

UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-EAU CLAIRE

**THE INFLUENCE OF NATIONAL MOVEMENTS ON THE
UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-EAU CLAIRE:
ABORTION AND CONTRACEPTION**

A HISTORY CAPSTONE PROJECT SUBMITTED TO
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Abstract

National political, social, and economic movements have had a long history in the United States. The women's movement has been one of the largest in the 20th century. As national movements occur they began to impact smaller cities across the U.S., different institutions, and many different people. The University of Wisconsin Eau Claire was part of the national women's movement. A look at primary sources and comparing them to overall movements proves that the UWEC was involved in changes in abortion and contraception during the early 1970s when some of the greatest social and political changes took place.

Introduction

“Abortion. Information. Abortion Guidance. An abortion can be arranged within 24 hours and you can return home the same day you leave! Call toll free. (800) 523-4436. Non-profit organization. Open 7 days a week.”¹

This advertisement was found in a college newspaper. The year was 1973; the United States was full of action. There were still troops in Vietnam, Nixon was President and the Watergate scandal was brought to the attention of the public, the Cold War was still ongoing, Women’s Movement was at full speed, and there were political protests and actions being made across the United States. These events were taking place at college campuses around the U.S., including University of Wisconsin-Madison, well-known for its liberal views. This was a large school however, with students coming from across the state of Wisconsin, so an active student population would be expected. So what happened when you moved away from a large and populated city to a place like the city of Eau Claire with a population of 44,619?² It too had a college, the University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire (UWEC) with a population of about 6,006.³ One would assume that a city, miles away from larger cities like Minneapolis, St. Paul, or Madison, would not be as active or involved in these movements, protests and other implications. In reality the students at the University of

¹ *The Spectator*, 22 March 1973, 3.

² US Census Bureau, *Nineteenth Census of the United States*, 1970, City of Eau Claire, Wisconsin, C3.223/970/v.1/pt.51,12.

³ UWEC Health Service Administrative Correspondence. Special Collections & Archives, University of Wisconsin Eau Claire, Series 109 Box 1.

Wisconsin-Eau Claire, were just as highly involved as the students in Madison, even Milwaukee, and across the nation as well. They worked both on campus and throughout the community to seek changes. Although issues in abortion and contraception are far different from one another and in more different in comparison to anti-war efforts, these national movements all commonly have made an impact or influenced UWEC. These larger influences also sparked students to make changes in other things such as changes that were taking place from building a bike path, to additions to buildings, and even changes in classes and testing, many of the same things that student today are involved with.

There was something different during the 1970s than today. Students appeared to be, at this time, highly involved in organizations and other groups that were involved in issues and movements happening across the nation. This can be seen in the Spectator during these years as the one reads through old newspapers and sees the ongoing articles about changes the students want made or when and how different group meetings and activities went. One of the largest and longest ongoing issues and movements was women's rights concerning contraception and abortion. This movement was at one of its highest peaks during 1973. After decades of legal battles over abortion, and more recently during the 1960s as a "Movement to liberalize abortion laws . . . sexual revolution and demands for women's rights" issues with abortion laws came to a major breakthrough.⁴ In 1973 abortion became a guaranteed right under the Constitution of the United States of America as decided by the United

⁴ Barbara Hinkson Craig and David M. O'Brien, *Abortion and American Politics* (Chatham: Chatham House Publishers Inc., 1993), 9.

States Supreme Court.⁵ At the same time the continuing issues with contraception forged on. Eau Claire like many other colleges worked to make changes on their campus as well as to make efforts to create changes at UWEC that were occurring throughout the nation, especially concerning abortion and contraception. The activism of the students at UWEC was crucial for changes to occur at UWEC and to be an essential part of the national movements.

The history of abortion and birth control has been a popular and a much debated topic for many centuries. There have been histories upon histories written about the topics.⁶ Although this is true, there has yet to be a look into the actions and involvement of students at UWEC, in these issues. This paper will discuss and show the importance that students at UWEC have had in Eau Claire and the rest of the United States concerning abortion and contraception.

Abortion and contraception are highly researched topics. There are books, journal articles, and studies that have looked at nearly all of these aspects. One of the most well known is Donald Critchlow's *Intended Consequences*. His book contains an extensive look at archival material from the federal government as well as numerous secondary literatures. Throughout researching he has been led to believe that the federal government from the post World War Two era began to establish a family planning policy with its laws and regulations on abortion and birth control

⁵ Donald T. Critchlow, *Intended Consequences: Birth Control, Abortion, and the Federal Government in Modern America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 10.

