Article

Journal of Contemporary Ethnography
1–37
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DOI: 10.1177/0891241613516627
jce.sagepub.com

Evangelical Underdogs: Intrinsic Success, Organizational Solidarity, and Marginalized Identities as Religious Movement Resources

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Abstract

The evangelical crisis pregnancy center (CPC) movement demonstrates both low rates of success and robust support from evangelicals. I draw upon three theoretical frameworks—subcultural identity, organizational solidarity, and doing religion—to explain this seeming paradox. Data stem from a study of this pro-life/antiabortion movement and include fieldwork observations in seven CPCs, thirty-eight semistructured interviews, and analysis of primary and secondary documents. Empirically, evangelicals' commitment to CPCs is tied to three aspects of subcultural identity: emphasis on intrinsic meanings of success, solidarity among evangelical organizations, and understandings of activism as an identity marker. These findings suggest that evangelicals are doing religion through their activism, making action and identity mutually reinforcing, and insulating activists from forces that might otherwise hinder religious identity. Theoretically, these results indicate that subcultural identity theory should be modified to acknowledge organizational solidarity as a form of religious action and the mutually reinforcing relationship between action and identity as the process of doing religion.

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Keywords
evangelical Christianity, crisis pregnancy centers, subcultural identity, organizational solidarity, doing religion

Introduction

The crisis pregnancy center (CPC) movement is the oldest and largest antiabortion movement in the United States. Originating in the early 1970s, this movement encompasses more organizations, volunteers, and volunteer hours than all other forms of pro-life/antiabortion activism combined, yet is also the least studied (Munson 2009). Most of the roughly three thousand CPCs in the United States are operated by evangelical Christians (Kelly 2012). This evangelical movement is not particularly successful in meeting its stated goals of preventing abortion, promoting traditional gender roles and families, and converting clients to evangelical Christianity. Paradoxically, however, the movement experienced explosive growth in the last twenty years and increased from 600 to 2,300 or more evangelical centers, increased funding for local centers as well as national organizations, expanded services, and extensive media coverage from pro-life, Christian, and mainstream media and politicians (Care Net 2008; Gibbs 2007; Hartshorn 2003).

The movement is overtly religious in its framing processes, which exemplify what Snow and McAdam (2000, 49) define as identity construction, or "the process through which personal and collective identities are aligned, such that individuals regard engagement in movement activity as being consistent with their self-conception and interests." Here I explicate how specific cultural elements of evangelicalism, particularly its robust subcultural identity, prompt activists to maintain a collective religious identity despite limited success and challenges stemming from secular society and pro-choice forces. Stated another way, how does evangelical Christianity shape CPC activists' definitions of movement success? How does the religious identity constructed by evangelical activists ensure they remain committed on the organizational and individual levels in the face of limited external success and resistance from pro-choice forces?

I draw upon an extensive qualitative study of the CPC movement and three key theoretical frameworks: subcultural identity, organizational solidarity and doing religion to examine how particular aspects of evangelicalism align personal and collective evangelical identities. Moreover, this is the first academic study of evangelical CPCs and offers insight into the specific content of evangelical culture and beliefs sustaining this movement. It also builds upon findings from subcultural identity research based upon survey and interview data and takes account of behaviors as well as attitudes via an

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ethnographic study (Smith et al. 1998; Smith 2000). Thus, the purpose of the paper is to both provide an empirical account of CPCs as a religious movement and, more broadly, to use the movement to illustrate the relationship between religious identity and action among evangelicals.

The next section of the paper provides an empirical and historical overview of the movement from its inception to the present day, noting key events and shifts in the movement relevant to religious identity. The subsequent literature review summarizes the key characteristics of evangelical Christianity and presents the three theoretical frameworks utilized in my analyses. The first two, subcultural identity theory and organizational solidarity, both describe features unique to evangelicalism that sustains its vitality. In fact, organizational solidarity is an expression of subcultural identity. The third, doing religion, is a broader framework explaining how faith-based action is the foundation of religious identity (as opposed to vice versa). I then move into a detailed description of my data, methodology, and analysis strategy. The findings represent the range of strategies activists use to maintain their commitments to the movement despite their lack of success meeting their goals. In particular, I find activists value faithful action over outcomes, adhere to subcultural norms that make CPC activism an authentic expression of religious adherence and obligate other evangelicals to support CPCs, and draw identity-bolstering boundaries between themselves and significant others, most notable a fallen secular society, pro-choice forces, and a media and government structure that threaten to overpower evangelicals' antiabortion efforts. I then consider the consequences of these strategies in terms of the harm CPC activists unwittingly inflict on clients. The paper concludes with the theoretical implications of these findings, most notably the incorporation of organizational solidarity and doing religion into subcultural identity theory. By combining the insights of these frameworks, it becomes clear that activism is a form of religious observance and that action and identity are mutually reinforcing.

The CPC Movement

The CPC movement is the oldest form of modern pro-life activism in the United States and encompasses more organizations and activists than all other forms of pro-life activism combined (Munson 2009). Activists seek to dissuade women from having abortions and roughly 2,300 of the 3,000 or so CPCs in the United States are overtly evangelical Christian—these centers are the focus of this study (Family Research Council, hereafter FRC 2009). CPC activists believe that if women in problematic pregnancies are offered material and emotional support, they will forgo abortion. To meet these

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needs, CPCs offer free pregnancy tests, lay counseling performed by volunteers, baby items, maternity clothing, social service referrals, housing, and financial assistance. Secondary goals of the movement include converting clients to evangelical Christianity and promoting traditional gender roles, specifically adoption or marriage in the event of a pregnancy and sexual abstinence before marriage. CPC client programs include abstinence seminars, couples counseling, financial planning, and parenting classes. With the exception of pregnancy tests and referrals, assistance is connected to meeting obligations set by the center, such as attending Bible studies or client programs. Activists are required to be Christians (Heritage House n.d.; Care Net 1995; Hartshorn 2003; Kelly 2012).

Structure of the CPC Movement

The estimated 2,300 evangelical CPCs encompass roughly forty thousand activists (FRC 2009). Each local center has a small number of paid administrative staff members. Most local activists are volunteer lay counselors and interact regularly with clients. Counselors administer pregnancy tests and client programs (FRC 2009; Kelly 2012). National-level leaders work in two national organizations, Care Net and Heartbeat International (hereafter HBI). These organizations serve as public relations and information clearinghouses, publishing most of the materials used in local centers, such as counseling materials and volunteer training manuals (Kelly 2012). Evangelicals feel strongly that only women can understand the challenges of pregnancy and motherhood and thus the movement attracts mostly women activists. Men in the movement generally are found in local administration or national leadership positions.

The increasing availability of CPC client counseling materials from more broadly focused conservative organizations speaks to the intertwined manner in which evangelical organizations conduct their operations. HBI networks with related Christian organizations offering resources promoting the goals of the CPC movement, such as abstinence and adoption (HBI 2011a). Care Net maintains a list of its "ministry partners," other Christian organizations that participate in joint ventures with Care Net (Care Net 2010, 2011; HBI 2010). Evangelical media (e.g., *Christianity Today, World Magazine*, and *Religion & Society Report*) and other evangelical pro-life groups (e.g., National Right to Life Committee) routinely chronicle developments in the CPC movement for their readers. The National Institute of Family and Life Advocates (NIFLA) provides legal services to CPCs. eKyros develops CPC client management software and *At the Center* is a magazine aimed exclusively at evangelical CPCs.

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Identity markers are omnipresent at the national and local levels of the movement. Shared symbols such as the Christian cross or issuing a statement of faith are shorthand ways activists and organizations signal their mutual faith commitments to each other and enhance recruitment and interorganizational cooperation (Stevens 2002). Care Net requires activists in affiliate centers to sign a Statement of Faith adapted from the National Association of Evangelicals, demonstrating the overlapping nature of Christian organizations (Care Net 2009b). Likewise, HBI purports to provide affiliates with the resources "to be creative and entrepreneurial, as the Lord leads, in their own communities" (HBI 2011b). Care Net and many local centers highlight their memberships in the Evangelical Council for Financial Accountability (ECFA) on their websites to encourage donors. Toward this end, Care Net offers workshops sponsored by ECFA at its annual conferences (Care Net 2011).

