

Ill-conceived History: An Analysis of the Fiftieth Anniversary of the Pill

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Abstract: The fiftieth anniversary of the pill was an international commemorative event celebrated in 2010, and this thesis is an analysis of the use of history within this anniversary literature. Within the fiftieth anniversary, commemorators relied heavily on the idea of the past in order to make contemporary narratives of the pill appear less controversial to a popular audience. This suppressed the polyvalent nature of the pill and resulted in an extremely narrow presentation of this history. This thesis analyses these commemorations as they occurred in the United States and Australia, concluding that this anniversary demonstrated an expedient use of public history.

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Abbreviations:

ACOG – American College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists

AJOG – American Journal of Obstetrics and Gynaecology

ANZJOG – Australian and New Zealand Journal of Obstetrics and Gynaecology

BWHBC – Boston Women’s Health Book Collective

FDA – [American] Food and Drug Administration

FPNSW – Family Planning New South Wales

IPPF – International Planned Parenthood Federation

IUD – Inter Uterine Device

JAMA – Journal of the American Medical Association

PPFA – Planned Parenthood Federation of America

SH&FPA – Sexual Health and Family Planning Australia

SUWN – Step Up Women’s Network

VWT – Victorian Women’s Trust

WHM – women’s health movement

WLM – Women’s Liberation Movement

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Pfizer advertisement in Christine Read ed. *Taking It: 50 Years of the Pill*, (NSW: NSW Family Planning, 2010), p. 28. Reproduced in this thesis with the permission of Pfizer Australia.

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Introduction – The Fiftieth Anniversary of the Pill

‘The Pill’ is an umbrella term that can be applied to any type or brand of oral contraceptive tablets. It is a medication taken by women on a daily basis in order to avoid pregnancy, and it is known to be one of the most simple and effective methods of reversible contraception currently available.¹ It contains synthetic oestrogen and progesterone, which mimic the body’s natural hormone functions and prevent pregnancy by inhibiting ovulation.² Currently over 100 million women worldwide take the pill, because when used correctly, it is 99 per cent effective in preventing pregnancy.³ This has made it an extremely popular contraceptive option since its introduction to the Western drug market over fifty years ago.

In 2010, the social and individual implications of the pill were considered significant enough to warrant a fiftieth anniversary celebration. This thesis is an analysis of that anniversary as it occurred in America and Australia. It is therefore a thesis about the use of history in a popular context, and what follows is an investigation of how, why, and to what effect, the history of the pill was employed in fiftieth anniversary commemorations: concluding that this anniversary demonstrates an expedient use of history. The two main groups involved in propagating this anniversary – international feminist thinkers, and the global pharmaceutical industry – both portrayed the pill primarily as a symbol of women’s empowerment.

However the history of the pill is far more sullied and complex than this suggests, and this approach effectively silenced all aspects of this history that did not serve the commemorators’ aims: which were raising the public profile of the pill, and

¹ John Guillebaud and Anne Maccregor, *The Pill and other forms of hormonal contraception: The Facts*, seventh edition, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), p. 7.

² Guillebaud, *The Pill and other forms of hormonal contraception*, p. 15.

³ Guillebaud, *The Pill and other forms of hormonal contraception*, pp. 7, 16.

increasing women's access to oral contraception. This argument will be explored specifically in relation to the absence of population control throughout fiftieth anniversary literature, using three chapters that broadly relate to, contraception in the 1960s, the pill and feminist thought, and the relationship between the pill and the pharmaceutical industry.⁴

In 1970, it was argued that 'to place the pill in its proper perspective historically, socially and medically is an incredibly difficult and probably impossible task'.⁵ This is because the pill represents an intriguing cross over between medical, economic, and social history: it was the first medication to be taken by healthy people on a long term basis, its development was bound to the issue of global overpopulation in the 1950s, and it is frequently equated with Western women's increased opportunities in the second half of the twentieth century.⁶ While historical silences are unavoidable, fiftieth anniversary events and publications made no real attempt to capture the complex and polyvalent nature of the pill. Thus this thesis looks at the historical elements that commemorators chose to include and exclude, and analyses this process of selection in regards to this use of public history and the broader social understanding of the pill that the fiftieth anniversary influenced.

⁴ Because the pill is a medication most popular amongst young, white, middle class, heterosexual women in Western countries, the fiftieth anniversary is a narrative based on the experiences of this demographic of women. Thus in analysing this material, this thesis is subject to certain limitations, namely the absence of discussion pertaining to race, class, age, and sexuality. In regards to age and sexuality, these are purely practical concerns as only heterosexual women of a certain age require contraception, meaning that this is, ironically, one context where these absences are appropriate. With respect to race and class, these absences are far more significant, and these are considerations that have had a tremendous influence on women's experiences of the pill. However due to practical constraints, unfortunately in analysing a narrow representation of this history, this analysis itself can be quite limited in regards to women of colour, women living in developing countries, and women of a lower socio-economic status; Guttmacher Institute, 'Fact on Contraceptive Use in the United States', (July, 2012), <http://www.guttmacher.org/pubs/fb_contr_use.html>, accessed 19 February 2012.

⁵ Elizabeth B. Connell, 'Facts and Fantasies about Oral Contraceptives', *Family Planning Perspectives*, vol. 2, no. 1 (January 1970), p. 45.

⁶ Elizabeth Siegal Watkins, *On The Pill: A Social History of Oral Contraceptives 1950-1970*, (Baltimore and London: The John Hopkins University Press, 1997), pp. 1-16; Lara V. Marks, *Sexual Chemistry: A History of the Contraceptive Pill: With a New Preface*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001, 2010), pp. 1-2.

This analysis will be based on primary material produced in the United States and Australia between early 2010 and late 2011 for the specific purpose of commemorating the fiftieth anniversary of the pill. These sources consist of a small selection of books: *America and the Pill: A History of Promise, Peril and Liberation* by Elaine Tyler May, *Love, Sex, Freedom and the Paradox of the Pill: A Brief History of Birth Control* by Nancy Gibbs, and *Taking It: 50 Years of the Pill* edited by Christine Read.⁷ In 2011, the Victorian Women's Trust (VWT) hosted a commemorative event, '50th Anniversary of the Pill in Australia – an Incomplete Revolution', the speeches from which will be analysed.⁸ The pharmaceutical industry also hosted a number of commemorative events, and produced a considerable amount of online content, all of which is investigated. A collection of American and Australian newspaper articles serve to make up the remainder of this published primary literature.⁹

In conjunction with this written material, oral histories of the fiftieth anniversary will also facilitate this analysis. A series of interviews with members of the public directly involved in commemorating the fiftieth anniversary were conducted by the author in order to discuss the use of history within this anniversary.¹⁰ Interviewees were asked a series of questions regarding their participation in the fiftieth anniversary, and their involvement in remembering the pill in this context. Dr Elaine Tyler May, author of *America and the Pill*, and Dr Christine Read, editor of *Taking It*, have provided the

⁷ Elaine Tyler May, *America and the Pill: A History of Promise, Peril and Liberation*, (New York: Basic Books, 2010); Christine Read ed., *Taking It: 50 Years of The Pill*, (NSW: Family Planning NSW, 2010); Nancy Gibbs, *Love, Sex, Freedom, and the Paradox of the Pill: A Brief History of Birth Control*, (e-book, kindle edition, 2010).

⁸ '50th Anniversary of the Pill in Australia– an Incomplete Revolution' event hosted by the Victorian Women's Trust, 23 November 2011, audio-visual recording of the event available on YouTube, <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v2JhJ2sQVFg>>, accessed on 16 February 2012.

⁹ See bibliography, American and Australian Fiftieth Anniversary Sources, pp. 99-106.

¹⁰ 'The Fiftieth Anniversary of The Pill', prepared by Tiarne Barratt under the supervision of Professor Alison Bashford, approved by The University of Sydney Human Research Ethics Committee on 1 May 2012, ref. no. AH00088; Please note that all interviewees gave permission to be referred to by their full name in the presentation of this research.

bulk of this oral history.¹¹ As well two speakers from the VWT event, ‘50th Anniversary of the Pill in Australia’, Mary Crooks, the Executive Director of this organisation, and Dr Louise Keogh, were also interviewed.¹²

The fiftieth anniversary of the pill was an extremely recent event, and as such, this thesis is the first study to critically analyse the use of history in this context. In terms of secondary literature, existing social histories of the pill, and theories of population control considerably inform this thesis. This analysis also draws on literature from reproductive politics in the US and Australia, the history of commemoration, the historical Women’s Liberation Movement, and the twenty-first century critique of the pharmaceutical industry.

Elizabeth Siegal Watkins and Lara V. Marks have set the standard for social histories of the pill by producing the two most authoritative and widely acclaimed interpretations of this history.¹³ Watkins looks at the American social history of the pill from 1950-1970. Her work was considered ground-breaking because she challenged the perception that the pill was revolutionary by debunking the myth that in the 1960s, it sparked the sexual revolution.¹⁴ Though there are limitations to Watkins’ work, her

¹¹ Elaine Tyler May, written interview, 14 June 2012, ‘The Fiftieth Anniversary of The Pill’, prepared by Tiarne Barratt under the supervision of Professor Alison Bashford, approved by The University of Sydney Human Research Ethics Committee on 1 May 2012, ref. no. AH00088; Christine Read, written interview, 27 July 2012, ‘The Fiftieth Anniversary of The Pill’, prepared by Tiarne Barratt under the supervision of Professor Alison Bashford, approved by The University of Sydney Human Research Ethics Committee on 1 May 2012, ref. no. AH00088.

¹² Mary Crooks, written interview, 30 July 2012, ‘The Fiftieth Anniversary of The Pill’, prepared by Tiarne Barratt under the supervision of Professor Alison Bashford, approved by The University of Sydney Human Research Ethics Committee on 1 May 2012, ref. no. AH00088; Louise Keogh, written interview, 27 July 2012, ‘The Fiftieth Anniversary of The Pill’, prepared by Tiarne Barratt under the supervision of Professor Alison Bashford, approved by The University of Sydney Human Research Ethics Committee on 1 May 2012, ref. no. AH00088.

¹³ Watkins, *On The Pill*; Marks, *Sexual Chemistry*.

¹⁴ Watkins, *On The Pill*, pp. 1-8.

book *On The Pill* received little academic criticism, and on the whole, was met very positively.¹⁵

In comparison, Marks took an international focus, free from chronological boundaries, which meant she was able to address many of the gaps in Watkins' work: namely population control, the importance of religion, and the pill in contemporary society. Marks' work focussed on the failure of the pill to eliminate unplanned pregnancy, and although it was not considered as revolutionary as Watkins', her book *Sexual Chemistry* has been described as 'the most balanced and complete history of the contraceptive pill currently in print.'¹⁶

Linda Gordon has described the development of the pill as the marriage of birth control and population control, which is an apt depiction of this historical interconnectedness.¹⁷ And yet, as this thesis argues, population control is notable for its absence in fiftieth anniversary literature. The following analysis of the pill and population control has been largely facilitated by the work of Matthew Connelly, Laura Briggs, and David Critchlow, all of whom argue its centrality and importance.¹⁸

Fiftieth anniversary narratives repeatedly prioritised the theme of women's empowerment over population control when presenting the history of the pill, failing to

¹⁵ One of the few negative reviews of Watkins' book was by chemist Carl Djerassi, however it is arguable that his criticism stemmed from the opinion that his personal contributions to the development of the pill were overlooked in this particular historical narrative; Carl Djerassi, 'Djerassi reviews "On the Pill: A Social History of Oral Contraceptives, 1950-1970" by Elizabeth Siegel Watkins', *The New England Journal of Medicine*, vol. 360, no. 6 (February 1999), pp. 485-486.

¹⁶ Heather Munro Prescott, 'Reviewed work(s): *Sexual Chemistry: A History of the Contraceptive Pill*. By Lara V Marks', *The Quarterly Review of Biology*, vol. 77, no. 4 (December 2002), pp. 493-494.

¹⁷ Linda Gordon, *The Moral Property of Women: A History of Birth Control Politics in America*, third edition, (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2002), p. 286.

¹⁸ Matthew Connelly, *Fatal Misconception: The Struggle to Control World Population*, (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2008); Laura Briggs, *Reproducing Empire: Race, Sex, Science, and U.S. Imperialism in Puerto Rico*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002); Donald T. Critchlow ed., *The Politics of Abortion and Birth Control in Historical Perspective*, (Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1996).

acknowledge the intersection of these concepts.¹⁹ This dismissal is arguably a continuation of a broader tendency to view the economic concern of population as a somehow unrelated issue within social histories.²⁰ Frequently, population control is labelled a separate issue when it conflicts with existing perceptions of the past, and the absence of population is one of the characterising features of the 2010 “liberation narrative” of the pill.²¹

The “liberation narrative” is a term which will be applied throughout this thesis, and it refers to the popular trend within fiftieth anniversary literature of anachronistically using the historical concept of liberation.²² Contextually, the term liberation has a very specific and historicised meaning because it is associated with the radical Women’s Liberation Movement (WLM) of the 1970s. In contrast, fiftieth anniversary literature employed this historic concept as a way to contemporarily summarise what were considered to be the empowering benefits of the pill: namely Western women’s increased access to family planning, work, and education in the

¹⁹ Pascal K. Whelpton, ‘Control by Fate or Foresight? - Summary of paper to be presented at the Sixth International Conference on Planned Parenthood, New Delhi, February 1959’, *Sixth International Conference on Planned Parenthood*, 1959, Box 56, Folder 5, Planned Parenthood Federation of America Records (series 5), Sophia Smith Collection.

²⁰ Connelly, *Fatal Misconception*, p. 4.

²¹ Connelly, *Fatal Misconception*, p. 13.

²² Some examples the “liberation narrative” include: Nancy Gibbs, ‘The Pill at 50: Sex, Freedom and Paradox’, *Time Magazine*, 22 April 2010; Deborah Kotz, ‘Birth Control Pill Turns 50: 7 Ways It Changed Lives’, *U.S News & World Report*, 7 May 2010, <<http://health.usnews.com/health-news/womens-health/articles/2010/05/07/birth-control-pill-turns-50-7-ways-it-changed-lives>>, accessed 13 February 2012; Kira Miskimmin, ‘Celebrate 50 Years of “the Pill” with reflection, action’, *The Charlestown Gazette*, 4 July 2010; Planned Parenthood, ‘Planned Parenthood Marks 50th Anniversary of Birth Control Pill’, *Opposing Views*, 7 May 2010, <<http://www.opposingviews.com/i/planned-parenthood-marks-50th-anniversary-of-birth-control-pill>>, accessed 11 February 2010; Anne Saker, ‘On Mother’s Day, commemorating the 50th birthday of the pill that changed motherhood’, *Oregon Live*, 8 May 2010, <http://www.oregonlive.com/O/index.ssf/2010/05/on_mothers_day_commemorating_t.html>, accessed 24 February 2012; Joann M. Weiner, ‘How the Pill Changed the Course of Women’s History’, in *The Birth Control Pill’s 50th Anniversary, From Three Generations of Women*, 7 May 2010, politics.com, <<http://www.politicsdaily.com/2010/05/07/the-birth-control-pills-50th-anniversary-three-generations-of/>>, accessed 11 February 2012.

second half of the twentieth century.²³ This use of “liberation” was a frequent occurrence throughout the fiftieth anniversary: it suppressed the radical history of the term, instead drawing on the vague concept of empowerment associated with liberation in order to censor the coercive element of this narrative and make the history of the pill appear less controversial to a mainstream audience.

The liberation narrative had a pervasive influence within anniversary literature, mainly because it was a trend perpetuated by several influential people: people who would easily appear as sources of authority to a public audience. For example, the title of historian Elaine Tyler May’s book, *America and the Pill: A History of Promise, Peril and Liberation*, embodies this use of liberation. Though this was done to appeal to a popular audience, within related newspaper articles May regularly made statements such as, ‘The pill, quite simply, liberated mothers’.²⁴ Well known feminist thinkers, such as Gloria Steinem and Anne Summers, expressed similar sentiments such as, ‘1960 marked a liberating milestone for women’, and ‘[the pill was] greatly liberating’.²⁵ This influenced other commemorators – such as representatives of the pharmaceutical industry – and enabled them to draw upon this obscured idea of the past in order to present an uncontroversial fiftieth anniversary narrative that depicted the pill as an overwhelmingly positive development in women’s lives.

²³ Maren Lockwood Carden, *The New Feminist Movement*, (New York: Russel Sage Foundation, 1974), p. 2; Bayer Healthcare Pharmaceuticals, ‘Women's Empowerment Icons Commemorate the 50th Anniversary of the Pill’, *PR Newswire – United Business Media*, 6 May 2010, <<http://www.prnewswire.com/news-releases/womens-empowerment-icons-commemorate-the-50th-anniversary-of-the-pill-92958849.html>>, accessed 24 February 2012.

²⁴ Elaine Tyler May, ‘The Pill: Making motherhood better for 50 years’, *The Washington Post*, 9 May 2010.

²⁵ Bayer, ‘Women's Empowerment Icons’, <<http://www.prnewswire.com/news-releases/womens-empowerment-icons-commemorate-the-50th-anniversary-of-the-pill-92958849.html>>, accessed 24 February 2012; Anne Summers, ‘Little Pill that Changed the World’, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 8 May 2010.

Since its development, the pill has been situated within a broader, and controversial, field of reproductive politics. Thus it was necessary for commemorators to use history in this way, because in attempting to foster a positive public image of the pill, they were working against the controversial reputation of reproductive politics. Although the term was originally intended to represent a multitude of women's issues, reproductive politics have become heavily associated with abortion politics, something which is far more provocative in the US than in Australia.²⁶ Because reproductive politics connects contraception to abortion, this association was something that fiftieth anniversary commemorators sought to avoid. Hence the theme of women's empowerment was emphasised in direct contention with the issue of foetal rights, the idea that foetus rights trump women's rights, a pervasive concept within current abortion politics.²⁷

However, abortion was not the only challenge commemorators faced within reproductive politics. There was also the closely affiliated abstinence-only sex education movement. This conservative American movement rejects birth control, instead promoting chastity, and gained momentum in the early 1980s, becoming increasingly prominent ever since.²⁸ It is closely connected to the rise of religious fundamentalism which has been growing since the 1970s, and as the twenty-first century progresses, abstinence education is becoming more popular and receiving more

²⁶ Gordon, *The Moral Property of Women*, p. 304; Margaret June Sparrow, 'Abortion politics and the impact on reproductive health care', *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Obstetrics and Gynaecology*, vol. 46, no. 6 (December 2005), pp. 471-473.

²⁷ Susan Bordo, *Unbearable Weight: Feminism, Western Culture, and the Body*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), pp. 87-92; Rickie Solinger, *Pregnancy and Power: A Short History of Reproductive Politics in America*, (New York and London: New York University Press, 2005), pp. 232-35.

²⁸ Camille Hahn, 'Virgin Territory: Ms. goes to an abstinence conference and learns that it pays to be chaste', *Ms. Magazine*, (Fall 2004), <<http://www.ms magazine.com/fall2004/virginterritory.asp>>, accessed 2 October 2012.

funding than in previous decades.²⁹ Especially within the US, this movement represents an extremely powerful force, and the fiftieth anniversary was arguably perceived as an opportunity to positively counteract this public criticism of the pill by drawing attention to the perceived empowering effects of oral contraception.

The fiftieth anniversary of the pill was celebrated in May 2010. This date was based on the American Food and Drug Administration's (FDA) approval of the first pill, Enovid, for contraceptive purposes in May 1960. Enovid was manufactured by the American pharmaceutical company G. D. Searle and had been on the market since 1957 for the treatment of menstrual disorders such as endometriosis.³⁰ The reason the fiftieth anniversary was based on 1960, rather than 1957, is because this anniversary was a celebration of the perceived empowering benefits of contraception: it was not the medication itself that was being commemorated, but rather the approval of this medication for contraceptive purposes and all that this represented in regards to women's increased access to reproductive control, because this was the narrative considered most conducive to cultivating a positive public profile of the pill.³¹

The fiftieth anniversary was celebrated internationally and the date was marked in various ways throughout Asia, Australia, Europe, North America, and the UK: however the commemorative contexts that will be analysed here are from the US and Australia.³² The anniversary was based on the American FDA approval of the pill, commemorations occurred on a larger scale in the US, and arguably it was in this

²⁹ Michael O. Emerson and David Hartman, 'The Rise of Religious Fundamentalism', *Annual Review of Sociology*, vol. 32, (2006), p. 132.; Katherine Stewart, 'How Obama's healthcare reform boosted abstinence-only sex education: Congressional haggling over Obamacare meant conservatives won funding for faith-based sex education curriculums in schools', *The Guardian UK*, 15 August 2012, <<http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2012/aug/15/obama-healthcare-reform-booster-abstinence-only-sex-education>>, accessed 2 October 2012.

³⁰ Watkins, *On The Pill*, p. 25; Marks, *Sexual Chemistry*, p. 75.

³¹ May, *America and the Pill*, p. 32.

³² Christine Read, written interview, 27 July 2012.

context that the pill was in most need of positive publicity.³³ Australia has been chosen for comparison because in 1961 it was the second country to approve the pill, and because Australia provides what Lyn Spillman refers to as a ‘similar case comparison’ to the US.³⁴ This means that these cultures and styles of commemoration are similar enough that they highlight subtleties of this literature that may not have otherwise been apparent, were the US to be studied on its own.³⁵

This analysis will be framed by scholarship on commemoration: anniversaries are essentially commemorative, something which may seem obvious, except when considered in the context of commemorative history. This is because commemoration has traditionally been an exercise in nationalism, connected to modern warfare and nation building.³⁶ The nationalistic construction of commemoration theoretically means that the fiftieth anniversary of the pill should be incompatible with these theories: however this anniversary demonstrates that nationalistic theories can easily be applied to non-nationalistic commemorations, which reveals the narrow scope of this literature.³⁷

Both the pharmaceutical industry and feminists throughout the world acted as what commemorative historian Vered Vinitzky-Seroussi refers to as ‘agents of memory’

³³ May, *America and the Pill*; Gibbs, *Love, Sex, Freedom, and the Paradox of the Pill*.

³⁴ Read ed., *Taking It*, p. 4; Lyn Spillman, *Nation and Commemoration: Creating National Identities in the United States and Australia*, (Great Britain: University of Cambridge Press, 1997), p. 12.

