Someone Chose to Give You the Right to Choose

By Tylla Bradley

Margaret Sanger , the founder of Planned Parenthood, a woman's health organization, said, "No woman can call herself free who does not own and control her body. No woman can call herself free until she can choose consciously whether she will or will not be a mother."[1] Nearly forty years ago, obtaining an abortion was an illegal offense in most states with a few exceptions for cases involving incest and rape. The Supreme Court's ruling in *Roe v. Wade* overturned state abortion laws and made abortion the law of the land. And, since 1973, when the ruling went into effect, over 54 million abortions have been performed, terminating pregnancies and allowing hundreds of thousands of women to continue their lives unfettered.[2]

Since 1973, when Roe v. Wade declared that a woman has a right to have an abortion, the serious ramifications of those actions have resounded for over forty years. While there may be a string of valid and rational reasons for a woman to terminate her pregnancy, the primary anti-abortion response is that it is nothing less than the intentional murder of a child. Others have demurred by saying that the fetus really isn't a person or that it would be cruel to bring unwanted children into the world. Some have even phrased their decision as "[loving] her enough to send her to back to God."[3] Whatever the reason, it is certainly a personal choice that is greatly influenced, either consciously or unconsciously, by a combination of political policies, personal convictions, and public sentiment.

Politically, abortion is the law of the land. However, the degrees and aspects of abortions are a political minefield that has wrecked promising careers. And, while the specific aspects waffle depending on the political environment and state. One major issue that is highly divisive is the use of federal funds to pay for abortions. The Hyde Amendement was passed in 1976 as a rider to various bills mostly pertaining to Medicaid. It forbids the use of federal funds to pay for abortions. As Jessica Arons of the Center for American Progress points out, "because of the Hyde Amendment, a woman who qualifies for Medicaid due to her low income is denied coverage for abortion care. Instead, she and her family must divert scarce resources to pay for a needed abortion out of pocket."[4] With the passage of the new healthcare bill, more attention was drawn to reluctant Democratic representatives who refused to support the bill due to its inclusion of abortion coverage and their eventual acceptance of a hollow promise from the White House in exchange for their support of the health care bill. The end result is that in the near future, there is a great likelihood that

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[1] http://thinkexist.com/quotes/margaret_sanger/
[2] http://www.lifenews.com/2010/11/26/nat-6891/
[3] http://www.fwhc.org/stories/emily3.htm
[4] http://www.americanprogress.org/issues/2011/09/hyde_amendment_anniversary.html

federal funding of abortions will be available, allowing low income women everywhere to continue making bad decisions.

Another abortion issue not addressed by *Roe* but coming under increasing scrutiny by various state laws is parental notification of minors who want to obtain an abortion. As of right now, 44 states require the notification or at least one or possibly both parents before a minor can abort her fetus. However, according to the National Abortion Federation (NAF) "Parental involvement bills pose a serious threat to the health of young women."[5] They argue that teenagers and younger adolescents probably have good reasons to keep their pregnancies from their parents and will probably wait longer before trying to obtain an abortion or seek a possibly dangerous alternative method of aborting the fetus. Anti-abortion groups, however, encourage these laws as a way to keep parents informed and allow them to support their daughters.

Despite the ever changing political aspects of abortion, the anti-abortion message has made surprising strides in pop culture. In the 1970s, when tv shows such as *Maude* and *Cagney and Lacey* produced episodes with definitive pro-abortion messages, they were hailed as both groundbreaking and controversial. However, as a new generation takes over the conversations seems to have swung either to the other side of backwards depending on viewpoint. In fact, as Amanda Marcotte points out, "You'd think that something that happens to over a million women a year would merit more than one portrayal in the 37 years since Maude terminated her pregnancy, but in TV Land, abortion is rarer than coffee shop employees who can afford enormous Manhattan apartments."[6] She's right, despite the occasional reference in shows like *Sex and the City*, *Grey's Anatomy*, and *Battlestar Galactica*, abortion has been fairly non-existent in popular media. Combined with the popularity of the films *Knocked Up* and *Juno,* Hollywood was been projecting a rather anti-abortion slant. The fact that both women in the films chose to bring their pregnancies to term instead of simply having an abortion, while important for the story, also signaled a change in the way the younger generations of Americans think about abortion.

In addition, the plethora of celebrities who have made infants the new it thing after the purse dogs. From the fabulously clad Suri Cruise to Victoria Beckham's new bundle of joy, and even Beyonce's barely discernable bump, babies are popping and dropping all over L.A. Not that this is in and of itself a distinctly anti-abortion message. And, unless you're Chelsea Handler, no one really advertises how many abortions they've had, but as *Teen Mom* and *I Didn't Know I was Pregnant* grow in notoriety or popularity, abortion takes a back seat to the reality gravy train. So, when pro-abortion Hollywood keeps the baby pictures and bumps coming, what does that mean for the rest of America?

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[5] http://www.prochoice.org/policy/states/parental_involvement.html

[6] http://www.rhrealitycheck.org/blog/2009/05/05/no-copouts-37-years-ago-maude-got-abortion-experience-right

As most pro-abortion activists like to claim, they're against limiting the choice of a pregnant woman to options that vary on the theme of having the baby. Rather, they want her to have the choice of terminating the pregnancy and going on with her life unencumbered with her momentary brush with maternity. And, most anti-abortion activists point out that they're all for choice, except for the choice that eliminates any choice the unborn fetus might have concerning its future. As Mother Teresa said, "Human rights are not a privilege conferred by government. They are every human being's entitlement by virtue of his humanity. The right to life does not depend, and must not be declared to be contingent, on the pleasure of anyone else, not even a parent or a sovereign."[7]

In addition to the multitude of terms, both pro and con, the issues of legality, morality, and responsibility continually crop up to obscure the landscape and induce guilt at will.

