NEW CODER INTRODUCTION TO THE ABORTION DISCOURSE PROJECT

I. GENERAL OVERVIEW OF THE PROJECT

(SUMMARY OF THE RESEARCH PROPOSAL FUNDED BY THE NSF:

The goal of this research project is to compare public discourse on the issue of abortion in Germany and the United States, examining how it has shifted over the past 20 years. The issue of abortion will be used to develop and test a broader theory of public discourse and the conditions under which social movements, in particular, are likely to influence it.

Abortion is an especially rich issue for comparison because it can not be understood outside of a broader challenge to cultural codes about gender relations and the role of women. In addition, it is an issue with a significant, ongoing contest involving major unresolved issues of public policy in both countries. Finally, the abortion issue provides significant variation between countries (and over time within them) on two major variables of interest: (a) the degree of polarization reflected in mass media discourse and (b) the relative influence of social movement actors compared to political parties and other institutional actors in shaping it.

The primary methods employed are content analysis of newspapers and other mass media sources over time and a combination of content analysis and informant interviews with spokespersons for groups who are engaged in sustained efforts to further a particular interpretation or way of framing the abortion issue. The research design will employ common research instruments and cross-national teams in data collection.

(BEFORE READING FURTHER I RECOMMEND READING THE POOR TRAINING NEWSPAPER ARTICLES INCLUDED WITH YOUR OTHER TRAINING MATERIALS).

II. INTRODUCTION TO YOUR ROLE AS A CONNECTICUT CODER

This is an introduction to the project as a whole, and to your part in the project this summer. You will be part of the "Connecticut Team". The Project has three locations - the University of Connecticut, Boston College, and the Science Center (WZB) in Germany. We have divided the work that needs to be accomplished this summer between the Boston and Connecticut Teams. We will briefly describe the work that the Boston team is doing, and how it relates to your work, but will focus mainly on the tasks of the Connecticut team.

All of the ideas, concepts, and tasks that I will describe in general in this introduction are described in detail in three other documents: 1) the project codebook, 2) the guide to hierarchical coding, 3) and the software instructions.
You are now part of a large, National Science Foundation (NSF) funded project (described in general in part I). It is designed to take three years (we are currently in the second year), and it involves three stages. You will be involved this summer in the completion of the first stage: content analysis of newspaper articles from the New York Times and the Los Angeles Times from 1972 to 1993. We do not code every article about abortion, but representative samples (the articles will be retrieved and prepared for "coding" before you begin the project.) I will be talking about "coding", but it will take some time to explain exactly what this means. It will become clear as we proceed.

The principal investigators for the project, Myra Marx Ferree, Bill Gamson, and Freidhelm Neidhardt, are interested in abortion discourse, or talk about abortion. They want to know what the issues (frames) are for those involved in abortion discourse, and who the key actors are and the organizations they belong to. The information will be gathered in three stages: First from the newspaper articles, next from interviews with the people identified in the articles (and people involved in abortion discourse but not mentioned in the newspapers), and finally from questionnaires completed by representatives of the organizations identified in the newspaper content analysis.

All of the information that the investigators want from the newspaper articles are entered by the coders (YOU!) into a project computers, using a software designed just for this project. The software we use is called "ARTICLE". It was created by the investigators and computer programmers, using a database manager called Foxpro.

III. CODING

You will be coding using photocopies of newspaper articles, or you will be adding to information from the articles that were already put into the computer by other coders. Depending upon the particular task you are working on, you might be writing on a copy of an article (primary coding), or working with information already in the computer (secondary coding).

We have already coded the articles from 1989 to 1993. Our goal is to complete coding (have all of the information we need from all of the articles correctly in the computer program) for the remaining articles (1972-1987) by the end of the summer. This is a reachable, but high, goal. There are approximately 700 articles to complete: this means about 100 articles per person. The articles can be as short as three paragraphs, or as long as 160 paragraphs. The average time for coding an article is about 1 hour (some will take longer, some shorter). Although it will take some time to get used to coding (I will describe what this involves in more detail), you will become much quicker with practice.

Conceptually we have divided the articles into two levels. The first level is called the "article level". It is a holistic way of looking at the article. We are interested in the overall FOCUS of the
article, the ARENA of action, and the basic STRUCTURE of the story. This information will be coded by the Boston coders. The second level is called the "utterance level". At this level we dissect the article into pieces called "speech acts" or "utterances". We break the newspaper articles up into sections based on who is speaking (the author, and editor, or someone being quoted or paraphrased) and what is being said. There are sections of the article that we are not interested in (they are "naked"). These sections are not about abortion, are simply reporting but not providing evaluations, or are restatements of laws.

When we code an article, we are taking all of the information we have and breaking it up into variables. It is almost as is we were asking the newspaper article to answer a survey. When we code, we put the information given in the article into categories on the variables we are interested in. I will briefly talk about the variables that the BC coders enter, but we will focus today mostly on the variables that the Connecticut coders are responsible for: idea elements and process codes.

All of the information from the articles that we want will be entered into a computer program. We will teach you how to use the computer program at the follow-up training.

