

**WOMEN'S RESPONSE TO  
ECTOGENESIS,  
AND THE RELEVANCE OF SEVERANCE  
ABORTION THEORY**

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**18 December 1992**

Submitted in fulfilment of the requirements of the degree of Master of Bioethics,  
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## SUMMARY

Forty-five (45) Australian women were interviewed to investigate the validity of Singer and Wells' speculation about women's response to ectogenesis and to explore women's moral construction of abortion. The data shows that the incorrect projection made by Singer and Wells of women's response to ectogenesis is grounded in the inadequate understanding "severance" theorists have of women's abortion morality. While women in favour and women opposed to abortion rights have different views about the morality of women who choose abortion, they agree on the moral unacceptability of a woman choosing to evacuate her fetus to an ectogenetic womb. Where they disagree, however, is on what constitutes a responsible reaction by a woman, or what precisely a good mother *does*, when confronted with an unwanted pregnancy. For women in favour of abortion rights, abortion can sometimes constitute a morally responsible reaction by the woman to unwanted pregnancy, whereas for women opposed to abortion rights, the only morally responsible reaction a woman can have to unwanted pregnancy is to decide to gestate, raise and bear the fetus and the child it will become. Where both groups of women agree, however, is that adoption and ectogenesis constitute an abandonment by the woman of her responsibility for her fetus, and are thus actions that would be rejected by a good mother. An argument is made in favour of a reconceptualisation by ethicists of abortion morality based on the lack of relevance of much current theory to women's perspective and needs.

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## **STATEMENT**

I, Leslie Cannold, swear that to the best of my knowledge and belief, this thesis contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university and contains no material previously published or written by another person, except when due reference is made in the text of the thesis.

Signed on the 18th day of December 1992

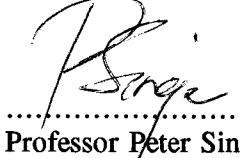


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Leslie Cannold

## SUPERVISOR STATEMENT

I, Peter Singer, certify that the work in this thesis was carried out entirely by Leslie Cannold, that this thesis is properly presented and *prima facie* worthy of examination. I also certify that the length of the thesis is appropriate to the topic and the prescribed weighting of the thesis.

Signed on the 18th day of December 1992

  
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Professor Peter Singer

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

First and foremost, I would like to thank my supervisor Professor Peter Singer. His intellectual honesty provided the necessary atmosphere for me to develop the ideas - some of which challenge his own - contained in this thesis. For this, and his wise and considered advise regarding the mechanics of putting it all down on paper, I am grateful.

I would also like to thank, in no particular order, Dr Karen Dawson, Dr Neil Campbell and Dr Victor Yu for assisting me to understand the complexities involved in the creation and preservation of young human life. I am grateful also to Dr Justin Oakley, Dr Michael Smith, Ray Langton, Lynn Gillam and Deborah Zion for helping to clarify my thoughts during the analyses and writing-up of the findings. I am also indebted to my husband, Dean McDonald, for walking the dogs, cleaning the house, making dinner and often taking me out for it when too many arduous days and nights at the computer precluded my being of any use regarding these tasks.

Last but not least, I would like to thank the women who so enthusiastically gave of their time to participate in this project. Of course, without them, none of this would have been possible.

## **Introduction**

### **WHERE WE ARE NOW**

In their 1985 book *The Reproduction Revolution*, Peter Singer and Deane Wells speculate that the advent of ex utero gestation - ectogenesis - could resolve the conflict currently surrounding abortion. This paper reports on research conducted to investigate the accuracy of this claim as it pertains to women. Forty five (45) women of varying ages, socio-economic backgrounds and political leanings were interviewed to ascertain their responses to ectogenesis, and what these responses said about women's moral construction of psycho-social abortion. The results undermine the theoretical basis upon which abortion rights are grounded in an influential strain of English-speaking ethical theory, indicating the vulnerability of much ethical argument in favour and opposed to a women's right to abortion<sup>1</sup>.

What must be understood is that Singer and Wells' speculation about the end of the abortion conflict is the result of logically sound extrapolation from an influential strain of English-speaking moral theory about abortion, which I shall henceforth refer to as

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<sup>1</sup> Discussion of abortion has evolved to the point where the use of the word "baby" or "fetus", "pro-life" or "pro-choice" indicates sympathy for one or the other side of the argument. In this paper I have opted for the description of "fetus" when the life remains within the woman's body, and baby when it is outside. The terms "opposed to abortion rights" and "in favour of abortion rights", and in later chapters "conservative" and "liberal" women have been used for those who label themselves "pro-life" and "pro-choice" respectively. These choices were made in the admittedly futile hope of offending no one, and the more realistic one that whatever offense is caused will be evenly distributed amongst those on both sides of the controversy.

"severance"<sup>2</sup> theory. The concern raised by the current findings is the manner in which severance theory has misunderstood women's construction of abortion morality, and has thus led to inaccurate suggestions regarding women's response to ectogenesis. The significance of the findings are three-fold. To the policy-maker, they offer the first empirical data about women's concerns about ectogenesis - a technology likely to become reality in the future. To moral theorists, they offer an example of an alternative methodology for the construction of ethical problems, one that promises more relevant solutions to the problems faced by people in their everyday lives. Thirdly, to those concerned with the stagnation of the moral debate about abortion, the words of the women recorded here offer a fresh insight into the moral issues involved for women in deciding the fate of an unwanted pregnancy; one that might rekindle useful debate in an area where solidified positions have for too long stifled constructive exchange and conciliation.

### **THE REALITY OF ECTOGENESIS**

Infertility technology like IVF and the lowering age of viability<sup>3</sup> have already made ectogenesis a limited reality. The knowledge necessary for very early *ex utero* human development has and will continue to be acquired by scientists working towards increasing the success rate of IVF and related infertility technologies. Current efforts in this area are being directed towards increasing the number of viable embryos created *in vitro* for transfer to women undergoing infertility treatment by improving the culture fluids in which the embryos are created and developed. While the current

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<sup>2</sup> An explanation of severance theory will be provided further on in this chapter.

<sup>3</sup> Viability is typically described as the potential of the fetus to be born alive, and to survive independently of its mother - albeit with artificial aid.

intent of the experimentation is directed towards higher IVF success rates, it is clear that the knowledge gained could also be applied to sustaining very early human development *in vitro* with the goal of partial or total ectogenesis.

On the other end of the gestational continuum are the neonatal intensive care units across the developed world that bring premature babies to term inside high tech incubators (or ectogenetic wombs); babies whose prospect for life was minimal only a decade ago. Whereas twenty years ago little could be done for babies born under 1000g, today doctors are able to ensure the survival<sup>4</sup> of many infants born weighing only 500 grams, or just 23 weeks old<sup>5</sup>. Some neonatologists have suggested that over the next decade, it will become possible to ensure the survival of babies born after only 16 to 18 weeks in the maternal womb<sup>6</sup>.

Further, despite the fact that funding is not made available in many countries to scientists working directly on the development of ectogenetic technology, there are some exceptions to this trend. In 1988, for example, a group of Italian scientists reported their successful incubation of an embryo for 52 hours in an artificial womb constructed of the extracted uteri of women with cancer. The scientists wrote that their

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<sup>4</sup> This figure is a survival rate only and does not reflect the high percentage of extremely low birthweight infants who suffer some form of physical, psychological, social and/or intellectual disablement as a result of their extreme prematurity. (See, for example, Teplin, et al. "Neurodevelopmental, health and growth status at age 6 years of children with birth weights less than 1001 grams" in *The Journal of Pediatrics* 118 (1991), pp. 768-77, and Saigal et al. "Cognitive abilities and school performance of extremely low birth weight children and matched term control children at age 8 years: A regional study" in *The Journal of Pediatrics* 118 (1991), pp. 751-760.

<sup>5</sup> The usual duration of a pregnancy is 40 weeks, and typical birthweights around 3500g.

<sup>6</sup> Campbell, Dr Neil, Personal Communication. Julien Murphy, a bioethicist, has written that neonatal technology is advanced enough currently to enable "the maintenance of fetuses - some as early as sixteen weeks or as small as two hundred grams - in incubators." Unfortunately, Murphy does not source this claim, and I have been unable to confirm it. See Murphy, J. "Is Pregnancy Necessary? Feminist Concerns About Ectogenesis" in H. Bequaert Holmes and L. Purdy (eds) *Feminist Perspectives in Medical Ethics* (USA: Hypatia Inc., 1992), p. 184.

study was undertaken to "...obtain the first early human pregnancy *in vitro* because future complete ectogenesis should not be ruled out".<sup>7</sup> More recently, Japanese scientists incubated a partially developed goat kid from 120 days (the equivalent of the 20th to 24th gestational week of a human fetus) until it was ready to be born 17 days later. Despite obvious developmental problems with the resulting kid<sup>8</sup>, the scientists were pleased with their results, making it likely that such work will continue in the future.

### ***CONSERVATIVE AND LIBERAL/FEMINIST MORAL PERSPECTIVES ON ABORTION***

The conservative position on abortion is simple and unambiguous. Adherents decry abortion as murder because they believe that a fetus, as either a human being or a potential human being, has a right to life. Because the right to life is denied the fetus by abortion, the procedure is considered to be morally wrong.

One strain of the liberal and feminist argument<sup>9</sup> made in favour of a women's right to choose claims that abortion is justified only as a severance procedure. Severance

<sup>7</sup> Bulletti, et al. "Early human pregnancy *in vitro* utilizing an artificially perfused uterus" (*Fertility and Sterility*, 49:6 1988), p. 991.

<sup>8</sup> It was unable to stand or breath by itself, a consequence of the sedatives administered to keep it from swallowing the "amniotic fluid" in its gestational sac. See Hadfield, P. "Japanese pioneers raise kid in rubber womb" (*New Scientist*, 25 April 1992), p. 5.

<sup>9</sup> Not all moral theorists in favour of abortion rights adopt the position that abortion is justified only as a severance procedure. Michael Tooley, Peter Singer and Jonathan Glover, for instance, argue that because the fetus (and in the case of Tooley and Singer, the infant) lacks the attributes required for "personhood", the destruction of the fetus through abortion is morally permissible. Ethicists like Gerald Paske, Stephen Ross, Catriona McKenzie and Rosalind Hursthouse all make arguments supporting the morality of abortion in some circumstances based either on a notion of an individual's autonomous right not to be a parent (Paske, Ross and McKenzie) or the virtuous nature of the woman seeking the termination (Hursthouse). The work of most of this second group of authors will be discussed more fully in Chapter 6.

theorists<sup>10</sup> argue, in other words, that abortion is justified because the woman's right to bodily autonomy - to "control her own body"<sup>11</sup> - overrides any right<sup>12</sup> a fetus might have to life.

Severance theorists have argued that were it possible for the mother to exercise her rights to control her body without infringing on any right to life held by the fetus, she would have no right to cause the fetus's death. The implication of this position is that if fetal evacuation is possible, classical abortion (where the fetus dies) is impermissible. Judith Jarvis Thomson's view on this point, which utilises her well-known violinist analogy, is typical:

...while I am arguing for the permissibility of abortion in some cases, I am not arguing for the right to secure the death of the unborn child...I have argued that you are not morally required to spend nine months in bed, sustaining the life of the violinist; but to say this is by no means to say that if, when you unplug yourself, there is a miracle and he survives, you then have a right to turn round and slit his throat<sup>13</sup>.

Similarly, Christine Overall, who explicitly recognises that "...in the future, expulsion from the uterus will ordinarily not result in the death of the embryo/fetus"<sup>14</sup> contends

<sup>10</sup> Amongst the ranks of severance theorists are Mary Anne Warren, Judith Jarvis Thomson, Christine Overall, Paul Ramsey, Alan Donagan and Sissela Bok.

<sup>11</sup> "Our Bodies, Our Choice" is a well-known slogan from the feminist political movement in favour of abortion rights. The ethical notion of bodily autonomy on which the slogan draws can be found in a number of liberal philosophical arguments in favour of abortion rights - some explicitly feminist, others not. See footnote 9 for examples of both sorts.

<sup>12</sup> This point has been argued with the right to life of the fetus both accepted and rejected as a premise.

<sup>13</sup> Thomson, J.J. "A Defence of Abortion" in P. Singer (ed) *Applied Ethics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), p. 56.

<sup>14</sup> Overall, C. *Ethics and Human Reproduction: a feminist analysis* (USA: Allan & Unwin, 1987), p. 70.

that "The pregnant woman (or anyone else, e.g., a physician) has no right to kill the embryo/fetus"<sup>15</sup>.