⁶ There are many books written about the histories of contraception and abortion, especially concerning the various methods used. As laws were passed making them illegal and later as they were repealed, the histories began to include the movements that coincided with these laws. There has yet to be a work written on the history at the University of Wisconsin Eau Claire.

(contraception).⁷ His extensive look into materials, specifically between the 1950s to the 1970s, can help readers with understanding what occurred during that time period, which was some of the most heated and eventful times in the abortion and contraception movement.

Another useful book in understanding the background of birth control is Andrea Jone's *Devices and Desires: A History of Contraceptives in America*. Her description of changes in birth control help to get an understanding of what was happening in homes, clinics, hospitals as well as on college campuses around the United States as well as Eau Claire. She also takes a deeper look into the "bootlegging" of birth control, which during the late 1960s and 1970s was a major mean for women college students to obtain contraceptives.⁸ Jone's book helps to explain the underground story that often one does not know much about and how events in the past continued to create "policy implications" for the future.⁹ As "bootlegging" of birth control was taking place, there was a contrast between "the politics of abortion is similar to the historic struggle over Prohibition in the 1900s."¹⁰ This just showed the political, moral, and social histories that exist and are extremely complicated. Social movements have impacted the government so that legal changes were made. At the same time these social movements, specifically the women's

⁷ Ibid., 12.

⁸ Andrea Jone, *Devices and Desires: A History of Contraceptives in America* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2001), xi.

⁹ Ibid., xvii.

¹⁰ Barbara Hinkson Craig and David M. O'Brien, *Abortion and American Politics*, 36.

movement, would not occur or in this case may not include issues such as contraception or abortion, if certain laws were not in place.

Many of the materials that are written about abortion and contraception discuss the morality issues with making them legal or illegal while others focus on using them as family planning devices or for population control. Although they are very interesting, they are not very useful in helping to understand how students at UWEC became involved on campus in order to participate in the larger national movements.

Active Students

In order to understand the involvement of the abortion and contraception movements at UWEC a closer look into the students who participated is necessary. Many of these students who spoke out were involved with other events and issues that took place. Students were involved with the Student Senate and voted on various campus interests such as the funding of concerts.¹¹ For example there were meetings held constantly over the years with attempts to determine the visitation policies in the residence halls, like in 1972, members of the United Residence Hall Council met with the Board of Regents to extend hours of dormitory visitation.¹² These events can be tied to larger movements across the U.S. as well. Author Robert L. Daniel discusses

¹¹ *The Spectator*, 12 April 1973, 3.

¹² *The Spectator*, 27 March 1972, 6.

in his book, *American Women in the 20th Century: The Festival of Life*, that schools had control over the visitation hours and times of return to dormitories, especially for women.¹³

These were two specific examples of students involved with campus affairs, yet students were part of the deeper issues that were taking place at UWEC and across the nation as well. Daniel also brings up the idea that the student feminist movement first came into effect during the late 1960s, which helps for understanding why student activism began at UWEC shortly after that. Women students across the nation began to pressure campus health services for birth control information and access to it. He also states that college health services were ill-equipped to perform abortions and often declined to refer students seeking abortions.¹⁴ Daniel shows what was happening and how it was happening across the U.S.. By looking closely at events taking place at UWEC, it is clear that the same things were occurring at UWEC as the rest of the United States.

Campus Services & Organizations and Actions

One of the largest and most active groups at UWEC and the community of Eau Claire was the National Organization for Women (NOW). According to Joan D. Mandle in, *Women & Social Change in America*, many of the members of NOW were

¹³ Robert L. Daniel, *American Women in the 20th Century: The Festival of Life* (New York: Hartcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1987), 280.