³⁵ Although this is a comparison of American and Australian commemorations, primary focus will be given to the US, and Australia has been included to provide a similar case comparison. As a result, the bulk of this content pertains to the pill in the US, and unless specifically referring to the Australian situation, it can be assumed that discussion relates to the American context.

³⁶ David Rieff, *Against Remembrance*, (Victoria: Melbourne University Press, 2011), p. 20; Karin Hausen, ‘The “Day of National Mourning” in Germany’, in Gerald Sider and Gavin Smith eds., *Between History and Histories: The Making of Silences and Commemorations*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997), p. 127.

³⁷ David Simpson, *9/11: The Culture of Commemoration*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), pp. 1-3.

for the fiftieth anniversary, meaning that their actions made this a tangible event.³⁸

Perhaps surprisingly, these two agents of memory did not differ a great deal in their perception or representation of the pill, only in their motivations for commemoration.³⁹

These agents shared a common goal of raising the public profile of the pill and increasing women's access to contraception. Within feminist thought, this goal was motivated by a desire to provide women with reproductive control and to reduce unplanned pregnancies. In contrast, the pharmaceutical industry was driven by financial profit rather than a desire for gender equality, yet the end result was the same, and the liberation narrative of the pill prevailed.⁴⁰

Chapter one of this thesis returns to 1960, and situates the pill in its contemporary socio-political context. This is in no way a comprehensive history of the development and introduction of the pill: instead it documents what issues the pill actually raised in 1960, so as to highlight the historical absences of commemorations in 2010. Three main silences will be addressed in this chapter, beginning with the absence of population control: overpopulation was a pervasive and international concern in 1960, thus any attempt to separate birth control and population control in this context, without at least acknowledging this exclusion, can be considered a deliberate manipulation of the past.

The initial public response to the pill will also be examined, because fiftieth anniversary literature tends to imply that the pill had an immediate and revolutionary impact on society, yet it was several years before this occurred. Finally, the historical

³⁸ Vered Vinitzky-Seroussi, *Yitzhak Rabin's Assassination and the Dilemmas of Commemoration*, (Albany: State University of New York, 2009), pp. 6-7.

³⁹ Elaine Tyler May, written interview, 14 June 2012.

⁴⁰ Global Industry Analysts, Inc., 'Global Contraceptives Market is Projected to Reach US\$17.2 Billion by 2015, According to New Report by Global Industry Analysts, Inc.', (San Jose, CA: *PRWeb*, 25 October 2010), <http://www.prweb.com/releases/contraceptives_oral/condoms/prweb4688884.ht>, accessed 23 July 2012.

role of the pharmaceutical industry will be discussed in relation to the origins of the contemporary liberation narrative: concluding that commemorative interpretations of the introduction of the pill can be misleading.

Chapter two examines the historical relationship between the pill and feminist thought in order to facilitate an understanding of this relationship as it was presented in fiftieth anniversary literature. Within commemorative discussion, the historical connection between feminism and the pill was drawn upon as a way of legitimising fiftieth anniversary narratives, and this chapter analyses feminism's use of its own history in this context. This literature frequently draws upon the feminist concept of women's liberation, yet in this circumstance, liberation has little in common with the historic WLM, thus it is necessary to make a clear distinction between the conservative and radical use of this concept.⁴¹

The WLM was a dominant strand of the American second wave feminist movement that originated in the 1960s.⁴² It argued that opportunity was problematically based on gender and these women fought for a life that was not governed by a gendered double standard.⁴³ In Australia, Women's Liberation indicated a similar anger in regards to the gendered double standard and women's lack of equal opportunity.⁴⁴ However, commemorative narratives have largely rejected this radical history in favour of older generations of feminist thought: controversial in their initial context, these ideas now

⁴¹ Carden, *The New Feminist Movement*, p. 2; Bayer, 'Women's Empowerment Icons', <<http://www.prnewswire.com/news-releases/womens-empowerment-icons-commemorate-the-50th-anniversary-of-the-pill-92958849.html>>, accessed 24 February 2012.

⁴² Carden, *The New Feminist Movement*, p. 1.

⁴³ Carden, *The New Feminist Movement*, p. 10; Edythe Cudlipp, *Understanding Women's Liberation: A complete guide to the most controversial movement sweeping America today*, (New York: Paperback Library, 1971), pp. 7-9; William L. O'Neill, *Everyone Was Brave: A History of Feminism in America*, (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1971), p. 357.

⁴⁴ Marilyn Lake, *Getting Equal: The History of Australian Feminism*, (Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 1999), pp. 214-23.

serve to distance the pill from contemporary reproductive politics, and it is this selective use of history that provides the focus of chapter two.

Chapter three examines the role of the international pharmaceutical industry in the fiftieth anniversary, and finds that this industry employed their historical connection to the pill as a means of validating their profit-driven narrative of individual women's empowerment. Despite the widespread impact of the global pharmaceutical industry, the influence of this industry has only recently begun to be critiqued, arguably because solid primary evidence pertaining to the industry can be difficult to acquire.⁴⁵ Since the beginning of the twenty-first century, the pharmaceutical industry has been increasingly critiqued on the basis that it wields overwhelming financial power at an international level, which fundamentally contradicts the idea that healthcare should be a not-for-profit basic human right.⁴⁶

Disillusionment with the pharmaceutical industry is increasing as the twenty-first century progresses. For example, according to a Harris Poll in the US, the percentage of adults who believed that the industry was adequately serving its customers fell from seventy-nine per cent in 1997, to forty-four per cent in 2004, and only fourteen per cent of people surveyed found the pharmaceutical industry to be 'generally honest and trustworthy'.⁴⁷ The reason for including this information is not to

⁴⁵ John P. Swann, 'The Pharmaceutical Industries', in Peter J. Bowler and John V. Pickstone eds., *The Cambridge History of Science: Volume 6, The Modern Biological and Earth Sciences*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), p. 126.

⁴⁶ Jerome P. Kassirer, *On The Take: How America's Complicity with Big Business can Endanger your Health*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005); Leonard J. Weber, *Profits Before People? Ethical Standards and the Marketing of Prescription Drugs*, (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2006); Jorg Blech, *Inventing Disease and Pushing Pills: Pharmaceutical Companies and the Medicalisation of Normal Life*, (London and New York: Routledge, 2003); Meredith Fort, 'Globalization and Health', in Meredith Fort, Mary Anne Mercer and Oscar Gish eds., *Sickness and Wealth: The Corporate Assault on Global Health*, (Cambridge: South End Press, 2004), p. 4.

⁴⁷ Michael A. Santoro, 'Creating a Sustainable Path for the Twenty-First Century Pharmaceutical Industry', in Michael A. Santoro and Thomas M. Gorrie eds., *Ethics and the Pharmaceutical Industry*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), p. 3.

make a judgement about the pharmaceutical industry, but to emphasise that this public profile is something the industry is constantly fighting against, which needs to be taken into consideration when discussing their role in the fiftieth anniversary. These three chapters come together to reveal the limited nature of the fiftieth anniversary, concluding that this narrative could potentially influence a future public understanding of the pill that is ignorant of the polyvalent nature of this history.

Chapter One – Contraception and the Pill in the Early 1960s

In 2010, the pill was presented as a symbol of women's liberation and remembered as a tool of women's empowerment. The history of the pill – predominantly its introduction in 1960 – was then employed to bestow legitimacy upon this narrative.¹ However the pill was not the beginning of women's experience with contraception, 1960 was not a year that witnessed a fundamental change in women's contraceptive habits, and in this context, individual women's opinions regarding contraception were not highly valued.² Instead, the pill was a matter of population control in the first instance, it was a highly controversial topic of discussion, and the contemporary liberation narrative actually originated in 1960s pharmaceutical advertising, rather than feminist thought.

Chapter one returns to 1960, the year the pill received FDA approval in America, in order to show that the fiftieth anniversary does not capture the polyvalent nature of this history. While women's liberation is a significant consideration, in 1960, women's empowerment was by no means the dominant concern in the development and acceptance of the pill, and there are many other equally important elements to this narrative that are not immediately apparent within fiftieth anniversary literature.³ This chapter examines three absent elements of the pill's history: population control, the initial response to the pill, and the role of the pharmaceutical industry. This is not an attempt to provide a complete history of the pill, but rather to briefly highlight the narrow and exclusionary nature of the fiftieth anniversary liberation narrative.

¹ See bibliography, American and Australian Fiftieth Anniversary Sources, pp. 99-106.

² Pascal K. Whelpton with Arthur A. Campbell and John E. Patterson, *Fertility and Family Planning in the United States*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1966), p. 279.

³ Elaine Tyler May, *America and the Pill: A History of Promise, Peril, and Liberation*, (New York: Basic Books, 2010); Christine Read ed., *Taking It: 50 Years of The Pill*, (New South Wales: Family Planning NSW, 2010).

The Population Explosion

Population is absolutely central to the history of the pill and a strong connection between birth control and population control was characteristic of the 1950s and 1960s.⁴ Indeed in the United States, birth control, family planning, and population control were interchangeable terms in this context.⁵ There was little distinction made between the “liberating” use of contraception, and the coercive use of contraception, and even the most ardent feminist supporters of birth control considered population control and individual reproductive control to be equally important.⁶ Concerns regarding overpopulation were crystallised in the twentieth century “population explosion”, which was the articulation of the fear that unchecked population growth would result in political and economic instability, and subsequently lead to a global shortage of resources.⁷ However, the anxiety induced by this potential outcome of overpopulation often outstripped concerns about the immorality of contraception, and this facilitated an increased acceptance of the pill.⁸

The population explosion was more than a general fear of overpopulation, it was the concern that the birth rate in Western countries was too low, and that the birth rate in

⁴ Pascal K. Whelpton, ‘Control by Fate or Foresight? - Summary of paper to be presented at the Sixth International Conference on Planned Parenthood, New Delhi, February 1959’, *Sixth International Conference on Planned Parenthood*, 1959, Box 56, Folder 5, Planned Parenthood Federation of America Records (series 5), Sophia Smith Collection.

⁵ Linda Gordon, *The Moral Property of Women: A History of Birth Control Politics in America*, third edition, (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1990), pp. 271-80; Matthew Connelly, *Fatal Misconception: The Struggle to Control World Population*, (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2008), p. 16.

⁶ ‘Mike Wallace Interview – 21 September, 1957’, in Esther Katz ed., *The Selected Papers of Margaret Sanger: Volume 3: The Politics of Planned Parenthood, 1939-1966*, (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2010), pp. 423-6.

⁷ Laura Briggs, *Reproducing Empire: Race, Sex, Science, and U.S Imperialism in Puerto Rico*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), p. 110; Elizabeth Siegal Watkins, *On The Pill: A Social History of Oral Contraceptives 1950-1970*, (Baltimore and London: The John Hopkins University Press, 1997), p. 16.

⁸ ‘3 out of 4 Americans Favor Making Birth Control Data Available’, *Planned Parenthood News*, no. 26 (Winter 1960), p. 2.

developing countries was too high.⁹ In the context of the Cold War, the disparity between birth rates in developed and developing countries was perceived as a communist threat to the Western world and global economic stability.¹⁰ Economic instability was thought to facilitate communist expansion, which would threaten Western capitalist culture and dominance.¹¹

This meant that overpopulation was regarded as a serious political issue, and made population control through birth control crucial to national and foreign policy.¹² It was suggested that the implications of the population explosion could be more catastrophic than the atomic bomb, and this meant that birth control was no longer considered a ‘question of individual health or preference’, but a matter of global welfare.¹³ These fears stemmed from eighteenth century Malthusian population control theory, ideas that went on to influence the twentieth century perception of overpopulation.

Thomas Malthus has been remembered as one of the first people to recognise the true importance of population growth in determining the outcome of human affairs.¹⁴ He was a British economist who wrote the influential paper, *Essay on the Principle of Population* in the late eighteenth century, and the ideas outlined in this essay have had a

⁹ Lara V. Marks, *Sexual Chemistry: A History of the Contraceptive Pill: With a New Preface*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001, 2010), pp. 16-7; Joseph Marion Jones, *The Facts About Population Growth and Economic Development: Does overpopulation mean poverty?*, (Washington D. C.: Centre for International Economic Growth, 1962), p. 7.

¹⁰ Marks, *Sexual Chemistry*, pp. 23-4.

¹¹ Donald T. Critchlow, ‘Birth Control, Population Control, and Family Planning: An Overview’, in Donald T. Critchlow ed., *The Politics of Abortion and Birth Control in Historical Perspective*, (Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1996), p. 9; Marks, *Sexual Chemistry*, p. 14.

¹² Richard Symonds and Michael Carder, *The United Nations and the Population Question 1945-1970*, (London: Chatto and Windus, 1973), p. 92.

¹³ Alan F. Guttmacher and Eleanor Mears, *Babies by Choice or by Chance*, (London: Victor Gollancz, 1960), pp. 51-2.

¹⁴ Paul R. Ehrlich and Anne H. Ehrlich, *The Population Explosion*, (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1990), p. 168.

considerable impact on the recent history of family planning and birth control.¹⁵ While Malthus considered overpopulation to be a serious issue, he also believed that population checks such as famine, disease, war, and poverty would always come into play, yet in devastating ways.¹⁶ He considered overpopulation to be a leading cause of poverty, and argued that abstinence and delayed marriage were the best way to combat poverty and achieve economic security.¹⁷ These concepts then shaped Neo-Malthusian ideas supported by the early advocates of birth control who believed that population growth could be managed with contraception.¹⁸ These ideas went on to influence later ideology, and by the dawn of the twentieth century, people had become concerned with the quality as well the quantity of populations.¹⁹

Family planning and birth control movements are often remembered in relation to the feminist struggle for women's reproductive rights, and quite frequently only in this context.²⁰ Even though the connection between eugenics and birth control was no secret in the 1950s or 1960s, it is politically very difficult for feminist or family planning groups to incorporate these concepts into their own histories. This is because in recent decades, eugenics theory has become synonymous with the Holocaust and the socially condemned concept of genocide.²¹

This association with genocide means that population control is frequently downplayed when people wish to equate birth control with freedom and choice, and the

¹⁵ Watkins, *On The Pill*, p. 15; Connelly, *Fatal Misconception*, pp. 1, 19, 28; John Sharpless, 'World Population Growth and Family Planning', in Donald T. Critchlow ed., *The Politics of Abortion and Birth Control in Historical Perspective*, (Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1996), p. 81.

¹⁶ Marks, *Sexual Chemistry*, p. 15.

¹⁷ Susanne Klausen and Alison Bashford, 'Fertility Control: Eugenics, Neo-Malthusianism, and Feminism', in Alison Bashford and Philippa Levine eds., *The Oxford Handbook of the History of Eugenics*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), p. 99.

¹⁸ Gordon, *The Moral Property of Women*, pp. 40-1.

¹⁹ Marks, *Sexual Chemistry*, pp. 16-7.

²⁰ Klausen, 'Fertility Control', pp. 99, 109.

²¹ Connelly, *Fatal Misconception*, pp. 8, 16.

complex origins of the family planning movement are often overlooked in favour of Planned Parenthood as a model of women's empowerment. This narrative persists even though the rise of family planning was very much in line with economic and eugenics theories, and managed to simultaneously promote responsible parenthood amongst the middle classes, and population control amongst the lower classes.²² Indeed, it was this ambiguous nature of family planning that enabled the movement to gain such widespread support, and it becomes apparent that from its origins, family planning had more than women's reproductive freedom in its sights.²³

While the Planned Parenthood Federation of America (PPFA) and the International Planned Parenthood Federation (IPPF) undoubtedly contributed to individual women's increased access to reproductive control, they also sought to prevent overpopulation by curbing birth rates in developing countries.²⁴ In 1960 the World Population Emergency Campaign was formed in the US and in 1961 merged with the PPFA.²⁵ Early twentieth century family planning was a fusion of feminism, eugenics, and population control, which created a movement driven by demography and economics as much as a desire for women's improved fertility control.²⁶ Indeed one of the reasons why developer of the pill, Gregory Pincus, initially received a PPFA grant

²² Connelly, *Fatal Misconception*, p. 10; Critchlow, 'Birth Control and Population Control', p. 7.

²³ Connelly, *Fatal Misconception*, p. 114.

²⁴ 'JFK, Black See Threat in World Population Explosion', *Planned Parenthood News*, no. 30 (Spring 1961), p. 1; Julian Huxley, 'Population Planning and Quality of Life - Summary of paper to be presented at the Sixth International Conference on Planned Parenthood, New Delhi, February 1959', *Sixth International Conference on Planned Parenthood*, 1959, Box 56, Folder 5, Planned Parenthood Federation of America Records (series 5), Sophia Smith Collection; C. P. Blacker, 'Eugenics in an Atomic Age - Summary of paper to be presented at the Sixth International Conference on Planned Parenthood, New Delhi, February 1959', *Sixth International Conference on Planned Parenthood*, 1959, Box 56, Folder 5, Planned Parenthood Federation of America Records (series 5), Sophia Smith Collection; Sharpless, 'World Population Growth and Family Planning', p. 76.

²⁵ Michael J. O'Dowd, *The History of Medications for Women: Materia medica woman*, (New York: The Parthenon Publishing Group, 2001), p. 353.

²⁶ Critchlow, 'Birth Control, Population Control, and Family Planning', pp. 1-2.

for his work was because he believed that biologists had a social responsibility to address the issue of overpopulation.²⁷

Similarly, many people would now be surprised to discover that the feminist pioneer of birth control, Margaret Sanger, had any connection to population control or eugenics. Yet in the 1950s, she openly acknowledged that the ‘population question’ was one of her main reasons for promoting birth control.²⁸ There was no need for her to deemphasise the connection between population and individual fertility control, because supporting eugenics ideology was not something that brought her feminist principles into question.

As a result, Planned Parenthood’s involvement with the population control movement was public knowledge and the organisation’s distribution of oral contraception at their clinics was consequently seen in light of their ‘birth-curb’ aims.²⁹ This said, Planned Parenthood was not a government aligned agency, so its actions are not representative of national policy, because even in light of the population explosion, the pill was still highly controversial in the broader socio-political context of the 1960s. However as the decade progressed, national policy and the PPFA became more aligned.

Australian attitudes towards the population explosion in the 1960s were comparable to those in the US because overpopulation was essentially a global issue. There was the same fear that the rising global population would result in a shortage of resources and communist expansion, and there was the same perception of birth control

²⁷ Briggs, *Reproducing Empire*, p. 133.

²⁸ ‘Mike Wallace Interviews Margaret Sanger’, *Planned Parenthood News*, no. 19 (Fall 1957), p. 5.

²⁹ ‘Birth-Curb Group to Distribute Pill: Oral Contraceptive Will Be Offered At Clinics - Cost Is About \$10 A Month’, *New York Times*, 4 August 1960.

as a potential solution to this problem.³⁰ In this context, there was the idea that family planning through birth control was a form of ‘preventative medicine’, and this contributed to the increasing social acceptability of birth control.³¹

In Australia, concerns about overpopulation were more specifically associated with Asia’s growing population, and although this was considered a global concern, geographical distance prompted the idea that Australia had a ‘ring-side seat’ to the ‘Asian problem’.³² Considering that there had been concern within Australia regarding Asian immigration since the nineteenth century, this was a predictable response to the population explosion.³³ However despite these concerns about overpopulation, Family Planning Australia was not as immediately supportive of oral contraception as the PPFA, and there was greater concern voiced regarding the medical safety of the pill in this context.³⁴

In the late 1950s, Margaret Sanger described the Roman Catholic Church as the main opposing force to family planning in the US.³⁵ By this point, other Christian denominations had come to accept the necessity of birth control and advocate support for family planning programs.³⁶ However the rhythm method was the only officially approved method of contraception available to Catholic adherents, because the church rejected any form of birth control that could be considered a ‘deliberate act aimed solely and directly at the antecedent frustration or hindrance of the fecundity of the conjugal

³⁰ ‘U.N. Report sees Danger from “Explosion” of Population in Asia’, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 5 March 1958, p. 3.

³¹ ‘Lords Debate Birth-Control’, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 30 June, 1961.

³² ‘Australian Warns of Population Rise’, *New York Times*, 14 April 1961.

³³ Connelly, *Fatal Misconception*, p. 34.

³⁴ ‘New Light on Birth Control Likely’, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 13 June 1962, p. 1.

³⁵ ‘Mike Wallace Interviews Margaret Sanger’, *Planned Parenthood News*, p. 5.

³⁶ Margaret Sanger, ‘Birth Control 1958’, *Britannica Book of the Year 1959: Events of 1958*, (1959), sourced from The Public Writings and Speeches of Margaret Sanger 1911-1960, <<http://www.nyu.edu/projects/sanger/webedition/app/documents/show.php?sangerDoc=320988.xml>>, accessed 4 May 2012.

act'.³⁷ And yet, the Church was supportive of population control and agreed that overpopulation was a massive contemporary social issue.³⁸

However, rather than promote contraception, the Church argued that improving the standard of living in developing countries would lead to economic stability and a decline in birth rates.³⁹ This was the international Catholic position, thus Australian Catholicism reflected similar attitudes to those promoted in the US.⁴⁰ Although the Church did not support the pill, these attitudes reveal the pervasiveness of population control in the 1960s, and highlight the absolutely inescapable nature of this topic.

The Immediate Response to the Pill

The first oral contraceptive pill, Enovid, had been on the American drug market since 1957 as a therapeutic treatment for menstrual disorders, and in May 1960 this same drug was approved by the FDA as a contraceptive agent.⁴¹ Because the fiftieth anniversary was based on contraceptive approval, rather than the introduction of the drug itself, this implied that 1960 witnessed a fundamental shift in women's social status and contraceptive use as a result of the reclassification of Enovid. However for the most part, women's lives were not instantly changed or revolutionised by this FDA decision, and it is only in hindsight that this date has been taken as a symbol of women's, apparently

³⁷ John L. Thomas, 'The Catholic Position on Population Control', *Catholic Mind*, vol. LVII, no. 1147, (Jan-Feb 1960), p. 7.

³⁸ 'Birth Control and Public Policy', *The Commonwealth: A Weekly Review of Public Affairs, Literature, and the Arts*, vol. LXXII, no. 1 (5 August 1960), pp. 397-399; Thomas, 'The Catholic Position on Population Control', pp. 4-11.

