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Reproducing Jane: Abortion Stories and Women's Political Histories

It was, in the eyes of some of those involved, "the most remarkable abortion story ever told" (*Hyde Park–Kenwood Voices* 1973). In the early 1970s, before the *Roe v. Wade* Supreme Court decision made abortion legal across the country, a group of feminist laywomen in Chicago performed thousands of abortions. Abortion referral services were not uncommon in this era, existing in many areas through the aid of women's liberation groups and clergy members.[1] But the Abortion Counseling Service of the Chicago Women's Liberation Union, known colloquially as "Jane" after the pseudonym its members adopted, was distinct, and its story has lingered in feminist historical consciousness while others have not. After initially counseling women and referring them to carefully chosen doctors, the women of Jane began performing the procedure themselves, despite lacking formal medical training (Kaplan 1995). As one member recalled, "we finally took speculum, flashlight and cannula in hand" (in *Hyde Park–Kenwood Voices* 1973). With the procedure controlled entirely by women, Jane members developed what came to be described as a radically feminist approach to abortion—offering extensive counseling before and after, handing out copies of the newly written *Our Bodies, Ourselves*, holding women's hands, and chatting casually during the procedure. Jane members claimed to perform these abortions *with* women, not *on* them, ostensibly putting radically feminist ideals into practice (Kline 2010).

The first "Jane," Heather Booth, was a student and civil rights activist living in Chicago. Booth did not initially intend to start an abortion referral service, and especially not one that performed its own abortions. But after she helped an acquaintance find an abortionist, word of her knowledge spread. Her association with newly formed women's liberation groups made her a target for advice seekers. Once women successfully obtained abortions through

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[1] For more on the history of such services, see Joffe (1996), Reagan (2000), and Cline (2006).

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her contacts, they would refer others back to Booth. In 1968, Booth recruited other women from her women's liberation meetings to help, delegating tasks and officially establishing a referral and counseling service. Women seeking abortions in Chicago called a phone number and asked for "Jane," a safely anonymous pseudonym, who would comfort and counsel them and set up appointments with underground abortionists (Kluchin 2010).

Over the next several years, Booth moved on to other projects, and the group expanded in her absence. At first, Jane members would only comfort the women prior to the procedure and negotiate prices with doctors. In 1970, however, they discovered that the abortionist they had begun to use exclusively was not actually a licensed physician. What followed made the group famous. If this "doctor" could perform abortions so skillfully without formal training, they figured, they could too. The women, instead of finding another provider or giving up, began performing abortions on their own. A few members apprenticed with a sympathetic local doctor, learning what to do and what tools to use. They, in turn, taught other members. The service grew dramatically, as did their clientele, which included many women of color and poor women who could not afford to travel to places like New York, where the procedure was legally available. For the next few years, they operated out of various apartments, under what they described as the full knowledge of the Chicago police department. In 1972, the police finally raided their apartment headquarters, and seven members were made to stand trial, charged with abortion and conspiracy to commit abortion. With the legalization of abortion across the country in 1973, charges were dropped. Jane disbanded shortly thereafter, and some members continued working in feminist health clinics (Kaplan 1995).

Jane is perhaps one of the most vivid images of radical second-wave feminist activism. More shocking than the mythical specter of bra burning and seemingly more dangerous than cervical self-exams, it can, in theory, provide excellent fodder for antifeminist conservative critiques. Yet Jane is known almost exclusively in pro-choice and feminist circles. As anthropologist Sandra Morgen has observed, in recent years "the story of Jane tends to be told as a form of consciousness-raising in the women's health and pro-choice movements," such that "the telling of this foundational story remains part of the process of movement making, circulating stories about the past that embolden the present" (Morgen 2002, 35).

In this essay I explore the evolution of this storytelling practice, beginning in 1973, just after Jane's dissolution, and ending in the present moment, by which time the group has made its way onto YouTube and into the consciousness of a new generation. Over this span of time, former Jane members became more and more enthusiastic about sharing their experiences, while

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more and more scholars and writers incorporated their story in their works. Younger women in turn represented the group in a variety of media that served as sites of intergenerational communication. These included documentaries, zines, blogs, and a play. Looking at Jane stories and their evolution throws the shifting concerns into relief, as the events of the past become usable and are claimed by a range of individuals for personal and political utility. How is this peculiar story told? Which parts get emphasized, or ignored, and for whom exactly is Jane's memory preserved? While Jane members and their contemporaries have been concerned with preserving and fashioning their historical legacies, their younger audiences have eagerly adopted and interpreted the tale on their own terms. In this process of remembering, Jane stands as a case study in both the making and using of second-wave feminist history, as well as an example of the power of narratives in shaping our understanding of the politics of abortion.[2]

Common abortion narratives have placed a stark and celebratory divide at 1973, the year of *Roe v. Wade*. The recent history of abortion, however, reveals a more uneven victory with many bumps along the road. Abortion post-*Roe* is far from an uncontested triumph of women's reproductive rights. Since legalization, there have been murders and arson committed against abortion providers. Antiabortion advocates have championed laws enacted at the state level that creatively restrict access to the procedure for many, subverting constitutional rights under the guise of protecting women (Schoen 2015). We find ourselves, nearly half a century later, still fighting to protect basic reproductive rights. Planned Parenthood's bright pink protest signs exclaim, "Save *Roe*!"