¹⁴ Ibid.

educated and came from middle-class backgrounds.¹⁵ This would help to justify why NOW established a chapter at UWEC because it allow for educated and middle-class students and community members to get involved. Different members may have had their own motivations or goals for NOW, but the UWEC NOW's purpose as stated in their constitution was to:

The Purpose of the Eau Claire Chapter shall be to take action to bring women into full participation in the mainstream of American society, NOW, exercising all the privileges and responsibilities thereof in truly equal partnership with men. This purpose includes, but it not limited to, equal rights and responsibilities in all aspects of citizenship, public services, employment, education and family life, and it includes freedom from discrimination because of marital status or motherhood.¹⁶

This meant that NOW was involved with many aspects of campus and community life ranging from reproductive health, to the Equal Rights Amendment, and supporting candidates in elections. All the while, an important provision was made in the constitution which greatly affected UWEC:

The Eau Claire Chapter of N.O.W. will consider itself a university organization at the University of Wisconsin at Eau Claire, serving both university students and faculty as well as the larger community of Eau Claire. As such, this chapter will consider itself bound by the University regulations governing all student organizations here. However, the Eau Claire Chapter of NOW does reserve the right to disassociate itself from UW—EC at such time as the chapter cannot, in good conscience, be bound by the University's regulations because of conflict with the larger goals of NOW, Inc. In such an event this chapter will automatically consider the words “and by established University of Wisconsin at Eau Claire policies” (Section 3) null and void. The decision to remove the Eau Claire Chapter of NOW from the campus of the

¹⁵ Joan D. Mandle, *Women & Social Change in America* (Princeton: Princeton Book Company, 1979), 162.

¹⁶ National Organization for Women Eau Claire Chapter (Eau Claire, Wis.), Constitution of the Eau Claire Chapter of N.O.W., 1979-1983, Special Collections & Archives, University of Wisconsin Eau Claire, 0.1 linear feet (1 folder).

University of Wisconsin at Eau Claire will be made according to the regulations governing by-law amendment.¹⁷

If for any reason NOW felt that the university's regulations were unfit to meet their needs they would withdraw from UWEC. This was not the case during this time, apparently by the length of the collection from NOW at UWEC. The collection contains letters, board meeting minutes, and flyers of activities that occurred at the time. The board meeting minutes show few with UWEC as an institution, except for in July of 1972 there was a note that, "No space is presently available" for NOW to have their own designated space on the UWEC campus.¹⁸

The best way to understand the actions made by NOW and other active students of this time is to take a look at campus life and consider the actions made by these students. For example, from the years 1964 until 1976 the physicians (there were two staffed throughout the day or on call) at Student Health Services were all male with female nurses. In the 1976-77 academic year Dr. Theresa Rice, was the first female in over a decade to be a physician at Student Health Services.¹⁹ This action took place several years after a request by the secretary of NOW to the president of the student government. In November 8, 1972, the Reproduction Task

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ National Organization for Women Eau Claire Chapter (Eau Claire, Wis.), 1979-1983, 18 July 1972.

¹⁹ Student and University Directory, 1964-1977, Special Collections & Archives, Eau Claire, WI. Box 1-2.

Force reported after a meeting attended by twenty-five students, “The students requested that the next physician hired by Student Health Services be a woman.”²⁰

Previous to this in an article in *The Spectator*, November 4, 1971 “pregnancy tests and x-rays were made in local hospitals” and at the same time, “According to a committee chairman ‘students said they were not getting proper or sufficient treatment from the health service’.”²¹ Students at this time were feeling dissatisfied with the health care that was being provided to them on campus. Students however needed to receive care from somewhere. As the article continued, it was clear that many of the students attended the Karma House. “Karma House, Eau Claire’s free clinic was receiving up to 25 to 30 students from UW-EC some evenings.”²² The Karma House became a way for students to receive potentially less costly health care or maybe even, assumed by the author, that students were more than likely to receive certain drugs or contraceptives not available on campus. Within the next year (1973), more money was spent on the health center in order to bring more students back to Student Health Services. The new budget for 1973 allowed for physicians to be there full-time and for more nurses and other necessary personnel to be hired, as students were no longer able to be employed due to their work ethic and inability to keep record confidentiality.²³

²⁰ National Organization for Women Eau Claire Chapter (Eau Claire, Wis.), 1979-1983, 8 Nov. 1972, p 2.

²¹*The Spectator*, 4 Nov 1971, 10.

²² *Ibid.*

²³ *The Spectator*, 9 Mar 1972, 9.