In the years since the Roe ruling, the possibility of it being struck down by a bench of conservative justices has been a prominent fear in the hearts of pro-abortion activists and a key goal in the minds of anti-abortion activists. Anti-abortion activists protest that it is simply a bad ruling based on hypotheticals and emotions by activist judges who wanted to make a change. They argue that 1) since there is no clear place in the Constitution or Bill of Rights asserting a right to privacy it is 2) in the state's interest to protect unborn life (future taxpayers/citizens), and 3) any transaction, i.e. medical procedure, that involves payment for services falls under state law they have the right to regulate. Pro-abortion supporters counter by pointing out that a woman has the right to do what she wants with her body and it isn't anyone else's business what she does or how she handles situations. They argue that without the legal protections engendered by the Roe ruling abortion would once again revert to deadly back alley or self-inflicted abortions which is cruel, barbaric, and endangers the lives of women.

The likelihood that Roe will be overturned in the near future is slim, but pro-abortions activist like Planned Parenthood and NARAL are ever vigilant to protect the key piece of legislation. However, they might have become the victim of their own success. NARAL surveyed 700 American voters under 30 years of age and the results were surprisingly disturbing. Of the percentage that considered themselves pro-abortion rights, only 26% considered it an important voting issue compared to 51% of people who self-identified as anti-abortion rights.[8] The issue becomes further complicated as Millennial voters continue to perceive abortion as more of a moral issue rather than a legal issue. Their mindset tends toward the thought that even though abortion is legal, that doesn't mean that you should have one.

While legalizing abortions prevents women from spending time behind bars, the morality of abortions is something that will trap some women on a lifelong maze of uncertainty,

[7] http://www.gargaro.com/mother_teresa/quotes.html
[8] http://www.thedailybeast.com/newsweek/2010/04/15/remember-roe.html

doubt and guilt. Former presidential nominee contender Howard Dean, a medical doctor himself, said, "The issue is not abortion. The issue is whether women can make up their own mind instead of some right-wing pastor, some right-wing politician telling them what to do."[9] Granted the general discussion of morality is something philosophers have been having for centuries and while entertaining is certainly too long and unrelated to be retold here. Suffice it to say that many organized religions consider abortion to be immoral. And, while there are some sects and splinter groups that dare to disagree and take a pro-abortion stand, they're definitely in the minority.

Some have argued that abortion is a moral solution to prevent poverty and child abuse by suggesting that abortions offers the chance to ensure that "every child is a wanted child' and ensures family stability that increase the output if healthy, productive children. There is even the argument that it would be better to terminate pregnancies where the fetus is known or suspected of having birth defects or congenital problems that would affect the quality of life. And, through the use of relative morality, something that some religious groups are greatly opposed to, these are justifiable responses and reasons.

However, for a pregnant woman weighing the pros and cons of termination versus childbirth, the one thing that weighs heaviest on her mind, body, and conscience is the issue of responsibility. Granted, there is enough responsibility to go around. Is she ready and responsible enough to raise and care for a child on her own? Will the father of the child be willing and able to either participate in the raising the child and/or pay child support? If she wants to terminate the pregnancy, who pays for it?

Her?

The father?

The government? Well, the federal government won't since the Hyde Amendment prohibited the use of government funds to pay for abortion. A controversial move in the eyes of the pro-abortion movement who point out that anti-abortion activists are forcing their moral beliefs on the unfortunate low-income women and the men who impregnated them who cannot afford the additional child or the money it costs to terminate the pregnancy.

The anti-abortion activists point out that they should not be forced to pay for an elective procedure that violates their belief system. The argument for abortion coverage for low-income women basically holds society and tax-paying citizens responsible for the bad decisions and lifestyle choices of the woman while seemingly alleviating both responsible parties of any of the costs or responsibility.

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[9] http://www.searchquotes.com/quotation/The_issue_is_not_abortion._The_issue_is_whether_women_can_make_up_their_own_mind_instead_of_some_rig/115744/

With the ruling of Roe v. Wade, abortion emerged from the shadowy back alleys across America to the corners of the projects, chic clinics in suburbia and the muted high rises in the city. But, no matter how hard the battle for acceptance will be waged, a small, determined sector of society refuses to back down. The irony is while the current political establishment, prevailing intellectual thought, and seemingly the general sentiment may be going against them, anti-abortion activists have two things in their favor, 1) they don't believe in abortion, and 2) they teach their children that abortion is wrong. Now on the surface, this may seem an obvious, trivial fact, but anti-abortion activists, especially ones who practice religion, tend to have large families. And, while they continue on a cycle of self-perpetuation, the pro-abortion activists continue their mission of self-decimation. As Norma McCorvey, formerly known as Roe in *Roe v. Wade* says, "I firmly believe that the only 'champions' of this whole situation are the women who have been lucky enough to not be aborted since Roe v. Wade was handed down."[10]

The controversy surrounding the abortion issue is well deserved, thoroughly justified, and when taken to extremes, deadly. Some anti-abortion activists and bombers purporting to be anti-abortion activists have systematically declared a quasi-holy war on various abortionists and abortion clinics, shooting and bombing their way through doctors, patients, and nurses. On the other hand, hundreds of thousands of abortions have been performed, snuffing future parents, children, and spouses in the personal interests of the woman.

[10] http://www.roenomore.org/press/realroe.htm