The Paradox of the CPC Movement

At the heart of the CPC movement, however, is a puzzling contrast. The movement garners impressive support among evangelicals, yet the movement has only limited success meeting its primary goals. Officially, the movement claims 20 percent of the women who visit a CPC are considering abortion, indicating most visitors to a CPC are not the target client (Freeman 2008; Glessner 2002). A closer look at the data aggregated by the movement suggest even this low number is optimistic. Less than half of clients (45 percent) seek out pregnancy testing. Of those who do, 61 percent have a positive test result and the majority of positive test clients (79 percent) state intentions to carry the pregnancy to term. Ten percent of pregnant clients are undecided about abortion and 4.5 percent indicate intentions to have abortions (5 percent do not state their intentions). Ultimately, only 4 percent of clients are the target client—pregnant women intending to abort or undecided about abortion. Roughly 4 percent of all pregnancy test clients (7 percent of all positive pregnancy test clients and 1.9 percent of all clients) are what CPCs identify as successful target cases, that is, pregnant women who changed their minds about abortion (eKyros 2010).

CPCs are no more successful in meeting their secondary goals. Nearly 80 percent of CPC clients are unmarried (Care Net 1995; Mathews-Green 1996; eKyros 2010) despite centers' explicit efforts to promote marriage. Estimates from activists suggests between 2 and 10 percent of single, pregnant clients marry, but up to 90–95 percent of pregnant clients intend to single-parent (Olasky and Olasky 1990; Mathews-Green 1996, 1997). Adoption rates for CPC clients (1–3 percent) are no different than the national average (Young

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1998a; Hull 2008). Finally, in terms of what eKyros calls "spiritual status," approximately 1.9 percent of clients "make a profession of faith" and roughly 0.4 percent "rededicate their lives" (eKyros 2010).

This disconnect between the movement's goals and outcomes does not mean the CPC movement is irrelevant to the larger struggle between pro-life and pro-choice forces. As Staggenborg (2001) notes, an internal focus on nurturing cultural identities is a logical strategy for movements to take during periods when political gains are unlikely. These activities may help maintain the strength of the collective identity and provide the resources to mobilize once political gains are more likely. As I demonstrate below, the power of CPC activism to maintain a collective evangelical, antiabortion identity should not be dismissed and indeed may be the most important outcome produced by the movement. Thus, the seeming paradox between evangelicals' investment in the movement and its underwhelming outcomes is understandable in the context of evangelical religious identity. Moreover, it is not uncommon for unsuccessful religious movements to reframe failure as evidence of society's dire need for their efforts or to emphasize action over outcomes bolster religious identity (e.g., Youngman 2003) and the CPC movement follows this pattern as well.

Literature Review

Evangelical Christianity

The dramatic growth of the CPC movement in the last two decades did not happen in a social vacuum but rather is the result of the growing prominence of evangelicals in public discourse and politics (cf. Blanchard 1994; Martin 2005). In particular, prominent evangelist Jerry Falwell persuaded large numbers of evangelicals that activism was part of their religious obligations, particularly antiabortion efforts, beginning in the 1970s (Harding 1990). Evangelical Christianity refers to a trans-denominational, conservative Protestant body and represents the largest religious group in the United States today, making up over a quarter of the population (Pew Forum 2008). Adherents claim the Bible is the infallible word of God and believe one must undergo a religious conversion, commonly referred to as being born again, to receive salvation. Evangelicals claim to possess God's ultimate moral truth and that God holds them responsible for converting others to evangelical Christianity. American evangelicalism enjoys extraordinary vitality, meaning believers demonstrate robust faith, high rates of participation in religious activities, and effective recruitment and retention compared to other American religions' traditions (Smith et al. 1998).

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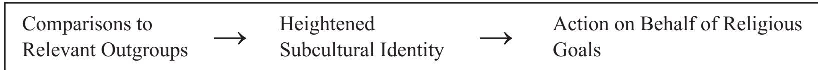

Figure 1. Original subcultural identity theoretical framework.

Subcultural Identity Theory

The theoretical framework most often associated with the vitality of evangelical Christianity is subcultural identity theory (Smith et al. 1998; Figure 1). Evangelicals make comparisons between themselves and a fallen secular society (Bartkowski 2004; Smith et al. 1998; Williams 2008; Youngman 2003). The boundaries of evangelical identity are defined in opposition to Others (see Williams 2008 for a historical account of evangelicals' chosen Others). Williams (2008) notes that evangelicals frequently vilify those who seem to threaten Christian values by exacerbating boundaries and heightening tension.

This tension leads to a greater salience of religious identity and motivates evangelicals to take action to change society. Scholars refer to the felt responsibility to take action as the evangelical burden, whereas the concrete actions are engaged orthodoxy (Smith et al. 1998). For example, pro-life activism is a key example of aligning personal identity with collective forms of engaged orthodoxy, a necessary precursor to mobilization (Glass 2009; Ruiz-Junco 2011; Snow and McAdam 2000). Evangelicals feel at odds with a secular society that condones nonmarital sexuality and legal abortion, and thus opposition to abortion provides multiple outgroups relevant to identity construction. Evangelicals entered pro-life activism in significant numbers in the 1970s, with dramatic increases throughout the 1980s. Today, roughly two-thirds of pro-life activists are evangelicals, often spurred on by religious leaders who claim pro-life activism is part of the evangelical burden (Ginsburg 1998; Gorney 1998; Maxwell 2002; Risen and Thomas 1998).

Religious actors in contexts with multiple relevant outgroups have more opportunities for interaction and/or confrontation, and thus more chances to emphasize identity and build religious strength (Smith et al. 1998). The basic causal process might be conceptualized in this way;

Evangelicals, despite their desire to enact change, may be uniquely insulated when they are ineffective in meeting their stated goals by attributing the fault to their targets (Williams 2008). According to evangelicals, Others fail to understand the value of Christian lifestyles and evangelicals must continue their efforts, no matter how disinterested or even hostile these Others seem. As Smith et al. argue,

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> Organized evangelical ministries designed for "outreach" work are not frequently distinguished by a strong sense of humble reciprocity with those ministered to, although individual evangelicals in ministry often may be so. More typically, an "us" and "them" mentality prevails, often along with a certain un-self-critical paternalism (Smith et al. 1998, 133).

Furthermore, the qualities evangelicals count as the most positive about themselves, other Americans judge as their worst, perceiving evangelicals to be overly emotional, judgmental, paranoid about other subcultures, and self-righteous (Smith et al. 1998). Why such reactions do not prompt changes in strategy from evangelicals (in the CPC movement and elsewhere) is an important question that cannot be fully answered relying upon the original subcultural identity framework. What is clear, however, is that evangelical Christianity may be grounded in action as much as in belief. Below I argue that evangelicals value efforts more than outcomes.

Organizational Solidarity

While subcultural identity theory offers an intuitive, elegant explanation of evangelical religious identity, it remains untested in certain empirical fields. Smith et al. (1998) constructed subcultural identity theory from survey and interview data and thus did not study how distinction and engagement are bound up in religious movements or organizations (Stevens 2002). Stevens (2002) applies Stinchcombe's (1965) organizational approach to conservative Protestantism, to explain how conservative Protestant organizations maintain a high level of commitment: "religious vitality is largely a function of the relative density of organizational relations within the religious population. . . . Subcultures emerge as organizational systems with legitimating ideologies that provide for compelling identities" (Stevens 2002, 347). Stevens' key claim is that an organizational approach reveals the empirical mechanisms leading to persistence and vitality. First, conservative Protestant organizations enjoy a dense network of organizational ties that form a coherent, complete world for believers. Evangelicals attend churches, volunteer in religious organizations, shop at Christian-owned businesses, send their children to Christian schools and colleges, seek out news from Christian media organizations, and support Christian advocacy groups (Stevens 2002). In terms of subcultural identity theory, expressions of organizational solidarity can be considered part of the "action" part of the process.

Second, belonging to a Christian organization is an important way individuals demonstrate their engagement with the wider society, as well as their distinction from it (Smith et al. 1998). Along similar lines, Christian

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organizations look to each other for appropriate organizational models, and hold each other to shared standards (Stevens 2002). These standards may be institutionalized, for example, the ECFA ranks evangelical organizations on the transparency of their accounting practices and the proportion of donations that go directly to ministry services. Christian organizations adhering to these standards therefore may legitimately ask other organizations and individual believers for money (Stevens 2002).

