

THE UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-EAU CLAIRE

Reproductive Rights in Wisconsin: The Movement Through the Experiences of Women from the
1960s-1980s

DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY

BY
Kahsara Underwood

SUPERVISING PROFESSOR: JOSEPH ORSER

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Abstract

This paper is looking at the Reproductive Rights Movement during the 1960s-1980s and how it played out in Wisconsin. Wisconsin is a state of interest because it was so far behind every other state in the US on granting unmarried women rights to birth control while granting women access to legal abortions on the same level as many states at the same time. Looking at collections of three advocates for more access to birth control and abortion as well as the laws and news of the time shows that Wisconsin failed to give women in the state their full rights by denying them choice in their reproduction.

Introduction

Chances are that while you are watching your favorite TV show, you will see a commercial advertising a type of birth control. The product ads vary from Trojan condom commercials to advertisements about intrauterine devices. Some of the commercials can be pretty wild, and I sometimes wish there was a little less of them. However, for there to be less of them would ignore the fact that 40 years ago it was still illegal in Wisconsin, to advertise or to discuss birth control with a health care professional other than a doctor. The Reproductive Rights movement in the US has been an ongoing struggle for over 100 years. From the mid-1800s, where contraception was illegalized to the 1970s when abortion was legalized, there has been an enduring struggle to make birth control legal for different groups of people. This paper will focus on how that struggle played out in Wisconsin from the 1960s through the 1980s. Looking at the experiences of three women will show the idea that “Wisconsin, considered so rich in respect for individuals, is not only not in the vanguard of legislation in this important area of individual choice but is in fact the Caboose of the train of current [1970s] social thought”.¹

Early writers discussing the movement, such as Historian William F. Ogburn in *Technology and the Changing Family* discuss how the movement gained support because of changes in technology such as new types of condoms or the birth control pill. Later authors, such as Historians Linda Gordon and Andrea Tone, say that the technology helped, but it was the politics and society surrounding the technology that shaped the waves of the Reproductive Rights movement. One of the best examples of this idea is when the birth control pill was introduced in Puerto Rico, it was not widely received because of side affects and because it was

¹ Oral Report on Recent Legislative Changes Relevent to Family Planning, October 11,1966, Marylu Raushenbush Papers, Wisconsin Historical Society, Madison, WI.

perceived as racial population control. In the US however, especially by middle class white women, the pill was really well received despite the side effects.² There has been a lot of research done at the national level on how the movement progressed, and on major east coast cities, but nothing really on Wisconsin itself. In order to understand a little of what is happening in Wisconsin however, a discussion of the broader national movement is necessary.

Background of the Movement

The Reproductive Rights movement in the US has seen four stages from the mid-1800s until today.³ Each of these movements was shaped by a particular social or political ideology. The first stage is when the people working for the movement are interested in “voluntary motherhood” and are working against Victorian prudery and Comstock’s act that made the sale of contraceptives illegal.⁴ The second stage which Gordon states as being between 1910 and 1920. During this time birth control organizations rise and there is a focus on “empowering the powerless” such as the poor and females, which fits with the ideology of the rising progressive movement.⁵ The third stage is associated with “planned parenthood” and is a less radical version of the second movement and goes from 1920 into the 70s. The fourth stage is the one associated with second wave feminism and the “right to choice”. Each stage has had different people fighting for or against reproductive rights for women.

The first stage of the Reproductive Rights movement rose in a society that was immersed in Victorian Prudery and was fighting a battle against immorality. Prostitution, smut novels and pornography were running rampant in the cities. In order to help stop this rise in immorality

² Linda Gordon, *The Moral Property of Women A History of Birth Control Politics in America*, (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2002), 287.

³ Gordon, “Introduction”.

⁴ Gordon, 4. Andrea Tone, *Devices and Desire: A History of Contraceptives in America*, (New York: Hill and Wang, 2001), .