³⁹ Symonds, *The United Nations and the Population Question*, pp. 89-90.

⁴⁰ Rev. Nicholas Crotty, 'The Moral Issues in Hormonal Control of Fertility', *The Australasian Catholic Record*, vol. XXXVIII, no. 2 (April 1961), pp. 102-113; Rev. Thomas Connolly, 'Further Observations on the Use of Fertility Drugs', *The Australasian Catholic Record*, vol. XXXVIII, no. 3 (July 1961), pp. 179-94.

⁴¹ May, *America and the Pill*, p. 32.

new, control over their reproductive bodies.⁴² Indeed it was several years before the pill began to achieve the level of popularity and success that it is now known for, yet this is not something that commemorative literature chose to emphasise.

Essentially, the pill barely received a mention in the public arena during its transition from a therapeutic to a contraceptive drug, and it took time before many doctors were even comfortable writing Enovid prescriptions.⁴³ This was partially because legally and morally, contraception was still quite a controversial issue in 1960. Even the FDA members who approved the pill for contraception were hesitant to express their public support. John L. Harvey, FDA representative was repeatedly quoted say that, ‘Approval [of the pill] was based on the question of safety... We had no choice as to the morality that might be involved...our own ideas of morality had nothing to do with the case.’⁴⁴ The other reason for this slow uptake was that there was already a significant non-hormonal contraceptive market in place that the pill had to contend with, and overall the introduction of the pill was not as dramatic or revolutionary as it may seem in anniversary literature.⁴⁵

In 1960 the FDA approval was scarcely considered newsworthy. Far from making headlines, this event received little more than a token mention in leading American newspapers.⁴⁶ Newspapers were one of the main ways in which people received information, which affected public opinion, and in 1960 the media did not

⁴² ‘Timeline of Top News Stories 1960-1967’, *Facts On File – World News Digest*, <<http://0-www.2facts.com.library.sl.nsw.gov.au/menu/digest-menu-1960s>>, accessed 9 May 2012.

⁴³ Marks, *Sexual Chemistry*, p. 122.

⁴⁴ John L. Harvey (FDA representative) quoted in *New York Times*, and *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 10 May 1960.

⁴⁵ Maxine Davis, *Every Woman’s Book of Health and Medical Care*, (London: Fontana Books, 1961), pp. 187-91.

⁴⁶ The *New York Times* and the *Chicago Daily Tribune* give the FDA approval of the pill a token mention on the 10th of May, but apart from this remain silent on the issue. The *Wall Street Journal*, America’s most highly circulated daily newspaper, does not mention the FDA approval of Enovid for contraceptive purposes at all; ‘U. S. Approves Pill for Birth Control’, *New York Times*, 10 May 1960, p. 75; ‘FDA Approves Pill for use in Birth Control’, *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 10 May 1960, p. A11.

present the pill as a symbol of empowerment or reproductive freedom.⁴⁷ Indeed, the major priority within immediate media discussion appears to have been to distance the pharmaceutical industry, the FDA, and the major newspapers from the moral controversy that surrounded the pill, by emphasising that approval was granted on the basis of safety rather than morality: which is ironic considering that by the end of the decade, the medical safety of the pill would be the subject of considerable scrutiny and public criticism.⁴⁸

The initial media discussion in May 1960 was brief and this literature informed readers of little besides the fact that a prescription-only drug known as Enovid, manufactured by the pharmaceutical company G. D. Searle, had received FDA approval for use as a contraceptive. Some papers went into slightly more detail by informing their readers of the cost of Enovid and the number of days of the menstrual cycle that it should be taken.⁴⁹ As 1960 progressed, readers were provided with more information, but this was still a relatively rare occurrence and papers were careful not to be seen out rightly promoting the use of contraception.⁵⁰ However, discussion of the pill in media directed specifically towards women was virtually non-existent, and this meant that women who desired further information about the pill had to actively seek it out for themselves.⁵¹ This lack of public discussion is reflected in patterns of contraceptive use in the early 1960s, which saw no dramatic change in the years immediately following FDA approval.

⁴⁷ Watkins, *On The Pill*, p. 6.

⁴⁸ 'U. S. Approves Pill for Birth Control', 10 May 1960, p. 75; 'FDA Approves Pill for use in Birth Control', 10 May 1960, p. A11; Barbara Seaman, *The Doctor's Case Against the Pill: 25th Anniversary Edition*, (United States: Hunter House, 1969, 1995).

⁴⁹ News-Miami, 'Birth Control Pill Approved', in "Woman's World", *The Miami News*, 10 May 1960, <<http://news.google.com/newspapers?id=E7MyAAAAIBAJ&sjid=vOkFAAAAIBAJ&pg=2653,5306231&dq=birth+control+pill&hl=en>>, accessed 23 March 2012.

⁵⁰ T. R. Van Dellen, 'How to Keep Well – Birth Control Pills', *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 10 August 1960.

⁵¹ *Ladies Home Journal*, 1960-1961; *Good Housekeeping*, 1960-1961. Neither of these leading women's publications mentions the introduction of the pill or contraception in general which provides an indication of the acceptability of women publically discussing birth control in 1960.

Within the Australian media, there was less immediate discussion of the pill, yet this discussion was more concerned with the issue of its ambiguous medical safety.⁵² Indeed in 1962, the Family Planning Association of Australia was still upholding their original decision not to recommend birth control pills until more was known about the medical risks involved with taking them.⁵³ Yet although there was this expression of medical concern, Australian women were not necessarily provided with adequate information on the pill.

In the early 1960s there was a huge discrepancy between the information women desired and the information they had access to, which can be observed in the public response to the pill as featured in *The Australian Women's Weekly*. This magazine did not feature an article discussing oral contraception until 1964, yet when this article finally did appear, it became the highest selling issue of the decade.⁵⁴ This overwhelmingly positive response to a feature on the pill reveals that women's need for information had not been met previously, so in this sense, the Australian and the US media were comparable in their lack of response to the pill.

Along with the media, the prescribing patterns of the medical profession had a significant influence on the initial response to the pill, because women could not obtain the pill without a doctor's prescription. Despite vigilant attempts on behalf of the pharmaceutical industry to increase pill prescriptions, many doctors resisted, and it was

⁵² 'New Light on Birth Control Likely', 13 June 1962, p. 1; 'Letters to the Editor – Birth Control by Pills', *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 8 February 1962; 'Letters to the Editor – Birth Control by Pills', *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 10 February 1962.

⁵³ 'New Light on Birth Control Likely', 13 June 1962, p. 1.

⁵⁴ Rene Lecler, 'Latest Medical Survey on The Pill', *The Australian Women's Weekly*, (22 July 1964), pp. 4-5; Australian Women's Register, 'The Australian Women's Weekly (1933-)', in *Bibliographies Trove: National Library of Australia*, <<http://trove.nla.gov.au/people/634568?c=people>>, accessed 25 March 2012.

⁵⁴ Watkins, *On The Pill*, p. 36.

not until 1965 that ninety-five per cent of American doctors were prescribing the pill.⁵⁵ As ‘question and answer’ sections from the *Journal of the American Medical Association (JAMA)* reveal, this resistance was because many doctors were uninformed about how to prescribe the pill and were unaware of its side effects and efficiency as a contraceptive.⁵⁶ In a context where doctors, the gate keepers of the pill, were still uncertain, it becomes apparent that the pill did not take America by storm in its first year on the market. Despite early safety concerns, the uptake was quicker in Australia, and Australian women were using the pill at almost double the rate of American women by the mid-1960s.⁵⁷

One reason for this lack of immediate public discussion was that, in the first half of the twentieth century, birth control was quite controversial. It was associated with sexual promiscuity and lapsed morality and for these reasons, was considered something of an obscenity.⁵⁸ The legal status of birth control in the US is something that complicated the development of the pill and its initial integration into society, because the restrictive Comstock Laws of 1873 were still partially in place at this time.⁵⁹ These were a series of federal laws prohibiting the dissemination of birth control and information about birth control that were upheld well into the twentieth century, as they were only repealed in their entirety in 1971.⁶⁰ Although certain states had more relaxed policies towards birth control than others, essentially there was no national legal

⁵⁵ Watkins, *On The Pill*, p. 36; Marks, *Sexual Chemistry*, p. 122.

⁵⁶ John H. Talbot, ‘Questions and Answers – Contraceptives’, *Journal of the American Medical Association*, vol. 174, no. 1 (September 1960), pp. 97-102; Walter W. Williams, ‘Questions and Answers – Contraceptive Tablets’, *Journal of the American Medical Association*, vol. 174, no. 7 (October 1960), pp. 918-926.

⁵⁷ Stefania Siedlecky and Diana Wyndham, *Populate and Perish: Australian Women’s Fight for Birth Control*, (Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 1990), p. 44.

⁵⁸ ‘Mike Wallace Interview’, *The Selected Papers of Margaret Sanger*, p. 433.

⁵⁹ Marks, *Sexual Chemistry*, pp. 33, 56-7.

⁶⁰ Marks, *Sexual Chemistry*, p. 33; Gordon, *The Moral Property of Women*, p. 32; Rickie Solinger, *Pregnancy and Power: A Short History of Reproductive Politics in America*, (New York: New York University Press, 2005), p. 71.

consensus regarding the status of birth control, and this unreceptive political climate had some bearing on the relatively restrained response to the pill in 1960.

Apart from this legal hostility towards birth control, as previously discussed, there was also considerable religious opposition and the influence of the Catholic Church in this context should not be discounted.⁶¹ This opposition was not restricted to the US, it was the international Catholic position, and as a result there was also considerable religious hostility towards contraception in Australia.⁶² It was hoped by John Rock, developer of the pill and Catholic adherent, that the church would accept oral contraception, yet even in the twenty-first century, the pill is condemned within official Catholic thought.⁶³

The lack of initial response to the pill can also be attributed to the fact that in 1960, there was already an established birth control market in America, and in this context the pill was only one, rather expensive, option.⁶⁴ Although the pre-pill era of birth control is often depicted as unimaginably bleak in fiftieth anniversary narratives, describing a world in which women had ‘virtually no control’ over their reproductive bodies, women were actually using a range of non-hormonal contraceptive methods with varying degrees of success and satisfaction before the advent of the pill.⁶⁵ Prior to 1965, the diaphragm had been the most popular female controlled method of birth control, and the pill was on the market for several years before it irreversibly surpassed the

⁶¹ ‘Mike Wallace Interview’, *The Selected Papers of Margaret Sanger*, p. 424.

⁶² Frank Bongiorno, *The Sex Lives of Australians: A History*, (Victoria: Black Inc., 2012), pp. 229-30.

⁶³ Bongiorno, *The Sex Lives of Australians*, p. 229; John Rock, *The Time Has Come: A Catholic Doctor's Proposals to End the Battle over Birth Control*, (London: The Catholic Book Club, 1963), pp. 91-110; Giovanni Maria Vian, ‘*Humanae Vitae* marks 40 - A Sign of Contradiction’, *L'osservatore Romano*, 30 July 2008, pp. 1-2.

⁶⁴ Valued at approximately eleven dollars a month, Enovid was out of the price range of many American women. News-Miami, ‘Birth Control Pill Approved’, 10 May 1960, p. 2B.

⁶⁵ Anne Saker, ‘On Mother's Day: Commemorating the 50th Birthday of the Pill that Changed Motherhood’, *Oregon Live*, 8 May 2012.

diaphragm in popularity.⁶⁶ While there is no doubting the pill's popularity by 1965, the diaphragm had been an extremely popular contraceptive option for much of the twentieth century and this tends to be overlooked in light of the later success of the pill.⁶⁷

Commemorative portrayals of the 1960s frequently refer to non-hormonal contraception as 'messy', 'embarrassing', and 'unreliable', however the contemporary rejection of the diaphragm appears to have been applied retrospectively.⁶⁸ In 1961 Maxine Davis produced *Every Woman's Book of Health and Medical Care*, in which she advocated the diaphragm as the most satisfactory, successful, and reliable method of birth control available to women.⁶⁹ Davis was a popular women's health writer who acted as a medium between the medical profession and the "average woman", and in the early 1960s she prioritised the diaphragm over the pill, as did others in similar positions.⁷⁰ For example, in 1960 the *JAMA* advised doctors that, when used perfectly, condoms, the diaphragm, and the pill had comparable success rates, yet the pill had many side effects that were not associated with the traditional barrier methods.⁷¹ Thus it is important to acknowledge the pre-pill history of contraception in order to understand the public reaction to hormonal contraception in 1960, which is largely absent from fiftieth anniversary literature.

⁶⁶ Whelpton, *Fertility and Family Planning in the United States*, pp. 278-9; Norman B. Ryder and Charles F. Westoff, *Reproduction in the United States: 1965*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1971), p. 124.

⁶⁷ Marks, *Sexual Chemistry*, p. 122; Watkins, *On The Pill*, p. 62; 'Interview with John Riddick – 30 October 1964', in Esther Katz eds., *The Selected Papers of Margaret Sanger: Volume 3: The Politics of Planned Parenthood, 1939-1966*, (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2010).

⁶⁸ Louise Keogh, 'The pill's 50th anniversary: do we have freer sex and better managed fertility?', *The Conversation*, 23 November 2011; Anne Summers, 'Little Pill that Changed the World', *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 8 May 2010; Laura Eldridge, *In Our Control: The Complete Guide to Contraceptive Choices for Women*, (New York: Seven Stories Press, 2010), pp. 79-87.

⁶⁹ Davis, *Every Woman's Book of Health and Medical Care*, pp. 188-9.

⁷⁰ Marjorie Richards, *Design for Living: For Girls*, (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1963).

⁷¹ Talbot, 'Questions and Answers', p. 98.

The Pharmaceutical Industry

The global pharmaceutical industry has been integral to the promotion and manufacturing of the pill since the 1950s and essentially this industry is responsible for the existence of the pill.⁷² Enovid, the first oral contraceptive, was produced by the company G. D. Searle and its introduction to the US was followed closely by the introduction of Anovlar to Australia in 1961: a pill produced and distributed by the German based company Bayer, then known as Schering.⁷³ Reproduction and the control of fertility had been the subject of scientific research since the beginning of the twentieth century, yet it was not until the 1950s that scientific understanding and public opinion were prepared for the development of the pill.⁷⁴ In this context, contraception was still highly controversial and the companies involved had to be prepared for intense social disapproval as much as vast financial profit.⁷⁵ Thus the pharmaceutical industry has been responsible for maintaining a positive public profile of the pill since Searle launched Enovid.⁷⁶

Searle was the first company to produce an oral contraceptive pill, not because they were the first to have the technology, but because they were the first company willing to risk the controversy, the potential legal implications, the wrath of the Catholic Church, and the human drug trials that were associated with the pill.⁷⁷ G. D. Searle was initially a small American pharmaceutical company, founded by Gideon D. Searle in 1888 in Omaha, Nebraska. The company sold medication to doctors throughout the

⁷² Watkins, *On The Pill*, pp. 21-40.

⁷³ Watkins, *On The Pill* p. 32; Bayer HealthCare, 'History', <<http://www.bayerpharma.com/en/company/history/index.php>>, accessed 6 August 2012.

⁷⁴ Briggs, *Reproducing Empire*, p. 129; Watkins, *On The Pill*, pp. 21-4.

⁷⁵ Watkins, *On The Pill*, p. 24.

⁷⁶ Marks, *Sexual Chemistry*, pp. 66-82.

⁷⁷ Marks, *Sexual Chemistry*, p. 35; Briggs, *Reproducing Empire*, p. 131.

Midwest and Enovid was their biggest success, with the company's profits increasing by 135 per cent by 1965.⁷⁸

Bayer on the other hand, was founded in Germany in 1863 as a competitor in the textiles industry. Between 1881 and 1913 Bayer's focus gradually shifted from textiles to pharmaceuticals and the company achieved its first major success in 1899 with the development of Aspirin.⁷⁹ These companies have both played a huge role in the history of the pill, yet this role is considerably, and quite often intentionally, downplayed in the fiftieth anniversary, because this profit-driven narrative conflicts with the altruistic image of the pharmaceutical industry that is promoted in this literature.

Although the pharmaceutical industry was not directly involved in the scientific research that produced the pill in the 1950s, it did produce the synthetic hormones used to develop the pill, and took on the responsibility of funding human trials for this medication.⁸⁰ The development of synthetic hormones was crucial to the development of the pill, because hormones made from natural material were extremely expensive to produce, and this hindered research. Initially the pharmaceutical industry funded the research of synthetic hormones so that it could capitalise on cortisone, the "miracle" hormone treatment for arthritis, in the late 1940s.⁸¹ The commercial success of cortisone then paved the way for the synthetic production of progesterone – one of the core hormonal components of the pill – when it became apparent that this would be a profitable avenue to for the industry to pursue.

⁷⁸ 'G. D. Searle & Co. History', Funding Universe, <<http://www.fundinguniverse.com/company-histories/g-d-searle-co-history/>>, accessed 10 August 2012.

⁷⁹ Bayer, 'The Early Years', <<http://www.bayer.com/en/1863-1881.aspx>>, accessed 4 August 2012.

⁸⁰ Briggs, *Reproducing Empire*, p. 124.

⁸¹ Watkins, *On The Pill*, pp. 21-3.

However to be a commercial success, the pill required FDA approval, and the economic and political concerns created by overpopulation facilitated the compulsory human drug trials.⁸² The majority of pharmaceutical companies deemed human trials of the pill to be too ethically and medically provocative and not worth the potential financial benefits. Searle acknowledged these risks, and instead decided to proceed with the original trials in the offshore location of Puerto Rico.⁸³

In Puerto Rico, press and publicity could be avoided and the huge demand for contraception made finding women to participate in the trials an easy task.⁸⁴ It was also believed that the poverty caused by overpopulation would prevent Puerto Rican women from vocalising concerns regarding medical side effects.⁸⁵ Even so, large numbers of Puerto Rican women withdrew from pill studies due to the side effects they were experiencing.⁸⁶ These drug trials were only the beginning of the public profile of the pill, and the pharmaceutical industry has had the responsibility of managing this profile from the 1950s onwards.

Because the American socio-political climate was not overly receptive to contraception in the late 1950s and early 1960s, the pharmaceutical industry was faced with a difficult task in maintaining a profitable public image of the pill. Pharmaceutical literature concerning the pill was highly regulated and Searle was careful not to flaunt the contraceptive benefits of Enovid to an unresponsive audience.⁸⁷ Within literature

⁸² Marks, *Sexual Chemistry*, p. 36.

⁸³ Briggs, *Reproducing Empire*, p. 131.

⁸⁴ Marks, *Sexual Chemistry*, p. 102.

⁸⁵ Gordon, *The Moral Property of Women*, p. 287.

⁸⁶ Marks, *Sexual Chemistry*, p. 105.

⁸⁷ Watkins, *On The Pill*, p. 36; 'Nonsurgical treatment of Endometriosis with Enovid', advertisement placed by G. D. Searle, *American Journal of Obstetrics and Gynaecology*, vol. 79, no. 6 (June 1960), p. 131.

Note that this advertisement also appears *American Journal of Obstetrics and Gynaecology* in vol. 80, no. 1 (July 1960), p. 118; vol. 80, no. 2 (August 1960), p. 73; vol. 80, no. 4 (October 1960), p. 87; vol. 80, no. 6 (December 1960), p. 112; vol. 81, no. 2 (February 1961), p. 13.

privately disseminated by Searle, the contraceptive properties of Enovid were made apparent from 1960 onwards because this was considered a controlled environment.⁸⁸ For example, the *Physicians' Product Brochure No. 67* that was distributed to the medical profession in 1960 openly discussed the value of Enovid as a contraceptive.⁸⁹ However, in a context where as many as thirty states still had statutes either prohibiting the sale or advertisement of contraception, it was financially safer to restrict discussion of Enovid, and this explains why there were many doctors who felt they did not have enough information about the pill in 1960.⁹⁰

Following this line of thinking, advertisements of Enovid were initially highly controlled and carefully constructed, which can be observed in Searle's advertising campaign in the *American Journal of Obstetrics and Gynaecology (AJOG)* throughout the early 1960s.⁹¹ Prior to May 1960, Enovid had been advertised in this journal as a treatment for menstrual disorders and advertising remained restrained after contraceptive approval had been granted, revealing that the transition from a therapeutic to contraceptive drug was a slow process.⁹²

This uncontroversial advertising promoted Enovid as a treatment for endometriosis, amenorrhea, menorrhagia, and metorrhagia.⁹³ These advertisements were conservative, plain, devoid of colour, and featured images of respectable, buttoned-up

⁸⁸ 'Enovid: For Disturbances of Menstruation and Pregnancy and for Ovulation Control', *Physicians' Product Brochure No. 67; For the Medical Profession Only*, (Chicago: Prepared by the medical department of G. D. Searle & Co., 1 August 1960), pp. 12-16.

⁸⁹ 'Enovid', *Physicians' Product Brochure No. 67*, pp. 12-16.

⁹⁰ Watkins, *On The Pill*, p. 12; Williams, 'Questions and Answers – Contraceptive Tablets', pp. 918-926.

⁹¹ *American Journal of Obstetrics and Gynaecology*, vol. 79-82, (January 1960 – December 1961).

⁹² Watkins, *On The Pill*, pp. 37-8.

⁹³ 'Enovid simplifies, maintains control of functional uterine bleeding', advertisement placed by G. D. Searle, *American Journal of Obstetrics and Gynaecology*, vol. 79, no. 1 (January 1960), p. 101; Note that this advertisement also appears in *American Journal of Obstetrics and Gynaecology*, vol. 79, no. 2 (February 1960), p. 107; vol. 80, no. 3 (September 1960), p. 120; vol. 81, no. 4 (April 1961), p. 13; 'Enovid in threatened or habitual abortion', advertisement placed by G. D. Searle, *American Journal of Obstetrics and Gynaecology*, vol. 79, no. 2 (February 1960), p. 123; Note that this advertisement also appears *American Journal of Obstetrics and Gynaecology* in vol. 79, no. 4 (April 1960), p. 95.

women looking slightly uncomfortable about their association with Enovid. There was no suggestion of Enovid as an empowering medication or a symbol of reproductive freedom, and this style of advertising continued for some time after May 1960.⁹⁴

Minor adjustments were made to the textual content of this advertising campaign in June 1960 to inform practitioners of Enovid's capacity to inhibit ovulation.⁹⁵ Even so, Enovid was still advertised as a treatment for menstrual disorders as opposed to a contraceptive.