### ***CONSERVATIVE AND SEVERANCE THEORISTS' VIEWS OF ECTOGENESIS***

As Singer and Wells point out, the logic of the conservative position dictates a welcoming attitude towards ectogenesis:

Ectogenesis could at some future time make right-to-life organizations drop their objections to abortion; for it is only our inability to keep early fetuses alive that makes abortion synonymous with the violation of any right to life that the fetus may have<sup>16</sup>.

Thus, because the primary and often sole objection raised by conservative philosophers to abortion is that it is a violation of fetal rights to life, a technology that enables this objection to be answered should engender conservative support.

In the same way, the fact that an ectogenetic womb would enable a woman to exercise her right to bodily autonomy by evacuating an unwanted fetus, yet not force her to violate any right to life held by the fetus means that severance ethicists are also compelled to welcome the technology. Say Singer and Wells:

Freedom to choose what is to happen to one's body is one thing; freedom to insist on the death of a being that is capable of living outside one's body is another<sup>17</sup>.

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<sup>15</sup> Overall, (*Op. Cit.*), p. 71.

<sup>16</sup> Singer, P., Wells, D. *The Reproduction Revolution: New Ways of Making Babies* (Oxford University Press, 1984), p. 119.

<sup>17</sup> Singer and Wells, (*Op. Cit.*), p. 120.

## ***IMPLICATIONS OF ELIMINATING ABORTION IN FAVOUR OF FETAL EVACUATION***

There are a number of implications of viewing a woman's rights towards her embryo/fetus as ones limited to evacuation. The first concerns abortion procedures clearly designed to cause the death of the fetus, not to free the woman from pregnancy. The most obvious example of this sort of procedure is known as multiple pregnancy reduction or selective termination. Performed during the first or second trimester in some instances of multiple pregnancy, the procedure is done to either "eliminate a fetus found to be handicapped or at risk of disability, or simply to reduce the number of fetuses in the uterus"<sup>18</sup>, usually in the interests of sustaining the pregnancy and preserving the woman's health<sup>19</sup>. As we have seen, severance theorists would deem selective termination as impermissible<sup>20</sup>, because it is designed to terminate the life of one or several of the woman's fetuses, not her pregnancy.

The view of severance theorists would also dictate their opposition to terminations of handicapped fetuses because in many cases the women desiring this sort of abortion

<sup>18</sup> Overall, C. "Selective Termination of Pregnancy and Woman's Reproductive Autonomy" (*Hastings Center Report*, May/June 1990), p. 6.

<sup>19</sup> Multiple pregnancies nearly always result in premature delivery. With triplets, the length of pregnancy on average is only 33 weeks, and with quadruplets about 28. (see footnote 3 for health concerns faced by premature children). For the pregnant woman, continuation of a multiple pregnancy is likely to result in higher risks of pregnancy-induced hypertension, polyhydramnios, severe anaemia, preeclampsia, and postpartum blood transfusions.

<sup>20</sup> I am unpersuaded by feminist ethicist Christine Overall's argument to the contrary. Overall's main point is that the manipulation of women inherent in the infertility procedures at the root of multiple pregnancies means that women can not be said to have "chosen" selective termination, and thus can be held morally responsible for the procedure. Not only this argument fails to address the cases where selective termination is chosen for naturally occurring multiple pregnancies, it is typical of feminist arguments that depict women as passive victims of conspiratorial societal oppression, with which I disagree. Overall also attempts to differentiate selective terminations from abortion because of the different attitudes of the mothers seeking the two procedures. While I agree that these attitudes would be different, and that women's intentions are a crucial part of a moral evaluation of abortion (as I will argue in the last chapters of this paper), this view seems inconsistent with Overall's description of abortion morality expressed elsewhere (See Overall, C. "Selective Termination...." (*Op. Cit.*) and Overall, C. *Ethics and Human Reproduction...* (*Op. Cit.*)).

would be purposefully pregnant, and would arguably be choosing abortion to terminate the life of the fetus, not the pregnancy. In addition, the logic of the severance position dictates that the rare baby born alive as a result of a second trimester abortion be given the same treatment afforded to babies born unintentionally before term.

Moreover, the liberal/feminist way of looking at abortion morality ties women's abortion rights to technological advances. As the age of viability lowers, and the period in which it is possible to promote the growth of embryos *in vitro* extends, less time exists in which women may exercise their right to terminate the life of the fetus through abortion. In other words, if women are only given access to abortion when the fetus is not viable, those wishing to abort in the period of fetal viability may be compelled instead to *evacuate*<sup>21</sup> their fetuses to an artificial womb.

But the impact of the lowering age of viability and the ever-increasing period of embryo viability on women's abortion rights are not just confined to the future. In the USA and England, legislation and judicial rulings indicate the law's willingness to hinge changes in reproductive law to technological developments. In the US Supreme Court's 1992 ruling in *Planned Parenthood v. Casey*, the majority affirmed the court's reliance on viability as the "...point at which the state's interest in fetal life is constitutionally adequate to justify a legislative ban on nontherapeutic abortions"<sup>22</sup>. The

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<sup>21</sup> James has pointed out that the procedure necessary to extract the fetus intact from the woman's body will inevitably be more risky and intrusive for her than current first trimester procedures using vacuum aspiration. He contends that women should have the freedom to "...choose or reject one's own medical treatment...based on their own judgment of the foreseeable risks." While I wholeheartedly agree with James that women are entitled to this sort of freedom, the reality of the spate of forced cesarian on unconsenting women in the US suggest a more gloomy picture of society's views regarding the bodily autonomy of pregnant women. See James, D. "Ectogenesis: A Reply to Singer and Wells" (*Bioethics*, 1:1 1987), p. 87.

<sup>22</sup> "Excerpts From the Justices' Decision in the Pennsylvania Case" (*The New York Times*, June 30 1992), p. A16.

court noted that the lowering age of viability does affect the "...time limits on the realization of competing interests"<sup>23</sup>.

In England, the *Infant Life (Preservation) Act 1929* makes it an offence to destroy the life of a child capable of being born alive. The act defines a child as a fetus aged 28 weeks or older. However, in *Rance v Mid-Downs Health Authority & Storr*, the court recognised the lowering age of viability and held that "...to destroy the life of a child capable of being born alive whether or not the 28 week period had been reached would be an offence under the Act"<sup>24</sup>.

English courts are considered to have "persuasive authority" in Australia, though the Australian judiciary is no longer bound by English rulings. Thus far, there have been no rulings or legislation of any significance in this area in Australia.

### **WHAT WOMEN THINK AND WHY IT MATTERS**

What do women desire and intend when they have abortions? Are they primarily or solely concerned with terminating the physical experience of pregnancy, terminating the life of the fetus, or both? How do women describe and mediate the moral issues raised by unwanted pregnancy, and what are the differences in the way women with opposing perspectives on abortion characterise these issues? How do women's moral perspectives on unwanted pregnancy and abortion elucidate their response to the prospect of ectogenesis?

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<sup>23</sup> "Excerpts From the Justices'..." (*Op. Cit.*), p. A16.

<sup>24</sup> *Australian Health and Medical Law Reporter*, Clinical practice, Paragraph 21-740, p. 24902.

The findings of this research indicate that, with few exceptions, women in favour of abortion rights believe that women who undergo abortions primarily intend to bring about the death of their fetus. Most of the women believe abortion is killing, but if the decision of the terminating woman is made responsibly, it is perceived to be "killing from care", and thus morally acceptable. Women in favour of abortion rights also believe that a woman who would evacuate her fetus to an ectogenetic womb would be abandoning her fetus in a way similar to a woman who relinquishes her child for adoption. Thus, ectogenetic technology is rejected by women in this group as an irresponsible resolution to unwanted pregnancy.

Interestingly, the majority of women opposed to abortion rights also reject ectogenesis as an unacceptable abandonment by the pregnant women of her responsibility to care for her fetus. They also agree with women in favour of abortion that adoption is an inadequate solution to the problem of unwanted pregnancy. But whereas women in favour of abortion rights believe that abortion is a morally acceptable way for a woman to terminate her responsibility to her fetus and the child it could become, women in this group contend that there are no morally acceptable ways for a pregnant woman to end her responsibility to her fetus and the child it could become. Because women opposed to abortion rights believe that a woman who would utilise ectogenetic technology would be relinquishing her responsibility to her fetus and the child it could become, this group of women were opposed to the technology, despite its potential to save fetal life.

What can be seen from these results is the inadequate "fit" between the philosophical framework for abortion and the abortion morality articulated by women. This discordance between severance abortion theory and women's ethical reality as expressed by women in this study is problematic for two reasons. Firstly, it leads to inaccurate predictions, like those of Singer and Wells, about possible resolutions to the abortion conflict. If such predictions are used as the basis for political change, they could lead to policy changes that are at worst detrimental, or at best irrelevant to the goal of fostering women's reproductive freedom. Secondly, the discordance between severance theory and the abortion morality articulated by women in this study means that much ethical reflection on abortion has little of relevance to say to women who face hard choices regarding unwanted pregnancy<sup>25</sup>, and thus offers them little assistance as they strive to make moral decisions. Christine Overall argues for an ethical perspective that "highlight[s] women's experience, needs, and behaviour in connection with reproduction..."<sup>26</sup>. It is my hope that this study can contribute to the process of creating such an ethic.

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<sup>25</sup> Peter Singer has pointed out that the goal of philosophical discourse may not always be to assist people to make moral decisions. Another goal of this discourse, for instance, may be to contribute to political debate and assist in the shaping of policy. However, while it is my belief that at least some of the ethical work on abortion is done with the intention of influencing women's moral decision-making, it is certainly my contention that assisting women should be at least one of the goals of ethical reflection in this area. (Private Communication, 11.11.92)

<sup>26</sup> Overall, *Ethics and Human Reproduction.... (Op. Cit.)* p. 81.

## Chapter 2

### THE STUDY

The study was conducted to investigate the validity of Singer and Wells' speculation about women's response to ectogenesis and to explore women's moral construction of abortion. The hypothesis was that women's construction of abortion would fundamentally differ from that articulated by severance theorists, and that this would lead most women to reject ectogenesis as a moral solution to unwanted pregnancy. A further hypothesis was that women would consider the intentions and motivations of pregnant women who choose abortion to be a critical factor in their moral evaluation of the pregnant woman's choice. Forty-five (45) Australian women were interviewed over a time period of five months. All the women were residents of the city of Melbourne, with the majority residing south of the central business district. Interviews were conducted after hours either south or within the central business district, with both time and locations selected to allow working women to attend.

The project was advertised in a wide variety of media, and through relevant clubs, societies and religious organisations<sup>27</sup>. When women who were interested contacted

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<sup>27</sup> Advertisements were placed in the newsletters of the Women's Electoral Lobby, Healthsharing Women, the Council for Single Mothers and Their Children, The Australian Federation of University Women and the Monash Postgraduate Association. Advertisements also appeared in the women's page in the newspaper *The Age* and the "What's On" section of the St Kilda local paper. Advertisements were also placed in the newsletter of Victorian Right to Life, and a number of Catholic Church bulletins. In addition, advertisements were posted in cafes and community organisations around the St Kilda

the researcher through the telephone number supplied in the advertisement, an interview appointment was arranged. An attempt was made to place women in groups with other women with similar attitudes towards abortion, and this was mostly, though not always successful. Because some difficulty arose in assembling the sample of women opposed to abortion rights, women in this group who did make contact were encouraged to bring friends along to the interview, which several of them did. The only criteria for exclusion was age, with the sample restricted to women who identified themselves to be of childbearing age.

Interviews lasted anywhere between one half hour to two and one half hours. In general, interview sessions with women opposed to abortion rights tended to be of shorter duration than those with women in favour of abortion rights. Prior to the interview, Explanatory statements were provided to participants and signatures on Consent Forms sought<sup>28</sup>. Women were given the Explanatory Statement, with the name and contact information of the researcher, and a copy of their signed Consent Form to keep. A Questionnaire<sup>29</sup> was administered to collect demographic information and abortion history and views. Women who were interested supplied their address to the researcher in order that they could be contacted as to the details of any publications. At the conclusion of the interview, women were "debriefed", or given the opportunity to hear more about the rational of the study and the working hypotheses. X

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area and the Clayton campus of Monash University, as well as the notice boards of a number of Catholic Churches, and Victorian Right to Life. Recruitment was also assisted by the leaders of a number of Christian groups at Monash University who publicised the project to their membership. Please see Appendix 1 for the basic text of the notices published and posted.

<sup>28</sup> See Appendix 2 for the Explanatory Statement and Consent Form.