⁵ Gordon, 4.

obscenity laws rise like Comstock's law.⁶ The 1873 Comstock Act outlawed the "the dissemination through the mail or across state lines of any 'article of an immoral nature, or any drugs or medicine, or any article whatever for prevention of contraception'".⁷ The Comstock Act was the first one to make contraceptives illegal and it is this illegality that the advocates for birth control are working against. Contraception, something that was previously not viewed as immoral for married couples to use, was now added to the list of things that were obscene. Tone suggests that the reason for this is that contraception was often sold by the same people that were selling the pornographic novels and posters and so were associated with these immoral items.⁸

At this time however, even people that laude the idea of "voluntary motherhood", such as Ezra Heywood, were against "artificial" methods of contraception.⁹ Tennessee Claflin, another feminist that was for "voluntary motherhood" even called artificial contraception "a permanent indictment against American women... No woman should ever hold sexual relations with any man from the possible consequences of which she might desire to escape".¹⁰ One interpretation of these ideas is that the workers in the movement are still a part of the Victorian moral ideas and did not wish to encourage promiscuity-which the artificial contraceptives were seen to do.¹¹ The idea of not encouraging promiscuity by supporting birth control is an idea that will be prominent in most of the stages of the Reproductive Rights movement.

The second and third stages of the movement also rose in relation to a social ideology. The movement after 1910 was less about Victorian morality and more about health and helping the poor. The first chunk of the movement was based in more radical ideas of "empowering the

⁶ Tone,

⁷ Tone, 3-4.

⁸ Tone, 15.

⁹ Gordon, 57.

¹⁰ Gordon, 57.

¹¹ Gordon, 57.

powerless". The later movements were less radical and were often influenced by the idea of public health over morality. This change can be seen by looking at Margaret Sanger's career. When she opened her first clinic in 1916 she was imagining a grass-roots movement, where poor women would use word of mouth to spread knowledge of contraceptives. The movement was all about helping women gain their full rights. Her original publication was even titled *The Woman Rebel*.¹² Later however she would push to put birth control into the hands of doctors and professionals and pull the power of birth control out of the hands of her original grass-roots movement. When she opens the first permanent birth control clinic in 1923 it is allowed because of its basis in public health and its use of medical professionals.¹³ This stage of the movement was also associated with some of the more notorious ideologies like eugenics and population control.

It was during the third stage of the movement that the law began to become more lax in terms of contraceptives and the government began to get involved in access to birth control. Reformers and pro-birth control politicians used ideas such as eugenics and population control in order to convince reluctant politicians to legalize birth control and give federal money to get out to the poor.¹⁴ A venereal disease outbreak amongst US soldiers between World War I and World War II helped to convince the government to support some forms of contraception-especially for the fighting men. This support came with the rationalization that contraception was not only good for public health of men as well as women.¹⁵ This time period also saw the debate over whether giving out contraception would encourage promiscuity or just be a good way to prevent consequences of an inevitable activity.

¹² Tone, 118.

¹³ Tone, 107.

¹⁴ Gordon, 283.

¹⁵ Tone, 99.

The fourth stage, and the one that I will be focusing on in Wisconsin, overlaps with the third stage, beginning in the 1960s. The rise of the second wave of feminism embraces the Reproductive Rights movement as one way to help all women have access to choice. In 1965 the US Supreme Court case *Griswold v Connecticut* ruled that the states laws making giving out birth control devices and information illegal were unconstitutional and *married* couples have the right to privacy.¹⁶ Many advocates for birth control, like Dr. Hania Ris in Wisconsin, were working to make birth control available to unmarried women as well. In 1972 another US Supreme Court decision made the same claim as in the *Griswold* case, that unmarried women should have access to birth control because of their right to privacy in the matter of sex.¹⁷ The right to choose abortion was also something that many Reproductive Rights advocates pushed for in the fourth stage as well. In 1973 the Supreme Court case *Roe v Wade* declared “virtually all restrictive abortion laws unconstitutional. The case was based once again on the idea of privacy and the fact that the original laws were created for public safety. Since new abortion methods were much safer the mortality rates of women getting abortions decreased drastically and so there was no longer a public safety issue associated with abortion.”¹⁸

Another part of the fourth stage however is the backlash against some of the headway made during the 1970s for Reproductive Rights. “The political contestation over these issues...was pre-eminently a contest of meaning...”according to Linda Gordon, “a liberal vision in which birth control is an individual right, a woman’s right, part of a society committed to sex equality and sexual freedom; and a conservative vision in which birth control is a modern

¹⁶ Nancy E. McGlen, et al., *Women, Politics, and American Society*, (New York: Pearson Education Inc., 2005), .

¹⁷ McGlen, .

