. At the same time, Sanger does not point out that it had traditionally been one of the few options open to women.

The second frame combination is maternalist and eugenic. Although she was propagandizing on the fear of “race suicide” that was popular at the time, Sanger was also simultaneously crediting women as accepting their duty as mothers and placing the burden of the perpetuation of the quality of the American and human race on women’s shoulders. It seemed important for her to link the institution of motherhood to the broader society and, more specifically, the future of humanity. Sanger proposed that motherhood was the most important and fulfilling duty, or function, of women. “Freed from fear of unwanted pregnancies, freed from the dread of bringing into the world children whom they cannot adequately rear, the women of America will build ever happier families and better homes and create a new race.”

While Sanger was glorifying the role that women serve as mothers, her definition also seems to exclude the other roles that women are capable of serving, and again assumes that “woman” equals “mother.” But she was also attempting to elevate the status of women within the birth control movement and humanity. Public opinion during this time, and even today, was concerned with the institution of the family and with the instrumental role that mothers play in the lives of their children. In this way, Sanger was hoping to attract support for her cause from more conservative elements of society who esteemed the role of motherhood and would not have advocated the legalization of birth control unless the issue was framed in a way that sought to improve that role for women. In this way, Sanger was also adjusting her norms to the specific culture and norms of the general public.

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46 Article reprinted from The Clubwoman (the official publication of General Federation of Women's Clubs) for August 1936, entitled “The Birth Control Crusade Marches On.”
The third combination is that of the eugenic and alleviation of social problems frames.

One example is Sanger’s rhetoric concerned with the population problem and what it was doing to America’s resources and welfare and relief agencies.

“[P]opulation is certainly pressing upon our relief funds which is the means of subsistence for over 12 million men and women unemployed in our country today...It’s pressing upon the structure of our social system and upon every educational and cultural agency, the existence of which is threatened by increasing hordes, fearful of hunger and want...There are some basic truths which should form the cornerstone of any plan for permanent national security, one of which is that we can never permanently improve the general standard of life until we greatly lessen the precaution of physically and mentally unfit to the general population.”

In this way we see Sanger’s argument linking a eugenic argument—that the less desirable elements of the population are overrunning our country—with the idea that birth control would alleviate the social problems experienced by the United States and would lessen the economic strain on the government. Similarly, Sanger, after founding the National Committee for the Federal Legislation of Birth Control, spoke before the House of Representatives in order to present to them a bill that her organization had drafted, which would legalize birth control as a necessity to the progress and “health” of the country.

“By the Immigration Act of 1917, the United States Government recognizes that there is a population problem in this country; that the resources of the land are limited; that unrestricted population increase through unrestricted immigration is bound to invite disaster to the social and racial life of the country...All that we are asking in the passage of Bill H.R.11082 is that contraceptive instruction may be given to curtail the increase of the same undesirable types within our country that are now restricted from entering the country by the Immigration Act of 1917.”

What is important is that Sanger was comparing her organization’s proposed bill to an already-existing bill that limited the immigration of certain groups into the United States. She makes an effective point by emphasizing that certain groups, ethnicities or what she calls “races,” were not
allowed citizenship in America, but that American citizens with the same undesirable
characteristics were overpopulating and decreasing the quality of the population of the United
States.

Development of Frames Across Time (1915-1938)

Eugenic Frame

Although it has become popular consensus that Margaret Sanger gave up part of the
movement’s and her own autonomy to eugenicists and doctors when she forged a link between
the birth control and eugenics movements, my analysis of her speeches and other writings
contradicts this notion. I demonstrate that she used eugenic rhetoric near the beginning of her
participation and development of the movement. In an unclearly labeled article or speech dated
1916, Margaret Sanger uses the eugenic frame when she admits “I believe birth control to be a
great racial step forward.” She goes on in the same piece to use the term “feeble-minded” when
she points out that according to “recent and reliable authorities” the “fertility of the feeble-minded
parent is four times that of the normal parent.” In addition, she links feeble-mindedness to class
and also to uncontrollable fertility. “I believe that birth control when disseminated among the
working people, who are less able to carry the burdens of the race than any other class, would
help to reduce immediately the present burden upon the man and woman with the insufficient
existing wage.”48 From this piece, it is apparent that as early as 1916—only a year after she
coined the term “birth control” she had already adopted, consciously or unconsciously, a
distinctly eugenic tone to her writing. And by 1922, she called for Americans to produce a “race
of thoroughbreds.”49