Pro-choice women come back to Jane particularly in those heated political moments when the cracks in the ice become visible, and we are reminded of the fragility of abortion rights. At times contemporary concerns are refracted through the lens of the Jane story; among other things Jane is variously portrayed as an embodiment of collectivist feminist ideals, the radical counterpart to liberal reformists, or a community of inclusive coalition builders in counterpoint to your average exclusionary, white, middle-class second-wavers. But there is something even more fundamental that haunts the pro-choice collective consciousness—something that coat-hanger imagery

[2] Recently scholars have argued against the wave metaphor in the history of US feminism and have pointed to the coalitions of women who do not fit into this model, whose stories have not been told as widely as others. In this essay I retain the labels "second-wave" and "third-wave" as actors' categories, respecting participants' self-identifications and as a shorthand method of indicating differences in age cohorts. See, however, Henry (2004), Gilmore (2008), and Hewitt (2010).

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contradicts and "Save *Roe*" slogans obscure. Rather than a depressing reminder of bleak pre-*Roe* times, like tales of women being butchered and swindled by back-alley abortionists or discussions of women self-harming with wire coat hangers, the story of Jane is a motivational call to arms.

Why have women turned to the same story over and over again for more than forty years? This need to retell derives in large part from the existence of a continuous, painfully acknowledged post-*Roe* struggle to preserve abortion rights (or even, in some cases, to achieve them in practice in the first place). The persistence of Jane is a function of one roiling, uncomfortable fact: the battle is far from won. But above all else, women keep retelling this story because Jane is, at its core, a reminder of women's resilience and the power of collective action, even if it was not, strictly speaking, a collective. It is a lesson that even in the darkest of hours, with the most unjust of laws restricting their right to self-determination, women can and do act—by coming together to help other women. In fact, retelling this story can almost entirely sidestep both the legal system, which grants women permission to obtain abortions in the form of legal rights, and the organized medical profession, which has been blamed by historians for getting us into this quandary in the first place with its advocacy for abortion laws all those years ago (Mohr 1978; Smith-Rosenberg 1985a; Reagan 1996). The heroes here are not Supreme Court justices, or advocates for abortion reform, or even heroic doctors who manage to perform the procedure under political duress. This is a tale of self-determination and sisterhood in action, and its stars are women. Not only are women choosing abortion (that is, those obtaining the procedure), but the main characters are going above and beyond that by choosing to learn how to perform the procedure, making the former group's choice possible in the first place. Although it seems paradoxical due to the group's illegality, for a moment listeners can think about the deeply personal subject of abortion unbound by its uneasy and ever-shifting political context. It opens up the imaginative possibilities of women's ability to make choices about their bodies, whatever the constraints. Although the story of Jane has been utilized by many different people over many years, its primary function remains the same: as a reminder that women can and will find a way.

Making abortion history

Both inside and outside of the academy, feminists in the 1970s began seriously investigating the past, looking toward plausible roots of women's modern political dilemmas, including the hot-button issue of abortion. Like the broader enterprise of women's history at the time, the accounts of historians typically focused on consequential episodes in the nineteenth century

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(see, e.g., Smith-Rosenberg 1985b). Feminists in other disciplines shared their concerns, including Pauline Bart, who in her prolific career as a feminist sociologist would write articles and books on female depression, sexism, rape, and violence against women. Bart's participation in the women's movement in Berkeley and later Chicago was formative during the early phase of her career. She was especially drawn to feminist critiques of health care, the salience of which was reinforced by personal experiences. She recalled a brush with medical patriarchy: "the physician who gave me a diaphragm without having me insert it, telling me to make sure I was covering my cervix and fit under the pubic bone . . . he could have said put it under Madagascar covering the Canary Islands" (Bart 1996, 267). This type of treatment, she decided, had to change.

