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Identity, conflict and radical coalition building: A study of grassroots organizing in Northern Ireland

by

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Abstract

Coalitions in Northern Ireland have been organizing across the ethno-nationalist divide for decades. Yet, while empirical research has addressed challenges of, and potential for, organizing across ethno-nationalism, the ways in which coalition members attend to their complex subjectivites have been overlooked. Using a critical, constructivist approach to qualitative research, this study of Alliance for Choice sheds light upon the impacts of attending to / overlooking difference and power dynamics. Data was collected through field research, semi-structured interviews and document analysis, and analysed through the lens of radical coalition building, along with theories that address the complexity of identities.

The findings suggest that members of the coalition have created a depoliticized coalitional space in order to avoid conflict and unite around their campaign goal. This has had implications in terms of homogenizing women's experiences, overlooking elements of class privilege, and falling back into traditional practices of avoidance around controversial issues.

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Chapter One: Introduction

The purpose of this study is to explore the ways in which a coalition of grassroots pro-choice activists in Northern Ireland understand and attend to difference within their coalition. While coalitions often form around particular campaign goals and objectives, often internal dynamics are overlooked, leading to marginalization and exclusion of particular identities and experiences. Therefore, this research will examine the ways in which individuals within a coalition in Northern Ireland attempt to forge alliances across their differences, for, as Wilson reminds us, "contested societies desperately need spaces where different citizens meet in robust and difficult exchanges about the nature and future vitality of that society, yet hold one another in respectful relationships" (p. 4).

I conducted the research within Alliance for Choice, a grassroots coalition that was formed in advance of an upcoming vote in Westminster on the extension of the 1967 Abortion Act to Northern Ireland. The goal of this coalition is to make abortion legal in Northern Ireland by having the act extended in order that women in Northern Ireland have the same rights as their counterparts in Scotland, England and Wales. Currently, women in Northern Ireland are forced to travel abroad, spending thousands of dollars to receive an abortion, or attempt to perform abortions themselves using pills bought over the Internet. Alliance for Choice engages in rallies, letter-writing campaigns, and public meetings in order to educate the public about abortion rights, and mobilize support for the campaign.

Origins of the Study

My experience as an activist in Alberta showed me that often we systemically overlook elements of oppression within our grassroots coalitions. Anything aside from the overarching "goal" of the coalition or campaign is seen as a distraction, and framed as breaking down of coalitional coherence. Subsequently, individuals who had previously been very active in community organizing are removing themselves from these spaces and places. As a member of these communities, and one that enters into them with huge respect for those I work with, and the hope that we can create progressive social change, I am interested in how we can form coalitions that, while working towards campaign goals and objectives, can be attentive to internal coalition dynamics, including the differing lived realities and subjectivities of individuals within the coalition, in order that we do not systemically recreate hierarchies of oppression within our coalitions while we seek to overturn those same hierarchies within society.

My identity as a first-generation Canadian of parents from Northern Ireland led me to seek answers to these questions in Northern Ireland. This country has had complex identity issues in regards to sectarianism throughout its history, which have led to massive confrontation and violence. Having not visited Ireland since the signing of the Peace Agreement in 1998, I was curious to see how coalitions within that political climate were able to forge alliances across sectarianism, along with other forms of difference. It is my hope that this study will allow those of us working in radical, grassroots coalitions to begin to understand how we can create inclusive spaces that are attentive to difference and

power dynamics between coalition members and can effectively challenge and resist forms of oppression we see affecting our world and society.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this research is to look at a coalition in Northern Ireland in order to understand how it is that individuals in contested societies attend to difference – particularly ethno-nationalism, gender and class – and the power dynamics associated with difference. It also examines how these processes may create tension between individuals, and the ways in which these tensions can be attended to in order to unmask hidden hierarchies and power struggles within coalitions.

Wilson (2006) refers to Northern Ireland as a "contested society" and states that "the structuring of relationships within the historical and communal rivalries of such a conflict zone, and the patterns of silence, avoidance and politeness often accompanying them, has a deep impact on how people meet and engage with one another, if they choose to meet at all" (p. 3). In Northern Ireland, religious affiliation has historically determined political leanings, with those born Protestant automatically becoming unionist and those born Catholic becoming nationalist, which further determine each individual's positioning on nationalist issues, with unionists wanting to remain loyal, and part of, Britain and nationalists wanting a United Ireland. Thus, the boundaries between identities are multiply constituted and highly essentialized. Members of coalitions that organize across lines of difference between Catholic Irish nationalists and Protestant British unionists have chosen to work together towards a shared future; however, this

alone does not erase the history of violence and trauma endured by all members of the society.

Radical coalition building advocates working for the development of radical alliances across differences of identity and power, arguing that attending to difference is necessary in that it not only creates recognition of complex identities, but also provides the potential for bringing to light the situated and complex nature of each group member within their own oppression and privilege (Bystydzienski & Schacht, 2001). Due to the complex histories, the intertwined nature of essentialized identities within the Northern Ireland peace-building process, and the necessity of working across these differences in order to achieve peace (Wilson, 2006), radical coalition building theory provides a lens through which to view a grassroots coalition in Northern Ireland.

Research questions.

Specifically, this research addresses the following research questions:

1) What is the role of attending to difference within coalitions in a contested society?

2) How does a coalition's approach to difference affect issues of bordering?

3) What is the impact of attending/not attending to difference and power dynamics within contested societies?

Terminology

The following is a list of terms used throughout this thesis. Many of the terms relate specifically to Northern Ireland, and to ways of referring to and

identifying ethno-nationalist affiliation. They are given here in order to provide clarity. Others, such as coalition and pro-choice, are specific to this research project, and provided in order to make clear the particular ways they will be used throughout this study.

The Belfast Agreement (also knows as the Good Friday Agreement) was signed in 1998. Contained within the Agreement were clauses ensuring peaceful and democratic processes of conflict resolution between all political parties, establishment of a two-year time frame for decommissioning of paramilitary weapons (by May 2000), recognition of the birthright of all people in Northern Ireland to choose between British and Irish citizenship, and establishment of a Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission, a North-South Ministerial Council to ensure cross-border cooperation, and power-sharing in Northern Ireland. Furthermore, the Agreement allowed for the recognition of the rights of separate identities and their expression.

Coalition refers to a group of people, or organizations, who have come together to organize around a particular goal or issue. In this study, it assumes that coalitions are composed of individuals and/or organizations that have differences between them.

Contested Society is "one where there have been, and are, groups firmly opposed to one another" (Wilson, 2006, p. 5) and in which there is a lack of shared identity. In Northern Ireland, the opposed groups are Protestants/unionists/loyalists and Catholics/nationalists/republicans.

Democratic Unionist Party (or the DUP) is the larger of the two main unionist parties in Northern Ireland. From its founding in 1971 until the spring of 2008, the DUP was led by Ian Paisley, who was then succeeded by Peter Robinson. This party favours union with the United Kingdom.

Irish Republican Army (or IRA) is a paramilitary organization, and the militant wing of Sinn Féin.

Loyalists are individuals in Northern Ireland who wish to remain part of the United Kingdom. This term usually refers to a more militant brand of unionism.

Nationalists are those individuals in Northern Ireland who seek union with the Republic of Ireland.

Pro-Choice refers to the belief that women should have the right to choose whether or not they will continue or terminate their pregnancy.

Republicans desire a United Ireland. This term usually refers to a more militant brand of nationalism.

Sectarianism in the context of Northern Ireland refers to discrimination, hatred or violence between differing religious or ethno-nationalist communities, i.e. Protestants and Catholics, unionists and nationalists, loyalists and republicans.

Sinn Féin is currently the largest nationalist party in Northern Ireland and is led by Gerry Adams. The party seeks a United Ireland. Throughout the Troubles, Sinn Féin was known for its association with, and support of, the Irish Republican Army.

Social Democratic and Labour Party **(or the SDLP)** is one of two nationalist parties in Northern Ireland. Throughout the Troubles it was the more popular of

the two parties, but following the disarmament of the IRA, Sinn Féin has surpassed it. The SDLP was known for its refusal to accept, or participate in, violence throughout the Troubles.

The Troubles refers to three decades of violence extending from 1971 to the signing of the Belfast Agreement in 1998. Throughout this time, Northern Ireland was the site of armed campaigns by various military and paramilitary groups.

Unionists are those individuals in Northern Ireland who are loyal to, and seek to remain part of, the United Kingdom.

Background

Socio-political conditions.

Northern Ireland has been defined by dichotomies for centuries. However, strict identity binaries and boundaries between the Catholic and Protestant communities were reinforced by the establishment of the partition line between the Republic of Ireland and the province of Northern Ireland in 1921.

English rule was established throughout most of the island of Ireland beginning in the seventeenth century. While this was challenged and contested on numerous occasions, it was not until the Easter Rising of 1916 that the possibility of independence became a reality. Following the uprising, Sinn Féin declared independence, which was rejected by Britain. Consequently, the Irish Republican Army (IRA) mounted a guerrilla war against the British government from January 1919 to July 1921, in which "Protestants and Catholics were killing each other in the north [and the south], and Belfast was under the taut control of the police and army. They had the right to shoot anyone found on the streets after the evening

curfew" (Lundy, 2006, p. 310). The end result of this War of Independence was establishment of the Irish Free State in 1921. However, this new state only included 26 of the 32 counties of Ireland due to the fact that the considerable Protestant population living in the northern region of the island voted to remain part of Britain. These six remaining counties became the predominantly Protestant province of Northern Ireland. However, a substantial number of Catholics remained, many clustered around the city of Derry/Londonderry.

O'Dowd and McCall (2008) argue that in the case of Northern Ireland, the partition border "served to 'cage' competing ethno-national and territorial demands within NI" (p. 85) and accentuated the inequitable power relations between Irish nationalists and Ulster unionists. This led to antagonism between the two groups, as each was striving to lay its claim on the territory.

Issues of identity continued in the 1960s, when civil rights campaigns began to emerge. At the time, Northern Ireland was under the rule of a unionist government, as it had been since its inception in 1921, and Northern Irish Catholics, who had unequal access to power and resources, mounted a civil rights campaign to demand equality and justice. Initially, the movement included both Protestants and Catholics, but as the unrest continued, and the Royal Ulster Constabulary enforced a pro-unionist stance throughout the province, violence between the two communities escalated and the Troubles began. As the unionist government entered into discussions with the government in Dublin regarding possible reforms, disagreement occurred over whether these reforms, which would benefit Catholics, would ultimately harm Protestants. This zero-sum

thinking, in which Protestants argued that rights for Catholics could only hurt Protestants,

> led to a violent sectarian backlash from unionism in the late 1960s; and to defensive and then offensive armed actions when a defunct IRA was resurrected. It 'justified' its actions by arguing that Northern Ireland was an unreformable, gerrymandered framework in which Catholics were predetermined losers, locked into minority status by unionism's 'democratic' Protestant majority, and permanently excluded from power. (Anderson, 2008, p. 91)

In the ensuing conflict, 3,600 people were killed and over 30,000 were injured (Smith, 2003). Due to the unrest, the ruling unionist party was replaced by Direct Rule from Britain in 1972, and from 1973-74 an initial power-sharing agreement was established between unionists and nationalists. However, this fell apart, and between 1974 and the signing of the Good Friday Agreement in 1998, various types of governing structures were put in place, none of which were successful at ending the conflict.

On April 10, 1998 the Good Friday Agreement (or Belfast Agreement) was signed in Belfast by the British and Irish governments. A referendum was held in Northern Ireland on May 23, 1998, in which the Agreement was endorsed by Northern Irish voters. Furthermore, voters in the Republic of Ireland also voted that day to change their constitution to align with the Agreement. Within the Agreement was a clause that allowed for the recognition of the rights of separate identities and their expression.

Following the signing of the Agreement, there were several setbacks that caused delays in implementation, most importantly the Provisional IRA's (PIRA) refusal to disarm. However, eight years later, on September 26, 2006, PIRA

announced that it had completely decommissioned all of its weapons, and though unionists were still skeptical, the power-sharing executive was re-instated in 2007.

The Northern Ireland peace process, resulting in the reinstatement of a power-sharing agreement in May 2007 between unionists and nationalists, has been hailed as the successful resolution to a conflict that lasted over four centuries. However, this shift in government has not erased the years of violence and trauma that the people of Northern Ireland have endured, nor the deeply entrenched ethno-nationalist identities held by individual citizens, highlighted by the fact that sectarian attacks are still occurring more than ten years after the Good Friday Agreement was signed (Heaney, 2008).

In addition, while territorial boundaries have been contested and at issue throughout the Troubles, they are not the only borders at play. Newman (2001) argues that borders are not only political, but also "social, spatial, political constructs that are tied up with the politics of identity" (p. 139). Through segregated schools, neighbourhoods, church congregations, etc., the people of Northern Ireland geographically separate themselves within their communities. Ferguson (2009) clearly summarizes the binary nature of Northern Ireland, which extends beyond political affiliation into all aspects of life. He starts with ethno-nationalist identities and their associated symbology:

Protestant	Catholic
Unionist	Nationalist
Loyalist	Republican
Prods	Taigs/Fenians
The Queen	The Pope
Union Jack	Irish Tricolour
The red-white-and-blue	The green-white-and-orange
London as a distant capital	Dublin as a distant capital

Orange	Green (p. 26)

He goes on to demonstrate the ways in which the ethno-nationalist divide has crept into all aspects of life, determining musical interests, football teams, even names:

Lambeg	Bodhran
Cricket	Hurling
Rangers	Celtics
Billy	Seamus (p. 92)

All of these bordering issues led to the development of strict identity binaries that clashed during the Troubles, and continue to perpetuate a contested society. However, coalitions in Northern Ireland are organizing across sectarian lines. Therefore, if this contested society is to move towards peace and cross-community reconciliation, there must be processes in place that allow people to work across and through the sectarian divide.

Women's community activism in Northern Ireland.

This section will present an overview of the history of women's community activism in Northern Ireland from the 1960s to present day. It will follow a timeline outlined by McWilliams (1995) and Rooney (1995).

During the late 1960s and early 1970s, women were involved in the civil rights movement, and were particularly active on housing action committees, which challenged the discriminatory housing allocation process that favoured Protestants over Catholics. As substantial numbers of men were arrested for engaging in political activities, women were put into more political roles. Bernadette Devlin became well known internationally due to her involvement in

direct action campaigns around civil rights. However, women who were politically engaged at that time did not have an awareness of women's rights, and men were only comfortable with women's political engagement so long "as these women activists concentrated on campaigning for the rights of their men rather than their own rights" (McWilliams, 1995, p. 21). A particularly ironic element of this was that women were seen at civil rights marches with slogans stating, "One man one vote" (Rooney, 1995, p. 42). However, feminist consciousness had not yet arrived in Northern Ireland.

Throughout the 1970s, partially due to the influence of feminist organizing globally, women in Northern Ireland began campaigning for women's rights issues. While they had several successes, they also faced clashes due to sectarian politics. In the early 1970s, women organized across the sectarian divide for two important campaigns, the "Falls Road Curfew" and the "Mothers of Belfast Milk Campaign." The former was the first women's rights action in Northern Ireland. Following a curfew imposed by the British Army that refused entry into the curfew zone by food vans, women living outside the zone challenged the curfew by bringing milk and bread to the women inside, which resulted in the end of the curfew. In the latter campaign, mothers of schoolchildren in Belfast marched from City Hall to Stormont with two milk cows to challenge the decision by government to stop the free milk program in schools. This campaign began with women from both Protestant and Catholic communities; however, Protestant women were forced to leave the campaign by

members of their community who saw it as a “Catholic antistate protest” (McWilliams, 1995, p. 22).

Throughout the rest of the decade, the women’s movement was plagued by tension between women’s rights feminists and republican feminists. Rooney (1995) notes that every campaign became politicized and positioned in relation to the union with Great Britain, with unity between women problematic due to the conflict over women’s relationship to the state. “The practice of lobbying for legislative change in a context where the legitimacy of the legislature is contested” (p. 43) became an issue for the movement. There was a divide between those women from a leftist, socialist/Marxist background who prioritized women’s issues, and republican feminists, who put the national question at the forefront of all organizing. Women’s rights feminism required “a basic acceptance that women as a group are denied ‘human rights’ on the basis of gender. What’s more, the politics of women’s rights calls for unity among women regardless of other forms of division or oppression” (p. 42). Conversely, republican feminists did not see “womanhood” as substantial grounds for forming unity. Rather than prioritizing women’s rights due to women’s shared experiences of oppression, they emphasized that women’s issues should fall under the broader movement of nationalist politics. “Any attempt to transcend political division and unite women on their own rights issues must contend with the realities of lives lived within the ideological constructs and political structures of religion, nationhood, race, class, and history. And it also must contend with competing analyses of the nationalist conflict” (p. 44). They saw the women’s rights activists’ attempts to transcend the

political realities of women in Northern Ireland and subsume all of these realities under the umbrella of women's rights "as an evasion and avoidance of personal experience" (p. 44). Thus, tensions between these two approaches to feminist organizing made any attempt to work across the political divide challenging, if not impossible. One example of this was republican feminists' refusal to support the abortion rights campaign that sought to extend the 1967 Abortion Act to Northern Ireland, as this would legitimize the role of Westminster in Northern Ireland.

In 1976, the "Peace People" (originally the "Peace Women") attempted to develop a cross-community, non-sectarian alliance that could move beyond historical clashes between women's groups, but it too fell apart due to differing attitudes amongst the groups involved. As Peace People became dominated by middle-class members, and was more and more heavily influenced by the church, working-class women, particularly from republican backgrounds, left the group.

The 1980s saw the arrival of women's community organizations, some of which were able to "temporarily, tactically, 'transcend' the political cleavage" (Rooney, 1995, p. 45), and others who forged alliances with the understanding that they would avoid political conflict. Women's groups throughout the 1980s and 1990s felt similar challenges to those in the past in terms of uniting on women's rights issues while being located within the nationalist conflict. However, they also began to see that such a heavy emphasis on sectarianism was overshadowing other types of inequality faced by women. Through this realization, women were able to build alliances in order to challenge different forms of oppression and unite on issues that affected women's lives. This was

often done by recognizing the differing situated realities of women based on their community background, and, importantly, by "agreeing to disagree" (McWilliams, 1995, p. 32) on more divisive issues. As Collins (as cited in McWilliams, 1995) states, "each group speaks from its own standpoint and shares its own partial situated knowledge. But because each group perceives its own truth as partial, knowledge is unfinished…Partiality and not universality is the condition of being heard" (p. 33).

As can be seen, women's activism in Northern Ireland has been fraught with tensions and conflicts, as women seek to find their place within a society that has been typically dominated by men, and women seek to address the ethno-nationalist tensions that persist within their communities.

Theoretical Approach

In this section, I present the theories that will be used to guide the analysis of the research. As this research is looking to analyze power and identity within a feminist coalition, I have chosen to first present differing understandings of unity within feminist organizing, including an overview of essentialism, following the work of Butler (1999) and Stone (2004). I will also look at theories of power, specifically Lopes and Thomas (2006) and Foucault (1990), as they challenge traditional oppressor/oppressed binaries. This will incorporate an outline of Bourdieu's theories of social and cultural capital, which will be addressed in order to conceptualize class power dynamics within coalitions.

Feminism and unity.