Enovid is a potent, orally effective progestin. The addition of a 3-methyl ether of ethynylestadiol prevents 'breakthrough' bleeding and produces an ideal mimic of the hormonal changes in pregnancy. Enovid inhibits ovulation, induces a secretory endometrium and produces a decidual effect in areas of endometriosis.⁹⁶

Visually and stylistically this advertising campaign did not change and this inclusion of Enovid's ability to inhibit ovulation was a minor modification, not immediately apparent. Thus it would appear that Searle consciously refrained from advertising the contraceptive properties of Enovid until they felt confident that they would be received by a receptive audience.

This occurred in July 1961 when Searle abandoned their original therapeutic advertising campaign in favour of the modernised '...unfettered' campaign that marketed Enovid as a contraceptive drug.⁹⁷ Arguably this change was symptomatic of

⁹⁴ Enovid advertisements in *American Journal of Obstetrics and Gynaecology* from June 1960 – June 1961 (vol. 79, no. 6 – vol. 81, no. 6) treat Enovid as a therapy for menstrual disorders rather than as a contraceptive.

⁹⁵ G. D. Searle, 'Nonsurgical treatment of Endometriosis with Enovid', p. 131.

⁹⁶ G. D. Searle, 'Nonsurgical treatment of Endometriosis with Enovid', p. 131.

⁹⁷ '...unfettered', G. D. Searle advertisement of Enovid in, *American Journal of Obstetrics and Gynaecology*, vol. 82, no. 1 (July 1961), pp. 86-87; '...unfettered', G. D. Searle advertisement of Enovid in, *Obstetrics & Gynaecology*, vol. 18, no. 1 (July 1961), p. 62-3, in Elizabeth Siegal Watkins, *On The Pill: A Social History of Oral Contraceptives 1950-1970*, (Baltimore and London: The John Hopkins University Press, 1997), p. 72, Fig. 1.

wider developments in American socio-political attitudes towards birth control, because it would appear that after the legal developments of June 1961, Searle decided that public opinion had progressed significantly to present doctors with “The Pill”.

In June 1961 the United States Supreme Court decided 5-4 that the case of *Poe v. Ullman*, which based on the legal restrictions on birth control, would be dismissed because these laws were considered too abstract to rule on.⁹⁸ Essentially, the dismissal of this case declared Connecticut’s birth control laws irrelevant, and although this action appears to have been relatively insignificant in terms of direct changes to birth control legislation, it was enough of an amendment to launch Searle’s new advertising campaign.⁹⁹ This campaign represented the beginning of the pill as a symbol of empowerment and the origin of the contemporary liberation narrative.

The ‘unfettered’ campaign was a complete reversal of the conservative, black and white imagery of Enovid advertising in previous years. The drab portrayal of Enovid as a treatment for menstrual disorders was replaced with a vibrant purple image of the Greek goddess Andromeda – naked, breaking free of her chains, a symbol of liberation and empowerment.¹⁰⁰ This was the first time that such a direct link had been drawn between the pill and individual freedom, and it was the pharmaceutical industry that initially perpetuated the contemporary liberation narrative.¹⁰¹ However, this advertising campaign was not directed towards individual female consumers of the pill, it was directed towards the male medical profession because direct to consumer pharmaceutical

⁹⁸ ‘Supreme Court Actions: June 19 - The Supreme Court took the following actions today’, *New York Times*, 20 June 1961; ‘Planned Parenthood to offer Contraception in Connecticut’, *Planned Parenthood News*, no. 30 (Spring 1961), p. 1.

⁹⁹ In July 1961 G. D. Searle launched the ‘unfettered’ advertising campaign, first appearing in *American Journal of Obstetrics and Gynaecology*, vol. 82, no. 1 (July 1961), pp. 86-87.

¹⁰⁰ G. D. Searle, ‘...unfettered’, pp. 86-87.

¹⁰¹ Elaine Tyler May, written interview, 14 June 2012, ‘The Fiftieth Anniversary of The Pill’, prepared by Tiarne Barratt under the supervision of Professor Alison Bashford, approved by The University of Sydney Human Research Ethics Committee on 1 May 2012, ref. no. AH00088.

advertising was not legal in the US at this point.¹⁰² Thus, ironically, in this context Andromeda does not represent women's empowerment, she represents male control over women's reproductive capacity: a far cry from the fiftieth anniversary interpretation of the pill.

In this advertisement, the pill presented male gynaecologists with the power to 'normalize' women's reproductive bodies and lives. If they so decided, women would have the option to cease being a 'vessel to the temporal demands... of her reproductive system', and instead she would be 'freed from her chains'.¹⁰³ Searle presented the pill as an opportunity for doctors to liberate women, and consequently they promoted the idea of women's liberation before Women's Liberation emerged.

In 1961 advertising in medical journals had considerable influence over physician's prescribing practices, and it becomes apparent that channelling the idea of the pill's potential for liberation through men was the most effective way to manage the public profile and ensure the success of the pill.¹⁰⁴ This means that the contemporary feminist idea of the pill as a symbol of liberation originated as a marketing tool for the pharmaceutical industry in the 1960s. However in recent years, it has become more profitable to promote the loosely feminist affiliated idea of empowerment to women directly. As a result, the origins of this narrative do not appear within fiftieth anniversary literature, as later chapters discuss.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰² Shaili Jain, *Understanding Physician-Pharmaceutical Industry Interactions*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), p. 59.

¹⁰³ G. D. Searle, '...unfettered', pp. 86-87.

¹⁰⁴ Modern Medicine survey originally quoted in M. H. Cooper, *Prices and Profits in the Pharmaceutical Industry*, (Pergamon Press, 1966), subsequently cited in Stuart P. Slatter, *Competition and Marketing Strategies in the Pharmaceutical Industry*, (London: Redwood Burn Limited, 1977), p. 34.

¹⁰⁵ Bayer Healthcare Pharmaceuticals, 'Women's Empowerment Icons Commemorate the 50th Anniversary of the Pill', *PR Newswire – United Business Media*, 6 May 2010, <<http://www.prnewswire.com/news-releases/womens-empowerment-icons-commemorate-the-50th-anniversary-of-the-pill-92958849.html>>, accessed 24 February 2012.

Australian pharmaceutical advertising in the 1960s was somewhat different to its American counterpart, and can be observed in the *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Obstetrics and Gynaecology* (ANZJOG). In this context the pill was introduced as a contraceptive rather than a treatment for menstrual disorders, and this is reflected in initial advertising campaigns.¹⁰⁶ In terms of content, the advertising in the ANZJOG is somewhat different to that found in the *AJOG* because the contraceptive benefits of the pill are the main focus of the advertisement from the origins of the campaign. However stylistically, the original Enovid campaign and the original Anovlar campaign share the same muted tones and understated presentation.¹⁰⁷

Hence while the contraceptive benefits of the pill were never disguised in Australian advertising, there was also never the same bold narrative of liberation that appeared in American advertising: if anything, Australian advertising emphasised female dependence rather than liberation.¹⁰⁸ These discrepancies make it apparent that national context had always been an important consideration in the management of the public profile of the pill, and make the subtle differences between Australian and American commemorative narratives an expected outcome of this anniversary.

Conclusion

The purpose of this chapter was to illustrate that the introduction and development of the pill was more complex and varied than fiftieth anniversary literature would suggest. This

¹⁰⁶ Schering AG, 'Anovlar for Ovulation Control', *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Obstetrics and Gynaecology*, vol. 1, no. 2 (June 1961).

¹⁰⁷ Schering AG, 'Anovlar for Ovulation Control', *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Obstetrics and Gynaecology*, vol. 1, no. 2 (June 1961); vol. 1, no. 3 (September 1961); vol. 1, no. 4 (December 1961); vol. 2, no. 1 (March 1962); vol. 2, no. 2 (June 1962); vol. 2, no. 3 (September 1962); vol. 2, no. 4 (December 1962); 'Enovid simplifies, maintains control of functional uterine bleeding', *American Journal of Obstetrics and Gynaecology*, vol. 79, no. 1 (January 1960), p. 101; vol. 79, no. 2 (February 1960), p. 107; vol. 80, no. 3 (September 1960), p. 120; vol. 81, no. 4 (April 1961), p. 13.

¹⁰⁸ Searle, 'The Balance in Nature is a Delicate Thing', *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Obstetrics and Gynaecology*, vol. 9, no. 2 (May 1969).

literature was not completely silent in regards to population control, the pharmaceutical industry, or the history of contraception prior to the advent of the pill. However this discussion was also not representative of the significance of these themes within the history of the pill. While individual women's reproductive control is an undeniably important aspect of this history, within the fiftieth anniversary this was misleadingly framed as the primary consideration in the development of the pill.¹⁰⁹ This created an intentionally unbalanced interpretation of the past that overlooked the broader socio-political context of the 1960s, and over emphasised the importance of individual fertility control.

It must be acknowledged that the fiftieth anniversary was a commemorative event which was not regulated by the same standards of historical accuracy that academic writing demands, and that the theme of individual women's liberation was deliberately accentuated in this context.¹¹⁰ However, when this historical interpretation of the pill was presented to the public in 2010, this necessary context was not included and as such, this highly selected narrative was presented as historically accurate. Thus it is important to look beyond the liberation narrative, as this reveals the intricacies of the history of the pill, which in turn facilitates a deeper analysis of the fiftieth anniversary.

¹⁰⁹ Rita Rubin, 'The pill: 50 years of birth control changed women's lives', *USA Today*, 8 May 2012.

¹¹⁰ Richard White, 'A Commemoration and a Historical Mediation', *The Journal of American History*, vol. 94, no. 4 (May 2008), p. 1073; Titus Ensink and Christoph Sauer, 'Facing the Past: The Commemoration of the Warsaw Uprising on the Occasion of its Fiftieth Anniversary', in Titus Ensink and Christoph Sauer eds., *The Art of Commemoration: Fifty Years After the Warsaw Uprising*, (Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2003), p. 7; Elaine Tyler May, written interview, 14 June 2012.

Chapter Two – Feminism and the Pill

The relationship between feminism and the pill is multifaceted, complex, and crucial to understanding the construction of the fiftieth anniversary.¹ Chapter two examines the status of the pill in historical feminist thought, and compares this to fiftieth anniversary representations of the pill: focussing on feminism's use of its own history in this context, and noting that a critique of population control is predominantly absent from the 1960s onwards. Although historical feminist thought had a pervasive influence on literature produced for the fiftieth anniversary, this did not create a unified anniversary narrative, as the history of feminism and the pill was engaged with extremely selectively in this literature. Instead, the fiftieth anniversary drew attention to internal divisions within contemporary feminist thought, and in this context, the pill was simultaneously perceived as a symbol of empowerment, and as a harmful medication.²

These conflicting perceptions of the pill – as empowering and as medically harmful - represent different generations of historical feminist thought, and yet within fiftieth anniversary literature, this history was employed in a way that presented these perspectives in contention with one another. In the late 1960s and early 1970s, the ambiguous medical safety of the pill made it a provocative issue within second wave feminism. This was a progression from previous generations of feminist thought, because in the first half of the twentieth century, there were feminist thinkers who considered the pill to be necessary in achieving gender equality. Within the fiftieth anniversary, the history of feminism and the pill was invoked as a way to afford

¹ Elaine Tyler May, written interview, 14 June 2012, 'The Fiftieth Anniversary of The Pill', prepared by Tiarne Barratt under the supervision of Professor Alison Bashford, approved by The University of Sydney Human Research Ethics Committee on 1 May 2012, ref. no. AH00088.

² Laura Eldridge, *In Our Control: The Complete Guide to Contraceptive Choices for Women*, (New York: Seven Stories Press, 2010).

legitimacy to contemporary feminist narratives, and for the most part, older generations of feminist thought were relied upon to promote a positive, uncontroversial public image of the pill.

The Historical Relationship between Feminism and the Pill

Margaret Sanger was a pioneering member of the American birth control movement, who spent the first half of the twentieth century lobbying for women's increased access to contraception.³ In 1916, Sanger illegally opened America's first birth control clinic and later went on to establish the Planned Parenthood Federation of America (PPFA). Her work was also integral to the repeal of the Comstock laws, legislation that originated in the nineteenth century restricting the dissemination of contraception and information about contraception.⁴ Sanger believed that there was a pronounced connection between maternal mortality rates and women's lack of access to contraception: a situation which she sought to remedy.⁵ Because her activism was bound to her fight for contraception, Sanger represents a very specific strand of historical feminist thought, meaning that she does not represent mainstream feminism, but rather the American birth control movement.⁶

Frequently, Sanger is remembered primarily in relation to her birth control activism throughout the 1920s and 1930s. Although she was extremely active during this period, this did not signal the end of her career, and her campaign for the pill lasted the

³ Lara V. Marks, *Sexual Chemistry: A History of the Contraceptive Pill*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), pp. 50-2.

⁴ Elizabeth Siegal Watkins, *On The Pill: A Social History of Oral Contraceptives 1950-1970*, (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997), pp. 13-4; Michael J. O'Dowd, *The History of Medications for Women: Materia medica woman*, (New York: The Parthenon Publishing Group, 2001), p. 353.

⁵ Marks, *Sexual Chemistry*, p. 51.

⁶ Olive Banks, *Faces of Feminism: A Study of Feminism as a Social Movement*, (Oxford: Martin Robertson, 1981), pp. 200-1.

duration of the 1950s.⁷ By this time, Sanger had already had “pioneer status” bestowed upon her in connection with her earlier birth control work, and as she was well into her seventies by this point, the introduction of the pill can be seen as her final act of activism.⁸

For Sanger, birth control was crucial to women’s rights and gender equality, and she believed that women would never truly be in control of their bodies until motherhood was voluntary.

I knew something must be done to rescue those women who were voiceless; someone had to express with white hot intensity the conviction that they must be empowered to decide for themselves when they should fulfil the supreme function of motherhood. They had to be made aware of how they were being shackled, and roused to mutiny.⁹

She argued that the ideal contraceptive would be safe, affordable, easy to use, readily available, reliable, and in women’s control.¹⁰ The “magic pill” that she envisioned would be controlled by women, yet regulated by the medical profession, because in this context it was generally believed that every social problem had a scientific solution.¹¹ Thus Sanger turned to science to find an answer to women’s lack of access to contraception.

However, as discussed in chapter one, the development of oral contraception was never solely about women’s rights and Sanger was also quite closely aligned with eugenics.¹² Though Sanger is sometimes targeted as a racist or eugenicist because of this connection, it has not prevented her from being heroised, and especially within the

⁷ Ellen Chesler, *Woman of Valor: Margaret Sanger and the Birth Control Movement in America*, (New York: Anchor Books, 1993), p. 414.

⁸ Chesler, *Woman of Valor*, p. 414.

⁹ Margaret Sanger, *Margaret Sanger: An Autobiography*, (New York: Maxwell Reprint Company, 1970 [originally published by W. W. Norton & Co., 1938]), p. 106.

¹⁰ Watkins, *On The Pill*, p. 14.

¹¹ Carl Djerassi, *This Man’s Pill: Reflection on the 50th Birthday of the Pill*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), p. 282.

¹² Sanger, *Margaret Sanger*, p. 376.

fiftieth anniversary, she is considered to embody the relationship between feminism and the pill. This is ironic, because in the 1960s, Sanger and the women of her generation were considered quite obsolete and dated within new generations of feminist thought.¹³ Like many women within older generations of feminism, Sanger died in the 1960s, and second wave feminists perceived her as a historical rather than a contemporary figure, even though she was still active in her later years.¹⁴

When birth control is situated in Sanger's generation of feminist thought, it becomes apparent, on one level at least, that individual reproductive control has always been associated with gender equality: thus it is easy to see how the liberation narrative developed.¹⁵ This strand of feminist thought – that supported the development of the pill, the medical profession, and female-controlled contraception – persisted until the late 1960s, when a new generation of feminism began raise questions about the medical safety of the pill.¹⁶

The positive benefits of the pill came into question within feminist thought at a time when a general critique of the healthcare profession was occurring, which can be observed in the rise of the women's health movement (WHM). The WHM was an offshoot of radical second wave feminism, and it was a critique of the male-dominated medical profession.¹⁷ Women taking control of their bodies was the primary focus of this movement, and in this context, the pill was considered to be an extension of male control over women's bodies and reproductive capabilities.

¹³ Sarah Slavin Schramm, *Plow Women Rather Than Reapers: An Intellectual History of Feminism in the United States*, (Metuchen: The Scarecrow Press, Inc., 1979), p. 47.

¹⁴ Marilyn Lake, *Getting Equal: The History of Australian Feminism*, (NSW: Allen and Unwin, 1999), pp. 5-6.

¹⁵ Sanger, *Margaret Sanger*, p. 106.

¹⁶ Watkins, *On The Pill*, pp. 103-4; Barbara Seaman, *The Doctor's Case Against the Pill: 25th Anniversary Edition*, (United States: Hunter House, 1969, 1995).

¹⁷ Sheryl Burt Ruzek, *The Women's Health Movement: Feminist Alternatives to Medical Control*, (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1978), p. x; Sandra Morgen, *Into Our Own Hands: The Women's Health Movement in the United States, 1969-1990*, (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2002), p. 10.

The WHM found male doctors to be ‘condescending, paternalistic, judgemental, and non-informative.’¹⁸ It was felt that there was inadequate dialogue between women and their doctors, that healthcare was administered to women on the basis of their reproductive capacity, and that within this profession, women were perceived as reproductive organs first, people second.¹⁹ The WHM was influenced by the Women’s Liberation Movement (WLM) and originated with the goal of consciousness raising: as the 1970s progressed, focus shifted towards activism in the public sphere, and members could be quite radical in the message they advocated.²⁰

In 1972 health activist Carol Downer addressed the American Psychological Association:

In what has been described as “rape of the pelvis”, our uteri and ovaries are removed often needlessly. Our breasts and all supporting muscular tissue are carved out brutally in radical mastectomy. Abortion and preventative birth control methods are denied us unless we are a certain age, or married, or perhaps they are denied us completely... How can we rescue ourselves from this dilemma that male supremacy has landed us in? The solution is simple. We women must take women’s medicine back into our own capable hands.²¹

Within current narratives of the pill, this radical sentiment associated with second wave feminism and the WHM was deemed too controversial to be associated with the fiftieth anniversary: the contemporary liberation narrative therefore has little in common with the historic WLM.²² Rather than invoke the contextually appropriate second wave

¹⁸ The Boston Women’s Health Book Collective, *Our Bodies Ourselves: A Book By and For Women*, (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1973), p. 1.

¹⁹ Ruzek, *The Women’s Health Movement*, p. 11.

²⁰ Ruzek, *The Women’s Health Movement*, p. 183.

²¹ Carol Downer, feminist health activist addressing the American Psychological Association meeting in 1972, quoted in Sheryl Burt Ruzek, *The Women’s Health Movement: Feminist Alternatives to Medical Control*, (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1978), pp. 1-2.

²² Pfizer advertisement in Christine Read ed., *Taking It: 50 Years of the Pill*, (NSW: NSW Family Planning, 2010), p. 28.

feminism, fiftieth anniversary literature relied upon Sanger's generation of feminist thought to legitimise the contemporary liberation narrative, as this was considered to be more beneficial in distancing the pill from provocative associations with reproductive politics.

Within the WHM's general critique of gynaecological healthcare, concern about the medical safety of the pill developed, and its relatively undisputed popularity was suddenly thrown into question.²³ In 1969, health activist Barbara Seaman produced a book, *The Doctor's Case Against the Pill*, which is considered to mark the origin of the 1970s feminist medical critique of the pill.²⁴ Seaman has been described as one of the most vocal opponents of the pill.²⁵ She was a freelance health writer for American women's magazines in the 1960s, and became involved in the medical debate after hearing her readers express concern about the side effects of the pill.²⁶

Throughout the 1960s, the safety of the pill was assumed, however Seaman argued that international medical concern had been brewing for years, and this literature had just not been centralised enough to influence public opinion.²⁷ In her book, she informs readers that as early as 1961, Searle had reports of 132 incidences of thrombosis amongst Enovid users, eleven of which were fatal.²⁸ Seaman argued that the primary danger associated with the pill came from blood clots, followed closely by strokes: she also identified nausea, headaches, loss of sex drive, sterility, cancer, heart disease, diabetes, jaundice, thyroid problems, weight gain, urinary infections, arthritis, skin and gum problems, depression, and irritability, as potential side effects of the pill, or as

²³ Ruzek, *The Women's Health Movement*, p. 226.

²⁴ Seaman, *The Doctor's Case Against the Pill*; Morgen, *Into Our Own Hands*, p. 8.

²⁵ The Boston Women's Health Book Collective, *Our Bodies Ourselves: A Book By and For Women: Completely Revised and Expanded*, (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1976), p. 188.

²⁶ Watkins, *On The Pill*, p. 104; Seaman, *The Doctor's Case Against the Pill*, pp. 1-2.

²⁷ Morgen, *Into Our Own Hands*, p. 8.

²⁸ Seaman, *The Doctor's Case Against the Pill*, p. 2.

existing conditions that could be worsened by oral contraception.²⁹ Yet it was not until the US Senate hearings of 1970 that the medical safety of the pill was subject to public scrutiny.³⁰

These hearings were chaired by Senator Gaylord Nelson, a congressman frequently involved in investigating matters pertaining to the pharmaceutical industry: the inquiry was a direct result of Nelson's contact with Seaman's book.³¹ The outcome of these hearings was that pharmaceutical companies became legally required to include inserts in oral contraceptive packaging, detailing the potential side effects associated with the medication.³² This was the first time that such an insert had been mandatory for any medication, and these events were integral in redefining the feminist stance on the pill.³³

Although there was a strand of second wave feminist thought that remained wary of the side effects of the pill throughout the 1970s, once the package insert informing women of these side effects became mandatory, this critique relaxed, and the WHM advocated informed choice rather than a complete rejection of the pill.³⁴ These women acknowledged that contraception was far from ideal, '...the fact that the risk of death is indeed a consideration [in choosing a method of birth control] is indicative of just how lousy the situation is.'³⁵ But they also accepted that for many women, the medical risks of the pill were inconsequential compared to the protection from pregnancy it provided.³⁶

²⁹ Seaman, *The Doctor's Case Against the Pill*, p. v.