Bart's experiences led her to seek out other women who were finding outlets to express their dissatisfaction with the medical establishment. When the recently formed Boston Women's Health Collective wrote the first version of *Our Bodies, Ourselves* in 1970, Bart was eager to share it with others.[3] She recalled that she "brought copies to one of the first Sociologists for Women in Society meetings and had a woman demonstrate cervical self-examination in [her] room at the American Sociological Association meetings" (Bart 1996, 267–68). In 1973 she wrote an opinion piece for a local Chicago newspaper, the *Hyde Parker*, titled "Sexism and Health Issues," elaborating on the problems facing women when it came to health care (Bart 1973). For Bart, already interested in women's health issues, Jane's story had a particular resonance. In a later autobiographical account, she noted that her interest in Jane had been "sparked by [her] own illegal abortion before *Roe*." It had been "performed by an MD in his office, without a nurse to wipe the vomit off [her] face when [she] threw up from the pain; paid for with [her] wedding presents; incomplete." She recalled, "the hospital would not treat me until I told them who had performed the procedure. That physicians qua physicians could mess up was not lost on me" (Bart 1996, 267). Frustrated by this experience, Bart hoped that the women's liberation movement could somehow help change others' experiences for the better. In Jane, she found a commendable feminist alternative to the pain she had experienced with her own illegal abortion. Recognizing the power of their story to inspire her and perhaps others, she chose to write about them academically.

Writing about Jane as an academic was not easy. Bart reported that originally the members of the group did not want to be interviewed. She figured that they were "anti-professional and anti-academic," since "professional"

[3] The 1970 edition of this work was titled *Women and Their Bodies: A Course*. The first edition titled *Our Bodies, Ourselves* was published in 1971. See Wells (2008).

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was "a negative word in the Women's Health Movement" (Bart 1987, 340). They apparently "considered it ironic for a group that was anti-professional and anti-academic to be studied by an academic, although they were not concerned (with one exception) about their illegal activities becoming known" (Bart and Schlesinger 1982, 143). Finally, however, some Jane members agreed to be interviewed. After all, Bart concluded, she "had been active in the Women's Movement, her self-presentation was not 'professional,' and she did not have a grant, which was considered proof of her not having been coopted" (Bart and Schlesinger 1982, 143). Ultimately everyone she approached agreed to be interviewed, as well as some who spontaneously contacted her on their own, totaling thirty-two women. The interviews took place mostly in Jane members' homes. Bart spent anywhere from forty-five minutes to two hours talking to members, some more than once. Although the women were universally kind during the interviews, often feeding her lunch, she found that they did not all agree on how to interpret the actions of the group. In particular, they were not entirely in agreement on whether Jane was actually a collective (Bart 1987).

Bart continually sought feedback from Jane members about her interpretation and was pleased when "two key members" later agreed with her about "the applicability of the various dimensions of the Rothschild-Whitt model" of democratic collectivist organizations for her sociological analysis (Bart 1987, 341).[4] Examining a static image of Jane at the height of its productivity and before the police raid, Bart noted the many sites of overlap with the Rothschild-Whitt model, including concepts such as "authority resides in the collectivity as a whole," "minimal stipulated rules," "social control through homogeneity" (349), and "the ideal of community" (350). The social stratification of the group was "egalitarian," and the division of labor was differentiated fairly, in accordance with each woman's individual capacity (354). Jane, Bart argued, was an effective feminist alternative to abortion fitting the sociological models and theories that she encountered, standing in sharp contrast to the other illegal options available to women at the time.

Bart wrote up her findings in a paper titled "Seizing the Means of Reproduction: An Illegal Feminist Abortion Collective—How and Why It Worked." She presented it at the annual American Sociological Association (ASA) conference held in Jane's hometown, Chicago, in 1977, to some interest. According to Bart, one audience member approached her after the talk, admitted to having had an abortion through Jane, and offered to be interviewed

[4] In the work that Bart references, Joyce Rothschild-Whitt (1979) seeks to delineate an ideal type for collectivist organizations, inspired by the alternative models of governance adopted by various groups in the 1970s.

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(Bart 1987, 339). Bart hoped that once in print, her story would gain even more currency and reach a wider audience. A few years later, in 1982, a version of her paper appeared in an anthology called *Workplace Democracy and Social Change*. The new title even more explicitly referenced Jane's status as a feminist collective: "Collective Work and Self-Identity: Working in a Feminist Illegal Abortion Collective" (Bart and Schlesinger 1982).

Yet these books, edited by colleagues sympathetic to the essay's political nature, were unlikely to reach the audience that most needed to learn about Jane's activities. In other words, Bart was probably preaching to the choir. It was a full decade before Bart could reach mainstream academic audiences with her observations about Jane and her argument for the significance of its feminist collectivist model. Bart recalled initially having "great difficulty" in getting the article published, "because it was so political" (1998, 1). But during the years that elapsed between her ASA talk and the publication of "Seizing the Means of Reproduction," the political and cultural context for her work had changed dramatically (Bart 1987).

Since Bart's interviews with Jane members in the early 1970s, the landscape of abortion rights had undergone significant changes. The backlash against widespread legalized abortion began almost immediately after the passage of *Roe v. Wade*. Opponents of abortion access founded sophisticated political organizations like the National Right to Life Committee. In 1977, Congress approved the Hyde Amendment to an appropriations bill, prohibiting the funding of abortions through Medicaid, which severely limited access to the procedure for poor women. Throughout the late 1970s and early 1980s so-called right-to-life activists used increasingly dramatic imagery and rhetoric in their protests, including images of maimed fetuses, to gain support for their cause. Antiabortion forces frequently harassed women seeking the procedure at clinics, and protests grew more violent (Schoen 2015).