There is much debate in the literature on women's organizing about the grounds upon which to build feminist coalitions. While some argue that forming unity between women is useful in terms of allowing women "to understand and then challenge the world" (Flax, as cited in Porter, 1997, p. 84), others argue that this overlooks difference and relations of domination between women (hooks, 2000; Mohanty, 2006; Stone, 2004). In this section, I will present two differing ways of understanding/developing unity within feminist coalitions, one which highlights the commonality of woman's experience as grounds for unity, while the other argues a need for building radical coalitions of women that are cognizant of women's differing experiences and positionality. I will use Mohanty's (2006) outline of Robin Morgan's (1984) essay "Planetary feminism: The politics of the 21st century" in discussing the first approach, and Bernice Johnson Reagon's (1983) essay "Coalition politics: Turning the Century," along with other radical coalition building literature, to outline the second approach.

The first perspective, as put forward by Morgan, states that women's unity is based on their shared perspective, goals or experiences of oppression. This notion of "universal sisterhood" (Mohanty, 2006, p. 116) allows for an unexamined, normalized understanding of womanhood in which "feminism is not defined as a highly contested political terrain; it is the mere effect of being female" (Mohanty, 2006, p. 109). The act of being born female creates the conditions for the formation of universal sisterhood. By framing "woman" in this way, power dynamics and differing lived experiences between women become

concealed, invisible, overlooked; in addition, feminist coalitions are able to "forge political unity" (p. 108) without addressing internal power relations. Universal sisterhood presupposes that the hegemonic force against which women are oppressed by, and resistant to, is universal patriarchy, which assumes that all women experience patriarchy in the same way, regardless of difference in socio-historical or cultural location (Butler, 1999).

Stone (2004) emphasizes that universal claims about women create a normalization and privileging of specific forms of femininity, i.e. white, middle-class, and Western, without recognizing other forms of femininity based on differing historical realities. This approach can be seen as essentializing women's identity, which she defines as

> the belief that things have essential properties, properties that are necessary to those things being what they are. Recontextualized within feminism, essentialism becomes the view that there are properties essential to women, in that any woman must necessarily have those properties to be a woman at all. (Stone, 2004, p. 138)

Essentialism is problematic in that, by constructing a fixed, bounded category of "woman," it privileges certain women, while marginalizing others, thus replicating hierarchies of oppression that feminists are attempting to resist. For example, hooks (2000) comments on the ways in which, historically, feminist organizing in the U.S. excluded working-class women and women of colour. The movement failed to interrogate the interrelatedness of sex, gender and class, rather assuming shared unity amongst women based solely on being women.

Mohanty (2006) critiques the notion of assumed universal sisterhood by emphasizing that it "ends up being a middle-class, psychologized notion that

effectively erases material and ideological power differences within and amongst groups of women" (p. 116). If all women are united based on common experience, difference "can only be understood as male/female" (p. 112), rather than difference between women. This creates a strict binary between men/women, oppressor/oppressed that places both men and women within strict, unchanging, bounded gender categories. Furthermore, by creating unity among women through the myth of homogeneity, coalitions effectively remove the political from questions of womanhood; in fact, "all conflicts among and within women are flattened" (p. 114). Reagon (as cited in Mohanty, 2006) emphasizes that women's groups that unite around an essentialized definition of woman establish an "in-house definition of woman" (p. 118) that allows women to identify with one other, but is built upon overlooking difference between women. What is of concern to Reagon "is not a sameness that allows us to identify with one another as women but the exclusions particular normative definitions of 'woman' enforce" (p. 118). Feminist coalitions built around the commonality of "womanhood" and the invisibility of difference serve to marginalize those in the community that are already marginalized due to "silence…regarding class, gender, and other power relations" (Bannerji, 2000, p. 158).

Rather, Mohanty (2006) and Stone (2004) argue that feminist coalitions must strive to attain unity across race, class, gender, and cultural and historical locations. Mohanty (2006) emphasizes the "complex relationality that shapes our social and political lives," and the necessity of "retain[ing] the idea of multiple, fluid structures of domination that intersect to locate women differently at

particular historical conjunctures" (p. 55). For Reagon (1983), feminist coalitions must unpack and problematize their assumed understandings of "womanhood" and begin to address the differing historical realities faced by woman. Rather than emphasizing commonality based on shared experiences, women's coalition must analyze the ways in which power operates within their coalitions to shape women's lives in particular ways based on their individual positioning. Nicholson (1995) represents this as a "map of intersecting similarities and differences. Within such a map, the body does not disappear but rather becomes an historically specific variable whose meaning and import is recognized as potentially different in different historical contexts" (p. 61). By attending to these differing, and yet intersecting, maps, feminist coalitions can be founded not on unity, but on a recognition of our overlapping, and yet distinct, socio-historical realities. Yuval-Davis (1993) writes, "the transversal pathway may be full of thorns, but at least it leads in the right direction – to the kind of feminist coalition politics which does not fall into some of the more common traps 'sisterhood' has tended to fall into in the past" (p. 9).

Power.

In order to understand and conceptualize power, I will draw upon Lopes and Thomas (2006) and Foucault (1990). Lopes and Thomas (2006) discuss differing elements of power: (a) organizational power, derived from our professional position, resources, and organizational seniority; (b) social power, derived from our identity (gender, class, race, etc.); and (c) collective power, which comes from solidarity and community and can be used to organize against

institutional power. In a separate document (Thomas & Lopes, no date), they add personal power, which is derived from individual characteristics that we and others value. The authors highlight that individuals hold power in all of these forms, and that each element links to, or builds upon, other forms of power. However, we must be cognizant of our social power, and build collective power in a way that respects "everyone's lived experiences, with honesty of acknowledging power we do hold, and by taking action with that awareness" (p. 2).

Brunt (as cited in Holst, 2002), influenced by the work of Foucault, states,

> in order to work out political strategies that actually match the situations we're in…we need a recognition that power is "omnipresent."…If power is everywhere…it makes no sense to talk in any simple way of "the priorities" or "the main thing," against which other struggles are subordinated. (p. 49)

Thus, rather than viewing the power relationship between Protestants and Catholics, unionists and nationalists, men and women as dichotomous, or based on binary identity categories, it is necessary to analyze the differing ways in which power plays out in particular contexts. This understanding of power as omnipresent, but also systemic and linked to identity, will frame the way in which I will understand power to be operating within the coalition.

In order to unpack the ways in which power operates in terms of class dynamics within the coalition, I will refer to Bourdieu's (2001) concepts of social and cultural capital, which are useful when analyzing coalitions in Northern Ireland, particularly as individuals working in coalition come from different socio-economic backgrounds, which in turn has implications on who/what is valued within the coalition. Bourdieu (as cited in Davies & Guppy, 2006) defines

cultural capital as “a widely recognized set of cultural symbols that signify high status,” (p. 39), which include the speech patterns, styles of dress, knowledge, possessions and cultural preferences of the upper class. In particular, he was looking at the implications of cultural capital on school success based on class differentiation. He argues that students from high socio-economic backgrounds enter schools with the behaviour, language, skills, aptitudes, clothing, manners, and values to succeed. In his work, Bourdieu argued that the culture of the dominant group forms the knowledge and skills that are most highly valued and the basis of what is taught in school. To possess that cultural capital means one is considered educated, smart or talented; to not have that cultural capital means one is considered stupid, ignorant or uneducated. Those who possess it are rewarded with good grades and educational credentials, while those who don’t are disadvantaged. Thus, the inequitable social hierarchy is continually reproduced through the education system. Bourdieu (2001) also refers to social capital, or “the aggregate of the actual or potential resources that are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition” (p. 102). Individuals gain social capital by being connected to, and able to mobilize, a large network of individuals who possess other forms of capital, whether it is economic, cultural or otherwise.

Côté (1996) questioned Bourdieu’s emphasis on the importance of cultural capital, particularly within modern society, with its highly changeable rules, orders, and tastes. Rather than valuing the cultural preferences of the upper class, Côté argued that “the key is for the individual to form and sustain an identity

pragmatically situated in a social/occupational matrix" (p. 425) in order that they are able to choose from a wide selection of identities according to the social situation. Similar to Bourdieu's cultural capital, Côté's "identity capital" includes tangible assets, such as educational credentials, membership in clubs and personal deportment, along with intangible assets like critical thinking skills, moral reasoning abilities, and skills in self-monitoring. However, as Erickson (1996) echoes, the emphasis shifts from understanding high-class culture to having a broad understanding of cultural tastes and interests that are applied appropriately according to the situation.

This research addresses issues of identity within a society structured around dichotomies, and the ways in which individuals living within this society attend to/overlook the multiple layers of their identity when organizing in coalition. Furthermore, it is looking to unpack how power is implicated within the organizing process, and is related to the privileging of particular identities. Thus, theories that delve into the multiple constituted layers of individual identities and the ways in which this impacts how individuals come into coalition in Northern Ireland, such as those outlined above, are particularly well suited to this study.

Limitations and Delimitations

This study is delimited to one coalition in Northern Ireland. Rather than a broad-based study whose aim may be to provide expansive generalizations, the goal of this research is to understand the complexity of identities within a coalition and analyze emerging issues within this context. It is limited in that it is primarily descriptive and based on a single context; however, the "richness of the

material [presented] facilitates multiple interpretations by allowing the reader to use his own experiences to evaluate the data" (Roizen & Jepson, as cited in Wellington, 2000, p. 100). Therefore, while the findings may not be directly generalizable, readers will be able to relate to the data presented and draw parallels and contradictions to their own context.

Assumptions

There are a number of assumptions inherent in this research study, primarily that individuals will be able/willing to reflect on their own identity and power within the coalition and the ways in which these impact who or what issues are included, and who becomes marginalized. Additionally, no prior inquiry was made to evaluate the diversity of participants within the coalition; rather, the coalition was chosen by purposive sampling in order to ensure it would fit the requirement of being a grassroots coalition. Therefore, it is assumed that the coalition under study could include people from diverse ethnicities, classes, genders, or religious affiliations.

Significance of the Study

While there is much written theoretically regarding radical coalition building (Keating, 2005; Bystydzienski & Schacht, 2001; Barvosa-Carter, 1999; Armstrong, 1999), there is a lack of empirical research that applies the theoretical models to actual coalitions, particularly within contested societies. Thus, this research will contribute to an increased understanding of the role of radical coalition building within social justice organizing.

Furthermore, I am interested in identifying some of the social actors whose experiences and impacts are less well represented in the current literature. As McWilliams (1995) and Boland (1995) note, women in Northern Ireland, like women in other conflict situations, are often silenced in terms of expressing the impact of the violence on their lives. However, Boland comments that this has shifted, and that what she now sees

> is a feminine energy which has found a speaking part. Which has walked boldly out of the tropes, and customs and symbols which silenced it and turns back – although not without compassion – to question both the silence and its agents. (p. 8)

This shift needs to be documented. Women need to "look at the present and find a credible narrative of the past to hand on to their daughters and their granddaughters" (p. 7) that challenges the oppression previously experienced by women in that country. McWilliams (1995) refers to Daly's concept of "memory-bearing", which refers to the importance for female activists "to reflect on our memories, to enable the next generation of feminists to build on our strengths and to learn from our mistakes in the voyage to the next wave of feminism" (p. 17). My hope is that this research will provide some form of memory-bearing that can bring to light the ways in which one particular feminist coalition in Northern Ireland attends to conflict resolution and identity tensions.

In addition, Freire (as cited in Horton & Freire, 1990) argues that education and social movements share a dialectical relationship that allows for educating within organizing and organizing within educating. He states, "education is before, is during, and is after. It's a process, a permanent process" (p. 119). The cyclical nature of the education/organizing process allows people to

both mobilize to accomplish change while simultaneously being educated by the process of organizing. Dykstra and Law (1994) and Kilgore (1999) highlight the role of consciousness within social movement learning and the implications that such consciousness can bring to future engagement and actions within the social movement. By participating in the research process, it is hoped that participants will begin to unmask “the relations of power/control that manufactures the consent that people unconsciously give to those in authority” (Dykstra & Law, 1994, p. 123). Furthermore, by reflecting on their own personal identity and privilege, along with coalition membership and dynamics, coalition members will begin to “question the every-dayness” (p. 123) of the coalition, which may lead to an increased awareness or consciousness regarding the political forces that shape the coalition, and may impact future directions of the coalition.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

This research is attempting to understand the ways in which radical alliances can form across difference. As the research takes place within the context of Northern Ireland, it is important to understand the complex processes of identity and bordering that exist within this divided society. Therefore, the chapter will begin here, and then move into an overview of radical coalition building, a body of literature that attempts to address how radical alliances can be formed while attending to the multiplicity of identities within coalitions. It will conclude with the possibilities of moving beyond strict identity binaries and towards a culture of cross-community reconciliation and peace.

Identity, Borders and Northern Ireland

This section will explore the ways in which identity and borders are constructed and understood in Northern Ireland, and the implications of the power-sharing agreement on identity and bordering.

Identity.

> In working-class residential areas at sectarian interfaces, contentious flags, opposing national colours painted along pavements and physical barriers in the guise of peace walls sharply separate almost entirely homogenous sectarian neighbourhoods. (Oberschall & Palmer, 2005, p. 89)

The Troubles in Northern Ireland, with roots extending back four centuries, is often understood as a clash between Protestants/unionists and Catholics/nationalists (Todd, O'Keefe, Rougier & Bottos, 2006). At the heart of the conflict is a clash between ethno-nationalist identities, with unionists seeking to remain part of, and loyal to Britain, and nationalists striving to create a United Ireland between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland.

Though some may argue that identities, and collective identities in particular, do not constitute a substantial reality and cannot be seen as empirically real (see Brubaker, as cited in Jenkins, 2006), others argue that group identities are socially constructed and have particular norms and values, and that individuals can identify themselves as members of these groups (Arber, 2000; Jenkins, 2006). Essentializing identity construction invariably entails processes of bordering, defining that which is "us" from that which is "them." In Northern Ireland, this has involved distinguishing Protestants/unionists/loyalists from Catholics/nationalists/republicans. Furthermore, religious affiliation has determined political leanings, with those born Protestant automatically becoming unionist and those born Catholic becoming nationalist, which has further determined each individual's positioning on nationalist issues. Thus, the boundaries are multiply constituted:

> The boundary between 'Protestant' and 'Catholic' is constructed at once from religion and ethnicity and morality and a sense of culture and politics and nationality. It is not a matter of adding other symbolic divisions onto an 'essential' ethnic one, but rather that they are interrelated, semi-fused, symbolically inter-resonating. The result is a clear and stable boundary between 'Protestant' and 'Catholic.' (Todd, 2006, p. 5)

With this deep intermingling of political, national and religious identity, the people of Northern Ireland became deeply polarized (Gallagher, 2005). Strict ethno-nationalist group identities led to the creation of nationalist paramilitary groups such as the Irish Republican Army (IRA), a revolutionary military organization, and the Irish National Liberation Army (INLA), along with loyalist paramilitary groups such as the Ulster Freedom Fighters (UFF), the Red Hand Commandos and the Loyalist Volunteer Force (LVF). Along with the existence of

these paramilitary groups, the bi-partisan division in Northern Ireland has constantly been constructed and reproduced through small-scale organizations: "sports clubs, religious congregations, local paramilitary units, schools, lodges, bands, political party branches – these are all significant" (ibid., p. 398). For example, less than 4% of pupils attend integrated (cross-community) schools (Smith, 2003). Furthermore, "families, peer groups and friendship circles are regularly identified along ethnic lines" (Jenkins, 2006, p. 398).

Oberschall and Palmer (2005) highlight that nationalist identities have remained fairly stable since the beginning of the Troubles: in the 1960s, 76% of Catholics identified as Irish, while 71% of Protestants identified as British; today, 62% of Catholics identify as Irish, while 75% of Protestants identify as British. Not only do people self-identify with ethno-nationalist identities, but they also have a well-developed aptitude to externally identify others through a practice of determining the ethno-nationalist identity of others (Jenkins, 2006). This process of defining, categorizing and enforcing strict binaries is a way of creating boundaries between "us" and "them" and is constantly at work in Northern Ireland.

Todd, O'Keefe, Rougier and Bottos (2006) interviewed Irish citizens, including 150 'Northern Irish,' in 1988, 2003-2005 and 2004-2006, to determine the ways in which individuals construct and change their identity. They found that most interviewees had a wide range of identity categories with which they could identify; however, each category was only acceptable in a particular context and could not be transferred to another context. For example, one man identified

himself as "Northern Irish, but British, you know I belong to the United Kingdom…so, some would see themselves as being English but British, I see myself as being Irish but British, Northern Irish but British" (p. 329). Furthermore, he was also Protestant, and more explicitly "Protestant Irish of the Unionist tradition" (p. 329); however, he also identified as a Born Again Christian of the Presbyterian denomination. Though he and others were able to identify with multiple identities, these appeared to be bounded, inflexible and applicable only to a particular context, with clarity regarding the distinction between each category. Categorical fluidity, or the ability to shift between two opposing identity categories (i.e. Protestant/Catholic) was rare, while cases of essentialization were common, and often were the result of hurtful accusations or experiences of violence. For example, one man reflected on his process of coming to self-identity as a Protestant:

> When did I realize I was a Protestant? Probably when I was about six or seven years of age, whenever some neighbor men were shot by the I.R.A. and you asked why they were shot by the I.R.A., 'why were they shot?' 'they were shot because they were Protestants,' and 'what is a protestant, what is a catholic,' 'we're Protestants,' 'yeah,' 'we're Unionists,' and the I.R.A. don't want, they want a United Ireland, they don't want a British presence and they see us as a British presence and therefore they shoot us. (p. 337)

Thus, experiences of trauma or stigmatization led to strict categorization and, subsequently, essentialization. The authors state, "these cases of essentialization were intuitive responses to other-attribution, when others defined the individual in hurtful, sometimes dangerous ways" (p. 338). Essentialization was partly the result of the necessity of being "one" or the "other," either Protestant or Catholic,

which then became inextricably intertwined with and inseparable from political and national identity.

Some individuals in the study rejected essentialism, refusing to fall into the strict dichotomies of ethno-nationalist identity. For example, when asked how he defined himself, one man responded, “At the minute? Well mm hard working…a plumber…Work every day that I can…see myself as having some sort of stature here in the town in the work that I do, plumbing” (p. 332). In terms of religious and political identity, he did not support violent action done in the name of religion, and refused to view the world through strict identity binaries as “you don’t get forward in that mindset” (p. 332). Some noted attempts to teach their children about the dangers of essentialization, while others worked to reject boundaries established by essentialized notions of identity by socializing within sites where social boundaries overlap: “boxing and business, ice-skating, community work and university are such sites, as well as some other sports and explicitly cross-community political and educational ventures” (Todd, 2006, p. 8). Finally, others were able to separate out elements of their identity (i.e. separating religious identity from national identity), “transform[ing] a singular multiply-determined boundary into multiple boundaries with many overlaps” (p. 8). However, this act of refusing to participate in the dominant binary framework is challenging, particularly when society is structured in such a way that parents have little choice but to send their children to a segregated school, or must choose to baptize their child as Protestant or Catholic. At this point, identity boundaries can become reinforced or unavoidable. Todd, O’Keefe, Rougier and Bottos

(2006) note that refusing to internalize essentialization and crossing over of boundaries is challenging to negotiate and often crisis-ridden, and thus is quite rare.

