

● ● ● | **Psychological Aspects
of Social Issues**

Chapter 8
Abortion

1

● ● ● | **Outline/Overview**

- Opinions/Attitudes
- Biology of pregnancy and development
- Personhood
- Moral positions
- Readings
- Current research on outcomes and correlates of abortion

5

● ● ● | **Biology of pregnancy/
development**

- Fertilization
 - Sperm penetrates ovum
 - 46 Chosomes
 - 23 pairs
 - 1 of ea pair from each cell



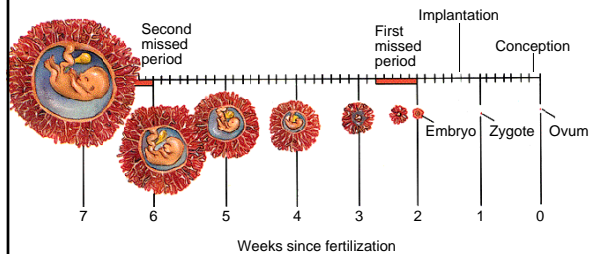
8

Zygote

- First two weeks following fertilization
- Initial division, about 30 hour process
- Quickly accelerates
- Day 4 – 60-70 cells, hollow fluid filled, called _____.
- Differentiation starts
- Implantation – 7th – 9th day
- As many as 30% do not implant

9

Immediately following fertilization

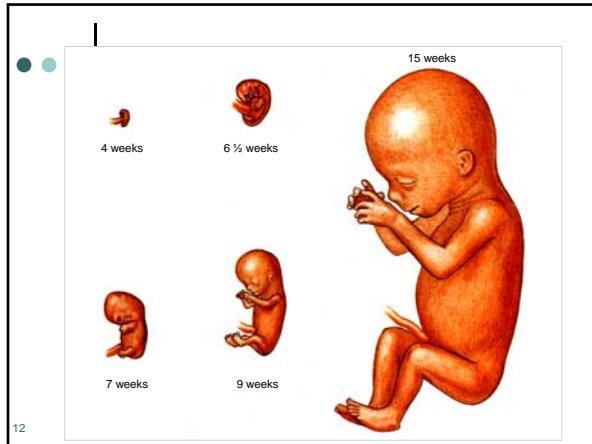


10

Embryonic Stage

- 3-8 weeks
- Groundwork for all body structures
- Vulnerable to the effects of teratogens, such as?
- Embryonic disc forms 3 layers of cells
 - Ectoderm, Mesoderm, and Endoderm
- By end of the 1st month, ¼ in long
- By end of 2nd month, 1 in. long

11



Fetal stage

- 9th week until the end
- During the third month – muscles, organs, and CNS become organized and connected
- By 12th week, genitals well developed-sex can be determined
- This is end of first trimester

Fetal stage - Second trimester

- 17-20 weeks – quickening, what is this?
- Organs very well developed
- By the end of trimester, most neurons are in place
- 20 week old fetus-stimulated and irritated by sounds
- sight has started to emerge
- generally not able to survive if born now

● ● ● | Fetal stage - Third trimester

- Viability is reached
 - Around 22-26th week
- Born between 7th and 8th month, still likely to have trouble breathing
 - Alveoli not yet ready to inflate
- Time awake increases toward the end of this period
- Personality begins to emerge
- React to sound, show preferences

15

● ● ● | What is a “person”?

- **Biological category:** homo sapiens
- **Ethical status:** moral agent
- **Political status:** legal recognition

18

● ● ● | Moral positions on abortion

- **Conservative:** abortion is never morally justified or, at most, justifiable only to save the mother's life
- **Liberal:** abortion is always morally justifiable, regardless of the reasons or the time in fetal development
- **Intermediate or moderate:** abortion is morally acceptable up to a certain point in fetal development and/or with some reasons, though not all

19

● ● ● | “An Almost Absolute Value in History”
John T. Noonan

- Abortion is always wrong, except to save the life of the mother
- A fetus is a “human” from when?
- Based on what?
- Do you agree with the idea that considering the unborn a person from conception poses fewer problems than alternate views?
- Biological vs. Psychological Personhood

20

● ● ● | “A Defense of Abortion”
Judith Jarvis Thomson

- Assume the anti-abortion premise: that fetus is a person from the moment of conception
 - What are the consequences for abortion rights if we assume that premise?
 - Even if the fetus is a person from the moment of conception, are all abortions necessarily wrong?
- Focus on rights (not consequences) of fetus, of mother, of third-parties

21

● ● ● | “On the Moral and Legal Status of Abortion”
Mary Ann Warren

- Defense of the extreme liberal position
- Critique of both Noonan and Thomson
- The fetus is not a person and thus abortion is not immoral
- Defends her position against criticism that it permits infanticide

22

● ● ● | “Why Abortion Is Immoral”
Don Marquis

- Central thesis is that, except in rare cases, abortion is seriously immoral.
- Rights/rationality as grounds for a “right to life” fail
- Loss of one’s future is crucial
- Several implications support: 1. not only for humans; 2. nonhuman animals; 3. active euthanasia; & 4. infanticide and killing children prima facie wrong

24

● ● ● | Marquis (cont.)