Doing Religion

Other recent theoretical developments in the sociology of religion that go beyond an exclusive focus on evangelicalism may deepen our understanding of sustained religious activism in a context of limited success. Avishai (2008) developed the “doing religion” framework (based upon West and Zimmerman’s [1987] “doing gender” framework) to explain how religious identity is created and maintained through religiously motivated action. Avishai argues that taking action in a manner consistent with one’s beliefs is the essence of constructing an authentic religious identity, that is, “doing religion is associated with a search for authentic religious subjecthood and that religiosity is shaped in accordance with the logics of one’s religion, and in the context of controlling messages about threatened symbolic boundaries and cultural Others” (409). Religiosity is therefore a “status that is learned, negotiated, or achieved by adhering to or performing prescribed practices that distinguish the religious from the non-religious” (428) and is “performed and achieved in the context of a dialogue with a secular Other” (410). In sum, observance is the core of identity. While Smith et al. (1998) argue that identity prompts action, Avishai claims that actions produce identity. Incorporating the doing religion framework with subcultural identity theory suggests that the relationship between identity and action will be mutually reinforcing; in short, the results of actions will be less relevant for constructing an authentic religious identity than will the actions themselves. Put another way, evangelicals are responsible for taking action as God would want, but God alone is responsible for the outcomes. I offer evidence for these claims below.

Research Method

This study is a multilevel examination of the CPC movement, covering the organizational, individual, and national levels and spanning ethnographic observations, thirty-eight semistructured interviews, and secondary and primary data analysis. I opted for qualitative methods as this was the first sustained academic study of evangelical CPCs and researchers knew little of

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substance about it (Strauss and Corbin 1998). I sought to understand the framings and strategies of the movement, the motivations and meanings activists attached to their efforts, and above all to present my findings holistically while maintaining the salience of activists' "voices" throughout. As a feminist ethnographer, I was aware of the challenges of fairly representing these voices in my work (cf. Ginsburg 1997) while still noting how participants were affected by or implicated in processes of inequality.

This research began in 2006 when I began observing a CPC, eventually growing to encompass six additional organizations and thirty-eight interviews. The ethnographic portion of the data collection concluded in 2008, although I continued to collect primary and secondary documents through 2009. I performed an estimated hundred hours of observation in the first CPC over twenty-four months and briefer, one-time observations in an additional six CPCs, averaging approximately two to three hours and focused upon the mission, general operations, and client programs of each of these centers. I received institutional review board clearance before beginning fieldwork or interviews. Below I offer more detail on each type of data collection.

Ethnographic Observations

I performed twenty-four months of ethnographic fieldwork in one crisis pregnancy center, and supplemented these observations with briefer observations in an additional six centers throughout the southeastern United States. The center where I performed the bulk of my fieldwork is located in a midsize southern city with an ethnically and socioeconomically diverse population, suggesting that the center's clientele would reflect the movement's clientele as a whole. Out of ethical concerns, I informed the center director that I identify as pro-choice, feminist, and nonevangelical when asking for permission to conduct research in the center. I did not counsel clients but instead performed tasks in the center's clothing donation program, usually spending my time in the center doing laundry and odd jobs as requested and talking with activists about the center and key statuses we shared in common, such as motherhood. When not working in the room dedicated to laundry services, I spent my time in the lobby of the center, the default "hang out" location for activists not otherwise occupied. By being in the center in a less obtrusive way, I could observe everyday conversations between activists and client–activist interactions outside of the counseling sessions. I jotted notes on pieces of scrap paper I carried in my pockets while at the center and typed out field notes after each visit to the center, using my on-site notes to ensure I would not forget to record any observations. Initially, I made field visits twice a week for one month for one to three hours at a time. After that point,

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activists became accustomed to my presence and field visits usually took place two to four times a month on a schedule similar to that of the volunteers, who usually work one half-day shift per week. My observations grew less frequent after twelve months as I neared saturation and averaged one observation per month for the second twelve months. My time in the field totaled roughly hundred hours.

During these observations, I also fielded repeated “conversion attempts” as activists would try to discuss my faith (or lack thereof) and invite me to various religious events. I did not find these overly burdensome with the exception of efforts that focused upon my then–preschool age son (I am a never-married single mother) and the alleged harm he suffered as the result of not living in a traditional two-parent home. In all cases, I listened to what the respondent had to say and replied as neutrally as possible. While I wanted to demonstrate respect for respondents’ views, I was uninterested in converting to evangelical Christianity and dubious (at best) about the benefits of the patriarchal family. However, as a feminist sociologist, I believe that respondents have a right to be heard on their own terms. Therefore, I was careful to listen and take thorough field notes to better understand respondents’ perspectives and to parse out my own personal reactions to their statements. All of this is not to say I could not establish rapport or that I didn’t come to like many respondents—I found many of them to be genuinely concerned and proactive regarding the well-being of their communities. Thus, the amount of emotional labor required for data collection was significant, but not uncommon for qualitative work (Kleinman and Copp 1993).

Interviews

It took a few months for activists to be at ease with me (and vice versa). After I had been coming to the center roughly one to three times a week for four months, a rapport solidified and I began interviews. The twelve interviews from this CPC, along with my analysis of national movement accounts, indicated that this center was something of an outlier in the movement, seeing a smaller number of clients and offering a narrower range of services compared to other CPCs. To gain a more comprehensive picture of the movement, I sought out other activists (n = 26) and centers (n = 6). These additional activists and centers were selected via snowball sampling after meeting an activist from a different CPC at an antiabortion protest. This new respondent introduced me to numerous CPC activists from her center and others nearby. Many CPC activists are leery of giving researchers access because of negative portrayals of the movement in non-Christian media. Thus, referrals from my original respondents proved critical to gaining access to three additional

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centers and fifteen more interviewees. I reached out to three additional CPCs and six more activists (cold calling) to ensure I had respondents from rural, suburban, and urban centers across the country and from the local and national levels of the movement. Finally, the editors of a pro-life anthology I contacted put me in touch with five additional CPC activists from across the nation.

Of the thirty-eight interviews, twenty-two were conducted face-to-face (nineteen in the CPC where the respondent worked) and sixteen were conducted over the phone. Interviews ran between forty-five minutes and four hours long, with an average near two hours. Interviews were loosely structured so that respondents' perspectives would be at the forefront, focusing on four major themes: respondent's personal history with the movement, what purpose CPCs fulfilled in the United States, how and why women clients used the centers' resources, and how effective were the respondent's own center and CPCs in general. All interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim, with four exceptions wherein I took extensive notes during the interview (at respondents' requests or because the interview environment was not conducive to recording).

Respondents represented thirty local CPCs spread across eight states in various regions of the United States and the District of Columbia, both national organizations, and four related evangelical organizations across four states, including a maternity home, a firm specializing in establishing ultrasound services in CPCs, and two consulting firms specializing in volunteer training seminars. Some activists had worked in both local CPCs and national organizations or worked in multiple locations of a small chain of centers located within a limited geographic region, such as a large city. Nearly all respondents were women (thirty-five) and Caucasian (also thirty-five), making my sample generally representative of the gender and ethnic composition of the movement. Activists ranged from nineteen to sixty-five in age, and from six months to thirty-seven years in movement experience.

Primary and Secondary Documents

I draw on primary movement publications including press releases, training and operations manuals, program materials, websites, and newsletters. To contextualize the movement within evangelical Christianity, I gathered publications from pro-life, religious, and conservative advocacy groups supporting the movement, providing resources to CPCs. To understand the interplay between the movement and its chosen Others, I searched for secular media accounts of the movement from popular media sources such as *Time Magazine* and *The New York Times* and pro-choice groups' accounts of opposition to the

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CPC movement, congressional legislation and reports on CPCs, and lawsuits initiated by former CPC clients.

I also use data from eKyros, a software company that exclusively produces a client data management system for CPCs. CPCs use the software to maintain record files on all clients that access CPC services, noting the purpose of the clients' visit, demographic data, and outcomes of the visits in terms of abortion decisions and conversion to evangelical Christianity. eKyros can then aggregate the data from these CPCs and issue statistics and reports based on these data. While eKyros will not reveal how many centers use the software, the statistics provide the aggregated number of clients and client outcomes for these centers on an annual basis for the years 2000 through 2010. In 2008, Care Net and HBI centers collectively reported approximately 850,000 clients. eKyros reports data on 336,726 clients visiting its patron centers, or 40 percent of the total number claimed by the networks. In 2009, Care Net and HBI centers claimed roughly one million center client visits and eKyros reported on 418, 828, or 42 percent. Thus the eKyros statistics are likely roughly representative of the movement as a whole if not exhaustive. Statistics for 2010 include 450,484 client visits, 45 percent for pregnancy tests.