47 Dinner speech entitled “Birth Control Comes of Age,” given at the Mayflower Hotel in Washington,
D.C. on February 12, 1935.
48 Speech or article entitled “Birth Control and Society” and dated 1916.
49 Address designated “Birth Control in China and Japan,” given at Carnegie Hall on October 30, 1922.
By 1921, the frame had become more individual-oriented and Sanger was now not only calling on the politicians and lawmakers to push for legalization, but she was directing her words towards the masses. In this way, she was making not only the government, but also the individual responsible for their own fertility and the overall unbalanced fertility rate of the United States.

“We are convinced that racial regeneration, individual regeneration, must come ‘from within’...it must be autonomous, self-directive, and not imposed from without...every potential parent, and especially every potential mother, must be brought to an acute realization of the primary and central importance of bringing children into this world.”

By 1921, Sanger was not only blaming United States law for exacerbating “race suicide” through the persistence of the Comstock law; she had now decided that individuals were partly accountable for their own plights and the population problem of the country.

It seems that later in her career and after she had been involved in the movement longer Sanger became more concrete in her arguments and began linking the eugenic frame to particular social problems to which the lack of birth control was contributing. She also begins to mention her advocacy of sterilization around 1928. In a document entitled “The Need for Birth Control,” Sanger uses the term “reckless” to describe the “defective, delinquent, and dependent classes.” In the same piece she predicts that “Sterilization will undoubtedly become a necessity.” She does add, though, that elective sterilization and access to birth control must be dually accessible to the masses.

In a speech given in California in 1928 Sanger calls the state of California “advanced” because of its implementation of a sterilization law. In 1932 Sanger comes to promote a policy of rewards for voluntary sterilization. “I’d like to see the U.S. Government...offer life pensions, to every man and woman with a known transmissible disease who would consent to

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50 Speech/article written for Eugenics Congress (refused) 1921, entitled “Eugenic Value of Birth Control Propaganda.
51 “The Need for Birth Control,” speech/article dated April 25, 1928.
sterilization.” In a 1934 article for *American Weekly* Sanger even goes so far as to say that although individual civil liberties must be protected, the fate of the nation as a whole is somewhat more important. “While there must be sample safeguards in administering such laws so that the rights of the individual are considered, the paramount need is to protect society as a whole.”

What is interesting about Sanger’s use of the eugenic frame is its development as a theme in her writing which changes over time. She uses eugenic language as early as 1916, but it does not the gain its racial and culpable force until the late 1920s. She also does not mention sterilization early on in her career, but later preaches the necessity of sterilization—either because she sees no other alternatives for specific segments of the population, or because of her connections to the eugenics movement.

**Alleviation of Social Problems Frame**

In 1916 Margaret Sanger identified the lack of birth control as a social problem, even extending it to a moral problem. She criticized the United States government for governing morality. She linked the effective use of birth control to the progression of society. “Neither the law nor the penalty imposed by the law can make people moral. We ask the United States to make terms with Progress, with human needs, in fact with Civilization, and no greater service can be rendered to society than to break the chains of woman’s sex subjection. Knowledge to control birth is the key to that dissolution.” In this same piece, Sanger associates the lack of birth control with domestic unhappiness, prostitution, the institutionalization of the insane, and the need for philanthropic charity.

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52 “The Necessity for Birth Control.” Speech given at the Auditorium Theatre, Oakland, CA on December 19, 1928.
55 Article entitled “Birth Control and Society” dated 1916.
In defining the lack of birth control as a social problem, Margaret Sanger blamed the government for the way it ignored the problem. "Our Government pronounces itself unwilling to assume responsibility in alleviating the hazardous trade of maternity. At the same time the State and Federal authorities refuse to countenance legislation which would allow American mothers to help themselves." As early as 1925, Sanger delivered a challenge to the government to enact a practical solution to this growing problem.

In 1922, Sanger was already commenting on the problem of overpopulation not only in the United States but even across the globe. "There are too many people for our limited intelligence. There are too many people for the social systems [in]volved. There are too many people for our present equipment, transportation, housing, schools—everything which should help to advance our civilization." At this time, Sanger also identified the lack of birth control as a world problem, one not limited only to the United States.

