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A close reading and concept-oriented rhetorical and literary analysis of Margaret Sanger's eugenics-based discourse

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**A close reading and concept-oriented rhetorical and literary analysis of Margaret
Sanger's eugenics-based discourse**

by

Leslie M. Shapy

A thesis submitted to the graduate faculty

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

Major: Rhetoric, Composition, and Professional Communication

Program of Study Committee:
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2016

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DEDICATION

For Mom and Dad: Thank you for your unwavering love and support over the years.

And for Jacob: Thank you for taking this journey with me.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
NOMENCLATURE	v
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	vi
ABSTRACT	vii
CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION	1
The Origins of Eugenics	1
The Women’s Eugenics Movement in 1920s America	2
Margaret Sanger’s Implementation of Eugenics-Based Rhetoric	4
Rhetorical and Literary Analyses of Sanger’s Discourse	4
Concept-Oriented Rhetorical Analysis of Sanger’s “ <i>The Morality of Birth Control</i> ”	6
Close Reading and Literary Analysis of Sanger’s <i>The Pivot of Civilization</i>	7
Implications	7
CHAPTER 2 THE EUGENICS MOVEMENT: ITS ORIGINS, PROMINENCE IN 1920S AMERICA, AND CONTINUATION IN PRESENT-DAY DISCOURSE	9
The American Eugenics Movement	12
The Women’s Eugenics Movement in 1920s America	13
Adolf Hitler’s Manipulation of American Eugenics	13
Present-Day Eugenics-Based Discourse	15
CHAPTER 3 MARGARET SANGER’S PASSIONATE CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE AMERICAN BIRTH CONTROL MOVEMENT AND WOMEN’S EMPOWERMENT	18
The American Birth Control Movement	21
Margaret Sanger’s Discourse	22
The Establishment of Planned Parenthood Clinics	24
Margaret Sanger’s Manipulation of Eugenics-Based Rhetoric	25
Margaret Sanger’s Legacy	26

CHAPTER 4	SCAPEGOATING BY MEANS OF ANTITHESIS: A CONCEPT-ORIENTED RHETORICAL ANALYSIS OF MARGARET SANGER’S EUGENIC AGENDA IN “THE MORALITY OF BIRTH CONTROL”	29
	Methods for Analysis	32
	Concept-Oriented Rhetorical Analysis of Sanger’s Speech	36
	Implications	45
CHAPTER 5	MARGARET SANGER’S CAREFUL CONSTRUCTION OF ETHOS AND LOGICAL APPEAL: A CLOSE READING AND LITERARY ANALYSIS OF <i>THE PIVOT OF CIVILIZATION</i>	47
	Literary Analysis of Margaret Sanger’s <i>The Pivot of Civilization</i>	50
	Implications	62
CHAPTER 6	CONCLUSION	63
REFERENCES	66

NOMENCLATURE

ABCL	American Birth Control League
CIW	Carnegie Institute of Washington Station
ERO	Eugenics Record Office
IPPF	International Planned Parenthood Federation
SEE	Station for Experimental Evolution

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ABSTRACT

Margaret Sanger, a well-known nurse, women's rights and birth control activist, and sex educator is known for her influence on the birth control movement and the establishment of what is now known as Planned Parenthood, a national organization that has assisted women with their sexual and reproductive health for decades. Sanger, one of the most influential advocates for women's self-empowerment, manipulated popular eugenics-based language constructions of the time to gain elite followers for her birth control movement. Although many historical, theological, feminist, and social scientific scholars have studied Sanger's underlying eugenic agenda, Sanger's deliberate use of specific rhetorical strategies have not yet been analyzed. Through a close reading and concept-oriented rhetorical analysis of Sanger's 1921 speech, "The Morality of Birth Control," and 1922 publication, *The Pivot of Civilization*, this thesis will explore Sanger's deliberate and predetermined use of antithesis, scapegoating, and ethos to promote her birth control movement.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Margaret Sanger, a well-known nurse, women's empowerment and birth control activist, and sex educator is known for her influence on the birth control movement and the establishment of Planned Parenthood, a national organization that has assisted women with their sexual and reproductive health for decades. Sanger, one of the most influential advocates for women's self-empowerment, manipulated the popular eugenics-based language constructions of the time to gain elite followers for her birth control movement. Many feminists view Sanger as the founder of Planned Parenthood, the woman who coined the term "birth control," and a social activist who fought long and hard for women's rights to birth control. Little do they know, Sanger's rhetoric reflected "a eugenically vitiated view of woman's liberation, which did not mean the freedom for every woman to decide, without coercion, the number of children she desired to have; rather, it meant sexual freedom for the 'fit,' who seemed to be those who made the same reproductive decisions as Sanger" (Franks 16). Many prominent rhetorical and feminist scholars, who will be introduced later, argue that Sanger's "commitment to female liberation and freedom is completely compromised by her eugenic-based beliefs: forcible sterilization of the 'unfit,' she believed, was more important than the freedom to have children" (Franks 187). Overall, these scholars believe that birth control and Planned Parenthood were established for the freedom of women, but only for the women who were deemed "fit" to reproduce.

The Origins of Eugenics

Charles Darwin's groundbreaking publication, *On the Origin of Species* (1859), established biological evolution and led to various social and cultural adaptations, such as

Herbert Spencer's notion of the "survival of the fittest." Overall, Darwin's publication "espoused that 'natural selection' [is] the survival process governing most living things in the world of limited resources and changing environments" (Black 12). Influences from Darwin's scientific claims brought forth eugenics research, a new branch of social science that combined "socioeconomics, philosophy and biology" to create a "resilient and fast-moving pseudoscience that would change the world forever" (Black 9). Founded by Sir Francis Galton in his 1883 publication, *Inquiries into Human Faculty and Its Development*, eugenics originated as the study of the "well born," since Galton "reasoned that talent and quality were more than an accident. They could be calculated, managed and sharpened into a 'highly gifted race of men by judicious marriages during several consecutive generations'" (Black 15). Galton built upon Darwin's scientific ethos to formulate his own methods of calculating talent, status, and giftedness for future generations.

The Women's Eugenics Movement in 1920s America

In 1920s America, the eugenics movement intertwined with feminism, the right of reproduction, and women's natural rights (Gordon). At this time, the eugenics movement was an "intersection of science, politics, and social policy" and the movement was given its own scientific ethos (Hasian Jr. 23). Eugenics escalated into a branch of science and "both as a science, movement, and ideology, eugenics was popularized in part because of its very ambiguity" (Hasian Jr. 23). Some regarded eugenics as a race science or "raceology," whereas others saw eugenics as a way of life and educated their children about the importance of eugenics-based breeding from an early age.

One of the most influential branches of eugenics was the women's eugenics movement. In 1920s America, women were "among the primary social actors in the eugenics controversies

and they were also important characters in stories told by the hard-line eugenicists themselves” (Hasian Jr. 72). Since women endured the pressure to abide by eugenics-based parenting expectations, to choose “fit” mates, and to create “fit” children, they were viewed as the tools needed to produce the best of the Nordic race, but were not given basic human rights. Some women were simply used as reproductive tools since

women had constantly agitated for more control over their reproductive lives, and the new eugenics movement seemed to recognize the importance of reproduction in the creation of social, economic, and political relationships. Some women sympathized with a movement that seemed to be concerned with both the quantity and quality of race, and they were drawn to the new science that favored selective limitation of the population as a way to prevent the deterioration of the race. (Hasian Jr. 73)

Those women who supported the eugenics movement were finally given a specific purpose in a world where they were second-class citizens; their purpose was to improve American parenthood and to become successful mothers.

Women who identified with the eugenics movement viewed eugenics as a way to establish effective parenting skills by being eugenical mothers; rather, mothers who are able to reproduce and create successful and intelligent children. Marouf A. Hasian Jr. states that as a

rhetorical construct, this alternative version of eugenics invited women to engage in a form of sisterhood that benefitted individual and nation, regardless of social class and without the need for male or state intervention. Attacks on false claims of ‘necessity’ on the part of males became part of the rallying cry of feminists interested in the rights of women in the area of reproductive rights (79)

Not all women within the eugenics movement agreed with the positive branch of the eugenics movement, or the notion that mothers must simply abide by strict parenting guidelines. These women grew to be devout supporters of the negative eugenics movement, promoting the need to forcibly reduce the “unfit” population in order to create and maintain an idyllic society. Both positive and negative eugenics will be examined in detail in chapter two of my thesis.

Margaret Sanger's Implementation of Eugenics-Based Rhetoric

Margaret Sanger's working-class upbringing and abundance of siblings laid the foundation for her life's passion: birth control access for all. She was raised by a struggling family of thirteen in New York and eventually married William Sanger, a well-known leftist politician. William Sanger's leftist ideologies influenced Margaret and ultimately established her credibility within the women's eugenics movement. Margaret Sanger began publishing articles in magazines, newspapers, and passed out pamphlets to educate the public about the importance of "controlling birth."

As important as women's reproductive rights were to most women during this time, Margaret Sanger's establishment of birth control was "especially attractive to the rich, who often perceived their wealth as a demonstration of their innate genetic superiority" (Franks 37). Sanger's beliefs that reproduction should revolve around quality, not quantity, was showcased in the rhetorical strategies exhibited in her discourse. Overall, Sanger's discourse was created to empower women who were "fit" to reproduce -- ultimately formulating a societal hierarchy which favored the superiority of the elite. Sanger repeatedly used very strong eugenics-based rhetorical patterns in her discourse to persuade her followers to help the "fit" maintain power. Sanger specifically implemented eugenics-based rhetoric into her discourse to align with powerful eugenics-promoting scientists and politicians to gain additional support and funding for her birth control movement.

Rhetorical and Literary Analyses of Sanger's Discourse

Margaret Sanger is most known for her radical social rights movements and persuasive reproductive rights campaigns, revolving around women's right to choose and birth control access for all. Many prominent scholars have studied Sanger, focusing on her eugenic beliefs and

on her contributions to the medical field and social sciences and to the feminist movement generally. Specifically, theologian and feminist scholar, Dr. Angela Franks, studied Sanger's eugenic agenda in her book *Margaret Sanger's Eugenic Legacy: The Control of Female Fertility*. Similarly, Dr. Linda Gordon, a feminist and historian, has shined a light on Sanger's underlying eugenic beliefs in *The Moral Property of Women: A History of Birth Control Politics in America*. Many prominent rhetorical and feminist scholars address Sanger's rhetoric in light of her philanthropic mission or in terms of feminist rhetoric. In essence, Margaret Sanger's rhetoric is approached in a holistic sense, analyzing her birth control movement, and the rhetoric used to bolster it, as a lifetime achievement. What makes my argument unique is my analysis of Sanger's uniquely kairotic moment – a moment in 1920s American society where eugenics-based rhetoric was considered the norm. In my thesis I will explore how Sanger used this widely accepted eugenics-based rhetoric, how eugenics-based rhetoric garnered support for her movement, and how the movement impacted American culture.

Specifically, chapter two of my thesis will provide a literature review on the emergence of the eugenics movement in the mid-1800's, and its specific prominence and influence on women in 1920s America. Additionally, chapter three of my thesis will provide context about Margaret Sanger's upbringing, young adult life, contributions to public welfare and women's empowerment, and Sanger's American birth control movement. Chapter three will also illustrate Sanger's manipulation of popular eugenics-based rhetoric in 1920's America in order to gain recognition and financial support for her birth control movement.

To argue that Sanger implemented popular eugenics-based rhetoric to subtly sway her audiences to favor her birth control discourse, I will perform close readings of Sanger's oral and written discourse. Specifically, in chapter four, I will perform a close reading and concept-

oriented rhetorical analysis on Sanger's well-known 1921 speech, "The Morality of Birth Control." Secondly, in chapter five, I will conduct a close reading and literary analysis on Sanger's 1922 book, *The Pivot of Civilization*, in order to explore Sanger's use of eugenics-based language constructions to promote her birth control movement and gain support and funding. My final chapter will explore the implications of Sanger's implementation of eugenics-based rhetoric within her birth control discourse. I will delineate how Sanger's discourse was received by the American public, and how Sanger's discursive rhetorical constructs influence birth control rhetoric to this day.

Concept-Oriented Rhetorical Analysis of Sanger's "The Morality of Birth Control"

In chapter four of my thesis, I will introduce Margaret Sanger's speech, "The Morality of Birth Control." Sanger's speech was delivered on November 18, 1921 at the Park Theatre in New York City. Sanger had originally been scheduled to deliver this same speech at the First American Birth Control Conference on November 13, 1921, but the police raided the Town Hall and arrested Sanger before she was able to deliver the closing address. Sanger's arrest showcases the heated debates and severe conflict revolving around the concepts and ideologies Sanger asserted in her discourse. Sanger's "The Morality of Birth Control" is featured in many rhetoric textbooks as one of the most influential speeches in American history -- two examples being *American Rhetoric* and *Great Speeches for Better Speaking*.