Data Analysis

I analyzed the data using Strauss and Corbin's (1998) "open coding" method, searching for broad patterns in the data and gradually narrowing my analytical focus into a more structured approach using axial coding. Initially, I relied on the broad themes addressed in the subcultural identity, organizational solidarity, and doing religion frameworks as "sensitizing concepts" (Blumer 1969, 48) to do the initial pass through of the data. I also relied upon a series of memos from field notes describing similarities and differences between my observations and the existing literature. In light of the fact that there is a significant body of research on evangelical Christianity and activism but little was known about the CPC movement, this was the most appropriate approach. When I realized how well the sensitizing concepts I used in open coding fit the data, I reanalyzed the data several times for axial codes identifying the connections between the open codes and began to refine the analysis by sorting the data into categories relevant to each of the three frameworks and their substantive concepts. In this process, I noted some places of significant departure between the data and subcultural identity framework regarding the mutual reinforcement of identity and action and I discuss this below. I also realized that many of my codes overlapped across more than one framework and began to consider how these frameworks might be fruitfully synthesized.

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Findings: Strategies for Maintaining Commitment

Valuing Actions More Than Outcomes

The striking combination of limited success and robust support in the CPC movement indicates activists' definitions of success are internally oriented. Rather than measuring success in terms of prevented abortions, client marriages or adoptions, activists believe their task is to act in accordance with their faith and God will determine the outcomes (a similar process occurs among Christian activists in Operation Rescue activists; see Youngman 2003). The movement's definition of success is summed up by a local volunteer writing in *At the Center* about the "five ways that God says He measures the success of our job" (Vogel 2007, n.p.):

> success is based on the significance of our task, not our material rewards . . .
> success is measured by obeying His Word, not pleasing our clientele . . .
> success is based on our dependence upon God, not our own competency . . .
> success and significance are not based on our job description, but rather by our heart motivation . . .
> *God* says success is not based on results, but on faithfulness. (emphasis in original)

Thus, for CPC activists, it is enough to have the ability to meet their stated goals; whether clients visit centers, change their minds about abortion, convert, marry, place for adoption, or choose abstinence is up to God. Activists' mission is to facilitate this process by garnering resources from other evangelicals and creating opportunities for clients to convert or to reject abortion. Toward these ends, activists have opened more centers, invested in marketing research, and expanded services to include ultrasound, prenatal care, abstinence education, and marriage and adoption promotion. Having these services available to women represents faithful action and trust that God will bring clients to centers as He sees fit.

CPC national leadership does not ignore client outcomes; they have in fact attempted to alter framings to urge local activists to embrace more pragmatic orientations to CPC work. The movement issued several reports lamenting the declining proportions of "abortion-minded" women visiting centers, arguing that CPCs have become too similar to secular social service agencies and now primarily serve women who would have continued their pregnancies anyway (Freeman 2008; Glessner 2002; Young 1998b). Care Net and HBI have increased efforts to involve local volunteers in encouraging clients to consider adoption. Yet appropriate, religiously motivated *action* remains the focus for local activists, suggesting that it is difficult to alter the point of

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convergence between individual and collective identities. Activists have a clear sense of how they should do religion that is not easily altered. Sharon, the director of a newly opened urban center, told me:

> We're not about a checkmark, saying, "Oh, so we saw 10 people today." . . . It doesn't matter about how many people we see. . . . We would never get into that business because then that means that you move away from your purpose . . . you're more concerned about how many people you serve than you are about the people . . . [you're] trying to make things happen for the wrong reason.
> —Sharon, fifty-four, five years in the movement.

Caroline, a sixty-three-year-old active in the movement for twenty-three years, ran five centers and previously operated three for-profit abortion clinics before converting to evangelicalism. She emphasized the movement was not about meeting quotas, stating "The statistics will not change based on our work but individuals will be helped and changed and have positive outcomes because of our work. I can't change the world. I can just change my little corner." Likewise, Nicole, a rural center director, emphasized that obedience to God's will superseded all other priorities:

> It's [the meaning of center activism] got everything to do with how great God is and how he wants us to share Him with people that don't know Him because when you take Christ out of it we're just another social service . . . as long as I'm here we are *never* straying from what Christ can do and how powerful He is and how much He loves you. Never.
> —Nicole, thirty-four, two years in the movement.

Even when clients failed to respond to the centers' message, activists could still be assured they had acted as God would want them to. Jana, 29 and in the movement for the last three years, summed up this attitude, telling me "I just lay the truth out there for them and if they choose not to believe it I can't help that. . . . If they choose to accept it, then amen . . . if they choose to reject it, then you know, it's in God's hands." As these comments suggest, an inability to affect the changes sought in clients did not necessarily threaten the religious identities of the activists involved or undermine their motivation.

Activists are also selective about the client outcomes they focus upon, often relying on anecdotal successes as a form of motivation and to attract donors. Many centers have an annual fundraising banquet. Centers commonly show a video of select clients highlighting the positive effects of the center's efforts, or have clients bring babies born in the last year to the event. This strategy proves effective, as individual client stories resonate with

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donors and activists, who often tell the same client story among themselves over and over. During my two years of field work, two clients placed their children for adoption. Both stayed in frequent contact with the center during their pregnancies and one woman invited her CPC counselor to attend the child's birth. Counselors were thrilled by the adoptions. These clients were mentioned in casual conversations between counselors, and they eagerly inquired about the women's health and well-being, and updated each other with any available information. After the first adoption was finalized, activists regaled me with stories about the client's decision to have her CPC counselor carry the baby from the birth mother and give her to the waiting adoptive parents. In a third instance, a woman had considered abortion for health reasons, but ultimately decided to continue the pregnancy after visiting this CPC. She experienced numerous health problems, delivering only thirty weeks into the pregnancy. Counselors spoke of her courage in facing a difficult pregnancy, praising her decision and thanking God for "changing her heart towards life."

Despite anecdotal successes, counselors could not provide systematic data on client outcomes when I requested it. They did not seem evasive in their vague answers, but rather seemed unaware of the numbers—numbers were not deemed important. Instead, they spoke of the need to attract community support, build relationships with individual clients, and collectively celebrate each prevented abortion, adoption, or conversion with other activists. Newsletters and websites of local centers and national organizations typically feature one or two client stories while urging centers not to focus too much on numbers, reflected in this excerpt from an article from *At the Center* (Hiehle 2010; n.p.):

> We look at only numbers and determine that if our numbers are not big, then God is not blessing . . . size is not what God uses to gauge effectiveness or significance. . . . Don't judge your ministry by man's criteria, but rather on God's barometer of success.

Information on local rates of client outcomes are difficult to obtain, suggesting this is not how the local activists measure success. Instead, as individual clients improve their lives, the effects will aggregate into wider social change and a more moral society. This change is only possible through one-on-one relationships that emulate the tenets of evangelical faith and not through impersonal mass efforts. This emphasis on faithful action and deemphasis on outcomes demonstrates how evangelicals blend personal identity with collective forms of engaged orthodoxy in their own unique forms of doing religion.

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Organizational Support for CPCs as an Expression of Identity

Organizational solidarity represents an institutionalized aspect of doing religion for evangelicals. Evidence of the dense networks enjoyed by evangelical organizations and the identity markers that signify membership in this Christian world abound within the CPC movement (Stevens 2002). I noticed many examples of this seamless connection between Christian identity and organizational support in my fieldwork and interviews. For individual CPCs, these overlapping ties can be seen in the financial and in-kind support centers receive from churches and Christian-owned local businesses, including ultrasound services from some physicians. CPC activists described the process by which they acquired ultrasound services for their center: one activist approached a local Christian doctor, described the work of the CPC, and asked the physician to donate ultrasound services to help the center convince clients to forgo abortions. Shared religious background and felt obligation was enough to persuade pro-life physicians to donate costly services. Physicians sometimes also agreed to provide free or reduced-cost prenatal care to uninsured clients who agreed to continue their pregnancies. Many activists also frequently make monthly personal donations to the center. While secular individuals and organizations often ignored and sometimes responded with hostility to invitations to participate in CPC fundraising efforts, faithful evangelical donors consistently donated to their local centers and participated in fundraisers including banquets, silent auctions, golf tournaments, and motorcycle charity rides.