Sanger highlights the fact that the use of birth control could decrease the need for organized charity and the significant sums of money being spent by the government on the poor. At the same time she adds that the birth control clinic is not meant to replace the many charities that provide integral services to poorer communities. Referring to the Birth Control Clinical Research Bureau, she mentions that "We are not competing with the organized charities or other philanthropic social agencies. We are endeavoring to fulfill to the best of our ability, and with ever increasing efficiency a social function that deserves the support of every intelligent member of the community."

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57 "Birth Control in China and Japan"—speech at Carnegie Hall given October 30, 1922.
58 Opening address at the 7th Anniversary of the Birth Control Clinical Research Bureau at the Plaza Hotel 1929.
By the 1930s, Margaret Sanger became more specific in her denouncement of the United States for creating, or at least perpetuating its own problems, citing concrete examples and explanations for particular social problems. "Ignorance of the methods of birth control has become an acknowledged factor in infant and maternal mortality, unemployment, child labor, slum conditions, overcrowding, illiteracy, and feeblemindedness."59 In another piece dated 1930, she adds juvenile delinquency,60 as a consequence of unconscious parenthood, to the list of social problems related to the lack of birth control.

Sanger also links birth control to specific causes of social problems, which could be mitigated through the use of birth control. "Our Children’s Bureau lists three factors in the infant death rate—the father’s wage, the spacing of the children, and the place they occupy in the family."61 In addition, Sanger cites the lack of birth control as increasing both infant and maternal mortality rates—which should only be considered medical problems, not social problems. Blaming the Comstock law, she indicates that "[t]his law in effect has already been responsible directly and indirectly for the deaths of approximately one million mothers and for the deaths of fifteen millions of children many of whom were born unwanted and in conditions of hardship, poverty, cruelty, and disease."62 In another piece by Sanger she points out that according to 1936 statistics collected by the Children’s Bureau, "16,000 women die each year from ‘causes associated with pregnancy and childbirth,’” adding that the U.S. maternal mortality rate is "higher than Australia, Belgium, Canada, England, Germany, Japan, Sweden, Switzerland."63

60 Unpublished article entitled “Do Women Want Children?” dated 1930.
61 Report on Address by Sanger at Colgate University Chapel, November 13, 1936 (no title).
63 “Birth Control—For the People’s Sake!” dated 7/6/36.
Sanger also offers many solutions during speeches and articles written during the 1930s when population and poverty were two topics on many Americans’ minds because of the Depression. As early as 1925 she called for a plan that would reward small families. During this time, money was the biggest concern for the country, especially how it could most effectively mitigate the effects of the Depression. Sanger believed that the millions of dollars spent on charitable institutions would be better spent if it “were converted to a system of bonuses to unfit parent[s], paying them to refrain from further parenthood, and continuing to pay them while they controlled their procreative faculties.”\(^64\) Sanger adds to this argument advocating a system of bonuses in an article appearing in *American Weekly* with the question “What is social planning without a quota?”\(^65\) Later in the same article, she admits that this quota system would be difficult.

During the New Deal Era, Sanger was one of many Americans who believed that a reorganization of the federal and state governments could bring about positive change. Sanger voiced her proposal that a governmental department or agency be established to study the effects of the growth of population.

“I now suggest to the present administration the organization of a federal population department as an immediate and imperative necessity to survey our human resources. This department should be scientifically equipped and empowered to diagnose the population problems confronting the nation today with the aim of formulating a federal population policy. This policy must be determined upon the primary considerations of public health and racial conservation.”\(^66\)

She also thought that birth control should be part of the plan in this national state of security.

“There are many conditions in which Birth Control should be advocated as part of an emergency relief program, not only for woman’s health and the economic security of the family, but also to

\(^{64}\) Address of Welcome at a population conference on March 25, 1925.


\(^{66}\) Speech given at the 21\(^{st}\) Anniversary—“Birth Control Comes of Age” Dinner at the Mayflower Hotel in Washington, D.C. on February 12, 1935.
protect the race against the transmission to offspring of ailments that are detrimental to the future of the race.”

Similarly, she points out that the National Recovery Administration cannot solely be successful in bringing about economic stability. “While the NRA strives through its many codes to increase employment and thus to raise the purchasing power of the people in general, it does not provide for lightening the burden of the parents by reducing the number of mouths that each wage-earner must feed or which the public must feed for him.”