<sup>29</sup> See Appendix 3 for the Questionnaire.

**PROFILE OF PARTICIPATING WOMEN**

From the questionnaire, the following picture of the sample emerges. Of the forty five women interviewed, 12 (27%) described themselves as "Opposed to abortion in all circumstances - no exceptions", 9 (20%) described themselves as "Opposed to abortion in most circumstances - a few exceptions where in favour", 9 (20%) said they were "In favour of abortion rights in most circumstances - a few exceptions where not in favour" and 15 (33%) said they were "Totally in favour of abortion rights - no exceptions". None of the women said they were "Undecided/Indifferent" to the issue.

For purposes of analyses, the categories "opposed to abortion in all circumstances - no exceptions" and "opposed to abortion in most circumstances - a few exceptions where in favour" were compressed into a single category renamed "women opposed to abortion rights". Similarly the two categories expressing partial or complete support of abortion rights was compressed into a single category renamed "women in favour of abortion rights". Utilizing these two categories we discover the following:

***Age***

The ages of participants ranged between 19 and 53, with the bulk of the woman between the ages of 20 and 40. 18% of the women were 20 years old or younger, 39% of the women were between age 21 and 30, 27% of the women was between 31 and 40 years of age and 18% of the women interviewed were aged 40 or over. Of the women opposed to abortion, 33% were 20 years old or younger, 29% between the ages of 21 and 30 with the remaining 38% of the sample divided evenly between the

31 to 40 age group, and the over 40s. On the other hand, only 4% of women in favour of abortion rights were 20 years old or younger, with 46% of this subsample between the ages of 21 and 30. 33% of women in this group were between the ages of 31 and 40, with 17% over 40 years old. To summarise these results, we see that the bulk (62%) of women opposed to abortion rights were aged 30 or under, with most (79%) of women in favour of abortion rights between the ages of 21 and 40.

### ***Education***

School leavers<sup>30</sup> comprised 15.6% of the sample, with women who had completed their HSC/VCE making up the largest group with 33.3%. Those holding diplomas made up 17.8% of the sample, while those with undergraduate university degrees comprised 20%. 13.3% of the women in the sample held postgraduate degrees. The bulk of women opposed to abortion rights had either left school prior to receiving their HSC/VCE certificate (24%), or this certificate constituted their highest educational qualification (48%). No women in this group held a postgraduate qualification. On the other hand, only 8.3% of women in favour of abortion rights were school leavers, with the rest of this sub-sample falling more or less evenly into the other educational categories. This finding is consistent with other work in this area which indicates that higher education levels are correlated with more liberal attitudes towards abortion<sup>31</sup>.

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<sup>30</sup> The term school leavers was used to describe people who left school without completing the HSC or VCE, the educational certificates granted by most public and private schools in Melbourne.

<sup>31</sup> See Luker, K. *Abortion and the Politics of Motherhood* (University of California Press: 1984), p. 195.

***Marital Status***

Married and single women made up equal percentages of the sample (47%), with 7% of the women describing themselves as divorced. The 13% of the sample that described themselves as divorced were made up entirely of women in favour of abortion rights.

***Children***

Just over half the sample were childless. 13% had one child, 13% had two children, 9% had three children and 11% had four children or more. There were no discernable trends amongst women in favour of abortion rights and women opposed to abortion rights in this category.

***Work Status***

64% of the women currently worked outside of the home, while 36% described themselves as homemakers. 57% of women opposed to abortion rights worked outside the home, as compared to 43% of this group that were homemakers. In contrast, fully 71% of women in favour of abortion rights worked outside the home, with only 29% describing themselves as homemakers. Again, this finding is consistent with other work in the area that suggests there is a positive correlation between employment status and more liberal attitudes towards abortion<sup>32</sup>.

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<sup>32</sup> See Luker, K. (*Op. Cit.*), p. 195.

***Income***

The largest proportion of women in the sample lived in households where the income was \$20,000 or less. Households of between \$36,000 - \$50,000 and \$21,000 and \$35,000 comprised the next largest groups, with only 7% from households earning between \$51,000 - \$75,000 and just 9% of women coming from households with incomes over \$76,000. No trends could be identified by comparing income distribution of women opposed to abortion rights with women in favour of abortion rights.

***Abortion History***

Almost one third of the women (31%) had undergone an abortion. Of the women opposed to abortion rights, only one (4.8%) had undergone a termination, while for women in favour of abortion rights, over half (54%) had abortion in their history.

**Interview questions**

Women were asked four questions, always in the same order. Non-directive questioning techniques were used to facilitate discussion of the issues. The questions were as follows:

1. If pregnant with a child you could not keep, would you choose to have an abortion, or would you choose to have the child and give it up for adoption?

Why?

2. Imagine that you are two months pregnant. You do not want to raise the child or are unable to do so and thus must decide between having an abortion or carrying the child to term and giving it up for adoption. As you are considering these options, a doctor approaches you and tells you that you have a third option. Thanks to technology, it is now possible for you to abort your foetus without killing it. Your foetus can be extracted from your body and transferred to an artificial womb where it will be grown until it is able to live outside of that artificial womb, at around nine months, then will be put up for adoption. The doctor informs you that this procedure carries no more medical risks or inconvenience to you than the traditional abortion method<sup>33</sup>. Would you chose this third option?
3. Imagine that your relative suffers from a disease that can be successfully treated with fetal tissue. Up to now, your relative has used tissue available from abortions that were not done with the intention of providing tissue for this use. Lately, however, not enough abortions have been done to cope with the increasing demand for tissue, and your relative has requested that you become pregnant in order to abort the fetus to assist in her treatment. Do you do it?
4. Imagine that you have become pregnant voluntarily. Just as you begin to show, you discover you have won an all expenses paid trip for two to Barcelona for the Olympics. However, for promotional reasons, the people offering you the

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<sup>33</sup> As noted in footnote 21, it is in reality unlikely that fetal evacuation will be as medically safe for women as current vacuum aspiration abortion methods. However, the scenario was shaped in this way in order to curtail certain areas of discussion.

trip don't want you to look pregnant. They say that you must have an abortion in order to take up the winnings, which because they revolve around the Olympics, can not be delayed until after the child is born. What would you do?

The intent of the questions were to discover the women's position on abortion (Questions 1-4), the way they justified these positions (Questions 1-4), their response to ectogenesis and the relationship between this response and their position on abortion (Question 2), and the moral framework supporting their position on abortion (Questions 3 and 4).

A few remarks about some of the questions are necessary. In Question 1 the intention was to pursue why women choose either abortion or adoption, not their reasons for being unable to keep the child. Thus, for example, if a woman would state her preference for abortion in terms of her inability to financially support a child, she would be asked why she chose abortion rather than adoption as a remedy to this problem.

In a number of interview sessions, issues and concerns were raised about the role of men in a society where ectogenesis was available. Most prominent of these were questions regarding the meaning of the male genetic contribution to the fetus in a world where conception, gestation and birth could be separated. These issues were pursued when they arose, and will be reported on in the following two chapters.

Finally, in one of the early sessions with women in favour of abortion rights, a woman raised a moral dilemma analogous to the one described in Question 4 ("Barcelona"). She presented the case of a female athlete who became pregnant to utilise the hormone change that accompanies pregnancy to assist her athletic performance, and then procured an abortion before the pregnancy came to term. This dilemma, which I will henceforth refer to as "Competition", was raised and discussed by the interviewer with women in a number of subsequent sessions, with the results reported under Question 4 in both of the following chapters.

### Chapter 3

## **WOMEN IN FAVOUR OF ABORTION RIGHTS SPEAK**

#### **Question 1**

*"If pregnant with a child you could not keep, would you choose to have an abortion, or would you choose to have the child and give it up for adoption? Why?"*

Of several sorts of reasons why women said they had or would choose abortion, concerns about giving the child away, what I will call relinquishment concerns, were those most often cited. Several women, for example, were concerned about the binding effects of pregnancy and childbirth. This is Jacinta:

...having had children I think it would be very difficult to give them up for adoption, having gone through the pregnancy. (2/1)

Charity agrees:

I'd rather terminate than go right through the pregnancy and have to go through the trauma of giving up a child at the end, after giving birth to it. (2/1)

Similarly, Jane worries that if she carried the child to term her "maternal instinct" (1/8) might take over and she'd keep it, even though the rest of her life "would suck" (1/8) as a result of this choice.

Gillian too wonders how a woman could

...go 6, 7, 8 months of justifying why you're going to give it away when the whole time you're bonding closer to it yourself? I mean, in your own mind you must be going crazy. I don't think it's possible. I don't know how people can do it, I couldn't see myself ever doing it. (2/3)

Lily's relinquishment concerns revolve around the fear she will be unable to forget the child:

I would have an abortion because I don't think I could emotionally detach myself. Knowing that I've had a kid, that it's out there somewhere. I'd also have that nagging feeling 'what's it doing now'. (3/3)

Regarding the difficulty of relinquishment, Jacinta has this to say:

I'm a little bit older than everyone else here I suspect. When I was young there really wasn't choice. Theoretically there was the choice of having a termination but you had to have know-how, money and take risks because it was pretty dicey...And it's interesting that now that we have so-called legal and safe abortions, adoption has really gone out. And I don't think it's necessarily just fashion, I think it is the real choice that people choose, not to give a baby up for adoption because it's the hardest option. (2/13)

Several women said they would choose termination over adoption because of their desire to exert influence in and control over the lives of their children. Jane, for example, believes she would find it too difficult to "see someone else raising" her child, (1/2) while Jacinta believes she:

... would spend the rest of my life wondering what was happening to that child, and not being able to control what was happening. Certainly now [with adoption] you can take more part in what's happening, but you don't have any control over what's happening (2/1)

For several women there was a connection between their concern about losing control of their child, and the feeling that the children they have belong to them. Frances explains:

I think...you're passing on part of yourself when you become pregnant and have a child. If I can't have it, no one else can have it. And I know that's supposedly wrong because it's as though I own the child. We're all told we don't own our children, I think we really do. (3/2)

Several women, aware of recent moves to make adoption more open in Australia, were concerned that the child would seek to reestablish connections with them when it came of age. Janine, for example, says she would not hesitate to have an abortion if

I didn't want any future connections, demands on me. People coming to my door and saying 'I'm your daughter', and all of that. (1/18)

Margot elaborates:

I think I would be somewhat anxious about whether or not that child would at a later stage want to come back and find me. Not necessarily to admit that yes, this is my child, but the difficulty about forming a relationship and the expectations that I might have of the child or the child might have of me. I suppose that anxiety comes from the fact that I know people who have adopted children and those children have sought their natural parents and it seems to be a difficult situation. (1/19)

Many women expressed concern about the effect of adoption on the lives of their children. Charity again:

It's that fear about what's going to happen to them, and what damage have you done to a human being by not having any influence on them. (2/1)

Kerry agrees:

My father is adopted, and he had a very unhappy life....generally speaking - statistically - adoption is not functional because of the proportional breakdowns of families where adoption takes place. I don't think it's a functional solution. (3/1)

Callie expresses the belief shared by a number of women that abortion is the only way to sever the ties of parental responsibility:

No matter what you thought, there's life here, and you are in some way responsible. I just find that you are responsible for putting another person on the planet...they would have to come back or they'd be

wanting their medical history or anything like that. You are still responsible for them. (1/21)

Apart from relinquishment concerns, women were also concerned about the social pressure they would experience were they to carry a pregnancy with the intent of adopting the resulting baby. Jacinta, for example, thinks such women would be seen as morally deficient:

I think there's the idea that people would say 'how on earth could you give up a baby. How could you be so cold, calculating, whatever to give up a baby'. (2/4)

Lucy also thinks she would be stigmatised for choosing adoption:

I would never give it up for adoption. I mean, how could you? Your husband's in work, your family, your friends would see you carrying it through, then see you give it up. I mean, you couldn't do it. I mean if you were single and somewhere in a city where nobody knew me, but I would never give it up for adoption. (4/3)

Gillian agrees:

...you can't hide away. I mean people will see you...they'll assume that because you're having the baby you're keeping it...You've still got to go to work...go shopping....see your friends. And they're going to assume you're having a baby because you want it, and not because you're made this moral decision that it's wrong to kill the baby... So it's not only what you think, it's the pressures of people around you. (2/3)

Charity fears she would be sanctioned for "losing" control of her body:

There's more and more pressure to plan. To be completely in control of your body, if you fall pregnant you've done it deliberately, and you know when you're going to fall pregnant...Because women are expected more and more to do more and more things in their lives, you've got a spot worked in to have your children. (2/4)