Even though some interviewees demonstrated shifts in their national identity, most shifts that occurred were towards, rather than away from, opposition. Todd, O'Keefe, Rougier and Bottos assert that "the process of essentialization described here is an ever-present possibility where there is a history of division (oppositional repertoires available to individuals) and where there are humiliations, slights, stigmatizations of individuals as group members" (p. 340). These sorts of actions reinforce identity binaries and polarize people based solely on their ethno-nationalist identity.

Interestingly, even though processes of essentialization were common, and most identified themselves within a strict identity category, "in most of the cases, respondents describe themselves as open to a blurring of boundaries, to friendships and intimacies across the divisions" (p. 338). Furthermore, a study done in 1996 showed that "most people in Northern Ireland want to live together rather than apart, and…even on those matters on which there is most disagreement there are some possible compromises" (Hadden, as cited in Oberschall & Palmer, 2005). This counters a 1968 study, which found that the majority thought people should stick to their religious community. Thus, there is a desire within Northern Ireland to reach reconciliation and work across the sectarian divide, even while complex acts of internal and external identification continue to categorize people into strict ethno-nationalist identities.

Borders.

> Territoriality's…advantages can become serious disadvantages, not merely simplifying but *over*simplifying, reifying and distorting social realities, and especially in contested border regions. It depersonalizes social relationships, obscures relations of power, and often erroneously equates *physical* space with *social* space, arbitrarily truncating social processes at borders. Its oversimplification reinforces the distorting simplifications which also feature more widely in other aspects of ethno-national conflict. (Anderson, 2008, p. 93)

In the case of Northern Ireland, borders have been drawn not just politically, in terms of partition between the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland, but also symbolically, through segregated schools, neighbourhoods and communities. Both of these will be discussed in terms of their impact on Northern Irish society and their role in the Troubles.

Following the Easter Uprising of 1916 and subsequent War of Independence, a partition line was drawn to create the Irish Free State (later known as the Republic of Ireland) and Northern Ireland. However, due to the geographical scattering of Protestants and Catholics across the island, "it was impossible to draw a partition border which clearly separated them" (p. 89). Anderson states that ideally, geographic and territorial realities should correspond in order to form nation-states. When the reality does not fit this ideal, deeply rooted conflict can ensue.

One place where the implications of the partition are highlighted is in the border city of Derry/Londonderry. This predominantly Catholic city became part of Northern Ireland in 1921, and subsequently was a main site of conflict and tension throughout the Troubles. Lundy (2006) states,

> the city should not have been included in the province of Northern Ireland in 1921. It was predominantly Catholic, and it is situated on the West Bank, the Irish, Donegal, side of the River Foyle, which is a natural boundary. But the Ulster Protestants had been unwilling to let Derry, with its profound meaning and legacy, go into a Catholic Ireland. (p. 315)

Tensions between Catholics and Protestants flared in this city, and the Battle of the Bogside took place on August 12, 1969, during the relief-of-the-siege celebrations by the Apprentice Boys, in which Protestants celebrate the end of the 1688/89 siege of Londonderry by hosting the week-long Maiden City Festival, which includes a march around the city walls. This event has often been met with confrontation and violence. Furthermore, this border city was also the site of Bloody Sunday, January 30, 1972:

> British paratroopers killed fourteen unarmed civilians during a banned civil rights march in the city. The troopers sallied out from the Butcher Gate as if it were three hundred years earlier. They hunted down their targets through the crummy, narrow streets of the Bogside, killing Irishmen as if they were the wolves and kerns the seventeenth-century Thomas Blenerhasset had recommended slaughtering with such gusto in the early days of the Plantation… This time, it swept away a government. Bloody Sunday triggered so much more blood in the streets that the little statelet of Northern Ireland came tumbling down. (p. 315)

Anderson (2008) notes that failure to find a solution in Northern Ireland was "inevitable when the border was *the* issue" (p. 91). With unionists wanting the border between the North and the South to remain the same and nationalists wanting the border to change, conflict appeared to be inevitable. Furthermore, O'Dowd and McCall (2008) emphasize that when conflict occurs over sharply defined territorial entities, polarization typically occurs. This is evident in the case of Northern Ireland, where the Troubles continued for over 30 years as competing groups struggled to gain control over defining the border.

While territorial boundaries have been contested and at issue throughout the Troubles, they are not the only borders at play. Newman (2001) argues that borders are not only political, but also

> social, spatial, political constructs that are tied up with the politics of identity and in which territorial ordering is a means through which national and ethnic groups form their respective hierarchies and social order and belonging, creating exclusive and inclusive spaces in a world of transboundary movement and virtual spaces and communities. (p. 139)

Through segregated schools, neighbourhoods, church congregations, etc., the people of Northern Ireland geographically separated themselves within their communities. Arber (2000) argues that when we differentiate ourselves from others in this way, we imprison each other within different spatial realities.

> The spaces in which 'we', 'I', 'they' are positioned, are constrained by the way subjectivity is made spatial. Positionality is not simply a matter of places but of the spatial relationships between places and spaces and the distribution of people between them…people are given access to particular kinds of places, and to the paths that allow one to move to and from such spaces…It sets out not only where we can go, but that which we might become. (p. 56)

Todd (2006) argues that Protestants and Catholics differentially construct these symbolic boundaries and borders through their differing values narratives and interpretations of nationality. "In this sense the boundary is asymmetrical and contested, not just meaning different things but perceived at a different place depending on perspective" (p. 5). The interplay between physical and symbolic borders is explained beautifully by Said (1979):

> A group of people living on a few acres of land will set up boundaries between their land and its immediate surroundings and the territory beyond, which they call 'the land of the barbarians.' In other words, the universal practice of designating in one's mind a familiar space which is 'ours' and an unfamiliar space beyond 'ours' which is 'theirs' is a way of making geographical distinctions that can be entirely arbitrary. It is

> enough for 'us' to set up these boundaries in our own minds; 'they' become 'they' accordingly, and both their territory and their mentality as designated as different from 'ours.' (p. 54).

Thus, through the formation of boundaries - partition borders, segregation and symbolism - national and group identities in Northern Ireland were, and continue to be, polarized.

Consociationalism: Reinforcing borders and identities.

> Consociationalism contains and regulates conflict by institutionalizing power-sharing between contending groups, but, its critics argue, at the cost of helping to perpetuate, even deepen, the divisions between them. (Anderson, 2008, p. 96)

Anderson and Jenkins (2006) both emphasize that while ethno-nationalist identities may be deep rooted, due to the constructed nature of identity there is always possibility for change. In fact, studies have shown that there is support in Northern Ireland for mixed neighbourhoods, schools, and workplaces (Oberschall & Palmer, 2005), and Todd, O'Keefe, Rougier and Bottos (2006) found that individuals are willing to associate with those of a differing ethno-nationalist identity. However, due to the history of violence and segregation in Northern Ireland, people often retreat to sectarian politics. The Northern Ireland Legislative Assembly established under the Good Friday Agreement serves to reinforce this sectarian division.

The Good Friday Agreement "recognize[s] the legitimacy of whatever choice is freely exercised by a majority of the people of Northern Ireland with regard to its status, whether they prefer to continue to support the Union with Great Britain or a sovereign United Ireland" (The Agreement, 1998). This means that Northern Ireland will remain part of Britain so long as that is the wish of the

majority of Northern Irish citizens. However, as soon as the majority of Northern Irish citizens want a United Ireland, the North will join the South in the Republic of Ireland. There is contradiction at the very root of the Agreement in that it “was sold to unionists as a means of ensuring Northern Ireland’s place within the United Kingdom while, at one and the same time, it was sold to nationalists as an opportunity to bring about a United Ireland” (Oberschall & Palmer, 2006, p. 81). Rather than being about integration and cross-community reconciliation, each group entered into the Agreement hoping to ultimately implement their own agenda.

The governance structure established by the Agreement is also problematic, in that it serves to reinforce strict identity binaries and boundaries. Under the power-sharing agreement, members of the legislative assembly must designate themselves as unionist, nationalist or neither. However, any contentious votes must receive 40% support from the unionist and nationalist blocs, ensuring that smaller political parties have little to no say (Gallagher, 2005). Furthermore, by giving most of the control to unionist and nationalist MPs, the structure of the power-sharing agreement serves to emphasize and give priority to the divide between unionists and nationalists. By giving proportional representation to Sinn Féin (nationalist) and the Democratic Unionist Party (unionist), there is a continuation of the discourse of two communities rather than one Northern Irish community, thus it seems to endorse continued segregation. By reinforcing the centrality of borders and identity binaries and encouraging sectarian politics, rather than integrative measures, this “solution” will cause a continuation of

sectarianism and conflict (Anderson, 2008; Jenkins, 2006; Oberschall & Palmer, 2005). In addition, Anderson (2008) argues that with the power-sharing agreement,

> people are forced into one or other ethnic camp, and more fruitful bases of political mobilization (e.g. class) which cross-cut ethnic divisions are marginalized or excluded. The so-called middle-ground of compromise, or other grounds for alternative politics, are eroded; and the primacy and permanency of ethno-national categories are conservatively accepted rather than questioned or challenged. Whatever the more discerning opinions of its advocates, in practice consociation lends support to essentialist segregation and exaggerates division. (p. 97)

In fact, Oberschall and Palmer (2005) argue that, even though there is support for cross-community reconciliation, no political party has cut across the sectarian divide to mobilize people. Thus, the power-sharing agreement serves to entrench ethno-nationalist identities, rather than encourage new forms of cooperation across the sectarian divide. By its very nature it is polarizing because it forces people to identify with either the DUP or Sinn Féin.

Such strict limitations on political parties and political affiliation serve to limit the ways in which people can come together around partisan politics. For those who wish to campaign on political issues, there appears to be a difficult choice. Align with a political party and organize with those who similarly identify, or reach across the divide and build coalitions with those who may hold differing political views and beliefs. But how do members of such coalitions move beyond the years of violence and trauma that have been experienced within their communities, particularly in a society where models of interaction are grounded within the ethno-national divide? What do those spaces look like? How do people negotiate the issues of identity that arise within these spaces and which

move beyond ethno-nationalism into race, class, gender, sexual orientation and so on?

Radical Coalition Building

Edwina Barvosa-Carter (1999) opens her paper on radical coalition building with the following statement: "Conventional wisdom holds that differences among us prevent the formation of radical alliances that are working for social justice" (p. 111). Armstrong and Prashad (2005) also comment on the fear amongst a number of activists that undue attention to identity politics has the potential to fragment the movement. Within this is an implicit statement regarding the role of attending to difference within and amongst individuals and groups who are striving for social justice: that it is irrelevant, unimportant, a waste of time and energy. However, a new way of thinking about coalition building states that lack of attention to internal hierarchies, power relations, and difference can ultimately cause coalitions to fail (Barvosa-Carter, 1999; Bystydzienski & Schacht, 2001). Hamdon (2007) argues that striving for internal homogeneity is problematic in at least two ways. First, it "serves to perpetuate the dominant/minority binary. Second, it fails to consider the multiple forms of oppression that act upon various members of the community" (p. 63). This overlooks the complexity of identities within coalitions because people

> have more than one social group characteristic - every person simultaneously has a gender and sexual orientation, is of a certain age, belongs to an economic class and to a race – and this makes it virtually impossible to separate neatly and portion out individual identities into exclusively organized groups. (Bystydzienski & Schacht, 2001, p. 4)

Furthermore, this attempt at homogeneity has the effect of silencing, or causing invisible, power relations and hierarchies within the group that are dependent on class, race, gender and other privilege. By remaining inattentive to this, some individuals/groups within the movement become situated at the margins, while others control the agenda.

Rather than not deal with issues of identity politics, radical coalition building attends to the multiplicity and complexity of identity in order to understand the interplay of the multiple and interlocking oppressions that, according to Burack (2001), occurs within and between individuals and collectives. The forging of radical coalitions involves recognizing the multiplicity of identities and experiences amongst group members, providing a space where these differences are discussed, and developing a process of recognizing and redistributing privilege that one holds, a process that can occur at both the interpersonal and structural level (Bystydzienski & Schacht, 2001).

Burack's (2001) understanding of radical coalitions is based on an examination of the writings and experiences of Black feminist and womanist scholars in the U.S. who analyzed the impact of white feminist organizing on women of colour. She found that dialoguing across difference of race/class/gender was necessary within feminist organizing in order to begin to unpack the complexity of identities within the feminist movement, along with their interrelationship and impact on each other. In addition, in her document analysis of interviews from the U.S participants in the Global Feminisms Project, which looked at feminist activism and identity in China, India, Poland and the U.S., Cole

(2008) found that coalition members must recognize heterogeneity within social identity groups, attend to difference, resist the impulse to normalize certain identities, and employ intersectional analyses. Luna's (2006) findings from her analysis of the same interviews also highlight the importance of intersectionality and of attending to multiple oppressions in social justice organizing. Furthermore, Cole (2008) found that differences of power within coalitions may threaten their existence, and thus coalition members must look critically at their assumptions and address their privilege. Grossman's (2001) case study of a coalition between First Nations communities and Rural Whites in Northern Wisconsin also highlighted the necessity of understanding the inequitable access to power, resources, and legitimacy held by these two groups. Radical coalition building is a process that brings together diverse voices, perspectives, identities, and power relationships in order that individuals, communities, groups, and organizations can develop deep and long-lasting alliances. Rather than ignoring these differences and power dynamics, radical coalition building recognizes that these are key elements of strong, sustainable movements.

Coalition-building processes.

Keating (2005) provides a three-step process for what she entitles "coalitional consciousness-building" (p. 86). It involves: sharing experiences, with awareness to the racial, class and other relevant contexts being presented; exploring the multiple layers of oppression within the group; and finally, examining the interplay of these oppressions, paying particular attention to power dynamics within the group and how they can be challenged in order to ensure

coalition sustainability. A combination of the above processes allows recognition that each individual's identity is composed of multiple layers relating to a variety of social identities, each providing a particular lens through which to view the world. These social identities can include, but are not limited to

> gendered and sexual identities, cultural, ethnic and racial, ideological and subcultural identities, identities based in nationality, physical ability, specific lifestyle, socio-economic status, language group, subnational region, generation, and so on. (Barvosa-Carter, 1999, p. 113)

Not only do these processes create recognition of complex identities, but they also provide the potential for bringing to light the situated and complex nature of each group member within their own race/class/gender oppression and privilege. As Quintero (2001) expresses, this multi-layered identity results in those who are oppressed in one situation being the oppressor in another.

Jeanette Armstrong (1999), an Okanagan Indian from the Penticton Indian Reserve in British Columbia, provides another framework for developing radical coalitions. She presents a three-step process, referred to as En'owkin, which can be defined as "coming to understanding through a gentle integrative process" (p. 1). The principles were developed within Armstrong's community; however, she argues that they are also useful in diverse communities or coalitions as they provide a way of sharing differing opinions and perspectives. En'owkin is

> not so much a debate as a process of clarification, incorporating bits of information from as many people as possible, no matter how irrelevant, trivial, or controversial these bits might seem, for in En'owkin, nothing is discarded or prejudged. (p. 4)

The first step encourages members of the coalition to share how a choice the community is confronted with affects them personally in both the long- and short-

term. From this grounding, the coalition is challenged to "suggest directions, mindful of each area of concern put forward" (p. 4). This process calls upon elders and others in the community to address areas of apprehension. Within this process, it is requested that "each person be committed to creatively include in his or her own thinking the concerns of all others. It requires each person's understanding to expand to accommodate the whole of the community" (p. 6). In the final stage, the coalition makes a decision that takes into consideration "all the short-term, concrete social needs of the community as well as long-term psychological and spiritual needs" (p. 6). The beauty of this process lies in the way it explicitly creates a space where diverse perspectives can be heard, discussed, and challenged.

> The point of the process is not to persuade the community that you are right, as in a debate; rather, the point is to bring you, as an individual, to understand as much as possible the reasons for opposite opinions. Your responsibility is to see the views of others, their concerns and their reasons, which will help you to choose willingly and intelligently the steps that will create a solution – because it is in your own best interest that all needs are addressed in the community. (p. 6)

However, this is not a consensus-based model, but rather it works to inform all members of the community about differing perspectives, while maintaining the ability to move forward with a decision.

Essential to this process of building radical coalitions, expressed most profoundly by Bernice Johnson Reagon (1983) in her article "Coalition politics: Turning the century," is the notion that it should include discomfort. She argues that

> coalition work is not work done in your home. Coalition work has to be done in the streets. And it is some of the most dangerous work you can

> do. And you shouldn't look for comfort. Some people will come to a coalition and they rate the success of the coalition on whether or not they feel good when they get there. They're not looking for a coalition; they're looking for a home. (p. 359)

Confronting systems of oppression and places of privilege is messy, uncomfortable work, but as Reagon reminds us, we cannot stay in our comfortable, cozy "barred room" (p. 358) filled with homogenous individuals. "There is nowhere you can go and only be with people who are like you. It's over. Give it up" (p. 357). She affirms the importance of building radical coalitions within social justice organizing, even though it can be threatening, challenging and potentially painful. Keating (2005) supports this argument, asserting "the tendency to think of consciousness-raising groups as 'safe' spaces undermines the possibilities of creating the necessarily risky but potentially productive openings in these groups that would be required to create effective and deep coalitions" (p. 93). Quintero (2001) found that within her work with an HIV/AIDS coalition, confronting her privilege as an HIV-negative woman was challenging in that she was forced to "accept some harsh truths about my advantages as an HIV-negative person" (p. 94). She not only found that there were personal conflicts she needed to address, but also tensions within the coalition due to privileging some forms of oppression while overlooking other systems of oppression at play.

Those working towards social justice must develop an understanding of intercomplexity, or the dynamics created by the complexity within both one individual's own identity as well as its dynamics with other individual's complex identities. In fact, it should be a requirement for members of social movements

(Sudbury, 2001). By attending to internal differences, coalitions provide a "deeper personal growth and political awareness" (Quintero, 2001, p. 102) among coalition members. This attention to the complexity of identity allows for more opportunities of freedom because the "more connections among specific social units, the more complex the interactions" (Jakobsen, 1998, p. 5). Through this process, individuals/groups must be mindful that they are not only challenging a particular form of oppression, but are working alongside other groups that are committed to social justice and social change. Thus, "to achieve unity, the majority needs to recognize and respect difference and understand how doing so can benefit universal values" (Grossman, 2005, p. 37).

As Reagon (1983) and Keating (2005) point out, being in coalition can be dangerous work. Thus, skilled leaders are essential in the building of radical coalitions. As Quintero (2001) states, they must be

> skilled in mediating differences, competent in identifying tensions rooted in oppressive perspectives, comfortable in naming them, and capable of encouraging members to address them. If they are not, the readiness to confront "isms" could be exploited to promote organizational self-interest and hidden agendas, since differences in operating styles can be shaped by race, culture and gender. (p. 102)

In order for coalitional work to be successful and avoid falling into the myth of homogeneity, leaders must work to deconstruct the tensions between complex identities. Grossman (2001) refers to these individuals as "bridge workers" (p. 157) and states that they are often those individuals who have an understanding of both worlds. For example, in his study of mediation between Native Americans and a rural white community, leaders tended to be those white individuals who had strong connections with the Native American community.

This body of literature has shown that radical coalitions are essential to dismantling systems of oppression and marginalization. By dissecting the myth of homogeneity as strength, radical coalitions develop deep alliances amongst members who highlight and redistribute power and privilege. For

> it is in noticing resistance to oppressions in their complex interconnections, including interlocking to fragment people categorically, that we can sense each other as possible companions in resistance, where company goes against the grain of sameness as it goes against the grain of power. (Lugones, 2003, p. 11)

This section provides the framework through which coalition-building processes in Northern Ireland will be analyzed.