¹⁸ Judith A. Baer, *Historical and Multicultural Encyclopedia of Women’s Reproductive Rights in the United States*, (Westport, Conn: Greenwood Press, 2002), 183-184.

convenience that must be closely restricted lest it become destructive of social cohesion and sexual and family morality”.¹⁹

The 1980s Reagan Administration worked to limit teenage women’s access to birth control and reverted back to earlier methods of preaching abstinence as way to stop some of the negative consequences of premarital sex. Reagan also banned the use of federal funds for abortion counseling, showing how the government did not support abortion.²⁰ This battle of meanings was also fought by women in Wisconsin in regards to birth control.

The Women

There were many women that worked on the Reproductive rights movement in Wisconsin during the 1960s-80s. Three women in particular represent the different facets of the movement in general. The first woman, Marylu Raushenbush, represents the more conservative side of the birth control movement during the mid to late 1960s. While she did a lot of work to liberalize the Wisconsin Laws about birth control, she is not highly publicized. In fact, most of the news coverage of her is in the society pages discussing the sorts of parties she and her husband has recently thrown.²¹ Raushenbush and the Planned Parenthood Group that she was a part of made more conservative proposals with the main goal of helping poor married women gain access to birth control.

The second woman, Dr. Hani Ris, represents the mid- 1970s and the connection of the reproductive rights movement with the second-wave of feminism. Ris was an advocate for the rights of many underprivileged groups throughout her life, the focus of this paper is her work for unmarried young women. She felt that birth control for young women was their right, as well as

¹⁹ Gordon, 296.

²⁰ McGlen, 260.

²¹ Louise C. Marston, “Paul A. Raushehbush Feted,” *Wisconsin State Journal*, December 05, 1968.

beneficial for their health.²² These first two women were focused on changing Wisconsin laws that they felt made the state the “Caboose” of the birth control train.

Maggi Cage, the third woman, represents the late 1970s to through the 1980s. As an abortion clinic manager, she worked the hardest at getting and keeping abortion as a legal means of birth control in Wisconsin. While the other two women are more focused on birth control in general, Cage is mostly focused on trying to gain peace between the pro-choice and pro-life sides of the abortion debate. Even though her clinic faced a lot of troubles, Wisconsin was at least on the same level as the other states in terms of abortion. Each one of the women has a unique story showing how the fight for birth control has played out in Wisconsin.

Marylu Raushenbush

Marylu Raushenbush was an upper middle class stay at home mother of four. Raushenbush gave up her career in advertising in order to raise her children and allow her husband to continue his career as a lawyer and later as a law professor. Even though she was a stay at home mom she was also an artist. One of her most famous works is her series of photographs titled “Women of Consequence” in which she took pictures of thirty US women she felt were influential. It seems that her place as an important member of Madison society may have had something to do with her work to make Wisconsin a better place.

According to one of her sons, Paul, Raushenbush was put on the governors committee for human rights in the late 1960s as well as a champion for fair housing, along with being a founder of the Dane County Planned Parenthood Program.²³ In 1966 that got together with a group of likeminded people and decided to start a Planned Parenthood Program (PPP) in Dane

²² Rosemary Kendrick, “Education Must End Sex Myths, Stop VD: Dr. Ris,” *The Capital Times*, August 14, 1972.

²³ Paul Raushenbush, “Mother’s Day, Feminism and Marylu,” *beliefnet.com*, May 10, 2009, <http://blog.beliefnet.com/progressiverevival/2009/05/mothers-day-feminism-and-maryl.html> (Accessed December 8, 2011).

County.²⁴ One of the first things that the group did was send out letters to many different clubs in the area to show legislators that they had support for the program to begin with. Local doctors, welfare directors and even ministers showed their support for a PPP run with welfare money.²⁵ The group had two main concerns for starting a PPP: Access to birth control information for poor women and revision of Wisconsin Statute 151.15.

The Wisconsin State Statute 151.15 was the equivalent of the national indecent articles laws such as the Comstock Act. In Wisconsin, like at the national level, attached contraceptives and abortifacants to other indecent articles like pornography. Wisconsin State Statute 151.15 made the “advertising or display of indecent articles” illegal. The statute allowed doctors to prescribe birth control to married women only, and no one else could discuss birth control or have access to it.²⁶ This was problematic for low income women because they could not afford to visit doctors that were allowed to give out birth control information. Welfare workers especially wanted to have the ability to discuss birth control with their clients and even when asked about it had to say “we can’t tell you because it is against the law”²⁷ In a letter to a fellow Planned Parenthood worker, Raushenbush describes that by 1966 all of the neighboring Midwest states had “liberalized” birth control policies which allowed married and unmarried women access to it and information could be given out by people other than doctors.²⁸ Raushenbush felt that Wisconsin being one of the two last states to change was unacceptable. The PPP suggested that

²⁴ Raushenbush specifically mentions that they have been living a good middle class life in one of her Christmas letters that she sent out to friends. Even if she would not have specifically said that her family was middle class it could have been inferred from the fact that her husband was a lawyer and she discusses family vacations to Cape Cod.