The alleviation of social problems frame changes over time as Sanger first identifies the inaccessibility of birth control as the cause of a number of social problems. She then blames the government for its ignorance and role in the perpetuation of various social problems. Finally, Sanger offers concrete examples of these social problems and provides several solutions. By 1936 Sanger had become more pessimistic. “I am convinced that today we have the wisdom, the knowledge, the skill in knowing what to do and how to solve our problems, but we have not the virtue to do it.”

What is also interesting about the alleviation of social problems frame is that her use of the frame is concentrated in the 1930s, which is possibly related to their prominence and intensification during the Depression era.

Democratic Frame

Sanger’s first mention of birth control as a democratic right appears in an article dated 1916. In it she compares the United States to other European countries who she thinks mock our country for its backwardness, lack of sophistication, and denial when it comes to the defense of personal rights. “We in this country are proud of our boasted freedom and liberty, but it is generally known throughout Europe that most of our liberties are a farce. We have a political and

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67 Statement from Mrs. Sanger’s speech before the Ways and Means Committee of the House of Representatives—May 19, 1932.
69 Report on Address by Sanger at Colgate University Chapel, November 13, 1936 (no title).
religious liberty but individual moral liberty must yet be fought for us here before we can progress in art, literature, or in human understanding.” She goes on to mention that the defense of civil liberties will add strength and cohesion to our democracy. “When we make a clean, intelligent, and strong individual today, then and only then can we look for or expect a strong, clean, and intelligent society.”

In the 1920s Sanger ties the use of birth control as a democratic duty to the emotional nature of patriotism. “No loyal or patriotic citizen has the right to bring diseased or probably diseased children into the world for others to take care of them.” Similarly, she emphasizes that “It is the foremost duty of every patriotic American to do everything in his or her power to make possible the creation of a healthy and vigorous race of Americans of tomorrow.” She highlights that it is undemocratic and unfair for the poor and “unfit” segments of society, who cannot take care of their own children, to rely on the kindness and charity of the wealthy. “With the hand of charity and philosophy, democracy and Christianity, we reach out and grapple with Nature. We take to ourselves these inefficient, demented, or feeble-minded persons and we tax the normal, the fit and the healthy members of the population for their care.” Here Sanger criticizes the dependent segments of society for being undemocratic and praises the independent and charitable segments of society for being democratic in an unjust situation.

Although Sanger employs the democratic frame much more in the 1920s than the 1930s, it seems that as time progresses, she characterizes the use of birth control more as a right that is deserved than as a duty that should be expected. In an article appearing in a magazine entitled True Confessions Sanger linked the ideal of democracy that could be achieved through access to

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70 Article (published?) dated 1916 and entitled “Birth Control and Society.”
71 Outline of address at the Kiwanis Club (in Beacon?), 1928.
72 Article published in Holland’s in February 1926, with the title “Passports for Babies.”
73 Speech entitled “The Necessity for Birth Control,” given at the Auditorium Theatre in Oakland, CA on December 19, 1928.
birth control to the ideal of motherhood. Arguing that the Comstock Law passed in 1873 was outdated and desperately needed to be repealed, Sanger writes: “Here is true democracy. Here is a chance to give to every mother in America the right to decide when she should undertake that most noble career, motherhood.”\textsuperscript{74} According to Sanger, democracy is linked to the institution of motherhood and to the standard that the individual should have control over his/her future. It is not clear whether women should not be denied access to birth control because it is a democratic right, or because it is their duty to be mothers and their right to be good mothers to whatever number of children they desire. Sanger sees the achievement of a more educated, aware, and sophisticated country/government as bestowing the right of birth control on its citizens. “When there is no need to replenish the extravagant waste of human life by the procreation of new lives, there will be less coercion and compulsion exercised upon womankind to produce them. When that state is definitely established—in brief, when there is more free will and less compulsion, we shall be able to decide whether women want children.”\textsuperscript{75} Sanger admits that the legalization of birth control cannot be established until the country as a whole changes its attitude towards the family, marriage, and its function as procreators. This consciousness will then prompt the acceptance of birth control.