There are only two pieces of information that you will enter into the computer about the article as a whole. First you need to determine if the article is about a protest event or not. Second you need to determine if the article is about the women's movement or not. If you are unsure if the article qualifies as an article about a protest event or about the women's movement, you can describe the article in a special place on the computer program and the researchers will decide later. Basically you will be "flagging" articles.

IV. IDEA ELEMENT CODING

As described above, the second level of analysis involves dissecting the articles into "utterances". Utterances are special kinds of statements in the newspaper articles that the project is particularly interested in. Utterances have 4 main components.

1. SPEAKERS. For this project, speakers are the people who make statements (say or write words), that we consider "codable". Speakers include authors, editors, government actors (Judges, presidents, aides, officials, etc), movement actors (president of NOW, leader of Operation Rescue, etc), people on the street or at rallies, etc. Most speakers are identified as belonging to ORGANIZATIONS and as having a particular FUNCTION in the organization (judge, chair, head, president, member, unk). Often the author will give additional information about the speaker, such as their, history with a movement, their age, their background, etc. This information is considered DEPICTION.

2. TEXT OF THE UTTERANCE. For our purposes, speakers make utterances. It is often more difficult than one might anticipate to determine
who said what, and what is the beginning or the end of the utterance (boundaries of utterances), because not everything that is said is codable. The Boston coders will focus on including ONLY codable utterances, and ALL codable utterances. How does someone decide what is codable? Codable (versus naked) utterances have the following characteristics (meet the following criteria):

1. the utterances is about abortion, or movement activities about abortion
2. the utterance includes PROCESS talk, specifically:
   
   A. Procedures
      such as laws, fundraising, introducing bills, file briefs, etc.
   
   B. Political Opportunity Structure
      Political changes that increase or decrease the ability of a group to reach set goals, such as a new president helping or hurting pro-choice goals, or a new law blocking pro-life activities.
   
   C. Motivation and Morale
      Such as comments about continuing to fight despite setbacks, or determination to open or close a clinic, etc.
   
   D. Meta Communication
      These are statements that can be thought of as "Talk about the talk" - such as statements about heated debate, increasing war language, softening rhetoric, divisive language, etc.

Your primary goal will be to decide what the statements in the article are really about (frames/idea elements), and if process talk is involved (described above, #2 A-D). After you decide what the utterance is about (the frame) you will look for the code that corresponds to that idea. For example, if a woman says that the Catholic Bishops oppose abortion because it involves taking a human life, the issue is: the fetus is a life. We have a general frame that corresponds to this idea (iXX). After you find the general frame, you will look for a specific idea element code within the general frame (abortion is murder, 115).

Over 500 idea element codes have been established. Each code has a 3-digit number assigned to it. Fortunately, you do not need to know all five hundred codes from memory. They are arranged into eight large categories, called frames. The frames are identified by the first number of each idea element code (18). These numbers correspond to the main themes in abortion discourse in the United States and Germany for the last 20 years and have been grouped into the following eight categories:

1. the fetus is a life
2. balance between the fetus and the mother
3. gender, women's issues
4. issues about the state's role/responsibility
5. morality issues, abortion as a moral issue
6. the social impact of abortion
7. harms done, efficacy and other pragmatic concerns
8. justice and bias issues.

Within each of the eight over arching themes there are more detailed ideas, such as stages of life, or the mother's life takes precedence in cases of rape or incest. There are between 3 and 9 more specific codes under the eight themes. These are the second digits in the code. Some ideas that are expressed are very specific, and have their own third digit code, such as abortion is murder (115) or the government needs to do everything it can to protect a woman's right to choose (416). Although it may take time to learn all of the many specific codes, it should not take to long to identify which of the eight primary categories to begin looking under. If a code is not where you might think, there are generally cross references (see your IDEA ELEMENT CODE BOOK for a better understanding of the structure of the codes).

The process of identifying and applying idea element codes is described in more detail in the codebook and Myra's guide to hierarchical idea element coding. We will also be giving you examples of utterances, and will practice with you to identify the issue and the code. Over time you will know automatically how to identify common codes, and how to find the less common ones.

Sometimes statements are general and abstract, and will easily fit one of the codes. Other times the speakers will stay focused on particular details, and the coder will need to make an abstraction from the specifics and decide a code for the statement.

When you read a newspaper article, you will read for statements about abortion. When the author or an actor talks about abortion issues, you can stop and ask yourself: what is the issue here? What is this person's opinion or decision about abortion? What is the main idea being discussed? Once you determine the issue, you need to find the appropriate idea element code. We have created a list of codes that correspond with all of the issues that are part of the abortion debate (if you find something that is relevant but does not have a code, we have procedures for handling it).

The Boston coders will enter all of the information about the article into the computer with the exception of the idea elements. Your job is to:

1. check that the speaker, organization, and function information is accurate.
2. add idea element codes
3. add process codes if necessary (#3, A-D).
Before you begin entering information on the computer, you will generally write the idea element codes and process codes on a copy of the article (at times someone else might write on the article and you will enter the information for them).

We will have team meetings to go over difficult issues/articles. There are rules that have been established for coding the articles and entering the information into the computer (these are detailed in the general codebook).

READ THE FOLLOWING AND THINK OF QUESTIONS FOR THE TRAINING:
1. THE IDEA ELEMENTS
2. THE CODEBOOK
3. THE GUIDE TO HIERARCHICAL CODING