²⁵ Reverend George F. Lobian to Marylu Raushenbush, October 26, 1967; Marylu Raushenbush to Dane County Welfare Director, October 15, 1967; Marylu Raushenbush to Mrs. David Schmitt, 1967, Marylu Raushenbush Papers, Wisconsin Historical Society, Madison, WI.

²⁶ Wisconsin State Statute 151.15, 1963, Marylu Raushenbush Papers, Wisconsin Historical Society, Madison, WI.

²⁷ “Possible Answer for a Big Problem,” *Wisconsin State Journal*, November 20, 1967.

²⁸ Marylu Raushenbush to Mrs. Howard Sandin, July 10, 1966, Marylu Raushenbush Papers, Wisconsin Historical Society, Madison, WI.

Statute 151.15 was changed to make birth control information available through specific state workers as well as allow unmarried women over 18 access to birth control.²⁹ It would still make public advertisements, such as the ones that are on television almost daily today, illegal and the younger unmarried women would still not have access to birth control either. This more conservative suggestion would be hotly debated between the PPP and its allies and the anti birth control groups.

One of the biggest opponents to changing the state statute was the Catholic community in Wisconsin. In November 1966 the church released an essay called “Statement on the Government and Birth Control Adopted by Roman Catholic Bishops in the US”. This essay discussed a lot of the fears that the church had about changing current laws about birth control. Some of the arguments were unfounded, such as claims that it would allow 12 year old girls access to birth control, which is something that was never suggested by the PPP. Another argument that they had against changing the statute was the fear that if public health employees could give out information on birth control it would infringe on a woman’s choice to *not* choose birth control.³⁰ Another individual opposed to changing the bill was Dr. John J. Brennan. He wrote a report to a Wisconsin senator discussing how there was evidence that states that had liberalized access the birth control had increases in illegitimacy of children, more promiscuity and an increase in Venereal disease.³¹

In order to combat Catholic Church and Dr. Brennan, Raushenbush and her group immediately started writing letters to legislators as well. Attached to the letters explaining why

²⁹ Marylu Raushenbush to a Legislator, November 5, 1967, Marylu Raushenbush Papers, Wisconsin Historical Society, Madison, WI.

³⁰ “Statement on the Government and Birth Control Adopted by Roman Catholic Bishops in the US,” November 14, 1966, Marylu Raushenbush Papers, Wisconsin Historical Society, Madison, WI.

³¹ John J Brennan to Senator Holger B. Rasmussen, June 6, 1968, Marylu Raushenbush Papers, Wisconsin Historical Society, Madison, WI.

the statute needed to be changed were statements from the doctors that Brennan quoted as well as a research paper by Joan Swanson called “The Local Problem”. The essay included stats that the number of children was rapidly increasing and these unwanted children also were thought to be prone to criminal behavior and even went so far as to blame Southern racism on the south having so many unwanted children. The paper was essentially to use the growing population as a scare tactic to convince Wisconsin legislators to change the statute. In Brennan’s report on the ails facing states with liberalized birth control laws he quoted a Dr. Seymour L. Halleck on how access to birth control raises promiscuity. Dr. Halleck however says that he never found evidence of a correlation between access to birth control and increased promiscuity.³² Another expert quoted by Dr. Brennan was Bernard J. Stumbras, the Wisconsin Director of the Bureau of Program Planning and Development of the Division of Family Services.³³ He discussed that the fear that unmarried women having access to birth control would lead to promiscuity was unfounded by saying “fear of pregnancy has not prevented promiscuity in the past, and will not prevent it in the future” and “to say it [birth control] may only be used by married persons is to say single persons are to be punished for their promiscuity...married persons may continue with their promiscuity without fear of unwanted children”.³⁴

While there is some discussion of changing the law for a woman’s right to individual choice for women, Raushenbush and Planned Parenthood mostly used “scare” tactics in the form of statistics on the growing population and the negative effects that this growth would have on the economy and the society as a whole. Along with the letters from local experts, Raushenbush

³² Seymour L. Halleck to Senator Holger B. Rasmussen, June 27, 1968, Marylu Raushenbush Papers, Wisconsin Historical Society, Madison, WI.