\textit{Feminist Frame}

Margaret Sanger’s writings are timeless in that she frames her feminist argument with language that was defined as strongly feminist in the early decades of this century and which retains some of its feminist character in a lesser degree even today. In her earliest piece in my collection/sample, she insists that the illegality of birth control imposes sex subjection on

\textsuperscript{74} Article published in \textit{True Confessions} April 1936 entitled “Does the Public Want Birth Control?”

\textsuperscript{75} Unpublished article entitled “Do Women Want Children?” dated 1930.
women. Even in the 1920s Sanger was already defining the illegality of birth control as not isolated as a women’s problem but rather a woman’s concern. “This is peculiarly woman’s problem. Of course it is man’s problem also, but men are not concerned in it in the way that women are. It is women who bear the penalties in injury, disease, and death and mental torture that are involved in it.” Similarly, Sanger admits her unwavering “conviction...of the responsibility that rests upon the shoulders of the American women engaged in furthering the ideals of humanity, of a better, stronger civilization.”

It is much more difficult to trace a change over time in Sanger’s use of the feminist frame. Not one period, or decade is any more feminist than another. In an article published in Physical Culture in 1921 Sanger is quite ahead of her time for her praise of women’s impetus into the realm of sports and the professions. “It is one of the most encouraging signs today that more and more girls and women are entering into sports that build up strong bodies—swimming, diving, skating, tennis—and that the old ideals of fashions of the all-too-ladylike are disappearing.” She commends women who are sharing the responsibility of supporting the family by advancing a career of their own. She explains that they “wish to share the burden of homemaking with their husbands...because they are no longer content to be mere household drudges in a two-by-four flat. They are ambitious. They want to welcome their children into a real home with advantages.” Instead of criticizing mothers for abandoning their devotion to their house and family as was typical of much of the public opinion during this time, Sanger applauds their not-yet-accepted but growing contribution to the family.

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76 Article (published?) entitled “Birth Control and Society” dated 1916.
77 Article published in Holland’s February 1926 entitled “Passports for Babies.”
78 Excerpts for press use of a speech at the Hotel Comodore Luncheon December 8, 1920.
79 Article published in Physical Culture on January 5, 1921 entitled “Mobilizing for Motherhood (Through Birth Control)”.
Sanger’s writings during the 1930s are somewhat contradictory. We might expect them to be more feminist because women were steadily becoming more educated and played an integral role in the New Deal administration through their work in many of the social agencies established by the government. But the consequences of the Depression forced many families to prioritize men’s work over women’s because men could receive higher pay and were able to utilize more of the New Deal programs. Sanger’s writings display this same societal ambivalence. In an article published in The Clubwoman in 1936 Sanger insinuates that birth control can be a freedom for all women, because it will provide them with the means to limit the size of their families. “Freed from fear of unwanted pregnancies, freed from the dread of bringing into the world children whom they cannot adequately rear, the women of America will build ever happier families and better homes and create a new race.”\(^{80}\) In this way Sanger makes the erroneous assumption that all women want to be mothers. She implies that birth control is meant for the married woman who wants to plan, or is in the process of planning, her family. But in another pamphlet published in 1934 Sanger makes the opposite claim about the purpose of birth control. “I assert my faith that the bearing and nurture of children are not the aim and end of women’s existence. Nor do I consider the first duty of every married couple to be ‘nonstop’ perpetuation of their kind.”\(^{81}\) Even the quote itself is indecisive. Sanger admits that procreation is not women’s sole function, although the duty aspect is unclear. She also adds that married couples should not be expected to procreate “nonstop,” but are they expected to procreate at least once? Sanger is unclear in her intent here. Although Sanger has at times suggested that only certain women should limit their family size (namely the poor, uneducated, and unfit), in article

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\(^{80}\) “The Birth Control Crusade Marches On,” published in The Clubwoman (the official publication of General Federation of Women’s Clubs) for August 1936 issue.

\(^{81}\) Pamphlet entitled “Margaret Sanger—Woman of the Future,” first published in December 1934 by the Birth Control International Information Centre in London.
written in 1932, she advocates birth control as a method for all women. "It should be the woman's right to have knowledge, not because she is sick, diseased, or poor, but because as a woman whose body must be used in the creating and incubating of the new life, she should be given the right of choice, and time, consistent with her desires."[^82] Again, the allusion to the idea that woman=mother is apparent.