Larger scale alliances are also in evidence. A number of national evangelical groups provide support for CPCs across the United States. Focus on the Family (2010) will pay 80 percent of the costs for ultrasound equipment in individual CPCs, the Family Research Council conducts marketing research on behalf of CPCs (Young 1998a), and Heritage House (n.d.) publishes pamphlets and films local activists use in client counseling. The North American Mission Board allows centers to affiliate if a Southern Baptist church vouches for that center, thereby opening significant opportunities for grassroots fundraising. There are many smaller national, state, and local Christian organizations (both for-profit and nonprofit) providing goods and services to CPCs. Virtually all CPCs receive ongoing financial support from churches and Christian-owned businesses in their local areas and individual evangelicals donate generously and consistently to local CPCs and the national umbrella organizations (FRC 2009; author's field notes).

Historical movement trends offer further support for the utility of the organizational solidarity framework. Organizational solidarity is dependent on organizations' adherence to conservative Protestant norms. Between the early

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1970s, when the movement began in the United States, and the early 1990s, CPC services were typically limited to pregnancy tests and religiously based counseling (Hartshorn 2003). Few client programs were aimed at the practical needs of clients. However, pro-choice organizations launched a series of investigations into CPCs in the late 1980s and early 1990s, sending activists masquerading as clients into centers and publishing their experiences in a series of exposés (Planned Parenthood 1987, 1991; Wyden 1991). Centers were accused of providing medical services such as pregnancy tests without licenses, pressuring single women to give up their children for adoption, citing inaccurate medical information about abortion, using coercive counseling tactics such as graphic images of aborted fetuses, and masquerading as abortion clinics to trick women into coming to CPCs. Several high-publicity lawsuits ensued involving women suing centers for using abusive counseling strategies and coercive measures to force them to give up their children for adoption (*Boes v. Deschu* 1989; *Fargo Women's Health Organization v. Larson* 1986; *Planned Parenthood et al. v. Problem Pregnancy of Worcester* 1986; *South Dakota v. Alpha Center for Women* 1987; *Stoner v. Williams* 1996; *Tyler v. Children's Home Society* 1994; see also Cooper 1994).

By the mid-1990s, the CPC movement was nearly as stigmatized as more radical antiabortion organizations like Operation Rescue and suffered declines in volunteers and donors (Caulfield 2002; Hartshorn 2003; Olasky 1990; Scott and Bainbridge 2000). National leaders in Care Net and HBI sought to restore the image of the movement by instating a series of reforms including standardized counselor training and procedures. Client programs became more pragmatic at this time, with a greater focus on the practical needs of women in crisis pregnancies, such as the financial assistance and housing now available from most centers (Hartshorn 2003; Kelly 2012). These strategies reestablished the movement's legitimacy with its supporter base. By the early 1990s, there were roughly five to six hundred evangelical centers in the United States (HBI 2007; FRC 2009). That number has since jumped to 2,300 centers fielding roughly one million clients annually (FRC 2009). Volunteers and donors returned, and many individual centers now receive federal and state funds when championed by pro-life politicians (Edsall 2006; Simon 2007).

This perception of obligation tied to standards of Christian behavior may explain the drop in CPC volunteers and donors after the first round of client lawsuits, pro-choice organizations' exposés, and subsequent negative media attention on CPCs in the late 1980s. Only after Care Net and HBI introduced reforms intended to coordinate affiliate practices with accepted Christian norms did volunteers and donors return. The networks also issued statements formalizing their new commitments to the evangelical community, including

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"Our Commitment to Care" condemning deception (Care Net 2009a; HBI 2001), and a "Statement of Faith," adapted from the National Association of Evangelicals (Care Net 2009b). The recalibration of the movement in response to media criticism is easily reconcilable with idealized Christian behavioral norms as a conversion moment. Once the CPC movement reestablished itself as within the boundaries of Christian propriety, support escalated among evangelicals and provided the resources needed to achieve the spectacular growth in the 1990s and 2000s. CPCs once again became an acceptable venue for expressing organizational solidarity.

Creating Distinctions: Embattled Identity as Activists' Resource

How then do activists construct these robust religious identities that inspire such organizational solidarity that they can keep going despite resistance from those they purport to help? Effective social movement mobilization depends upon a compelling collective identity and movement frames. Frames must draw boundaries between activists and dissimilar Others in ways that make movement participation meaningful for activists (Snow and Benford 1988). Evangelicals in general rely on negative frames more frequently than positive frames, using them to construct a sense of threat and urgency (Williams 2008). As Williams (2008, 163) argues:

> There is a clear logic, both strategic and cultural, in the rhetorical framing of embattled persecution. It helps to establish the urgency of the situation, and justifies the importance of involvement and activism. It has important resonance with aspects of evangelical religious culture, and works well as a rhetorical mobilizing tool. The persecution claim . . . identifies both who suffers and who is to blame.

This sense of embattlement is evident in the CPC movement's framings of their most salient Others, a fallen secular society and pro-choice forces, especially Planned Parenthood. For CPC activists, the former group is merely ignorant or misunderstands the evils of nonmarital sex and abortion, while the latter group is fully aware of these issues and chooses to promote abortion for the sake of greed while persecuting CPCs. CPC activists drew on the differences between their efforts and those of pro-choice organizations by focusing on the unfairness of Planned Parenthood's "attacks" on CPCs, abortion providers' alleged exploitation of women, and the institutionalized injustice the movement suffers from the secular media and federal government. These framings serve as a form of interaction between the CPC movement and their chosen Others as evangelical activists define what they are in terms of what

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the Others are not and posit themselves as the outmatched but morally righteous underdogs in the battle over abortion. This sense of marginalization is established and maintained at multiple levels of the movement, which I examine below.

The call to save secular society. CPC activists perceive a world run amok as a result of cultural forces that devalue human beings and leave them spiritually crippled by a lack of basic understanding of what it means to be a moral person or what purpose their lives may have (Care Net 1993, 1995, n.d.; HBI 2005, 2006b). A volunteer training manual notes, "Today's culture includes many young adults who come from broken family situations and suffer from a broken image of personal and sexual identity. . . . This estrangement from God's ways and God's love has produced a culture of sex, betrayal, and death" (Care Net 1993, 1). Likewise, two Care Net activists commented, "Abortion remains at the heart of the culture wars in America because it pits two absolutely opposed world and life views against each other" (Delahoyde and Hansen 2006, n.p.). These sentiments are echoed by local activists as well. Gabrielle, twenty-four, and in the movement for one year, told me CPCs sought "to change attitudes and thinking about casual sex or protected sex or sex outside of marriage and how much more effective that would be than encouraging a culture of abortion on demand and disregard for children." As these quotes suggest, the problems of secular lifestyles cannot be overcome unless the faithful take action to restore America to a more moral existence. Undermining abortion is at the crux of winning back society.

Evangelicals link abortion to broader practices in secular society that they find antithetical to God's will. Secular men and women accept sexual promiscuity (i.e., nonmarital sexual activity) as normative in relationships. Furthermore, evangelicals argue changing gender roles have led men and women to seek fulfillment in careers and material possessions, instead of God and family. Activists repeatedly told me that sexual availability outside of marriage combined with the decreased importance of family allows secular adults to view unplanned pregnancy as an unacceptable "inconvenience" and abortion as the solution. These framings create a sense of urgency by pitting evangelicals against secular society.

Movement elites frame women considering abortion as lost and in need of moral guidance that only Christians can provide. This contrast draws sharp boundaries between the religious and the unsaved, thereby boosting religious identity among activists and motivating them to act on their convictions. The degree of separation between religious and secular cultures is evidenced in the following paper featured in the *Center of Tomorrow*, a journal published

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by Care Net. In addressing the factors that lead women to abort, the author argues "Moral relativism and post-modern/post-Christian mindsets leave women with no frame work for decision-making. . . . Counselors can establish client relationships more easily if they are well versed in the foreign culture of today's women" (Jacobson 2004, 16–17). The choice of the word "foreign" to describe secular culture reveals the sharp rhetorical boundaries drawn between activists and clients. However, while secular culture is posited as the source of numerous spiritual and social problems, it is also a means for evangelicals to compare themselves and their sense of religious mission to a society foundering without a religious base. In this way, activists may use the social distance between themselves and clients as an identity resource by claiming clients are lacking in moral substance and positioning themselves to provide moral guidance to women in need.