The pro-choice community found these changes alarming. Bart wrote passionately about this changing climate in her article: "When this research was begun [in the mid-1970s], abortion was legal and poor women received third-party payments. Lack of funds could not prevent them from terminating an unwanted pregnancy" (Bart 1987, 356). By 1987, however, "third-party payments for abortions [were] almost nonexistent and a strong lobby supporting a 'human life' amendment [was] trying to make abortions illegal again" (356). Bart hoped that her article would speak to this uneasiness and inspire readers to do something proactive about it. "Perhaps," she suggested in her conclusion, "knowledge of the success of Jane will do more than expand the sociology of medicine, the sociology of social movements and organizational theory. Perhaps it will enable us to seize the means of reproduction" (356). Bart extended her activism beyond academic publishing,

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speaking at abortion rights rallies in the late 1980s. As she recalled, "it was great to be able to tell people that we could learn to do abortions with a group of laywomen" (Bart 1998, 7). She later noted that speaking at these rallies was the activist work that she most enjoyed during her career. Along with these speaking engagements, the National Women's Health Network used her 1987 *Qualitative Sociology* article in pro-choice literature during this period (National Women's Health Network 1989).

Personal political histories

With the possibility of further restrictions on abortion looming, Jane members themselves began to speak up, harnessing the power of personal testimony to lay claim to their history. The first interview with Jane members since the ones Bart conducted was published in *Sojourner* by journalist Diane Elze in 1988. "Jane 1" declared anonymously, "what we did was an important part of the history of the women's movement in this country, and I don't want it to go unrecognized anymore. It was real sad to me that it had faded to the point where, nationally, the person most well known for speaking about Jane was not a member of Jane" (in Elze 1988, 13). These Jane members wanted their story to be more widely known during this time of crisis and did not want Pauline Bart to be the only one telling it. They also hoped to reach out to others involved with the group. An author's note at the end of the interview reads: "Former members of Jane are looking for other former members of Jane, friends of Jane, people whose apartments Jane used, and of course, any woman who had an abortion with Jane in Chicago. Former members of Jane are trying to document Jane's herstory," the note declared, and readers fitting any of these descriptions were urged to "send responses to Jane c/o *Sojourner*" (Elze 1988, 13). With the stakes high in the battle over reproductive rights, these women began organizing and taking ownership of their story.

In 1989, several Jane members spoke out in public at a panel at the National Women's Studies Association (NWSA) conference. This time, they were not anonymous. There were four panelists—Laura Kaplan, Linnea Johnson, Judith Arcana, and Cheryl Curtis Zeigert—all "complete fanatics about Jane," according to an *Off Our Backs* article about the event (Wallsgrove 1989, 17). The author of the article, Ruth Wallsgrove, described it as "one of the most fascinating sessions [she] attended" at the conference. The panelists covered much of the same ground that Bart had in her articles, but they presented one important twist: Jane was not an idyllic feminist collective. Under the heading "uneven power politics," Wallsgrove reported Arcana's take: "There's been some historical mystification now they're in

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history. . . a lot of the ways they dealt with each other in the group weren't always terrific. It was not a collective, in her view. In her memory, there was always uneven power politics: people who knew things and didn't share, people who cared about that and people who didn't. . . . She loved what they did, and in this session was in no way trying to be negative about it. But they were flawed" (1989, 17). The panelists sought to complicate Bart's narrative about Jane and give their own history more depth. Wallsgrove also stressed the importance of hearing about the group firsthand, exclaiming, "very often history is told to us second, third, fourth hand. We were very lucky to be told it by the people who actually participated" (17). Former Janes took this opportunity to encourage each other to speak out about their shared history.

Over the next few years, Jane members continued speaking out. One appeared in the 1989 pro-choice activist documentary *With a Vengeance* to discuss the history of Jane and situate it in the film's broader discussion of struggles over abortion rights. Several members also appeared at an event at a Chicago bookstore that year, spurring a three-page write-up of the group in *Ms. Magazine* (Van Gelder 1991). The journalist drew on Bart's articles but also quoted extensively from Jane members vocal during this time. In 1990, a Jane member pseudonymously contributed a short chapter titled "Just Call 'Jane'" in Marlene Gerber Fried's edited volume on the history of the abortion rights struggle, *From Abortion to Reproductive Freedom* ("Jane" 1990). This too was a retelling of the Jane story—but written from a member's perspective rather than an outsider sociologist's. For former Jane members, these acts of speaking out were both self-affirming and strategic. By making claims to their story now, they cemented their position as inspirational figures in the feminist movement long after the events that made them famous. Their story was a unique tool in continuing pro-choice struggles, affording them an undeniable cultural cachet and opportunities to influence feminist discourse.

