

STOP ABORTION? FIX MEN!

Writer Toni Morrison once remarked on: “what men frequently do when they want to manage and govern women. They focus on their babies – whether they’re having them or not having them. Reproductive organs become the focus.” [*Wash. Post* 1/6/98, B2]

Pregnancy discrimination is the perfect form of sex discrimination, letting some men harass and dominate women without penalty to themselves or other men. Pregnancy – actual or prospective - has long served as the all-purpose pretext for everything from job discrimination and insurance exclusion to forced marriage, forced sterilization, social ostracism, physical assault and genital mutilation. And all without violating a revered constitution that has repeatedly denied women’s right to bodily integrity and equal protection of the law. Continued denial of the Equal Rights Amendment preserves the framers’ original intent to privilege men by excluding women from constitutional rights and protections.

Restricting abortion is just another way to control women through a condition that men create but do not experience. While some men have described a pregnant woman as “in a fix,” and noted with a chuckle that “there’s no such thing as a little bit pregnant,” abortion spoils this age-old gotcha because it lets a woman who is a little bit pregnant be not pregnant after all. A painful medical procedure is apparently too little punishment for such insubordination.

A moral stance inapplicable to one's own behavior is a fraud. Pregnancy is virtually impossible without, as it were, male input. To have any credibility, therefore, abortion opponents must deal with the primary cause of unwanted pregnancy – uncontrolled male fertility. .

One and a half million abortions per year in the United States testify to a million and a half occasions when men chose intercourse without contraception. Had they prevented conception, there would have been no need for abortion. It should be obvious, therefore, that men who say they have a problem with abortion should address it realistically by working for regulatory legislation to curb men’s fertility. A variety of effective methods are already available and putting some real money into research should make it possible to manipulate men’s hormones just as readily as women’s.

In the United States, child abuse and neglect is rampant while funding for child care, health care, and the education of children is chronically inadequate and given low priority in state and federal spending. Children are all too often impoverished along with their mothers in the wake of divorce or abandonment by fathers. Or in other instances, taken from their mothers in custody battles weighted in the father’s favor by his ability to hire more costly legal firepower. Does this sorry situation for real children square with the overblown rhetoric of tender devotion to fetuses professed by men who oppose abortion, or does it call their bluff?

But what about the women who oppose abortion? They are equivalent to the women who in times past obediently beseeched legislators to protect them from the awful burden of the ballot. Women who, making the best deal they can under the circumstances, pledge allegiance to men’s authority over their minds and actions, as well as their – and other women’s – bodies.

As for pro-choice activists, it is time to stop defending abortion and start attacking the outright misogyny that made it a debatable issue in the first place. If activists prefer to continue treating this human need as a shaky “right” always on the brink of extinction, they reveal themselves as part of the problem, not the solution. Any law treating abortion differently from other medical procedures is sex discrimination.

Women know that abortion is an essential aspect of pregnancy and they also know that denial of access to abortion is misogyny that privileges all men (whether anti-abortion or not) at expense to women’s dignity, autonomy, and right to bodily integrity. Our first responsibility is to women.

-- Twiss Butler