"David versus Goliath": Evangelical underdogs against a "pro-abortion" majority. If secular society forms a general backdrop for evangelical identity, pro-choice forces, especially Planned Parenthood, stand in sharp relief in the foreground. The movement constructs itself as a small, sincere group of followers combating more powerful pro-choice forces. The CPC movement's responses to pro-choice exposes, lawsuits, and congressional hearings into CPC practices demonstrate how the movement's sense of embattlement takes the form of an underdog mentality, or what Klemp and Macedo (2008, 217) call a "narrative of victimization." CPC leaders contend that they are a persecuted minority fighting to perform God's will and remind activists that while it will be a difficult and unpopular battle, God rewards those who do His will in the face of great adversity. In other words, it is not enough to simply believe—evangelicals must do religion through activism. For the CPC movement, the marginalization they perceive at the hands of pro-choice groups creates an underdog identity that equates fighting difficult battles with spiritual faithfulness, a process consistent with the doing religion framework. Michelle, fifty-three and previously active in the movement for twenty-two years, described a conflict between her local center and a nearby Planned Parenthood clinic:

> We lived through the Planned Parenthood attack on us. They did a negative publicity campaign on crisis pregnancy centers back in '86, '87. And, oh my goodness, we just couldn't believe it. Talk about a bag of buffalo chips. . . . But you know the thing that was amazing about it was that they would run . . . these horrible smear jobs on CPCs. And then the CPC would see more clients than ever. . . . You know it was totally one of those Joseph things where they meant it for evil; God meant it for God. And who knew any publicity is better than no publicity?

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As Michelle's words demonstrate, the pro-choice movement's campaign against CPCs is the primary element driving the movement's sense of embattlement. Although the movement restored its credibility among evangelicals after the initial investigations into CPC practices in the late 1980s and early 1990s, pro-choice forces continue to monitor CPCs (Planned Parenthood 2002). In 2002, then–Attorney General of New York Eliot Spitzer issued subpoenas to twenty-four CPCs suspected of violating consumer protection laws with deceptive advertising and counseling practices designed to make them appear to be abortion providers (Tilghman 2002). In 2006, Rep. Henry Waxman (2006) reported that 87 percent of CPCs provided inaccurate or misleading medical information to clients. This same year, Rep. Carolyn Maloney introduced federal legislation aimed at curtailing centers' allegedly deceptive practices (Maloney 2006). In response, CPC activists claim that pro-choice organizations are involved in a conspiracy to co-opt secular media and government and discredit CPCs (Olasky 1988, 1990; Scott and Bainbridge 2000). The Spitzer subpoenas were referred to as a "political witch hunt" and a "David vs. Goliath standoff" instigated by an "unjust aggressor" (Blunt 2002; Caulfield 2002, 19–20). Activists viewed Spitzer's actions as part of a larger "smear campaign" to undermine the efforts of "money-strapped" CPCs operating on "bare-bones" budgets (HBI 2006a; Dreher 2002). Pro-life activists writing in a newsletter for Life Decisions International, a group that organizes boycotts of companies supporting Planned Parenthood, complained:

> The campaign to "expose" pregnancy care centers did not begin by accident. It was not the result of "investigative journalism." It was not due to law enforcement efforts. It was the direct result of a conspiracy between pro-abortion groups, abortionists, the news media, and sympathetic lawmakers. It was a clear example of the news media abusing power without regard for truth or fairness. (Scott and Bainbridge 2000, 1)

Activists feel pro-choice groups deliberately cultivate misconceptions about their efforts by labeling the movement as extremist despite activists' efforts to construct a moderate image.

Protecting women from "pro-abortion" exploitation. In addition to persecuting pro-life activist and organizations, CPC activists accuse "abortionists" of being profit-driven and deceiving women into giving "uninformed consent" to abortion (Throckmorton 2006; author interviews). The current president of NIFLA claims that "the abortion industry has a financial stake in the abortion issue, and every woman who chooses life represents a lost profit for an abortionist" (Glessner 1990, 121–22). This sentiment is echoed in interviews with

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local activists. Barbara, a fifty-year-old active in the movement for the past three years, told me, "Abortion is a very lucrative business. There are a lot of people making a lot of money doing abortions . . . what are there, about 4,000 a day in this country [costing] about $500 a shot? . . . obviously somebody's making a lot of money." (Barbara's numbers are not far off—there are roughly 3,300 abortions performed daily in the United States at an average cost of approximately $425 to $535 for first-trimester abortions. However, these revenues do not necessarily represent profits. For example, nonprofit Planned Parenthood clinics perform more than 25 percent of all abortion procedures in the United States [Planned Parenthood Federation of America (PPFA) 2011]. Furthermore, the rate of inflation in abortion costs is far lower than that of other medical procedures [Jones and Kooistra 2011]).

Gabrielle echoed Barbara's position when she described her experience at a pro-choice rally. What she heard convinced her that pro-choice side was indeed profit-driven. She told me a Planned Parenthood official described the college town Gabrielle lived in as a "really great, marketable, client base . . . to them, it's a market. No matter what terms they use to try to present themselves as a compassionate, family planning, equal opportunity, equal option organization, they make their money off of abortion and abortion referrals." She summed up the differences between CPCs and Planned Parenthood clinics:

> Planned Parenthood is the leading provider of referrals and abortions, and that goes just directly against what we're trying to accomplish. We're trying to be the leading provider of assistance to pregnant women who decide to do maybe the hard thing and keep their babies. . . . [Planned Parenthood goes] directly against what we think is good for women, and is good for children and is good for society and for families in general. . . . We don't make money off anything we do. We are against abortion and they are for it and making a lot of money off of it. We're fundamentally opposed in our missions.

For these activists, so long as money was involved, pro-choice motives would remain suspect. In contrast, CPC motives may be trusted, as CPCs do not charge for services and rely primarily on unpaid volunteers.

According to activists, women seeking abortion services are not provided with information about fetal development or other pregnancy options, information activists feel would change women's minds. In fact, CPC activists commonly refer to pro-choice groups as "pro-abortion," claiming they are not interested in helping women consider parenting or adoption. Instead, activists argue pro-abortionists coerce women into having unwanted abortions by trivializing the magnitude of abortion or making women feel like they have no choice but to abort. Local activists expressed these sentiments

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to me in interviews. At age sixty-five, Mary had been in the movement for eighteen years. She said abortion providers "make these girls think that it's fine, they try to convince them that it's not really a baby, that it's just-something else, just a blob or this or that. They never are honest with the girls about what abortion really is."

"What abortion really is" was a common phrase among local activists, as it represented a shorthand way to contrast the misinformation of the pro-choice approach to the "truth" offered by CPC activists (Author field notes and interviews). Kristin, a forty-five-year-old volunteer counselor with twenty-one years in the movement, believed she had received inadequate counseling prior to her two abortions. She told me "it was more of a sales pitch for an abortion than a counseling session . . . what they teach their counselors is 'You're gonna' sell this to this girl because we want her money.'" Activists contrasted themselves with pro-choice activists by presenting themselves as providing accurate abortion information to women and being driven by goodwill, not monetary gain. June, sixty-two and in the movement for thirty-five years contrasted Planned Parenthood with the medical services offered by CPCs, arguing CPCs offered

> true reproductive healthcare, which is the alternative to what Planned Parenthood provides. They call it reproductive healthcare but there is nothing reproductive about it. It's anti-reproductive and it's not healthy at all. It leads to STDs and infertility and sterility and all those kinds of things. So I believe that our centers will probably be providing or at least partnering with medical providers to provide pro-life reproductive health care. We will be really what I call transcending Planned Parenthood in being the place that women want to go because we truly respect their dignity.