In this chapter, I will perform a close reading and concept-oriented rhetorical analysis on Sanger's speech to argue that Sanger implemented specific eugenics-based rhetorical strategies to appeal to an American audience saturated with eugenics-based rhetoric. Specifically, I will focus on Sanger's 1921 speech, "The Morality of Birth Control," in order to explore Sanger's

use of scapegoating and antithesis to promote her birth control movement and gain much-needed support and funding.

Close Reading and Literary Analysis of Sanger's *The Pivot of Civilization*

In chapter five of my thesis, I will introduce Sanger's book, *The Pivot of Civilization* which she published in June of 1922 to highlight key connections between the birth control and eugenics movements in terms of early twentieth-century science. Sanger's publication revolved around the "fundamental importance" of birth control in order to control feeble-mindedness, interracial relationships, and poverty. In her publication, Sanger defines feeble-mindedness, motherhood, and fertility and deems feeble-mindedness and poverty as a "world problem."

In this chapter, I will perform a close reading and literary analysis on Sanger's *The Pivot of Civilization*. Specifically, I will analyze Sanger's strategic incorporation of feminine rhetorical style, how she carefully constructs her ethos, her use of metaphor, scapegoating, and antithetic language, and attempts deliberately to craft a logical appeal to tie her birth control movement to the American eugenics movement. In *The Pivot of Civilization*, Sanger's main goal is to write a logical, scientific appeal to target white male scientists and politicians. By doing so, Sanger would heighten her ethos within the scientific community, thereby gaining credibility and more support and funding for her birth control movement.

Implications

In my contribution to the rhetorical discipline, I will focus on the women's eugenics movement, which gained recognition in 1920s America. Overall, I will contribute to the rhetorical discipline by rhetorically analyzing Sanger's "The Morality of Birth Control" and *The Pivot of Civilization* in light of her establishment and support of the 1920s' American birth control movement. Although it cannot be proven that Margaret Sanger was a self-proclaimed

eugenicist, or supported the American eugenics movement at all, it is clear that Sanger utilized eugenics-based rhetoric within her discourse in order to gain support and funding for her birth control movement. I will illuminate Sanger's contribution to American birth control politics, but shine a light on her use of eugenics-based rhetorical constructs which were socially accepted in 1920s America. Sanger's contributions to American birth control politics, namely in her establishment of Planned Parenthood, have been glorified and celebrated for decades, especially since her contributions have helped women get the reproductive care that they need. However, I will explore Sanger's consciously crafted rhetorical contributions to eugenic-based policies, and how these same policies are alive and well to this day. My intention is to initiate a new conversation about American birth control rhetoric, ultimately highlighting the carefully crafted rhetorical strategies hidden within birth control-related discourse.

CHAPTER 2

THE EUGENICS MOVEMENT: ITS ORIGINS, PROMINENCE IN 1920S AMERICA, AND CONTINUATION IN PRESENT DAY DISCOURSE

Charles Darwin's *On the Origin of Species*, published on November 24, 1859, established the foundation of evolutionary biology, or the notion of natural selection. Darwin argued that populations evolve over time over the course of generations, formulating a web or branching evolutionary pattern. Just about a decade later, Darwin's cousin, Francis Galton, began applying evolutionary biology to the human race in order to establish what constitutes being "well born." Galton's first published research article was entitled "Heredity Talent and Character." Published in 1865 in a respected monthly journal geared towards an upper-middle-class audience, "the article argued that the laws of inheritance applied to humans just as much as they did to other animals, and that mental and temperamental as well as physical traits were inherited from both parents. Galton also proposed that human mentality and character could be improved through institutionalized good breeding" (Paul et al. 29). Four years later, Galton expanded his research and published *Hereditary Genius*, a book that coined the term "eugenics" as the study of the "well-born."

In 1883, Galton published his social scientific novel, *Inquiries into Human Faculty and Its Development*, in which he established the definition and foundations of the eugenics movement. Galton defined eugenics as the study of the "well born," since Galton "reasoned that talent and quality were more than an accident. They could be calculated, managed and sharpened into a 'highly gifted race of men by judicious marriages during several consecutive generations'" (Black 15). Galton "understood eugenics to be the rational planning of, and intervention into, human breeding, the application of 'selection' to humans based on statistical probability and on

an understanding of the mechanisms of heredity” (Levine et al. 5). Galton built upon Darwin’s scientific ethos to formulate his own methods of calculating talent, status, and giftedness for future generations.

After Galton originally formulated the foundation of the eugenics movement, he continued studying human genetics and the unique human fingerprint. He aimed to improve the human race in terms of eliminating disease, suffering, and discomfort, by promoting higher rates of sexual reproduction between people with desirable traits. Galton’s branch of eugenics, coined “positive eugenics,” sought to eliminate human suffering through the promotion of sexual reproduction between those people free of disease, poverty, or undesired social traits. On the other hand, the notion of “negative eugenics,” was also coined shortly afterwards. Negative eugenics relates to the idea that those who suffer from disease, poverty, “feeble-mindedness,” or lack of education must reproduce less frequently, be subject to marriage prohibitions, or be sterilized, in order to avoid producing human beings with less desirable genetic traits. Galton “expressed the twin sides of the eugenic coin: efforts to improve the fertility of some (positive eugenics) while curbing the fertility of others (negative eugenics)” (Levine et al. 5). After the establishment of the two branches of the eugenics movement, the concept of eugenics took on a life of its own. Eugenics “sometimes aimed to prevent life (sterilization, contraception, segregation, abortion in some instances); it aimed to bring about fitter life (environmental reforms, *puericulture* focused on the training and rearing of children, public health); it aimed to generate more life (pronatalist interventions, treatment of infertility, ‘euteleogenesis’). And at its most extreme, it ended life (the so-called euthanasia of the disabled, the non-treatment of neonates)” (Levine et al. 3).

In 1904, the Carnegie Institute of Washington (CIW) Station for Experimental Evolution opened a eugenics department and laboratory in Cold Spring Harbor, New York. The Eugenics Record Office (ERO), directed by Charles Davenport, was officially named the Station for Experimental Evolution (SEE) in 1906. With financial backing from the Carnegie and Rockefeller Foundations, the laboratory was able to make administratively visible and viable the commitment to the idea of eugenics and the notion that superior classes of people could be identified and encouraged to reproduce. As Black points out, “biological supremacy, raceology and coercive eugenic battle plans were all just talk until those ideas married into American affluence. With that affluence came the means and the connections to make eugenic theory an administrative reality” (Black 94). Largely funded by the Carnegie Foundation, the Rockefeller Foundation, and Mrs. E. H. Harriman, the ERO and SEE took on a life of their own.

The ERO was the headquarters for the American eugenics movement, and also served as the base for international eugenics relations. The ERO housed all eugenics-based documents revolving around generational genetic traits for every American family who agreed to complete and submit comprehensive questionnaires circulating nationwide from the ERO. These questionnaires collected and documented information regarding the physical, mental, and temperamental traits of America’s citizens. In 1910, Davenport took on Harry H. Laughlin as co-director of the ERO in Cold Spring Harbor. At this point in time, the alliance between Davenport, Laughlin and their “eugenic constellation were not interested in furthering a democracy -- they were creating a supremacy” (Black 87). The ERO, originally established to record and study American hereditary traits, turned into a prominent center for raceology, the social anthropologic study of ethnicity and race, politics, and nation-wide sterilization tactics.

The American Eugenics Movement

As indicated earlier, the American eugenics movement, at its peak between the 1890's and 1930's, was supported by some of the most wealthy and prominent families and politicians present during that time. Not only was the eugenics movement supported by the best universities and scholars in America, it was also "endorsed by the brightest thinkers" and "financed by the richest capitalists" (Black 107). Among these capitalist supporters was the six-generation Rockefeller family who founded Standard Oil and the Rockefeller Foundation, a philanthropic organization which provided funding for the American eugenics movement. Additionally, the eugenics movement "took the form of mass education that encouraged individual responsibility for sexual and reproductive conduct and for healthy conduct that would benefit a larger collective" (Levine et al. 8). By the late 1910s, the eugenics movement slowly shifted from the positive eugenics branch to a form of the negative branch of eugenics. American eugenicists began viewing the poor as "irresponsible breeders, fecund beyond their limited resources and unconcerned at bringing weak or poor stock into the world" (Levine 51). Eugenicists became fearful of immigration and sought massive immigration reform in terms of immigration guidelines. Prominent American eugenicists were afraid of "the declining birth rate of native-born Americans" and began viewing birth control as a possible solution for eliminating the "unfit" American population, especially in terms of American immigrants (Klausen et al. 100).

The American eugenics movement was commonly discussed within America's upper- to upper middle-class social circles, but soon news of the movement began filtering down to the masses. American citizens "began to understand that the ruling classes were planning a future America, indeed a future world, that would leave many of them behind" (Black 101). Sensational articles began to circulate in newspapers, journals, and monthlies, ultimately using scare-tactics

to characterize American eugenics as an attack against poor or underprivileged American citizens. At this time, the focus became less on the elite classes and more on the importance of eugenical motherhood and birth control reform.

The Women's Eugenics Movement in 1920s America

During the 1920s, the eugenics movement reached its peak -- the social science was universally accepted as fact and the war between the weak and wealthy waged on. Specifically, the 1920s American eugenics movement shifted its focus onto women. Since the American eugenics movement narrowed its focus onto negative eugenics, its "focus on selective breeding, typically placed women at the center of its project" (Klausen et al. 108). In 1920s America, a notion of patriotic motherhood became prominent. Middle to upper-middle-class women were no longer victims of eugenics politics, they were "important agents in the implementation of eugenic policies" and "educated women from the middle classes, in particular, claimed eugenic policy-making as an area for active political participation" (Mottier 146). American doctors began relying on their female nurses to focus on mothers as "primary educators of the future generations, linking individual care with the collective obligation of 'race improvement'" (Mottier 146). Supporting the feminist eugenics movement was viewed not as restrictive for women but rather as an opportunity for women to participate in reproductive policy-making in America.

Adolf Hitler's Manipulation of American Eugenics

The eugenics movement remained strong and gained even more financial support throughout the rest of the 1920s and 1930s. During the 1920s, Laughlin and Davenport's negative eugenics campaign would spread to like-minded social scientists throughout Europe. Many European eugenicists traveled to America for training at Cold Spring Harbor and to attend

meetings and conferences led by Laughlin and Davenport. During one eugenics conference, representatives from the United States, Germany, Belgium, Italy, and France established themselves as the International Eugenics Committee (Black 235), ultimately formulating international eugenics politicians and policies.

Although the United States and its eugenic followers did indeed push for race-based eugenic campaigns, Germany manipulated the concept of eugenics and turned it into something else altogether. In Edwin Black's *War Against the Weak: Eugenics and America's Campaign to Create a Master Race*, Black explains that America "crusaded for a biologically superior race, which would gradually wipe away the existence of all inferior strains. Hitler would crusade for a master race to quickly dominate all others" (270). In *Mein Kampf*, Hitler declared:

The demand that defective people be prevented from propagating equally defective offspring is a demand of the clearest reason and, if systematically executed, represents the most humane act of mankind. It will spare millions of unfortunates undeserved sufferings, and consequently will lead to a rising improvement of health as a whole. (51)

In Hitler's eugenic-based rhetoric, he recited "social Darwinism imperatives, condemned the concept of charity, and praised the policies of the United States and its quest for Nordic purity" (Black 275). Soon after, prominent American and European eugenicists and hereditarians became genuinely revolted by Hitler's eugenic-based campaigns. American eugenicists began distancing themselves from their eugenics campaigns and funding began to dwindle. Looking back, Black states that:

Hitler's bloody regime, the Holocaust and the Second World War would be perceived as merely the outgrowth of the unfathomable madness and blind hatred of one man and his movement. But in fact Hitler's hatred was not blind; it was sharply focused on an obsessive eugenic vision. The war against the weak had graduated from America's slogans, index cards and surgical blades to Nazi decrees, ghettos and gas chambers. (318)

After World War II, the American negative eugenics movement ceased to exist; however, eugenics-based rhetoric has essentially renamed itself -- eugenics today revolves around human genetics and genetic counseling (Black 411). Eugenics-based discourse has also continued to be prominent in social scientific studies throughout the 1980s and 1990s, specifically in regards to Planned Parenthood's birth control discourse, *The Bell Curve*, and *The Mismeasure of Man* -- popular social scientific publications promoting a continuing strain of the negative eugenics movement, ultimately supporting racist ideologies and the removal of public policies such as affirmative action programs.