_Engagement of Marriage and Parenthood Frame_

Margaret Sanger argued that parenthood was a responsibility and that parents could not realize that responsibility until they were given autonomy in their duty of parenthood. "Only by self-control of this type, only by intelligent mastery of the procreative powers can the great mass of humanity be awakened to the great responsibility of parenthood."[^83] But by 1930 Sanger had become more critical of the moral and traditional pedestal on which our culture places parenthood.

"The joys of motherhood have been so persistently advertised, the charms of babyhood so colorfully and so sentimentally depicted, that it has become almost sacrilege to warn young men and women standing at the threshold of life to stop, look, and listen. Yet those of us who are convinced that such a warning is an imperative necessity at the present moment, do not aim to minimize traditional reverence, but rather to develop and intensify the sense of its solemn responsibilities."[^84]

Here we see that Sanger realizes that something must change—that parenthood is not a role which should be celebrated as an accomplishment in itself, but rather should be taken seriously, planned for, and truly wanted. Sanger makes an important point in the same unpublished article from 1930. "Parenthood does not end with having a baby. It merely begins there!"[^85]

What is most revolutionary and laudable about Sanger's framing of how birth control would enhance the institution of marriage is that she was not afraid to talk about sexuality and its

[^82]: Article (published where?) January 1, 1932 entitled "The Pros and Cons of Birth Control."
importance to the marital bond. Even in 1926 she makes the significant distinction between
control of family size and control over the sexual relationship between husband and wife.

“[Women] have a right to know how they can intelligently—not crudely and dangerously—
control their sexual lives.” 85 This particular quote is also feminist in that it not only asserts that
the sexual relationship is necessary for the union, but distinctly for women. In another article
published in 1932 Sanger concludes that “Barren women, pregnant women, sterile men and
women have sex desires. The sex urge is as old as life itself. It is a wonderful, beautiful thing if
we well make it so...It should be accepted with reverence and pride, not connected with
shame.” 86 Similarly, in an unpublished article by Sanger dated 1930 she again points to the
magnitude of the sexual bond in a marriage which can be damaged when the act of sexual
intercourse cannot be separated from the act of procreation. “Fear of pregnancy often acts as a
powerful deterrent to satisfactory marital relations between husband and wife. The act which
should be fulfilled as a physical and spiritual communion, sealing the bonds of matrimony,
cementing mutual love, and periodically renewing the love between husband and wife, is
habitually dreaded and avoided by women who have suffered agonies” because of earlier
unintended pregnancies. 88 According to Sanger, the goal and result of birth control is to allow
husbands and wives to develop and maintain a “well-rounded married life.” 89

Several pieces written throughout the 1920s and 1930s indicate that Sanger had very
specific ideas about when, where, and how couples should marry and then have children. In an
address dated 1928 she admits that she is less concerned with the couple’s age at marriage than

86 Article published in Holland’s February 1926 entitled “Passports for Babies.”
87 Article (published where?) entitled “The Pros and Cons of Birth Control” dated January 14, 1932.
88 Unpublished article entitled “Education and the Birth Control Clinic” dated 1930.
89 Article entitled “Birth Control: The Doctor’s Duty” published in June 1937 issue of Clinical Medicine
and Surgery.
with the age at which they start their family. "While early marriage has its advantages, early parenthood is no longer considered advantageous or advisable."90 In at least four separate pieces—two dated 1923,91 one dated 1928,92 and another dated 193293—Sanger outlines guidelines which she feels should be heeded by married couples contemplating the raising of a family and also by hospitals, clinics, and other social agencies. The formula that she recommends lists the cases or instances under which it is not advisable for a couple to bear children. Sanger bases these directives on several criteria: the physical and mental health of the parents (especially of the woman), the physical and mental health of their current children, the age of both parents, the age of the previous children, the financial stability of the family (including the father’s wage), the work status of the woman, and the length of marriage. These guidelines are posed in a way that indicates that Sanger prescribes them in order to make marital life more satisfactory and child-rearing more fulfilling. But in an unpublished article dated 1930 she accentuates how following these guidelines on an individual basis can have a positive effect on other families and, almost more importantly, the rest of society. "Until the actual father and mother of today learn to merge their selfish parenthood into the deeper and all-embracing parenthood, until they come to the realization that the well-being of my child is intricately and organically bound up with the well-being of yours,"94 Sanger does not see any large-scale societal change occurring. It almost seems as if to Sanger the methods of birth control itself cannot effect change in practice or behavior without an initial change in our cultural attitudes towards marriage and child-rearing.