Two members in particular—Laura Kaplan and Judith Arcana—have dedicated a significant part of their post-Jane careers to preserving and sharing the group's memory. In the 1990s, Kaplan began interviewing her friends and former associates. As Elze recalls in her author's note, she wanted to document and do sufficient justice to Jane's "herstory" (1988, 12). And as Kaplan told the NWSA panel, it was important that she and the other Janes do it themselves. In addition to rediscovering a 1973 *Hyde Park–Kenwood Voices* article series written anonymously by a Jane member just after the group's dissolution, Kaplan received permission to examine the transcripts of Bart's 1970s interviews (Kaplan 1995, xix). She also conducted her own interviews with as many Jane members as she could track down, collecting "hundreds of hours of interviews with somewhere between a third and a half

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of the more than one hundred women who were at one time or another members of Jane" (1995, xix). In addition, she interviewed some of the male partners of Jane members, the abortionists they worked with, and women who had abortions through the service. In 1995 the initial NWSA storytelling and Kaplan's extensive research culminated in what, as she suggested, "might be called a collective memoir"—a three-hundred-page book titled *The Story of Jane* (Kaplan 1995, xix).

Kaplan hoped to finally put to rest the notion that Jane was an entirely democratice, nonhierarchical collective. She expanded on the idea of Jane's uneven power politics that had first appeared at the 1989 NWSA panel discussion. In her introduction, she described a "hierarchy of knowledge" within the group: "the politics of power, which we recognized so clearly in the larger society, were ironically mirrored in our own internal dynamics" (Kaplan 1995, xi). This imbalance was significant enough to warrant its own chapter, and Kaplan explained, "the service called itself a 'leaderless democracy' but, in fact, their structure, although no one overtly stated it, was a series of concentric circles. On the outer edge were women whose involvement was limited to counseling; in the center was the inner circle. . . . They made the decisions about Jane's practice, without input from the full group" (1995, 161). According to Kaplan, Jane members may have worked together for the benefit of women in need, but their relations with one another were often difficult. Jane was not an ideal collective to be emulated as an alternative organizational model but rather a cautionary tale in these troubling times of antiabortion threats.

The publication of Kaplan's book triggered a new wave of material about Jane. A documentary about the group followed in 1996. In the hour-long *Jane: An Abortion Service*, members appeared on screen with varying levels of anonymity. Some used their full names, some only their first, and two wore sunglasses to disguise their faces. The documentary made use of original primary source documents discovered while Kaplan was researching her book. The women showed the camera index cards on which they took notes about those who called for help. The film also includes what appear to be short clips of original footage shot inside the apartment where they performed the abortions. *The Story of Jane* was reviewed positively in the feminist press. The following year, Kaplan contributed a chapter about Jane in Rickie Solinger's edited volume, *Abortion Wars* (Kaplan 1998). Around this time, the Feminist Women's Health Center added a page about Jane to its website, summarizing and advertising the documentary and memoir.[5] The

[5] See "Jane: An Abortion Service," at http://www.fwhc.org/jane.htm.

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feminist magazine *Off Our Backs* interviewed Bart about her long academic and activist career in its December issue, spending a considerable amount of time on her now-famous Jane research (Bart 1998).

Originally a teacher, writer Judith Arcana has spoken and published extensively on her experiences as a Jane. In 2005 Arcana published the poetry collection *What If Your Mother*, featuring six poems inspired by her time with Jane. In one of two separate notes on the subject, she clarified the language used to describe the group, explaining, "The Service is called 'Jane' in texts and discussions of the history of women's health; the women who were members of the Service are generally called Janes" (Arcana 2005, 89). In her Jane poems, Arcana conveys the gravity of her experience with realism and fine-grained detail. In the bluntly titled, "Here Is What Happened," Arcana describes an abortion she performed on a woman who was five months pregnant: "Two days before, we reached / up inside, pushed down outside. / She breathed out like fire, / she gushed out salty water" (Arcana 2005, 78). In "Glenda Charleston, 1971," she describes a particularly memorable case in even more vivid detail: "Her vulva was a wall, labia taut. / I had to massage her feet and belly, / rub her forehead. Then she relaxed, / let her thighs fall open, / let the speculum slide inside, / one smooth motion, in and open" (76). Arcana also sheds light on the embodied experience of the Janes, giving details of their day-to-day operations and providing a glimpse of how they interacted with and related to the women they served. In "In the Service We Said," she captures a common exchange: "Lying there, some would ask, so we said No, / we're not doctors; we're women just like you. / We needed to know how, so we learned it—/ you know, just like you learn anything" (71). Such gripping recollections serve to humanize the women who sought abortions through the service and provide a firsthand account of the lived experience of providing illegal abortion.