Un-Learning Borders and Essentialist Identities

> Nationalism and sectarianism are ethnic ideologies, forged and tempered in the fires of local history and only understandable in that context, but neither unbreakable nor impossible to decommission. (Jenkins, 2006, p. 395)

> At some point, on our way to a new consciousness, we will have to leave the opposite bank, the split between the two mortal combatants somehow healed so that we are on both shores at once and, at once, see through serpent and eagle eyes. (Anzaldúa, 1987, p. 378)

Anzaldúa (1987) argues that, in order to move towards a new consciousness, opposing groups can no longer stand opposite each other, shouting threats and insults, as this locks all parties involved into an oppressor/oppressed relationship that leads to violence and destruction. Rather, we must work to transcend duality, which she believes could “bring us to the end of rape, of violence, of war” (p. 379). Arber (2000) argues that one path for ending this dualistic thinking is to recognize the multiplicity and complexity of our intersecting identities and understand that we are all “implicated in unequally

empowered ways of understanding and doing: that people share positionings in common and yet are not simply defined by sets of binaries; black/white, working class/middle class, female/male" (p. 46). An understanding of multivocality weakens identity binaries as it shows how a person can be an insider in one aspect of their identity, while simultaneously be an outsider in another aspect. Thus, it breaks down the strict oppressor/oppressed relationship and shows the intersecting nature of our complex identities. However, the very nature of the power-sharing governance structure established by the Good Friday Agreement has resulted in the continuation of a discourse of two communities by solely focusing on, and institutionalizing, ethno-nationalist identities.

Arber (2000), referring to Bhabha (1997), emphasizes that in order to shift away from strict identity binaries, and their resultant boundaries, we must begin to find the places "in between" where we can resist this dualistic identification. Ethno-nationalist identities have taken centre stage in Northern Ireland, but in order to move towards the "in between," Anderson (2008) argues that there must be more emphasis on issues that cross-cut ethno-nationalist divisions, such as race, class, gender and the environment. He asserts that

> creating living, functioning transnational political communities, which define themselves in non-ethnic, non-territorial or cross-border terms, requires practical mobilization around social, cultural and political as well as economic issues which are not the preserve of any particular ethnicity and are self-evidently worthwhile in their own right. (p. 100)

With the existing polarizing governance structure, grassroots community organizations and coalitions have a role in working across the sectarian divide. Wilson (2006) argues that community organizations within contested societies

such as Northern Ireland have a difficult task, as they work to provide an open space where individuals with conflicting identities can meet and build deep relationships. He states:

> In a contested society, the spaces for really meeting others at some depth are continually eroded. They are hostage to a wider dynamic of preferring 'separation' if at all possible; 'avoidance' where people have to be in the vicinity of one another or 'politeness' around one another and all sensitive topics where people have to share the same place. (p. 24)

In the case of Northern Ireland, individuals working in coalitions must attempt to create bridges between opposing groups, as they play a key role in providing a space for "meeting together, acknowledging differences and sharing stories about their own lives, hearing the choices people have felt forced to take (in rivalry) and the choices people freely wish to take now (in openly meeting together)" (p. 20). By attending to the multiplicity and complexity of identity in order to understand the interplay of the multiple and interlocking oppressions that, according to Burack (2001), occurs within and between individuals and collectives, the forging of radical coalitions recognizes the multiplicity of identities and experiences amongst group members, provides a space where these differences are discussed, and develops a process of recognizing and redistributing privilege that one holds, a process that can occur at both the interpersonal and structural level (Bystydzienski & Schacht, 2001). A combination of the above processes allows recognition that each individual's identity is composed of multiple layers relating to a variety of social identities, each providing a particular lens through which to view the world.

Bystydzienski and Schacht (2001) emphasize the importance of coalitions as shared spaces for mutual understanding and empathy. In the context of Northern Ireland, coalition building could provide an opportunity for individuals to share their deeply personal traumas and struggles, and to unpack their intertwined religious, political and national identities in order to start breaking down the strict identity binaries between Protestants/unionists and Catholics/nationalists. In a place such as Northern Ireland where ethno-nationalist identities have deep roots and are strongly intertwined with a history of violence and distrust, enabling people to move away from their opposing riverbanks to come together in coalition will be challenging, but this process could provide one possible avenue to begin to break down the ethno-nationalist identity binary that has troubled Northern Ireland for centuries.

Relevance of the Literature Review

It is apparent from the literature that strict identity binaries exist in Northern Ireland, though there is conflict regarding how difference should be addressed. However, little current research has been done on the role of coalitions or grassroots movements in attending to the sectarian divide. It can be seen from the literature that radical coalition building may provide one way to break down strict identity binaries and work across the sectarian divide. Therefore, this research will look to understand the role of attending to difference in the context of a grassroots coalition. Such coalitions could provide an opportunity for individuals to share their deeply personal traumas and struggles, and to unpack their intertwined religious, political and national identities in order to start

breaking down the strict identity binaries between Protestants/unionists and Catholics/nationalists. This could lead to a "space between" that "bespeaks uninhibited or potential movement within the space between dualistic categories that substantiate opposing poles" (Borgerson & Rehn, as cited in Linstead & Brewis, 2004, p. 355). Rather than continuing to apply broad generalizations, people may begin to uncover the relationship between religious, national and political identities and slowly understand the complex situated identity of each individual coalition member.

Research Questions

The purpose of this research is to look at a grassroots coalition in Northern Ireland in order to understand how it is that coalition members in contested societies attend to difference and power dynamics. It will also examine how these processes may create tension between individuals, and the ways in which these tensions can be attended to in order to unmask hidden hierarchies and power struggles within coalitions. Specifically, it addresses the following research questions:

1) What is the role of attending to difference within coalitions in a contested society?

2) How does a coalition's approach to difference affect issues of bordering?

3) What is the impact of attending/not attending to difference and power dynamics within contested societies?

Chapter 3: Methodology

The purpose of this study is to critically analyze the experiences of members of a grassroots coalition in Northern Ireland in order to shed light on coalition-building processes in divided societies, and attend to the complexities that such an undertaking entails. In order to shed light on some of these tensions, I did a critical study of a pro-choice coalition. I will present participants' interpretation of working across difference within the coalition, along with my own analysis, grounded within my particular socio-historical location and guided by my own affiliations and biases. In this chapter, I will outline the methodological decisions that guided this study.

Methodology

This study is situated within a critical constructivist ontology, which understands that "reality is constructed; driven by power and power relations" (Paul, 2005, p. 47). As this study was looking to "critique existing social relations in order to transform them" (Strega, 2005, p. 208), it is also grounded in emancipatory theory. In stating that this study sought to unmask hierarchies and power struggles within the coalition, it was apparent that this research was a political act. Therefore, I sought to remain grounded in an anti-oppressive approach, as outlined by Potts and Brown (2005). This entailed remaining cognizant that research must work towards social justice in both its process and outcome, understanding that knowledge is socially constructed and political, and recognizing that the research process is addressing issues of power and relationships. As an anti-oppressive researcher, I aimed to be "critical of the

power systems and inequality structures that dominate and oppress people in societies" (Sarantakos, 2005, p. 51). I looked to understand the power dynamics within the coalition in order to "explain the social reality, criticize it and empower people to overthrow it" (p. 51). This critical component included an understanding of how power operates, the role of language in challenging/reinforcing dominant ideology and power relations, and the impact of "dominant ideological practices [on] our vision of reality" (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2000, p. 283).

However, throughout the research process, I struggled with the role of the researcher. I wanted to avoid what Lather (1991) refers to as the "non-dialectical, non-reciprocal perception of the role of the researcher…intent on demystifying the world for the dispossessed" (p. 59), and rather be a "not-knower" (Moosa-Mitha, 2005) who can come to understand the research participants through engaging in a process of critical self-reflection and "through the act of empathetic imagination" (p. 67). Lather (1991) notes that there is a role for the researcher within this, as "sole reliance on the participants' perceptions of their situation is misguided" (p. 64). The researchers role is to interpret the data in such a way that participants re-analyze and re-interpret their situation, and ideally, work to change it. As Strega (2005) states,

> critical social science not only acknowledges its value position, it takes the stance that some values are better than others, and makes an explicit commitment to social justice…It accepts that knowledge is power, and challenges researchers to think about whether they want to support or challenge existing power structures. (p. 207)

As this study is researching a progressive coalition that is challenging existing power structures while concurrently attending to power within the coalition, this

commitment to naming inequitable power relations was important to the study. Thus, in order to minimize the researcher as all-knowing, while allowing space for critical interpretation of the data that would be meaningful to the research participants, I implemented critical self-reflection into the research design (Lather, 2001). Interrogation of my own "politics of location" (herising, 2005) allowed me to continually challenge my preconceived biases throughout the research project. Through this process, I could commit to undertaking a critical study while minimizing the "arrogance that may accompany efforts to emancipate 'others'" (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2000, p. 282).

Politics of Location

The decision to conduct research in Northern Ireland raised numerous questions for me. Questions around my choice to study there haunted me for almost a year, and stalled me from beginning to work on writing or research. My search for justification centred around my own positionality as a dual citizen of both the Republic of Ireland and Canada; a first generation Canadian of parents who emigrated from Northern Ireland in 1968. Other concerns floated around the notion of picking up questions that surfaced from my work within the Edmonton activist community and moving them to another context.

From this space, I started deeply questioning what it meant to be going there, turning first to literature on insider/outsider research. Merriam et al. (2001) reminded me of the complex nature of insider/outsider status, which includes more than just ethnicity or nationality. This realization allowed me to reflect upon the way in which the multilayered nature of my identity impacted my research,

rather than prohibited me from doing it. Thus, rather than abandon the project, I engaged in a process of reflexivity. herising (2005) notes that “a central component of critical research practice is to integrate and challenge various fields of power, authority and privilege that are embodied and practised by researchers” (p. 133). In this section, I will attempt to unpack my own positionality as it relates to this research in order to make visible the frames of reference through which I interpreted the research.

Before undertaking this research process, I had not realized that I grew up with a very one-sided account of the situation in Northern Ireland. When visiting as a child, I attended the parades on the Twelfth of July, learned about King Billy, and only witnessed the Bogside from atop the city walls of Derry/Londonderry. Those elements of Northern Irish culture that were recognizable to me came from a Protestant perspective. And yet, I would never identity myself as a Protestant. However, while in Northern Ireland to conduct the research, I experienced first-hand the “sophisticated everyday skill of working out who’s who, and what’s what, on encountering strangers of unknown ethnic affiliation” (Jenkins, 2006, p. 399), as individuals within my social network referred to me as “Protestant” based on my family background, though I do not self-identify in this way. Throughout the research, I was acutely aware of how my upbringing framed me in a particular way, and also how research participants would see this particular subjectivity. As such, I carefully framed the interview questions in order that they would not be seen to be advocating for one particular ethno-nationalist community, and chose language that would not directly link me to one community or another (i.e. Derry

versus Londonderry) in order to present myself as a Canadian with family connections within the Protestant community, but no political or religious affiliation to either community.

Additionally, even though I am familiar with Northern Ireland culture and practices, I did not grow up within a context of violence. I remember driving behind tanks as they patrolled rural roads, seeing blockades in Derry/Londonderry and hearing about the bombings in Omagh, which I had driven through the day previously, but these instances are slight in comparison to the everyday lived reality of those who grew up in Northern Ireland during the Troubles. Violence has played a small role in my life, unlike many of the participants in this study. Therefore, the ways in which I provide suggestions to participants in Chapter Six is grounded in acknowledgement of this.

Furthermore, due to my work within various activist communities in Edmonton, I was familiar with the struggles and tensions faced by the communities within which I work in terms of working across difference, and as such had many biases in terms of what it means to work in coalition. It became increasingly important to resist the urge to quickly draw links and parallels between what I was witnessing in Northern Ireland and what I see happening in Edmonton. However, it was also important not to overlook the importance of these past activist experiences in framing the research topic and questions. It was due to my experiences with activism in Edmonton, and particularly with feminist activists, that I was drawn to theories that address the multiplicity of identities and interrelatedness of oppressions. Even before this research study came into being, I

was reading Mohanty (2006) and writing papers on radical coalition building (Burack, 2001; Bystydzienski & Schacht, 2001; Keating, 2005) in order to address how coalitions could become radical spaces capable of achieving progressive social change. It is through conversations with other feminist activists in my community that I was able to further conceptualize my response to organizing I was seeing in my community, and these too sparked the initial design of this research process. These experiences highlighted the importance of doing research that seeks to address and challenge power dynamics. Thus, I wanted to ensure as much as possible that the research I was conducting wouldn't establish or further entrench existing relations of domination. In order to reflect and analyze my role as an anti-oppressive researcher, I kept a journal throughout the research process, reflecting on both the lead-up to my visit to Northern Ireland, along with experiences in the field, posing questions that would continually allow me to check in with my own power and privilege as a researcher.

Finally, I must recognize my own position as a pro-choice activist who has been involved in organizing a pro-choice rally, as well as advocating this position with friends and colleagues. My familiarity with such campaigns served as a point of similarity, or an initial meeting ground, between the research participants and myself.

Group Selection and Profile

In choosing a site for this research, I was looking for a grassroots activist group that was active in Northern Ireland at the time of my visit (July 2009). My desire to find a grassroots coalition spurred from the fact that my research

questions emerged from my involvement in various activist communities in Edmonton, and a keen interest in understanding the ways in which such non-formal coalitions organize across difference. Therefore, I used purposive sampling, which involves "making a contact with a specific purpose in mind" (Wellington, 2000, p. 59).

Before leaving for Northern Ireland, I began searching the Internet for a suitable grassroots coalition; however, my search only uncovered organizations and formalized groups. Due to my lack of connections to grassroots organizing in Northern Ireland and my inability to find a suitable site online, I arrived in Northern Ireland without a group in place. During the first two weeks of my visit, I had informal conversations with individuals attending events at various activist hubs in Belfast, and was told several times that grassroots activist coalitions are difficult to find in Northern Ireland as they typically dismantle quickly, or are co-opted by larger, organizational groups and structures. Therefore, following two weeks of initial field research, I turned to social media to continue my search for a grassroots coalition. By typing "Alliance Northern Ireland" into the Facebook group search function, I immediately came across Alliance for Choice. I could see from the description of the group as "an activist-based group who campaign for abortion rights for women" (http://www.facebook.com/home.php?#/group.php?gid=23645570204&ref=ts) that it would most likely meet my criteria. This was confirmed when I contacted the group via email. At this point, I was invited into the group. The participants were willing and excited to participate in the research. Based on this, and due to

time constraints that prohibited me from continuing to search for another coalition, Alliance for Choice became a suitable and accessible group with which to conduct this research. I worked with the coalition for the remaining three weeks of my time in Northern Ireland.

Alliance for Choice Belfast.

Alliance for Choice (AfC) is an activist group that campaigns for abortion rights for women, and particularly for the extension of the 1967 Abortion Act to Northern Ireland. It is composed of two regional groups – Belfast and Derry. The two groups meet separately in their home communities, yet have a coordinating committee that provides lines of communication between the two groups regarding events, actions, and strategies for working together towards their common goal. This research focuses on the Belfast branch of Alliance for Choice, which emerged in the summer of 2008 in advance of the upcoming October 2008 vote in Westminster on an amendment that would extend the 1967 Abortion Act to Northern Ireland. Throughout this research, the Alliance for Choice Belfast group will be referred to as Alliance for Choice or AfC.

Since its beginnings in 2008, AfC has organized film screenings, book launches, public meetings, rallies, consciousness-raising stalls in downtown Belfast, petitions, and fundraisers. The group is nebulous in terms of membership. About 20-30 people make up the active group, with a different selection of 10-15 of those at each meeting. 80-100 people participated in the "40 Women" protest and could also be considered "members" to some degree, while the Facebook group has 376 members, which is more a representation of support for the

campaign versus actual participation in the group. Up until the end of November 2008, AfC Belfast met weekly or bi-weekly at the Belfast Unemployed Resource Centre. Following this, meetings occurred monthly, with a break during the summer of 2009.

Conducting the Research

I used three methods of data collection over a period of five weeks in Northern Ireland: field research, semi-structured interviews and document analysis.

Field research.

My first two weeks in Northern Ireland were dedicated to field research and non-formal interviews. Due to time constraints, and the fact that I was visiting at a time when the coalition was not having regular meetings, my observation did not include observing the group either at meetings or events. However, as an insider/outsider to Northern Ireland, it was imperative to understand the socio-historical context within which the coalition I would eventually choose to research was organizing. Furthermore, Sarantakos (2005) asserts that field research has the potential of exploring "the reasons behind social interaction, and more particularly of seeing through the eyes of, and from the perspective of, those living in the field" (p. 202), which would be challenging, if not impossible, without knowledge of the socio-historical context. Thus, prior to making contact with the coalition, I spent two weeks in various communities in Northern Ireland having informal conversations with family, friends, and community members, visiting museums and sites of historical significance, reading local and national newspapers, and

attending events such as the Twelfth Parade in order to expand upon my previous understanding of the socio-historical context, which was based on previous visits, existing literature, as well as the knowledge gained from growing up with parents who had emigrated from Northern Ireland.

Semi-structured interviews.

In order to develop a deeper understanding of coalition members' personal experience within the coalition and to "prompt things that we cannot observe" (Wellington, 2000, p. 71), I chose to conduct five interviews. The interviews were semi-structured in nature in order to allow participants to speak to elements of their experience that they deemed important and to challenge the interview questions, while simultaneously allowing me to probe for more detailed responses to themes that emerged from observation and from the interviews themselves.

I used snowball sampling to determine my sample. Wellington states that this form of sampling is useful when issues of access are at work. Thus, I used the initial contact I had made with my key informant to gain access to other members of the coalition. I then contacted potential participants by email, informing them of the nature of the study, the data collection process, time commitment, ethics and anonymity, and potential uses for the research (see Appendix A). I arranged interview times and locations that were suitable to each participant. Two of the interviews took place in cafés in downtown Belfast, while the remaining three took place in the Student Union Building at Queen's University Belfast.

The interviews were the first time that I had met each of the participants, so I began each with some small talk. Before starting the recorder, I had the

participants read and sign the consent form (see Appendix B), and let each participant know that I would email them a copy of the initial transcription for feedback and insights. The interviews lasted from 45 minutes to one hour.

In advance of the interviews, I prepared a question guide (see Appendix C) that consisted of thirteen major questions categorized under four themes. I allowed the interview guide to initiate my questions and guide the overall discussion in order that each participant would speak to similar themes that were relevant to the overall research questions. However, I also took note of key phrases or topics brought up by the participants and used their responses to guide further conversation. In this manner, each of the interviews covered the same general topics, but had unique elements. At the end of each interview, I asked if participants had anything else they would like to add in order to “provide an opportunity for the interviewee to have the final say” (Patton, 2002, p. 379). When the interview ended, I stopped the recorder.

Following each interview, I conducted a post-interview reflection (see Appendix D), reflecting on the environment, participants’ reactions to questions, the rapport, my interview skills, and the overall “success” of the interview in finding out what I wanted to know (Patton, 2002). This allowed me to continually reflect on the interview process as it was occurring, adapt following interviews based on my reflections, and begin noticing emergent themes.