90 Outline of address at Kiwanis Club (Beacon?) on July 1928 untitled.
93 Statement from Mrs. Sanger’s speech before the Ways and Means Committee of the House of Representatives on May 19, 1932.
It is clear that Sanger was ahead of her time in her discussions of the significance of sexual relations to the marital bond. But the enhancement of marriage and parenthood frame does not become more liberal over time—it remains fairly constant. Similarly, her guidelines listing the situations in which childbearing should not be undertaken appear in both the 1920s and 1930s.

*Maternalist Frame*

Throughout Sanger’s writings the tone of her maternalist frame is considerably conservative and assumes that woman = mother. In a pamphlet written in 1917 she admits the discriminatory goal of only making birth control available to married women but not single women. At the same time, Sanger introduces her concept of the “Modern Woman” who does not want to be a “victim of unwilling motherhood.”

95 To Sanger, motherhood is both a duty to one’s family, but also to society. In other pieces Sanger has decried the slavery that the lack of access to birth control has imposed upon women. But it seems that she also considered motherhood an obligation expected of women. “[I]t seems to me…that every agency of church and state, of society should be at the fight of these women, should be glad to help them, to assist them, to just get a little out of life, to be the real mothers that we want them to be. It seems very little to ask, because can any mother serve society when she nearly died by having one child?”

96 In another speech Sanger gave in 1928, she mentions that birth control will give women “the right also to understand their husbands and to help him, too.”

97 The 1930s are less straightforward to categorize because of their contradictory nature. It seems at first that Sanger’s writings during the decade in which federal legalization was established had more of a liberal character, but this is made complicated by some writings that

95 Pamphlet entitled “Voluntary Motherhood,” written in the Queens County Penitentiary in 1917.
96 Address at Parson’s Theatre in Hartford, Connecticut on February 11, 1923.
97 Speech entitled “The Necessity of Birth Control” given at that Auditorium Theatre in Oakland, CA on December 19, 1928.
echo the 1920s. In one piece dated 1930 Sanger applauds the women who choose to remain childless, although I presume that she is referring to married women.

"Maternity, we are told, is woman's only road to self-realization. I cannot approve or share this policy...My deepest admiration goes out to the woman who refrains from motherhood, even though she may wish to have children, if there is a chance that the child may not inherit a strong constitution, rather than to the woman obviously unfitted for motherhood, who selfishly and thoughtlessly takes a chance." 98

Similarly, in another piece Sanger attempts to disguise her expectation that all women who are able to (and who meet Sanger's criteria) should choose motherhood in the feminist language of rights and freedoms. "Once the sympathetic wife has been sympathetically taught how she can master her maternal function, she is no longer a slave but a comparatively free woman." 99 But even in the 1930s, Sanger again admits that she only envisions accessibility to birth control as applying to married women in a statistic that cites the large number of married women who already are or could potentially be mothers. 100 But in one piece dated in 1935 during the Depression, Sanger appeals to her audience's sympathies for the poor who would most benefit from the legalization of birth control. "The Federal laws work tremendous hardship on the mothers of America. It is the poorest women who pay...The mothers of the poor, particularly the mothers in the millions of families on relief are the forgotten women." 101

Comparable to the enhancement of marriage and parenthood frame, the maternalist frame is too contradictory to illustrate any change over time. While it might appear that the maternalist frame takes on a more liberal or feminist tone by the 1930s, the assumption of motherhood is always implied. This implication makes Sanger's argument appear paradoxical.

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98 Unpublished article entitled "Do Women Want Children?" dated 1930.
99 Unpublished article entitled "Education and the Birth Control Clinic" dated 1930.
100 Pamphlet entitled "The Birth Control Crusade Marches On" published by The Clubwoman (the official publication of General Federation of Women's Clubs) for August 1936.
CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSIONS

This thesis supports the claim that framing is indeed a fluid process that evolves over time. It also highlights the agency of Margaret Sanger as a social movement leader in the rhetorical evolution of the American birth control movement. While framing has often been discussed in the literature as an occurrence unrelated to the individual who produces and maintains it, my research has attempted to bring the leaders, who are actively creating and influencing this process, into the spotlight. The case of the American birth control movement and Margaret Sanger has allowed me to address these issues of process and strategy as they relate to framing theory.