Teaching and learning lessons

Particularly beginning in the 1990s, Jane became a teachable moment as Janes and members of the umbrella group of which the abortion service was a part, the Chicago Women's Liberation Union (CWLU), began to organize. Amid the new buzz around Jane and the rediscovery of many documents, former Chicago activists became increasingly interested in preserving their history. The CWLU founded the Herstory Project in 1999, with the goal of reestablishing its significance in the history of feminism and social movements. "Though the CWLU was active just a generation ago," authors of the Herstory Project's mission statement lament, "an understanding of its impact on women in Chicago, as well as the national feminist movement of

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the times, is largely unknown." They sought to use the Internet "to tell the history of women's liberation from the ground up," documenting the role that the CWLU played in the broader women's liberation and student movements of the 1960s and 1970s. The project made many archival sources accessible, including "organizational documents, position papers, newsletters and newspapers, letters, notes, photographs, art work and a variety of other resources not available before."[6] That same year, Jane members were interviewed again, this time by a graduate student in history writing on reproductive health, who later published her own essay about the group (Kluchin 2010).

Seeking to pass the torch of feminist activism, former Jane members hoped that new web technologies would encourage crucial "inter-generational dialogue."[7] With several decades between the project and the events it chronicled, CWLU Herstory Project coordinators hoped to breathe new life into the CWLU's activism and make it relevant to younger feminists. They appealed to other older feminists to "help us bridge the generation gap!" by donating money for history preservation efforts and making themselves available for interviews by students.[8] "Our goal is to connect with women today who are becoming conscious feminists," notes the mission statement. "We want to work together to develop women's leadership and improve the safety and quality of women's lives in the larger struggle for social justice."[9] A significant portion of the Herstory Project's resources focus on Jane, their most famous component, giving it an honored place within an official organizational history. The CWLU Herstory Project has made previously obscure documents easily accessible through the Internet. As early as 2001, this greater accessibility made Jane a possible topic for student research papers. The Herstory Project proudly showcases two papers written about Jane by grade school and high school students on its website (Simpson 2001; Jessica and Carmen 2002).

The generation gap was a major concern for feminists of a certain age. Third-wave writers critiqued their second-wave foremothers for, among other things, what they saw as insufficient attention to issues of class and race. As Nancy Hewitt has suggested, their critiques of the second wave may be seen as part of a larger tradition of feminist movements defining themselves against caricatures of the past (Hewitt 2010). Regardless, third-

[6] These quotations are taken from "About the Herstory Project," at https://www.cwluherstory.org/about-us/.

[7] "About the Herstory Project."

[8] See "Support the Herstory Project" at https://www.cwluherstory.org/support-us/.

[9] "About the Herstory Project."

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wave politics and the new manifestations of feminist politics in the 1990s and beyond played a role in the reshaping the reception of later Jane stories, just at the point when second-wave foremothers were beginning to write en masse official historical accounts of the women's movement.

Like their second-wave counterparts, younger women were spurred to action around abortion rights issues in the late 1980s. Indeed, despite their other differences, feminists of all ages were concerned with threats to reproductive rights. The 1989 documentary *With a Vengeance*, in which a Jane member anonymously appears, was a product of younger women's mobilization around abortion. The interviewer, activist Ninia Baehr, began running "Abortion Rap" workshops in 1988. In these workshops, she spoke to other women about the history and continuing legacy of disrespect toward women's bodies and their sexual autonomy. Drawing on stories from the past to highlight their oppression, including anecdotes from the pre-*Roe* era, Baehr sought to mobilize action surrounding current abortion policies. *With a Vengeance* was intended to accompany or substitute for Baehr's workshop, spreading the same message about the need to look back to history as a motivation for the present.

To spread her message even more widely, Baehr consolidated her workshop into a short book. In 1990, she published *Abortion without Apology*. Baehr organized the book into five chapters, each focusing on a particular moment in the history of abortion. The story of Jane appears in the chapter titled "Woman-Controlled Abortion: The Self-Help Health Movement." After first discussing Carol Downer and Lorraine Rothman's menstrual extraction technique, which involved women using tools much like the ones Jane used in a self-help context, Baehr moves to Jane as an example of activists working outside of the system rather than agitating for the repeal of abortion laws. What Baehr seems to find most significant about Jane, however, is not the fact that abortion was woman controlled. She is more interested in discussing the class and race dynamics in Jane's story. After a very brief introduction to Jane's activities, she focuses on these concerns: "Over time, the population JANE served changed. Women with money began to leave the state for their abortions once legal abortions became available in New York." In contrast, "Women without money stayed in Chicago. Most of the women who came through Jane were poor and Black" (Baehr 1990, 26). Although these details are not absent in other accounts, their privileged location here is significant. Elsewhere in the book, particularly in her chapter on "Lessons for the 1990s," Baehr stresses the need for feminists to form coalitions across lines of race, class, and sexuality. She is sensitive to the concerns of women of color, reminding her readers that issues such as forced sterilization also deserve attention from pro-choice feminists. Baehr also includes a racially di-

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verse set of images throughout, integrating depictions of women of color in her cartoon and photo selections. In *Abortion without Apology*, a younger feminist with new concerns took the story of Jane and shaped it, highlighting recent anxieties about differences among women and suggesting how to counteract the fragmentation of the feminist community due to increasingly complicated issues around identity politics.