A number of women said that while they would opt for abortion, they considered it a forced choice, their preference being the support they deemed necessary to keep the child. This is Carmen:

I don't think that abortion is great because a woman has control over her body...I do feel at last resort it is the woman's decision, but I don't

feel terribly happy about it...I feel that if women had more support from their mates, the people around them and society in general. Because a lot of the time people can't really talk to anyone about what's happening. Or tell anyone about it. If they had more support, then they could be counselled or just supported in some way, then often these abortions wouldn't occur. (2/21)

Alison supports this view with her own story:

My reason [for aborting] was that there was going to be no support from him, and it's certainly proved completely correct since there is none with the living child. If things were going to be the perfect relationships then there is absolutely no way I would have aborted, but things weren't and aren't, and so I didn't see that there was any choice. (3/13)

## Question 2

*"Imagine that you are two months pregnant. You do not want to raise the child or are unable to do so and thus must decide between having an abortion or carrying the child to term and giving it up for adoption. As you are considering these options, a doctor approaches you and tells you that you have a third option. Thanks to technology, it is now possible for you to abort your foetus without killing it. Your foetus can be extracted from your body and transferred to an artificial womb where it will be grown until it is able to live outside of that artificial womb, at around nine months, then will be put up for adoption. The doctor informs you that this procedure carries no more medical risks or inconvenience to you than the traditional abortion method. Would you choose this third option?"*

Only two women who are in favour of abortion choice believed they would consider terminating their unwanted pregnancy into an ectogenetic womb. Lucy, whose primary concern with adoption is the social stigma involved in carrying the child to term with the intention of giving it away, feels the advantage of the ectogenetic womb would be its capacity to enable her to end her pregnancy without having to kill her fetus:

If you can not carry that child through...but you'd still like to see it live, you don't actually want to make that step to kill that child...I don't think I could give it up for adoption, and abortion would be the option I had to take, but this third option I find easier than having an

abortion...at two months, you don't have to tell the whole world, I'm giving up my child (4/7 and 4/18)

She also believes an artificial womb would give reluctant fathers time to come to an acceptance of parenthood:

...if there is a relationship there...you might find that by the end of the nine months, the whole idea has grown on him anyway, whereas two months, both people involved may have thought there was no chance of carrying that child through and...have decided to have an abortion and out the window. We all know people who decide to have an abortion and go through terrible traumas later, and are sorry it's happened. (4/10)

Margot, who was concerned the child might seek her out when it was grown, believes she would feel less connected to a child she had gestated only two months, and thus less concerned about any contact that might occur:

I would chose to allow this thing to have life [because] it wouldn't change the rest of my life, which choosing to have a child would do...if I didn't carry it to full term, so that I didn't go through childbirth and...feel it's part of me, after two months, I wouldn't feel its part of me. So I wouldn't deny that child life...(1/5)

However, for the vast majority of women in this group, the ectogenetic option did not offer a viable solution to abortion. For Callie, this option carried the same problems as did adoption:

I think there is still an emotional tie there, I think you've still created a life, and you're still responsible for that life. (1/7)

Frances agrees:

I still wouldn't be able to separate myself from the child cause I still would have conceived the child. It would still be out there somewhere, so it's just adoption before you have the child. (3/5)

In this discussion, Charity and Gillian reject ectogenesis because of the difficulty it would pose for the relinquishing mother:

...giving it up to a machine, you've got to live the nine months of 'right now I should not be sleeping', 'right now I should be eating twice as

much', so you would be going through a pregnancy still...knowing that the baby is still alive, and you're not eating for two, it would just be too much. (Gillian)

I just think that whole concept of the baby...being out there somewhere is really hard on the mother. (Charity)

When is should be with you, being nourished by you. (Gillian) (2/11)

Many women were concerned that a fetus gestated artificially would not be healthy.

Emily is concerned about the physical development of the fetus:

A baby two months is nothing almost, you can hardly see it...you think of putting that...into a machine, with all sorts of little electrodes and what have you stuck to it to actually make it develop into a proper fetus with every limb to it, and you don't really know. I mean even now when children are born at 23 weeks gestation there are so many risks. (4/4)

Carey's concern is the overall well-being of the resulting child:

How do you guarantee that you bring to life a child that is whole, that is nourished and emotional and spiritual and mental and whatever, as a pregnancy within the womb requires, if you attach it to some technology? (4/4)

Jacinta fears there may be social repercussions for a child gestated artificially:

I think it might feel a bit wrong for the child to...come to an age where it understood...that it was conceived in some woman's body and then given up to a machine because the woman didn't want it, and then perhaps at some other time given to another set of parents to bring up. I mean there's enough trouble...with children who are given up for adoption...because the child knows that it was given away, and unless...it is dealt with in a very sensitive way, the child can feel very unwanted.

Q: What if I say we know that the baby will be fine...

It might be physically normal, I don't necessarily think it would be psychologically normal. And nothing you could say would convince me. (2/10)

Marjorie too is worried:

I keep thinking about the child. Adopted children are often so confused, and want to know about their origins. And they come to their natural

mother can find them and hate them or whatever they want to do, but you don't really have any origin at all if you come out of a machine. (4/12)

Lisa's concerns are similar when she jokes:

They couldn't even do re-birthing! (4/7)

A great many of the women felt they would be abandoning their fetuses to a scientific and medical community they did not trust. This is Janet:

If you have the baby at nine months and hand it over to the family, ok you've got the added worry of whether the mother is doing the right thing to your so-called baby. If you [put it into an ectogenetic womb] I would worry about: were they looking after that fetus properly? What if they did something to it, and then it wasn't alright? Was it being looked after the way the fetus would be with me before I hand it over for adoption? (3/10)

Jacinta is equally suspicious:

...nobody now thinks that a baby that's adopted - did they chop it up. If you go through a scientific process like this, I think that is a distinct possibility. They may experiment with it in some way. They may - not chop it up - they might inject it with AIDS, but we'll never know. (2/8)

Jacinta is also concerned about the experimental nature of the technology:

The technology may go wrong, during the extraction, during the growth of the fetus in the machine. Because 8 weeks to nine months is a long time and things have to go right. I would have a concern about the technology not being perfect, and I would want the technology to be perfect. (2/5)

Frances agrees:

It's not considered enough. It's very recent and...there's a great reluctance for these professionals to look into any other issue besides the fact that it can be done. It's very surface level. (3/11)

For Charity, the problem with the technology was its incapacity to make the sort of caring decisions for her fetus that she, as its mother, would make:

...when you have an abortion you are making a decision about your own body and about that human's life. Whereas, if you give it away, someone else is making all those decisions, or technology is making all

the decisions...I imagine that my decisions would affect my child in a more humane manner, because I've got my child's interests at heart. And that's why I'd decide to terminate, for that child's sake. If you give it away to technology, you don't know what you're doing. (2/6)

A number of women resented the male encroachment into birth represented by the technology. Alison, for example, sees the ectogenetic womb as the last step in a line of developments enabling men to perform the childbearing and childraising work traditionally done by women:

There's this new thing that a man can strap over his shoulder, like a boob, you can put the formula in and he can actually nurse the child with this artificial tit hanging off one shoulder. I mean, we are a bee's dick away from giving them a womb. (3/8)

Elisa also believes the ectogenetic womb is designed to

...do away with women...it's just like saying, well women have their role but we can do it better. (3/7)

For many women, ectogenetic technology is offensive because it symbolises science and medicine's continuing attempt to control the very nature of human life. This is Gillian:

Have you ever read Brave New World? Where they just produce the babies and they decide levels, mentality and emotional, and it's like testing on rodents. We need this niche to be filled, so we'll teach these people not to enjoy flowers and colours and teach them to enjoy cleaning. It's like genetic engineering. We really let them play around with us like that. (2/8)

Lisa agrees:

...we place too much importance on creating lives and prolonging lives...I think we've got it a little bit distorted about how important our existence is...we should just accept that you get born, and you die. (4/16)

For Annette, ectogenesis symbolises humankind's regrettable retreat from nature and the natural:

I have a real repulsion for the technology...I believe that we're getting so far away from the physical act...from our humanity so much, our whole physicality of childbirth and child rearing and everything...we are just getting totally away from our bodies...[having children] is a natural act....it's just really instinctive. (1/8)

Frances was one of several women concerned with the allocation of resources to ectogenetic technology:

...if there's this much money potentially to spend on artificial wombs and saving all these poor fetuses, where's the money that's going to provide safe, efficient widely available contraception and sex education to these young girls...why on earth are things like IVF being developed in Asia where there are so many children they don't even get fed? (3/11)

Marjorie concurs:

...has it not been for these experiments perhaps we would be more concerned with other things. (4/9)

Finally, several women saw their decision to terminate the life of their fetus through abortion as a loving and caring decision, one made to serve the best interests of themselves and the fetus as an interconnected unit<sup>34</sup>. Ectogenetic technology, because it thwarts the crucial aspect of the woman's decision - to terminate the life of the child - was not seen as a helpful alternative for women faced with an unwanted pregnancy.

Carmen speaks of the unity of mother and child:

When you are pregnant, the baby and you are a unit...when you talk to a mother that's pregnant, you are talking to a person who is more than just a person you might ask in the street who is not pregnant...So it's not a question of you and the baby. You are making a decision for both of you as a unit. (2/12)

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<sup>34</sup> The nature and importance of the interconnectedness of mother and fetus in women's moral decision-making regarding abortion will be discussed more fully in Chapter 5.

Frances describes the fetal/maternal connection as an "emotional and spiritual" relationship:

I think it's more of an emotional or spiritual thing..I've never been pregnant, I don't know. But you have a relationship - there's a close physical relationship. If I was pregnant, I'd imagine that you'd be thinking about your child. Some people name it before it's born...one time [pregnant] women weren't supposed to look at ugly things because it was supposed to directly effect...(3/5)

Charity reflects on both the inseparable interests of mother and the caring nature of the abortion decision.

...my decision to have an abortion would be the decision I made to care for the child that was within me. So to have the child outside somewhere else would be more cruel to me then just ending it because it's giving the child no help. It's still just saying 'well, it's not my problem'...when you have an abortion you are making a decision about your own body and about that human's life. (2/6)

**The Role of Men**

Several women in this group were concerned that ectogenesis could strip women of one of their few sources of social power - their control over life. This is Carey:

As soon as you start looking at a third option, you're taking away a woman's power. Now men control most of the technology, that's a fact, but women have to date controlled the right to have or not to have a child. (4/12)

Jane agrees:

I think that this society is generally poor in terms of women's power, and this is one small area where women have power. And if you take this one away as well, there's not that much left. (1/14)

A number of women believed that the time for men to impact upon the decision is before the woman decides to abort. This is Carmen:

I think at the first stage, the stage when you're...making the decision whether to have an abortion, that's when you really need to cooperate with a man, and that's when there often isn't cooperation...that's the stage where a man should make his choice felt...(2/16)

Alison agrees:

'oh, hang on a minute, they can put it in this artificial womb'... would just be an ego trip for him. Just to...say, 'look what I've got'. If it was going to be up to him, he should damn well be...supporting you through out the pregnancy and the subsequent rearing of that child. (3/13)

In fact, a number of women shared Alison's worry that men's intentions and motivations in wanting to preserve the fetus in an ectogenetic womb would reflect neither a loving nor a caring attitude towards the fetus. They argued that male power in a decision about the fate of the fetus should be contingent on the moral quality of the man's intentions and motives for wanting that power. This point of view can be seen in women's discussions of the genetic father's relationship with the mother. The following is an exchange between Margot and Janine:

...if it were to be removed and then to be incubated that would be a choice of the father too. (Janine)

Surely it depends on who the father is? (Margot)

Well, yes it does. (Janine)

Because...if you're in a loving relationship with your partner that's one thing. If you have a one-night stand where you never see the person again, to me it seems to be a different situation...70% of men couldn't care less. (Margot) (1/10)

Several women were willing to allow the man equal say in the decision about the fate of the fetus if he was willing to support and care for the fetus when it was born. This is Nancy:

If the man involved said well I'm prepared to do this and that and be a father, be a financial support, then that gives him some sort of right. (1/14)

But even if the man was to offer to rear that child, some women continued to feel he should not have the power to veto her decision about the fate of the child after it was extracted from her body. Jacinta is concerned that the child will have later difficulties if it knew so many people had a hand in its survival:

I think a child needs to know that it hasn't had 20 people that allowed it to live, or maybe two if the father's still around. Because it's so confusing. (2/16)

Callie believes that while the relationship of the father to the mother is important, the woman's inability to walk away from the pregnancy ultimately gives her the right to decide the fate of the fetus:

If that option wasn't there, she would have to make the choice of having an abortion or adopting it out...If she did get pregnant and that third option wasn't there, she would have to deal with it. (Callie)

What if it was? (Margot)

Well she would still have to deal with it. She's the one that's been left there to deal with that problem, so she has right to do it. (Callie) (1/13)

The notion of the mother and child as unit arises again here, as Janet argues from a point made by Frances, that her right to control her body is inseparable from her right to decide the fate of the fetus:

...I think it's the woman that makes up her mind, because it's her body...I have to make a decision that's best for me. (Frances)

Q: Is it still her body, even if it is out of her...?