The interviews were recorded using audio equipment, and transcribed verbatim. In order to attempt to implement elements of reciprocity into the research design, these transcriptions were sent to the participants for feedback,

insights and clarification. Two participants asked for slight changes to the transcript, but none of the participants chose to expand upon the original transcriptions.

Document analysis.

Finally, I did document analysis in order to address the research questions and understand the ways in which the coalition presented itself to the public. The document sample included photos, form letters to be used in letter-writing campaigns, petitions, meeting advertisements, and press releases. In total, I reviewed seventeen documents. I gained access to the documents through my key informant, who provided a CD of organizational literature.

Data analysis.

Wellington reminds us that data analysis is not a separate, distinct stage that occurs at the end of the research process. Rather, "it must begin early, in order to influence emerging research design and future data collection" (p. 134). I employed this iterative approach to my data analysis. In analyzing the data, I found Wellington's (2000) six stages of data analysis particularly useful. The first stage, immersion within the data, occurred congruently with the interviewing process. In this stage, I took notes on the interview guide and did post-interview reflections in order to reflect upon emergent themes and bring this emerging analysis to the following interviews. Next, I transcribed each interview verbatim and noted key themes in the document margins. I reviewed the transcriptions and searched for less obvious themes that I may have missed in earlier read-throughs. Following this, I sent transcriptions to participants for them to check. While

waiting for the transcripts to be returned, I moved into the second stage, reflection. I mulled over contradictions I was seeing between the emergent themes and the literature, changed some themes, added others, and played with the data. It would have been easy to use the categories that came out of the interview process and from the first reading of the transcriptions. However, Wellington (2000) reminds us that themes are useful for categorizing data, but must remain tentative and flexible. I kept this in mind throughout the analysis process, constantly questioning the bias or meaning behind my attachment to certain themes, or my initial unwillingness to accept others as they emerged.

Upon return of all five transcripts, I re-immersed myself in the data, and began applying the themes to the transcriptions and documents. This began the third stage, which Wellington refers to as taking apart/analyzing the data. I printed out all of the transcriptions and highlighted chunks of data based on my emergent themes. These chunks were then pasted into new documents according to the themes, which were continually changed, combined and adapted. While some of the final themes were *a priori*, particularly in terms of understandings of difference within the coalition, others were *a posteriori*, emerging from the data through the data collection and analysis process. However, all themes were interrogated following the data collection period in order to ensure that they were representative of the participants' responses. In stage four, recombining/synthesizing data, I began looking for "contrasts, paradoxes, and irregularities (Wellington, 2000, p. 136). Some of my original themes were taken out, amalgamated, substituted, while new themes were added.

In my experience, the data analysis process was not linear, in that immersion in the data occurred throughout the data analysis stage. Similarly, stage five, relating and locating your data, also occurred throughout. In this stage, the researcher reflects on their themes in comparison to the existing literature. As I was ultimately guided by my theoretical grounding in the literature, I found it challenging, if not impossible, to not "hear" the literature in my head throughout the research process.

Finally, in stage six, I presented the qualitative data. At this point, I struggled with how much, or how often, I needed to quote participants in order to illustrate a point. I found myself wanting to present everything that was said on a particular theme, but recognized early on in the writing process that this would prove to be repetitive, if not onerous. Woods (as cited in Wellington, 2000) states, "I always like to demonstrate the breadth of support for a point and its nature, while including somewhere a lengthier statement if one of quality exists" (p. 140). I kept this in mind as I proceeded with writing up the data presented in Chapter Four.

Study Trustworthiness

As this research is emancipatory in its approach, it was necessary to have processes in place that would ensure usefulness to the research participants. Thus, I turned to Lather (1991) and Strega (2005) for an alternative approach to traditional validity measures. Lather (1991) recommends that, in place of internal validity, we use the concepts of triangulation, construct validity, face validity and catalytic validity in order to minimize researcher bias.

Briefly, triangulation refers to a process of "seek(ing) counter patterns as well as convergence" (p. 67). It includes using "multiple data sources, methods, and theoretical schemes," which in this research was done by using methods of field research, interviews and document analysis in the data collection and analysis process (p. 66).

Construct validity, or what Strega (2005) refers to as reflexivity, involves a critical, self-reflexive process, with the researcher being conscious of the ways in which data interplays with both the theory and the researcher's own preconceived notions/categories. Thus, I underwent an intense process of interrogating my own positionality in the research, as well as questioning my motives for doing this study.

Third, face validity, involves providing participants with opportunities to actively engage with the research process in order to ensure that participants are able to recognize themselves within the study (Lather, 1991). As this research is critical in nature, I was uncomfortable with writing a report that would challenge, or potentially marginalize, a coalition that was working with much courage and strength across the sectarian divide in order to achieve a goal about which members of the coalition were passionate. Therefore, I attempted to implement elements of face validity into the research design. This included allowing participants to revise their interviews upon transcription. By opening up this space, I hoped that participants would choose to engage in the research process. However, only two participants offered slight changes to the original document. At this point, it became clear that, while participants were willing to engage in the

interview process, they did not desire to become co-creators in the research. However, by attempting to implement elements of face validity into the research design, and reflecting upon participants' limited engagement with the analysis process, I was able to be critical while remaining conscious of the potential impacts of this study on the research participants themselves.

Finally, my decision to engage in critical research was also due to an understanding of catalytic validity, or the emancipatory element of the research that "re-orients, focuses and energizes participants toward knowing reality in order to transform it" (p. 68). In addition, I reminded myself of the "political implications and usefulness of what we produce for progressive, anti-oppressive politics and marginalized communities" (p. 228), Therefore, the purpose of this study was not to put down, diminish, or lessen the importance of Alliance for Choice and its actions. Rather, while this research was primarily concerned with the internal dynamics, or struggles, of the coalition, it understands that research itself is a political process. By failing to ask critical questions, I would be overlooking or devaluing key learnings that could be useful for future social movement organizing.

Ethical Considerations

This study was governed by the University of Alberta's regulations for conducting ethical research with human participants. Ethics approval for the research was gained through the Faculties of Education, Extension, Augustana and Campus Saint-Jean Research Ethics Board (EEASJ REB) prior to any contact with the respondents. As mentioned previously, I contacted potential participants

via email and included an introductory letter (see Appendix A), which outlined their rights as a participant.

I obtained individual permission to interview each participant, and had all participants sign a consent form (see Appendix B) at the start of the interview. I also gave them the opportunity to withdraw from the study on four occasions: at the time of recruitment, prior to commencement of the interview, after completing the interview, and after they reviewed the transcribed interviews.

Maintaining confidentiality was challenging as the core membership of the coalition is quite small, and participants would be able to determine identities according to particular demographic information. Pseudonyms were used to refer to participants throughout the thesis. However, when presenting data on ethno-nationalist identities, pseudonyms were held back so that this data cannot be linked to other data presented by individual participants. In order to ensure confidentiality of participants as much as possible, personal identifiers were removed upon transcribing the interviews. Furthermore, participants were able to review the interviews and remove/change any information that they felt compromised their identity.

I informed participants that all data, both written and recorded, would be stored in a locked filing cabinet for five years, that all computer files would be encrypted and protected by a password, that, after five years, all data would be shredded and encrypted files would be deleted, and that only I would have access to the data. I also let participants know that the data collected would be used in the writing of a thesis and in subsequent journal articles.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I presented an overview of the complexities of undertaking a critical study of a grassroots coalition in Northern Ireland. Following a summary of critical research, I interrogated my own positionality as a researcher with multiple, overlapping identities, and questioned the ways in which these identities interplayed with the research being done. From here, I outlined the methods used in this research, specifically field research, semi-structured interviews and document analysis, and provided reasoning for these choices. I was able to develop study trustworthiness by attending to the guidelines of Lather (1991) and Strega (2005). By keeping their recommendations of triangulation, construct validity, face validity and catalytic validity at the forefront, along with other ethical considerations, I was able to engage in a critical research process while being respectful of the courageous work done by members of Alliance for Choice.

Chapter 4: Findings

This chapter presents the rich data that I collected through interviews and document analysis. Through analysis, I came to two major themes: conflict and commonality, and understandings of difference, which were made up of multiple sub-themes. What became apparent throughout the data analysis process was that a third theme, sectarianism, emerged as an undercurrent that weaved its way through the other themes and sub-themes. Therefore, the ways in which participants discussed sectarianism will appear throughout the first two themes, while the implications of it as a common thread throughout the themes will be discussed in more detail at the end of the chapter.

Within coalitions, there are often tensions between striving for unity while being open to difference, searching for commonality while attending to conflict. The two initial themes will allow me to flesh out the coalition's understandings of these tensions in order to ask how it is that feminist coalitions in Northern Ireland can build effective, inclusive cross-community coalitions.

Conflict and Commonality

In this section, I will outline the ways in which participants understood unity within the coalition. Then I will go on to present the ways in which this foundational unity had implications in terms of the ways in which the coalition negotiated conflict and tensions, particularly around sectarian politics and abortion.

Unity.

Each participant made clear the importance of unity within the coalition. For Rosa, unity between coalition members was unquestioned: *"We were all on the same path in terms of why we were doing it and what we wanted to achieve"* (Interview). The same was true for Jamie, who asserted, *"what unites us in the room is the '67 act, right, so that's it"* (Interview), while Taylor hinted at the unusual nature of this unity within Northern Irish society: *"...the women's movement has also been split along sectarian lines in the same way as many other movements have here, and I think this has been quite a uniting issue, in a bizarre way"* (Interview). Molly highlighted reasons for this unity, particularly within a divided society:

> *I think* [there are no issues around Northern Irish identities] *because everybody's united on the issue. There's so much resistance to it from both sides. If you had a situation, say, for example, where all of the nationalist parties like SDLP and Sinn Féin were coming out and saying, "Yeah, you know, we totally think that this should be blah, blah, blah" then you'd probably see more of an identity issue, but because it's all the four main parties that are together objecting to this, to this law coming into Northern Ireland, I think that it's meant that resistance is happening from everywhere*. (Interview)

Though she recognizes that the united nature of all of the political parties on this issue allows for people to unite across sectarian lines around the issue of abortion rights, she also sees the tensions within this, in terms of "*pushing for this Westminster-central approach which would kind of, I don't know, wouldn't necessarily go alongside, sit comfortably, with the Irish national identity in Northern Ireland, because, you know, like seeking for like United Ireland"* (Interview).

While being cognizant of these tensions, Molly, like other participants, appreciates that it is the united goal of the coalition/campaign that enables members to work within these complexities:

> *I mean when we were set up, we were set up with a particular mission. Our mission was, is to campaign for the 1967 Act in Northern Ireland. That's our one thing that we have, and to be very political about how we do it…*(Interview)

Taylor draws attention to the tensions that exist between ethno-national communities in Northern Ireland, but uses the "human rights" element of the campaign to underscore how women from across the sectarian divide are able to unite on this issue:

> *There was, I mean, there was a discussion around whether we need…we were going to base part of the campaign on that the right to choose was an issue around Northern Ireland being part of the UK and that if other women in the UK have access to this right, then why shouldn't we. And the discussion was around whether that would alienate certain people, because it would be perceived to be based on being part of the union agenda, or whether it would actually encourage people to support the campaign. So it was a discussion around that. And one of the things was that, yes, it would be mentioned in the literature, you know, that women here don't have the same rights as elsewhere, but it wouldn't necessarily be highlighted as one of the main issues, because actually women should have that right whatever country or jurisdiction they live in and whatever their political opinion*. (Interview)

The coalition understands that working-class women are disproportionately affected by not having legal access to abortion; however, underlying this is an understanding that *"the rights issue is exactly the same, because actually neither of those women* [working class nor middle-class] *have the right to choose*" (Interview).

This framing of the goal as foundational was seen as a way to negotiate conflict when it arose. Taylor highlighted this when discussing ways in which the group attends to sectarian politics:

> *Like I said, I think people are fairly skilled and experienced and know why they're involved, and they're not involved to discuss sectarian politics, you know. It would be completely detrimental to everybody. So I think people are quite clear about the commitments to why they're there, you know, people come voluntarily and, like I said, I think the overriding issue provides that foundation where people will not challenge each other in that way because it's unnecessary, and it's one of our strengths of the group and people know that. You know, so making it an issue when actually it's one of our strengths*. (Interview)

Rosa also spoke of this foundation as a way to steer clear of conflict:

> *There were never any major disputes. It was more people thought an action was going to get the right publicity or not, so it wasn't, I suppose, why were doing, we were all on the same path in terms of why we were doing it and what we wanted to achieve*. (Interview)

Unity not only served as a way of limiting or negotiating conflict, it also served to limit what was acceptable discussion within meetings. When discussing an issue that arose at a public meeting where the words of one of the guest speakers around abortion and fetal abnormality offended a coalition member, Siobhan stated,

> *…basically people were all arguing that we might all have different opinions about the kind of nuts and bolts of how legislation should work, and we might all have slightly different personal moral position on cases where things should be legal or shouldn't be legal, or how decisions should be made, but the central fact was that the only common belief of members of Alliance for Choice was that the Abortion Act should be extended here, and that was it. Apart from that, everything else could be totally different. And one woman used the example of, "Yes, you know, we're from much," she didn't say we were from different backgrounds, but she said, "You know, we all have different political beliefs and I might, you know, like," she said, "When I hear people say the North instead of Northern Ireland, you know that, we might all have different words for things or whatever, but we have this one thing in common, which is just*

> *extending the 1967 Abortion Act here," so I think there was general sense that everything else was just off the table kind of thing. That we were just coming together for that one goal*. (Interview)

As can be seen from this quote, the united goal of the Alliance for Choice campaign served to limit what were acceptable topics for discussion and debate within the coalition. This was particularly true in terms of sectarianism and abortion. While Siobhan commented on avoidance of sectarian politics, Rosa stated, *"we weren't going to get into debate at what stage does a fetus become a baby, for instance. We weren't getting into that debate at all"* (Interview). While there was recognition that these complexities, ambiguities and tensions existed, discussions around these issues were not to be brought into the coalition. For example, Jamie reinforced that the coalition wasn't the place to discuss these tensions.

> *You see, everybody starts on the same thing. We're…when tension arises, we just reassert what we're for, you know, so there was some discussion about a meeting where we invited a speaker who's an excellent campaigner, Wendy Savage, and you know, she's in the public domain. And she came over, and the way she pitched the question about a women's right to choose in terms of disability was taken up by an individual in a way that was quite…that person took exception to it, right. And so it created a bit of discussion, but the way it was dealt with, it was to say, "Look, what do we all have in co…you know, what are we all here for, and what we're all here for is a women's right to choose in terms of the '67 Abortion Act. Anything beyond that is open for discussion and debate and there's grey areas, so we have to acknowledge that your position on it, or my position on it, might be different, you know, but it…what unites us is the fact that we want the '67 Abortion Act extended to Norther…If that individual's offended you, ok, you know, take that up in a discussion or a letter or whatever. But the core thing is what unites, and it's simple, it's the extension of the '67 Abortion Act, so…* (Interview)
>
> *…it's the approach to say, "Look, whatever you say about the national question, whatever you say about this, that and the other,"…whatever campaign you're in, you've gotta, you've gotta really be narrow to start of with and say, "Look, what are the demands of this campaign that we can*

> *unify on? All other question we can debate in the bar or the café afterwards, but this is what we're going to unify around and we're going to campaign for, and I think, if that's the general approach, then you can start, you won't eradicate it, but you can minimize any tension or negativity in the campaign*. (Interview)

Siobhan highlighted how this avoidance of speaking about sectarian politics was not unusual to the coalition, but rather evident in Northern Irish society in general, which highlights the complex nature of this issue and the way in which people in Northern Ireland attend to it. She describes a situation in which she had to explain the societal norms to a friend from another country:

> *I had to in the end explain to him that you can't just go into a group of friends and start asking them all what they think about the constitutional question…So I had to explain in the end to basically think of it as something indecent, that if you wouldn't talk about something really obscene in that company, just don't talk about religion or politics really in that sense. So you can with like, close friends one-on-one, but you wouldn't just sort of arrive into a gathering and start making people reveal themselves. So in the group it would, like I only ever once heard anything remotely linked to it mentioned, which came up as a result of something else*. (Interview)

This quote not only highlights how this topic is avoided, but also that this is often done to avoid conflict.

A final element of unity was the coalition's approach to decision-making, which favoured a consensus-based approach. Rosa mentioned that the group allowed for everyone's perspective to be heard, and then, *"generally speaking, once you heard all sides of the argument we were able to reach a consensus on things.* (Interview), while Siobhan emphasized that the unstructured nature of the meetings meant that decisions weren't made by a "*hands in the air vote on things"* (Interview), but rather by consensus. Because they were *"all kind of slightly responsible for* [decisions and actions]*,"* (Interview) not only of the

Belfast group, but of the Derry group as well due to sharing a name, this consensus model was valued by the coalition.

This section demonstrates the attention paid to, and importance of, unity within the coalition. Not only did this unity serve to bring together people from across the sectarian divide, it also served as a control mechanism, determining acceptable conversation and topics for debate. Participants also highlighted the ways in which remembering what had brought them together in the first place acted as a means of avoiding conflict and working through the complexities of seeking the extension of a British law into the contested province of Northern Ireland.

Conflict.

While the previous section highlighted the ways in which members of Alliance for Choice drew upon the notion of their united goal in order to avoid or negotiate conflict, conflict was also discussed in other ways.

Several participants noted that conflict within the group was unavoidable. When referring to the conflict that arose around fetal abnormality, Taylor notes that conflict "*happens, you know…it's not unusual to this group"* (Interview). Jamie echoed these sentiments:

> *And that doesn't mean to say there wouldn't be problems that arise from time to time, and a clash of personalities, and given, you know, especially when people are involved in so many campaigns and they want to make a shortcut to getting this somewhere, but, you know, you're gonna get tensions arise at some stage. It's how you sort those out is the thing.* (Interview)

This is interesting when juxtaposed with previous comments of how the united goal served to limit, or avoid conflict within the group.

Taylor and Rosa also discussed conflict in terms of it distracting the group away from its real aims. Again, in reference to the conflict around fetal abnormality, Rosa stated,

> *… our view is this individual made a very emotive response to a difficult situation and in doing so, also, I suppose, slandered, made a number of serious allegations about members of the group, so it was very disruptive to the group as a whole. It drained a lot of our energy kinda dealing with it because we wanted to afford this individual every opportunity to have his voice heard…* (Interview)

Rosa also referred to another conflict that arose around campaign strategies, and stated,

> *I remember sitting there thinking, and you know, if our enemies could see us they'd be laughing at us cause we should not, we should not be engaging, or wasting our energy, in this level of debate*. (Interview)

Conflict was seen to draw members away from the real aims of the meetings in particular, as well as the overall campaign goals:

> *And it is hard when* [tensions] *come up and you go, "God, I'm here voluntarily, do I really want to be spending my Tuesday nights listening to us getting pulled into all of these things that isn't why we're here? Do you know? So there is some of that to, and I'm sure, I have no doubt we probably put off some people who attended meetings and went, "Oh my god, what is this about?"* (Interview)

> *I can't remember what the meeting, we just had one individual who was a very strong character and had a lot of experience, but sometimes didn't like other people being in control. So I just remember being at one of the early meetings and literally it descended into being quite bitchy, and I remember sitting there thinking, we're all here working towards the same thing*. (Interview)

Though some participants saw conflict as an unavoidable distraction that took energy away from the campaign, participants also recognized that conflict had consequences. All but one of the participants, Molly, referred to the conflict that occurred with one coalition member around fetal abnormality at some point

in their interview, with the remaining four dedicating substantial time during the interview to outlining the context and situation surrounding the incident. Rosa and Taylor in particular recognized that a member of the group had been hurt by the experience, and was no longer participating as actively in the group. Rosa stated, *"so the person's still a member of the group, but they haven't attended anymore meetings so that was one, I suppose, one loss in the group"* (Interview), while Taylor emphasized that this member is *"kind of on the outskirts more…"* (Interview).