³³ Ruth Flegel, “State Welfare Officials Hit Newly Signed Law,” *Wisconsin State Journal*, Dec. 30, 1971.

³⁴ Bernard J. Stumbras to Senator Holger B. Rasmussen, July 2, 1968, Marylu Raushenbush Papers, Wisconsin Historical Society, Madison, WI.

discussed how Madison's population had grown 30 percent in six years³⁵ and that 25 percent of firstborns in the US were unwanted.³⁶ This was used to show how much the population increase could be slowed down if more women had access to birth control in Wisconsin. Another scare tactic that she used was discussing money. According to "The Local Problem", the large growth in Madison population would lead to a 121 percent increase in the cost of families using Aid for Dependent Children. Along with this, the 1967 Social Security Act would require states to give aid to unmarried women with children, so to deny them birth control would just be adding to later costs.³⁷ The debate was still going on in 1969 when the state assembly resolved to change the law to include the Planned Parenthood's suggestions. This would allow qualified professionals, such as nurses and welfare workers, to finally give out information about birth control, even to unmarried women.³⁸ However, Dr. Hania Ris was still fighting against the restrictive birth control laws in Wisconsin.

Dr. Hania Ris

Hania Ris was a Polish-born, Swiss-trained doctor who immigrated to the US in 1939 in order to "learn more about American pediatrics and explore the world".³⁹ Her first job was at the Sydenham Hospital for Contagious Diseases in Baltimore. In 1949 she moved to Wisconsin with her family, apparently after *Life* magazine named Madison Wisconsin as one of America's best places to live. Ris moved to Wisconsin with her husband, whom she was a zoology professor at the University of Wisconsin. One newspaper best described her by saying that "Dr. Hania Ris has

³⁵ Joan Swanson, "The Local Problem," May 25, 1966, Marylu Raushenbush Papers, Wisconsin Historical Society, Madison, WI. This source was a paper done by a student at the University of Wisconsin and is attached to many letters from Raushenbush in order to convince people to join her cause.

³⁶ Marylu Raushenbush to a Legislator, November 27, 1967, Marylu Raushenbush Papers, Wisconsin Historical Society, Madison, WI.

³⁷ Marylu Raushenbush to a Legislator, October 15, 1967, Marylu Raushenbush Papers, Wisconsin Historical Society, Madison, WI.

³⁸ Report on Resolution 89, 1969-69, *The Capital Times*, Jan 10 1969.

³⁹ Dr. Hania Ris, "Land of Opportunity Taught a Lot," *Wisconsin State Journal*, November 20, 1991.

been embroiled in one controversy or another almost from the first moment she set foot in Madison”⁴⁰ When she first got to the state her medical license was denied due to the American Medical Association’s review of foreign medical schools.⁴¹ Even though she had worked as a physician before coming to Wisconsin, she still had to wait almost two years before she was allowed to take the state test to get a medical license in 1951.⁴²

She was a founding member of the Wisconsin Women’s Network as well as being a delegate to the White House Conference on Youth in 1971 and being very active with the democratic party.⁴³ In the 1970s she became the medical director at the Wisconsin School for Girls in Oregon, WI. The school was an alternative school and many of the students were “troubled” teens. One thing that she noticed at the school was the prevalence of venereal disease of the girls she treated there. One of the reasons she began writing and meeting with politicians about getting better birth control access for unmarried teens was because of what she saw at the school.

The Wisconsin School for Girls was opened in Oregon, WI in 1941. The original school, Wisconsin Industrial School for Girls, was in Milwaukee, but was closed due to controversy over abuse of the girls. At first the school was run with harsh discipline but after the school was moved and taken over by Brubaker it used “humane means” to help treat the girls. It was a correctional school for girls that had “broken some rule of society”.⁴⁴ The staff was mostly going off the assumption that the students were breaking societal rules because they did not know any better, and so part of the program was to teach the girls how to behave appropriately. The girls were even allowed to write letters to boyfriends as long as they were appropriate. They had

⁴⁰ “Dr. Hania Ris,” *Wisconsin State Journal*, March 20, 1983.

⁴¹ “Hold Up State License For Ex-Johns Hopkins Physician,” *The Capital Times*, January 12, 1950.

⁴² Hania Ris Papers, Wisconsin Historical Society, Madison, WI.

⁴³ “Dr. Hania Ris,” *Wisconsin State Journal*, March 20, 1983.