Activists believe abortion workers not only withhold information, they are also rumored to actively exploit women to create new abortion customers. According to Christy, a forty-year-old counselor active in the movement for four years, Planned Parenthood advertises contraception through sexual education programs in public schools, then deliberately gives teenage girls ineffective dosages of birth control pills, resulting in more pregnancies and abortions. She said "their marketing plan was to give teenage girls low doses of birth control pills, knowing that if they didn't take them at the same time every single day they had a higher percentage of [girls] getting pregnant. And their goal was to get three to five abortions from every teenage girl they could before they graduated from high school." As extreme as this claim may seem, these convictions are common among many of the activists I interviewed and serves as a particularly striking example of identity-based comparisons with negative outgroups.

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For activists, some of the most serious consequences of "uninformed consent" (Throckmorton 2006) were the alleged physical and psychological effects of abortion, including increased risks of breast cancer, infertility, and psychological disorders (HBI 2008). The CPC movement argues that women who have had abortions commonly suffer from a form of psychological trauma activists refer to as Post Abortion Syndrome (PAS), although no such disorder is recognized by any reputable medical, psychiatric, or psychological professional organizations. PAS is a variation of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder and alleged symptoms include flashbacks, problems forming relationships with men and children, addiction, depression, and even suicide (Siegel 2008). Activists, particularly those who have had abortions themselves, consider abortion rights advocates' dismissal of PAS to be demeaning attempts by pro-choice forces to invalidate not only CPC claims, but the lived experiences of women who regret having abortions (Cochrane 2005; Author interviews). CPC activists therefore contend that pro-choice groups cannot be legitimately concerned with women's health or well-being before or after abortion. In contrast, where the abortion industry is motivated by greed and profits, CPC activists point out that all CPC services are free of charge (if not free of obligation). In the minds of activists, pro-choice groups try to deceive women about the moral meaning and medical risks of abortion, while the CPC movement offers complete and truthful information from a Christian perspective. Once again the pro-choice movement offers the strongest comparisons for evangelical activists that serve as identity resources.

Struggling against institutionalized injustice: secular media and government funding. In addition to their objections to Planned Parenthood's scrutiny of their centers and abortion providers' alleged exploitation of women, activists felt marginalized by mainstream institutions, namely, the secular media and state and federal government. Activists felt pro-choice advocates took advantage of liberal biases among secular media reporters, who rarely sought out the CPCs' side of the story or dismissed CPC activists' statements as unreliable (Olasky 1988, 1990). Like many local activists, Jillian, forty-five years old with six years in the movement, noted this imbalance, telling me "I really feel like we get a very biased slant in the media, unfavorably, a lot of times." Barbara particularly resented this perceived media bias, saying "if you're pro-life . . . in the media that that means you're anti the woman and that's not it at all. . . . Concerned Women of America probably have ten times the membership of NOW but nobody ever goes to Concerned Women of America to ask them what their opinion is." Eva, new to the movement and forty-eight years old, tried to make the best of a difficult situation by staying focused on

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her center's clients, saying "services that we provide may never be put out in the media [but] we will come alongside you if you choose [to continue the pregnancy].

Other underdog references are clear in the comparisons of government funding levels between Planned Parenthood and CPCs. CPC activists often bring up the federal government's funding of Planned Parenthood as evidence that secular society is stacked against the pro-life cause. Government funding for Planned Parenthood clinics topped $270 million in 2004–2005, while CPCs received $30 million for nonreligious abstinence education (HBI 2006a). Christy, forty, and active in the movement for several years, contrasted the government funding with the local donations her CPC work relied on, saying "if you look at all the money that Planned Parenthood gets from the government and all the grants—I mean you don't find anywhere near the comparison to pregnancy centers and stuff getting that much money. You just don't."

Activists rarely recognize that Planned Parenthood provides any services besides abortion, although abortion comprises only 3 percent of Planned Parenthood services (PPFA 2011). Many also believe Planned Parenthood is a for-profit corporation, despite its 501(c)(3) nonprofit status, the same tax status as CPCs themselves. Simultaneously, activists often erroneously reported that PPFA received federal funds to perform abortions and profited from both public and private funding. It is therefore particularly galling to activists that the government would seemingly fund both abortions and CPC investigations. Peggy Hartshorn, president of HBI, commented, "It's a shame that tax-payer money is being used to support the abortion lobby, and to hinder and smear the good of life-affirming, faith-based pregnancy centers" (HBI 2006a). Another activist, writing in the *Center of Tomorrow* journal, asserted Planned Parenthood used public resources to portray itself as a "mainstream, trustworthy agency that had women's best interests in mind" and worthy of public funds. Simultaneously, pro-choice groups allegedly caricaturized pro-life activists as "bombers, fanatics, religious and narrow-minded" without government sanction (Jacobson 2004, 10, 13), or, as Olivia put is, as "a pro-life crazy person," an image she perceived as unfair and strove to counter in her interactions with clients. Such perceptions of marginalization heighten identity and give activists the motivation to continue their efforts.

"The strength to stand up to tyrants." Because of their perceptions of an unfair playing field, activists remain committed to their work. Movement discourse repeatedly stresses that God is on the side of CPC activists and counsels patience and faithfulness as the solution to injustice. *World Magazine*, an

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evangelical publication claiming to offer a Biblical perspective on current events, named CPC activists the 2007 "Daniel of the Year," an award going to individuals or groups whose "faith in God gave them the strength to stand up against tyrants who tried to put themselves in God's place" (Olasky 2007). CPC activists received the award "for standing up to those forces and circumstances in a woman's life that seemingly point to abortion" (Care Net 2007). In the immediate aftermath of the Waxman report, Maloney bill, and the 2006 elections that returned control of both the House of Representatives and Senate to the Democratic Party, Kurt Entsminger, general counsel for Care Net, offered this warning to movement activists, saying "Abortion advocates are emboldened by the election results and alarmed by the growing effectiveness of pregnancy centers. They will continue to attempt to malign our work." He also urged activists to remain committed to their work in the face of increased opposition, saying "pro-life legislative advances will inevitably be shut down. In the years ahead, pregnancy centers remain the best and last hope for reducing abortion in America" (Entsminger 2006).

Along with "David versus Goliath" references, movement literature compares the CPC movement to other Biblical figures such as Job or Jesus Christ, who were unfairly persecuted, yet eventually triumphed by maintaining a steadfast faith in God. Such references are particularly effective for framing activists' religious identities (Snow and McAdam 2000). Hannah summed it up neatly: "Basically we just believe that God moves in response to His people's prayers." Likewise, Caroline told me activists "just want to be open and want His favor to stay so that He'll continue—we'll be faithful and He'll continue to bring the people and they'll continue to give to Christ." As Hannah and Caroline demonstrate, maintaining doing religion in the face of difficult odds is an expression of faith and provides motivation to continue; thus, doing religion is a process that reinforces both identity and action.

The success of the persecution theme is linked to evangelicals' belief that persevering despite resistance is evidence of their religious commitment. For religious believers, observance is the essence of identity (Avishai 2008). Performing religious identity, as CPC activists do by working with secular clients and battling pro-choice forces, keeps religious identity salient and meaningful while fulfilling the obligations of the "evangelical burden" to reach out to the unsaved. For each claim about these Others, the movement makes a corresponding comparison that establishes the CPC movement as opposite and offering positive alternatives. While "post-modern" society offers no moral compass, CPCs offer women in crisis pregnancies material aid and spiritual guidance. Although promiscuity and casual relationships are the norm, CPCs try to offer women a monogamous vision of marital sexuality and positive alternatives to abortion. Planned Parenthood is an unjust

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aggressor, but CPC activists will continue their faithful battle. The abortion industry exploits women, while the CPC movement demonstrates a sincere interest in women's well-being. The media exercise a liberal bias and government agencies unfairly allocate funds to Planned Parenthood, but CPC activists will continue to fight on an uneven playing field. Activism is therefore a critical resource for identity construction, and CPC activism offers evangelicals a compelling opportunity for doing religion, thus reinforcing the mutually reinforcing relationship between identity and action.

Doing Religion, Doing Harm

Doing religion cannot be understood as "only" about religion as the believer does not only affect herself or himself. Avishai's conceptualization of doing religion deemphasized inequality and how it may be perpetuated *by* the adherent *against* others. Avishai focused upon why women chose to participate in religions predicated upon their subordination and why religious subjecthood outweighed these injustices. What is not fully explored in Avishai's original work is how these observances may reify inequalities between the practitioner and those who become part of his or her religious practices. The consequences of doing religion go far beyond the individual believer.