But is still was a part of her. So I think it is almost impossible to say it's not a part of me anymore. (Janet) (3/15)

For several other women, the decision about the fate of the fetus was made when they decided not to carry, birth and parent it. The decision to abort, in other words, was a decision to terminate the life of the fetus. This is Frances:

...you go for the abortion as it is now, you're saying nobody else is even getting the option of making this decision. It's my decision and I've made it...he can only make a decision if you take this third option...you can prevent that by refusing to have this...artificial womb thing. You make the decision in choosing the mode of abortion...I want to decide when, where, how and why to have children.

Q: So, it's not enough to be deciding about your body?

No...(3/15)

Gillian concurs:

Because the decision you make is not only for yourself, you're making a decision about the fetus. You have chosen its destiny, and that is termination. (2/15)

### Question 3

*"Imagine that your relative suffers from a disease that can be successfully treated with fetal tissue. Up to now, your relative has used tissue available from abortions that were not done with the intention of providing tissue for this use. Lately, however, not enough abortions have been done to cope with the increasing demand for tissue, and your relative has requested that you become pregnant in order to abort the fetus to assist in her treatment. Do you do it?"*

All but three of the women in this group rejected abortion in this scenario. Of the three women who said they would consider aborting their pregnancy to provide fetal tissue, their reasons focused either on the nature of their relationship with the relative, the seriousness of the outcome for the relative if they refused to donate, and/or the stage of their pregnancy. For instance Elisa:

...it depends on whether I like that person, what the relationship of that person - it's a living person with a history - whereas a couple of weeks being pregnant...(3/17)

Janine reasons along similar lines:

I think of the scenario of my daughter. Now, if to save her life...this is a life I have already given...If to save her I needed to be pregnant again to get some fetal tissue, I think I would do it. I wouldn't do it even for a sister...but there already is an input in my daughter, and I think ...I would jump and do that if that was what was required to save her life. (1/25)

Jacinta concurs:

When you said relative, I thought 'no, that's not right'. But if you said to me my daughter, or my son, and I have some of each, I think that would be quite different. Yes, I think I would get pregnant to save either my daughter or my son...the difference is that I don't know this life that I'm stopping at all, where is I do know my children. And I have a relationship with my children. (1/24)

However, although these three women felt they would accede to their relative's demands, two voiced significant reservations. For Jacinta, the concern was the trade being made between lives:

Because I would have created a baby, and then have an abortion...Because I'm stopping one life to save another. But I am stopping a life...Because I don't think abortion is easy for any woman. (2/19)

Janine is concerned that such a practice makes light of abortion:

...it is not a light issue. And I think it's a moral issue. I....still think that it's not morally wrong to abort fetal tissue at two months, but nevertheless it's not a light issue...(1/26)

But for the majority of women, pregnancy and abortion for this reason would be out of the question, or entered into only in extreme circumstances. Although few seemed concerned about the use of fetal tissue *per se*, many were worried about the deliberate nature of the pregnancy and abortion in this situation. Carey, for instance, rejects the idea because:

I don't think it's moral...morally correct to create life in order to kill a life. (4/21)

Margot agrees:

It would have to be an extreme case, because my initial reaction is yuck.

Q: Why?

Because it's the deliberate creation of potential life with the deliberate intention of destroying it. It's the deliberateness about it that is off-putting...mostly when abortion happen, it's a result of non-deliberate action. (1/24)

Frances' concern with the deliberate nature of the act is reflected in her willingness to donate tissue if the abortion was already planned:

I wouldn't conceive deliberately, but if I found out just as I was on my way to my pre-planned abortion that this fetal tissue would come in handy, I would say yes, use it...but I wouldn't conceive and abort for that reason. (3/18)

Sheena's reasoning is similar:

To deliberately get pregnant? No, I wouldn't...But if you actually happen to be pregnant, I'd do it. (4/20)

Gillian believes a woman who deliberately falls pregnant and aborts to obtain fetal tissue would, by "coldly" using her fetus as a means to an end, be guilty of murder:  
...you're not thinking about the baby [in this situation]...I'll go so far as to say that termination for yourself in convenience. You're thinking go yourself, you're thinking about the baby, it's not a cold decision. But getting pregnant in order to kill the baby! Doing it intentionally just doesn't seem right...Having a baby to kill it, there's no you in that. You're just setting out to murder, premeditated murder. (2/18)

Several women believed the trade in lives that concerned Jacinta militated against acceding to their relative's demand. Emily for example, believes

...you've still got to fight this back on the fact that you'd be killing...You're taking a life away to save a life. (4/22)

Lisa agrees:

...fixing someone else by knocking someone else off, it's not on. (4/21)

Cassie also objects because

...you've still created a life. You haven't won, because what you've done is create a life to kill that, to save another person. (3/17)

For a number of woman, the concern was that the use of tissue in this way distorts and cheapens the painful decision to abort. This is Alison:

Having an abortion, I mean it is horrific enough - someone saying to you 'oh, just get pregnant and have the abortion so I can have the tissue'. That's just, I mean I didn't go out and deliberately get pregnant just so I could have an abortion. (3/18)

Carey also believes the use of abortion to obtain fetal tissue belittles the difficult nature of the abortion decision. She is speaking here with Lucy and Lisa against the use of aborted tissue by the medical profession without the consent of the aborting woman:

[Abortion} is like they're taking out your appendix and throwing it in the rubbish...your appendix is diced out, and the fetus is diced out and it's out of you, it's not part of you...I mean, it is gone, you've chosen to...kill that child. You've killed that child and it's gone... (Lucy)

If they started doing something like that, I would start to take my tupperware container with me (Lisa)

Oh, absolutely. (Carey)

Q: ...do you feel like you have a right to it, even though you've chucked it in the bin?...

The whole handling of the abortion issue is wrong. You don't toss it in the garbage. I mean, I've had an abortion, it was an incredibly painful experience. I didn't toss it in the garbage...(Carey)

Q: OK, what did you do?

It sounds very callous and my decision was not a callous one. It was not unthought about, it was not clear, and it certainly wasn't indifferent. (Carey) (4/25)

Emily agrees:

It's a bit mafia-ish. It's really taking all the emotion out, isn't it? (4/21)

A few women worried that once the fetal tissue was in the hands of the scientific and medical profession, it could be used for diabolical or unstipulated purposes. This is Carey and Lisa:

And they might have a bit of tissue they'll use for someone else (Carey)

Yeah, you know I'm just getting a bit suspicious that they're asking things like that...they're not taking my appendix, uh uh. (Lisa)

Q: Why?

Because I'm scared of what they do to things, I'm scared of the power they've got and what's going on...(Lisa) (4/24)

Marjorie concurs:

the thing is they might ask you, but you might not really know what it is used for. Someone can say 'can it be used for medical reasons', but you don't really know...It would be very difficult to know what is going on. (4/25)

For Carmen, the worry is that using fetal tissue in this way will lead to the use of "human" donors:

It's the same as saying, somebody needs kidneys and there's not enough donors so we're free to breed a certain section of society's donors. The fact that it's a fetus, or a person isn't much of a step, is it? (2/17)

A few women believed their relative should value life but also accept death. This is

Janet:

I've already lost a son through cancer...It's the quality of life that counts, not quantity. (3/17)

Similarly, Lisa and Emily believe that when:

...Your number's up, that's it. That's the way it goes. (Lisa)

Life and death and whatever you do inbetween you enjoy. (Emily)  
(4/20)

#### **Question 4**

*"Imagine that you have become pregnant voluntarily. Just as you begin to show, you discover you have won an all expenses paid trip for two to Barcelona for the Olympics. However, for promotional reasons, the people offering you the trip don't want you to look pregnant. They say that you must have an abortion in order to take up the winnings, which because they revolve around the Olympics, can not be delayed until after the child is born. What would you do?"*

There was unanimous agreement amongst women of this group that for a woman to abort under in these circumstances would be wrong. Women argued that the Barcelona/Competition<sup>35</sup> option described trivial reasons for seeking a termination, reasons that trivialised the life of the fetus and the pain of the abortion decision. Thus, women who chose to terminate in these circumstances would be acting "coldly" or "callously", making their abortion decision morally deficient<sup>36</sup>.

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<sup>35</sup> Readers are reminded that in several sessions, women were also asked their opinion about female athletes who become pregnant to increase their competitive standing, and then seek abortions. This question is referred to as "Competition". For a fuller discussion of this aspect of the protocol, see Chapter 2.

<sup>36</sup> Women in this group drew a sharp distinction between the moral acceptability of a woman's abortion decision, and the morality of restricting her access to safe and affordable abortion. This distinction will be explained in greater detail at the end of this chapter, and discussed more fully in Chapter 5.

Several women focused on the relative lack of merit of the Barcelona/Competition as a reason for abortion. For example, Nancy:

If you changed the incentive, you could con me into it. If you offer the job I really really want. If you say you could have a place on a Supreme Court bench...(1/27)

For Lisa, the reason is simply not good enough:

It's only \$2000 bucks to Barcelona. In my economic climate, that wouldn't be an issue. To go to Barcelona is nothing special...

Marjorie concurs:

There are a lot of reasons women can have to have abortions. But for myself, I wouldn't find it a strong enough reason. (4/27)

The problem for a large number of women, was that to make such a decision trivialised both the life of the fetus and the decision to abort. Janine, for instance, thinks:

...we shouldn't trivialise human life. While we're saying we'd like to have the right to make the decision to have an abortion, we don't think it's a light matter like sweeping out some fluff or some dirt. (1/29)

Emily and Carey agree:

I don't think you're honouring the creation of life. (Emily)

And it is, it's a phenomenal creation, wonderful, special and if you utilised it....it's corrupt. (Carey) (4/30)

In the same vein, Lucy believes that:

Women don't look at abortion so easily...That question basically shows that you might be...overall for the right to choose, but you probably find that most women would...say no to that. I mean like that isn't a strong enough reasons to say yes. (4/26)

Charity and Gillian believe that few women would make such a "cold" decision:

I don't believe any woman who got pregnant because she wanted to would even consider that option. (Gillian)

Q: What if she did?

She'd be a pretty foreign thing to me...(Gillian)

It's hard to accept that a woman could make a cold judgement like that...it's pretty hard to swallow. (Charity) (2/23)

Carey and Ellen also comment on the lack of feeling in this sort of abortion choice:

You're losing a bit of humanity in there. (Carey)

It's emotion, feeling, love. (Emily) (4/29)

For a few women, a decision to go to Barcelona would be bereft of the autonomy they associate with the decision to abort:

It's like someone telling you to do something with your body to get something (Emily)

If you're a good girl, you get a trip to Barcelona. (Lisa) (4/26)

Kerry believed that should a woman choose Barcelona/Competition, she should not be prevented from having the abortion because she was likely to be an unfit mother.

[She] shouldn't have a child anyway. They'd probably be doing everyone a favour. Especially the child. (3/18)

Jacinta agrees:

I would have a real concern about how she's going to treat her child were it to be born...I think I'd tie her tubes while she was under anaesthetic. (2/24)

**Chapter 4****WOMEN OPPOSED TO  
ABORTION RIGHTS  
SPEAK****Question 1**

*"If pregnant with a child you could not keep, would you choose to have an abortion, or would you choose to have the child and give it up for adoption? Why?"*

Not surprisingly, women opposed to abortion rights say they would choose adoption over abortion if they were pregnant with an unwanted child. Three exceptions to this were noted. The first was that for a number of women, where their life was at risk, abortion was deemed permissible. The second was the belief of several women that in the case of pregnancy as a result of rape, they would be likely to choose abortion.

The third exception was several women who believed abortion in the case of pregnancy in a young girl as the result of father/daughter incest was permissible.

If their life was at stake, several women said they would choose abortion. For example

Maria:

In the questionnaire I did say there are some circumstances, but that is more a case of the mother going to die at the same time, if the mother in danger of dying, in those circumstances I might

Q: So if you were going to die, you would have an abortion?