⁴⁴ John N. Reddin, “School Reclaims Girls by Humane Treatment,” *The Milwaukee Journal*, May 5, 1949, 1.

access to radios, books and even had parties every Friday. Even though the girls were technically in a correctional institution, they were given a lot of privileges, which students had to earn.⁴⁵

In 1972 the school became co-ed and worked with both male and female students. The school in the 1970s focused a little less on teaching societal rules and more about teaching the students how to see themselves in a more positive light. According to the Ris, the students were “emotionally, educationally, and medically deprived” and the school worked to meet all of those needs.⁴⁶ Since the poor were the main victims of the restrictive birth control laws, the poor students that came to the school from around Wisconsin were at a major disadvantage when it came to their reproductive rights. In December 1975 10 percent of the girls were pregnant when they entered the school and many of the students had a venereal disease.⁴⁷ This was one of the reasons that Ris became an advocate for sex education for youth as well as access to contraceptives.

In 1969 the Wisconsin State Assembly had resolved to liberalize the birth control laws on the books, but at the “last minute” was swayed by religious groups to keep them.⁴⁸ Dr. Hania Ris, along with women like Marylu Raushenbush was still working on getting the laws changed until 1975, when an audit was done on Wisconsin laws that discriminated against women. “The antiquated birth control laws” were among rape and credit laws that were not woman friendly that were changed by the state.⁴⁹ Even though the 1972 US Supreme Court *Baird* case deemed laws banning birth control access to unmarried women unconstitutional, Dr. Hania Ris was still fighting for changes to be made to the restrictive laws. In a 1973 letter to the Maternal and Child

⁴⁵Reddin, May 5, 1949, 31.

⁴⁶ Howard Cosgrove, “Improving Self-Concepts is Oregon School’s Goal,” *Capital Times*, December 26, 1975, 1.

⁴⁷ Cosgrove, December 26, 1975, 1.

⁴⁸ “Sex, Pot, and Winds of Change”. *Capital Times*. March 24, 1972.

⁴⁹ “Midge Miller Explains her ERA Revisions”. *Appleton Post-Crescent*. March 5, 1975.

Health ADHOC Committee, Ris addresses the fact that Wisconsin was the last state to ban birth control from unmarried women and make the advertisement of it illegal.⁵⁰

Ris supported sex education classes in order to inform young people about diseases like gonorrhea and methods they could use to prevent them. She also advocated for hotlines that young women could call in order to get advice on sex, and wanted to allow minors access to health care for sexual transmitted diseases without parental consent as well.⁵¹ Ris also faced the same debate faced in earlier years: whether giving unmarried people access to birth control would increase promiscuity. Ris' point of view was that the girls she worked with were obviously having sex, and not giving them the information was detrimental to their health as well as the babies they might give birth to. In the same letter to the Maternal and Child Committee Ris explains that the Wisconsin infant mortality rate for children born out of wedlock was 25.8/1000 compared to 16/1000 live births to babies born in wedlock.⁵² Wisconsin however, was still held up on the idea that birth control was a moral problem, not a public health problem.

Ris not only saw the change of restrictive birth control laws in 1975, but was also involved in the abortion debate in Wisconsin. The first abortion clinic in Wisconsin, opened in 1971, was located in Madison and Ris was a big supporter of legal abortions. Even though *Roe v. Wade* was not in effect until 1973, a 1971 US Circuit Court case said that Wisconsin's laws banning abortions before 18-weeks was a violation of women's rights. This meant that the Madison abortion clinic doctor could not be prosecuted under Wisconsin's abortion laws because they were illegal. The abortion clinic still faced a lot of persecution from the public including

⁵⁰ Hania Ris Papers, Wisconsin Historical Society, Madison, WI.

⁵¹ Rosemary Kendrick, "Education Must End Sex Myths, Stop VD: Dr. Ris," *The Capital Times*, August 14, 1972.

⁵² Wisconsin Health Policy Council, Maternal and Child Health ADHOC Committee 1973, Hania Ris Papers, Wisconsin Historical Society, Madison, WI.

raids by the police.⁵³ Ironically, Wisconsin had legal abortions before they had unrestrictive birth control laws on the books. By 1975 however, due to the hard work and diligence of women like Hania Ris, Wisconsin was the last state to make advertisement by people other than doctors and access to birth control by unmarried women legal.