Writer Paula Kamen, another self-identified third-wave feminist, picked up on Jane's story and was eager to share its lessons with others. A Chicago native and 1989 graduate of the University of Illinois, Kamen first learned about Jane in 1992, when she heard a member speak about her past experiences during a conference panel about the future of feminism. Intrigued by this story, Kamen sought out other former Jane members (Kamen 2005a). Rather than write another article or book, however, she thought that the story of Jane would work best as a play, like Eve Ensler's popular *Vagina Monologues*. Kamen's choice of genre did not mean that hers was not a serious work of scholarship. She wanted readers of the script and viewers in the audience to know that this play relied on detailed historical research. In her stage directions, she took care to convey a sense of history. These directions are meticulous and meaningful, noting when actors are quoting verbatim her oral history interviews or original documents (Kamen 2001). In the script, she provides short biographies of each member to help the actors get acquainted with their characters (2–6). The prologue features an abortion recipient named Crystal giving an interview to an actress playing Kamen and granting Kamen permission to record her. Kamen makes it clear that these were real women from history, telling their real stories.

Like Baehr's booklet, Kamen's play can be read with an eye to the concerns of third-wave feminist politics. Kamen found the class- and race-consciousness of Jane compelling and admirable, telling an interviewer, "Jane was there for the poorest of the poor. They often charged just $10 for an abortion when the back-alley rate was $1,000. They had really high class-consciousness, but in our current American culture, you don't see that at all" (Kamen 2000, 64). Kamen also specifically sought a multiracial cast. *Jane: Abortion and the Underground*, she explained, "offers ethnically diverse roles and strong roles for women." The service, after all, "was the one safe alternative for about 11,000 Chicago women of all backgrounds" (Kamen 2005b, 9). Her interpretation of Jane heavily weighted race, class, and the need for coalition building among women, and her directions explicitly addressed these issues.

Kamen hoped to make her play safe for consumption by large audiences of young women, not alienating and politically heavy-handed. She was reluctant to admit that her play was intentionally political. She noted that "while

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addressing politics (which are inextricable from the characters' lives), the play is NOT AN 'ISSUE PLAY'—and concentrates on telling stories rather than on polemics" (Kamen 2005b, 11). The play was a "suspenseful drama" with "occasional dark humor" (11). This does not mean that performers have not made it into an issue play—one 2007 production claimed that the play "is supposed to help send the message to advocate for comprehensive sexual education, access to reproductive health care and contraception."[10] Kamen, however, hoped to appeal to broader audiences with the dramatic and comedic appeal of the story of Jane: "Nothing is as it seems on the surface: a minister and pregnant woman are abortion-rights activists; a policewoman knocking on the door of The Service is seeking an abortion, not an arrest; and the abortion doctor is revealed not to be a real doctor" (Kamen 2005b, 11). The events of the play are "twists and turns of the plot" as much as they represent historical events with relevance for today's activists. It was necessary "to lighten it a bit," according to Kamen, who realized in early drafts that "it was hard to sit through—it's very heavy—so being funny helped to leaven it" (Kamen 2000, 64).

Despite the backdrop of persistent threats to abortion rights, the college-aged audience for Kamen's play grew up after the galvanizing panics of the Reagan and George H. W. Bush years. Perhaps more significant, they were coming of age in a world that commentators were increasingly describing as postfeminist. As Susan Faludi (1991) argued, a conservative backlash against the so-called extremes of the women's liberation movement hindered women's continued political progress. A 1998 *Time Magazine* cover asking "Is Feminism Dead?" captured this sense of feminism's defeat and irrelevance during this decade.[11] Kamen was very conscious of this and hoped to avoid appearing too polemical. Her audience of younger women, possibly thinking that feminism was already over, might be alienated by tactics similar to what Kamen described as the overt "propaganda" of earlier feminists. Her philosophy, then, was "to take all this feminist stuff to the mainstream" (Kamen 2000, 64). In this light, Kamen's play can be seen as a sly form of feminist consciousness-raising for a new generation.

More recently, in the 2000s and 2010s, a newer generation drawn to radical politics has transmitted Jane stories in new formats. New-millennium Jane stories have often taken the form of a rediscovery of radical feminist ac-

[10] This text is taken from an article titled "VOX Presents Jane: Abortion and the Underground" by Megan Grady that appeared on the online *DoG Street Journal* in 2007 but has since been removed.

[11] To view this image, visit http://content.time.com/time/covers/0,16641,19980629,00.html.

