



Choices that must be made for choice :: Tortured Torsion By Jason Damron

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It is a strange feeling to critique a movement so fundamental to the lives of so many women I know and love. The right to choose an abortion, plain and simple, is the elemental right that has emancipated women from a system in the United States that was wholly unfair and knottily tied to certain moralities that all women most assuredly did not share. The Roe decision was the only way out of a system so rotten that it refused to save women, dying for their choice not to have a child. The decision was essentially a confirmation of the myriad of sexual and reproductive choices that women make on a daily basis and a confirmation of control over one's own destiny. Alas, pregnancies still happen—miracles and disasters.

How is it that Roe v. Wade is now more threatened than ever? How can a more secular and more liberalized America be rejecting "choice" in ever more numbers? How can the recent "partial birth abortion" ban (really a ruse to rollback abortion rights) pass with a resounding majority of America's governmental representatives? Some would say the answer is simple: America is governed by white, Christian men intent on imposing their will on women everywhere. Yet hyperbole is moving pro-choice movements nowhere. Ask any choice activist, anywhere—a fear of the end of reproductive freedom is palpable.

There is a soul searching in the pro-choice movement that painfully, ironically comes from the evacuating of the 'soul' from the discourse of the movement. The pro-choice movement is now caught in the tightening specificity of legal language to describe pregnancy, the process of choice and the women themselves. Many women I know made the choice to have an abortion, not because they were assured by the fact the fetus was "only" fetal tissue, but because after intense soul-searching they found a decision they could survive with. It was not about fetal tissue; it was about a future child. No matter how much the pro-choice movement ignores this (at their peril) it is central to the choices of reproduction.

The pro-life movement, then, perversely proffers what pro-choice movements have ignored—a language that considers the fetal tissue, the woman, and the child. This is not to say that women should be subservient to their reproductive capability, but that a movement of reproductive choice must not hide from the results of pregnancies not ended in abortion. The pro-choice movement, as a result, is on the verge of finding itself emptied of meaning and is desperately searching for a way to endear their message to the most lackadaisical of feminists – the young women under twenty-five who would never call themselves feminists in the first place.

As a male, I find myself in a precarious position offering advice to women about social movements concerning their most intimate decisions. But as a male, it would be a lie to say that I have not been there in the most intimate moments leading to such decisions. I have sat in warmly glowing bedrooms where the other decisions were made. And I have sat in cool, white lobbies distractedly reading People magazine where the decisions were made behind closed doors and we all pretended that it was solely my girlfriend's choice. This was a lie. Both she and I knew our truth; I shed as many tears for her as she had for me. While I understand that ultimately she would have the final say over the decisions regarding her body, it cannot be denied that this was a physical and emotional collaboration from the beginning. As I sat in the lobby staring through tears at glossed pages, I hoped she could feel me holding her hand.

I will never waver in my support of a woman's right to make her own reproductive choices. This, however, does not lessen my concern for all women and men and others whose reproductive choices are now represented by a movement in need of change. There is a desperate overhaul needed in Planned Parenthood, National Abortion Right's Activist League and other organizations. This overhaul must include an emphasis on treating the whole woman, and her decisions, and the important people in her life with equality and empathy. It must also include an outreach effort that crystallizes in the public mind that the right to an abortion and other reproductive options is a fundamental human right, not the eccentricity of feminist activists. The pro-choice movement, as well, must align itself with other civil rights organizations, queer organizations, willing religious organizations

and certain men's movements to illuminate that the right to an abortion is critical and essential to each organization's goal of equality and liberation.

On April 25, 2004 the largest reproductive choice rally in the nation's history will be on the National Mall in the nation's capital. Originally, the rally and protest was scheduled as the Choice March. Then, after disagreements among the organizers, it was the Freedom of Choice March. Now, it is officially Saving Women's Lives. These changes are a reflection that my critiques are not unique in their intent. My hope is that the reproductive choice movement recognizes, before it is too late, that they are also saving, altering, and impacting the lives of so many others, and they must begin to be radically inclusive in ways so far unrealized. If not, I fear we will all be back in the cities' alleys, suffering at the hands of a tyrannical moralistic minority and the do-nothing disenchantment of a youthful middle class.

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