³⁰ Watkins, *On The Pill*, pp. 106-7.

³¹ Watkins, *On The Pill*, pp. 104-6.

³² Watkins, *On The Pill*, p. 120.

³³ Watkins, *On The Pill*, pp. 104-5.

³⁴ The Boston Women's Health Book Collective, *Our Bodies Ourselves*, p. 113.

³⁵ The Boston Women's Health Book Collective, *Our Bodies Ourselves*, p. 114.

³⁶ The Boston Women's Health Book Collective, *Our Bodies Ourselves*, (1976), p. 188.

There were still people that took a more radical stance on pill usage, but essentially informed consent was at the centre of this movement, and there was a general consensus that women should make their own choices.³⁷ However, this movement was a critique of male dominance within women's healthcare, and for this reason, American second wave feminists took issue with the burden of responsibility and medical risk that the pill placed upon women.³⁸

The Australian WHM was similarly inspired by the WLM of the 1960s, however while there was the same questioning of professionalism and the medical profession, this critique did not influence women's healthcare in quite the same way.³⁹ The American WHM was a predominantly white, middle-class, self-funded movement, meaning that these women already had considerable access to healthcare services, and the goal was to improve on these services.⁴⁰ In contrast, the Australian WHM was more concerned with increasing women's access to healthcare, rather than improving existing services. Because Australian healthcare was more state subsidised, the WHM received more funding from, and was more closely affiliated with the government, than the US movement.⁴¹ This connection to the government meant that the Australian WHM was less controversial than its American counterpart.

National context influenced the way in which feminists reacted to the medical controversy of the pill. This meant that whilst the American WHM remained concerned

³⁷ The Boston Women's Health Book Collective, *Our Bodies Ourselves*, p. 113; Ruzek, *The Women's Health Movement*, p. 12.

³⁸ Ruzek, *The Women's Health Movement*, p. 12; Watkins, *On The Pill*, p. 14; The Boston Women's Health Collective, *Our Bodies Ourselves*, p. 108; Sheldon J. Segal, 'Contraceptive Research: A Male Chauvinist Plot?', *Family Planning Perspectives*, vol. 4, no. 3 (July 1972), p. 21.

³⁹ Toni Schofield, 'Health', in Barbara Caine with Moira Gatens, Emma Grahame, Jan Larbalestier, Sophie Watson and Elizabeth Webby eds., *Australian Feminism: A Companion*, (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1998), p. 125; Kerreen M. Reiger, *Our Bodies, Our Babies: The Forgotten Women's Movement*, (Victoria: Melbourne University Press, 2001), pp. 187-9.

⁴⁰ The Boston Women's Health Book Collective, *Our Bodies Ourselves*, pp. 1-2.

⁴¹ Schofield, 'Health', p. 127.

about the safety of the pill throughout the 1970s, within Australian thought, this concern passed in a matter of months, and pill usage was on the rise again by 1971.⁴² The Australian 'pill scare' of 1970 was more a reflection of American concern, and these different attitudes were the result of the different goals of the Australian and American WHM, namely access vs. quality within women's healthcare.⁴³

Primarily concerned with women's access to contraception, Australian feminists regarded the pill scare as an incidence of media sensationalism that was detrimental to their efforts, as it encouraged women to abandon their contraceptive pills, leading to unwanted pregnancies and abortions.⁴⁴ Although informed consent was important irrespective of national context, in Australia, women's lack of access to contraception was regarded as a more pressing social issue than the potential medical side effects of the pill.⁴⁵ Thus while American feminists were still concerned with side effects, Australian feminists were campaigning to have the luxury tax on the pill removed, a tax which was abolished by the Whitlam government in 1972 when they added the pill to the National Health Scheme list.⁴⁶

In the US, there was a considerable ideological distinction between the WHM and the PPFA, whereas in Australia, the WHM and Family Planning were far more ideologically aligned.⁴⁷ Although PPFA, Family Planning, and the WHM were all focussed on providing women with adequate healthcare, it was only the American WHM

⁴² Stefania Siedlecky and Diana Wyndham, *Populate and Perish: Australian Women's Fight for Birth Control*, (Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 1990), p. 45; Ruzek, *The Women's Health Movement*, p. 38.

⁴³ 'Growing fears in U. S. over the Pill', *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 23 March 1969, p. 25.

⁴⁴ Edith Weisberg on 'Full Circle', produced by Barbara Chobocky, aired 17 April 1997, Australian Broadcasting Corporation, ABC Online, <<http://www.abc.net.au/time/chars/char12.htm>>, accessed 28 August 2012.

⁴⁵ Siedlecky, *Populate and Perish*, pp. 137-53.

⁴⁶ Lake, *Getting Equal*, p. 224; Siedlecky, *Populate and Perish*, pp. 135-6.

⁴⁷ Ruzek, *The Women's Health Movement*, p. 214; Siedlecky, *Populate and Perish*, pp. 137-53.

that supported the 1970s medical critique of the pill.⁴⁸ Arguably, this was because the pill was integrated into Australian culture much faster than in American culture, because despite initial concerns about medical safety, by the mid-1960s the number of Australian women using the pill was almost twice as high as in the US.⁴⁹

In regards to PPFA and Family Planning, these organisations were more critical of the critique of the pill, than they were of the pill itself.⁵⁰ For example, in a Planned Parenthood review of Seaman's book, Elizabeth B. Connell, M.D, declared that it 'so obviously preys upon the fears and emotions that it loses its credibility'.⁵¹ Instead, she argued that the pill was a strong medication that naturally came with associated, albeit infrequent, risks, which should not act as a deterrent from this otherwise effective medication, and outside of the WHM, this was a commonly held view.⁵²

The late 1960s medical controversy surrounding the pill was never fully resolved in the US: as package inserts became mandatory, women's health activists felt there was little else for them to do.⁵³ By the end of the 1970s, other feminist issues such as the legalisation of abortion, the investigation of inter-uterine devices (IUDs), and the emergency contraceptive DES, had well and truly replaced concern about the pill.⁵⁴

⁴⁸ Ruzek, *The Women's Health Movement*, p. 214; Harriet B. Presser, 'Women and Their Bodies', *Family Planning Perspectives*, vol. 5, no. 4 (Autumn 1973), pp. 251-2.

⁴⁹ Siedlecky, *Populate and Perish*, p. 44; 'Experts Discuss Birth Control', *The Australian Women's Weekly*, 9 August 1972, p. 35; 'The Pill', *The Australian Women's Weekly*, 30 July 1975, p. 56; 'A Positive Approach to the Pill – A consulting gynaecologists argues that, in spite of its many imperfections, the pill is still the best contraceptive going', *The Australian Women's Weekly*, 22 October 1975, p. 39; 'Reflections on the Pill', *The Australian Women's Weekly*, 18 January 1978, p. 99; 'New Light on Birth Control Likely', *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 13 June 1962, p. 1.

⁵⁰ Elizabeth B. Connell, 'Facts and Fantasies about Oral Contraceptives', *Family Planning Perspectives*, vol. 2, no. 1 (January 1970), pp. 45-6; Weisberg, 'Full Circle', <<http://www.abc.net.au/time/chars/char12.htm>>, accessed 28 August 2012.

⁵¹ Connell, 'Facts and Fantasies about Oral Contraceptives', p. 46.

⁵² Connell, 'Facts and Fantasies about Oral Contraceptives', pp. 45-6; David Rorvik and David Delvin, *Good Housekeeping Woman's Medical Guide*, (London: Ebury Press, 1975), pp. 159-60.

⁵³ Watkins, *On The Pill*, pp. 109, 133.

⁵⁴ Watkins, *On The Pill*, p. 133; Ellen Frankfort, *Vaginal Politics*, (New York: Quadrangle Books Inc., 1972), pp. 112-5.

Attitudes regarding medical safety and the appropriate role of the healthcare industry in women's lives changed so much between the 1950s and the 1970s, that it has been suggested that the pill would not have been approved, had it appeared any later than 1960.⁵⁵ While feminists of Sanger's generation had complete faith in the medical profession, second wave feminists urged women to question the healthcare industry. Initially it was thought that contraception needed to be in women's control, but later this was considered an unfair burden of responsibility.⁵⁶ Although Sanger and Seaman shared the belief that women needed to be in control of their reproductive lives, they essentially represent completely different strands and generations of feminist thought.

American Feminist Thought and the Fiftieth Anniversary

There can be no doubt that the pill has had a liberating effect on the lives of women: its invention revolutionised contraception, and drastically increased women's reproductive and sexual freedom, and accordingly their ability to pursue career and educational opportunities.⁵⁷ However, as it was brought to public attention in the late 1960s, the liberating potential of the pill was not unconditional, and for many women, the contraceptive benefits did not outweigh the medical risks.⁵⁸

These dual historical perceptions of the pill - as liberating and as medically harmful - were invoked in 2010 in order to legitimise the feminist perspectives propagated at the time of the fiftieth anniversary. This was done by citing the historical feminist figures of either Margaret Sanger or Barbara Seaman, and recounting the

⁵⁵ Djerassi, *This Man's Pill*, p. 282.

⁵⁶ Watkins, *On The Pill*, p. 14; The Boston Women's Health Collective, *Our Bodies Ourselves*, p. 108; Segal, 'Contraceptive Research', p. 21.

⁵⁷ Watkins, *On The Pill*, pp. 1-2.

⁵⁸ Seaman, *The Doctor's Case Against the Pill*, pp. 21-2.

history of the pill through the experience of one or other of these women.⁵⁹ Essentially, this was an anachronistic presentation of feminist thought, which positioned different generations of feminism in contention with one another, and in an attempt to use history as a means of making current issues appear less controversial, contemporary feminist thinkers created a debate out of what was originally a consecutive progression of thought.

Two main representations of the American liberation narrative are *America and the Pill* by Elaine Tyler May, and *Love, Sex, Freedom and the Paradox of the Pill* by Nancy Gibbs.⁶⁰ May is a Regents Professor of American Studies and History at the University of Minnesota, and her book was geared towards a public readership.⁶¹ May's work was the most academic text produced for the fiftieth anniversary: although she did emphasise the theme of individual women's empowerment, her professional background warranted that other aspects of this history were also addressed, for example, she included a chapter on population control.⁶²

In contrast, Gibbs is the executive editor of *Time Magazine*: her book was intended as a brief history of birth control, and for an example of commemorative literature, it provides a relatively balanced perspective.⁶³ Both authors see the history of the pill and feminism as absolutely interconnected, and believe that without the social context of equality that feminism facilitated, the pill would have simply been another

⁵⁹ Elaine Tyler May, *America and the Pill: A History of Promise, Peril, and Liberation*, (New York: Basic Books, 2010), pp. 3-7; Eldridge, *In Our Control*, pp. 1-8.

⁶⁰ May, *America and the Pill*; Nancy Gibbs, *Love, Sex, Freedom, and the Paradox of the Pill: A Brief History of Birth Control*, (e-book, kindle edition, 2010).

⁶¹ Elaine Tyler May, written interview, 14 June 2012.

⁶² May, *America and the Pill*, pp. 35-56.

⁶³ Gibbs, *Love, Sex, Freedom, and the Paradox of the Pill*, location 1 of 612.

medication.⁶⁴ Indeed, May believes that the importance of the pill cannot be understood without acknowledging the importance of feminism.⁶⁵

The contemporary liberation narrative promotes empowerment as individual reproductive control, and focusses on women's increased family planning, work, and educational opportunities as the apparent result of access to the pill.⁶⁶

Private, easy to use, convenient, temporary, safe and 99 per cent effective, the pill puts a woman's reproduction within her control. The pill has played a major role in decreasing unplanned pregnancies, improving maternal and infant health, lowering infant mortality, and increasing women's abilities to fulfil educational, political, professional and social aspirations.⁶⁷

This reduction distances the fiftieth anniversary from the historical Women's Liberation Movement and radical reproductive politics, as well as other controversial aspects of this history, such as population control.⁶⁸ It raises the question of why the pill was retrospectively linked to feminist thought at all, and arguably this is because the international pharmaceutical industry played a significant role in propagating the fiftieth anniversary liberation narrative.⁶⁹

The pill, feminism, and the pharmaceutical industry are interconnected concepts and have been so since the 1950s. The success of the pill was equally dependant on

⁶⁴ Gibbs, *Love, Sex, Freedom, and the Paradox of the Pill*, location 318 of 612; Elaine Tyler May, written interview, 14 June 2012.

⁶⁵ Elaine Tyler May, written interview, 14 June 2012.

⁶⁶ Deborah Kotz, 'Birth Control Pill Turns 50: 7 Ways It Changed Lives', *U.S News & World Report*, 7 May 2010, <<http://health.usnews.com/health-news/womens-health/articles/2010/05/07/birth-control-pill-turns-50-7-ways-it-changed-lives>>, accessed 13 February 2012.

⁶⁷ Kira Miskimmin, 'Celebrate 50 Years of "the Pill" with reflection, action', *The Charlestown Gazette*, 4 July 2010.

⁶⁸ Sanger, *Margaret Sanger*, p. 106; Jenifer De Pinto, 'Poll: Most Say The Pill Improved Women's Lives', *CBS News*, 10 May 2010, <<http://www.cbsnews.com/stories/2010/05/07/health/main6468828.shtml>>, accessed 26 February 2012.

⁶⁹ Bayer Healthcare Pharmaceuticals, 'Women's Empowerment Icons Commemorate the 50th Anniversary of the Pill', *PR Newswire – United Business Media*, 6 May 2010, <<http://www.prnewswire.com/news-releases/womens-empowerment-icons-commemorate-the-50th-anniversary-of-the-pill-92958849.html>>, accessed 24 February 2012.

feminist thought and the pharmaceutical industry, and although it may seem contradictory, these two bodies have been mutually dependant on one another since the introduction of the pill. The idea of feminism has assisted the pharmaceutical industry in managing the public profile of the pill, and there would not have been a pill for feminists to support without the pharmaceutical industry: however this interrelatedness will be the subject of more detailed discussion in chapter three.

Ironically, the historical silences employed to reduce the controversial nature of the liberation narrative, actually had the potential to invite criticism of this presentation of history. This criticism was pre-emptively counteracted by utilising Sanger, ‘...a crusader throughout the 20th century’, and all the credit her name bestows, to validate the “liberating” claims of the pill, and to provide this narrative with the necessary historical legitimacy to appear uncontroversial.⁷⁰

The Pill not only separated sex from procreation; it separated sex from birth control...Above all, it [contraception] was entirely within her control — just as Sanger and McCormick had wanted. And that put many other things under women’s control as well.⁷¹

This statement, made by Nancy Gibbs, deliberately omits the history of population control, the second wave medical critique of the pill, and the belief that the pill placed an unfair burden of responsibility on women.⁷² It draws on a selective representation of Sanger, and implies that she viewed the pill solely in terms of individual fertility

⁷⁰ ‘Public Radio Broadcast – Liane Hansen interviews Nancy Gibbs (Executive Editor, Time Magazine)’, National Public Radio News (United States), 9 May 2010, <<http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=126646877>>, accessed 27 February 2012; May, ‘The Pill’, 9 May 2010; Steve Ainsworth, ‘Over 50 Years of the Oral Contraceptive’, *Practice Nurse*, vol. 41, no. 4 (March, 2011), pp. 41-2; Planned Parenthood, ‘Planned Parenthood Marks 50th Anniversary of Birth Control Pill’, <<http://www.opposingviews.com/i/planned-parenthood-marks-50th-anniversary-of-birth-control-pill>>, accessed 11 February 2010.

⁷¹ Gibbs, *Love, Sex, Freedom and the Paradox of the Pill*, location 376 of 612.

⁷² The Boston Women’s Health Collective, *Our Bodies Ourselves*, p. 108

control.⁷³ By invoking Sanger's original desire for contraception to be controlled by women, Gibbs' erases all subsequent progression of feminist thought and the coercive element of this history, in order to present the public with a more palatable anniversary narrative.

Although this literature was predominantly positive and celebratory, this presentation of feminist thought did not go entirely unchallenged, as there was also a contemporary feminist medical critique of the pill identifiable within this literature.⁷⁴ This feminist counter narrative did not advocate women's increased access to oral contraception, and as a result, it did not receive the same support or mainstream publicity that collaboration with the pharmaceutical industry afforded the liberation narrative.⁷⁵ *In Our Control: The Complete Guide to Contraceptive Choices for Women*, produced in 2010 by Laura Eldridge, was the primary text to support this renewed medical critique of the pill.⁷⁶

Dedicated to Barbara Seaman, 'a true heroine, a great activist...', this book was intended to challenge the fiftieth anniversary, and to act as an alternative to the liberation narrative.⁷⁷ Eldridge had worked with Seaman prior to her death, and felt that this working relationship alerted her to the complicated historical connection between feminism and the pill, which she believed had been lost in recent decades and replaced

⁷³ 'Mike Wallace Interview – 21 September, 1957', in Esther Katz eds., *The Selected Papers of Margaret Sanger; Volume 3: The Politics of Planned Parenthood, 1939-1966*, (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2010), pp. 423-6.

⁷⁴ See bibliography, American and Australian Fiftieth Anniversary Sources, pp. 99-106.

⁷⁵ Holly Grigg-Spall, 'Reproductive Writes: Keep Talking: An Interview with Laura Eldridge', *BitchMedia*, 2 April 2010, (United States: *Bitch Magazine*), <<http://bitchmagazine.org/post/reproductive-writes-keep-talking-an-interview-with-laura-eldridge>>, accessed 1 April 2012; Bayer, 'Women's Empowerment Icons', <<http://www.prnewswire.com/news-releases/womens-empowerment-icons-commemorate-the-50th-anniversary-of-the-pill-92958849.html>>, accessed 24 February 2012.

⁷⁶ Eldridge, *In Our Control*, pp. 1-8.

⁷⁷ Eldridge, *In Our Control*, p. v; Grigg-Spall, 'Reproductive Writes', <<http://bitchmagazine.org/post/reproductive-writes-keep-talking-an-interview-with-laura-eldridge>>, accessed 1 April 2012.

with a one-dimensional view of the pill as a symbol of women's liberation and empowerment.⁷⁸

Prior to her professional relationship with Seaman, Eldridge had seen the pill as 'synonymous with the gains feminism had made.'⁷⁹ However she has since become determined to share Seaman's initial critique of the pill, and the fiftieth anniversary was considered an appropriate platform to do so. Eldridge viewed the fiftieth anniversary as 'decidedly celebratory', but believed that the counter narrative position had strengthened significantly in the twenty-first century.⁸⁰ Arguably, this contemporary medical critique can be seen as the culmination of a growing disillusionment since Bayer Healthcare introduced the third generation progesterone pills, Yaz and Yasmin, in the mid-2000s.⁸¹

In 1969, Seaman identified blood clots as the number one danger associated with pill usage.⁸² The development of second generation pills decreased the risk of blood clots significantly because this chemical formulation helped counteract the side effects associated with first generation pills.⁸³ However, this concern re-emerged with the introduction of third generation pills, because unlike second generation pills, they do not have the same effect on the original side effects, and women have a higher chance of experiencing clotting whilst taking these pills.⁸⁴

⁷⁸ Grigg-Spall, 'Reproductive Writes', <<http://bitchmagazine.org/post/reproductive-writes-keep-talking-an-interview-with-laura-eldridge>>, accessed 1 April 2012.

⁷⁹ Eldridge, *In Our Control*, p. 2.

⁸⁰ Eldridge, *In Our Control*, p. 35.

⁸¹ 'FDA Approved Drug Products – Yaz', U.S Department of Health and Human Services, <<http://www.accessdata.fda.gov/scripts/cder/drugsatfda/index.cfm?fuseaction=SearchDrugDetails>>, accessed 22 August 2012; Bayer Healthcare, 'Products', <<http://www.bayer.com/en/Products-from-A-to-Z.aspx#R>>, last updated 25 June 2012, accessed 6 September 2012.

⁸² Seaman, *The Doctor's Case Against the Pill*, pp. 72-87.

⁸³ John Guillebaud and Anne Macgregor, *The Pill and other forms of hormonal contraception: The Facts*, seventh edition, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), p. 58.

⁸⁴ Guillebaud, *The Pill*, p. 58.

Rather than advocate a total rejection of the pill, Eldridge wished to alert women to the existence of non-hormonal contraception, and encouraged women to use whatever method they felt comfortable with.⁸⁵ In this sense her argument is in line with that of the 1970s WHM, and she uses that connection in order to validate her stance on the pill: ‘realizing how dangerous the Pill was for women is one thing that galvanised the women’s health movement.’⁸⁶ Eldridge cites the history of the WHM in order to support her potentially controversial contemporary argument, which is comparable to the way the history of the pill is used in the liberation narrative. In this sense, there is little difference between the liberation narrative and the medical critique, because both engage with the historical relationship between feminism and the pill selectively and for a very specific purpose. Historical discussion does not extend beyond feminism and the pill, making this a somewhat insular debate.

Australian Feminist Thought and the Fiftieth Anniversary

In Australia, reproductive politics are far less polarised than in the US, and as a result the fiftieth anniversary of the pill was considerably less controversial in Australia. In contrast to American commemorations, Australian literature was less overtly celebratory and more unified, as there was an absence of a strong medical critique within this strand of feminist thought.⁸⁷ Instead, mainstream commemorations were more critical,

⁸⁵ Eldridge, *In Our Control*, pp. 4, 79.

⁸⁶ Grigg-Spall, ‘Reproductive Writes’, <<http://bitchmagazine.org/post/reproductive-writes-keep-talking-an-interview-with-laura-eldridge>>, accessed 1 April 2012.