Present Day Eugenics-Based Discourse

Eugenics-based discourse is still very prevalent to this day in relation to the attitudes about the poor and reproduction, regardless of the end of formal "eugenics" education after Hitler's regime. Specifically, the rhetoric circulating around debates about Planned Parenthood and social-scientific class studies shine a light on how eugenics still permeates American rhetoric to this day.

To begin, controversies surrounding Planned Parenthood have become very political in nature. In *Choice & Coercion: Birth Control, Sterilization, and Abortion in Public Health and Welfare*, Johanna Schoen shines a light on the political philosophy behind Margaret Sanger's Planned Parenthood and its relation to eugenics-based rhetoric today. Schoen, an associate professor at Rutgers School of Arts and Sciences and reproductive rights, sexuality, and eugenics scholar, argues that the reproductive rights of less fortunate women have not changed over the past fifty years. Schoen provides an overview of Bill Clinton's welfare reform and George W. Bush's "dismantling of women's reproductive health services," showcasing how American

politics and public opinion have continued to hinder any advances in the reproductive rights of poor women (247).

In 1994, Richard J. Herrnstein and Charles Murray published *The Bell Curve*, a social scientific study on human intelligence. Herrnstein and Murray claim that human intelligence is ultimately influenced by environmental factors and financial income, highlighting Schoen's perception of the ties between class, wealth, and perceived intelligence. The basis of Herrnstein and Murray's study revolves around a clear-cut separation between the "cognitive elite" and those Americans who have average to below-average IQs.

Herrnstein and Murray's exploration into human intelligence has had many mixed reviews over the years, some condemning their binary approach to class structure and elitism, and some praising their ability to approach a taboo topic head-on. Herrnstein and Murray conclude that America, and society in general, is headed towards "an increasingly isolated cognitive elite," "a merging of the cognitive elite with the affluent," and "a deteriorating quality of life for people at the bottom end of the cognitive ability distribution." Their choice of rhetoric highlights how eugenics-based ideals were still alive and well into the mid to late 1990's.

In 1996, Stephen Jay Gould published a critique of Herrnstein and Murray's *The Bell Curve* in which he argued that Herrnstein and Murray "omit facts, misuse statistical methods, and seem unwilling to admit the consequences of their own words" (370). Gould's claim that Herrnstein and Murray manipulated data directly reverts back to Davenport and Laughlin's manipulation of "scientific data" in order to force sterilization or enforce marriage prohibitions to avoid reproduction and procreation of the "unfit." Gould also highlights Schoen's claims in regard to the connection between eugenic-based rhetoric and the politics surrounding today's eugenic-based discourse. Gould states:

[*The Bell Curve*] is a manifesto of conservative ideology, and its sorry and biased treatment of data records the primary purpose -- advocacy above all. The text evokes the dreary and scary drumbeat of claims associated with conservative think tanks -- reduction or elimination of welfare, ending of affirmative action in schools and workplaces, cessation of Head Start and other forms of preschool education, cutting of programs for slowest learners and application of funds to the gifted (376-7).

Gould's claims in his critique of *The Bell Curve* highlight how eugenics-based policies and discourse are still alive and well in the 21st century. Although the concrete notion of negative eugenics was reportedly finished with the rise and fall of Adolf Hitler, negative eugenics-based discourse, policies, and rhetoric permeates our media and American social philosophy to this day.

This chapter's historical overview of the American eugenics movement serves as a base understanding of eugenics-based discourse in American rhetoric. Chapter three will critically examine Margaret Sanger's upbringing, promiscuous lifestyle, and passionate contributions to the American birth control movement. The presence of eugenics-based rhetorical patterns in Sanger's birth control discourse will be explored in chapters four and five in order to understand the ties between eugenics-based language and Sanger's birth control movement.

CHAPTER 3

MARGARET SANGER'S PASSIONATE CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE AMERICAN BIRTH CONTROL MOVEMENT AND WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT

Margaret Louise Higgins was born on September 14, 1879 to Michael Hennessey Higgins and Anne Purcell Higgins. Margaret was born in her small family home in Corning, New York, since no hospital was available in the area. Margaret was the sixth child in the Higgins' eleven years of marriage, soon to be followed by five more siblings. Margaret's mother gave birth to eleven children and suffered seven miscarriages. In 1892, when Margaret's mother had given birth to her last child, Anne Higgins "succumbed to the tuberculosis that made her last years an agony of fitful coughing, bloody expectoration, and persistent enervation" (Baker 10). Margaret's working-class upbringing and abundance of siblings laid the foundation for her future life's passion: birth control access for all.

Michael Hennessey Higgins and Anne Purcell Higgins moved to America from Cork, Ireland during the Great Potato Famine. Michael was very outspoken and taught Margaret to speak her mind from a very young age. Margaret spent her childhood as an outsider and admittedly associated "poverty, toil, unemployment, drunkenness, cruelty, quarreling, fighting, debts, and jails with large families" (Baker 15). Although Corning, New York experienced the vast commodification of post-Civil War America, the Higgins children were always dressed in hand-me-downs and were often ridiculed for their poverty. In Margaret's autobiography, she stated that "Christmas were on the poverty line. If any of us needed a new winter overcoat or a pair of overshoes, these constituted our presents" (Sanger 13). Also in her autobiography,

Margaret reflected on an instance where one of her younger brothers was forced to wear a dress to school, due to her mother's inability to keep up with the laundry for a family of thirteen.

As a young adult, Margaret knew that her future was dim, since an undereducated young woman would have to become a domestic servant or marry a factory worker in order to have a comfortable life in Corning. Against her family's wishes, Margaret decided to pursue her dreams and enrolled at the Claverack College and Hudson River Institute in Hudson, New York. Margaret studied penmanship, book-keeping, accounting, and ended up moving into the literary program (Baker). Margaret loved her life at Claverack, where there was "running water, electricity, elegant furniture, and books for the library" (Baker 24). At Claverack, Margaret grew into an outspoken, passionate, and educated young woman and felt much less discrimination than she had during her childhood in Corning. Margaret never graduated from Claverack, as she was called upon to return to Corning to care for her dying mother. Anne Purcell Higgins died from tuberculosis, contracted during her many pregnancies. After her mother's death, Margaret found that she was responsible for the care of her father and younger brothers and sisters and set aside her dreams of a bright future.

As she grew older, Margaret became an "immensely attractive woman, small but lithe and trim. Her green eyes were flecked with amber, her hair a shiny auburn hue, her smile always warm and charming, her hands perpetually in motion, beckoning even to strangers" (Chesler 16). At this time, Margaret immediately clashed with her father in regards to her numerous boyfriends. One night, Margaret missed her father's set curfew and her father locked her out of the house. Although she and her father later reconciled, Margaret left Corning and viewed returning to the small town as a sign of defeat.

Now on her own, Margaret entered nursing school in White Plains Hospital on the outskirts of New York City. During this time, Margaret met William Sanger, a wealthy, “sophisticated, urbane, and sexually adroit” young man who actively courted her against her wishes (Baker 34). Margaret began to see how the middle and upper classes in American society lived and gave in to William’s advances. Six months later, Margaret and William married during Margaret’s two-hour break from her nursing duties (Baker). Five months after their marriage, Margaret Sanger was pregnant, and like her mother, pregnancy “exacerbated her [then dormant] tuberculosis” (Baker 37). Margaret began to fear that she would assume a similar life and fate as her late mother.

In the winter of 1910, the Sanger family, consisting of Margaret, William, and their three children, moved to New York City. In 1910, New York was surging with immigrants and its five boroughs contained a population of nearly four million people (Baker). With the demand for housing provoking soaring housing costs, Margaret Sanger resumed her nursing career where she primarily worked with pregnant women and women suffering from postpartum depression. What changed Sanger’s view on women’s reproductive health was tending to a patient named Sadie Sachs. Sanger was called to the Sachs family’s small apartment on a couple of occasions due to Sadie’s self-inflicted abortions. The second time that Sadie performed a self-inflicted abortion, she suffered and died from septicemia while Sanger sat by her bedside. After consoling Sadie’s desperate husband, Sanger wrote the following in her journal, which was later published in her autobiography:

I looked out my window and down upon the dimly lighted city. Its pains and griefs crowded in upon me, a moving picture rolled before my eyes with photographic clearness: women writhing in travail to bring forth little babies; the babies themselves naked and hungry, wrapped in newspapers to keep them from the cold; six-year-old children with pinched, pale, wrinkled faces, old in concentrated wretchedness, pushed

into gray and fetid cellars, crouching on stone floors, their small scrawny hands scuttling through rags, making lamp shades, artificial flowers; white coffins, black coffins, coffins, coffins interminably passing in never-ending succession. The scenes piled one upon another on another. I could bear it no longer (Sanger 92).

This represented a turning point in Sanger's nursing career -- Sanger's sole focus became women's reproductive rights and the right to birth control to eliminate abortion altogether.

The American Birth Control Movement

The shift from the Victorian notion of purity to the promiscuity of the roaring 1920s paved the way for Sanger's vision of the American birth control movement. During the mid-to-late 1910s, Sanger took advantage of her husband's involvement in the Twenty-third Assembly District of the Socialist Party and impressed the group with her active support and ability to speak publicly. Gradually over the next few years, Sanger began to take on lecture topics revolving around sex education. During a time when women were said to lack sex drives and "submitted to sexual intercourse in order to please their husbands and to conceive children," Sanger established that women "might have the capacity to be sexual subjects rather than objects, feeling impulses of their own [...] opened a door to denying that women were governed by maternal instinct" (Gordon 58-9). During this time, Sanger did not merely lecture about women's natural sexual impulses -- she acted on them as well. Sanger began associating with the bohemian culture in Greenwich Village and took on multiple lovers, often leaving her children at home with her husband while she indulged in her sexual escapades.

The American birth control movement began to utilize popular eugenics-based rhetoric in order to gain support and funding. Feminists, including Sanger, used "eugenic arguments as if aware that arguments based solely on women's rights had not enough power to conquer conservative and religious scruples about reproduction" (Gordon 68). During a time when

children “no longer represented useful farm labor” and grew up in the “urban middle and upper classes, [children became] expensive projects of venture capital to be nurtured and educated and only after years of support sent out to their own destiny” (Baker 41). In this case, large families detracted from the potential success of having a couple of well-educated and nurtured children, and the call for birth control became prominent.

During the American birth control movement, Sanger identified herself as someone who could fill the gap between physicians and scientists -- someone who could educate the general population about the benefits of birth control. Sanger’s passion for birth control was also an effort to eliminate unsafe self-induced abortions. During this time, Sanger began selling pamphlets and birth control information on the streets of New York City and was arrested numerous times for violating obscenity laws. American obscenity laws stemmed from the Comstock Law, a federal act passed by United States Congress on March 3, 1873 banning the circulation of “obscene literature and articles of immoral use,” which included erotica, contraceptives, abortifacients, sex toys, or any information revolving around the aforementioned “obscene” materials (Black 273). After multiple arrests, charges against Sanger were often dismissed to avoid building Sanger up as a martyr, because of her growing support. Sanger went on to lead numerous women’s empowerment organizations worldwide. As Black points out, Sanger’s “crusades evolved from birth control and contraception into sex education and world population control” (142). Little did Sanger know, her legacy was just beginning.

Margaret Sanger’s Discourse

During a time when disseminating birth control information was deemed pornographic, especially given the strict enforcement of the Comstock Law in America, Sanger still published her birth control and sex education information in *The New York Call*. During late 1912 and

early 1913, the publication included Sanger's seven-part series entitled *What Every Girl Should Know* (Baker). In her series, Sanger "included [women's] reproductive physiology" and talked about women's "sex impulses" -- subjects that were forbidden to be discussed at the time (Baker 69). *What Every Girl Should Know* allowed Sanger to "separate sex and reproduction" and helped Sanger gain the attention and funding that she so desired (Baker 70).

In 1916, Sanger published her first birth control magazine, *The Woman Rebel*. She became the magazine's "editor, publisher, principal author, bookkeeper, manager, and distributor" (Baker 76). *The Woman Rebel* contained stories about Sanger's interactions with desperate mothers as well as public policy articles. Every month, *The Woman Rebel* was confiscated by the postmaster due to supposed pornographic content, leading to another arrest -- but Sanger never gave up on her birth control crusade.

