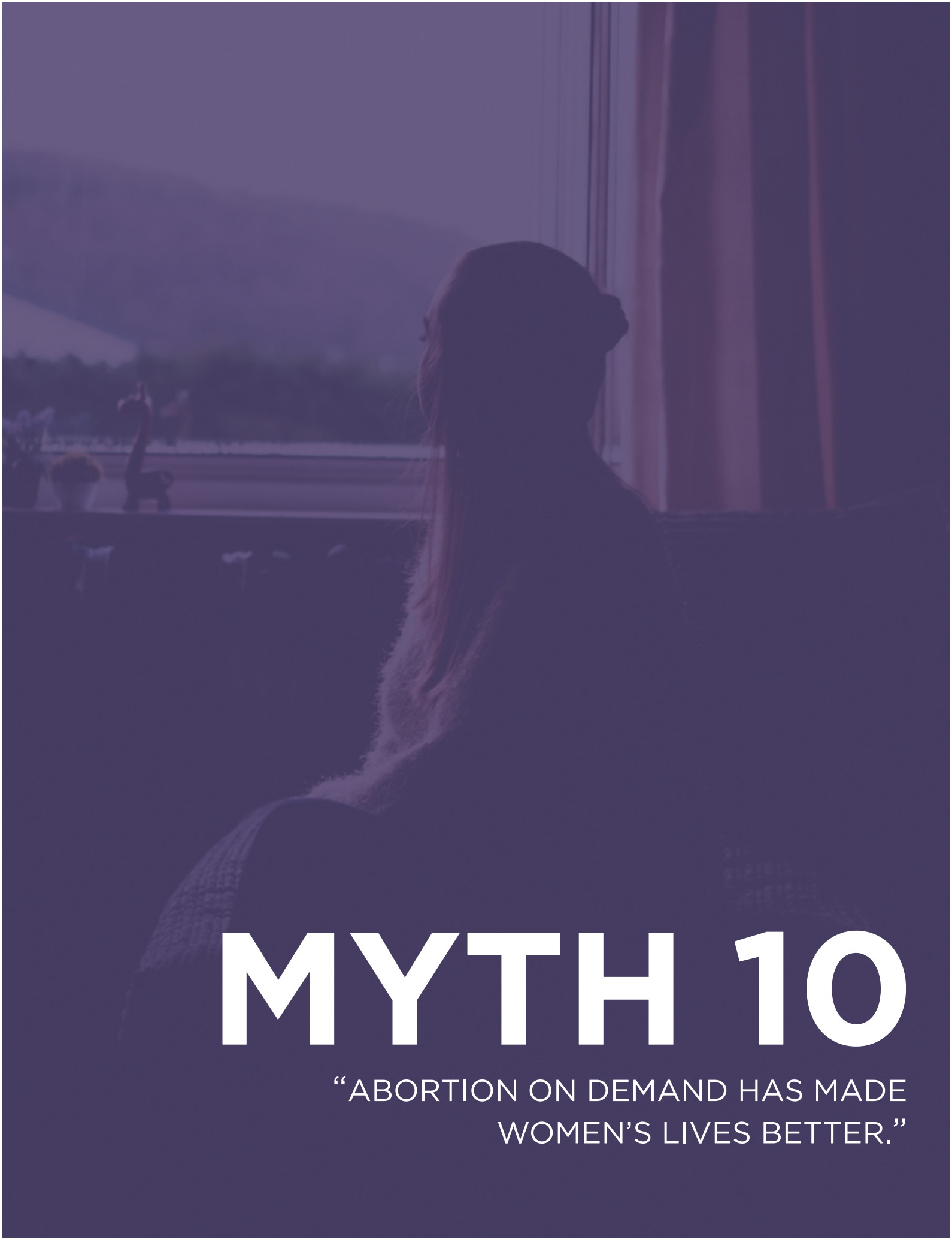


MYTH 10

"ABORTION ON DEMAND HAS MADE WOMEN'S LIVES BETTER."



MYTH #10: "ABORTION ON DEMAND HAS MADE WOMEN'S LIVES BETTER."

If women are not better off when they choose abortion, then why do we recommend, encourage, and sometimes coerce women into choosing this option?

In the past 45 years, the lives of 60 million unborn humans have been forcibly ended in our country. This number should give anyone pause, no matter their views on abortion. It has been said, "One death is a tragedy. A million is a statistic." Imagine how each abortion has impacted the woman who found herself in a situation where she felt that ending the life of her unborn child was her best, or only, option.