I'd put my own life first. (5/2)

If pregnancy was the result of rape, Martina and Natasha believed they might choose abortion:

It's bring back the sort of resentment, it's be too - oh I might as well say it - I've been raped as well. (Martina)

I think, if I was raped, I would seriously consider abortion...because I don't know if I could have the baby with all that anger. I don't know how I'd react to it. (Natasha) (7/3)

Sarah believes that abortion is warranted only in the case of adolescent incest victims because you can't

...really expect that child to carry a pregnancy right through, destroying her body as she's doing it. That baby wasn't one born out of love, it was born out of fear, sickness, whatever. So there is no love there for that baby. (6/11)

Susan reluctantly admits that in extreme circumstances, a woman who decided in favour of abortion would not be blameworthy:

Say you were so bad you were starving, dying of hunger. To steal is wrong morally, isn't it? But to steal when you are very very hungry for your family? It's morally wrong but who could blame you for it? I mean it's not to be compared with abortion, but there are situation you just don't talk about it...it's sometimes up to an individual (6/13)

In the vast majority of cases, however, women opposed to abortion rights said if faced with an unwanted pregnancy, they would chose adoption over abortion. A number of women said this choice was motivated by their belief that abortion was morally wrong. Gina, for example, explains her choice simply:

I'm a practising Catholic and my religion says abortion is committing a mortal sin (6/2)

Lenore also believes abortion is morally wrong:

I think that a fetus is a life, and it's wrong to kill a life...which I believe it is - killing (8/4)

A few women believed it would be unjust to make the baby pay with its life for their irresponsibility. This is Nellie:

I should have taken the responsibility before the baby was created, it's me, it's not the baby's fault. I have no right to kill the baby because I was irresponsible.

Q: What if you got pregnant through a rape or failed contraception?

...Yeah, even if it was that, I couldn't kill the baby...the baby's innocent. I don't think it should be killed for something someone else did. (7/3)

A few women's comments suggested they would choose adoption because of a sense of moral obligation to give the fetus life. For example, Charlotte:

I think that giving somebody a life is the best thing you can do for them. (5/2)

Similarly, adoption is the choice for Jamie because it would

...give that life a chance somewhere else. (5/2)

Jennifer concurs:

...you're not taking the life away, you're giving it a chance of life. So life is then making the decision for adoption. (5/2)

Quite a few women felt adoption was the right thing to do, given the large number of women unable to have children of their own. Maria, for example, says:

If I couldn't keep the child I'd...give that child up for adoption. The reason being that I know people who have been unable to have children and they've always wanted to adopt and I know the joy that gives parents who aren't able to have a child. (6/2)

Margie also thinks it wrong to "kill a child" when

...they're many people who want children and can't have children (8/1)

Several women were concerned about the impact of the termination procedure on women's bodies. Susan, for instance, believes there are

...medical ramifications of terminating a pregnancy...Things like will she ever be able to have a baby again...For myself, I wouldn't like to go through that risk of having such a serious medical operation such as an abortion (5/5).

Maria agrees:

...once that process has begun at conception, other parts of the body go into action. For instance, the milk is beginning to be produced. And...if that has been cut, it takes a lot of time to get the body into working order again. (6/3)

A few women worried they would experience regret and guilt if they chose abortion. For instance, Charlotte:

...I think you'd feel better knowing you'd given your baby a chance to live, rather than thinking I've made a decision that is irrevocable, and I can't do anything about it now. (5/3)

Similarly, Mary believes

...a lot of girls tody have [abortions] now, and then in twenty years time have to live with themselves. I know of somebody whose been through that situation and hates themselves for what they've done. (6/2)

However, women in this group were not unaware of the difficulties associated with adoption. Like the women in the other group, these women admitted that significant social pressure would come to bear on a woman who was planning to relinquish the child she was carrying. This is Amanda:

...people would see you and there would just be an automatic assumption that you would be keeping the child and the difficulty would be saying 'no, I'm not keeping the child', and that's where you'd get the pressure from people. I really don't know that they would accept that you were going to give it up...

Q: They would think badly of you?

They would think badly of you. (6/4)

In fact, a large number of women opposed to abortion rights were sceptical about the ability of abortion to satisfactorily resolve the dilemma posed by unwanted pregnancy. As with women in favour of abortion rights, women in this group doubted their ability

to relinquish a child. However, unlike women in favour of abortion rights, whose solution to the difficulty posed by relinquishment was abortion, these women sought to avoid relinquishment by finding a way to keep the child. This is Mary:

I'd choose adoption as opposed to abortion, but I don't think I could even come to that. I think I'd probably find a way to bring it up myself.

Q: Why don't you think you'd be able to adopt?

I don't think I could go through the nine months of being pregnant and have the baby...and then give it away. (6/1)

Sarah agrees:

I wouldn't have an abortion. I'd carry that baby but I wouldn't be able to adopt. I'd find some way to keep that baby.

Q: It's not even imaginable?

Not at all. I just wouldn't do it. I just know myself, I really couldn't give that baby up. I really couldn't. (6/1)

Martina uses examples from her own life to demonstrate the unacceptability of adoption as a solution to unwanted pregnancy:

I've had two children, and before I had them I would have said I wouldn't chose abortion because I don't believe in abortion, I think it's wrong, and I just would have said adoption straight out as being the other alternative. But...I couldn't adopt a child either, because you do grow to love it so much. I've had to make that choice, with my second child, because we really couldn't afford it, but I decided to keep my second child because I just couldn't part with it...

Q: So really the choice is keep it or give it up for adoption, but it's really just keep it?

Yeah, basically...it was something we talked about, but I just couldn't think of doing it. No, I just think there's too much of a bonding, it's too hard to do... (7/2)

Grace believes women's biology argues against relinquishment:

...there's no doubt that the hormonal changes in your body as a woman just do things to you. Now I had sixteen horrible weeks of morning

sickness and I thought...I hate this child, I despise this child...but it passes. And once you ...feel the movement and the joy...the changes come within your system and your heart. And it just grows and by the time that pregnancy's finished, you might feel differently. (7/1)

### Question 2

*"Imagine that you are two months pregnant. You do not want to raise the child or are unable to do so and thus must decide between having an abortion or carrying the child to term and giving it up for adoption. As you are considering these options, a doctor approaches you and tells you that you have a third option. Thanks to technology, it is now possible for you to abort your foetus without killing it. Your foetus can be extracted from your body and transferred to an artificial womb where it will be grown until it is able to live outside of that artificial womb, at around nine months, then will be put up for adoption. The doctor informs you that this procedure carries no more medical risks or inconvenience to you than the traditional abortion method. Would you choose this third option?"*

Of the twenty women in the sample opposed to abortion rights, only two said they would consider evacuating an unwanted pregnancy into an ectogenetic womb<sup>37</sup>. Tania thinks the ectogenetic womb might make it easier to relinquish the child:

It depends...if it was just in an artificial womb and it didn't get any love, or any sense of just anything, I think I'd carry it to nine months. But if...it'd be getting some love, or...the baby didn't feel anything from you anyway, I'd probably consider it pretty strongly, because then I wouldn't have to give it up after nine months...(8/2)

Margie agrees that the ectogenetic womb could relieve some of the pain of relinquishment, in addition to making things easier for the adoptive mother:

I'd almost definitely take the third option. To reduce the trauma to myself and for the new mother to know that the baby has made no bonds with me. I think she'd feel it was her own baby more. (8/3)

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<sup>37</sup> Interestingly, both these women were in the twenty years old and under age group.

However, several women<sup>38</sup>, when forced by the interviewer to choose between abortion and evacuation into the ectogenetic womb, chose the latter. Marybeth's reasons for this choice were simple:

It's the lesser of two evils. (5/6)

Charlotte thought that in a forced choice situation, it would be better to

...put it in the incubator thing [and]... go for life. (5/6)

Though she would reject it herself, Natasha would want women considering abortion to have the option of the machine:

...this way, a certain percentage of those children being killed would still be alive...Not that I would do it myself...but I'm just saying that it's better than killing the whole percentage. (7/9)

For the majority of women opposed to abortion rights, however, the ectogenetic womb would be rejected as an inferior choice to both adoption and abortion. In fact, many women believed it was "worse" than abortion. Interestingly, many of the objections these women had to the technology were similar to those expressed by women in favour of abortion rights. For instance, Grace's concern about the woman's ability to heal from her experience if ectogenetic technology is utilised was raised as a concern by several women in favour of abortion rights:

I don't think the woman gives up the total identity of the child, and it's always, "I wonder what's really happened to the child, perhaps I can go have a look". So she's still in turmoil...(7/6)

Women opposed to abortion also expressed considerable concern about the welfare of a child gestated artificially. This concern can be seen in the following exchange between Mary, Amanda and Sarah:

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<sup>38</sup> Again, it is interesting to note that these three women are amongst the youngest in the sample, two aged 20 and the third aged 22.

I'd be too worried what the baby would end up like, because it hasn't had that...(Mary)

...part of their development is just growing in a body. It doesn't matter how comfortable they'd be, it still hasn't got...(Amanda)

Someone to talk to...(Mary)

Those...maternal feelings that you would have when you were carrying it. It could have the singing, the humming and the lull and everything like that in it, but it wouldn't have that actual maternal feeling that only you as that person could give it by carrying it in the womb. (Sarah) (6/6)

Like some women in favour of abortion rights, Susan worries about a child experiencing negative social repercussions as a result of being gestated artificially:

...with this modern technology, a lot of children might be born who don't have roots, they don't know where they've come from. There is not the security of the family, and we might grow up with children who really don't know what their purpose in life is... (5/10)

A few women in this group disliked the unnatural nature of the ectogenetic technology, a concern also heard from one of the women in favour of abortion rights.

This is Nellie:

I just think everything seems to be so unnatural nowadays. It just seems too strange to be doing all these things. (7/10)

Grace agrees:

...you really should be returning to nature as much as possible...we're just getting further and further away from the core of our existence. The more we intervene with nature, and nothings more natural than birth, the more our society becomes stuffed up. (7/12)

As with women in the other group, women opposed to abortion rights believed it would be irresponsible of them to abandon the fetus to the untrustworthy scientific and medical communities. This is Nellie and Natasha:

You're just putting the baby completely at the hands of science...I mean, you can't trust science, anything could go wrong, just putting it at the mercy of the doctors or whoever. (Nellie)

Anything could go wrong naturally too. (Natasha)

Yeah, but at least you haven't given it away, exposed it to even more. (Nellie) (7/6)

Grace also worries about the fate of a fetus left in the hands of the scientific and medical communities:

Eventually...they'd be saying we can't afford to have all these...babies...stuck in these humidicribs...so we'll just quietly turn off the machines... (7/5)

The issue of responsibility for the fetus is also important to Jennifer:

I would be concerned who would then own the baby, and who becomes the carer of the baby in the artificial womb...what rights does the baby have in the artificial womb? (5/4)

Marybeth was similarly concerned:

...what happens to those babies who, after two months, develop abnormalities...does [someone] have a right to say...that we should terminate it because no one would want that baby. Who would have [responsibility] for the baby? (5/7)

The experimental nature of the technology worried women opposed to abortion rights as it had women in favour of abortion rights. For example Miranda:

It's like putting your baby up to be a bit of a guinea pig, you know, to see. (7/5)

Grace agrees:

We're not too sure what sort of human being results from growing in a machine rather than a warm safe environment. (7/8)

Resource allocation issues, mentioned by several women in favour of abortion rights, was also a concern for women in this group. Amanda and Mary for instance, note that:

Abortion would be cheaper. Just talking from a dispassionate point of view...an artificial womb would be incredibly expensive. (Amanda)

And the government would have to fund it. (Mary)

Or us. (Amanda) (6/6)

Charlotte is similarly concerned about

...the cost of the experimentation that would go on in order to make this possible. I don't know what stage it is at, but I feel that the medical sciences are...doing all these things, and I don't think the community can afford to pay for it, and I just wonder who you are...depriving of some other medical treatment in order to carry this out. (4/5)

A number of women in this group believed some women who would otherwise choose abortion would opt for the ectogenetic womb because it would enable them to rid themselves of responsibility for the fetus without feeling guilt. Miranda and Grace explain:

...they might see that as a better solution because they wouldn't have as much guilt as if they had an abortion...because they haven't actually killed the baby. But they don't physically have to do any more for it...(Miranda)

I say there are always people who are ready for a cop out...and this is an easy cop out...it negates their responsibility. They've taken the child and they've put it in the machine where someone else can rear...the child, and at the end of nine months it will be another human being....but for that person it is just a cop out...they can say well, I haven't had an abortion so therefore I haven't done anything wrong. (Grace)

Q: You seem to be saying that you still think there is something wrong, even though they haven't taken the life of the child.