Because Sanger employed several frames within each piece, what is important is the number and breadth of frames that she utilized in her public communication. In addition, the combination of both complementary and contradictory frames and their change or constancy over time contributes to our sociological and historical understanding of the use of multiple frames that one leader uses within a movement or social movement organization. Although it is difficult to identify the particular audience whom Sanger was targeting, what is clear is her intent. Margaret Sanger attempted to mobilize many varied constituents with each publicly communicated piece.

she wrote, each which seemed to be written for the purpose of attracting a broad audience of support. In using a very specific and limited sample of her writings, I have documented six individual frames. If the sample of Margaret Sanger’s writings was expanded, it is very possible that many more would emerge. In addition, Sanger employed each individual frame in conjunction with several others. The frames were not only meant to stand alone, but to convey a message, influence opinion, and mobilize broad audiences in combination with other frames.

What is Sanger’s greatest accomplishment is her weaving of contradictory frames into one single article or speech. In addition, while it appears that she is saying one thing on the surface, if we read more closely, we can see that there is an underlying assumption or societal expectation (i.e. the duty of motherhood, the fear of “race suicide”). While this analysis confers agency upon the leader who creates and develops a particular frame, it also points out the fact that social movements are conceived and manipulated by human beings. Human beings do not live in a vacuum. While Margaret Sanger clearly had her own convictions, she sometimes knowingly exploited societal morals and values and sometimes was unconsciously swayed by that same public opinion.

Public opinions and values instigated change in some of Sanger’s frames in a manner similar to the way in which they infiltrated Sanger’s public writings. Although not all of Sanger’s frames experienced a notable change over time (feminist, maternalist, and enhancement of marriage and parenthood), three did—the eugenic frame, alleviation of social problems frame, and the democratic frame. It is interesting that the three frames, which evolved across the twenty-year period, concerned broader beliefs and were less personal than the three which did not. It seems that there is something inherent in the nature of each frame, which makes it more likely to develop as an argument, rather than remaining constant and static. The three frames, which did not experience any path of clear-cut change, can be categorized as more personal and value-
oriented—one's beliefs about feminism, motherhood, and the institution of marriage and the family. On the other hand, the three frames, which did transform as individual units were more political in nature, concerning beliefs about the state of the government and society and what could and should be done to improve them. So although the personal is political, in this case what characterized each group of frames was that fine line that divides them.

So why have social movement scholars concerned themselves more with the identification of master frames than with the use of multiple frame strategies? Why have frames been cataloged and categorized more than they have been treated as interacting and mutating units? And why have frames been discussed as if they have no origin in a leader who conceived of them as a rational agent? First, leaders in general, and especially leaders in particular, have not been attributed with affecting the outcome of an entire movement. Movements have been traditionally characterized in the literature as being group efforts. In addition, when rational agents are discussed the emphasis is on the targeted constituency and how leaders can attract and maintain them. Second, master frames have been assumed to be the key to understanding a movement, assuming that the master frame truly is an uniting component of the movement. But master frames also assume that there is only one way to understand a movement's ideology and that the constituents and the leadership operate according to a single line of rhetoric. Third, time only becomes relevant to the discussion in describing the length of a movement or a movement's cycle. The common assumption centers around the argument that a change in frame signals the end of a cycle or the entire movement. Fourth, there is hesitancy to point out that the framing process contains some inconsistencies on the surface. Frames within one movement or SMO that appear incompatible to each other are feared as detrimental to the mobilizing process when they can actually attract broader audiences and reflect the sometimes contradictory nature of public opinion and societal values.
Because the framing process of a movement alters the individual frames themselves and because leaders are influencing that change, it is imperative that sociologists and historians understand how the framing characteristics of process and agency relate to the success or failure of social movements or SMOs. Since the literature is concerned with the identification of master frames, it is important to analyze how master frames adapt over time or are replaced with a new one. Although I document how individual frames transform across the lifetime or cycle of a movement, further research is needed to determine if and how frame combinations experience the same process. A lack of emphasis on the importance of leaders as rational agents also must be addressed in the literature. Although I recognize that a leader does not alone make a movement, it is not possible for a movement to survive and be successful without a leader. Because leaders must market their movement to gain support and popularity, social movement literature necessitates research regarding the competition between leaders within a movement and even within one SMO.
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