In 1917, Sanger published *Family Limitation*, a pamphlet educating women about female anatomy and physiology as well as different effective contraceptives. *Family Limitation* "became the most influential printed material on the subject. Translated into several languages, with sales of over 160,000 copies in the United States in four years, and revised in eighteen future editions, it carried her name and message throughout the United States and Europe" (Baker 85). In *Family Limitation*, Sanger inserted a forward illuminating that contraception is the solution for self-induced at-home abortions. She stated that "no one can doubt that there are times where an abortion is justifiable but they will become *unnecessary when care is taken to prevent conception*. This is the *only* cure for abortions" (Sanger 14). Also in 1917, Sanger began *The Birth Control Review*, another monthly birth control magazine that reached twenty-five hundred subscribers (Baker 132). *The Birth Control Review* eventually became Sanger's "principal means

of communication with the public” and included articles on contraception, the eugenics movement, family planning, and birth control (Baker 135).

In 1919, Sanger began to latch onto the popular eugenics movement in order to solidify her celebrity status. She published *Woman and the New Race*, which sold two hundred thousand copies in one year (Baker). In 1922, Sanger published *The Pivot of Civilization* which “embraced eugenics as a female cause with a female solution, repeating her utopian correctives that women ‘must prevent the birth of the weak and helpless and unwanted children of the world’” (Baker 162). Together, *Woman and the New Race* and *The Pivot of Civilization* sold 567,000 copies in five years (Baker 161).

The Establishment of Planned Parenthood Clinics

During the next phase of Sanger’s birth control movement, Sanger turned her attention to the establishment of clinics to disseminate birth control and reproductive care. On October 16, 1916, Sanger opened her first clinic in two small rooms in a storefront on Amboy Street. On the clinic’s opening day, more than one hundred women and twenty men waited in line to seek Sanger’s reproductive advice (Baker). Ten days later, on October 26, 1916, a police raid shut down Sanger’s birth control clinic because of her violation of the Comstock Law, as well as not having a presiding physician for the clinic. Between October 16 and October 26, over five hundred clients came to the clinic for reproductive and sex education.

Within a couple weeks of her arrest, Sanger opened a new birth control clinic in Brownsville, New York. She was immediately arrested again and was deemed a public nuisance. Finally, on January 1, 1923, Sanger opened a birth control clinic with its first active physician. In order to appeal to the public, Sanger stated that “there must be toys for the children while the mothers are examined; the staff must be hospitable; the clinic must be attractive and neighborly

[...] without the intimidation of a hospital or even a doctor's office" (Baker 189). After an eventual falling out with the first established physician, Sanger took on a second director and physician for her successful birth control clinic, Dr. Hannah Stone. Stone's sensitivity and approachability helped gain even more popularity for the clinic. By 1925, "1,655 patients visited the clinic; four years later, 9,737 women, most of them mothers from lower-income families and a quarter of them Catholics, along with a few men" (Baker 191). Later, Sanger's clinic became the most active and famous birth control clinic in the world, "attracting local medical students, nurses, and visiting doctors" and by 1931, "sixteen doctors, five trained nurses, four social workers, and several researchers served a growing population of over 18,000 clients" (Baker 197). By 1934, the clinic had records of 49,798 women (Baker). Later named Planned Parenthood, Sanger's clinic provides medical, social, and mental health assistance to support the sexual and reproductive rights of women to this day.

Margaret Sanger's Manipulation of Eugenics-Based Rhetoric

Many critical scholars associate Margaret Sanger with the eugenics movement; however, it is important to consider Sanger's desire to acquire funding for her birth control movement. According to Jean H. Baker, Sanger's support of eugenics ultimately cost her some of her reputation, "while at the same time it revealed her passion for the cause of birth control, along with her pragmatism" (147). On the other hand, Edwin Black states that "Sanger came to view eugenics and her [birth control] movement as two sides of the same coin. She consistently courted leaders of the eugenics movement, seeking their acceptance, and periodically maneuvering for a merger of sorts" (135). Regardless, it can be noted that Sanger's underlying eugenic agenda was indeed inherent in her discourse, whether because of cultural contexts or because Sanger actually supported the eugenics movement.

Baker states that Sanger's acceptance of the eugenics movement must be considered in the context of her time. Sanger's eugenic-based views, showcased in her birth control discourse, are "abhorrent by today's standards, [and] should be seen in the context of a time in American history when prominent Americans -- from presidents to Supreme Court justices to scientists -- believed in genetic improvements through the intervention of the state" (Baker 223). At the time, the eugenics movement permeated American political discourse, so Sanger may have been using a universally accepted eugenics-based rhetorical approach to her birth control discourse.

However, other scholars, such as Edwin Black and Angela Franks, believe that Sanger did indeed have a strong underlying negative eugenics agenda. Black states that "Sanger was an ardent, self-confessed eugenicist, and she would turn her otherwise noble birth control organizations into a tool for eugenics, which advocated for mass sterilizations of so-called defectives, mass incarceration of the unfit and draconian immigration restrictions" (127). Sanger also repeatedly referred to poor American citizens as "'human waste' not worthy of assistance, and proudly quoted the extreme eugenic view that human 'weeds' should be 'exterminated'" (Black 127). It is difficult to discern whether or not Sanger actually believed in the negative eugenics movement, but Sanger's desire to appeal to the wealthy and the middle class in order to fund her movement may have influenced her eugenic approach to her birth control discourse.

Margaret Sanger's Legacy

Regardless of whether or not Margaret Sanger actually had a strong underlying eugenic agenda of her own, one thing is certain: Sanger's passionate contributions to the birth control movement live on to this day. In the 1930s, Sanger proposed the idea of a "cheap, reliable birth control for women, some sort of pill, as she once said" (Baker 255). Upon forming the International Planned Parenthood Federation (IPPF), Sanger was finally able to assist with the

development and distribution of cheap and effective birth control methods for women of all social classes.

In 1957, Searle, a pharmaceutical company, filed for a license for an oral contraceptive. Sanger was “past seventy when the world finally began to heed her concern for unchecked population growth, past eighty when the team of doctors and scientists she had long encouraged marketed the oral, anovulant birth control pill” (Chesler 11). In 1960, The Pill was released and just two short years later, was being used by 1.2 million women worldwide (Reed). The Pill allowed women to further their education, provide for families that were as large or as small as they wished, and assisted with marital relationships. Additionally, the research conducted to establish The Pill “led and continues to open the way to new contraceptive methods, including the morning-after pill, implants, and long-lasting injections” (Reed 251).

Although Margaret Sanger’s mind began to deteriorate in the late 1950s, she still indulged in her sexual impulses and maintained relationships with various men, showcasing that Sanger’s free will and dynamic personality could never be extinguished. On September 6, 1966, Margaret Sanger died in a nursing home in Tuscan, just as President Lyndon Johnson began incorporating family planning into American welfare programs (Chesler). Today, the International Planned Parenthood Federation consists of six regional offices and reaches more than 180 countries, offering family planning and reproductive care to both men and women (Reed). Additionally, “the pill” constitutes eight percent of contraceptive use worldwide (Reed). Regardless of Margaret Sanger’s intentions, eugenics-based or not, it is impossible to deny her unwavering courage and determination to assist women with their reproductive health.

Although it is difficult to discern whether or not Sanger actually believed in or supported the negative eugenics movement, Sanger’s desire to appeal to wealthy and middle-class

American citizens in order to fund her movement may have influenced her eugenics-based rhetorical approach to her birth control discourse. Chapter four will present a close reading and critical examination of Sanger's 1921 speech, "The Morality of Birth Control" through a rhetorical lens to explore how eugenics-based discourse enmeshed with Sanger's birth control rhetoric.

CHAPTER 4

SCAPEGOATING BY MEANS OF ANTITHESIS: A CONCEPT-ORIENTED RHETORICAL ANALYSIS OF MARGARET SANGER'S EUGENIC AGENDA IN "THE MORALITY OF BIRTH CONTROL"

Throughout the summer of 1921, Margaret Sanger organized an international conference to bring together both supporters and skeptics of her birth control movement. At the conference, Sanger sought to cover popular social issues such as population control, war, maternal problems, health, and American birth control politics (Baker 173). Sanger recruited well-known medical experts to give talks on birth control and reproductive issues that were most prominent in 1920s America. Speakers such as Dr. Adolphus Knopf, "an authority on tuberculosis and New York clinics," Dr. Lothrop Stoddard, "the well-known eugenicist author of *The Rising Tide of Color*," and Dr. Raymond Pearl, "a statistician at the Johns Hopkins Medical School, who believed in the sterilization of some convicted criminals," all agreed to present at Sanger's conference (Baker 173). Sanger strategically chose these speakers in order to establish an ethos for her conference and convert skeptics to support her cause. The First American Birth Control Conference was set to convene on November 11 and end on November 18, 1921.

On November 11, 1921, over two hundred physicians, social workers, eugenics scientists, and population experts, as well as Sanger's loyal followers, met in the spacious New York Plaza Hotel Grand Ballroom (Baker 172). Sanger purposely timed her conference to overlap with the American Public Health Association's annual conference so that those who were suspicious of her birth control movement might attend and experience a change of heart (Baker 172). On the third day of her week-long conference, Sanger planned on addressing the "contested issue of the

morality of using birth control” in order to address the skepticism surrounding her cause (Baker 174).

Sanger’s speech, “The Morality of Birth Control,” was scheduled to be delivered on November 13, 1921 in New York City’s Park Theatre. Police Captain Thomas Donahue ordered for the doors to the Park Theatre to be locked, minutes before the town hall was scheduled to begin, trapping many people who had already congregated inside. Sanger ordered Donahue to open the doors to let out the crowd who had already congregated in the hall to listen to her speech. As Donahue opened the doors, Sanger immediately took the podium to declare the injustices being committed to those congregated there. Other activists joined Sanger on stage, and were immediately arrested on charges of disorderly conduct. As Sanger was arrested,

a riot broke out among the crowd of supporters that followed them [to the 47th Street Police Station]. According to an article in *The World*: ‘A great crowd followed the prisoners from the Town Hall when police reserves were called in to clear the hall and marched to the station. Down 43rd street to Broadway, 3,000 strong, they went, singing loudly, ‘My Country ’Tis of Thee, Sweet Land of No Liberty’. (Grimaldi)

Sanger’s arrest showcases the heated debates and severe conflict revolving around the concepts and ideologies that Sanger and her followers asserted in their birth control discourse. After being discharged due to a lack of incriminating evidence, Sanger stated: “I consider my arrest in violation of every principle of liberty that America stands for, and I shall take this case to the highest courts, if necessary, to preclude the possibility of it ever happening again.”

On November 18, 1921, when Sanger was finally able to give her speech without interruption, she addressed the injustices that she and her followers had to face even to conduct the First American Birth Control Conference. She clearly exhibits an urgent need and demand for peace and understanding about the concept of birth control. Her audience consisted of other

wealthy women's rights activists who later called themselves the American Birth Control League (ABCL). Given this moment in history, Sanger and the ABCL overcame many obstacles and constraints in order to promote the need for birth control to save what they understood to be their disintegrating society, due to poverty, crowded tenements, and crime. Sanger's "The Morality of Birth Control" is a critical representation of the relations between eugenics-based language and Sanger's birth control discourse. Sanger's use of eugenics-based rhetorical constructs shines through the descriptive language used in her speech during a time when birth control was deemed immoral.

The Catholic Church's response to "The Morality of Birth Control"

Upon researching the public's reception of Margaret Sanger's "The Morality of Birth Control," I came across a highly publicized debate about Sanger's morality in terms of the ideologies upheld by the Catholic Church. In the 1920s, the Catholic Church was a cultural, social, and political powerhouse, having much power and prestige over immigrants and those settled in New York. To say the least, Sanger's "The Morality of Birth Control" was not accepted by the Catholic Church. Specifically, Archbishop Hayes, the man who was said to have contacted the police to raid Sanger's First American Birth Control Conference, declared that Sanger was violating the Comstock Law, as well as the laws of the Catholic Church. Declaring that he had a duty to proclaim the morality of the Catholic Church, Archbishop Hayes proclaimed that "the law of God and man, science, public policy, human experience are all condemnatory of birth control as preached by a few irresponsible individuals," which was directly referring to Sanger herself (Baker 176). To hit a nerve with Sanger, Archbishop Hayes, who knew Sanger was the sixth child in a family of eleven, explained how the seventh child in any family is "exceptional, a familial placement most favored by nature, a point that the lives of

Benjamin Franklin, Ignatius Loyola, and even Catherine of Siena demonstrated” (Baker 176).