We frequently hear that a woman must be able to control her own body, including terminating the life of the fetus residing there, in order to control her own destiny. One abortion rights activist stated, "Abortion is necessary to free women from historically routine conscription into maternity."[131] Certainly, thinking about "**motherhood as slavery**" is a pessimistic view of a woman's unique ability to bear and nurture children, but is it true? Has the ability to terminate an undesired child led to improvements in the lives of women over the past 45 years?

By many parameters of success, of course, women's lives have improved over the last four decades. Many women have received advanced degrees and are very successful in their chosen careers. Women hold many positions of power in our government, they are presidents of many universities, and executives of many companies. **Yet, there is no direct correlation between any of these gains and legalized abortion.** Virtually all progress in legal, social, and employment rights has come about through federal or state legislation and judicial interpretation unrelated to legalized abortion. This progress includes legal protections regarding job discrimination, pregnancy discrimination, equal pay, educational equity, sexual harassment, maternity coverage, maternity leave, medical leave, domestic violence, and sexual assault.[132]

Despite these positive changes, we see that many of the **societal issues** that legalized abortion was supposed to solve have actually become more common. How might this happen? Let's examine how the unrestricted sexuality that abortion enables may harm a woman. Although sex outside of marriage is nothing new, it has definitely become more common since the "sexual revolution" of the 1960's, which coincided with the legalization of contraception and abortion. These changes reduced a woman's ability to withhold premarital sexual favors from men. Whereas once, the fear of an out of wedlock pregnancy was enough to provide a strong motivation for a couple to abstain from intercourse, now that excuse is no longer valid.

The easy access to contraception and abortion has led to a dramatic increase in **promiscuous sexual activity** with related **unintended pregnancies** and **sexually transmitted infections**. Sex while dating casually, or for recreation, has become the norm. Despite the reassurances about "safe sex," contraception frequently fails, and half of unintended pregnancies are conceived while a couple is using some method of contraception. Likewise, sexually transmitted infections (STIs) are extremely common. The CDC estimates that one in four sexually active young women has an STI, such as chlamydia or human papillomavirus.[133]

The vast majority of women (80-95 percent[134]) still desire to marry and have children.[135] Sadly, if a woman has contracted an STI such as chlamydia (of which over one million cases were reported in 2016[136]) during her years of non-monogamous sexual activity, she may have trouble conceiving a desired child later, due to tubal damage. Years spent obtaining an education and establishing a career often lead to a delay in forming a serious relationship. This may place a woman in a bind when her fertility begins to wane in her mid to late 30's. At that point there may not be a serious candidate for marriage and fatherhood in her life, so she may choose to have a child alone, or she may remain unintentionally childless.

Or, a woman may become accidentally pregnant during a casual relationship, and her boyfriend may see the ready availability of abortion as a quick fix. In the past, an accidental pregnancy often led to a couple reevaluating a superficial relationship, and more often than not, they committed to seeing the pregnancy through and raising the relationship to the next level. But with the ready accessibility of abortion, this is no longer necessary. Six hundred dollars later, the problem has been "taken care of," and the commitment is often not made. Sadly, studies show that this action often marks the end of the relationship. A woman may succumb to pressure to end a pregnancy "until a better time." But the guilt and grief that often accompany that decision are likely to tear the relationship apart.[137]



THE RHETORIC OF "HER BODY, HER CHOICE..." IS OFTEN INTERPRETED BY MEN AS "HER PROBLEM, NOT MINE..."

If a woman chooses to continue an unintended pregnancy, her boyfriend may feel he has no responsibility because she had another option but chose not to use it. The rhetoric of "her body, her choice..." is often interpreted as "her problem, not mine..." The insistence that men have no right to express opinions about the subject of abortion has likely led to many men feeling distant and unsympathetic to the plight of a pregnant woman, and also may lead them to believe they have no responsibility as a father. What was once a beautiful bonding experience for a couple has become a lonely, solitary task for many women. Society has placed the responsibility of childbearing solely on the shoulders of the mother. Men have been removed from the decision of whether to bring a child into the world, and an increase in fatherless children is the result. The dark side of women's "bodily autonomy" is isolation and loneliness for far too many women and their children.[138] [139]