- Loss of life = greatest misfortune we can suffer
- Morally permissible abortions, extremely rare
- Counterexamples to idea that mental activity is necessary to be victimized
- Avoids equivocation, doesn’t rest on religious claims, avoids speciesism, compatible with euthanasia and contraception

25

● ● ● | Current research on abortion and outcomes

- Prevalence/Safety
 - Differences between medical and surgical
- Psychological Consequences
- Summary

26

Prevalence

- o 1955 birth cohort in South Australia, abortion legal throughout their entire reproductive lifetime, 29%.
- o Higher rates for later birth cohorts
- o US rates, over 40% of women
- o 1998 WHO estimate, 50 million worldwide yearly, 20 million unsafe
- o 80,000 die yearly

27

Recent Headlines/Data

January 19, 2008: Scranton Times

Report shows U.S. abortion rate at lowest level since early '70s

BY DAVID CRARY
ASSOCIATED PRESS

NEW YORK — The number of abortions in the United States fell to 1.2 million in 2005, down 25 percent from the all-time high of 1.6 million in 1990 and dropping the abortion rate to its lowest level since 1974, according to report issued Thursday.

The Guttmacher Institute, which surveyed abortion providers nationwide, said there likely were several reasons for the decline, including more effective use of contraceptives, lower levels of unintended

pregnancy and greater difficulty obtaining abortions in some parts of the country. The institute's president, Sharon Camp, noted that despite the drop, more than one in five pregnancies ended in abortion in 2005.

"Our policymakers at the state and federal levels need to understand that behind virtually every abortion is an unintended pregnancy so we must redouble our efforts towards prevention, through better access to contraception," Ms. Camp said.

The Guttmacher Institute supports abortion rights, yet both sides in the debate on the

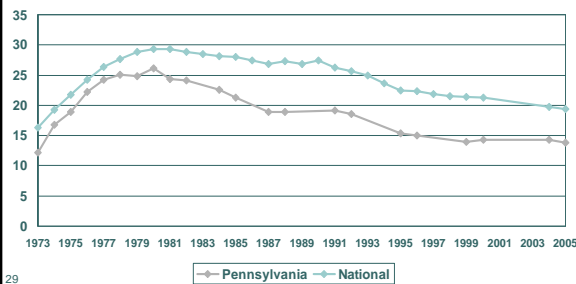
issue consider its abortion surveys the most comprehensive in the United States because they encompass California, the most populous state. California state agencies do not collect abortion data to contribute to federal surveys.

According to the Guttmacher data, the number of abortions declined by 8 percent between 2000 and 2005, from 1.31 million to 1.21 million — the lowest total since the 1.18 million abortions tallied in 1976.

The 2005 abortion rate of 19.4 per 1,000 women aged 15 to 44 was the lowest since 1974, when it was 19.3.

Abortion rates in the United States and Pennsylvania, 1973-2005 – Guttmacher Institute

Abortions per 1,000 women aged 15-44, by state of occurrence



29



Complications/ consequences by method

- No evidence of increased problems w/future pregnancy w/RU-486
- Women generally satisfied w/medical method
- No difference in psychological consequences by method, medical vs. surgical

30



Psychological Consequences

- NLSY data – unintended pregnancy resolved by abortion associated with increased risk for substance abuse.
- Abortion group, more likely to be in high risk range for depression
- Underreporting likely, rates only about 40% of # expected

31



Psychological (cont.)

- New Zealand Study, n = about 500
- By age 25, 41% had been pregnant at least once, 74 had obtained an abortion at least once.
- 90 of 422 pregnancies were terminated
- Underreporting likely, rates at 81%

32



Psychological

- Abortion group more likely to have:
 - Major depression
 - Suicidal ideation
 - Illicit drug dependence
 - Higher number of MH problems
 - A university degree
 - Professional qualification

33



Subsequent parenting

- Little systematic difference between groups
 - Youngest group of first born children received less emotional support
 - 5-9 year-olds had higher levels of behavior problems
 - No differences in levels of cognitive stimulation provided to any group

34



Final thoughts

- Emotional turmoil for many women
 - Can be due to a variety of factors
- Large scale and reliable studies have not supported the idea of dire, long term consequences.
- Greatest anguish, generally during decision making, later regret usually mild compared to relief

35



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36