Interesting to note is that though Molly referred to the public meeting that sparked this incident, she does not make reference to the incident. When responding to questions around issues over difference and identity, Molly stated,

> *I mean, tensions, not on the grounds of identity. I mean I can't think even vaguely where there's been an identity issue even raised or, I mean…we're currently trying to get our banner made by these nuns in Derry because they do banners and there's no problem with these Derry nuns doing our banners because they have links, they do it cheap and they don't mind because it's business for them and so we haven't had any issues. I mean, certainly it's something we're quite open about as well, like we talk about the difference between this community and that community and how to interact with them and stuff, but it's not…* (Interview)

The last part of the comment may appear to show that the group does in fact discuss issues of sectarianism, which would go counter to previous statements around the way in which the group avoided these discussions. However, when this statement is looked at within the context of other statements made by both Molly and other participants, it becomes clear that, though they were aware of framing the campaign in terms of larger societal divides that exist in Northern Ireland,

coalition members did not discuss sectarian issues in terms of how they impacted individual group members. This will be discussed in more detail later.

Understandings of Difference / Borders and Boundaries

The ways in which coalition members spoke about members of the coalition, as well as those outside of the coalition, have implications in terms of constructing borders and boundaries. While the implications of this bordering will be taken up in Chapter Five, this section will simply present the ways in which coalition members talked about their own members, as well as those outside of the coalition.

Implications of sisterhood and class.

The Alliance for Choice campaign was framed as an issue of women's rights and equality, with *"Our bodies! Our lives! Our right to decide!"* (Organizational Document) as the main campaign slogan. This issue of equality was both between men and women, and between women in Northern Ireland and women in the United Kingdom. Members argued that *"there will never be equality as long as women here are denied the right to govern what happens to their own bodies and their own lives over four decades after their sisters in England, Scotland and Wales…"* (Organizational Document).

Participants had an essentialized understanding of "women" that often glossed over racial or socio-economic realities. For example, abortion was seen as a reality that could possibly affect all women in Northern Ireland:

> *Female participants at tomorrow's event will all be wearing t-shirts with the slogan "40 women a week – it could be me." Cynthia of Alliance of Choice group says, "the purpose of the slogan is to highlight the fact that abortion is a reality of life for the female population here. It could be your*

> *mother, sister, workmate, the woman who serves you in the canteen, the quiet girl who sat beside you in school. It could be me. It could be you. There is nothing to distinguish women who have had abortions from women who haven't. It could be literally any woman at all that you know."* (Organizational Document)

Further in line with this mode of understanding women's oppression, discussions around gender highlighted the commonality in women's experience:

> *Well things like the, you know, the women from loyalist communities and women from republican communities deal with the same shit most of the time, and that shit usually comes from the same sources, do you know, so…But, and I think the women's movement has been very good at recognizing some of those commonalities based on poverty, based on wanting to raise your kids, based on all those other issues that come with living in a conflictual society where you're the class that is expected to maintain that conflict and pay the price for it*. (Interview)

This conceptualization of women's rights, or women's struggles, aligns with traditional identity politics, in which essentialized identity categories are used to determine oppressor/oppressed relations. Furthermore, it understands all women as having a similar experience due solely to being women.

However, while participants broadly applied the category of "women" to describe those to whom the campaign was relevant, they did recognize during the interviews that the inaccessibility of legal abortions was especially meaningful and relevant to working-class women, particularly in that

> *if you have to borrow two grand to go to England for a termination, it's a very different prospect to if you're upper-class and can pay somebody here to do it for you, quietly, cause mommy knows or daddy knows somebody. It's completely different*. (Interview)

Molly commented on the ways in which lack of access to abortions has greater impacts on working-class women who *"just can't afford to just pay or put it on their credit card or just go"* (Interview).

While the campaign was about the rights of all women to choose,

> *the campaign recognizes the nuances within that and how, for some women, it's far more difficult. And for some women it's much, for some women it's much more hidden than it is for others, so all those issues come into it. So people, I mean people are fairly upfront about the class issue.* (Interview)

However, in organizational documents, including press releases, posters, flyers, form letters and petitions, economic implications of needing or having an abortion were only mentioned twice. In a form letter, the implications of unwanted pregnancies on women with a low-income were mentioned, in stating that it *"can leave them in a desperate situation"* (Organizational Document). The other mention of economic implications was in an outreach letter, which highlighted that*"the fact that women from here have to pay for the procedure means that very many women are left in debt and poverty for years following an abortion"* (Organizational Document). However, neither of these mentioned pre-existing economic realities, rather focusing on the subsequent implications of being forced to travel and pay for an abortion. Other than the two previous examples, women continued to be conceptualized as a unitary body made up of similar experiences, and whom should seek the right to have responsibility over their actions and choices, particularly in regards to obtaining an abortion.

Ethno-nationalist divides.

When referring to ethno-nationalist identities, participants used a classificatory, binary framework for outlining the differences between coalition members, and also between individuals within Northern Ireland. As is common in bordering/identifying processes in Northern Ireland, ethno-nationalist identities

were fluid with religious identities. The participants referred to several subjectivities: nationalist, coming from a DUP family background, republican, having an Irish national identity, loyalist, unionist, Catholic and Protestant. Group members felt that there was a diverse representation of these identities within the coalition. When asked if she thought there were any missing experiences or perspectives in the group, participants stated:

> *I don't think so. I mean, cause I think you had people from all, I mean even think of a political background. You had people there from a very strong unionist perspective, you had people there from republican nationalist perspective, you had people there who were from a socialist background, you had people there from a communist background, so I don't think there were any, you had people there also who'd been brought up in very strong religious households…* (Interview)

> *There's also politically quite a difference in the people who are there. It's not talked about in the meetings, but I think…people are sophisticated in the way that they deal with differences politically.* (Interview)

Difference in ethno-nationalist identities was not discussed by coalition members, and was seen not to be an issue within the group.

> *Well, we haven't really had an issue with it with us. I mean certainly we have people from different community backgrounds in Northern Ireland, but I mean certainly there is, in terms of language, it's quite funny, but nothing that's ever been an issue. You might get somebody writing about the North of Ireland and somebody else corrected them "Northern Ireland" would be one of the identity issues*. (Interview)

> *I think people are fairly skilled and experienced and know why they're involved, and they're not involved to discuss sectarian politics, you know. It would be completely detrimental to everybody*. (Interview)

The preceding comment in particular relates back to earlier discussions around unity as foundational in terms of determining discussions and avoiding conflict.

However, even though ethno-nationalist tensions were labeled as a non-issue, participants were cognizant of the different identities of coalition members

and would register them: "*I mean, I could probably guess at the affiliation just on the basis of name, blah, blah, blah"* (Interview).

> *…although that would never really be something that was mentioned, it would just be something, I'm sure, you know, everyone kind of register it in the back of their heads*. (Interview)

> *You could reflect and think, well, "Who's a Catholic, who's a Protestant," all that type of stuff. And you're aware of the differences in language people use based on their social background or religious background, and you're aware of that…* (Interview)

These quotes highlight the avoidance of this issue, as, after being together for almost two years, coalition members still have to guess at the ethno-nationalist identities of other coalition members. This ability to identify people according to ethno-nationalist categories was in part due to the sophisticated way in which people in Northern Ireland negotiate discussions around ethno-nationalist differences. It appears that coalition members chose not to challenge this understood societal norm.

Though participants do not attend to these differences within the coalition, they were cognizant that the ethno-nationalist divide has significant meaning within Northern Ireland, and built their campaign accordingly. They understand that "j*ust because people in NI vote along confessional lines does not mean they live their lives according to the edicts of the religions concerned"* (Organizational Document). Though the coalition members work to avoid discussions of how ethno-nationalist tensions operate in their personal lives, they are open to having these discussions in terms of how the campaign will be taken up by individuals within Northern Ireland, and strategize about employing different tactics when

engaging with community members depending on their ethno-nationalist affiliation:

> *So whenever you're talking about this issue to like the DUP, you're saying, "Well why aren't you, why are you campaigning on the one hand to have this wonderful United Kingdom and on the other hand saying we don't need your laws over here" so it's this dichotomy, whereas with the nationalist vote, you're kind of trying to find a different tact, you know, that wouldn't have any sway. They're like, "Phew, they don't have it in the South so we don't need it here kind of thing."* (Interview)

Nonetheless, while group members spoke of the ethno-nationalist divide within Northern Ireland using a classificatory, binary framework for identifying people from different communities, the way in which they referred to their own identities shows that they understood these identities to be more porous and flexible. One participant referred to giving *"confusing symbols"* (Interview) due to her mixed background, which wouldn't allow people to easily place her into the binary system, while another, who is not from Northern Ireland, highlights her *"feminist/socialist background"* (Interview). A third participant also does not fit into the traditional binary system, having "converted" from Catholicism to atheism, while the fourth also highlights changes to her identity:

> *I mean, in terms of how I self-identify, I was raised within the Catholic education system but I'm non-practicing, actually in the process of excommunicating myself from the group, you know, so I don't self-identify that way, but I would self-identify in terms of being Irish rather than as a nationality British. But in terms of religion, I don't identify with Northern Ireland. So, I'm kind of outside that box, And I think for a lot of people who are involved in the pro-choice movement, they're not very actively involved in their church because they don't really go together. Not so much*. (Interview)

Thus, while they speak of the classificatory, binary system in Northern Ireland, participants see flexibility and multiplicity within their own identities and, accordingly, do not fit themselves into strict identity binaries.

Experience and background.

What became interesting when asking participants about difference or diversity that existed within the coalition was the way in which they outlined three types of backgrounds - professional background, activist/community development background, ethno-nationalist background – and attached value to these backgrounds. In addition, the networks that came along with some of these backgrounds and experiences were also highly valued by participants.

In terms of professional backgrounds, a number of participants commented on the wide variety of professional experiences in the group, from those with an understanding of legal issues and intricacies of the UN, to postgraduate Queen's students. These professional backgrounds *"helped in being able to articulate in letters or in emails or in meetings, because that really helped to pin down the way that we as a group were going to deal with things"* (Interview).

In addition, all participants commented on the wide range of activist/community development backgrounds within the group, with some *"members of the group whose work is very much based in this kind of stuff"* (Interview). This included members who worked in, or were involved with the women's rights sector, student union organizing, and anti-capitalist organizing, or who came from a *"legal/human rights background. There were women there who*

had spent years in the trade union movement" (Interview), others *"have been involved in quite a variety of campaigns around justice and discrimination…and then you'll have other people whose focus is very much around women's rights issues"* (Interview). There were "*professionally people who are quite different…and are obviously incredibly well-skilled and educated"* and those "*who come from much more of an activist, community development background* (Interview).

With these backgrounds and experiences came networks, which were seen as highly useful for the campaign:

> *Because a few people in the group are quite involved with their unions, so they had connections already like the women's officers and things like that, and the unions had a pro-choice stance and we had actually campaigned for money off them, so I mean…it was very, very welcomed because we had nothing*. (Interview)

Rosa also commented on the high value placed on individual networks: "*I think very much being involved in the group was you were bringing your own experience and also those contacts that you had, that networking idea was very important, you know*" (Interview).

Furthermore, several participants commented that it was due to people's professional or activist experience that the coalition was able to smoothly negotiate conflict that arose. Roles were often assigned in the group based on this experience, particularly in terms of the role of treasurer:

> *I think, there was a woman who was the treasurer…I imagine that's because she knows about that kind of stuff and they needed someone who actually knew about it, and so she was always taking care of the money, as far as I remember*. (Interview)

A third way in which participants referred to experiences and backgrounds was through discussing the consequences of coming from a particular ethno-nationalist background in terms of understanding social movement history. Taylor stated,

> *traditionally here, human rights issues have been perceived to belong to the nationalist community. Now I don't believe that's true, but that has been the image portrayed*. (Interview)

Taylor mentions that the history of the civil rights movement has been *"taken by one community and not the other"* (Interview) even though, initially at least, the civil rights movement was made up of both Protestants and Catholics. However, this has had consequences in terms of which communities have an understanding of social movements and campaign politics,

> *…because in Northern Ireland you've had it, you know, obviously from the republican tradition and a left tradition, you've had people who've campaigned on all sorts of issues, and it hasn't been the same for people from a Protestant background, right*. (Interview)

Based on personal experiences and networks, Taylor found it easy to enter into the coalition:

> *So I came through that, was involved in student union stuff. I work in the community and voluntary sector, so I would have that background. On a personal level and a professional level. So I have the connections in both ways, I suppose. And I've worked in various organizations and different areas in Northern Ireland so I have a fairly wide-spread, and it, I'm kind of a bit of a jack of all trades and not of any, you know, cause I've been involved, but I don't know none of them very well, do you know that kind of…?* (Interview)

Taylor emphasizes that *"coming in cold would probably be very difficult. To the background, and the whole…and there is that kind of political community here on that level"* (Interview).

One manifestation of this differing history between the communities is that people use different language based on their ethno-nationalist upbringing. Within Northern Ireland, language is highly political, with "North of Ireland" connoting a different political perspective than "Northern Ireland." Jamie mentioned another example:

> *In Belfast or in Northern Ireland, people would use the term "Derry" and "Londonderry." Right, now Derry is obviously the one that republicans and left-wingers would use, and people come from a Protestant background, or who are not that political on the national question would use the word "Londonderry," which can be seen as offensive to certain people, right. But the fact that they feel comfortable to use it, and nobody's jumping down their throat and saying, "Listen, it's Derry. You use that…you know, you're offending me."* (Interview)

What is interesting about this statement is that it indirectly presents Jamie's perspective on the national question, while also implying which term is "acceptable" by the coalition, even though both terms are allowed. This statement clearly places the language of those from a left-wing, republican background in the centre, while marginalizing other language codes. It also implies that left-wingers come from a republican background. Another statement demonstrates Jamie's desire that coalition members will eventually assimilate into a particular way of speaking:

> *People have come from quite religious backgrounds particularly from a Protestant background, and it's wonderful to see that, their, you know, as they're speaking you just know they've been on a journey. They've gone from somewhere to somewhere very rapidly, and it's good to see, you know*. (Interview)

Participants who were not raised within a community of social activism are expected to shift towards more left-wing, acceptable language choices. However,

Jamie sees it differently, viewing this as a strength of the campaign, in that it is open to working with those from across the sectarian divide:

> *And when you get a campaign where you have people who haven't had that history saying things, and they don't say it in a polished, left-wing sense, it's really refreshing. It's really normal, ordinary people's language, do you know what I mean? Not corrected and all this type of stuff. And it's wonderful cause it shows the breadth of the campaign. You're reaching into parts that the traditional campaigns don't reach into, you know, so…* (Interview)

However, while the coalition accepts the use of different language codes, it still appears to centre those from a left-wing, republican, socialist background.

Construction of group identity.

While participants were able to recognize the differences that existed within the group, there was a strong sense of needing to be seen in a particular way, which served to construct borders around who was a suitable representative or member of Alliance for Choice.

> *It's sort of talked about sort of semi-ironically, but the need to look respectable, that part of the PR is kind of looking like nice young ladies, and so that would… So, for instance, there's also the Queen's University student pro-choice group, which kind of sprang out of Alliance for Choice…I think we all felt it was in some way a bit of a PR coup that one of our members managed to be very happily, heavily pregnant and properly married to a man, she's the sort of poster girl of our, you know, "We're normal!"* (Interview)

> *It was actually mentioned explicitly once, kind of. We had a guy in the Queen's pro-choice group who worked in Stormont doing pressy stuff, so he was interested in giving us a wee bit of media training, and he kept trying to tell us how we should really be pushing the kind of respectable student angle that, you know, "We're not just riff-raff, we're…" So people* [in the group] *were like, "Hmmm, yeah…"* (Interview)

Juxtaposed with this need to control their public image was the desire to be seen as a diverse group in order to have broad appeal. Siobhan followed up the previous statements with:

> *It is really important to have a diverse range of people because you have to be constantly reminding people that it is about everybody. It's not a minority, although it might be a thing that a minority of people want to shout about, it's something that does have implications for absolutely everybody, it is a human rights issue, and it's much more difficult to present those arguments if you all look the same and talk the same. And also just in terms of, because we are quite a kind of fragmented society in lots of ways, in sort of class terms as well as the political stuff, I think it's definitely very important to have a wide mix of people, and it's also quite, it's not, it doesn't always happen naturally normally, so I think it was quite good*. (Interview)

Other participants saw benefits to not being seen as belonging to one ethno-nationalist community or another. Taylor mentioned a discussion that occurred within the coalition around framing the issue as women in Northern Ireland having the same rights as women in the UK, and whether that would alienate those coming from a nationalist perspective. The result was that coalition members felt it was important not to

> *…be labeled as, you know, belonging to… but like I said, I think people here in Northern Ireland are very sophisticated in the way they deal with that, and I think the community voluntary sector and these kind of coalitions and campaigns are very skilled in doing that, and overcoming those kind of barriers when you talk about a single issue, you know. So I think that reflects the environment we live in…So in that way, I think that helps, that we're not backed by any side, as such…"* (Interview)

The group saw itself as diverse, and saw benefits to this diversity, particularly in terms of being able to work across the sectarian divide. However, counter to this are discussions of wanting to paint a mainstream, "girl next door" image onto the campaign. When you combine this with the way in which the

group presented issues around gender and class, there are interesting implications in terms of positioning of identities and working across difference in coalitions, which will be taken up in Chapter Five.

Sectarianism as a Common Thread

What became interesting throughout the data analysis process was that, while participants highlighted the way in which sectarian issues had not been an issue within the coalition, this theme emerged as a common thread that appeared in all themes and sub-themes previously presented. During the first round of data sorting, sectarianism was chosen as a theme, and data from all five interviews that referred to sectarianism was organized under this theme. Upon subsequent rounds of data sorting, sub-themes were put onto this theme, and it became clear that each of the themes and sub-themes appeared when participants spoke about sectarianism, including discussions of unity and conflict, conversations to be avoided, issues relevant outside of the coalition but not within it, and the construction of group identity. So while they downplayed the role of sectarianism, it in fact plays a large, unacknowledged, role in the coalition.

Chapter Summary

The focus of this chapter was on giving voice to the participants as they discussed identity, difference, sectarianism, unity and conflict within the coalition. I began by outlining the ways participants discussed unity and conflict, in which it became clear that the unity of the campaign goal had several purposes, including bringing people together across the sectarian divide, limiting acceptable conversation topics, and working through conflict.

In the second section, participants discussed the differing identities in the group, the ways in which the group formed and presented its group identity, and understandings of ethno-nationalist identities in Northern Ireland. What was interesting was the emphasis placed on the professional and activist backgrounds of many participants, along with the networks that came from having these backgrounds.

Finally, it was shown that, while participants downplayed the role of sectarianism within the coalition, it became a dominant thread that held other themes together. This was an unexpected finding, as all of the participants minimized the impact of sectarianism on the internal dynamics of the group. However, upon analysis, it emerged as a common thread that flowed through and between all other themes and sub-themes.