Dr. Maggi Cage

Maggi Cage is an avid feminist and has been an advocate for the rights of many people. She was even awarded feminist of the year from the Wisconsin chapter of the National Organization of Women in 1985.⁵⁴ Cage was born in Montana but raised in Wisconsin from the time she was a year old and in 2011 she was still there, working as the Executive Director of the Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transgender Community Center in Wisconsin. Cage earned a PhD in Counseling Psychology from the University of California- Santa Barbara, but returned to Wisconsin after that. In 1977 she helped to set up and then run the Fox Valley Reproductive Health Care Clinic (FVRHC), one of three abortion clinics ever in Wisconsin.⁵⁵

Unlike the case for birth control to unmarried women, Wisconsin did follow the 1973 *Roe v Wade* instructions and made abortions legal in the same year. However it had been legal in 17 states before *Roe v Wade*.⁵⁶ By the time Maggi Cage came onto the scene with her abortion clinic, Wisconsin had finally caught up with her sister states and had little restriction on birth control and abortion. Even though she did have to face any legal opposition, there were still some problems facing Cage and the FVRHC.

⁵³ “Abortionist Says: Women Have Right to Decide Whether to Have Youngsters”. *The Sheboygan Press*. April 29, 1971.

⁵⁴ “Abortion Center Endures,” *Green Bay Press-Gazette*, May 26, 1985, Maggi Cage Papers, Wisconsin Historical Society, Madison, WI.

⁵⁵ Jean Scherwenka, “The Multifaceted Maggi Cage: New Executive Director of Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transgender Community Center,” *Riverwestcurrents.com*, February, 2007, <http://www.riverwestcurrents.org/2007/February/002584.html> (accessed December 8, 2011).

⁵⁶ Gordon, 300.

The Fox Valley Community was very vocal about the clinic being set up. The Post Crescent Newspaper had many “Letter to the Editor” articles wherein community members showed their support or dislike of the clinic. Even though the clinic offered a range of women’s healthcare such as contraceptive counseling, and gynecological checkups, the fact that they offered abortion made it very controversial. One of the main arguments was from the pro-life side that felt that abortion being legal ignored the fact that a fetus was a person.⁵⁷ Not all of the Fox Valley area was against abortion however. Mrs. June Pearson, for example, felt that abortions should be allowed because she did not want the religious ideologies of others to take away choices from someone else.⁵⁸ Even though there was some support for the abortion clinic, the pro-life argument was especially hindering to Maggi Cage because it is what the majority of the Grand Chute Board of Health felt about abortion. In the minutes for their October 10, 1977 meeting regarding whether or not they should approve the clinic it was decided that the clinic would bring about “the killing of large numbers of Grand Chute and Fox Valley unborn persons”.⁵⁹ However, the state board of health approved the clinic and Cage was allowed to continue. The locals did wield some power over the new clinic and delayed it a whole three months by adding more requirements for building permits. The clinic, after much hardship, was finally opened in December 1977.⁶⁰

Her view on abortion was “pro-choice” which she explains as wanting women to have the right to choose termination of pregnancy. She hoped however that one day technology would make

⁵⁷ James and Gail Cummings, People’s Forum, *The Post-Crescent*, September 22, 1976, Maggi Cage Papers, Wisconsin Historical Society, Madison, WI.

⁵⁸ June Pearson, People’s Forum, *The Post-Crescent*, October 4, 1976, Maggi Cage Papers, Wisconsin Historical Society, Madison, WI.

⁵⁹ Grand Chute Board of Health Meeting, October 10, 1977, Maggi Cage Papers, Wisconsin Historical Society, Madison, WI.

⁶⁰ Bob Lowe. “Area Abortion Clinic to Open in 3 Weeks”. *The Post-Crescent*. Sept. 22, 1977, Maggi Cage Papers, Wisconsin Historical Society, Madison, WI.

abortions obsolete, because she was not pro-abortion, just pro-choice.⁶¹ Because she was pro-choice she supported the 1977 alternatives to abortion that Planned Parenthood was looking into, while at the same time supporting raising the amount of public funds that helped poor women have access to abortions. Wisconsin worked to give financial aid to those wishing to adopt as well as giving \$35 million more to upgrade sex education, family planning programs and contraceptive research. These actions would give women information on preventative choices, so that abortion would not have to be a choice.⁶²

When asked why she wanted to open the clinic Cage explained that she had had an illegal abortion when she was 19 and did not want other women to face that. At the time that she opened the FVRHC there were only clinics offering abortions in Madison and Milwaukee, and she felt that there was a need for one in the Fox Valley area.⁶³ The clinic was privately funded and was set up to give services to anyone, no matter their financial standing.