The archbishop went on to declare that “the lack of genius in our day is that we are not getting to the end of families,” explaining how birth control is eliminating the potential prodigies who could further society and eliminate societal conflict (Baker 176).

About a month later, the archbishop delivered his famous Christmas pastoral, later titled “Children Troop Down From Heaven,” ultimately declaring the immorality of birth control and the evils of preventing conception. Archbishop Hayes declared:

Children troop down from Heaven because God wills it. He alone has the right to stay their coming. To take life after its inception is a horrible crime; but to prevent human life that the Creator is about to bring into being is satanic. In the first instance the body is killed while the soul lives on; in the latter not only a body but an immortal soul is denied existence in time and in eternity (Baker 176).

Sanger finally replied to the archbishop’s attacks by explaining how Archbishop Hayes was entitled to his opinion and his religion. Sanger stated that “we, who are trying to better humanity fundamentally, believe that a healthy happy human race is more in keeping with the laws of God, than disease, misery and poverty perpetuating itself generation after generation” (Baker 177).

Although this exchange was quite controversial at the time, the Catholic Church actually bolstered Sanger’s birth control movement -- the Church drew even more attention to Sanger’s movement, garnering more support and controversy despite the Church’s attempts to condemn the movement altogether.

Methods for Analysis

Scapegoating

In Kenneth Burke’s *A Rhetoric of Motives*, Burke evaluates identification by maintaining the classical rhetorical perspective -- that rhetoric is a vessel for persuasive communication.

Burke claims that when a transmitter of a message is attempting to persuade the receiver of the message to adopt a certain ideology, at least one party must identify with the other in order for true persuasive communication to occur. Burke states that person A is not necessarily identical with his colleague, person B, but “insofar as their interests are joined, A is *identified* with B. Or he may *identify himself* with B even when their interests are not joined, if he assumes that they are, or is persuaded to believe so” (Burke 1325). In essence, person B is persuaded that they are similar to person A in some way, thereby identifying themselves with the sender of the persuasive message.

Burke acknowledges that identification can lead to negative outcomes, such as controversy, disarray, and discord. Burke illuminates the fact that if a communicator puts “identification and division ambiguously together, so that you cannot know for certain just where one ends and the other begins ... you have the characteristic invitation to rhetoric” (Burke 1328). Given these circumstances, it is possible to use identification in order to manipulate an uninformed audience. Burke states that “all that can reasonably be said is that, as judged by a different scheme of orientation, from a different point of view, a particular linkage is a deceptive one, making for faulty means-selecting” (Burke 16). This possible deceptive branch of rhetoric leads to the emergence of the scapegoat mechanism.

In Burke’s *Permanence and Change: An Anatomy of Purpose*, Burke introduces the scapegoat mechanism in terms of interpretation and orientation. Burke defines the scapegoat mechanism as “the use of a sacrificial receptacle for the ritual unburdening of one’s sins” as well as the “hypothetical introduction of a separate mental process” (16). Burke goes on to argue that the scapegoat mechanism is “merely an instance of [the rhetorician’s] trained incapacity” (17). In his *Sourcebook on Rhetoric*, James Jasinski states that “as Burke’s writing on the topic evolved,

scapegoating was associated with the inevitable presence of hierarchy in human society (Burke, 1966, p. 19) and with the problem of maintaining order and stability in a hierarchical society” (504). In times of conflict or historical and societal change, there is often a “sacrificial ritual of *redemption* through *victimage*,” or a unburdening of one’s sins by reflecting the deterioration of society onto one specific minority (Jasinski 503). In this case, Burke acknowledged in his essay, *The Philosophy of Literary Form*, the “importance of finding a sacrificial vessel that is ‘worthy’ of sacrifice” (Jasinski 503). To simplify, in order to fulfill a shift in society, or a sense of cultural catharsis, a minority is chosen to be the sacrificial object to purge a society’s morally deteriorating nature.

The basis for rhetorical scapegoating is the guilt it stimulates within the intended audience in order to achieve social or cultural redemption. Jasinski states that:

Guilt arises from disruptions to, or violations of, the social order or from threats to the social order. Burke suggested that guilt might be manifested in a variety of ways -- social tensions; anxieties; and feelings of uneasiness, uncertainty, or decline. In whatever form it might appear, guilt has a debilitating impact on the society. Consequently, there emerges a need to ‘cure’ the social order -- to cleanse it of guilt and achieve a state of social redemption. (504)

In essence, scapegoating uses a pathos-based strategy to elicit an emotional response from the intended audience. The speaker victimizes a certain group of people in order to place the blame on them for society’s problems. In this case, “an ‘us versus them’ antithesis is established” (Jasinski 504). In order for a society to redeem their moral or idyllic state, the scapegoat must be cast away from society, or eliminated altogether.

Antithesis

To define antithesis simply, antithesis refers universally to two things that are direct opposites. To define antithesis rhetorically, it is a “device in which two opposite ideas are put

together in a sentence to achieve a contrasting effect” (Literary Devices). Additionally, antithesis in rhetoric is a “figure of balance in which two contrasting ideas are intentionally juxtaposed, usually through parallel structure; a contrasting of opposing ideas in adjacent phrases, clauses, or sentences” (Eidenmuller). So, although antithesis literally means “opposites,” the concept is rhetorically defined as two juxtaposing ideas which are present in parallel structures within a rhetorical artifact. In order to properly understand what constitutes as parallel structure within a rhetorical piece, one must define rhetorical parallelism. In rhetoric, parallelism is a “figure of balance identified by a similarity in the syntactical structure of a set of words in successive phrases, clauses, sentences; successive words, phrases, clauses in the same or very similar grammatical structure. This figure often occurs in public address with others such as antithesis, anaphora, asyndeton, climax, epistrophe and symploce” (Eidenmuller). In essence, antithesis exists in a rhetorical artifact by means of parallelism at the word, phrasal, or clausal level with comparable grammatical structure.

Additionally, in rhetorical theory, amplification is the “art of emphasis (p. 173)” (Jasinski 12). Rhetorical theorist Richard Weaver argues that “the very task of the rhetorician is to determine what feature of a question is most exigent and to use the power of language to make it appear so (Weaver, 1971, p. 175)” (Jasinski 12). Jasinski references Chaim Perelman, when he states that in general, “amplification refers to the various linguistic and discursive devices such as repetition, restatement, aggregation (Perelman, 1982), explanation, enumeration, elaboration, elaborate description, magnification, and iconicity that can be used to emphasize (or ‘amplify’) a particular point” (12). Burke also discusses amplification in terms of extending or amplifying one specific concept or theme to increase persuasiveness.

In Sanger's "The Morality of Birth Control," antithesis is intensified by an exaggerated use of repetition and amplification. In this paper, I have broken up Sanger's speech into three distinct moves: the context that Sanger provides for her audience to further her argument, Sanger's construction of a societal crisis, and Sanger's call to action. Each move contains an amplified sense of antithesis, ultimately emphasizing her dominant use of scapegoating to promote her underlying eugenic agenda. The most prominent instance of antithesis is Sanger's repeated amplification of "moral" versus "immoral," or "morality" versus "immorality." This concept, or clear-cut division between right and wrong, is repeated throughout Sanger's speech 24 times -- ultimately amplifying, or intensifying, her use of antithesis as a rhetorical construct.

Concept-Oriented Rhetorical Analysis of Sanger's Speech

In "The Morality of Birth Control," Sanger uses three distinct moves to persuade her audience that society is disintegrating and that she has the solution to fix it. Sanger clearly showcases these three moves as processes that enable the world to function in its most pristine capacity. Sanger's first move provides context for her audience and followers. She describes the injustices that the ABCL was forced to face in order to enact their basic right to the freedom of speech. In this section, Sanger also describes her methods of analyzing the public's views on overpopulation and birth control. In her second move, Sanger identifies a clear societal problem: that the Catholic Church and birth control disbelievers are corrupting society. In this section, Sanger assigns scapegoats, the Catholic Church and the "feble-minded," and clearly constructs a societal crisis in order to assert the need for birth control in her final move. In her concluding move, Sanger asserts her formal call to action: that those immoral, feble-minded, uneducated, unhealthy, impoverished people must be eliminated to recover and maintain the ideal moral

society. Sanger clearly incorporates antithesis and scapegoating as rhetorical constructs to successfully deliberate these three moves.

Move one: Sanger provides context

Within Sanger's first move, Sanger clearly sets up context for her audience but uses antithesis as a rhetorical construct to build momentum into her second move where she personally constructs a societal crisis. In the first paragraph, Sanger introduces her oral discourse as a "postponement of one which was to have taken place at the Town Hall last Sunday evening" (Sanger). However, moving into the second paragraph, Sanger begins to build momentum into the issue at hand. Here, Sanger introduces the moral nature of birth control when she states: "there seems to be most uncertainty and disagreement [...] in the moral side of the subject of Birth Control." Sanger identifies that there is indeed a "moral side" to birth control, but fails to mention any immorality surrounding the subject for which she is advocating. There is a clear duality or antithesis used when Sanger antithetically pairs "uncertainty and disagreement" with the "moral side of the subject of Birth Control." Since morality is a positive attribute, delineating the distinction between right and wrong, Sanger pairs morality with words holding negative connotations, such as "uncertainty and disagreement" in order to establish the absurdity of disregarding the importance of birth control.

Also in the second paragraph, Sanger pairs two conflicting words when she states: "It seemed only natural for us to call together scientists, educators, members of the medical profession and the theologians of all denominations to ask their opinion upon this uncertain and important phase of the controversy." Here, Sanger establishes that she is fair and moral, given that she called together known antithetical occupations, such as scientists and theologians of all

denominations, yet she uses antithesis to her advantage when she introduces this phase of the birth control movement as an “uncertain and important” moment in time. Uncertainty has a negative connotation, since its literal meaning is “not able to be relied on; not known or definite” (Merriam-Webster). Conversely, “important” is literally defined as “of great significance or value; likely to have a profound effect on success” (Merriam-Webster). Here, Sanger intentionally pairs antithetical words to declare the positive nature of birth control. Sanger relies on opposing words to define the controversy, to clearly delineate right from wrong, and to shift the views of her audience to favor the birth control movement. Additionally, Sanger pairs the word *uncertain* with birth *control*, to emphasize that birth control is the solution to this societal uncertainty. Sanger uses these specific instances of antithesis to create stronger boundaries between what is “moral” and “immoral” later in her speech.

Continuing on in the second paragraph, Sanger discusses her methodology when she explains that she sent questionnaires to “the most eminent men and women in the world.” The questions are numbered one through four. In these questions, Sanger repeatedly uses antithetic words to assert the duality between right and wrong. Specifically, in question one, Sanger asks: “Is over-population a menace to the peace of the world?” Here, the clear antithetic language asserts that over-population is negative, ultimately affecting the peace of the world. Menace is literally defined as “a threat or danger,” whereas peace is defined as “freedom from disturbance” (Merriam-Webster). Considering this, Sanger is asserting that there are no positive attributes in regards to over-population, since it is a threat to an idyllic society. Since society strives for peace and tranquility, over-population must be sustained or eliminated in order to establish peace.

It is important to evaluate Sanger's frequent use of antithetic language in regards to this kairotic moment. Considering the controversy behind this new birth control science and the constraints placed on Sanger and the ABCL, Sanger must depend on the persuasiveness of her discourse to maintain followers and funding for her birth control movement.

Move two: Sanger constructs a crisis

In Sanger's second move, she assigns a scapegoat for society's deterioration and clearly constructs a crisis to illuminate the urgent need or demand for birth control. This section of Sanger's speech builds upon a kairotic moment where a minority is overpowered by a majority, thereby limiting the advancement of the birth control movement, or in a much broader sense, the advancement of society. In this section, Sanger relies on antithetic language and Burke's scapegoating mechanism to construct her societal crisis.

Within this section of her speech, Sanger repeatedly mentions morality versus immorality -- a clear-cut antithesis. Sanger defines morality as something that is "based upon knowledge," emphasizing her focus on the logical assumption that birth control can save society. Conversely, Sanger pairs immorality with those who opposed the birth control movement or hindered its progress. According to Sanger, the main group, highlighted in paragraphs three through five, who hinder birth control advancement is the Catholic Church. She states that "the Church has ever opposed the progress of woman on the ground that her freedom would lead to immorality." Sanger identifies a clear call to action when she states that the ABCL asks "the opponents of this movement to reverse the methods of the church, which aims to keep women moral by keeping them in fear and in ignorance, and to inculcate into them a higher and truer morality based upon knowledge. And ours is the morality of knowledge." Here, Sanger does three things: (1) She

identifies the difference between morality of the church and *the* morality of knowledge; (2) She pairs knowledge vs. ignorance – which seems to be the Church’s view of morality; (3) She uses Burke’s scapegoat mechanism to focus on the Church’s oppression of women.

