Opinion Paper: Should Abortion Be Legal?

Jessica Klatt

Siena Heights University

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Abortion has been a very hot topic of debate in our society for as long as I can remember. The idea of ending a life is a very uncomfortable thought. Whether you consider a fetus a human or a cluster of cells is another topic altogether, but there is no denying that in choosing an abortion, you are causing something living (tissue, cells, child) to cease to exist. Everyone is entitled to their own opinion. However, this matter has absolutely nothing to do with what you or I believe, unless it is you or I making the decision about a living *something* within our own body. While I agree that this should not be a decision made lightly, I believe that every person should be allowed to make choices about their own body. Just as the “Me Too” movement has continued to push the definition of consent, *your* *choice* should not affect *my body.* Period. Because of that, I feel that no matter what my personal beliefs are on the subject, abortion should be legal to give the choice to those who need it, when they need it.

 Growing up, my exposure to risqué topics, such as abortion, were limited. In my early teens a very graphic scene from a movie where the character attempted to perform her own abortion with a coat hanger in an alley, horrified me. I can remember being confused at the character’s actions and asking my mother why she would do such a thing. Her response was because abortion was illegal back then. It was not until 1973 that the Supreme Court decided restrictions on abortions were unconstitutional in the monumental case of Roe v. Wade (“The Editors,” 2018). The terrifying scene from the movie was not so uncommon. Dr. Mishell, chair of the ob-gyn department at USC’s Keck School of Medicine, stated that during his time working at Harbor General Hospital, now L.A. County-USC Medical Center, many women in his ward “...died from using coat hangers or knitting needles or radiator flush to induce abortions” (Morrison, 2014). Even today, it is estimated that 22 million females will have unsafe abortions with as many as 47,000 resulting in death and many more suffering severe injury (Shaffer, 2017). Many Pro-life supporters will argue that an abortion is murder of an unborn child. What about the mother? Does her life not matter? Does she not deserve proper medical care that will lessen her risk for infection or fatality?

 Procon.org, a website that offers unbiased pros and cons of controversial issues, states “If women become pregnant, they should accept the responsibility that comes with producing a child.” This argument is absolutely maddening! Not only does it overlook the simple fact that contraception can fail, it also assumes consensual sex and releases the male population from responsibility, further fostering victim-shaming. At what point did we dismiss men from the process of conception? It takes participation, at some level, from one male and one female to produce life. Speaking from experience as a mother, growing, birthing and raising a child is a very heavy task for an single person and creates a huge shift in responsibilities that are life-altering. Who is anyone, outside of that specific individual, to determine if that is something she is ready and willing to take on in her current stage of life? According to “Reasons U.S. Women Have Abortions: Quantitative and Qualitative Perspectives,”

The most common subreason given was that the woman could not afford a baby now because she was unmarried (42%). Thirty-eight percent indicated that having a baby would interfere with their education, and the same proportion said it would interfere with their employment. In a related vein, 34% said they could not afford a child because they were students or were planning to study. (Finer, Frohwirth, Dauphinee, Singh, & Moore, 2005)

Many respondents were concerned about education or employment, and all of the reasons given were in one way or another related to money. Women already face an approximate twenty percent disadvantage in pay based on statistics by the International Labor Organization (Schulze, 2018). Furthermore, according to Child Care Aware of America, the national average cost of childcare is approximately $8,700 per year (Chmurak, 2018). If those numbers aren’t shocking enough, the estimated cost of raising a child born in 2015 is between $12,000 and $15,000 per year, not including the cost of college (Lino, 2017). If a woman is being proactive in planning for her future, and possibly the future of her offspring, how is it fair to judge her for her attempt at being responsible?

 Life is stressful enough without judgement from complete strangers regarding a decision that will monumentally impact another woman’s life and possibly her child(ren). Pro-life activists will argue that obtaining an abortion will negatively impact the mental health of the potential mother even though sound research suggests that the psychological response after an abortion is consistent with other stressful life events (Adler et al., 1990). If a woman makes the choice to have an abortion, maybe the motivation behind that choice would have otherwise led to further stress in her future. As we do not know the reasoning behind the abortions that were studied by Adler, it is hard to draw a definitive conclusion that the absolute cause for the increased stress was directly related to the abortion itself and not to another stressor happening around the same time.

How is perspective affected if the child or mother has a legitimate medical reason for the abortion? Does the public still scrutinize the decision with hatred, claiming the mother is selfish? If the baby is to be stillborn, how do you argue that abortion is murder? Abortion gives mothers and families an opportunity to avoid serious medical complications that may occur due to childbirth or congenital defects. Despite advances in prenatal care, there are still approximately 24,000 stillbirths in the United States each year (“Facts About Stillbirth,” 2017). I can only imagine the heartbreak of miscarriage or knowing your baby will not survive childbirth. When a mother is faced with such news, it is hard to imagine that any of the options presented will be near adequate to deal with the grief, but some may allow peace before the inevitable.

 At the end of the day, I believe that there are good people in this world who are faced with impossible decisions. Donna Schaper, Senior Minister of Judson Memorial Church, commented perfectly:

**Women are moral agents.** Women are capable of making soulful, moral decisions about their own bodies. Assuming that a woman cannot decide for herself if and when to bear a child demeans women. Mandatory childbearing makes the woman a hostage to the will of others -- those unfamiliar with her story, her life experience and her needs, and may have disastrous consequences for the children. (Schaper, 2013)

I will never know what another woman feels when a little pink plus develops on her home pregnancy test. It could be unbridled joy, ready to explode when she reads the test. It could be unsurmountable fear that brings her to her knees. Or it could be somewhere in between. In any case, regardless of marital status, race, income, sexual orientation or other popular demographic used in the fight for or against abortion, she deserves to be the only one to make any decisions about her body and she deserves to do so with dignity and confidence knowing that she is making the right choice for herself at this specific moment in time.

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