According to Cage, most of the women that came to her clinic were young, 19-24 years of age, students and white. A majority of the women claimed that the reason they wanted to get an abortion was because they were not ready to be a mother. One point that Cage makes about her statistics is that almost all of the women were either not using contraceptives, or were using them incorrectly when they got pregnant. Cage released this information as an attempt to “give some valid information” to people that had not yet chosen sides in the debate between pro-life and pro-choice.⁶⁴ Along with the conflicts over the building permits, Cage also had to deal with protestors and terrorists attacking her clinic on a regular basis. She recalls having rocks and

⁶¹ “Opinion,” *Technique*, Vol 10. No. 6, May 1985, Maggi Cage Papers, Wisconsin Historical Society, Madison, WI.

⁶² “Alternatives to Abortion,” *The Post-Crescent*, July 10, 1977, Maggi Cage Papers, Wisconsin Historical Society, Madison, WI.

⁶³ “Abortion Center Endures,” May 26, 1985.

⁶⁴ “Typical Abortion Patient is Young, Single Student,” *Wisconsin State Journal*, July 9, 1985.

bullets hit the windows as well as the clinic being firebombed in 1985.⁶⁵ Because of these experiences, Cage also worked on the Common Ground movement, in which anti-abortion and pro-choice advocates had civil discussions together, rather than just violently yelling at each other on picket lines. This was on major success that happened in Wisconsin, and violence against clinics slowed down after this, even when other states were still dealing with rampant violence.⁶⁶

Maggi Cage, while facing some discrimination from political and social entities, was not facing any more problems than abortion clinics in other areas. The extremely controversial topic of abortion seems to be one part of the Reproductive Rights Movement that Wisconsin was not the “Caboose of social thought”. The Wisconsin common ground experiment also seemed to be very helpful on the road to making the fight between the two sides of the Abortion debate more peaceful.

Conclusion

The Reproductive Rights Movement in Wisconsin was a battle of ideals in order to either preserve the morality of Wisconsin or to make sure that the right to choose was protected for women of all ages and marital statuses. From the first more conservative movements to allow poor women more access to birth control, through the legalization of abortion there has also been some improvement on Wisconsin’s part. In the case of birth control, the state was nearly 10 years behind every other state in passing less restrictive laws. The national government played a much larger role in making abortion legal in Wisconsin and while there was a lot of public opposition to abortion, the laws protected a woman’s right to choose that form of birth control. Even though

⁶⁵ “Abortion Bombs Called and Assault on Rights,” *Green Bay News Chronicle*, May 20, 1985, Maggi Cage Papers, Wisconsin Historical Society, Madison, WI.

⁶⁶ John Patrick Hunter, “Group Seeks Common Ground on Abortion,” *Madison Capital Times*, May, 12 1992.

there was a lot of opposition to these Wisconsin women in their battle to gain more access to birth control for women, they had many successes.

Marylu Raushenbush and the Planned Parenthood group, along with their contemporary Hania Ris, pushed very hard and succeeded in getting poor and unmarried women more access to birth control and information. Because of them even women that could not afford a visit to the doctor could be educated on ways to control their own reproduction. Hania Ris wanted to give that education to younger teenage women in order to help battle venereal disease and teenage pregnancy. She advocated for sex education programs or at the very least programs that educated about diseases that could be transmitted through sex. Today Wisconsin does not require that schools provide sex education but they do have to provide information about sexually transmitted diseases.⁶⁷ Maggi Cage's reproductive health clinic also provided many women with access to birth control information and abortions. She faced many pressures from the pro-life groups, but still provided a way for 100s of women to have access to choice. Her work with the Common Ground Network to calm the storm between the two sides of the Reproductive Rights debate and even helped create the sex education programs that are taught in Wisconsin schools today.⁶⁸ In Wisconsin, the battle for Reproductive Rights was a tough battle, but the results of this battle has been benefit to women in Wisconsin today.

⁶⁷ Teen-Aid Inc. "State Sex Education Laws". http://www.teen-aid.org/State_Resourses/State_Sex_Education_Laws.htm (accessed December 11, 2011).

⁶⁸ "Pro-Life and Pro-Choice Groups Use Dialogue and Shared Concerns to Find Common Ground". <http://www.cpn.org/topics/families/prolife.html> (accessed December 11, 2011).

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