As of March 2, 1972 the Senate of the United States was to reconsider a birth control bill according to *The Spectator*. The bill would allow unmarried persons to purchase contraceptives.²⁴ At that time in Wisconsin and Federal laws, contraceptives were considered obscene materials according to the Comstock Laws, except for those who were married.²⁵ The Comstock Laws were implemented in 1873 to forbid the sending of obscene matter through the U.S. mail.²⁶ Birth control was considered to be obscene and in order to distribute birth control it needed to be sent through U.S. mail.

Within the next month students were meeting in order to discuss the “present and future role of the Health Services in the area of contraceptives.” This discussion was led by NOW. UWEC’s physician, Dr. William Mautz was present and willing to answer anyone’s questions regarding the reconsideration of the birth control bill, yet at that point in time the state’s policy would only allow the contraceptives to be given to married people. He believed though that if the bill was to be passed to allow the sales of contraceptives that permission would be given to Health Services and he would give it to any girl who wanted it over the age eighteen. Dr. Mautz also said, “Some doctors are reluctant to give contraceptives to unmarried persons” and students who were in need of an abortion are sent to the Counseling Center, and then the students were sent to Madison or New York.²⁷ At this time New York was the only

²⁴ *The Spectator*, 2 Nov 1972, 4.

²⁵ Deborah Hobbins, prod., *The Defenders: A History of the Birth Control Movement in Wisconsin*, Emily Rumsey and Dawnee Dodson, dir., 17min., Trilobyte Pictures, 2005, DVD.

²⁶ Linda Gordon, *Woman’s Body, Woman’s Right: A Social History of Birth Control in America*, (New York: Grossman Publishers, 1976), 24.

²⁷ *Ibid.* This was also confirmed in *The Defenders: A History of the Birth Control Movement in Wisconsin* Video at approximately 45 minutes.

state where abortion was legal. Students would often be sent to Madison first and then told to go to Canada or New York for abortions to be performed. Mrs. Suzanne Lervick , a head resident of Oak Ridge at this time, said there was a need for contraceptives and that as many as 40 percent of the girls in Oak Ridge were on it or had asked about it.²⁸ These two statements proved that the need for abortions and contraceptives, although two different aspects of reproductive health, were important issues to the students. Action or steps towards allowing birth control to be given to anyone, regardless of marital status, were taking place or would soon be implemented.

By October and November of 1972, students on campus and in the community continued to address the issue of repealing of the contraceptive law because it had failed in Senate earlier. In November there was a panel that supported the repeal because they felt that a woman has the right to control her own reproductive system. The members of the panel were Mike Becker, president of the Karma House; Marcia Van Gorden, chairwoman of the task force on contraceptives; and Sue Miller and Suzanne Hermann, NOW members. Panel members and audience members also discussed abortions, venereal diseases, and about the Karma House, explaining a need for volunteers to help the campaign and the Karma House.²⁹

²⁸ *The Spectator*, 27 Apr 1972, 6.

²⁹ *The Spectator*, 16 Nov 1972. 16.

Around the same time Dr. William Mautz, UWEC's physician, inspected Karma House's facilities and talked with the board of directors. He found that they offered many different services.

Table 1: Karma House Services- Fall 1972
Drug Information Center
Venereal disease diagnosis and treatment
Contraception Dispensing for both sexes
Abortion Counseling
Legal Aid
Draft Counseling- for men
Source: UWEC Health Service Administrative Correspondence. ³⁰

Dr. Mautz also found that some of the activities conducted were debatable. He and other board members questioned whether the Karma House should have been allowed to carry out these services:

Since prescribing contraceptives to unmarried individuals and minors is against the state law even if as individuals we might believe it desirable as a Medical Society I do not see how we can condone it especially since at least 2/3 of the girls seeking the "pill" are university students and in my opinion definitely not "under privileged" or unable to get them from a private physician.³¹

The physician at UWEC came to find that because people were unable to receive contraceptives and abortion services that they went to the Karma House at 116 ½ E. Grand Ave.³² The fact that men and especially women were a part of the "bootlegging" as Jone's called in *Devices and Desires*, is quite interesting.³³ Many

³⁰ UWEC Health Service Administrative Correspondence, 20 October 1972, Special Collections & Archives, University of Wisconsin Eau Claire, Series 109 Box 1.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 2.

³² *The Spectator*, 16 Nov 1972. 16.