There's something wrong with taking it out of you and sticking it in a machine...the woman who gives up the child to...grow in a machine is not really in control of the child. (Grace) (7/9)

Like several women in the other group, Grace believes that neither abortion, adoption or ectogenesis are anything but forced choices for women. The answer, she believes, is for society to change to enable women to keep their children:

I think it's better for us to change society's attitude to pregnant women, of all ages. They fall pregnant, they have children, whether they can afford to keep them or not, and we change our values and we find save havens for all those children. (7/9)

### The Role of Men

The issue about the role of men arose less often in this group, but of those women who dealt with the question, most did not accept what was a given for women in favour of abortion rights; that the fact of pregnancy taking place in a woman's body makes the termination decision hers alone. The opinion of women opposed to abortion rights regarding the importance of including men in decisions about the fate of an unwanted pregnancy, in other words, did not change with the introduction of ectogenetic technology. This is Charlotte:

I think that the first premise, that the woman has the right because it is in her body...things are not very good the way they are now with men not being included in the deciding process. Possibly because it's outside the body it's more practical...to bring the father's considerations into it, but I don't think the way things stand right now...is what would be ideal. (5/8)

Amanda and Mary argue similarly:

...I think both partners have a right to some say, whether the fetus is inside or outside the woman is irrelevant. (Amanda)

A lot of women wouldn't agree with that Amanda. A lot of women believe it's happening to their bodies, not their husbands'. (Mary)

Q: ...What do you think...do you feel it's the man's choice as well?

I think it should be, but it isn't in a lot of cases...(Mary) (6/7)

Several women in this group believed the removal of the fetus from the woman's body should result in more decision-making power being accorded to fathers, provided the parents are in a loving relationship. This is Cassie:

Well I guess it depends on the relationship you're in. If you're in a happy relationship...I think he's entitled to his opinion, because I think he's part of your life as well, so this child might be part of your life, so if you've decided to have that child taken out of your body...I think they should both have a say. (3/14)

Jennifer believed that if the fate of the fetus was in dispute, the father's view should hold sway because

...the mother has relinquished, because of the act of taking the baby out of the womb and putting it in an artificial womb...the mother...[has] relinquished the biological bond with the baby. (5/9)

**Question 3**

*"Imagine that your relative suffers from a disease that can be successfully treated with fetal tissue. Up to now, your relative has used tissue available from abortions that were not done with the intention of providing tissue for this use. Lately, however, not enough abortions have been done to cope with the increasing demand for tissue, and your relative has requested that you become pregnant in order to abort the fetus to assist in her treatment. Do you do it?"*

Only three<sup>39</sup> women in this group considered giving a positive response to their relative's request for help, with the majority of women rejecting the idea for some of the same reasons cited by women in favour of abortion rights. For the women who said they would consider the request, the nature of the relationship and/or the seriousness of the illness the relative suffered would be the deciding factor(s). This is

Anna:

If you said it was a brother, sister or parents, I'd think about it, and with a little bit of persuasion, I might do it. (Anna)

Q: Would you want to do it?

I won't want to do it, but you think about someone close and being able to help that person... (Anna)

Q: So you think it would be wrong but...

Yeah, it was wrong, but I'd still do it. (Anna) (8/6)

Natasha agrees:

...if it was someone I loved, you'd do everything you can for them to keep them alive. I know everyone is supposed to die but you're still like "what can I do, how can I help them, a few extra days is better than them going now". (7/15)

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<sup>39</sup> Again, it is interesting to note that the dissenters are amongst the youngest in the sub-sample, aged 19, 20 and 22.

Tania agreed that if the relative was close, and their illness serious, she would consider the request:

Like if it was my mum, or...a sister I was really close to - to save her life - I guess I'd have to think about it, but I'm still not sure I could do it. (8/6)

The majority of women, however, rejected the idea out of hand. Lenore's view, one shared by a number of women in favour of abortion rights, is that the deliberate nature of pregnancy and abortion in this scenario makes it impermissible:

...it's quite revolting...killing a child to, I mean deliberately having a child so you can kill it. (8/5)

Several women agreed with women in the other group that it was wrong to trade one life for another. For instance Gina:

...I couldn't go through an abortion knowing I was killing somebody to save somebody else. (6/6)

Amanda and Mary reason similarly:

I don't think you can weigh up one life against another. You can not just say this life is worth more than this one. (Amanda)

It's like picking up your two children and saying 'I love this one more than I love this one'. (Mary) (6/8)

Karen and Lenore agree:

I think for each child we have special feelings...and I don't think it's ok to say 'I'll give this life' (Karen)

Replaceable babies. (Lenore)

Q: You don't think they're replaceable?

No. I think life shouldn't be that cheap. 'Oh well, got rid of that one, just have another one'. (Lenore) (8/7)

Along these lines, several women felt fetal tissue was not theirs to give. Says Margie:

...I'm not saying, if they want something, a skin graft or something of myself...but I don't think I can make that sacrifice on behalf of somebody else. (8/5)

Several women believed such practices would exploit both women and fetuses. This is Susan:

No. Never. Because that then creates the wrong type of people who will then become fetus factories, get a dollar out of it. What about poor people in the undeveloped countries? If they know there's going to be a quid made, they're going to get pregnant and sell their babies to make a bit of money. (5/12)

Grace and Natasha agree:

...if demand for fetal tissue became so strong we would then have people...saying 'you have an abortion, you carry a fetus for me, and I'll pay you \$10,000 and I'll pay for the abortion...', so it's trading slavery using unborn children. (Grace)

It's a market. (Natasha) (7/16)

Several women were simply overwhelmed by their vision of the process necessary to take the tissue. This is Martina:

...I really can't comprehend doing it, I can't even think of it, it's just gross. Oh God. (7/14)

Jamie feels similarly:

I couldn't imagine fetal tissue being taken from a baby, I just couldn't imagine it. No, part of it being used and what about ...the rest of it? Just in my mind I couldn't picture it and in my mind I couldn't go through with it. (5/13)

Several women sounded similar themes as those heard from women in favour of abortion rights, about the need for people to accept death as a natural part of life. This is Nellie and Grace:

...eventually everyone is going to die, you can't keep just going 'we'd better do this' and 'we'd better do that' just to keep them alive. That's life. (Nellie)

It's just the way life is...we're born, we live, we die. (Grace) (7/15)

#### Question 4

*"Imagine that you have become pregnant voluntarily. Just as you begin to show, you discover you have won an all expenses paid trip for two to Barcelona for the Olympics. However, for promotional reasons, the people offering you the trip don't want you to look pregnant. They say that you must have an abortion in order to take up the winnings, which because they revolve around the olympics, can not be delayed until after the child is born. What would you do?"*

Not surprisingly, all the women in this group rejected abortion as the correct solution to the problem posed in the scenario. For many of these women, a woman's decision to abort to go to Barcelona, or to improve her competitiveness epitomises all that they believe to be wrong about women's reasons for having abortions in most situations; that they are done for reasons of "convenience". Abortions for reasons of convenience are spoken of disparagingly throughout the interviews with women opposed to abortion rights. This is Marybeth and Charlotte discussing their belief that women in favour of abortion rights would reject ectogenesis in favour of abortion:

They'd still abort because they don't want to be bothered or hassled.  
(Marybeth)

Yeah, I know of one woman who had an abortion because it was going to interfere with her skiing trip. It's just such a...I mean that's an inconvenience to her. (Charlotte) (5/11)

Lenore's view is similar:

I know that sometimes there are really extenuating circumstances but I think that a fetus is a life, and it's wrong to kill a life whether it's inconvenient to you or whatever...(8/4)

Susan believes that abortions done for reasons of "convenience" indicate a regrettable attitude amongst women towards the role of mothering children. Ultimately, she believes, it is the children that suffer:

Let's say...I abort this child for convenience...my child will then...feel my attitude towards them is 'oh well, whenever it's not convenient, I forget you. I do my thing, that's the most important thing in my life'.

Children aren't silly, it's not what you say it's the attitude you have towards them. My children are my life...If I have to make a choice, it is my children...I think a lot of people in the world wouldn't be here if they were planned and really wanted, I think the population would be very small. (5/14)

Jamie too is worried about the effects of such attitudes on children:

...friends of mine...I don't know if they've had abortions before, but for convenience...they wanted to go on a trip to Europe and the children stayed with a nanny for all that time and...were given whatever they wanted to make them happy. I don't know, I find that very surface, very 'this will cover it for the time being', but that was only a few years ago so you don't know what the outcome will be [for the children], but I find that a bit too selfish. (5/14)

For Miranda and Nellie, abortions for "convenience" violate their sense of responsibility to others:

I think golly it'd be so self-centred to do that, to give someone else up for yourself. (Nellie)

It just depends on how you're brought up..I come from a Catholic background and...you know you always put other people first, including unborn children. (Miranda) (7/17)

A few women rejected the idea of life having any price. This is Lenore:

...that would make me furious. I...don't think you can put a price on any life, so you could give me the whole world, and I still wouldn't have an abortion for that reason. (8/7)

For others, the Barcelona/Competition reasons are simply "too cheap". This is Margie:

The things I want aren't material. I mean, I like material things but they are not what's really important..I don't think anyone could actually give me material things to take a life. (8/8)

Anna agrees:

I think the reason's too cheap...my own reason, like I don't want to carry it nine months by myself...and all the people around me that are hurting, because they see me, especially if it's an unwanted pregnancy. Your parents would be hurt, your relatives, your family would be hurt. So for me, those are considerations, not material things. (8/8)

**Chapter 5****WHAT A GOOD MOTHER WOULD DO:  
MAKING SENSE OF WOMEN'S VIEWS  
ON ABORTION AND ECTOGENESIS****Argument Summary:**

The data confirms the hypothesis that the incorrect projection by Singer and Wells of women's response to ectogenesis is grounded in the inadequate understanding severance theorists have of women's abortion morality. While the women in both groups have different views about the morality of women who choose abortion, they agree on the moral unacceptability of a woman choosing to evacuate her fetus to an ectogenetic womb. Where they disagree, however, is on what constitutes a responsible reaction by a woman, or what precisely a good mother *does*, when confronted with an unwanted pregnancy. In other words, what women in favour of abortion rights and women opposed to abortion rights disagree about is what maternal actions satisfy, and fail to satisfy, the moral imperative that women take responsibility for their fetuses and the children they could become. For women in favour of abortion rights, abortion can sometimes constitute a morally acceptable response by a woman to unwanted pregnancy, whereas for women opposed to abortion rights, the only morally acceptable response a woman can have to unwanted pregnancy is to decide to gestate, raise and bear the fetus and the child it will become. Where both groups of women agree,

however, is that adoption and ectogenesis constitute an abandonment by the woman of her responsibility for her fetus, and are thus actions that would be rejected by a good mother. Thus, both adoption and ectogenesis are rejected by women in this study as inadequate resolutions to unwanted pregnancy.

### Women in Favour of Abortion Rights

What is made abundantly clear from the words of all the women interviewed, is that there is no easy solution to unwanted pregnancy. When Carey asserts that her decision "was not a callous one. It was not unthought about, it was not clear, and it certainly wasn't indifferent", she articulates for many women in this group the painfulness and difficulty of making a termination decision. Abortion for these women, in other words, is not a good solution, but sometimes the best one available to them in a world which they believe does not always make it possible for them to gestate, bear and raise the fetuses/children they conceive in the manner and environment they find right.

It is difficult to miss the sense of responsibility women<sup>40</sup> feel for their fetuses and the children they could become; a responsibility that seems to be derived not only from their sense of duty to a vulnerable being dependant on their care, but from the strong emotional response the fetus, as a being that could become their child, generates within them. Both aspects of women's sense of responsibility to their fetus draw heavily on a conception of femininity and motherhood seen in Western cultural

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<sup>40</sup> For simplicity's sake, I shall refer at times to the values, beliefs and opinions of women surveyed in this study as those of "women". Readers should bear in mind that the current sample can not be considered representative of the population of Australian women. (For more about the methodology of the study, see Chapter 2).

discourse; one that makes socially sanctioned female behaviour indistinguishable from the behaviour of a good mother<sup>41</sup>. Mothers, in other words, may merely be the genetic or gestational contributors to the life of their fetuses and the children they could become, but good mothers are ones that accept and perhaps even rejoice in the role of nurturer and parent of their fetus/children<sup>42</sup>. Yet, while women in both groups agree on this conception of a good mother, they disagree as to whether a woman can also be a good mother if she seeks to escape her gestational and parental role once she becomes pregnant<sup>43</sup>. While women opposed to abortion rights believe there are no morally legitimate way for a women to terminate her responsibility to gestate, bear and raise all the fetuses/children she conceives, women in favour of abortion rights believe that a woman could make a morally legitimate, or even a morally laudable, decision to terminate her pregnancy, and along with it, her maternal responsibility to care for her fetus.