⁸⁷ See bibliography, Australian Fiftieth Anniversary Sources, pp. 104-6; Lucy Kippist, ‘The Pill is 50, but not everyone’s celebrating’, *The Punch*, 29 April 2010, <<http://www.thepunch.com.au/articles/the-pills-50-but-not-everyones-celebrating/>>, accessed 24 February 2012.

arguing that, although the effects of the pill had been overwhelmingly positive, this was in no way a perfect method of contraception.⁸⁸

Australian commemorations were closely connected to government funded organisations such as Family Planning, and this uncontroversial context made pharmaceutical companies more willing to openly sponsor the fiftieth anniversary than they had been in the US.⁸⁹ The absence of a polarised abortion debate, the abstinence-only movement, and a strong medical critique of the pill, meant that Australian commemorators did not have to be so concerned with the way their message would be received, and as a result, the history of the pill was employed differently in this context. Rather than use history to validate contemporary arguments, Australian commemorators utilised the fiftieth anniversary as an opportunity to call attention to women's continued contraceptive needs, drawing on the past to support this claim.⁹⁰

The lack of strong internal debate within Australian feminist thought meant that the history of the pill could be used as a tool of reflection. It was used as a means of highlighting the progression of contraception since 1960, but also to emphasise the fact that the ideal contraceptive envisioned by feminists of Sanger's generation had not yet materialised.⁹¹ Thus rather than look to the past, Australian feminists looked to the

⁸⁸ '50th Anniversary of the Pill in Australia— an Incomplete Revolution' event hosted by the Victorian Women's Trust, 23 November 201, audio-visual recording of the event available on YouTube, <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v2JhJ2sQVEg>>, accessed on 16 February 2012.

⁸⁹ Sexual Health and Family Planning Australia, <<http://understandingyou.com.au>>, accessed 21 July 2012; Christine Read ed., *Taking It: 50 Years of the Pill*, (NSW: Family Planning NSW, 2010), pp. 28, 39, 48; Family Planning NSW, 'President's Report – Family Planning NSW, 2011', <www.fpnsw.org.au/fpnsw_annualreport_2011.pdf>, access 1 October 2012.

⁹⁰ Nina Funnell, 'Where women still don't own their own bodies', *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 5 May 2010; Louise Keogh, 'The pill's 50th anniversary: do we have freer sex and better managed fertility?', *The Conversation*, 23 November 2011.

⁹¹ The University of Melbourne, 'Sexual revolution incomplete - 50 years of the Pill in Australia', *The Melbourne Newsroom*, 23 November 2011, <<http://newsroom.melbourne.edu/news/n-700>>, accessed 24 February 2012; Anne Summers, 'Little Pill that changed the World', *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 8 May 2010.

history of the pill to provide a path to future developments in contraception.⁹² As Nina Funnell stated:

...while we should acknowledge this significant milestone [the fiftieth anniversary of the pill], it is important that young women continue to fight to expand and consolidate our reproductive rights. While it is hard for women my age and younger to imagine what it was like to live in the pre-Pill, backyard abortion era of the fifties, we cannot become complacent about our reproductive rights now.⁹³

Here Funnell invokes 'pre-Pill' history to urge her readers to fight for future developments in contraception and women's reproductive rights, and she was able to do this because there was no serious opposition to this line of thinking in Australian feminist thought. However, while this facilitated a more balanced narrative in the relation to individual women's use of the pill, there were silences similar to those in the US narrative regarding the coercive element of this history, because this continued fight for reproductive freedom was aimed at women living in developed countries.⁹⁴

In Australia, the fiftieth anniversary was a combination of celebration and reflection, and the event held by the Victorian Women's Trust (VWT), '50th Anniversary of the Pill in Australia – An Incomplete Revolution', demonstrates this approach.⁹⁵ Of the three speakers at this event, Dr Louise Keogh, Dr Leslie Cannold, and Mary Crooks (Executive Director of the VWT), Keogh argued that contraception needed to be

⁹² Caroline Harvey, 'Hopes and Dreams: Six wishes for the future of contraception in Australia', in Christine Read ed., *Taking It: 50 Years of The Pill*, (NSW: Family Planning NSW, 2010), pp. 43-4; Christine Read, 'Fifty years from now', in Christine Read ed., *Taking It: 50 Years of The Pill*, (NSW: Family Planning NSW, 2010), pp. 45-6.

⁹³ Nina Funnell, 'There's a long way to go...', in Christine Read ed., *Taking It: 50 Years of The Pill*, (NSW: Family Planning NSW, 2010), p. 42.

⁹⁴ Louise Keogh, written interview, 27 July 2012, 'The Fiftieth Anniversary of The Pill', prepared by Tiarne Barratt under the supervision of Professor Alison Bashford, approved by The University of Sydney Human Research Ethics Committee on 1 May 2012, ref. no. AH00088; Keogh, 'The pill's 50th anniversary', 23 November 2011.

⁹⁵ '50th Anniversary of the Pill in Australia', <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v2JhJ2sQVFg>>, accessed on 16 February 2012.

improved, Cannold discussed the questionable role of the pharmaceutical industry in the fiftieth anniversary, and Crooks drew upon the history of contraception in Australia in order to bring attention to the necessity of further developments in this field.⁹⁶

Crooks felt that although the pill was responsible for some significant gains in women's lives, such as increased access to work and education, it did not achieve gender equality, and this is at the heart of her argument.⁹⁷ This position is in line with American feminist thinkers, such as Elaine Tyler May, yet unfortunately this grounding in feminist thought appears to have had a stifling effect on the theme of population control in fiftieth anniversary narratives, irrespective of national context.⁹⁸

Conclusion

As discussed in chapter one, in the 1950s feminist thought regarding birth control was heavily influenced by concerns of overpopulation. Thus it is interesting to discover that population control is essentially absent from fiftieth anniversary literature, when this literature frequently invokes Sanger's era of feminist thought. However considering that the historical feminist thought cited in fiftieth anniversary narratives did not critique the relationship between population control and the pill, this silence is perhaps not so surprising. For example, within the WHM the prioritisation of gender meant that race and class became comparatively secondary concerns.⁹⁹

⁹⁶ '50th Anniversary of the Pill in Australia', <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v2JhJ2sQVFg>>, accessed on 16 February 2012; Caetlyn Davis, '50th Anniversary of the Pill in Australia: An Incomplete Revolution', pamphlet compiled for the Victorian Women's Trust, (2011).

⁹⁷ Mary Crooks, '50th Anniversary of The Pill in Australia: An Incomplete Revolution: BMW Edge, 23 November 2011: Address by Mary Crooks, Executive Director Victorian Women's Trust', Victorian Women's Trust website, <<http://vwt.org.au/events-32.html>>, accessed 5 March 2012; Mary Crooks, written interview, 30 July 2012, 'The Fiftieth Anniversary of The Pill', prepared by Tiarne Barratt under the supervision of Professor Alison Bashford, approved by The University of Sydney Human Research Ethics Committee on 1 May 2012, ref. no. AH00088.

⁹⁸ Mary Crooks, written interview, 30 July 2012; Elaine Tyler May, written interview, 14 June 2012.

⁹⁹ Ruzek, *The Women's Health Movement*, pp. 187, 198.

Accordingly, when the WHM took issue with the Puerto Rican based drug trials of the pill, it was not because Puerto Rican women were exploited, but because the sample size was not considered large enough to adequately ensure the drug's safety for Western women's usage.¹⁰⁰ Likewise, Barbara Seaman expressed concern about the effect of population control on women's health. Yet her primary concern was that Western women were put at medical risk because the population explosion provided the pill with 'diplomatic immunity' throughout the 1960s, making this medication exempt from criticism.¹⁰¹

Although it must be acknowledged that population control was not entirely absent from the fiftieth anniversary, when it was discussed, the implications were never made clear and the gravity of this history of coercion was lost.¹⁰² It was not explained that population control refers to the forcible control of reproduction, and instead this concept was presented in less confronting terms in an attempt to avoid directly implicating the heroes of this story, namely Margaret Sanger.

May writes, 'Some [birth control advocates] were motivated by humanitarian concerns, others hoped to achieve cold war political aims, and still others were primarily interested in social engineering and eugenics.'¹⁰³ This phrasing does not specify which historical figures were eugenics supporters, and there are comparable examples of this technique of subtle avoidance within Australian literature. For example, in Reads' 'potted history of hormonal contraception', British birth control pioneer Marie Stopes is

¹⁰⁰ Ruzek, *The Women's Health Movement*, p. 37.

¹⁰¹ Seaman, *The Doctors Case Against the Pill*, p. 2.

¹⁰² May, *America and the Pill*, pp. 35-56; Gibbs, *Love, Sex, Freedom, and the Paradox of the Pill*, location 262 Of 612.

¹⁰³ May, *America and the Pill*, p. 37.

openly discussed in relation to her involvement with the eugenics movement, yet Sanger is only referred to in regards to her feminist fight for birth control.¹⁰⁴

In a series of oral history interviews with fiftieth anniversary contributors Elaine Tyler May, Christine Read, Mary Crooks, and Louise Keogh, none of the above responded to the question of population control.¹⁰⁵ When asked, ‘Where do you think the fiftieth anniversary fits into a wider history of reproductive and population control politics?’, all participants responded to the reproductive politics aspect of this question, whilst remaining silent on the question of population control.¹⁰⁶ Reflective of their different national contexts, May referred to the controversial nature of reproductive politics in America, whilst Read, Crooks, and Keogh all referred to the need for further progress in the field of reproductive politics and contraception in Australia.¹⁰⁷ Being feminist writers, it is understandable that reproductive politics is the participants’ first response. However, this dismissal of population control reveals that within in feminist fiftieth anniversary narratives, population is thought to take on a completely separate history.

Thus although there was debate within this literature, this debate was somewhat insular because it revolved around the history of individual reproductive control, and disregarded the polyvalent nature of oral contraception. This was because it was in the best interests of the family planning movement and the pharmaceutical industry to draw on the history that would best facilitate a favourable public image of the pill. The idea of

¹⁰⁴ Terri Foran, ‘A potted history of hormonal contraception’, in Christine Read ed., *Taking It: 50 Years of The Pill*, (NSW: Family Planning NSW, 2010), p. 8.

¹⁰⁵ Elaine Tyler May, written interview, 14 June 2012; Christine Read, written interview, 27 July 2012; Mary Crooks, written interview, 30 July 2012; Louise Keogh, written interview, 27 July 2012.

¹⁰⁶ Question sixteen of, ‘Interview Questions – The Fiftieth Anniversary of The Pill’, prepared by Tiarne Barratt under the supervision of Professor Alison Bashford, approved by The University of Sydney Human Research Ethics Committee on 1 May 2012, ref. no. AH00088.

¹⁰⁷ Elaine Tyler May, written interview, 14 June 2012; Christine Read, written interview, 27 July 2012; Mary Crooks, written interview, 30 July 2012; Louise Keogh, written interview, 27 July 2012.

coercion contradicts the image of the pill as a symbol of reproductive freedom, and it was beneficial for these groups if population control remained part of a separate history. A comparison of American and Australian commemorations reveals that national context shaped both the content and reception of feminist fiftieth anniversary literature and events, and was also influential in determining the role played by the pharmaceutical industry in commemorations of the pill.

Chapter Three – The Pharmaceutical Industry and the

Fiftieth Anniversary of the Pill

The pharmaceutical industry has been tasked with managing the public profile of the pill since the 1950s, and in this sense, the industry's participation in the fiftieth anniversary was an extension of this historical involvement.¹ Yet although this was simply an extended exercise in public relations for the pharmaceutical industry, the success of this anniversary was largely dependent on this financial input.² This support went a long way towards transforming the fiftieth anniversary from an abstract concept into a tangible event, and chapter three focusses on this trend. By examining the commemorative actions of the specific company Bayer HealthCare, combined with a close reading of the advertising found in the Australian text *Taking It*, this chapter looks at how and why the pharmaceutical industry was involved in the fiftieth anniversary, as well as the effects of this involvement.³

Financial profit is an inescapable factor in the relationship between the pharmaceutical industry and the pill, and the fiftieth anniversary was no exception. In October 2010, the international market research group Global Industry Analysts, Inc., released a report that stated that the world market for contraceptives has been projected to reach US\$17.2 billion by 2015.⁴ The data from this report, 'Contraceptives: A Global Strategic Business Report', is available to purchase for US\$4,500, and features statistics

¹ Elizabeth Siegal Watkins, *On The Pill: A Social History of Oral Contraceptives 1950-1970*, (Baltimore and London: The John Hopkins University Press, 1997), pp. 35-40.

² Christine Read, written interview, 27 July 2012, 'The Fiftieth Anniversary of The Pill', prepared by Tiarne Barratt under the supervision of Professor Alison Bashford, approved by The University of Sydney Human Research Ethics Committee on 1 May 2012, ref. no. AH00088.

³ Christine Read ed., *Taking It: 50 Years of the Pill*, (NSW: Family Planning NSW, 2010).

⁴ Global Industry Analysts, Inc., 'Global Contraceptives Market is Projected to Reach US\$17.2 Billion by 2015, According to New Report by Global Industry Analysts, Inc.', (San Jose, CA: *PRWeb*, 25 October 2010), <http://www.prweb.com/releases/contraceptives_oral/condoms/prweb4688884.htm>, accessed 23 July 2012.

from 164 different companies that contribute to the world contraceptive market.⁵ This study also found that oral contraception had the largest market worldwide.⁶ Because it is impossible to overstate the financial stakes of the fiftieth anniversary, it should come as no surprise then that the pharmaceutical industry propagated the more palatable narrative of individual women's empowerment, rather than emphasise the coercive aspects of this history.

Similar to the mainstream American feminist position, the anniversary narrative generated by the pharmaceutical industry was one that discussed the pill in relation to the idea that "liberation" stems from individual reproductive control.⁷ This narrative was largely silent on the issue of population control, but also in regards to the substantial financial benefits that the commercial success of the pill has afforded the pharmaceutical industry since the 1960s.

On one level, this narrative demonstrates the way in which it is possible for private entities to utilise public history for individualistic purposes.⁸ In this context, the pharmaceutical industry presented a highly selected historical narrative based on the conviction that this interpretation of the past would prove to be most profitable. This is problematic, not because there are historical silences, but because these silences go unacknowledged and this presents a deliberately incomplete interpretation of the past as historically accurate. Yet on another level, the pharmaceutical industry does have a legitimate place in fiftieth anniversary commemorations, and arguably this was simply

⁵ 'Contraceptives: A Global Strategic Business Report', <http://www.strategyr.com/Contraceptives_Market_Report.asp>, accessed 23 July 2012.

⁶ Global Industry Analysts, 'Global Contraceptives Market is Projected to Reach US\$17.2 Billion by 2015', <http://www.prweb.com/releases/contraceptives_oral/condoms/prweb4688884.htm>, accessed 23 July 2012.

⁷ Bayer Healthcare Pharmaceuticals, 'Women's Empowerment Icons Commemorate the 50th Anniversary of the Pill', *PR Newswire – United Business Media*, 6 May 2010, <<http://www.prnewswire.com/news-releases/womens-empowerment-icons-commemorate-the-50th-anniversary-of-the-pill-92958849.html>>, accessed 24 February 2012.

⁸ Jeremy Black, *Using History*, (London: Hodder Arnold, 2005), p. 27.

the history of the pill from the industry's perspective. Hence this chapter examines the multifaceted relationship between the pharmaceutical industry and the pill, as it appeared in the fiftieth anniversary.

Bayer HealthCare and the Fiftieth Anniversary

The German based company Bayer HealthCare was more involved in the fiftieth anniversary of the pill than any other pharmaceutical company.⁹ As discussed in chapter one, Bayer introduced the pill to Australia in 1961, and has since been involved with oral contraception at a global level. The company was founded in 1863 as a competitor in the textiles industry, and towards the end of the nineteenth century Bayer began to trade internationally, now Bayer products can be found throughout the world.¹⁰

Although Bayer was involved in globally sponsoring the fiftieth anniversary, it is primarily American based commemorations that will be discussed here, with a secondary focus on Australian based commemorations.¹¹

Bayer was heavily involved in promoting the fiftieth anniversary of the pill, and these commemorations embodied the mainstream liberation narrative by emphasising individual women's empowerment through fertility control as the central theme of this

⁹ 'Celebrating Women, Celebrating Innovation – The "Pill" Turns 50', *Bayer Direct Global – News For Bayer Employees Worldwide*, no. 1 (March 2010), p. 1; Bayer is not strictly a pharmaceutical company, it consists of three main branches: Bayer CropScience, Bayer MaterialScience, and Bayer HealthCare. However because Bayer HealthCare was the only branch of the company involved in the fiftieth anniversary, from here onwards the general term Bayer will refer to Bayer Healthcare, irrespective of the national context. Until recently the healthcare branch of Bayer operated under the title of Bayer Schering Pharma, but as of 2010 this name is being phased out to be globally replaced with Bayer HealthCare; Bayer, 'Profile and Organisation', <<http://www.bayer.com/en/Profile-and-Organization.aspx>>, accessed 6 August 2012; 'News Briefs', *American Journal of Health-System Pharmacy*, vol. 67, no. 24 (15 December 2010), p. 2093.

¹⁰ Bayer, 'The Early Years', <<http://www.bayer.com/en/1863-1881.aspx>>, accessed 4 August 2012; Bayer, 'Becoming an International Company', <<http://www.bayer.com/en/1881-1914.aspx>>, accessed 4 August 2012.

¹¹ '50 Years of the Pill – Bayer – Celebrating Women, Celebrating Innovation', <http://www.bayerpharma.com/html/images/upload/SWF/50_jahre_pille/index_en.html?iframe=true&width=997&height=860>, accessed 28 July 2012; Christine Read, written interview, 27 July 2012.

history.¹² This feminist themed narrative disseminated a positive image of Bayer, and because no other interpretation of the pill appeared in this literature, it can be deduced that the generic concept of empowerment was considered to be most beneficial in maintaining a positive public profile of the pill. This approach was justified by highlighting Bayer's historical connection to the pill, and this connection was framed to present Bayer as an altruistic healthcare provider, rather than a profit-driven organisation.¹³ Within academic literature this would be perceived as a misuse of history, however in the context of commemoration, history and financial profit are not mutually exclusive, and Bayer's role as an agent of memory arguably legitimised this representation.¹⁴

As illustrated in chapter two, the contemporary liberation narrative is somewhat different to the way that the pill has been represented in historical feminist thought, and the fiftieth anniversary employs feminist thought in only the most basic and uncontroversial terms. In other words, Bayer endorses an idea of women's liberation that is in no way connected to Women's Liberation. And yet, it manages to draw upon the credibility of this vaguely feminist related concept, whilst avoiding any of the controversy actually associated with radical feminism.

Bayer HealthCare is the most profitable branch of the company and within this sector, oral contraception accounts for a significant portion of overall sales. For example, in 2009, Bayer made approximately \$US 1.7 billion in profit from the sales of

¹² 'How has the pill made a difference in our lives?', <<http://www.healthywomen.org/content/article/50th-anniversary-birth-control-pill>>, accessed 21 July 2012.

¹³ Read ed., *Taking It*, p. 39.

¹⁴ Vered Vinitzky-Seroussi, *Yitzhak Rabin's Assassination and the Dilemmas of Commemoration*, (Albany: State University of New York, 2009), pp. 6-7.

the contraceptive pills Yaz and Yasmin.¹⁵ Essentially this figure represents what is at stake for Bayer if the public profile of the pill were to be tarnished, and what Bayer had to gain in promoting a positive fiftieth anniversary narrative. However, because Bayer was significantly more involved in the fiftieth anniversary than any other pharmaceutical company, it is necessary to further examine their motivations, and to contextualise their actions in light of the considerable controversy that the company faced in regards to the dubious medical safety of Yaz and Yasmin.

As noted previously, the third generation pills Yaz and Yasmin, manufactured by Bayer, have been the subject of considerable controversy in recent years, and from 2008 onwards, the company has been faced with a spate of lawsuits regarding blood clots in women using this medication.¹⁶ This meant that Bayer was the pharmaceutical company most at risk of being associated with a negative public profile of the pill, and arguably their participation in the fiftieth anniversary can be interpreted as an attempt to counteract this adverse publicity. Presenting positive, empowered women performed considerable cultural work for Bayer, which also had financial rewards.

As of 2011, the FDA began to warn that users of third generation pills, such as Yaz or Yasmin, have a higher risk of developing blood clots than other oral contraceptive pill users do.¹⁷ However while women have been expressing concern about the side effects of these pills since the mid-2000s, there is still no consensus

¹⁵ Naomi Kresge, 'As the Pill Turns 50, a Rivalry Heats Up', *Bloomberg Business Week*, 15 April 2010, <http://www.businessweek.com/magazine/content/10_17/b4175055810984.htm>, accessed 13 February 2012.

¹⁶ Jef Feeley and Margaret Cronin Fisk, 'Bayer Said to Pay \$110 Million in Yaz Birth-Control Cases', *Bloomberg Business Week*, 13 April 2012, <<http://www.businessweek.com/news/2012-04-13/bayer-said-to-pay-110-million-in-yaz-birth-control-cases>>, accessed 23 July 2012; Yaz Lawsuit Centre, <<http://yazlawsuit-info.com/>>, accessed 26 March 2012; Yaz On Trial, <<http://yazontrial.com/>>, access 26 March 2012.

¹⁷ 'Information about Drospirenone', U.S Department of Health and Human Services, <<http://www.fda.gov/Drugs/DrugSafety/PostmarketDrugSafetyInformationforPatientsandProviders/ucm257168.htm>>, accessed 22 August 2012.

amongst the medical profession regarding the safety of these drugs. Indeed, one medical author described the concern about third generation pills as a ‘pill scare’ equivalent to that of the 1960s.¹⁸ Yet even without a general medical consensus, there is considerable dissatisfaction amongst the general public with regards to these pills, and this discontent has been expressed in the form of class action lawsuits.¹⁹

Hence it is becoming increasingly apparent that Yaz and Yasmin have a strong potential to become a liability to Bayer, and as of 2012, the company has begun to settle these civil action cases out of court. In April 2012 it was reported that the company had paid out over 100 million for US cases alone: by July this figure had reached over 400 million, and Bayer has allegedly already set a further 600 million aside for future US payouts.²⁰ This made the fiftieth anniversary an opportune moment for Bayer to draw attention to their connection with the perceived positive effects of the pill. These are presented as women’s increased access to work and education since 1960, and these commemorations were depicted as an altruistic public service, intended to foster a positive image of Bayer in the collective public conscious.²¹

However, Bayer also used the fiftieth anniversary as an opportunity to indirectly promote the pill, which can be seen in their collaboration with the American College of Obstetrics and Gynaecology (ACOG). In this context, the history of the pill was employed as a way to alleviate contemporary health concerns by assuring readers that, in

¹⁸ Anne Szarewski, ‘Combined oral contraceptive pill and venous thromboembolism’, *Expert Review of Obstetrics and Gynaecology*, vol. 6, no. 5 (September 2011), pp. 473-6.