In the following chapter, I will analyse these findings using literature on radical coalition building, unity within feminist coalitions, essentialism and power.

Chapter 5: Analysis

In this section, I will argue that, while recognizing the political nature of their campaign and the society within which they live, Alliance for Choice has created a depoliticized space within their coalition by essentializing the identity of women, failing to address class dynamics within the group, and avoiding the contentious nature of abortion and sectarianism in order to unite around their shared campaign goal. I will look at what has been depoliticized inside the coalition (i.e. differences in professional backgrounds, power relations between women, coalitional conflict around sectarianism and abortion), and what has been pushed to the outside and continues to be framed as political (access to abortion according to socio-economic status, societal conflict around sectarianism and abortion). From here, I will address the implications of depoliticization, or normalization, in terms of radical coalition building, and then discuss what it means for coalitions within the context of Northern Ireland.

Defining Political / Depolitical Spaces

Himmelstrand (1962) states that

> depoliticization then seems to imply a transformation of political *ideologies* into a set of more or less distinct administrative *technologies* based on a more widespread consensus as to what kind of goals one should try to attain. Even if ideological differences are not wiped out altogether, ideological differences are deemphasized in a depoliticized political community. (p. 83)

When reading this statement, it becomes clear that depoliticization has occurred within Alliance for Choice in order that coalition members can unite around their common goal of extending the 1967 Abortion Act to Northern Ireland. This depoliticization has occurred on several levels, including around participant

subjectivities, controversial issues, and goals. This single-issue campaign has stripped itself down to the bare bones in order that the campaign goal can be achieved.

One occurrence of depoliticization is around the subjectivity of "women," particularly in terms of homogenizing the experience of women. When discussing their campaign, participants spoke of abortion as a fundamental human right, and their campaign as a women's rights issue. Through their campaign messaging, they argue that abortion could affect any and all women in Northern Ireland, and as such, this is an issue that is relevant to all women. Organizing around identity politics in this way can be used as a tool to unite women around a common issue, and can create "value to the participants in terms of personal empowerment, including pleasure, comfort, intellectual stimulation, and increasing self-esteem, through association with others who have shared similar experiences because of their gender, ethnic origin, sexual orientation, or skin color" (Bystydzienski & Schacht, 2001, p. 3). By organizing around a particular identity category, such as "woman," members can "understand and then challenge the world" (Phillips, as cited in Porter, 1997, p. 84) according to that particular shared subjectivity. However, Reagon (1983) argues that "the women's movement has perpetuated a myth that there is some common experience that comes just cause [sic] you're women" (p. 347). According to hooks (2000), this framing of women as universal, this seeing all women as oppressed due to being women, "implies that women share a common lot, that factors like class, race, religion, sexual preference, etc. do not create a diversity of experience that determines the extent to which sexism

will be an oppressive force in the lives of individual women" (p. 5). Mohanty (2006) further problematizes this, referring to the ways in which uniting around "universal sisterhood" (p. 116) has the effect of concealing or overlooking differing power relations between women according to race, class, ability, sexual orientation and so on. It assumes that all women are similarly impacted by patriarchy and other forms of oppression. In the United States, this homogenization has historically meant that middle-class women have been able to overlook class privilege, racialization and power relations between themselves and working-class women of colour.

The ways in which participants frame the abortion rights issue has the effect of depoliticizing and homogenizing what it means to be a woman by neglecting to analyze or understand the differing power relations that exist between women within the coalition. The coalition is using an "in-house definition" (Reagon, 1983, p. 347) of "woman" without interrogating the multiple ways in which womanhood is experienced due to other subjectivities that overlap and lay on top of it. Thus, rather than needing to build a coalition of women across their multiple subjectivities, womanhood is assumed or unquestioned.

By overlooking power dynamics between women, the campaign becomes framed in a particular way, and with the interests of particular women in mind. For example, though it is seen as a joke that the coalition is fortunate to have a middle-class, young pregnant woman as the leader of the Queen's University AfC group, there are definite implications in terms of how members want to frame the issue to the public, and what type of woman this definition of "woman" leaves

out. One must question what sort of woman would be an unacceptable spokesperson for the campaign? While this can only be assumed, you can read into this that it would be less acceptable if the spokesperson was a sex trade worker who had been forced to have several abortions in order to be able to continue her job. So where is her voice in the campaign? As Reagon (1983) writes,

> so here you are and you grew up and you speak English and you know about this word 'woman' and you know you one, and you walk into this 'woman-only' space and you ain't there. Because 'woman' in that space does not mean 'woman' from your world. (p. 347)

Stone (2004) argues "that universal claims about women are invariably false and effectively normalize and privilege specific forms of femininity" (p. 135). In stating unequivocally, "This is who women are and these are their issues," in claiming universal sisterhood, the question is, "Is it possible that AfC members are missing or overlooking something?" There's a problematic gap, a voice that's not there. Who has been left out of the conversation? What subjectivities are trampled on and discarded? Which haven't even been thought of? What has been the effect of this?

In fact, other subjectivities are also overlooked, for example women from the sexual minority community. By arguing that abortion is a women's rights issue that affects all women, AfC defines "woman" within a heteronormative framework, arguing that all women must have the right to choose what happens to their body in case of pregnancy. However, to the sexual minority community, the question of a woman's right to choose is more "around the question of the individuals' right to control one's own body, including the right to control one's

sexuality, and therefore to have self-determination at the most basic human level" (Bunch, as cited in Weedon, 1999, p. 57). By homogenizing the experience of all women, AfC overlooks the fact that not all women understand the right to choose in the same way.

And what of women with disabilities? One of the tensions that AfC does not attend to is around fetal abnormality, and yet this issue is of particular importance to those within the disability community, and even to a past member of AfC who retreated from the group due to conflict over this issue. Where is their voice in the conversation?

Furthermore, as feminist scholars have noted, discussions around abortion that highlight commonality in women's experience tend to overlook race and class. While Alliance for Choice is aware of the differing ways in which class relates to issues around abortion, the campaign does not extend into discussions of reproductive rights or involuntary sterilization, issues which primarily affect women of colour (Nicholson, 1995).

> In the arena of reproductive rights, because of the race- and class-based history of population control and sterilization abuse, women of color have a clearly ambivalent relation to the abortion rights platform. For poor women of color, the notion of a "women's right to choose" to bear children has always been mediated by a coercive, racist state. Thus, abortion rights defined as a woman's right versus men's familial control can never be the only basis of feminist coalitions across race and class lines. For many women of color, reproductive rights conceived in its broadest form, in terms of familial male/female relationships, but also, more significantly, in terms of institutional relationships, must be the basis for such coalitions. (Mohanty, 2006, p. 54)

Who else is left out of the discussion? Who is left out of the campaign? When participants spoke of missing perspectives in the coalition, they noted that

many individuals see the abortion rights as contentious and can’t take part due to family or work obligations. But what of those women who live in abusive family situations where they are unable to speak out against men? The campaign slogan, *“Our Bodies, Our Lives, our Right to Decide”* fits comfortably into a liberal feminist discourse that seeks equal rights for women in terms of having the ability to be responsible for their own actions and choices. However, it overlooks historical and economic realities that make these decisions challenging for many women. The campaign is attempting to present itself as mainstream, all happy and pregnant. However, this isn’t the reality for most women seeking abortion. So where is their face in the campaign? Where are the issues that matter to them? Through their framing of this issue within liberal feminist discourse, the campaign leaves out the voices of so many.

Furthermore, due to the myth of universal sisterhood, participants have depoliticized relations between women in the group, specifically around class dynamics and community affiliation. While participants recognize that a woman’s class heavily impacts her ability to access an abortion in England or elsewhere, internal class dynamics are not addressed. Class privilege was exemplified by the high value placed on individual members’ professional backgrounds and networks by participants. However, while participants expressed their appreciation for the skills and experience held by such members, this cultural and social capital was never unpacked or linked to class privilege. Rather, the institutional power that came from these backgrounds was normalized and depoliticized (Lopes & Thomas, 2006).

Second, while Bourdieu (2001) emphasized the value of familiarity with high-class culture, what became evident in the findings was that the social and cultural capital gained by coming from a leftist, Catholic background was also highly valued. For example, a number of times participants mentioned the knowledge that comes from knowing the history of social movements due to family background, or the language choices made by coalition members based on community background. As Côté (1996) argues, it is being familiar with the knowledge and experience most relevant to, and useful for, the group that becomes valued. In this case, it appears that it is the "privilege" of being raised within a republican community that is respected.

These two privileged elements, professional experience and community affiliation, raise questions around the impacts of the uninterrogated power and normalized capital held by particular coalition members on those who have not had access to it. If the coalition values professional experience and knowledge of social movements, but does not explicitly interrogate how certain individuals gained these experiences, either due to class background or family affiliation, then how does this impact someone who comes into the coalitional space without such a background? What are the implications of the heavy emphasis on the usefulness of experience and professions? How do those who have not had the privilege to build activist networks respond? If the coalition gives roles to people based on their previous experience, what is it like for someone to come into that space without that background? How does it impact who becomes involved? Who participates and provides suggestions?

hooks (1990) writes mostly of the experience of black, working-class women entering into feminist coalitions and the ways in which the language used by middle-class women often excludes working-class women. She writes, “I often feel my class background. I struggle with the politics of location – pondering what it means for individuals from underclass and poor backgrounds to enter social terrains dominated by the ethos and values of privileged class experience” (p. 89). She goes on to discuss ways in which working-class individuals are able to fake class background in order to assimilate into the “hierarchical spaces of privilege” (p. 89). Individuals change their behaviour in an attempt to assume class and race privilege and fit in with the group, but in fact this act of assimilation is disempowering in that they retreat from their own subjectivities and experiences.

In terms of AfC, several of the participants commented on differing language use and knowledge of social movements based on community affiliation, and while it appears that the coalition accepts difference around language use, there seemed to be an understanding that the language used by those familiar with social movements was more acceptable and that others should eventually assimilate. Kincheloe and McLaren (2000) note that “language is not a neutral and objective conduit of description of the ‘real world’” but in fact “serves to construct it” (p. 284). Thus, how does this privileging of certain language choices in turn privilege particular members of the coalition? In addition, language choices around sectarian issues are highly charged in Northern Ireland, with particular words as key in defining ethno-nationalist divides. As shown in the findings, sectarianism is not discussed by the coalition, so what is the impact of

this on those in the coalition who do not assimilate, and also do not have a space to discuss the relevance of their language use as discussions around sectarianism are off the table?

Additionally, while this campaign was seen to be advocating for the rights of working-class women, the campaign goal (extending the Abortion Act) would do little to alter the economic realities of working-class women. Yes, abortion would become more accessible, but the other realities of living within a hierarchical, class-based society would still remain. hooks (2000) argues that "the positive impact of liberal reforms on women's lives should not lead to the assumption that they eradicate systems of domination" (p. 21). So while the coalition recognizes class differences, they are doing little to address underlying socio-economic realities between women, nor challenge the neo-liberal, capitalist, patriarchal state. Thus, middle-class women will be able to continue living their lives the same as before and have access to abortion. For working-class women, access to abortion will ease their burden, as abortions will become available in local hospitals and clinics, removing the need to spend thousands of dollars to travel abroad to obtain an abortion. However, legalization will not change their socio-economic positioning. As Rita Mae Brown (as cited in hooks, 2000) wrote in her essay, "The Last Straw,"

> Class is much more than Marx's definition of relationship to the means of production. Class involves your behaviour, your basic assumptions about life. Your experience (determined by your class) validates those assumptions, how you are taught to behave, what you expect from yourself and from others, your concept of a future, how you understand problems and solve them, how you think, feel, act. It is these behavioral patterns that middle-class women resist recognizing although they may be perfectly willing to accept class in Marxist terms, a neat trick that helps them avoid

> really dealing with class behavior and changing that behavior in themselves. It is these behavioral patterns that must be recognized, understood, and changed. (p. 3)

In not recognizing this, middle-class women feel they are advocating for working-class women, while not giving up or attending to their class privilege.

When analyzed through Lopes and Thomas' (2006) power framework, it can be seen that Alliance for Choice uses the social and institutional power of the group (i.e. networks, class, gender), along with personal power (i.e. energy and commitment of group members) in order to gain collective power and work toward their campaign goal. However, they fail to interrogate the ways in which members gained access to particular forms of power. By overlooking the links between networks and class privilege, and emphasizing the importance of professional backgrounds without addressing the ways in which certain group members have access to higher education while others may not due to class, they unconsciously reinforce class dynamics in the coalition.

While participants may not be conscious of the political nature of class and sisterhood within the coalition, they are very conscious of the political nature of sectarianism and abortion. However, rather than dialoguing about the ways in which these issues play out in their lives, they push these controversial issues to the external coalitional space as they are seen to cause conflict within the group and be a distraction from the overarching campaign goal. Noting this, AfC does recognize and build its campaign in such a way that is responsive to the politically divided nature of Northern Ireland, including campaign objectives, strategies and tactics. There is an understanding that the issue of sectarianism has meaning and

implications for the campaign, and yet it is seen as a potential source of conflict. As such, individuals' ethno-nationalist subjectivities are left at the door in order that coalition members can unite around their campaign goal without distraction. The coalition, as a depolitical space, is not the place to attend to ethno-nationalism. Thus, while participants are committed to working with individuals from all backgrounds, and recognize the strength that comes from that, by not allowing the opportunity for members to bring their ethno-nationalist identities into the coalition, they are replicating patterns of interaction that exist within Northern Ireland, rather than resisting the dichotomous, dividedness of their society in order to move beyond the history of violence and trauma.

The technicalities of making abortion legal is another topic that is not discussed, which is particularly interesting in that Alliance for Choice is a pro-choice group. However, ambiguities around when a fetus becomes a life and what to do in cases of fetal abnormality are left to the side. In accordance with Himmelstrand's (1962) definition of depoliticization, differences are left at the door in order that the campaign goal can be achieved. And yet, by not working through the complexities of the issue, AfC could potentially be unprepared to provide input to policy makers if the time comes to make decisions around these technicalities. This would be an unfortunate side effect of sidestepping the issue to avoid conflict, as AfC members are connected to the abortion rights issue at a grassroots, community level.

AfC members have created borders, not only in terms of defining themselves and defining women, but also between political and depolitical spaces.

In trying to unite, and gain the power needed to be united, they have stripped down their campaign and attempted to simplify, define and condense their own identities. Not talking about differences in socio-historical realities, about class, not recognizing difference, and not attending to the privilege and oppression of each individual coalition member privileges certain voices, experiences and perspectives (Barvosa-Carter, 1999; Stone, 2004). Furthermore, the campaign is stripped down to the bare minimum in order that people can unite around it, and yet important conversations around the ambiguities and complexities of the abortion issue are not attended to.

So what are the implications of the creation of depolitical/political spaces? Of this stripping down, simplifying, shaving off? Simply put, by emphasizing the ways in which their goal unites them, and by overlooking conflict, controversy and power dynamics within the group, coalition work is easy. Members are able to avoid conflict and dedicate their time to their goal of extending the Abortion Act to Northern Ireland. Attending to controversial issues is seen as a distraction from the goal or contrary to their commonality. They have created a depolitical space to campaign on a very political issue. In not attending to the political issues within their coalition, but rather projecting these issues to outside of the coalitional space, they have simplified what is important to their campaign goal. But who decided what's important and what they would commit to? Who does this goal overlook? Whose voice and perspective is left out when the issue is framed in this particular way?

Implications in Northern Ireland

These questions cannot be attended to without relocating this discussion within the complexities, ambiguities and tensions that is Northern Ireland. Adie (as cited in Davies, 2004) writes of the complications of taking up discussions that have deep and political histories. Referring to conversations she had with Croats, Serbs, Bosnians and Kosovans, she said,

> Everything grew out of history – the theft of a cow, the burning of a village, the driving out of hundreds of thousands from what they had always thought of as home. The events of yesterday – the previous twenty-four hours, such a vital element in my journalistic tradition – were but a recent drop in the ocean in the mighty historical flow. How could you talk of a few hours when centuries were clamouring to be heard? (p. 81)

Individuals in conflict or post-conflict societies carry the weight of these stories with them as they go about their daily lives, particularly in Northern Ireland, as the separation continues to be visible through murals, flags and graffiti. Cockburn (1998) talks about the embededness of separation in Belfast, the everydayness of peace lines dividing the city. The divide between Catholic and Protestant, nationalist and unionist, is entrenched deeply in the city, and yet "people step deftly through the intricate mesh of ethnic boundaries without making a big deal of it" (p. 47). And an intricate mesh it is, with not only the dichotomy between Catholic/Protestant, nationalist/unionist, but also further divides within those communities in terms of goals, visions and political ideology.

Wilson (2006) emphasizes the politeness and avoidance techniques that often come with having to negotiate the complex web of relationships in divided societies. While the participants did not identify themselves according to the traditional, overarching framework at use in Northern Ireland, seeing their own

identities as porous and flexible, they put into practice a "politics exist outside" strategy that ensured divisiveness around sectarian issues did not interfere with the campaign and allowed them to navigate the mesh.

This has been a common tactic used by women's movements in Northern Ireland. For example, in her study of the Women's Support Network in Belfast, Cockburn (1998) found that women implemented a practice of "elective and selective speech and silence on potentially divisive issues" (p. 83), or "leaving your politics at home" (p. 86). While some members of the Women's Support Network argued that they were not avoiding the issue, instead choosing to speak about divisive issues at the correct time, others felt that "unless political differences were explored more fully, the alliance might prove to be meaningless or vulnerable" (p. 86).

AfC is a relatively new coalition, and one that may not yet be at the stage of vulnerability. However, it is apparent that in uniting around their shared campaign goal, members have overlooked the diverse subjectivities present within the coalition. This has led to not attending to power dynamics within the group while essentializing, homogenizing and stripping down the identities of coalition members. It is unclear the reasons for depoliticization within AfC - it may be related to the history of violence within Northern Ireland, the societal practice of avoidance and politeness, the history of women's organizing, or the desire to keep conflict out of the group. While the findings demonstrate that much of this depoliticization has occurred based on the need to remain united, the socio-historical context and societal norms cannot be overlooked in terms of their

influence on the process of depoliticization. What is clear is that the process of depoliticization, particularly in terms of building sisterhood through a process of homogenizing the experiences of women, does have implications in terms of overlooking the multiple ways in which woman are privileged and disempowered based on their complex identities.

These findings, combined with insights from Cockburn's study on the Women's Support Network, surface questions around attending to coalition building, particularly when looking at Keating's (2005) three-step coalition building process. If radical coalition building is hinged on the exploration of the multiple and overlapping experiences of oppression that a group of people have around a particular theme, how can this be done when individuals are asked to leave pieces of their identity outside the door, whether it be their ethno-nationalist identity, race, class, etc., in order to unite around their shared goal? Burack (2001) outlines three frames through which coalitions can be viewed, with the first being coalitions within the self, defined as "bringing aspects of the self into conversation with one another" (p. 38). This notion of the intersectionality of our subjectivities cannot be fully understood when some subjectivities are left behind, particularly in a place such as Northern Ireland where ethno-nationalist identities have played such a huge role in the past.

This leaves questions of how to unite in a different way, and doing so in a society where identities are so politically charged and have contributed to violence in the past, and where the dominant way of relating to others is avoidance. There must be a shift away from this practice of "politics exist

outside" towards new practices of inclusivity. It will not be easy and will not happen without a commitment from all members of the coalition to engage in the process, along with a commitment to understanding that, as an abortion rights group, they are intricately connected to other social justice organizations, and thus their actions implicate the work of other activists and coalitions. It is necessary to ensure that no longer is there "the possibility that some strategies of action might challenge one form of oppression while reinforcing or even bolstering others" (Keating, 2005, p. 98).