Accordingly, while it may be advantageous to the CPC movement as a whole, evangelicals' emphasis on faithful action obscures some serious problems. When confronted by evidence that their efforts are not having the intended effect on Others, evangelicals may refuse to alter their course. This dilemma is in evidence in the CPC movement. During my field visits, I routinely heard activists complain about clients' lack of enthusiasm for the center's Bible studies and the parenting class, a multiweek commitment required of clients who wanted access to maternity clothing, baby clothing, formula, and diapers. Many clients dropped out of the programs or signed up and never returned for any of the sessions. If activists attempted to contact clients to discover why they were absent, frequently the client had provided the center with a disconnected or invalid phone number. Activists were aware that clients disliked being required to attend these classes but felt it was part of the center's mission to teach clients "responsibility." Activists framed clients as young, irresponsible, and immature. When confronted with a client who did not fit this mold, many activists could not respond appropriately to her, and these misinterpretations seemed tied to class and race privilege. During one field visit, a (white) grandmother arrived at the center to donate some outgrown children's clothing and requested some secondhand clothing from the center for her grandchildren. The activists told her material aid necessitated attending parenting classes or Bible study. The grandmother argued that she

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knew how to parent already, which is why the foster care system had placed her grandchildren with her, and she attended a Bible study at her own church. The activists on duty told her they could not help her and referred to her the Salvation Army thrift store. Defeated, the grandmother left.

A more extreme disconnect occurred when a monolingual Mexican immigrant woman came to the center seeking an abortion. The center matched her up with the only bilingual counselor, who reported all of the details of the encounter to the other activists present after the woman left (an unusually flagrant violation of the center's confidentiality rules). The would-be client already supported six children in Mexico by working construction in the United States and could not afford another child. The counselor, who was struggling with infertility problems, wept during her session with the client, offered to adopt the baby, and told her abortion was illegal, although presumably the counselor was referring to Mexico's abortion laws. The client abruptly broke off the session and stormed out of the center. As the counselor tried to compose herself, she told the other four or five activists (and me) what had transpired. Still upset, the counselor left shortly thereafter. The conversation remained focused on the client, however, with several activists commenting harshly on the client's decision to leave her children in Mexico. There appeared to be no awareness of the economic hardship or heartbreak this transnational family must be facing. Here I found the combined race and class privilege of the activists—most of whom were stay-at-home mothers while their children were young and comfortably middle class—intersected with religious convictions regarding "good" mothers and made it impossible for them to understand this woman's plight.

Taking action in ways consistent with their evangelical beliefs can mean activists fail to see clients' actual needs, and instead redefine them in terms of activists' priorities. Across the scope of the entire study, I interviewed a small minority of activists aware of race and class privilege, and these centers typically did not require anything of clients to receive material aid. Some even chose to deaffiliate from Care Net or HBI because of the networks' emphasis on meeting obligations as a condition of aid. However, in the majority of centers where evangelism is prioritized at the same level as (or even higher than) preventing abortions, this social myopia will likely continue. Activists in these centers see positive client reactions as evidence of their strategies' effectiveness and negative reactions as evidence of the clients' failings and take these shortcomings as additional proof their efforts are needed. Success becomes a reason to stay motivated, and so does failure. Jana summed up this perspective when she explained to me why she was not discouraged when a pregnant client challenged Jana's focus on proselytizing during their counseling session. According to Jana, the client, upset about the positive pregnancy

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test, asked Jana if she really thought religious faith was the most important factor the client should consider. Jana described her own feelings, telling me, "I totally just give it to God and that's it. . . . That takes a huge burden off my shoulders. . . . That's not my job, to convince people and change their minds. God puts the desire in their heart."

Taken together, the internally oriented definitions of success held by most CPC activists suggest that the movement will continue to have low rates of success in meeting their formal goals while maintaining strong levels of support from activists and handily succeeding at what activists prioritize—taking faithful action and trusting God will determine the outcomes. This powerful faith means that activists may misinterpret clients' needs but it also provides a powerful vehicle for doing religion or reinforcing identity. This commitment to action-based faith is also evident in the strong organizational solidarity enjoyed by evangelical communities in general and the CPC movement in particular.

Conclusion

The boundaries drawn between the CPC movement, secular society, and the "abortion industry" construct a collective identity that makes CPC activism meaningful as religious work. The sense of embattlement, expressed in the form of an underdog identity, creates a sense of urgency to mobilize. The experienced authenticity of the religious identity, how individual activists come to perceive themselves as "real" Christians, is based on actions undertaken as an expression of faith (Avishai 2008). For CPC activists, action is more critical to authentic religious identity than the outcomes of those actions. In short, the organizational structure of evangelical Christianity explains *how* the movement can continue to flourish, while evangelical ideology providing a sense of distinction and engagement explains *why* it continues to prosper.

While the CPC movement may appear to outsiders to be a failure because of its low rates of success in meeting its stated goals, activists see it as a thriving expression of God's will and an expression of their religious identities—to be a believer is to take action and this action makes one a stronger believer. The findings and discussion above indicate several important theoretical implications that incorporate doing religion and organizational solidarity into the subcultural identity framework and alter its causal relationships. First, the concept of organizational solidarity should be brought to bear on subcultural identity theory, as it can be understood as a form of the third stage of the subcultural identity process—action. If one believes God mandates believers to take action to change the secular world, then activism and supporting religious

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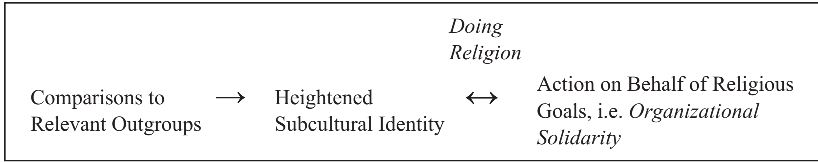

Figure 2. Modified subcultural identity theoretical framework.

organizations are forms of religious observance. This point is not a contradiction of the original subcultural identity theory but a more nuanced conceptualization of the types of actions evangelicals may choose to undertake.

Second and closely related to the first point, action and identity are mutually reinforcing for evangelicals and this process of mutual reinforcement can be understood as an expanded form of doing religion. The stronger one's religious identity, the more one is motivated in ways that reflect this identity. The more one acts in the name of religion, the stronger one's religious identity becomes. Smith et al. (1998) argue that a heightened sense of religious identity motivates believers to take faith based action. Avishai (2008) noted that observance is the essence of identity and actions form identity. Thus, Smith et al.'s causal direction (identity → action) is the reverse of Avishai's (action → identity). However, when we combine these insights to understand action and identity as mutually reinforcing, as demonstrated in this account of the CPC movement, a modification of subcultural identity theory is in order (Figure 2). This modification locates doing religion in the mutual causation of identity and action, meaning that doing religion becomes the *process* by which identity and action are mutually reinforcing in the formation and maintenance of subcultural identity.

While these modifications of the subcultural identity framework may seem simple, they point to important empirical ramifications. If identity and action are mutually reinforcing, then the outcomes of actions become less important, possibly even irrelevant in some instances, to religious identity. This process may even serve to insulate evangelicals from doubt and make it unlikely they will change their tactics based on the outcomes of their actions. In fact, limited success or even failure in meeting goals can be interpreted as further evidence of how badly secular society needs evangelical influence, thereby providing further contrasts with relevant Others, amplifying identity and provoking action. These insights help explain why CPCs receive such strong support from activists and other evangelicals despite evidence that most CPC clients do not find evangelical messages about abortion, adoption, marriage, abstinence, and religion particularly compelling.

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This mutually reinforcing connection between identity and action may also explain why evangelicals put so much effort into social issues even when they are unlikely to prevail, for example, legal abortion, premarital sexual activity, prayer in schools, or gay rights (Wellman 1999). It also suggests that efforts to directly confront or oppose evangelical efforts on the part of pro-choice and other secular groups will only serve to further evangelicals' sense of distinction and motivation. This will be particularly true when the secular group is a vilified Other. Thus, resistance from Others or even a defeat for evangelicals at the hands of salient outgroups may provide evangelical activists with greater staying power in the long term than an immediate victory.

Acknowledgments

The author thanks Lynne Cossman, Linda Grant, Shannon Kelly, Patricia Richards, and David Smilde for their comments on earlier versions of this paper.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Funding

The author(s) received no financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

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