Sanger’s syntactical strategies influence her rhetoric so that she can continue to subtly sway her audience to favor the birth control movement. To reiterate, Sanger states that the Church “aims to keep women moral by keeping them in fear and in ignorance, and to inculcate into them a higher and truer morality based upon knowledge. And ours is the morality of knowledge.” Sanger uses words such as “aims,” “fear,” “ignorance,” and “inculcate” to emphasize the negative connotations behind the church’s teachings. By using a word such as “inculcate,” meaning “to instill by persistent instruction” (Merriam-Webster), rather than “teach,” or “inform,” Sanger is highlighting the negative connotation behind the Church’s perception of morality.

Additionally, Sanger reasserts the difference between the mind and brain, or emotion versus logic. She ties the Church’s teachings back to a very pathos-based argument. On the other hand, when Sanger states “ours is the morality of knowledge,” referring to those who support the birth control movement, Sanger is asserting that her movement is moral in its logical, honest, or fact-based nature. Specifically, Sanger does not say that the birth control movement is morality of knowledge -- she places emphasis on “the” when she asserts “*the* morality of knowledge,” meaning that the ABCL is *the* holder of morality and *the* holder of knowledge -- not the Catholic Church.

Most importantly, this section begins to introduce Sanger’s manipulation of the scapegoat mechanism by means of antithesis. Sanger uses antithetic syntactical strategies to divide the

ABCL from the Catholic Church. By clearly dividing the ABCL's movement from those who oppress the movement, Sanger places the blame on the Church when she states: "If we cannot trust woman with the knowledge of her own body, then I claim that two thousand years of Christian teaching has proved to be a failure." In this instance, the Church serves as Sanger's "sacrificial receptacle for the ritual unburdening of one's sins" by "redemption through victimage" (Burke 16; Jasinski 503). Sanger uses the Church as a scapegoat because she deems them worthy of being the victim, considering that the Church had oppressed women's rights for centuries. Sanger uses succinct syntax to avoid denying the validity of the Church, but she distinctly singles them out for their oppression of women, the oppression of the birth control movement, and the oppression of societal progress.

On top of using the Catholic Church as a scapegoat for the corruption of society, Sanger also places the problems of society on a specific group of individuals: those who are "filling the earth with misery, poverty, and disease." In this section of her argument, Sanger declares the need for Americans to control the size of their families to prevent over-population. This may seem like a legitimate assertion, until Sanger divides society into three distinct groups of citizens. According to Sanger, the following are the three groups of citizens in 1920s America:

1. "Those intelligent and wealthy members of the upper classes who have obtained knowledge of Birth Control and exercise it in regulating the size of their families. They have already benefited by this knowledge, and are today considered the most respectable and moral members of the community."

2. “The second group is equally intelligent and responsible. They desire to control the size of their families, but are unable to obtain knowledge or to put such available knowledge into practice.”
3. Those “irresponsible and reckless ones having little regard for the consequence of their acts, or whose religious scruples prevent their exercising control over their numbers. Many of this group are diseased, feeble-minded, and are of the pauper element dependent entirely upon the normal and fit members of society for their support.”

Sanger’s clear division of the social classes highlights her use of Burke’s scapegoating mechanism as a vehicle to promote her underlying eugenic agenda. Sanger blatantly identifies the exigency for her argument, or the urgent need for change, when she states: “We do not believe that filling the earth with misery, poverty, and disease is moral. And it is our desire and intention to carry on our crusade until the perpetuation of such conditions has ceased.” In this section of Sanger’s speech she does three things: (1) She uses antithetic language to dehumanize those who are not “fit” to reproduce; (2) She uses Burke’s scapegoating mechanism to vilify those who are corrupting her idyllic society; (3) She asserts her underlying eugenics-based call to action.

Sanger presents the top tier of society’s hierarchical structure when she pairs words with clear positive connotations. When asserting who maintains the upper class, Sanger uses words such as “intelligent,” “wealthy,” “knowledge,” “benefit,” “respectable,” and so on. Additionally, Sanger connects these positive attributes with the fact that these people are the “moral members of the community” -- alluding to a sense of community for those who are part of the wealthy and elite top tier of society. The use of words such as “intelligent,” “wealthy,” and “respectable”

defines what it means to be “moral” in Sanger’s eyes, thereby setting the basis for how the rest of society can be categorized.

In Sanger’s second point, she identifies the middle class as a group who is “equally intelligent and responsible.” Again, Sanger identifies the positive attributes of this tier within the societal hierarchy. However, Sanger emphasizes the fact that these middle-class citizens are “unable to obtain knowledge or put such available knowledge into practice.” Here, Sanger clearly asserts that this upper class *knowledge* is indeed *available*. However, the middle classes are “unable to obtain knowledge” because of their lower position in society’s hierarchy. Sanger does not identify the middle class by using words with positive connotations -- she merely illuminates the fact that knowledge about birth control is available to them, but they are unable or unwilling to obtain it.

Last, Sanger presents a clear antithesis when she introduces the base tier of society’s hierarchy. The lowest tier of society are “those irresponsible and reckless ones having little regard for the consequences of their acts.” It is important to notice that Sanger does not identify this base tier of individuals as people, or as “members of the community.” Sanger is specifically constructing a hierarchy and amplifying a crisis in this section of her speech. She begins with the top tier of society -- those who are considered “members of the community;” moves onto the middle tier of society, or those who are a “group,” meaning that they can still be considered human beings; and ends with the lowest tier of society -- those “irresponsible and reckless *ones*.” Considering that those who are within this base level of the societal hierarchy are not necessarily human, Sanger amplifies her constructed crisis and identifies the solution for social deterioration: birth control to “stop at its source the disease, poverty and feeble-mindedness and insanity which

exist today” since these “lower the standards of civilization and make for race deterioration.” In this instance, Sanger is constructing a crisis in order to fulfill her third move which emphasizes the solution to over-population and the disintegration of society.

Move three: Sanger presents a solution

Sanger’s third and final move asserts her solution to over-population and the disintegration of society. In this move, Sanger repeatedly uses the concepts of morality versus immorality to amplify her eugenics-based rhetoric. In Sanger’s call to action, Sanger ties morality to those intelligent members of society who should reproduce. Conversely, Sanger ties immorality to those undesired members of society who are disease-ridden, feeble-minded, impoverished, and so on. This clear antithetic syntax paves the way for her use of Burke’s scapegoating mechanism. Jasinski argues that “scapegoating [is] associated with the inevitable presence of hierarchy in human society (Burke, 1966, p. 19) and with the problem of maintaining order and stability in a hierarchical society” (504). In this instance, when order cannot be maintained, Sanger uses those members of society who are deemed useless as a scapegoat revealing her underlying eugenic agenda. In order for society to regain its morality, those who “lower the standards of civilization and make for race deterioration,” must be managed, or eliminated over time via birth control. Sanger blatantly states that the more educated and wealthy people there are “the less immorality shall exist. For the more responsible people grow, the higher do they and shall they attain real morality.” In essence, Sanger is arguing that in order to fulfill this desired shift in society, those who are diseased, feeble-minded, and so on are chosen to be the sacrificial object to purge society’s morally deteriorating nature.

Implications

Sanger begins “The Morality of Birth Control” by clearly contrasting antithetic words and concepts in order to build momentum into the basis of her eugenics-based argument: the qualifications of moral people who need to reproduce versus the attributes of immoral people who are not “fit” to reproduce. Specifically, Sanger states that “so that in speaking of morals one must remember that there is a direct connection between morality and brain development.” Perhaps Sanger was using the term “morality” in the context of 1920s American culture – a culture that was prone to eugenics-based rhetoric. However, Sanger’s specific correlation between being fit, mentally developed and moral, versus being unfit, mentally deficient and immoral exhibits very harsh antithetical language. By beginning her speech with common antitheses, it is easy for Sanger’s audience to overlook the clear-cut division between those members of society who Sanger deems worthy of creating offspring. Additionally, Sanger uses Burke’s concept of identification to establish a concrete societal hierarchy, by illuminating the superiority of the elite in contrast to those “immoral” and “feeble-minded” members of society.

Sanger also incorporates Burke’s scapegoat mechanism to place the blame for society’s deterioration on the Catholic Church, and on those minorities who are easily overlooked or shunned, rather than on the majorities who will help fund and/or promote her birth control movement. Sanger strategically implements the scapegoat mechanism by means of antithesis as the driving rhetorical force behind her speech in order to construct a societal crisis and present birth control as the solution to this crisis. It is difficult to determine whether or not Sanger was a eugenicist, or a supporter of the negative eugenics movement on her own terms, given that she had to use the eugenics-based rhetorical constructs of the time to maintain funding and support

for her birth control movement. However, it can be noted that Sanger did indeed choose to manipulate eugenics-based rhetorical constructs to gain much-needed support and funding for her birth control movement.

This chapter performed a close reading and concept oriented rhetorical analysis on Margaret Sanger's 1921 speech, "The Morality of Birth Control," in order to explore Sanger's use of eugenics-based rhetorical moves which were prevalent during the flourishing negative eugenics movement in 1920s America. In her speech, Sanger established a vivid crisis using eugenics-based rhetoric in order to provide the solution for societal deterioration: birth control. Chapter five will provide a close reading and literary analysis of Sanger's 1922 publication, *The Pivot of Civilization*, in order to explore Sanger's use of popular eugenics-based rhetoric in her written discourse as well.

CHAPTER 5

MARGARET SANGER'S CAREFUL CONSTRUCTION OF ETHOS AND LOGICAL APPEAL: A CLOSE READING AND LITERARY ANALYSIS OF *THE PIVOT OF CIVILIZATION*

Having published her pathos-based book, *Woman and the New Race* in 1919, and having delivered her “The Morality of Birth Control” speech in 1921, Margaret Sanger planned to take a new approach to soliciting support for her birth control movement by writing a book in the form of a logical appeal. Sanger’s primary goal was to generate interest from white, male scientists and politicians in regards to the connections between her birth control movement and the American eugenics movement. *The Pivot of Civilization*, published in June of 1922, highlights Sanger’s key connections between the birth control and eugenics movements in terms of early twentieth-century science. As a clear logical appeal, Sanger wrote *The Pivot of Civilization* to “appeal to the scientist” in order to “have birth control ‘pass through the crucible of science’” (Reed 122). Sanger contrasted *Woman and the New Race* and *The Pivot of Civilization* by claiming that *The Pivot of Civilization* was her “head book,” formulating an impersonal and logical appeal to “present birth control as solidly and scientifically based” in order to gain acceptance from “the left-brain male scientists and male politicians governing the world” (Reed 122). In doing so, Sanger hoped that birth control could be accepted and distributed to the masses.

Throughout *The Pivot of Civilization*, Sanger asserts her ethos by incorporating academic substance to appeal to her intended patriarchal audience. Sanger “argues logically for the superiority of birth control over other ‘isms,’ dispatches Marxism, improves on the Malthusians, and examines eugenics” in order to discuss evolution, morality, and the future of society (Reed

122). In her publication, Sanger ties all world problems to the power and inescapability of natural sexual inclinations -- therefore, the answer to rapid procreation and the deterioration of society is birth control. Considering that this is Sanger's main underlying claim throughout the publication, it is interesting that she asserts that birth control must be practiced by "the individual woman [...]" and that the practice must be voluntary" (Reed 122). Since Sanger's target audience was male scientists and politicians, such an antithetic claim was very unique, showing that Sanger would not overthrow her base principals despite her shift in intended audience.

In *The Pivot of Civilization*, Sanger asserts that the creators of a new, intelligent and moral race were women who would no longer be "slaves to reproduction" (Baker 161). Sanger states that women must practice controlled fertility in order to become "the pivot of civilization" and "create a new race" (Baker 161). In her publication, Sanger "embraced eugenics as a female cause with a female solution" and had originally titled one of her chapters "The Limitation of Eugenics" to assert this point (Baker 162). In the final version of her publication, Sanger deleted the chapter title, but the American Eugenics Society, having been aware of this, refused to support Sanger's birth control movement and would not allow her to attend their conferences because she spoke about the limitations of eugenics.