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tion. As people learned about the story of Jane through campus performances of Kamen's play, viewings of the documentary, or reading Kaplan's book, the group's apparently radical nature comes to the forefront in retellings in zines and on the Internet. One zine author wrote in 2004, "Jane's implicit centrality of class stood in firm opposition to much of the bourgeois women's rights movement. These women operated . . . in cooperation and solidarity with those on the frontlines absorbing its blows. By their actions, they confronted the dogmatic liberalism of the women's liberation movement of the time" (*Jane: Documents from Chicago's Clandestine Abortion Service* 2004, 6–7). For this author, reprinting original Jane documents in zine format is a way of rescuing a forgotten and presumably rare instance of truly radical feminist activism. A blogger captured this tendency perfectly in 2009 when she wrote, "what is stunning . . . is how completely fucking *radical* these women were" (*AbsurdBeats* 2009). These interpretations reveal a forgetting or loss of a sense of radicalism in second-wave feminist projects, and it is precisely that radicalism that they celebrate.

Recent Jane stories hone in on direct action as the most commendable feature of the group's history. On a popular book review website, one reader of Kaplan's memoir comments, "the women in these pages are amazing. it makes me want to tap my radical side and just get out there and *do* something already, not just talk talk talk about all the problems with oppression i see in this world."[12] Jane has also made its way onto YouTube, courtesy of a pro-choice vlogger who highlights the group's direct action in celebration of Blog for Choice Day. The now-deleted video's creator spoke admiringly of Jane, noting that they "didn't wait for the rich, old, white men in DC to tell them that they could have abortions."[13] Folk/punk musician Shannon Murray included a song titled "Jane" on her album *Love and Fear*, showcasing the group among other politically radical stories from history. "It's 2006 and we don't give a shit / That *Roe v. Wade* is crumbling," she begins, going on to introduce her listeners to the story of Jane in gripping detail, singing: "And there's a history unknown / In 1969 the women of Chicago rose and said we're not gonna take this." Murray both narrates the group's history and commends their actions for her listeners, summarizing with lyrics such as "They didn't take it to the courts they didn't picket in the street / They knew direction action was the only way choice is free / They set up a clinic an abortion clinic / And no one was turned away because they couldn't pay /

[12] See Elisa Saphier's review on LibraryThing at https://www.librarything.com/work/154202/reviews/96409332. Other reader comments on *The Story of Jane* are available at http://www.goodreads.com/book/show/676543.The_Story_of_Jane.

[13] This video, posted in 2008, was titled "The Jane Collective."

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They performed 11,000 thousand abortions with kindness and compassion" (Murray 2006). Describing Jane members as ordinary people, she explains that while there were "no hospitals," "no doctors," and "no nurses," "nobody died, nobody died, nobody died." Alleging that both the capitalist and patriarchal medical industries "will never take care of you or me," Murray signals that when compared to Jane's unfettered and woman-controlled practices, "the abortion industry is just legalized brutality." Although her listeners may not agree with that particular point, she also insists at the end of the song, "If we don't decide the circumstances of our own lives / Then choice is just choosing to let someone else decide." Murray, and others, sing Jane's praises for their unwillingness to sit around waiting for political gatekeepers.

Conclusion

For decades women have told and retold the story of Jane. Since *Roe v. Wade* and Jane's dissolution in 1973, the pro-choice community has seen constant threats to legal abortion. Knowledge of Jane has been shared as a consciousness-raising tool, but critically examining this process and following who tells and who listens to the story shows more than just that. Jane members and their second-wave feminist sympathizers used Jane stories as a way to keep their political messages relevant in changing times. Their audiences and interpreters passed along this story in a variety of ways, finding particular resonance with the many different possible lessons contained within it, whether that was about working together collectively as feminists, preserving an accurate depiction of the past, coming together from different backgrounds, or fighting against political pessimism with direct action. Placing this ongoing practice of consciousness-raising in historical context reveals changes in the feminist movement over time. It also demonstrates the construction of the past itself as an ongoing political project.

In the spring of 2014, I presented some of my early dissertation research at a conference on the history of the women's liberation movement (O'Donnell 2014). Feeling disillusioned by the unrelenting bad news about women's reproductive rights, I had moved away from the history of abortion and instead wrote a biography of the writer and health activist Barbara Seaman. The conference coordinators placed me on the "Reproduction and Abortion" panel with Pauline Bart, whom I had met only archivally. I chose to recount an anecdote about Bart and Seaman's acquaintanceship in the early 1970s, to honor and amuse my esteemed copanelist. Bart gave a version of her Jane paper, nearly forty years old but just as salient (Bart 2014). All around the conference that weekend, there were pro-choice activists speak-

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ing up loudly and unhesitatingly in the question-and-answer session, passing out materials, and reminding us that our reproductive rights were right then, at that very moment, under serious threat. But the need to speak up only grew more urgent once we panelists dispersed and fell back into our academic routines. After submitting my dissertation, I revised this essay with a vengeance.

Drexel Hill, Pennsylvania

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