One more fact to acknowledge is that sex outside of a relationship, and abortion itself, are both actions that are contrary to a woman's biology. The female body is beautifully designed to create and nurture a human life, performing a vital function without which the human species would be unable to continue. A woman's body is also hormonally predisposed to bond with the one with whom she has sexual intercourse. Pheromones and estrogen attract a couple to each other. Oxytocin and prolactin are released during the act of intercourse, resulting in the formation of an intense bond with her partner. Dopamine causes a pleasurable emotion that makes the couple want to repeat the sexual act over and over. This influences the couple to stay together and care for any children that result from their union. Denying this biology, and encouraging the participants to enjoy the act for entertainment outside of a relationship, causes harm in many ways.[140]

If there was hope that available abortion would reduce **divorce rates** by avoiding "shotgun weddings" of couples ill-suited to **marriage**, then we see that abortion did not deliver as promised. The divorce rate doubled shortly after abortion was legalized, from 2.5/1000 people in 1970, to 5/1000 in 1980.[141]

The divorce rate is finally starting to improve (it is now around 3/1000), but for a depressing reason.[142] Many young people are choosing **not to marry** instead. Marriage rates have dropped from 12/1000 in 1970, to 7/1000 in 2010. Meanwhile, **cohabitation** has increased from 500,000 to 8 million. Couples who choose to raise their children without the bond of marriage are more likely to separate, and if they do eventually marry, their divorce rates are 33 percent higher.[143]

Though abortion might be expected to lower the number of **illegitimate births**, we have actually seen the opposite. The number of births to unmarried women has increased from 10.7 percent in 1970, to 28 percent in 1990, to 40 percent in 2014.[144] We know that a child raised by a single parent suffers both short and long-term economic and psychologic disadvantages.[145] Families

headed by **single mothers** have five times the poverty rate than that of married couples. The percentage of children now living with a single parent has risen in every demographic category. The rate for black children has risen from 35 percent in 1970 to 54 percent in 2014, Hispanic children from 18 to 29 percent, white children from 10 to 19 percent, and Asian children from 10 to 13 percent.[146] Thus, the number of children living in **poverty** has increased from 15.1 percent in 1970 to 21 percent in 2014.[147]

Overall, we have seen an increase in the number of **unintended pregnancies** since abortion was legalized, and this has been particularly striking in the teen population. The number of **teen pregnancies** more than doubled from 4.9 percent in 1972 to 9.92 percent in 1990.[148] Abortion increased from 2 percent of teenagers in 1972 to 4.4 percent in 1990, while the number **of teen births** increased from 2.3 percent to 4.2 percent. Thankfully, we have seen a downward trend since then, although the U.S. still has some of the highest teen pregnancy rates in the developed world.[149]

Unfortunately, we've also seen more women **relying on abortion as a form of birth contro**l. The **repeat abortion** rate has tripled from 15 percent to 43 percent, and half of women who present for an abortion report they were not using any birth control when they became pregnant.[150]

We have also seen **domestic violence** against women rise.[151] It is estimated that three women are murdered every day in our country by their current or former partners, and that one out of four women will be the victim of domestic violence in her lifetime.[152]

Avoiding the birth of unwanted children was supposed to decrease **child abuse**. Yet, the number of reported cases of child abuse has increased tremendously, from 167,000 in 1973 to more than 3 million today.[153] Guilt, poor self-esteem, and lack of social support are common attributes in women who have had abortions and are also commonly associated with child abuse.[154]



The children who experience domestic violence may become violent themselves. The rate of **juvenile violent crime arrests** has doubled, from 215.9 arrests per 100,000 people in 1970 to 430.6 arrests per 100,000 people in 1990.[155]

Infanticide should have become nonexistent, since women could now rid themselves of unwanted infants prior to birth. Yet, rates of infanticide have increased from 4.3/100,000 in 1970 to 7.2/100,000 in 2013.[156] The last 45 years have resulted in lower childhood death rates for almost every cause, except one. **Homicide** was the only leading cause of childhood death that increased in that period, and our country ranks seventh in the world in child homicide.[157] Is it possible that our decreased respect and protection for a child in the womb has led to devaluing the lives of our born children as well?

There are many men who benefit from easy access to abortion. An abortion is the obvious way to avoid detection of an illicit sexual encounter, whether it be an **extramarital affair**, the consequences of a **power or age imbalance**, **incest**, or **sex trafficking**. A woman or a minor who receives an abortion in this situation, without any other social service intervention, has been done a great disservice. The assumption that young teenagers can and should be sexually active can prevent the discovery of incest and abuse. Abortion allows sex crimes to be covered up more easily, which can lead to the perpetrator escaping the consequences of their crime.