¹⁹ Yaz Lawsuit Centre, <<http://yazlawsuit-info.com/>>, accessed 26 March 2012; Yaz On Trial, <<http://yazontrial.com/>>, access 26 March 2012.

²⁰ Feeley, ‘Bayer Said to Pay \$110 Million in Yaz Birth-Control Cases’, <<http://www.businessweek.com/news/2012-04-13/bayer-said-to-pay-110-million-in-yaz-birth-control-cases>>, accessed 23 July 2012; Jef Feeley and Naomi Kresge, ‘Bayer’s Yasmin Lawsuit Settlements Rise to \$402.6 Million’, *Bloomberg Business Week*, 31 July 2012, <<http://www.businessweek.com/news/2012-07-31/bayer-s-yasmin-lawsuit-settlements-rise-to-402-dot-6-million>>, accessed 6 September 2012.

²¹ Bayer, ‘Women’s Empowerment Icons’, <<http://www.prnewswire.com/news-releases/womens-empowerment-icons-commemorate-the-50th-anniversary-of-the-pill-92958849.html>>, accessed 24 February 2012.

comparison to the original pill formulation, today's pills are exponentially safer.²² In a fiftieth anniversary article produced by the ACOG, 1960 is invoked to argue the comparative safety of the pill in 2010, and to compare the initial medical risks associated with the pill to those faced by contemporary pill users. Presumably intended to dispel the medical controversy surrounding Yaz and Yasmin, the reputation of the ACOG brings credibility to this historical interpretation. However because Bayer provides this organisation with considerable monetary contributions in the form of contraceptive research scholarships each year, this article can be seen as a subtle extension of Bayer's fiftieth anniversary advertising campaign.²³

Bayer celebrated the fiftieth anniversary on a much larger scale in the US than Australia, and public commemorations consisted of three distinct yet interconnected elements: the first of which was the interview panel, '50 Years of the Pill – Bayer's Celebration of Women's Empowerment'.²⁴ This panel was hosted by historian Elaine Tyler May, and featured Hilary Swank, Gloria Steinem, Diana Ramos and Jane Wurwant. The footage from this panel originally aired on a fiftieth anniversary website created by Bayer, but has since been uploaded to various other affiliated websites.

Within press releases, this panel has been described as five 'influential female empowerment figures', gathered to 'reflect on the remarkable achievements of women

²² American College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists, 'Birth Control Pill Turns 50', *Medical News Today*, 7 May 2010.

²³ American College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists, 'Awards Presented at the 60th Annual Clinical Meeting of The American College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists', 6 May 2012, <http://www.acog.org/About_ACOG/News_Room/News_Releases/2012/Awards_Presented_at_the_60th_ACM>, accessed 5 September 2012; American College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists, 'Awards Presented', <http://www.acog.org/About_ACOG/News_Room/News_Releases/2012/Awards_Presented_at_the_60th_ACM>, accessed 5 September 2012.

²⁴ Bayer, 'Women's Empowerment Icons', <<http://www.prnewswire.com/news-releases/womens-empowerment-icons-commemorate-the-50th-anniversary-of-the-pill-92958849.html>>, accessed 24 February 2012; 'How has the pill made a difference in our lives?', <<http://www.healthywomen.org/content/article/50th-anniversary-birth-control-pill>>, accessed 21 July 2012.

since the introduction of the first birth control pill in 1960'.²⁵ In this context, the idea of feminism is replaced with the generic concept of women's empowerment, as this is less controversial and circumvents any association with contentious feminist critiques of gender binarism, the patriarchy, or the questionable medical safety of the pill.

According to May, Bayer considered these commemorations to be a public service and a celebration of a pharmaceutical milestone, which demonstrates the various ways in which these actions can be perceived.²⁶ Yet although the panel was set up to function as an educational service, this video footage is presented in a format that frequently credits Bayer with sponsoring the event. This then reinforces the idea that Bayer was responsible for the connection commonly made between women's empowerment and the pill.

The panel is presented in four short video clips: 'personal stories of empowerment', 'women in the workplace', 'the rise of women's healthcare', and 'what's next for women?'.²⁷ This format meant that the footage of May praising Bayer is replayed in the introduction and conclusion of each video, fortifying the connection between Bayer, the pill, and the idea that individual reproductive control is the epitome of freedom. These four categories are a rather narrow representation of women's experiences with the pill, and any aspects of this history that do not lend themselves to a positive interpretation have been excluded from the final presentation of this footage.

²⁵ Bayer, 'Women's Empowerment Icons', <<http://www.prnewswire.com/news-releases/womens-empowerment-icons-commemorate-the-50th-anniversary-of-the-pill-92958849.html>>, accessed 24 February 2012.

²⁶ Elaine Tyler May, written interview, 14 June 2012, 'The Fiftieth Anniversary of The Pill', prepared by Tiarne Barratt under the supervision of Professor Alison Bashford, approved by The University of Sydney Human Research Ethics Committee on 1 May 2012, ref. no. AH00088.

²⁷ 'How has the pill made a difference in our lives?', <<http://www.healthywomen.org/content/article/50th-anniversary-birth-control-pill>>, accessed 21 July 2012.

The five women who participated in this panel were carefully selected on the basis that they perceived the pill as a positive and empowering aspect of women's history, as this meant that they would promote a narrative that suited Bayer's desired public image. It was not difficult to find participants because the pill is perceived quite similarly within feminist thought and the pharmaceutical industry, albeit for very different reasons, as a symbol of individual reproductive control.

Author of *America and the Pill*, Elaine Tyler May, works as an academic historian and is introduced to the panel as a 'Professor/Woman's historian'.²⁸ May's participation in this panel is extremely significant because her presence here can be interpreted as her professional endorsement of Bayer's history of the pill.²⁹ Although May may not have intended to have this effect, there is no escaping the apparent academic legitimacy that her involvement lends to Bayer's historical interpretation of the pill.³⁰

Bayer's appearance of authority regarding the history of the pill is further strengthened by the presence of actress Hilary Swank and feminist activist Gloria Steinem. These women have gained notoriety in their respective professions and can both be connected to the concept of empowered women.³¹ Steinem's presence is particularly interesting, and emphasises the complex relationship between feminism and the pharmaceutical industry. Steinem is a well-known American activist associated with second wave feminism: in 1972 she co-founded *Ms.* magazine and has spent her career

²⁸ Elaine Tyler May, written interview, 14 June 2012; 'How has the pill made a difference in our lives?', <<http://www.healthywomen.org/content/article/50th-anniversary-birth-control-pill>>, accessed 21 July 2012.

²⁹ 'How has the pill made a difference in our lives?', <<http://www.healthywomen.org/content/article/50th-anniversary-birth-control-pill>>, accessed 21 July 2012.

³⁰ Elaine Tyler May, written interview, 14 June 2012.

³¹ 'Hilary Swank', <<http://www.imdb.com/name/nm0005476/>>, accessed 17 September 2012; 'Gloria Steinem', <<http://www.gloriasteinem.com/>>, accessed 17 September 2012.

campaigning for equality, which meant that her involvement had the potential to incite controversy.³² However, it also meant that her professional endorsement acted as the feminist equivalent to May's academic endorsement, and proceeded to further validate Bayer's interpretation of the pill as a narrative solely of individual women's fertility control.

The other two women on the panel, Diana Ramos, an obstetrician-gynecologist and the LA County Public Health Director, and Jane Wurwand the CEO of the skincare company Dermalogica, served to act as living proof of the idea that the pill has increased women's career and educational opportunities.³³ Through this panel, Bayer presented the public with different generations of women, and different generations of feminist thought, unified in their support of the positive effects of the pill and Bayer's role in providing women with oral contraception for the last fifty years.

The second element of Bayer's American commemorations was the Make Your Mark contest, hosted by DailyCandy, and funded by Bayer.³⁴ DailyCandy is a popular American based women's website, with daily content relating to food, fashion, and entertainment.³⁵ This was a collaborative effort in order for Bayer to capitalise on the trust generated by DailyCandy's involvement, as this took focus away from Bayer's actions and gave the impression that the contest was a philanthropic public service. The Make Your Mark contest encouraged women to submit their entrepreneurial ideas in celebration of women's empowerment and the fiftieth anniversary of the pill.

³² 'Gloria Steinem – Who is Gloria?', <<http://www.gloriasteinem.com/who-is-gloria/>>, accessed 29 September 2012.

³³ 'How has the pill made a difference in our lives?', <<http://www.healthywomen.org/content/article/50th-anniversary-birth-control-pill>>, accessed 21 July 2012; 'About Us', Dermalogica website, <<http://www.dermalogica.com/us/about/index.html>>, accessed 7 August 2012.

³⁴ DailyCandy, <www.dailycandy.com/promo/bayer/>, can no longer be accessed, however still shots of the promo website can be found at, <<http://www.behance.net/gallery/Bayers-50th-Anniversary-of-the-Pill-Microsite/501080>>, accessed 30 July 2012.

³⁵ 'About Us', DailyCandy, <<http://www.dailycandy.com/about.jsp>>, accessed 7 August 2012.

Three winners were selected based on the idea they submitted, and each received a grant of \$US 5000 and a photo session with Annie Leibovitz to help them realise this aim.³⁶ However in order to keep the idea of women's empowerment uncontroversial, the contest winners' goals were all associated with caring professions, such as teaching and childcare.³⁷ This positioned women's workplace success in a non-threatening, maternal way, which enabled Bayer to publicise their commitment to women's achievements without compromising their conservative position.

The final element of Bayer's American commemorations was the creation of a website, fiftyyearsofthepill.com, and this website originally featured the footage of the commemorative panel hosted by Elaine Tyler May.³⁸ This website was set up to function as the home of the fiftieth anniversary, and gave readers the option to make a 'Fiftieth Anniversary Pledge of Empowerment'. Essentially, this consisted of supporting the narrative of the pill that Bayer had disseminated, and for the first 50,000 people to make this public statement, the company would donate one dollar for each person to the Step Up Women's Network (SUWN).³⁹

SUWN is an American feminist organisation, 'dedicated to igniting women and girls to fulfil their potential'.⁴⁰ One of their main projects is helping teenage girls further their education, which is in line with Bayer's presentation of empowerment as increased

³⁶ Bayer, 'Women's Empowerment Icons', <<http://www.prnewswire.com/news-releases/womens-empowerment-icons-commemorate-the-50th-anniversary-of-the-pill-92958849.html>>, accessed 24 February 2012.

³⁷ 'Bayer Make Your Mark Contest Winners: Great Ideas, Inspiring Women', <<http://www.healthywomen.org/content/article/bayer-make-your-mark-contest-winners-great-ideas-inspiring-women>>, accessed 21 July 2012.

³⁸ Bayer, 'Women's Empowerment Icons', <<http://www.prnewswire.com/news-releases/womens-empowerment-icons-commemorate-the-50th-anniversary-of-the-pill-92958849.html>>, accessed 24 February 2012; Elaine Tyler May, written interview, 14 June 2012.

³⁹ Bayer, 'Women's Empowerment Icons', <<http://www.prnewswire.com/news-releases/womens-empowerment-icons-commemorate-the-50th-anniversary-of-the-pill-92958849.html>>, accessed 24 February 2012.

⁴⁰ Step Up Women's Network, 'Mission Statement', <<http://www.suwn.org/mission.aspx>>, accessed 21 July 2012.

access to education. Founded in 1998, the organisation has become quite successful, with notable supporters such as Jessica Alba and Jamie Lee Curtis.⁴¹ This widely supported organisation was the recipient of Bayer's charity because it is completely removed from abortion politics and birth control. Within contemporary reproductive politics, abortion is a very divisive and prevalent issue, and contraception can easily be drawn into this controversial discussion. SUWN is publically neither pro nor anti-abortion, and is thus unlikely to become involved in this discussion and tarnish the reputation of the pill or Bayer by association.⁴²

However, the public profile of the pill was not something that Bayer could afford to be left to chance, or deliberate sabotage, and as a result this entire website was removed from public circulation early in 2011.⁴³ Bayer went to considerable efforts to ensure that this website could no longer be accessed by the public in any way, and this suggests that the fiftieth anniversary was not something they could afford to risk falling into the wrong hands.⁴⁴ The extensive time and money invested in pharmaceutical advertising gives an indication of just how important this aspect of the industry is considered to be.⁴⁵

⁴¹ Step Up Women's Network, 'Notable Supporters', <<http://www.suwn.org/celebrities.aspx>>, accessed 7 August 2012.

⁴² Step Up Women's Network, 'Mission Statement', <<http://www.suwn.org/mission.aspx>>, accessed 21 July 2012.

⁴³ Fiftyyearsofthepill.com, <<http://www.searchqu.com/web?src=404&appid=101&systemid=406&q=http://fiftyyearsofthepill.com/>>, accessed 3 March 2012, 19 July 2012; Wayback Machine archives cease in February 2011, <http://wayback.archive.org/web/20110915000000*/http://fiftyyearsofthepill.com>, accessed 24 July 2012.

⁴⁴ Wayback Machine search for 'fiftyyearsofthepill.com', page could not be displayed or crawled due to robots.txt, <<http://web.archive.org/web/20110203015931/http://www.facebook.com/50years>>, accessed 24 July 2012.

⁴⁵ Marcia Angell, *The Truth About the Drug Companies: How they deceive us and what to do about it*, (Melbourne: Scribe, 2005), p. xxi; Shaili Jain, *Understanding Physician-Pharmaceutical Industry Interactions*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), p. x; Maggie Mahar, *Money-Driven Medicine: The Real Reason Healthcare Costs so Much*, (United States: Collins, 2005), p. 286.

Yet marketing is not an exact science, and public response largely depends on the broader socio-political environment: meaning that marketing decisions must be based on an evaluation of the current context, and on predictions of the stability of future contexts.⁴⁶ Because the pill and the fiftieth anniversary both had considerable potential to be ignited within public discussion, the future climate of reproductive politics was not considered stable enough to allow this information to remain in public circulation: presumably Bayer predicted that it would not be hard for their actions to be misrepresented and subsequently damage the company's reputation.

The controversial nature of reproductive politics in the US meant Bayer's commemorations of the pill generally only existed online, as this format was far more containable than hardcopy if the company wished to conceal or retract their involvement in the anniversary, depending on future socio-political developments.⁴⁷ This was not the case in Australia, and in this context, reproductive politics were considered stable enough for Bayer, as well as other pharmaceutical companies, to publish hardcopy advertising that irrevocably linked them to the fiftieth anniversary.⁴⁸

The stability of reproductive politics in Australia means that family planning agencies do not have to work to maintain an uncontroversial reputation, and this meant that in Australia, Bayer's commemorations were orchestrated in conjunction with Sexual Health and Family Planning Australia (SH&FPA) and Family Planning NSW

⁴⁶ Francis B. Palumbo and Michael V. Laric, 'A Pharmaceutical Marketing Plan for the 21st Century: Socio-political Environment as a Marketing Factor, in Mickey C. Smith ed., *Pharmaceutical Marketing in the 21st Century*, (New York: Pharmaceutical Products Press, 1996), p. 121.

⁴⁷ Wayback Machine, 'fiftyyearsofthepill.com', <<http://web.archive.org/web/20110203015931/http://www.facebook.com/50years>>, accessed 24 July 2012.

⁴⁸ Read ed., *Taking It*, pp. 28, 39, 48.

(FPNSW).⁴⁹ In contrast, the Planned Parenthood Federation of America has been the focus of heated political debate for decades in the US because it is the country's largest provider of abortion services.⁵⁰ As a result, it was not possible for Bayer to collaborate with family planning agencies, because in the US this public association was considered too controversial, and counterproductive to the overall goal of the fiftieth anniversary: increasing women's access to oral contraception.

As part of Australian commemorations, Bayer provided SH&FPA with an unrestricted educational grant to create the commemorative website, understandingyou.com.au, which unlike the American fiftieth anniversary website, is still fully functional.⁵¹ Family planning agencies welcomed the financial support, and FPSNW actually has a history of working with Bayer in maintaining the public profile of the pill. In 1986, Bayer sponsored a similar narrative of liberation and empowerment for the twenty-fifth anniversary of the pill, which was published by Family Planning.⁵²

However although it was politically safe to cooperate with family planning agencies in Australia, this was not the case when it came to independent women's organisations, because unlike in the US, these organisations did not necessarily welcome the offer. For example, Bayer invited Leslie Cannold, head of the reproductive rights advocacy group, Reproductive Choice Australia, to participate in a collaborative

⁴⁹ 'Family Planning Association NSW', NSW Health Department, <http://www.sesiahs.health.nsw.gov.au/young_parents/FPA.asp>, accessed 12 August 2012; Sexual Health and Family Planning Australia, <<http://understandingyou.com.au>>, accessed 21 July 2012.

⁵⁰ Julie Rovner, 'Planned Parenthood: A Thorn in Abortion Foes' Sides', *NPR (National Public Radio)*, 13 April 2011, <<http://www.npr.org/2011/04/13/135354952/planned-parenthood-makes-abortion-foes-see-red>>, accessed 27 September 2012.

⁵¹ Sexual Health and Family Planning Australia, <<http://understandingyou.com.au>>, accessed 21 July 2012.

⁵² Family Planning, *25 Years of Oral Contraception in Australia*, (NSW: The Family Planning Association of NSW, 1986), p. 5.

dialogue for the fiftieth anniversary.⁵³ Cannold interpreted this as Bayer attempting to capitalise on the reputation of her agency for financial profit, and rather than cooperate, she publically vilified their actions.⁵⁴ Thus while the general theme of Bayer's commemorations remained the same internationally, there were subtle modifications based on national context in order to maximise the advantages of their involvement in the fiftieth anniversary.

Australian Pharmaceutical Advertising – *Taking It: 50 Years of the Pill*

The close working relationship between Family Planning and the pharmaceutical industry as a whole can be observed in the Australian text *Taking It: 50 Years of the Pill*. This text was produced by Family Planning NSW, edited by Christine Read, and funded by the pharmaceutical industry in 2010, as a celebration of the fiftieth anniversary, and to raise the profile of the pill in public health history.⁵⁵ Within this text, the three major global pharmaceutical companies Pfizer, Bayer, and MSD, each placed a full page advertisement that drew on the idea that, in providing reproductive control, the pill became a symbol of women's liberation and empowerment.⁵⁶

This text is a culmination of the complex relationship between the pill, feminist thought, and the pharmaceutical industry. While it would appear that feminism and the pharmaceutical industry are at cross purposes, in this context these two groups found a common goal in providing women with increased access to contraception, although for the pharmaceutical industry this was more specifically oral contraception. This shared

⁵³ Leslie Cannold, 'Role of Big Pharma in question after half a century of the pill', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 5 April 2010.

⁵⁴ Cannold, 'Role of Big Pharma in question after half a century of the pill', 5 April 2010; '50th Anniversary of the Pill in Australia– an Incomplete Revolution' event hosted by the Victorian Women's Trust, 23 November 201, audio-visual recording of the event available on YouTube, <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v2JhJ2sQVFg>>, accessed on 16 February 2012.

⁵⁵ Christine Read, written interview, 27 July 2012.

⁵⁶ Read ed., *Taking It*, pp. 28, 39, 48; See Figure 3.1, 3.2, 3.3.

objective reconciled the seemingly incongruous aims of women's reproductive control and financial profit, and enabled these groups to work together despite their obvious differences.

It is for this reason that the same anniversary narrative of the pill was supported by mainstream feminist thought and the pharmaceutical industry: the idea of individual liberation was perceived as the one most likely to encourage further pill usage, and in this setting, motivation became irrelevant as they worked together to realise this aim. This unexpected connection between the pharmaceutical industry and feminism is not unique to the fiftieth anniversary, although this event did draw attention to the usually obscured relationship.⁵⁷

At the time *Taking It* was produced, editor Christine Read was working as the Medical Director of FPNSW. This organisation has the provision of contraception as its primary goal, which accounts for the dominant theme of individual women's empowerment via contraception throughout this text.⁵⁸ This also accounts for the close working relationship between Family Planning and the pharmaceutical industry, and the silence in regards to the coercive history of the pill. Although Read has an established writing career, and is highly qualified within the field of public health, this was her first time producing history-based literature, and this professional background is evident in the content of the text.⁵⁹

Prior to the publication of *Taking It*, Read had produced several popular books relating to women's health from a medical professionals perspective, which were

⁵⁷ Family Planning, *25 Years of Oral Contraception in Australia*, p. 5.

⁵⁸ Christine Read, written interview, 27 July 2012.

⁵⁹ Christine Read, written interview, 27 July 2012.

intended to be contemporarily rather than historically informative.⁶⁰ In comparison, *Taking It* was intended to ‘document an Australian milestone in the health arena’, and to address ‘important public health issues’ in a commemorative context, because Read felt the pill to be ‘one of the single most important public health advances ever made.’⁶¹

Taking It was envisioned as a public resource, and as such, it is available to download as a free PDF and free hardcopies have been distributed to doctors and Family Planning clients since 2010.⁶² This text was never intended to generate an income, thus outside funding was required in order to sustain the project: this was provided by the pharmaceutical industry. Read sold advertising space to the companies Pfizer, Bayer, and MSD, in order to fund the project, because she felt that it was important to involve all three major pharmaceutical companies, rather than to be aligned with one specifically.⁶³ These companies have recently been recognised as the dominant forces in the international pharmaceutical production of contraception, and although this refers to all methods of contraception, the pill is a prominent aspect of this market and all three companies had a considerable investment in promoting a positive anniversary narrative.⁶⁴

This corporate pharmaceutical sponsorship brings the editor’s potential to remain impartial into question, and this question of impartiality has been a consistent issue within the broader field of medical literature. Academic research is being increasingly

⁶⁰ Christine Read, *All About Thrush*, (NSW: Gore and Osment, 1996); Christine Read, *When love hurts: Overcoming Dyspareunia*, (NSW: Gore and Osment, 1996); Christine Read, *A Woman’s Breast*, (Vic.: Ashwood House Medical, 1993); Christine Read, *Depression: Lifting the Cloud*, (NSW: Gore and Osment, 1993); Christine Read, *Doctor, I’m tired: Causes and Treatments of Fatigue, Sleep Disorders, Depression, Chronic Fatigue Syndrome*, (NSW: Gore and Osment, 1992).