³³ Andrea Jone, *Devices and Desires: A History of Contraceptives in America*, xi.

people forget that contraceptives were not always for everyone. According to *The Defenders* DVD, women would wear other people's engagement or wedding rings in order to pretend they were married. Wedding rings could be used in place of marriage certificates to prove marriage. This made it easier for those who were not actually married and wanted access birth control, to actually obtain the contraceptives. In the late 1960s and early 1970s, places like Planned Parenthood and quite possibly the Karma House, in Eau Claire, just stopped asking if people were married. If they never asked, then it was not as though they were illegal distributing contraceptives.³⁴

Although it is not certain that illegal distributing of contraceptives took place, it more than likely occurred. We do know that good things were being done with the Karma House and by Marcia Van Gorden, the taskforce chairwoman for contraception. The volunteers of the Karma House and Van Gorden attempted to temporarily open a new Self-Help Clinic at the Karma House, which would familiarize women with their bodies.³⁵ In the end of April 1973, women from NOW went to an abortion hearing before the Assembly Judiciary Committee of Wisconsin. Members were also continuously urged to continue to contact their Senators and Representatives, to oppose restrictive regulations on abortion.³⁶ This was not the end of NOW at UWEC, but rather the end of a time when so many issues and movements were happening all at once.

³⁴ *The Defenders: A History of the Birth Control Movement in Wisconsin*, 21 minutes.

³⁵ *The Spectator*, 3 May 1973. 2.

³⁶ National Organization for Women Eau Claire Chapter (Eau Claire, Wis.), 1979-1983, 5 April 1973.

Conclusion

Although this has been a brief look at the history of student involvement on campus at UWEC, in order to change health care, specifically for abortion and contraception, there were a large number of changes and events that took place. In 1973 the Roe vs. Wade Supreme Court decision made abortions legal in every state. With the help of organizations like NOW Eau Claire chapter, groups were able to influence politicians enough to liberalize the abortion laws. A few years later, with continuous dedication by women, students, and organizations, Wisconsin repealed its own Comstock Law, allowing sale of contraceptives to unmarried persons; it was the last state in the country to do so.³⁷ Although abortion and contraception are two very different issues, they were a large part of the women's movement at UWEC and throughout the nation, and this national movement successfully made changes to the laws that were in place during the late 1960s and early 1970s.

Since those days, the use of contraceptives had grown so that by 1990, “an estimated 50 percent of couples in the world used contraceptives. In the United States contraceptive practice through artificial contraception and sterilization reached an estimated 80 percent among adults.”³⁸ Services offered at UWEC have reached a peak in 2008 by offering these services.

³⁷ *The Defenders: A History of the Birth Control Movement in Wisconsin*, 17 minutes.

³⁸ Critchlow, *Intended Consequences*, 10.

Table 2: Services offered at UWEC Student Health Services, 2008.
General Medical Exams
Minor Surgical Procedures
Men's Health Care
Laboratory Services
Immunizations and Allergy Shots
Mental Health and Depression
Health Education
Special Services
Sexually Transmitted Infection (STI) Testing
Women's Health Care
• Pelvic exams
• PAP smears
• Colposcopy
• Pregnancy tests & counseling
• Contraceptives exams & counseling
• Hormonal methods of contraception (including Implanon, the patch, the pill, and the ring)
• Intrauterine devices (IUDs) - Mirena and Paragard
• Emergency contraception
• Breast exams
• Diagnosis and treatment of sexually transmitted infections (STI's)
• Evaluation of menstrual irregularities and/or pain
• Diagnosis and treatment of yeast infections and other vaginal infections
Contraceptive Information
• Condoms (more affordable here than at your local drugstore)
• Oral contraceptive pills
• Depo Provera
• Ortho Evra
• Nuvaring
• Implanon
• Intrauterine Devices (Mirena and ParaGard)
• Emergency Contraception
Source: University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire Student Health Service. Services & Fees. ³⁹

So, a little over thirty years later, the number of services that UWEC provides increased drastically. Today they provide more contraceptive and women's health

³⁹ University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire Student Health Service, "Services & Fees," <http://www.uwec.edu/shs/services/services.htm> (accessed 12 April 2008).

care than ever before. Although abortion clinics are only location in Milwaukee and Madison, where there are larger student and public populations, the activists, women, or any student or community member that may have participated in or took action in these national movements would be extremely proud. I am sure that many of them have sons and daughters who attend UWEC as well, and now their children are able to benefit from the actions they made.

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