Ethicist Daniel Callahan summarized the response of men to readily accessible abortion succinctly: "If legal abortion has given women more choice, it has also given men more choices as well. They now have a potent new weapon in the old business of **manipulating and abandoning** women."[158]

It appears many abortions are not freely "chosen." Often the decision to terminate is influenced by **partner abandonment**, **family pressure**, or **outright coercion**. In a recent survey of post-abortive women, 58 percent said that they had their abortions in order to "make others happy," with over 28 percent saying they had the abortion because "they feared their partner would leave them" if they did not. Perhaps most heartbreaking is that 66 percent of women "said they knew in their hearts that they were making a mistake when they underwent the abortion."[159]

Sadly, the **murder of pregnant women** has become increasingly common. We can get insight into this when we consider the possible reaction of a narcissistic, violent man to an unintended pregnancy. If a woman doesn't want to have a baby, she has the choice of an abortion. If a man doesn't want a baby, he can't do anything about it. He is "stuck" with the child, child support, and the woman, possibly for the rest of his life. He may come to the conclusion that if she goes away, the problem goes away. Homicide is the leading cause of death in pregnant women.[160]

MINORITY GROUPS ARE DISPROPORTIONATELY AFFECTED BY ABORTION.

These consequences of abortion **disproportionately affect minority groups**. There is much discourse in our country today about the reasons that many young black people are suffering. It is beyond the scope of this discussion to comment on the many possible reasons for this, but let's look at some relevant demographic facts. In 1960, only 22 percent of black children were raised in single parent families. After the expansion of welfare programs, it rose to 37 percent in 1970. Today, more than 70 percent of black children are raised by only one parent, usually the mother. Although 37 percent of black families headed by a single woman live in poverty, only 8 percent headed by a married couple do.[161] One significant factor that has occurred in the time period in which we have seen the dissolution of the black family is the widespread legalization and availability of abortion.

Black women are **overrepresented in women that have abortions**. Although they represent only 12 percent of the U.S. population, they obtain 37 percent of the abortions in our country.[162] Half of all pregnancies black women conceive are aborted. Black women are also more likely to have a late abortion. The risk to a black woman continues beyond the current pregnancy. Black women are more likely to have premature babies, develop breast cancer, and experience mortality in pregnancy, all of which have been linked to a history of abortion.[163]

The same groups that noisily object to government regulation of abortion are usually insistent that the government sponsor social programs to enhance the well-being of the groups previously discussed: minorities, those in poverty, and broken families. Would it be possible to consider that the great experiment of abortion on demand in our country has worsened the conditions for these unfortunate Americans and support walking back this policy for the good of women and our country?

To close, here are some eloquent thoughts by two women who have bravely taken a deep look into the issue of abortion. Frederic Mathewes-Green, a pro-life feminist has stated: "For the question remains, do women want abortion? Not like she wants a Porsche or an ice cream cone. Like an animal caught in a trap, trying to gnaw off its own leg, a woman who seeks abortion is trying to escape a desperate situation by an act of violence and self-loss. Abortion is not a sign that women are free, but a sign that they are desperate."[164]

Likewise, pro-choice advocate Naomi Wolf has been willing to look at some of the complexities that legal abortion has created. Here is an outline of some of her more compelling statements (but consider committing the time to read her full essay). She takes pro-choice feminists to task for "refusing to look at abortion within a moral framework … We stand in jeopardy of losing what can only be called our souls … We risk becoming precisely what our critics charge us with being: callous, selfish and casually destructive men and women who share a cheapened view of human life … Some feminists developed a rhetoric that defined the unwanted fetus as at best valueless: at worst an adversary, a 'mass of dependent protoplasm'. Yet that has left us with a bitter legacy. For when we defend abortion rights by emptying the act of moral gravity, we find ourselves cultivating a hardness of heart … If we avidly cultivate love for the ones we bring to term, and 'get over' our love for the ones we don't, do we not risk developing a hydroponic view of babies—and turn them into a product we can cultivate for our convenience? … How can we charge that it is vile and repulsive for pro-lifers to brandish vile and repulsive images, if the images are real? To insist that the truth is in poor taste is the very height of hypocrisy …"[165]

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