While challenging, even daunting, it is possible to develop new practices that open up space to discuss issues of power and privilege. In the final chapter of their book on challenging racism in organizations, Lopes and Thomas (2006) have a candid conversation about the ways in which white privilege has impacted their relationship as co-facilitators and partners in anti-racism work. They discuss the ways in which, when there are friendships between white and racialized people, there is often a deal that racism will not be discussed, and comment that when the white person is called on issues of racism, "things fall apart" (p. 231). Similarly, the reliance on universal sisterhood within AfC could cause issues of silencing, as individuals may avoid bringing up issues of power and privilege in hopes of maintaining unity and the feeling of a safe space. And yet, as Lopes challenges Thomas on the ways in which she uses her white privilege to exercise dominance in the work they do together, they are able to deepen their relationships and begin to address power imbalances and issues of domination in their relationship. While they recognize that "these discussions are always grueling" (p. 220), subsequently

they are both able to work together in a way that Lopes no longer has to be as worried about "being attacked by a person I rely upon to be a source of support and an ally in the work" (p. 226), while Thomas is able to confront her often overlooked white privilege, attend to/recognize the damage and violence this has done to Lopes, and commit herself to being open to continue the dialogue and continue learning how to escape the history of white supremacy within which she was raised.

Returning to Keating's (2005) three-step model of building coalitional-consciousness outlined in Chapter Two, it appears to be a useful model for allowing participants to engage in deep conversation with one another, and begin to unpack assumptions and privilege that have previously been overlooked. This model pushes participants to engage in a process that will allow them to look for and eliminate "women standing on the oppression of other women, women colluding with the reduction of other women, women colluding with the blocking of other women's possibilities" (p. 97). This process involves developing processes for open dialogue and "step[ping] out of the center into the margins" (Lyons, as cited in Bystydzienski & Schacht, 2001, p. 8). By allowing people to "discuss their particular experiences of oppression and privilege and come to recognize the worldviews of others, they simultaneously create relations of respect and empathy or more egalitarian ways of 'getting along'" (p. 11), which in turn can lead to the establishment of new patterns of meeting and organizing.

However, the models presented within coalition-building literature, (Burack, 2001; Bystydzienski & Schacht, 2001; Keating, 2005; Reagon, 1983)

were developed in a North American context for communities that are working and organizing within drastically different realities and relationships with violence. While Reagon (1983) argues that coalition work "is some of the most dangerous work you can do" (p. 346), what does this mean in a place where the reality of violence and conflict is present both temporally and spatially? Coalition-building models must be extended to provide a space that can encapsulate the fears of entering into a not-safe space while living in a potentially not-safe society. This is not to say that difficult conversations should be shied away from. In fact, Wilson (2006) states, "contested societies desperately need spaces where different citizens meet in robust and difficult exchanges about the nature and future vitality of that society, yet hold one another in respectful relationships" (p. 4). While Wilson is referring to working across ethno-nationalism, his comments are useful in terms of organizing across all elements of difference. One key step in his approach is "the need to empower all to meet in spaces with others that they are not initially comfortable or easy with. Everyone is outside his or her areas of comfort; everyone is meeting across lines of difference" (p. 12).

There is little doubt that the members of AfC are capable of holding these conversations in a respectful manner. Participants have shown a willingness to engage across lines of ethno-nationalist difference, an act that, one decade following the signing of the Good Friday Agreement, many individuals have failed to do. This may be due to the fact that they "are precisely similar in being different, a bit out of line" (Cockburn, 1998, p. 80), as was the case in Cockburn's study of women's networks in the 1990s. Several participants commented on how

they rebelled against their family background and religious upbringing. Many are engaged in other forms of political work, whether it be with their trade union, other women's networks, or otherwise. Thus, they are already challenging the dominant patterns of interaction. However, now this process of engagement across difference needs to be extended beyond working across ethno-nationalism and into having challenging conversations about power and privilege in order that the important work being done by AfC does not inadvertently target those they are working with. It is within these conversations that they may find new potential.

Chapter Summary

The purpose of this chapter was to highlight the implications of depoliticization within AfC as viewed through the lens of radical coalition building literature. What has been demonstrated is that, while the models and theories within coalition building are useful in terms of providing coalitions with opportunities for challenging oppressive practices and tensions and moving out of depoliticized space, the theory must be expanded in order to recognize the complexities of the context within which the coalition is organizing. In relation to AfC, this means negotiating a balance between the dangers of creating a not-safe space within a divided society with the necessity of having challenging conversations in order to allow for deeper levels of engagement and open up opportunities for working in ways that promote inclusivity and equity.

Chapter 6: Suggestions and Reflections

In this final chapter, I will present recommendations for extending radical coalition building theory, and provide practical implications for members of Alliance for Choice. In doing so, I recognize that the theoretical framework and methodology used to conduct this study limited the ways in which I engaged with both the research process and with the words of participants. I will offer emerging questions that highlight future possibilities for the extension of this work. To close, I will reflect upon the ways in which engaging in this process has influenced me as a researcher, learner, and activist.

Expansion of Coalition-Building Theory

This study extends coalition-building theories by bringing in issues of depoliticization as a background for homogenization and avoidance of controversial issues, while arguing for a more contextually grounded approach to coalition building models. While coalition-building theory provides opportunities and models to encourage deeper engagement, it often overlooks the contextual realities that may initially bring coalitions to a depoliticized space. Unpacking how depoliticization may be linked to the socio-historical context within which the coalition is operating provides a new starting point in coalition theory. Further, it recognizes that beyond the inherent racialized, gendered and classed nature of Western societies, there may be other reasons for not engaging in difficult conversations. This recognition alone can be a starting point for coalitions as they walk the challenging path of building a radical coalition.

Suggestions for Alliance for Choice

Before offering suggestions for Alliance for Choice, I feel it important to comment on the courageous work being done by this coalition. These recommendations are given in the spirit of offering opportunities to enhance the work being done, rather than diminish the work in which coalition members are engaged.

The central theme arising from this study is that, through a process of depoliticization, members of AfC have overlooked the ways in which their actions implicate others, and have reduced the possibilities for deeply engaging with one another. While uniting around a shared goal and organizing around a "shared collective identity of the oppressed" (Bystydzienski & Schacht, 2001, p. 5) may initially allow for empowerment, it can often lead to simplification and homogenization of identities, as is the case with AfC. Not only does the myth of universality create occasions within which privilege can act without being checked, but, in the case of AfC, it has allowed for a continuation of societal practices in Northern Ireland of keeping quiet and/or avoiding controversial conversations and issues. Rather than offer an "answer" or "solution," I recognize that this is a complex issue, and thus offer a list of questions that can provide a starting point for future conversations into the intertwined nature of privilege and oppression:

1) In what ways could this action/strategy/campaign inadvertently impact others?

2) In what ways are each member's multiple subjectivities represented in the campaign, or the ways in which the coalition organizes?
    a. What subjectivities are overlooked?
    b. Are there dominant subjectivities? i.e., individuals with particular subjectivities who dominate discussion, decisions, etc.?
3) What voices/subjectivities are not present in this discussion?
    a. What are possible reasons for that?
    b. How could they be brought into the space?
4) What issues are considered "off the table?"
    a. What are possible reasons for that?
    b. How is the coalition limiting its potential by avoiding conversations around these issues?

Engaging in conversations around difference, power and privilege will be challenging and will lead to conflict, and yet we cannot avoid conflict on the way to justice. As Butterwick and Selman (2003) note, "perhaps the conflict that seems inherent to our social justice efforts means that we are working 'in the crack' of the contradiction, a contradiction that is not something to be transcended but rather embraced" (p. 20). This is the challenge before Alliance for Choice. It will be a difficult road to take, particularly in a contested society such as Northern Ireland. It will take much dedication on the part of participants, as "it is not about finding new tools to complete the job; rather, it is about finding ways of staying actively engaged in the dangerous work of social justice" (p. 20). Therefore, I would hope that the above questions and suggestions offer a starting point in a

never-ending journey of questioning and unpacking power and privilege in order to have the flexibility to adapt to new ways of working across difference.

Secondly, I would suggest a commitment to discussing abortion issues in order that, when the time comes to make recommendations to policy makers, AfC will have worked through the controversial elements and be well-positioned to comment in such a way that a multiplicity of perspectives and identities are considered.

Emerging Questions

This study attempted to address the implications of not attending to difference and power relations within AfC, and while I was able to further my understanding of how depoliticization within coalitions has damaging implications to those within the community who are already marginalized, I am still left wondering how to move forward. While literature on radical coalition building within feminist organizations provided a compelling frame through which to analyse the work of Alliance for Choice, it was only one of a number of possible frames that could have been chosen. It also led to a particular set of "solutions." Thus, I am left with burning questions around whether or not the insights offered will in fact be useful to members of AfC. Therefore, another avenue for research would be to undertake Participatory Action Research in which the above-mentioned coalition-building processes are implemented into the coalition. The effects of this process on individual members, as well as on processes of depoliticization and homogenization could then be studied. However, this would require immense commitment of both time and energy on behalf of the

researcher and AfC members. Alternately, a longitudinal study could allow for tracking of the ways in which the internal dynamics of AfC shifts as members continue to organize together.

Due to time constraints and logistical considerations, this study involved five participants, all of whom are highly involved in the campaign and all of whom felt that the members of the campaign worked well together. Considering this, it would be interesting to discuss similar themes with individuals who had chosen to detach themselves from the group. An additional possibility would be to interview a diverse range of individuals who are not involved with the campaign in order to further understand the practical implications of the campaign in terms of marginalizing certain segments of the larger community.

In relation to the relevance of the insights and recommended processes, a study that looks at a coalition within a different divided society would allow for cross-comparison between the two contexts, and allow for a deeper expansion of coalition-building theory. Furthermore, it would not require further commitment from AfC members, who have already graciously offered their time to this study, while also volunteering their time with AfC. While a comparative study may uncover similar findings, which could provide support for the recommendations above, different findings could allow for the development of a more contextually grounded coalition-building process.

Closing Reflections

I began this process with many questions of what it means to be a researcher and how to engage in work that will be meaningful to myself and to the

research participants. Now, as I conclude this process, I am left eager to engage in further critical, anti-oppressive research.

Throughout the analysis process, I struggled with what I, as an individual who has grown up removed from violence, could offer to individuals who understand violence in a tangible way, in such a way that impacts their daily lives and actions, even if they are unaware of it. However, I was reminded of the ways in which my unique positioning allows me to offer insights from that location, which does not supersede the opportunity for others to offer their own insights, whether it be through a different theoretical frame, methodology or positioning. Thus, I leave this document and this study with the understanding that what I have offered is one account, one perspective, one way forward. Furthermore, I understand that the study is limited in that only five coalition members were interviewed and by the fact that, due to the lack of AfC meetings while I was in the field, I was unable to observe participants. Therefore, I am open to engaging with those from other perspectives in order that we can continue to develop a coalition-building model that will allow those who are working courageously on issues of social justice to do so in such a way that they do not inadvertently harm or disempower others.

However, while I now have a deeper understanding of the hidden, inadvertent ways in which our organizing impacts others, having not experienced working in a “successful” coalition such as those described in the literature, I am still left with questions in terms of how to implement such theories into practice. How are difficult conversations negotiated? How do you convince those you are

organizing with that these "side" conversations are not distracting from the overall goals of the campaign, but are rather offering possibilities for more just and equitable organizing? I am reminded of the song, "Hide and Seek" by Imogen Heap:

> Mmmm whatcha say,
> Mmmm that you only meant well?
> Well of course you did.
>
> Mmmm whatcha say,
> Mmmm that it's all for the best?
> Of course it is.
>
> Mmmm whatcha say?
> Mmmm that it's just what we need?
> You decided this. (Heap, 2005)

For those of us working towards social justice, we may be working with our best intentions towards what we see as just and right. May this song act as a reminder that we are each intricately connected to one another and make decisions that affect one another. Thus, we must be responsible for continually questioning the ways in which our actions will impact others and strive to minimize oppression, deliberate or not, as we work with courage and passion towards justice.

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APPENDIX A: Letter of Initial Contact

Dear_____________,

My name is Anna McClean and I am studying for a Master of Education degree at the University of Alberta. I am examining the role of attending to internal power dynamics in coalitions, and the processes through which coalitions organize across difference (i.e. race, class, gender, religious affiliation, etc.). I understand that you are currently active in Alliance for Choice Belfast and I would be very interested in having you partake in this research.

The information for this study will be collected in three steps. First, I would like to observe group members during typical events (meetings, community events and engagements, actions, etc). Second, five participants will partake in an initial interview of no more than 45 minutes to an hour. There may be a need for a follow-up conversation of no more than 30 minutes. A follow-up conversation would occur if there was a need to make sure that I understood what was being said in the first interview and to make sure that I was representing your ideas correctly. Finally, I will collect and analyse documents concerning the group (i.e. meeting minutes, newspaper articles about the group, websites, pamphlets, etc.).

If you choose to participate (either through observation or interview) your personal identity will be protected by the use of a pseudonym when writing up the findings. Therefore, your real name will not be used to identify you, and any identifying features, such as your hometown, will be removed from your responses. Please be aware that at any time during this process (before, during or after the interview or observation) you may decide to withdraw from the research and any and all information gathered from you will not be used in the study.

Furthermore, you have the right to decline to answer any specific question you would prefer not to answer. In addition, all transcripts will be shared with you prior to submitting the first draft of the thesis. You will have the freedom to accept the transcription, make changes, or choose to withdraw at anytime prior to the submission of the first draft.

The information collected will be used for research purposes only. As the purpose of this research is to further knowledge and raise awareness about coalition dynamics, the ultimate goal of this study is to share the findings with others. Possible places this research could be published include: in a book, in an academic journal for university audiences, or in activist publications. All data will be kept for five years in a locked cabinet and all computer data will be encrypted and destroyed after 5 years.

If you have any questions about your rights as a participant in this research, you may contact me at 001-403-826-0736 (in Canada) or 07754205880 (in Ireland) or amcclean@ualberta.ca. Also, you can contact my thesis supervisor, Dr. Lynette Shultz, at 001-780-492-4441 or lshultz@ualberta.ca, at any time.

The plan for this study has been reviewed for its adherence to ethical guidelines and approved by the Faculties of Education, Extension, Augustana and Saint-Jean Research Ethics Board (EEASJ REB) at the University of Alberta. For questions regarding participant rights and ethical conduct of research, contact the Chair of the EEASJ REB at 001-780-492-3751.

Thank you for considering my request and I look forward to hearing from you in this regard.

Sincerely,

Anna McClean

APPENDIX B: Participant Consent Form

I, ____, agree to participate in a research project for a masters thesis.

I agree to be interviewed by Anna McClean under the following conditions:

1. I have the right to withdraw from the project at any time up until the first draft is submitted. If I choose to do so, the information I provide will be returned to me and not used in the project.

2. I have the right to decline to answer any specific question that I would prefer not to answer.

3. I agree to no more than two interviews, the first of which will last no more than 1 hour and a possible second interview, which will last no more than 30 minutes.

4. I understand that the interview will be recorded and transcribed and that the data from it will be used in a masters thesis and may also be included in published articles or presentations.

5. My identity will be kept confidential and a pseudonym used in all assignment materials.

6. The researcher will endeavour to ensure that no harm will come to me through my participation in this project.

I agree to these conditions:

Signed____

Date____

Researcher

Signed____

Date____

For further information regarding the purpose and methods of this project, feel free to contact either of the following:

Anna McClean, Graduate Student
001-403-826-0736 or 07754205880
amcclean@ualberta.ca

Dr. Lynette Shultz, Supervisor
001-780-492-4441
lshultz@ualberta.ca

The plan for this study has been reviewed for its adherence to ethical guidelines and approved by the Faculties of Education, Extension, Augustana and Saint-Jean Research Ethics Board (EEASJ REB) at the University of Alberta. For questions regarding participant rights and ethical conduct of research, contact the Chair of the EEASJ REB at 001-780-492-3751.

APPENDIX C: Interview Guide

Group History

1. Roles
    a. What is your role in the group?
    b. Has this changed?
    c. What other roles exist?
    d. Who fills these roles?
    e. How is this decided?

Power

1. Typical meeting
    a. Walk me through it
    b. Note taker, facilitator, and other roles?
    c. Who typically speaks?

2. Decision-making process
    a. Type of decision-making process in place – consensus, majority, etc.
    b. Consistency of decision-making process
    c. How are you (your ideas, identities, experiences) involved in the decision-making process?
        i. Included, excluded, listened to or not, valuable or not?
    d. Impact of having assigned roles?

3. Calling/planning meetings
    a. Who calls them?
    b. Who decides when they will happen and what will be on the agenda?
    c. Where are meetings held and how is this decided?
    d. In what ways does this process impact your participation at meetings?

Inclusivity/Exclusivity and Difference

1. Membership
    a. What kinds of diversity are present within the alliance?
    b. Your identity
        i. Use whatever terminology or categories you feel are appropriate.

2. Working across Difference
    a. How does this group work across these differences?
    b. How does it negotiate tensions? What strategies have been used to minimize tensions?

c. In Ireland, tensions between religious communities. How does this group negotiate these tensions or divides?
d. What have the challenges been?
e. What do you believe are the strengths in this?
f. What skills or practices are important or useful when working with diversity in your alliance?

3. Mainstreams/Margins
   a. Do you think there is a dominant identity, experience or perspective within the alliance?
   b. How would you describe this group?
   c. How would you describe the minority elements of the group?
   d. In your opinion, what has been the impact of this dynamic?
      i. Impact on the group and on you personally.

4. Gaps in participation
   a. What are your thoughts about these gaps?
   b. In your opinion, which voices are not heard as much?
   c. I know some groups set up community norms, others have guidelines for discussion, and others just let the meetings run as they are. How does this group approach the topic of equitable participation?

5. Missing Perspectives
   a. Are there identities or perspectives that you feel are missing within the alliance?
   b. Identities found within the pro-choice community but not in alliance?

6. Complexity of Identity
   a. What is your experience of being actively involved in the pro-choice movement and also being…(Protestant, Catholic, male, sexual minority, etc)?
   b. Challenges?
   c. In what ways does the alliance attend to/make space for these complexities of your identity?
   d. How are different experiences with/understandings of abortion discussed by the alliance?

Conflict

1. Can you tell me about a time when the alliance members experienced conflict?
   a. How did the members respond?

2. Can you tell me about a time when there may have been dissent, particularly in terms of particular elements of diversity being marginalized either within the coalition or outside the alliance? (way meeting structured, decision-making process, focus of alliance, etc.)
    a. How was dissent expressed?
    b. How was it responded to?
    c. What sort of shifts did you see in the alliance following this, in terms of group membership or participation in group process?

3. How does the alliance respond when feelings of exclusivity are presented by an alliance member?

Closing Question

Anything you would like to add?

APPENDIX D: Post-Interview Review Questions

1. Where did the interview occur?

2. Under what conditions?

3. How did the interviewee react to the questions?

4. How well do you think you did asking questions?

5. What was the rapport?

6. Did you find out what you really wanted to find out in the interview?
    a. If not, what was the problem? Poorly worded questions? Wrong topics? Poor rapport?