

Pro-life doesn't mean anti-woman

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After a heated debate on campus and in the media, Carleton University's student association decided this week to limit the activity of pro-life groups on campus. Students spoke out in favour of freedom of speech or in favour of women's rights, but this is a false opposition.

There's no battle between feminists and freedom. Being pro-life is a distinctly pro-woman stand; it is only for a lack of freedom of speech in Canada today that the debate is rarely framed this way.

The abortion debate is only partly a question of rights. It is, more often, a question of life. With each repetition of "my body, my choice," women's rights to complete information, to intellectual integrity, to the scientific roots of life, furthermore to her own physical and mental health, are denied.

Without consideration for the status of the unborn fetus, there simply is no abortion debate. If the fetus is not a person, who cares? But if it is, then the Constitution applies, we are faced with competing rights and there are a number of other considerations that are admissible, one of which is the fetus's right to life, liberty and security of the person. But how many of us frame the debate this way?

Not many. In high school and university, in the media and the movies, almost everywhere a woman turns, women's rights are pitted against the pro-life position.

If abortion is strictly a question of "a woman's right to choose," who could possibly be against it? But if abortion actually hurts women, precisely because the choice revolves around taking human life, does it then contribute or detract from women's rights? And if women don't know what the debate is, how are their rights served at all?

Seeing an abortion in real life or on video prior to having one is not something that many women get to witness. Planned Parenthood says it won't resort to "hysterical" videos like that. That's like telling a student who wishes to learn about China and has an opportunity to travel there that she is actually better off staying home and reading her Lonely Planet.

Ask Planned Parenthood Ottawa if the fetus is a person and it's not likely they will answer. This very question was posed at a debate that preceded the student body's resolution to limit pro-life groups.

Planned Parenthood had not come there to debate whether the fetus was a person, they said. They had come only to discuss whether abortion should be made illegal.

Fair enough. But it shows a pro-choice side that is out of touch with the real issue. Why are they in a position to counsel young women when unprepared to comment publicly on the heart of the matter?

We regulate any number of procedures without claiming that those regulations limit human rights. Who would claim, for example, that telling a woman she can't have an abortion while under the influence of drugs is an infringement of her rights? This is the rule when an addict, 18 weeks pregnant, requests an abortion.

Women must be clean for a number of hours before the abortion. In a case in British Columbia, a woman was not able to keep clean for the requisite hours, the abortion was denied and the baby was born. The irony is had she

been able to keep clean the addicted baby would have died in the womb. How would this abortion serve this woman's rights? How does the absence of one detract from them?

This is but one example of how abortion turns a blind eye to the real problems women face. In so many cases, the pregnancy is not the problem.

Asking why a woman wants an abortion highlights the real problem. Is it because her parents will throw her out of the home? Is it because she was raped? Is it because her culture demands she produce a boy, yet she knows she is carrying a girl?

In each of these cases, abortion does not address the problem, but sweeps it under the carpet. Abortion clinics can't ask the whys of it all: That's an infringement of women's rights -- the unalienable right to suffer in silence.

Pro-lifers support women, not abortion. Freedom of information has been curtailed such that no one understands how this could work. If abortion is not about another person, as well as the woman, none of this debate matters. If the fetus is a person too, then offering women one life-and-death choice without first fully discussing what is at stake is a denial of women's rights beyond comprehension.

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