Sanger's *The Pivot of Civilization* ends with a lengthy appendix covering the "principles and aims of the American Birth Control League." *The Pivot of Civilization* served as a source for advertising her new organization, as well as her birth control movement in America. In the appendix, Sanger lists the following as the aims of the ABCL: research, investigation, hygienic and physiological instruction, sterilization and education, as well as aiming for instigating an international birth control revolution (82). Like the rest of the publication, Sanger's appendix

also reads as a very systematic logic-based appeal with her bulleted lists and confrontation of what she understood to be the causes of American's deteriorating culture: namely poverty, crime, and the rise of "feeble-mindedness."

The public's reception of *The Pivot of Civilization*

Sanger's *The Pivot of Civilization* was reviewed and discussed within many American journals, both scholarly and otherwise. The most well-known critique of Sanger's publication was performed by Samuel J. Holmes, a zoology professor at the University of California, Berkeley in 1923. In Holmes' *The Pivot of Civilization Reviewed*, Holmes critiques Sanger's eugenics-based claims by arguing that Sanger solely wanted to control birth, rather than advocate for increased reproduction of those members of society who could create the best stock. Holmes argued that Sanger "is so obsessed by the notion of birth control as a remedy for racial and social ills that the idea that any class should have more children is apparently not entertained" (171). Holmes claimed that by simply controlling birth, the "better stocks" could be eliminated altogether.

Like Holmes, Theodore Roosevelt also published a similar response to Sanger's publication, showcasing the prominent rhetorical strategies exhibited by positive eugenicists in 1920's America. Roosevelt published *Birth Control -- From the Positive Side* in the *Metropolitan Magazine* in October 1917. Like Holmes, Roosevelt argued that "what this nation vitally needs is not the negative preaching of birth control to the submerged tenth, and the tenth immediately adjoining, but the positive preaching of birth encouragement to the eight-tenths who make up the capable, self-respecting American stock which we wish to see perpetuate itself" (151). Shortly afterwards, Sanger published *An Answer to Mr. Roosevelt* in *Metropolitan*

Magazine. In her response, Sanger argued that “we advocates of birth control know that one cannot make quality by insisting on quantity. One cannot make better people by having more people” (156). Sanger ended her response with a eugenics-based assertion, arguing that advocates of the birth control movement are “not so much disturbed by the stationary birth rate of the thinking classes, as by the reckless propagation of the ignorant” (158). The *New Republic* magazine, a well-respected “journal of opinion” recognized Sanger as a martyr and said that “it should not be necessary for brave women like Mrs. Sanger to risk their liberty” in order to voice her opinion, showcasing how universally debated Sanger’s *The Pivot of Civilization* was in 1920s America (115).

Literary Analysis of Margaret Sanger’s *The Pivot of Civilization*

In *The Pivot of Civilization*, Sanger carefully constructs a logical appeal in order to assert her ethos and connect the loose ties between her birth control movement and the American eugenics movement. To begin, Sanger strategically incorporates feminine rhetorical style in order to maintain her female audience, while subtly shifting her prose to appeal to a patriarchal audience as well. Sanger asserts that “Science” is the ally of her movement, attempting to gain the interest of male scientists and politicians. In order to appeal to her target audience, Sanger manipulates her ethos by tying in her lived experiences with scientific “facts” and statistics. Sanger’s use of war metaphors, medical terminology, and persuasive language also establishes a sense of ethos and solidifies her logical appeal. Additionally, Sanger repeatedly incorporates instances of scapegoating and antithetic language in order to tie her birth control movement to the American eugenics movement.

Sanger's carefully constructed ethos

Ethos, one of the most important rhetorical strategies used to make a substantial argument, is also a social ideology revolving around the beliefs that build community. Ultimately, “persuasion is achieved by the speaker’s personal character when the speech is so spoken as to make us think him credible” (Aristotle 76). Ethos is a Greek word that originally meant “accustomed place,” or “custom, habit” (Aristotle 76). The construction of ethos stems from the idea that a figure of authority is making a persuasive statement to guide the masses into a certain realm of thought. A figure of authority may establish their ethos in order to effectively relay a message, or begin a social movement. From a rhetorical perspective, ethos is the “persuasive effect of authority” and rhetoricians who establish their ethos “embody in their work and thought whatever of past thought and practice is deemed worthwhile; at the same time, they are exemplars of current thought and practice” (Gross 12-14). Ethos is rhetorically constructed through persuasive language and is “reinforced by social sanctions” (Gross 13). The social acceptance of a given ideology can stem from the rhetorician’s constructed ethos.

In *The Pivot of Civilization*, Sanger emphasized the fact that “Science” was an ally to her birth control movement as a way of rooting her ethos within the scientific community. Sanger strategically incorporates pathos-based feminine rhetorical style and narrative to appeal to those who already supported her birth control movement. However, Sanger shifted her language construction to emphasize her methodology, or “plan of action which lies behind the choice and use of particular methods” in order to solidify the methods behind her argument, or “the specific techniques and procedures used to collect and analyze data” (Scotland 9). Sanger wished to appeal to a white, male-dominated audience in order to position herself into a community of

eugenicists, scientists, and politicians, thereby solidifying her ethos and gaining much-needed funding and support for her birth control movement.

Sanger's strategic use of feminine style

The 19th-century Women's Rights Movement introduced many cultural, historical, and rhetorical shifts in American society. In order to construct the movement, women were forced to take on the "podium" which had initially been dominated by men. Women had the choice to imitate male speakers in order to construct an ethos, but "choosing this option would, in all likelihood, mean abandoning the rhetorical resources contained in social attitudes toward women and in women's specific social experiences" (Jasinski 253). Additionally, if women were to copy established masculine oral discourse, Karlyn Kohrs Campbell states that women were "likely to be judged masculine, unwomanly, aggressive, and cold" (188). Given these double standards, women were forced to create their own style when producing any oral or written work that would be projected out into the public sphere. Women began to feminize their discourse as well as the "role of public speaker by speaking through the personas of wives, mothers (Tonn, 1996), daughters, and/or sisters," ultimately creating their own distinct feminine rhetorical style (Jasinski 254).

Karlyn Kohrs Campbell defines feminine style as a rhetorical style that "emerged in 19th-century America as woman speakers sought to cope with the conflicting demands of the podium" (12). In this context, the "podium" is a "synecdoche for the public sphere, [which] throughout history [had] been the province of men" (Jasinski 253). According to Jasinski, feminine style is "an inchoate form of practice that disrupts patriarchal hierarchies as it gives voice to the unique experiences of historically situated women" (256).

Throughout *The Pivot of Civilization*, Sanger repeatedly discusses feminist eugenics in a positive light, specifically with respect to women's right to choose, birth control access for all, and women's reproductive rights. Sanger's common theme throughout her publication is the idea of the "power of sex, [a] deep instinct" being "partially responsible, along with industrial injustice, for the widespread misery of the world" (Sanger 7). Overall, Sanger studies economic and industrial struggles in order to promote her birth control movement to prevent misery and cut out the "unfit" population by "controlling birth." Sanger repeatedly reiterates the importance behind the power of birth control and claims that the birth control movement was established "because it was in this form that the whole relation of woman and child -- eternal emblem of the future of society -- could be more effectively dramatized" (Sanger 8). In this instance, Sanger strategically incorporates a distinct feminine rhetorical style in order to gain or maintain support from her established female followers, as well as followers of the feminist eugenics movement. Sanger crafted her persuasive introduction to appeal to feminist eugenicists, and those elitist feminists who followed Sanger's birth control movement. By connecting the mother to her unborn child, Sanger empowers women, and includes them in the conversation that she constructed specifically for a male-dominated audience.

Sanger emphasizes the relationship between woman and child but later shifts her rhetorical strategies to emphasize that only "fit" women should have such privileges. Sanger specifically states that the birth control movement in relation to eugenics is a "necessity" to eliminate the "unfit," thereby creating a "remedy" for a "crime of modern civilization" (Sanger 17). Sanger purposely chose to incorporate a distinct feminine style in order to maintain support from her established followers and build upon her usual emotional appeal; however, Sanger chose to target a male-dominated audience, which required her to change her tone and present a science-

based logical appeal. Sanger's use of scapegoating and antithetic language to construct her logical appeal will be examined throughout the rest of the chapter.

Sanger's consistent use of antithetic language

All throughout *The Pivot of Civilization*, Sanger uses literal, straightforward syntactical strategies to sway her audience towards the acceptance of her birth control movement. Specifically, Sanger continuously incorporates antithetic language in order to highlight the importance of "control" in regards to reproduction, especially emphasizing reproductive control over those who are not deemed "fit." To reiterate, antithesis is "the juxtaposition of contrasting ideas," a rhetorical tactic used to emphasize one concept in favor of the concept being contrasted (Ehnes 190). Sanger continuously defends her use of such a strong antithetic language by asserting:

Those critics who condemn Birth Control as a negative, destructive idea, concerned only with self-gratification, might profitably open the nearest dictionary for a definition of "control." There they would discover that the verb "control" means to exercise a directing, guiding, or restraining influence; --to direct, to regulate, to counteract. Control is guidance, direction, foresight. It implies intelligence, forethought and responsibility. [...] Birth Control, therefore, means not merely the limitation of births, but the application of intelligent guidance over the reproductive power. It means the substitution of reason and intelligence for the blind play of instinct. (8)

Sanger's connection between birth control and intellect is a very prominent strategy utilized throughout her publication. She repeatedly connects birth control with reason and education to persuade critics that birth control is created for the good of civilization, not for the individual desires of desperate women. By doing this, Sanger is subtly emphasizing the "close relationship between language, power, and social change" (Hasian Jr. 7). Sanger is promoting her birth control movement, but simultaneously she is carefully constructing a logical appeal directed to her intended patriarchal audience. Sanger uses prominent eugenics-based language which

appealed to scientists and politicians concerned with population growth and immigration at the time. Sanger uses the phrase “reproductive power” throughout her publication to persuade her audiences that intelligence and reason directly correlate with the power to inflict social change on a “miserable world.”

Sanger’s use of scapegoating to solidify ethos

To reiterate, Kenneth Burke’s scapegoating mechanism is the “sacrificial ritual of *redemption through victimage*” (Jasinski 503). The title of Sanger’s book itself exhibits the implementation of rhetorical scapegoating, given that Sanger is arguing that the subject, birth control, is indeed the “pivot” of civilization. The idea that civilization is pivoting emphasizes that there is a central point that turns and keeps civilization moving in a positive way. Since the title of the work is *The Pivot of Civilization*, Sanger is projecting a message to her intended audience and establishing that there is a central point holding civilization together, which can unravel without proper care. Overall, this “pivot,” or central point of society, is actually referencing Sanger’s promotion of her birth control movement, thereby illuminating the importance of population control, birth control, elimination of the “unfit,” and thus, the elimination of the weak and feeble-minded. Sanger incorporates eugenics-based rhetoric to appeal to her intended audience of white, male scientists and politicians. By implementing the scapegoat mechanism into her logical appeal, Sanger attempts to construct an ethos within the scientific community.

Additionally, in the fourth chapter of Sanger’s publication, titled “The Fertility of the Feeble-Minded,” Sanger shifts from talking about the importance of the benefits of her birth control movement, to the importance of making sure the “fit” population is the only population allowed to reproduce. Sanger refers to the “feeble-minded” population as a “great problem” and begins to reference criminal and medical terminology to emphasize her ethos as a social scientist.

Sanger's utilization of eugenics-based rhetoric is thoroughly developed in "The Fertility of the Feeble-Minded." Sanger begins by stating that:

the philosophy of Birth Control points out [that] civilized communities encourage unrestrained fecundity in the "normal" members of the population --always of course under the cloak of decency and morality --and penalize every attempt to introduce the ever-increasing problem of feeble-mindedness, that fertile parent of degeneracy, crime, and pauperism (27).