⁶¹ Christine Read, written interview, 27 July 2012.

⁶² Christine Read, written interview, 27 July 2012; Family Planning NSW, <http://www.fpnsw.org.au/taking_it_50_years_of_the_pill.pdf>, accessed 12 April 2012.

⁶³ Christine Read, written interview, 27 July 2012.

⁶⁴ Andrew Jack, ‘Market Expected to Reach 17 Billion by 2015; Contraception’, *Financial Times*, 9 July 2012.

Figure 3.1

**WHEN IT COMES TO CONTRACEPTION OUR THERAPIES
HAVE BEEN THERE SINCE THE BEGINNING**



It is now half a century since the first ever contraceptive pill was launched. It's maker, Searle, later became part of the Pfizer family.

In the decades since, Pfizer has quietly and steadily expanded its range of contraceptives, and were pioneers in bringing hormonal long-acting reversible contraception to Australian women.

We are not only committed to providing contraceptive options for women, but also in providing therapy choices in the areas of endometriosis, management of heavy periods and period pain, vaginal infection, hormone therapy and more.

Much has changed over the last 50 years, but the importance of providing therapeutic choices in Women's Health hasn't.

Pfizer Australia Pty Ltd (ABN 50 008 422 348)
38-42 Wharf Rd, West Ryde, NSW 2114
Pfizer Medical Information: 1800 675 229
www.pfizer.com.au



WORKING TOGETHER FOR A HEALTHIER WORLD.

Figure 3.2

Since 1961 to 2011 & beyond...

Bayer Schering Pharma is proud to support Family Planning NSW in commemorating 50 years of the availability of the oral contraceptive pill in Australia.

It was Schering AG, now part of Bayer Schering Pharma that brought the first pill to Australia, this was Anovlar in February 1961.

Since this time the company has been at the forefront of innovation in hormonal contraception. Firsts include:

- the progressive lowering of dosage
- new advances in packaging and presentation
- new progestogens offering the addition of non contraceptive benefits



It all started with Anovlar!

Our commitment...
Women's health and particularly contraception remain a strategic focus of the company's research and development. In this regard Australian prescribers and patients can be assured of continuing availability of state of the art products and support.

Note: Anovlar (ethinylloestradiol / norethisterone acetate) was launched in Australia 50 years ago and is now no longer available globally.



Bayer HealthCare
Bayer Schering Pharma

Bayer Australia Limited, JBN 22 000 158 714, 675 Pacific Highway, Pymble, NSW 2073.

Figure 3.3



Welcome

to the next 50 years
of contraception innovation

50

years ago women were offered a choice... half a century later women have changed, and so have their choices.

Australian women now choose from daily and longer-term reversible options, including hormonal options in the form of the pill, the implant, the ring, the injection or the intrauterine system, and non-hormonal options including the coil and male or female condoms.

MSD, through its Organon heritage, is proud to have provided innovative and ground breaking contraceptive options to Australian women.

MSD has also launched www.whatacontraceptiveyou.com.au an educational resource that informs Australian women about the contraceptive options available to them.

And looking to the next 50 years, we are committed to the innovation of more contraceptive options to suit women's ever changing lifestyles.

MSD

Takeda MSD is a global health care leader working to help the world live well. MSD is a trademark of Takeda Pharmaceutical Company, Ltd. (Takeda), a U.S. company. Through our prescription medicines, vaccines, biologics, and consumer care, we aim to improve lives and create a better world. To connect with our products, programs, and partnerships, visit www.msdaustralia.com.au. Contact: Sherrill, Doherty (Australia) Pty. Ltd. Tel: +61 2 9500 2113. WCHS 10-015-9028-D August 2010.

funded by the pharmaceutical industry, and published in journals sustained by pharmaceutical advertising.⁶⁵ This means that it is not just medical history, but also medical research that is being influenced by the financial sway of the pharmaceutical industry. However Read's professional background meant that she was arguably predisposed to be less critical of this industry and the potential effects of this relationship, because the two were united in their goal of providing women with contraception.⁶⁶ This relationship benefitted both parties: the pharmaceutical industry was offered a unique advertising opportunity – because direct to consumer pharmaceutical advertising is not legal in Australia – and Family Planning received the funding they needed in order to celebrate the fiftieth anniversary.⁶⁷

In regards to pharmaceutical advertising, this medium, and the endorsement of Family Planning, enabled these companies to draw on the history of the pill in order to bestow legitimacy upon their interpretations.⁶⁸ All three advertisements are similar in that they rely on a very selective history to substantiate their present claims to the pill. For example, MSD opens with the statement 'Welcome to the next 50 years of contraception innovation. 50 years ago women were offered a choice...half a century later women have changed, and so have their choices.'⁶⁹ This universalises women's experiences of the pill, ignores the inherent lack of choice associated with population control, and implies that this historical involvement means that MSD can be relied upon to improve contraception in the future.

In this sense, Australian pharmaceutical advertising can be seen as an extension of the general Australian narrative of the pill, which was the use of the fiftieth

⁶⁵ Jain, *Understanding Physician-Pharmaceutical Industry Interactions*, pp. 16-9.

⁶⁶ Christine Read, written interview, 27 July 2012.

⁶⁷ Jain, *Understanding Physician-Pharmaceutical Industry Interactions*, p. 59.

⁶⁸ Read ed., *Taking It*, pp. 28, 39, 48.

⁶⁹ Read ed., *Taking It*, p. 48; See Figure 3.3.

anniversary as an opportunity to reflect on women's continued need for improved contraception.⁷⁰ Throughout these advertisements, the pill was presented as the embodiment of freedom and choice, which will be discussed in relation to the advertisement produced by Pfizer.⁷¹

Pfizer claims to be the world's leading research-based pharmaceutical company, and has estimated that over 40 million people a day are treated with the medicine they produce.⁷² In 2011, Pfizer's overall revenue came to \$US 67.4 billion, making this company a global force that wields more financial power than many entire nations.⁷³ Pfizer's advertisement in *Taking It* manages to utilise their connection to the history of the pill, even though the company initially rejected the opportunity to be involved in oral contraception in the 1950s.⁷⁴

Instead, Pfizer used their recent takeover of Searle to validate their claim to the history of the pill.⁷⁵

When it comes to contraception our therapies have been there since the beginning. It is now half a century since the first ever contraceptive pill was launched. Its maker, Searle, later became part of the Pfizer family. In the decades since, Pfizer has quietly and steadily expanded its range of contraceptives, and were pioneers in bringing hormonal long acting reversible contraception to Australian women. We are not only committed to

⁷⁰ '50th Anniversary of the Pill in Australia', <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v2JhJ2sQVFg>>, accessed on 16 February 2012.

⁷¹ See Figure 3.1.

⁷² 'History: 2000 – Present', Pfizer website, <http://www.pfizer.com/about/history/pfizer_pharmacia.jsp>, accessed 8 August 2012.

⁷³ Pfizer Inc., '2011 Financial Report', p. 3, <<http://www.pfizer.com/files/annualreport/2011/financial/financial2011.pdf>>, accessed 8 August 2012; Jorg Blech, *Inventing Disease and Pushing Pills: Pharmaceutical companies and the medicalization of normal life*, (London: Routledge, 2006), p. 12; Nick Freemantle and Suzanne Hill, 'Medicalization, limits to medicine, or never enough money to go around?', *British Medical Journal*, vol. 324, no. 7342 (2002), pp. 864-5.

⁷⁴ Watkins, *On The Pill*, p. 24.

⁷⁵ Pfizer Inc., '2003: Pfizer and Pharmacia Merger', <http://www.pfizer.com/about/history/pfizer_pharmacia.jsp>, accessed 6 August 2012.

providing contraceptive options to women, but also in providing therapy choices in the areas of endometriosis, management of heavy periods and period pain, vaginal infection, hormone therapy and more. Much has changed over the last 50 years, but the importance of providing therapeutic choices in Women's Health hasn't.

Pfizer – Working together for a healthier world.⁷⁶

Pfizer is depicted here as an altruistic healthcare supplier, whose provision of contraception has enabled women to live happy, “liberated”, and successful lives. This presentation of the pill excludes key considerations such as the central issue of population control and the coercive element of this narrative, the experiences of non-Western women and women of colour, the feminist medical critique, and the significant financial rewards that the provision of contraception brings the company.⁷⁷ In this context, the history of the pill has been universalised and presented in the way that was perceived to be the most beneficial to the goal of increasing contraceptive use.

The above quote suggests that, through their involvement in women's health and contraception, Pfizer has played a ‘pioneering’ role in the history of the pill.⁷⁸ Within the traditional historical narrative of the pill, ‘pioneer’ status is usually reserved for figures like Margaret Sanger, Katherine McCormick, John Rock, and Gregory Pincus.⁷⁹ These are the people considered to have earned a pioneer status in light of the adversity they faced in their initial fight for the pill. Pioneers of the pill are understood to have

⁷⁶ Read ed., *Taking It*, p. 28; See Figure 3.1.

⁷⁷ Matthew Connelly, *Fatal Misconception: The Struggle to Control World Population*, (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2008), pp. 174-7; Lara V. Marks, *Sexual Chemistry: A History of the Contraceptive Pill: With a New Preface*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001, 2010), pp. 13-40; Rickie Solinger, *Pregnancy and Power: A Short History of Reproductive Politics in America*, (New York: New York University Press, 2005), pp. 1-26.

⁷⁸ See Figure 3.1.

⁷⁹ Watkins, *On The Pill*, pp. 13-5; Marks, *Sexual Chemistry*, pp. 10-11; Solinger, *Pregnancy and Power*, pp. 80-82; Linda Gordon, *The Moral Property of Women: A History of Birth Control Politics in America*, third edition, (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1990), pp. 138-52.

heroically and altruistically struggled against convention in order to provide women with reliable birth control, and as such, this term carries a certain level of authority.

Sanger in particular is a hero of this story, and within the mainstream narrative of the pill she is the ultimate pioneer – although this title is deeply questioned in more academic narratives.⁸⁰ Thus Pfizer has drawn on existing and accepted historical language of the pill in order to validate their interpretation of these events: by equating their involvement to that of the existing “pioneers” of the pill, they are implying that, for the past fifty years, their provision of contraception has been a self-sacrificing, rather than a self-serving action.⁸¹

This advertisement not only presents a universalised history of the pill, but also a universalised history of women in general, as womanhood is expressed in accordance to Pfizer’s narrow definition of the concept.⁸² In a photograph expected to be identifiable to all Australian women, three women – mother, daughter, and granddaughter, represent three generations of gratitude to Pfizer for the pill. These women are pictured smiling, brought together by family planning and Pfizer’s concern for women’s health.⁸³ This photograph is intended to capture the history of “real women”, yet as they are all obviously white and middle class, this is a highly selected version of historical reality.⁸⁴ These women epitomise the narrative of individual empowerment that is simultaneously promoted by the pharmaceutical industry and Family Planning: a narrative which is in

⁸⁰ Read ed., *Taking It*, pp. 4, 7-8, 10, 24, 36, 45.

⁸¹ Gordon, *The Moral Property of Women*, p. 138; David M. C. Hislop, *The People Who Made The Pill: An In-Depth Look at the Characters Behind Oral Contraception*, (South Carolina: Advantage, 2011), pp. 21-50.

⁸² Read ed., *Taking It*, p. 28.

⁸³ See Figure 3.1.

⁸⁴ Gill Branston and Roy Stafford, *The Media Students Handbook: Fourth Edition*, (London and New York: Routledge, 2006), p. 33.

direct contention with the history of population control, because every time choice is emphasised in this advertisement, it further silences this history of coercion.⁸⁵

There is no indication that the pill was a product of the twentieth century population explosion, no indication that this drug was initially trialled on Puerto Rican women, that birth control pioneer, Margaret Sanger, was a eugenics supporter, or that contraception has frequently been used to deny women of colour the reproductive freedoms that it is said to have brought Western women.⁸⁶ Not just Pfizer, but the pharmaceutical industry as a whole, has manipulated the history of the pill for the purpose of financial gain, and in doing so, have eradicated a significant segment of this history without acknowledging the magnitude or impact of what has been erased.

Conclusion

In some ways, the commemorative actions of the international pharmaceutical industry can be justified through Vinitzky-Seroussi's theory of collective memory, as he argues that commemoration is a balance between present needs and past commitments.⁸⁷ In this context, the pharmaceutical industry has acknowledged their responsibility to mark this event, and in many ways, the fiftieth anniversary would not have been such a publicised commemoration without this support. Considering that the pharmaceutical industry made the development of the pill possible, and that this industry has maintained the public profile of the pill since the 1960s, this use of the past is perhaps not quite as objectionable as it would initially appear.

⁸⁵ Donald T. Critchlow, 'Birth Control, Population Control, and Family Planning: An Overview', in Donald T. Critchlow ed., *The Politics of Abortion and Population Control in Historical Perspective*, (Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1995), pp. 1-21.

⁸⁶ 'Mike Wallace Interviews Margaret Sanger', *Planned Parenthood News*, no. 19 (Fall 1957), p. 5; Laura Briggs, *Reproducing Empire: Race, Sex, Science, and U.S. Imperialism in Puerto Rico*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), pp. 129-41; Connelly, *Fatal Misconception*, p. 10; Solinger, *Pregnancy and Power*, pp. 163-208; Gordon, *The Moral Property of Women*, p. 288.

⁸⁷ Vinitzky-Seroussi, *Yitzhak Rabin's Assassination and the Dilemmas of Commemoration*, p. 6.

However, the pharmaceutical industry was in a position of authority in this context, which was arguably abused when they supported this carefully constructed history of the pill. Although this was justifiable within family planning agencies and mainstream feminist thought because it potentially increased women's access to contraception, this narrative of individual women's choice and empowerment silenced the histories of the many women for whom contraception has been an experience of coercion rather than liberation.⁸⁸ Thus while it is possible to understand the motivation behind this presentation of history, this understanding does not change the fact that for the fiftieth anniversary of the pill, the public was presented with an extremely limited and exclusionary view of the past.

⁸⁸ Solinger, *Pregnancy and Power*, pp. 163-208.

Conclusion – Implications of the Fiftieth Anniversary

1960 witnessed considerable developments in regards to the introduction of oral contraception in the United States, yet a real change in individual women's contraceptive habits was not one of them. Instead, the majority of American women continued using their existing methods of contraception for several years after the advent of the pill, and the contraceptive approval of Enovid in May 1960 went relatively unacknowledged in the popular media.¹

The pill was not depicted as a tool of women's empowerment during its initial years on the market, and when this concept did emerge, empowerment was placed in the hands of the medical profession, rather than individual women.² Thus the contemporary liberation narrative, based on the introduction of the pill in 1960, is one that has been applied both disingenuously and retrospectively in this context: in 1960 the pill was inextricably bound to population control, and upon closer examination, the history of this “liberating” medication involves a considerable element of coercion.³

Rather than demonstrate the polyvalent history of the pill within fiftieth anniversary literature, both primary agents of memory – feminist thinkers and the pharmaceutical industry – chose to present the public with a highly selective and universalised narrative of “women's liberation”. This narrative focussed on Western women's increased access to family planning, work, and educational opportunities since

¹ Pascal K. Whelpton with Arthur A. Campbell and John E. Patterson, *Fertility and Family Planning in the United States*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1966), p. 279; ‘U. S. Approves Pill for Birth Control’, *New York Times*, 10 May 1960, p. 75; ‘FDA Approves Pill for use in Birth Control’, *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 10 May 1960, p. A11.

² ‘...unfettered’, G. D. Searle advertisement of Enovid in, *American Journal of Obstetrics and Gynaecology*, vol. 82, no. 1 (July 1961), pp. 86-87.

³ ‘Birth-Curb Group to Distribute Pill: Oral Contraceptive Will Be Offered At Clinics – Cost Is About \$10 A Month’, *New York Times*, 4 August 1960.

1960, presenting them as a result of the introduction of the pill, and depicted the history of the pill almost exclusively as one of individual Western women's empowerment.

This disregarded the experiences of all women who did not fit this description by implying that this was a universal representation of women and the pill. And although scholarship on commemoration frequently acknowledges that commemorative success often hinges upon forgetting as much as remembering, in assuming the role of agents of memory within the fiftieth anniversary of the pill, these groups took on a certain responsibility to the presentation of this public history.⁴

It is easy to see why the pharmaceutical industry and feminist thinkers alike propagated the narrative of liberation in this context: the fiftieth anniversary was used as an opportunity to foster a positive public profile of the pill, and increase women's access to oral contraception. In the US, commemorators were working against associations with controversial abortion politics and the conservative abstinence-only education movement.⁵ In Australia, commemorators were attempting to promote future developments in contraception, and in both contexts the liberation narrative was the historical narrative of the pill best suited to realising these aims.⁶

While these agents of memory shared a common goal in increasing women's access to contraception, there was a substantial difference in their motivations for

⁴ Richard White, 'A Commemoration and a Historical Mediation', *The Journal of American History*, vol. 94, no. 4 (May 2008), p. 1073; Titus Ensink and Christoph Sauer, 'Facing the Past: The Commemoration of the Warsaw Uprising on the Occasion of its Fiftieth Anniversary', in Titus Ensink and Christoph Sauer eds., *The Art of Commemoration: Fifty Years After the Warsaw Uprising*, (Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2003), p. 7.

⁵ Linda Gordon, *The Moral Property of Women: A History of Birth Control Politics in America*, third edition, (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2002), p. 304; Camille Hahn, 'Virgin Territory: Ms. goes to an abstinence conference and learns that it pays to be chaste', *Ms. Magazine*, (Fall 2004), <<http://www.msmagazine.com/fall2004/virginterritory.asp>>, accessed 2 October 2012.

⁶ Caroline Harvey, 'Hopes and Dreams: Six wishes for the future of contraception in Australia', in Christine Read ed., *Taking It: 50 Years of The Pill*, (NSW: Family Planning NSW, 2010), pp. 43-4; Nina Funnell, 'There's a long way to go...', in Christine Read ed., *Taking It: 50 Years of The Pill*, (NSW: Family Planning NSW, 2010), p. 42.

commemorating this anniversary. Feminist thinkers were driven by a desire to promote gender equality, and saw the increased reproductive control that the pill provides as a way of achieving this goal. In contrast, the pharmaceutical industry was predominantly driven by financial profit, and the opportunity to further capitalise on this already extremely lucrative medication.⁷ However, understanding these justifications unfortunately does not change the fact that a deliberately incomplete history of the pill was presented to the public for the fiftieth anniversary: the implications of which must be considered.

Fiftieth anniversary literature largely depicted 1960 as the beginning of contraception and individual women's reproductive control, dismissing the substantial history of contraception before the introduction of the pill. Or if this history was mentioned, it was done in a way that implied the innate inferiority of all contraceptive options that appeared prior to 1960.⁸ This historical interpretation prioritised the pill over all other contemporary methods of contraception, and methods such as condoms or the diaphragm – both developed before the pill, and both still in use – were presented as indisputably sub-standard in comparison to oral contraception. This had the effect of leaving many women feeling as if, in the twenty-first century, they had no other contraceptive options, or as if they could not express criticism of the pill.⁹

⁷ Global Industry Analysts, Inc., 'Global Contraceptives Market is Projected to Reach US\$17.2 Billion by 2015, According to New Report by Global Industry Analysts, Inc.', (San Jose, CA: *PRWeb*, 25 October 2010), <http://www.prweb.com/releases/contraceptives_oral/condoms/prweb468884.ht>, accessed 23 July 2012.

⁸ Louise Keogh, 'The pill's 50th anniversary: do we have freer sex and better managed fertility?', *The Conversation*, 23 November 2011.

⁹ Geraldine Sealey, 'Why I Hate the Pill: The birth control revolution brought freedom to countless women. It brought misery to me', *Salon*, 3 May 2010, salon.com – a leading progressive news site, <http://www.salon.com/2010/05/03/pill_pushback/>, accessed 11 February 2012; Holly Grigg-Spall, 'Why I'll Never Take the Pill Again', *The Independent*, 11 May 2010, <<http://www.independent.co.uk/life-style/health-and-families/features/why-ill-never-take-the-pill-again-1970488.html>>, accessed 1 August 2012.

The fiftieth anniversary was intended to be universally representative of women's experiences of the pill, but in reality it expressed this history through the experiences of young, white, middle class women living in developed countries. It continued the broader trend of labelling population control a separate issue within social history, and dismissed the coercive element of this narrative.¹⁰ This narrative was also dismissive of women of colour, of women of lower socio-economic backgrounds, of women living in developing countries, of women who choose not to use the pill for various medical or ethical reasons, and of women who do not fit the standard age demographic of oral contraceptive users.

In recent decades the inclusion of minority groups in history has become valued and recognised as an important addition.¹¹ This particular representation disregards this development, and instead universalises the history of the pill: applying a grand narrative approach to this diverse social history. In the context of the fiftieth anniversary, the primary agents of memory involved demonstrated an expedient use of history. Because this was done in such a popular context, there is the chance that this could influence a lasting public understanding of the pill that does not question the fiftieth anniversary narrative, and is ignorant in regards to the complex and polyvalent nature of this history.

Although this narrative was intended to counteract the controversial reputation of reproductive politics, and have a positive impact on women's lives by increasing their access to contraception, this does not change the incomplete, and at times misleading, nature of this information. Indeed, this presentation of the past appears to compromise the idea that women have the right to make informed decisions regarding their

¹⁰ Matthew Connelly, *Fatal Misconception: The Struggle to Control World Population*, (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2008); Laura Briggs, *Reproducing Empire: Race, Sex, Science, and U.S. Imperialism in Puerto Rico*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), p. 13.

¹¹ Gerda Lerner, 'The Necessity of History (1982)', in John Tosh ed., *Historians on History: An Anthology*, (Harlow: Longman, 2000), p. 336.

reproductive bodies, and jeopardises the element of trust involved in public histories.

Regardless of the motivations, fiftieth anniversary literature made a conscious attempt to distance the pill from the coercive elements of its history, and on an international level, presented the experiences of a very select group of women as the universalised experience of women throughout the world.

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