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Editorial musings: On the abortion issue
Kendra Gaines, PhD
Editor-in-Chief

My first thought when news broke about the Supreme Court’s possible decision to eliminate the protections for women of *Roe v. Wade* was—Oh no! Not again! The late 1960s were filled with seemingly endless discussions and arguments about the abortion issue. By the time *Roe v. Wade* was passed, I was almost more relieved to know that those discussions would finally end. And they did end, at least for a while. So did stories of back-alley abortions and deaths by hemorrhages from botched procedures. At least for a while.

And now, oh joy, they’re back! Once I recovered from my shock at realizing that *Roe v. Wade* was in serious danger, some depression set in. Really?—I thought. We’re really going back to the bad old days when even Ireland has made abortion legal? Why would this country willfully move backwards and do such a thing to women?

What could be more intensely personal to a woman than the realization that she is pregnant when she doesn’t want to be? What if she practiced sensible birth control, but somehow that sperm made its way through to the egg? What if she has no money, no income, no real home, and only shadowy prospects? Even worse, what if her partner says, “It’s your problem, honey. I’m outta here!” She is now faced with a decision that no woman ever wants to make, and yet she must make it. If the Supreme Court eliminates legal abortion, perhaps just leaving it all up to the various States, her options become severely limited. And in certain states, she could be summarily targeted by any stranger who suspects she is moving towards abortion and then be thrown into jail—while the stranger can earn a \$10,000 bounty for speaking out against her. How could this be happening?

I am fully aware that some of my readers may be in favor of condemning any woman who seeks an abortion, citing right-to-life doctrines about the sacredness of the fetus. I am also aware that I may be stepping on the toes of such readers when I ask, really, why is this your business? Are you planning to help this woman financially? Are you determined to tell a rape victim that she is going to love the product of this violent rape once the baby is born? Or say that any baby fathered through incest is somehow related to family values? Will you manage to bring in the Bible, the Torah, the Koran? What right, I ask, does any stranger have to demand that a woman do something she does not want to do just because that stranger tells her to? Why is this anyone's business other than the woman's and her physician's—and maybe the father's, if he has actually assumed responsibility?

To my mind it was a dark day indeed when the issue of abortion became politicized. I wish it had stayed as a personal and medical issue, just as choices about other medical treatments and surgeries are. Instead, it's an issue where almost automatically, people take sides. Then each side accuses the other side of all manner of things, most of them bad. With two sides screaming at each other endlessly, the woman with the unwanted pregnancy is no longer a real person. She simply gets lost in all the cries of "I'm right, you're wrong" and "we know what's best for women and they must do as we say." There's also the "life is sacred" argument, but once that life is born, of course, the screaming crowd melts away and moves on to the next victim of their self-righteousness.

What fascinates me in a rather horrible way about the "life is sacred" crowd is that a sizable percentage of them also worship guns. It would appear that a fetus, now grown into an adolescent, can shoot mindlessly into a school, killing scores of other fetuses, now adolescents, and somehow no one is willing to curtail the acquisition of a lethal weapon in even the smallest way. Similarly, a self-appointed fetus's-right-to-life person can rationalize the shooting and killing of an abortion doctor who, of course, was once a fetus too. If there is any logic in this way of thinking, it escapes me altogether.

I am at a point in my life when I confess I have no answers. Periodically human beings go through these paroxysms of so-called moral fervor, feeling called upon to demand that others do as they say because they are "right" to demand it. History has shown us how Prohibition turned out, with more deaths by bootleg alcohol than ever before, the growth of the mobs and vigilantes, and even more drinking than ever, since alcohol now had the glamor of being illegal. The War on Drugs has yielded similar dismal results, to the point where marijuana has now been legalized in numerous states, even if the Federal government has yet to make up its collective mind on the issue. People drink if they want to drink, take drugs if they want to take drugs—and get abortions if they are desperate enough. If *Roe v. Wade* becomes null and void, we will unquestionably be seeing more female deaths from bleeding and infection. And yet somehow our "I'm pro-life and I'm right" crowd wants to forge ahead with their agenda.

All I know with absolute certainty is that, if I were one of those women, I would say my body is mine and mine alone, and my decisions about how to treat my body are likewise mine and mine alone. To that end, I will permanently argue in favor of sensible sex education for adolescents and for readily available birth control. As more than one person has observed, the best abortion is the one that no woman needs to have. But sexual activity is programmed by nature to produce offspring, and sometimes that happens despite all precautions. At that time, a safe and legal abortion should be readily available to all women, discussed in advance with their doctors. No self-righteous, moralistic strangers should have anything whatsoever to do with this decision.

But I am not banking on this sensible approach to the matter happening within my lifetime. And yes, I wish I could say otherwise. But throughout most of human history, it has always been the woman who bears the brunt of moralistic attacks. One would think that she manages to get pregnant all by herself, that no male participant has anything to do with it. Sometimes it seems almost a tradition to blame the woman and not to hold the man to account—and a very sad and destructive tradition it is. I am so very tired of it all, so very saddened by it all. And that is where I shall end my musings.

Bio:

Dr. Kendra Gaines received her doctorate in English Literature from Northwestern University in Chicago, Illinois. She taught at Northwestern, as well as University of Michigan, before moving to Tucson. At the University of Arizona, she served for 16 years as Senior Tutor and Instructional Specialist in, first, the Department of English, and then at the UA's Writing Skills Improvement Program. Dr. Gaines has taught at Davis-Monthan Air Force Base for almost 30 years, teaching for Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University, Chapman University, Park University, and Pima College. Dr. Gaines teaches online as well. She is completing her seventeenth year teaching both English and Philosophy courses for Colorado Technical University. She has also been teaching online for Park University, work which has included several blended (both online and in person) courses and is a full Professor of English at Akamai University.

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Marana, AZ 85658

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