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## **Empty Wombs**

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There are millions of women who reject the notion that abortion rights lie at the base of women's empowerment. For us, all the implications of "choice" resound an empty echo of deception.

The women's movement has completely lost touch with our feminist foremothers, the original progressive leaders who established the Equal Rights Amendment. These women had strong pro-life beliefs.

Alice Paul, author of the original Equal Rights Amendment, referred to abortion as "the ultimate exploitation of women."

I have counseled thousands of women whose lives have been impacted by the experience of abortion – women who suffer the repercussions of a cruel and degrading procedure which many describe as more violent and brutal than rape. There is grief, sadness, guilt, shame and anger. They have learned to numb themselves with alcohol and drugs, or master their trauma through repetitions of it. Some reenact their trauma through promiscuity and repeat abortions, trapped in traumatic cycles of abandonment, rejection, a sense of helplessness, and abuse.

Others stuff their feelings through eating disorders, depression, anxiety, and thoughts of suicide. Some have suffered permanent physical and reproductive damage from abortion, which rendered them unable to have children in the future. Women who have suffered the loss of their children by abortion are the victims of unspeakable trauma – a hideous unspoken pain. Abortion hurts women.

### **Promoting the lies**

The National Organization for Women has enshrined abortion as a fundamental right, instead of an emotionally-wrenching act of destruction.

Legalizing abortion has not taken away the trauma of abortion as a death experience. Now they promise that taking a "simple pill" will make it even easier. Even with RU-486, passing the tiny dead body of one's child in the privacy of your own home will not end the nightmare that abortion is for women. Tragically, their homes will now become the setting connected to their trauma.

Women won't have the luxury of using the normal coping mechanisms, like avoidance of abortion clinics and doctors, to distance themselves from the painful memories of abortion. The traumatic scene will be accessible each time a woman uses her bathroom. What will become of the sanctuary of home when it becomes a trigger for traumatic memories and perceptions?

Likewise, the psychodynamics of the act of ingesting a poisonous medicine will lead to eating disorders and other psychological problems. It is a signal of injustice and desperation when a woman is forced to take the life of her unborn child.

### **Realities of abortion**

Most women who undergo abortions do so because they are desperate and feel there is no choice.

The idea that abortion is a fundamental right, or the only way that women can care for themselves, does not reflect the way that women actually experience abortion. It is more inherently felt as a violation of oneself rather than a caring and nurturing of oneself.

NOW ignores the fact that women are traumatized by abortion. They blatantly deny that breast cancer is linked to terminating pregnancy. An extreme example of their powerful denial is seen with the tragedy of partial-birth abortion. The women's movement would rather see a fully-developed baby (many of them little girls) partially delivered, stabbed in the back of the skull with scissors so her brain may be sucked out with a vacuum. They cannot see the grotesque reality of the D and X procedure as a chilling method of infanticide. I ask you, who is the radical extremist?

### **Fundamental failures**

Justice for women and mothers cannot be built on the bloody foundation of their dead children.

Feminism has failed to achieve its goal because it has aborted the traditional virtues of women.

Far from achieving liberation, the “reproductive freedom” gained through abortion has only anesthetized and deadened the nurturing souls of women.

There is a concealed facet to radical feminism that encourages oppression of women’s reproductive lives. It does little to affirm the dignity of women – cutting off their sexuality from the intrinsic act of procreation. The “safe sex” message reduces women to mere machines of pleasure, with no connection to the emotional and spiritual forces that are intrinsic to women’s identity and concepts of self-preservation and nurturing of offspring.

### **Restoring the promise**

True equality for women cannot exist until our reproductive capacity is valued, and the children we create are cherished by society and the men who father them. Violence against women will never end until society recognizes the benefits of fashioning life. Men and women must reclaim the life-giving, sacred nature of committed sexual love. Safe sex is a counterfeit lie that threatens women and their children with violence, abandonment and poverty.

To set us at war with our own bodies and children causes a great disconnection. When our culture sympathizes with the desperate plight of women dealing with an unplanned pregnancy by endorsing a violent solution, it does little to affirm the strength and worth of women or to restore their dignity.

It is time to look at women’s true experience of abortion – not in fear, judgment, or denial, but with the purpose of advancing the true feminist claim to who we are as women – life-givers, creative and compassionate nurturers.

### **Healing the damage**

There is a need to promote and provide non-violent solutions that do not compromise our physical and psychological integrity.

Since Rachel’s Vineyard retreats for healing after abortion have spread throughout the country, I know that there is, indeed, a widespread need for this healing. Last year there were 100 retreats offered all over the United States, from Alaska to Florida. I have also received email from all over the world, from women in Australia, Portugal, Africa, and Japan. Women who have been victimized by abortion are breaking out of their shackles of shame and grief. They are talking about the pain. They are embracing healing and hope.

We must struggle to release ourselves from the oppressive, dualistic rhetoric of abortion rights. The rhetoric which splits mind from body, sexuality from procreation, pleasure from loving passion, and mother from child must

cease. An ideology that retreats from the illegitimate voice of grief is struggling to be recognized, to be given a safe haven to find its voice.

### **Learning from mistakes**

Since many of our sisters have suffered in the aftermath of abortion, it is important to accept their experiences with tolerance and sympathy. They have something compelling to teach us about female oppression, discrimination, and a society that rejects women and the children of their wombs; about a planet where women are forced to be flattened in the name of freedom; about a tyranny that violates female instinct, femininity and the woman's unique role in procreation.

Our energies are truly needed for other battle: the protection of children, aid to those in crisis, support for victims of violence, adequate health care, stiff laws to enforce financial support from men for the children they have fathered, a more equal sharing of parenting responsibilities, support in the work place for pregnant women, accessible day care and prenatal care, housing and day care for women on college campuses, and a nursing room in every corporation and university. Progress in these areas would help women gain true equality.

Our children should feel they have a right to exist, regardless of the problems and circumstances of their conception. Society must learn to make room for its children with love and compassion, and with sacrifice. Children should not be considered disposable possessions, for in our children lies our future.

### **Time for decisions**

Will the future hold more abortions and the carving out of our insides? The cutting away at feminine souls? The suctioning out of our hearts? Will there be more discrimination, violence, self-destruction, despair, and hopelessness? More castrations of our maternity, like ancient tribal mutilations? Surely the feminine heart and mind can turn away from this painful desecration of our wombs and find solutions that help to build a culture of life.

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