In this statement, Sanger emphasizes her use of antithetic language in order to assert that there is a "normal" population which represents decency, morality, and truth; whereas, the feeble-minded population exists as a source of crime and the deterioration of American society. Here, Sanger strategically incorporates antithetic language to scapegoat those powerless members of American society who would essentially be targeted by the eugenics movement. Soon after, Sanger uses even stronger antithetic language to emphasize the menace behind feeble-mindedness:

these shocking truths about the menace of feeble-mindedness to the race, a menace acute because of the unceasing and unrestrained fertility of such defectives, we are apt to become the victims of a wild panic for instant action. (29)

Sanger's rhetoric emphasizes feeble-mindedness as a defect, creating a menace which will cause societal panic or deterioration of society altogether. Her strong use of scare tactics constructs a vivid societal crisis, making Sanger's argument even more appealing to her scientific and political male-dominated audience. Sanger goes on to define how "feeble-mindedness" is constructed by asserting:

Its roots strike deep into the social fabric. Modern studies indicate that insanity, epilepsy, criminality, prostitution, pauperism, and mental defect, are all organically bound up together and that the least intelligent and the thoroughly degenerate becomes pauperism or insanity in the next. There is every indication that feeble-mindedness in its protean forms is on the increase, that it has leaped the barriers, and that there is truly, as some of the scientific eugenists have pointed out, a feeble-minded peril to future generations --unless the feeble-minded are prevented from reproducing their kind. (27)

In the quote above, Sanger is explicitly declaring her ethos within the scientific community. She uses a scare tactic to persuade her audience what can happen if the birth control, or the eugenics movement, do not take effect or continue maintaining support. Sanger explicitly refers to the “modern studies” brought forth by “scientific eugenicists” which, during this time, made her argument credible. Considering that the concept of eugenics was taught in elementary schools, universities, and churches, and was passed on from parents to their children, the eugenics movement was a “proven” scientific movement which was brought forth to create the ideal Nordic utopian world. Given that the eugenics movement was “scientific fact” during Sanger’s time, her persuasive rhetoric is solidified by integrating scare tactics and a clear sense of scapegoating into her argument, illuminating the importance of birth control in order to “save the world from the feeble-minded” since feeble-mindedness was considered a crime in and of itself.

Sanger’s scapegoating by means of scare tactics and war analogy

In *The Pivot of Civilization*, Sanger takes her use of antithetic language and scapegoating one step further by constructing a societal crisis. Specifically, Sanger utilizes scapegoating by means of antithesis to create vivid war metaphors in order to continue to sway her intended audience to favor her birth control movement. Particularly, Sanger’s primary goal is to unify the birth control and American eugenics movements.

Sanger strategically incorporates war analogies into her publication to appeal to her male-dominated intended audience. Sanger begins her argument by critiquing society’s blind following of Christianity and claims that “philanthropy and charity” are the “basis of the sanctity of human life” (37). Additionally, Sanger states:

Yet recent events in the world reveal a curious contradiction in this respect. Human life is held sacred, as a general Christian principle, until war is declared, when humanity indulges in a universal debauch of bloodshed and barbarism, inventing poison gases and every type of diabolic suggestion to facilitate killing and starvation. (37)

In this section of Sanger's argument, she is highlighting the basis of society: the Christian doctrine. However, Sanger asserts that that same doctrine is not always beneficial in terms of the greater good. Specifically, Sanger is contextualizing the horrific aftermath of World War I, a war that caused worldwide suffering, loss, and pain. Sanger attributes WWI with the Christian doctrine to showcase how human life is held sacred until war must be declared on one another. Once war is declared, human life is merely a sacrificial tool to achieve whatever is desired. In this context, Sanger is using war analogies to remind her readers that human life is only deemed sacred when there is no conflict or sacrificial ritual. By using war analogy as a framework for her argument, Sanger is arguing that birth control will never be as horrific as war – preventing birth will never lead to a “debauch of bloodshed and barbarism” as alluded to by those Christians who openly opposed her movement. Rather, Sanger argues that birth control acts as a philanthropy, or a charity to help humanity regain its excellence after much bloodshed and loss after WWI. Sanger goes on to argue that philanthropy and charity are indeed the basis of humanity, and that in order to be charitable to all of society, women should be able to have the right to choose to utilize birth control, thereby assisting society by eliminating the “feeble-minded.”

Sanger's argument begins with Christian doctrine, attracting the attention of her elitist audience, but later shifts into a eugenic critique of society. She focuses on how Christian principles were ignored during World War I, and similarly, that they are still being ignored during the war against the feeble-minded. Sanger argues that:

while the gravest attention is paid to the problem of hunger and food, that of sex is neglected. [...] Until [politicians] shall have broken through the traditional inhibitions concerning the discussion of sexual matters, until they recognize the force of sexual instinct, and until they recognize Birth Control as the PIVOTAL FACTOR in the problem confronting the world to-day, our statesmen must continue to work in the dark. (39)

Here, Sanger uses antithetic language to tie common philanthropic focuses such as hunger and destitution, with “the force of sexual instinct.” Her capitalization of “PIVOTAL FACTOR” adds emphasis to her argument, declaring that birth control is indeed the end to all societal tragedies. From Sanger’s perspective, if American society understands that birth control is the “pivotal factor in the problem confronting the world to-day,” pain, suffering, starvation, and war can all be officially eliminated.

Sanger’s construction of logical appeal

Sanger did not depend solely on rhetorical strategies to attempt to persuade her intended audience to support her birth control movement. In order to assert her ethos and solidify her logical appeal, Sanger conducted an original empirical study in 1921. In her study, in conjunction with the First American Birth Control Conference, “letters were sent to eminent men and women in different parts of the world” (Sanger 10). In this letter, the following four questions were asked:

1. Is over-population a menace to the peace of the world?
2. Would the legal dissemination of scientific Birth Control information, through the medium of clinics by the medical profession, be the most logical method of checking the problem of over-population?
3. Would knowledge of Birth Control change the moral attitude of men and women toward the marriage bond, or lower the moral standards of the youth in the country?
4. Do you believe that knowledge which enables parents to limit their families will make for human happiness, and raise the moral, social and intellectual standards of population? (Sanger 10)

After Sanger incorporates her empirical study into her argument, to solidify her place in the eugenicist conversation, she argues that she and her colleagues sent the questionnaire to “not only those who we thought might agree with us, but we sent it also to our known opponents” (Sanger 10). Additionally, Sanger concludes her introductory argument by stating that “[her] interest in Birth Control was awakened by experience. Research and investigation have followed. Our effort has been to raise our program from the plane of the emotional to the plane of the scientific” (Sanger 12). Here, Sanger clearly asserts that she is attempting to break out of the emotional mold that she had been placed in. Rather, Sanger is taking on her own distinctly feminine persona, a persona free from pathos-based rhetoric, in order to appeal to a male-dominated audience.

Additionally, Sanger effectively incorporates credible secondary sources into her book. Sanger relies heavily on the ethos of government-funded programs, eugenics essays, and other scientific publications to establish and solidify her own ethos within the eugenics conversation. Sanger references the Children’s Bureau of the United States Department of Labor (13), Emma Duke’s “California the Golden” (26), United States Public Health Service (33), public health surveys (36), minutes from the International Conference of Women Physicians (45), Galton’s essays on eugenics (56), biblical references (60), and memoirs from the National Academy of Sciences (80) throughout *The Pivot of Civilization* to solidify her logical appeal with concrete, distinguished references.

One of Sanger’s most credible and rhetorically effective secondary sources is the integration of personal narratives collected from the Children’s Bureau of the United States Department of Labor. One specific case that Sanger references is “a typical case from

Johnstown, Pennsylvania” (Sanger 13). Sanger states that “a woman of thirty-eight years had undergone thirteen pregnancies in seventeen years. Of eleven live births and two premature stillbirths, only two children were alive at the time of the government agent’s visit” (13). In Sanger’s publication, she continues on with multiple emotion-evoking narratives such as the one quoted previously. Sanger argues that these narratives collected by the Children’s Bureau of the United States Department of Labor “forces us to a realization of the immediate need of detailed statistics concerning the practice and results of uncontrolled breeding” (13). Again, Sanger uses a rhetorically constructed scare tactic to persuade her audience to support her birth control movement.

Sanger includes similar personal narratives from the Department of Labor in order to give specific horrific accounts of miscarriage and infant deaths in order to promote her birth control movement and appeal to her intended audience. By using solid evidence of the horrific aftermaths of infant death and self-inflicted abortions, rather than emotional narratives that Sanger experienced herself, Sanger removes herself from the narrative and asserts her credibility as a researcher. Incorporating research in the form of official reports adds to Sanger’s sense of authority, or ethos, within the scientific community; however, Sanger manipulates this section of her argument by incorporating a pathos-based appeal as well. Since this account is not Sanger’s own lived experience, she is not directly formulating a pathos-based appeal, rather she is simply showcasing a narrative to solidify her argument. In this section, Sanger strategically incorporates ethos, pathos, and logos to assert her authority and knowledge, to appeal to her audience’s emotions, and to situate herself within the scientific community.

Implications

As stated earlier, it is nearly impossible to determine whether or not Margaret Sanger was a eugenicist, a supporter of the eugenics movement, or just a prominent speaker and writer who utilized the rhetorical norms of the time to gain support for her birth control movement. However, it can be noted that Sanger strategically implements antithetic language and Burke's scapegoating mechanism into her discourse to gain support and funding for her movement. Sanger specifically attempts to step away from her typical pathos-based approach to her discourse, and strategically constructs a logical appeal intended for a white, male-dominated audience. Sanger integrates credible secondary references and quotes recorded narratives to tie in an emotional appeal, but relies heavily on her carefully constructed ethos to gain support for her birth control movement.

This chapter performed a close reading and literary analysis on Margaret Sanger's 1922 publication, *The Pivot of Civilization*, in order to explore Sanger's use of deliberate eugenics-based rhetorical moves. In her publication, Sanger established a societal crisis using eugenics-based rhetoric in order to provide the solution for societal deterioration: birth control. Chapter six will provide the implications and conclusions discovered from examining Margaret Sanger's deliberate rhetorical decisions in her discourse.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

For decades, prominent rhetorical, feminist, and social scientific scholars have argued that Margaret Sanger was a eugenicist, or supported the American eugenics movement wholeheartedly. Specifically, in *War Against the Weak: Eugenics and America's Campaign to Create a Master Race*, Edwin Black asserts that Margaret Sanger was “willing to employ striking language to argue against the inherent misery and defects of large families” (132). Black argues that Sanger was a eugenicist and sought to merge her birth control movement with the American eugenics movement. Additionally, in *Margaret Sanger's Eugenic Legacy: The Control of Female Fertility*, Angela Franks argues that Sanger was an elitist who purposely scapegoated large families to appeal to eugenicists and garner support and a sense of ethos within the political and scientific communities.

In my thesis, I have focused on the women's eugenics movement and the common rhetorical constructs popularized in 1920s American discourse. During the peak of the American eugenics movement, eugenics-based rhetoric was commonplace and served as the norm when issues such as population control, birth control, or immigration were discussed in the public sphere. Due to this prominence of eugenics-based rhetorical constructs of the time, it is nearly impossible to decipher whether or not Sanger was a eugenicist on her own terms, or if she was just implementing the rhetorical constructs that were at her disposal during this time period. It is important to consider that Sanger had to fight long and hard to gain support, followers, and funding for her movement, and that Sanger had to make specific rhetorical decisions when it came to constructing her birth control discourse.

To review, both Sanger's "The Morality of Birth Control" speech, and *The Pivot of Civilization* publication serve as crucial representations of eugenics-based birth control rhetoric. In both instances of Sanger's written and oral discourse, Sanger used Kenneth Burke's scapegoating mechanism and antithetic language to appeal to a society saturated in eugenics-based discourse. Whether Sanger chose a pathological appeal, such as that in her "The Morality of Birth Control" speech, or a logical appeal as highlighted in *The Pivot of Civilization*, one thing is certain: Sanger implemented the socially accepted eugenics-based rhetorical constructs of the time in order to carefully construct her ethos and appeal to all Americans. Sanger incorporated pathological appeals and feminine rhetorical style to maintain her female followers and gain support from those who questioned her motives. On the other hand, Sanger constructed concise, factual, scientific rhetoric in order to craft a logical appeal for her male-dominated audience as well. My analyses reveal how Sanger specifically manipulated her rhetoric and merged both pathological and logical appeals to gain support and funding for her birth control movement.

Therefore, it is difficult to discern whether or not Sanger actually believed in or supported the negative eugenics movement. However, Sanger's desire to appeal to wealthy and middle-class American citizens in order to fund her movement may have influenced her eugenics-based rhetorical approach to her birth control discourse. Regardless of whether or not Margaret Sanger actually had a strong underlying eugenic agenda of her own, one thing is certain: Sanger's passionate contributions to the birth control movement live on to this day.

Today, the International Planned Parenthood Federation reaches more than 180 countries, offering family planning and reproductive care to both men and women (Reed). Additionally, the birth control pill constitutes eight percent of contraceptive use worldwide (Reed). Sanger's long, hard fight to legalize birth control has allowed women to further their education, provide for their

families, and maintain healthy marital and sexual relationships. Regardless of Margaret Sanger's intentions, eugenics-based or not, it is impossible to deny her unwavering courage and determination to assist women with their reproductive health.

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