Introduction

• NaProTechnology (NPT) is a fertility treatment developed as a Catholic Church-approved reproductive health and fertility care option.
• Due to a lack of peer-reviewed research demonstrating its efficacy, NPT has been mostly rejected by the American medical mainstream, but pockets of practitioners continue to teach and practice it, especially in the West.

Objective of the Study

I aimed to examine how American Catholics’ approaches to NPT and natural family planning compared to those of Polish Catholics, as examined in my fall junior paper in the History Department.

Methods

• Structured and semi-structured interviews with NPT practitioners and promoters
• Participant-observation in official NPT practitioner meetings, in churches that promote NPT in the Oakland Diocese, during a Polish-American heritage festival hosted by a Polish church, and in an IVF promotion event.

Results and Discussion

Key quotes:

• “I find it so harmonious that it really allows me to express every focus of my being.” – NPT Practitioner
• “She goes through the slides and I go into a catatonic state as I have hundreds of times.” – retired Billings practitioner about NPT practitioner
• “In those days it was almost like the beginning of the Protestants against the Catholics.” about rivalry between natural family planning methods in the 70s
• “Are we stealing eggs from their future? No, we are rescuing the follicles from their own demise.” – IVF practitioner

Questions and further inquiries

• How much do secular patients interact with natural family planning in other parts of the U.S. and world?
• Are Polish-American churches more involved in NPT in other parts of the U.S.?
• Will the FDA’s recent approval of a new natural family planning app affect the perception and popularity of NPT and other natural family planning methods?
• How will the expansion of certain California insurance plans to cover natural family planning consultations affect the demographics of future patients and practitioners?

Unexpected insights

• The Oakland Diocese practitioners are very removed from the communities that actually attend and manage the churches and Diocese itself
• The first and only time many devout parishioners learn about and encounter NPT is if they choose or are required to attend a marriage preparation class prior to being married in an Oakland Catholic Church.
• A majority of NPT patients were secular or patients of other religions who come to natural family planning seeking a less expensive and more “natural” or homeopathic alternative to hormonal contraception and/or IVF.

Acknowledgements

Thank you to the CHW, especially Sara Goldman and Dr. Amy Krauss for working with me from across the world to make this project happen.