Women's sense of duty to a vulnerable human being dependant on their care can be seen in the concern repeatedly voiced about the fate of the fetus in the ectogenetic womb. Women worried, in other words, that once the fetus was beyond their control and protection, it could fall prey to a wide array of physical, emotional and social

<sup>41</sup> Feminist scholars have explored this connection at length. Adrienne Rich, for example, describes the western cultural conception of a good mother as "beneficent, sacred, pure, asexual, nourishing", and maternal love as "quite literally selfless". Susan Brownmiller notes the socially sanctioned construction of a good, or feminine, woman as one who is nurturant, selfless, and a passive foil to active masculinity. See: Rich, A. *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution* (USA: Bantam Books, 1976) and Brownmiller, S. *Femininity* (New York: Fawcett Columbine, 1984).

<sup>42</sup> For the sake of brevity, I shall use the expression "fetus/children" in some instances as shorthand for the more cumbersome "fetus, and the children they could become".

<sup>43</sup> In fact, there is a suggestion in the data that women opposed to abortion rights also believe that women who seek to avoid pregnancy, in favour of say, a career, are also morally suspect. However, because the concern of this paper is to investigate women's moral perspective on abortion and ectogenesis only, this suggestion will not be pursued further here.

risks. Emily's concern that an ectogenetic womb wouldn't develop into a "proper fetus with every limb to it", and Carey's worries about the "emotional and spiritual and mental" well-being of an artificially gestated fetus are just a few examples of the sense of duty articulated by women to protect the vulnerable fetus from the dangers it faced if left alone outside their bodies. For a woman to expose the fetus to these risks would be irresponsible, and thus morally unacceptable in the eyes of women in this group.

The other aspect of women's sense of responsibility to their fetuses derives not from the fetus's vulnerability and dependence upon them, but from the fetus's status as a being that could become their child. Women's belief in the power and inviolable nature of the maternal/fetus-child bond is evidenced by the concerns they express about relinquishing<sup>44</sup> their fetus/child for adoption or to an ectogenetic womb. If their fetus is born, it will be their child, and women articulate an extensive range of obligations they believe they owe to their children, foremost amongst them being the obligation to raise them. Over and over women ground their rejection of adoption and ectogenesis in a belief that it would be morally irresponsible of them to bring a child into the world they were unwilling or unable to parent. When Kerry talks about the damage her father sustained as an adopted person, and Charity worries about damaging a child "...by not having any influence on them", both women underscore their belief

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<sup>44</sup> The issue of relinquishment has received a good deal of public attention in recent years because of its relevance to the surrogacy debate. The pain of relinquishment for both mother and child has been eloquently documented by a number of adoption activists. See, for example: Hirt, D. "I was Lied to about Adoption so why should I Believe you Now?" and Meggitt, M. "The Dismantling of Motherhood and One Woman's Story" in *Surrogacy - In Whose Interest?* (Proceedings of the National Conference, Melbourne: Mission of St James and St John, February 1991). Also Kane, E. *Birth Mother* (Australia: MacMillan Company of Australia, 1990).

that women have a moral responsibility to raise their own<sup>45</sup> children. To bring a child into existence is to accept responsibility for that child's well-being, perhaps for life. As Carey explains, once you have put "another person on the planet", regardless of who rears them, "...you are...responsible for them".

This belief about the nature of maternal responsibility elucidates the rejection by women in this group of both adoption and ectogenesis as irresponsible abdications by women of their maternal responsibilities. This is because in both cases the child remains alive, and women believe that if their child is alive, it is their responsibility to nurture it *in utero*, to give birth to it and to raise it once it is born. To abandon one's child to unknown adopted parents, or worse yet a machine, constitutes a morally unacceptable abandonment of a woman's responsibility to nurture and protect her fetus.

The rejection of both adoption and ectogenesis leaves women in this group with only two ways to resolve an unwanted pregnancy: abortion or keeping the child. Annette sums up the nature of this decision:

For me, it's the choice to be involved in creating a valuable human being, or deciding that I'm not going to be responsible for growing, rearing and parenting another human being, which is probably why I wouldn't chose...adoption or the [ectogenetic] option because for me, it...is the commitment I've got to make to either having a child and therefore being responsible for that child's growth and welfare and education. Or not having the child, and deciding OK, I'm not going to parent at the moment...and having an abortion. (1/20)

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<sup>45</sup> The scenarios used in this research made it impossible to distinguish whether a woman felt a fetus/child was "her own" because of her genetic contribution, gestational contribution, or some combination of both. This is an important issue that will hopefully be pursued by future research.

If a good mother raises her own children, the only solution for a women who does not want or is unable to undertake this task is for her to prevent her child *coming into existence in the first place*. One suspects that the ideal solution for many women in this situation would be to turn back the clock to a time before they became pregnant. However, this being impossible, women are forced to embrace the only solution available to the quandary they articulate: abortion.

Although never articulated directly, women in this group clearly felt that to terminate their fetus was not necessarily to visit upon it a punishment. In other words, the fact that abortion results in the death of the fetus does not necessarily mean that women believe they wrong their fetus by aborting it. A moral abortion decision is based on the woman's caring evaluation of the outcome of continuing the pregnancy for both herself and her fetus/child as an interconnected unit. The woman must evaluate the impact on herself of rearing the child and how her response to that task would consequently affect the fetus and child it could become; what I shall call the maternal/fetal-child unit. If the woman's decision to abort is based on her caring evaluation of the outcome of continuing the pregnancy for both herself and her fetus/child as an interconnected unit, abortion is not only seen as permissible, but often the most moral solution in the situation. Gillian captures the nature of the interconnectedness between a woman and fetus when she says:

I was thinking about the baby too. The adoption part was still not an issue in my decision. But I thought definitely for the baby, I didn't want it. How much more can you think about the baby- what a miserable life it was going to have. I just didn't want it. (2/14)

A number of assumptions underlie the belief of a number of women, here articulated by Gillian, that a mother's decision to abort based on an evaluation that continuing the

pregnancy would impact negatively upon her maternal/fetal-child unit, is morally justified. I will now seek to briefly identify and explicate these assumptions.

The first belief concerns what I have called the maternal/fetal-child unit. As already noted, women in this group believe that mothers and their children should remain together through the gestational period, and through the remainder of the child's dependant life. Thus in the quote above, Gillian is weighing the impact of abortion on her maternal/fetal-child unit as against the impact of her raising the child. Neither adoption nor ectogenesis have a place in her considerations because they constitute in her mind a morally unacceptable abandonment of her responsibility to her fetus.

The second assumption underlying this line of reasoning is that the fetus is not the moral equivalent of a child born. Although infanticide was not raised in the interviews<sup>46</sup>, it is this researcher's opinion that women in this group would not view the desire of a woman to kill her *child*, because she viewed the prospects for their maternal/fetal-child unit unfavourably, in the same light that they would view her decision to kill her *fetus* for the same reason<sup>47</sup>. Women, in other words, view abortion

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<sup>46</sup> In fact, the issue of infanticide did arise in one interview session, but not enough women overall addressed the topic for any conclusions about women's perceptions of the morality of this practice to be judged.

<sup>47</sup> There could be two reasons for this. One is that women view a child born to have acquired some previously lacking intrinsic moral significance that makes it impermissible to kill it, or women find it hard to imagine a circumstance where a woman would have been unable to act on her desire to terminate her maternal responsibility earlier. The issue for women in the latter case, in other words, would be "why did she wait?". Both perspectives would also explain the lack of comfort expressed by a number of women with late abortions. Certainly, research to investigate the validity of these speculations is needed.

as a way to *prevent the creation* of something for which, once it comes into being, they will be in inescapably responsible<sup>48</sup>.

The third assumption underlying the words of Gillian and women like her is that the killing of one being by another is not necessarily a morally unacceptable act<sup>49</sup>. Predicated on their belief that the mother and her fetus/child should remain as a unit, and that the fetus does not yet have the moral significance of the child, women believe that a loving and caring assessment by the mother that her maternal/fetal-child unit will be negatively impacted upon were she to allow her child to be born constitutes adequate justification for a woman to choose to terminate the life of her fetus through abortion. If the woman's intentions and motives in choosing abortion are to do what is best for her maternal/fetal-child unit, she can be understood to be "killing from care"<sup>50</sup>. For women in this group, a decision to "kill from care" can often be seen to be the most responsible choice she can make to resolve an unwanted pregnancy.

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<sup>48</sup> This raises questions about the precise point at which women consider the fetus to obtain moral significance, and the reasons women have for choosing this point. My intuition is that for women, the point of significance is birth, but unfortunately this was not an area explored in the current study, and will have to be left for future research to explore. Certainly if birth is found to be the point of significance in women's moral framework, interesting questions are raised about whether women would consider the evacuation of a fetus to an ectogenetic womb "birth", or whether the nine month mark would retain its potency for women despite its medical irrelevancy. Rhoden argues that the ability of medical technology to save fetuses of increasingly low gestational age does not mean that the 24 week old fetus viable today has the same significance of the 28 week old viable fetus of yesteryear. In other words, by disentangling viability from gestational age, the attribution of moral significance to the older fetus or the newborn gestated for nine months, and not to the younger fetus or the newborn gestated for only three months, could continue to be justified. See Rhoden, N. "Trimesters and Technology: Revamping Roe v. Wade" (*Yale Law Journal*, 95:639, 1986).

<sup>49</sup> The ethical debate around euthanasia is also challenging the notion that killing - for reasons other than self-defense - is to commit a moral wrong. Of course, the fact that the people at issue regarding euthanasia are both beings who have been born, and are or were at one time competent makes the relevant considerations in these cases substantially different to those pertinent when the killing of fetuses through abortion is at issue.

<sup>50</sup> I am indebted to Dr Michael Smith at the Philosophy Department at Monash University for coining this phrase.

Women in this group do not believe, however, that all termination decisions are "killing from care", and thus moral in nature. Decisions stripped of "feeling" and "love", ones in which the aborting woman is not motivated by care and protective concern for her maternal/fetal-child unit, are deemed irresponsible and thus immoral by women in this group. Gillian goes so far as to characterise decisions of this type as "murder".

Women's reasoning regarding the morality of abortion and adoption as solutions to unwanted pregnancy inform their perspective on ectogenesis. Ectogenesis is viewed by women in favour of abortion rights to constitute the same sort of fetal abandonment as adoption. In fact, several referred to ectogenesis as "early adoption" as they believed that a women evacuating her fetus to a machine would experience the same relinquishment pain, and loss of capacity to ensure the well-being of the fetus as a women relinquishing a child already born for adoption. Further, ectogenesis results in the creation of a child to which the women feels a maternal sense of responsibility. It creates, in other words, a woman's "own" child, and it is *precisely this event that women seek to avoid by choosing abortion*. Thus women in favour of abortion rights reject ectogenesis because it both constitutes an impermissible abandonment by the woman of her responsibility to care for her fetus, and results in her assuming maternal responsibility for a child that she is either unwilling or unable to assume.

Thus, to summarise the discussion thus far, the interview data suggests that women in favour of abortion rights believe that if a woman does not wish or is unable to assume the mantle of motherhood in the long-term, abortion is the only option

available to terminate her responsibility of care to the fetus, and to prevent her child from coming into existence. If her decision is made out of care and protective concern for herself and her child as a unit, women in this group believe that not only is abortion not murder, it can be the most moral option available to a woman. It is, in other words, what they believe a good mother who is unable to raise her child would do. Ectogenesis, like adoption, is not a solution for women faced with unwanted pregnancy because both involve the creation of a woman's "own" child, a situation that women feel must be avoided if they are to legitimately escape their maternal responsibility to their fetus/child.

Interestingly, women in this group believe that even if a woman's decision to terminate is morally suspect, it would be morally wrong to deny her access to termination services. The reasoning of the woman on this point was consequential, with woman contending that the outcome of an unwilling woman being forced into motherhood for both her and the child would be worse than the outcome for both parties if the woman is allowed to abort. Thus, while women in this group believe that a woman who terminated her pregnancy to go to Barcelona would be both "cold" and "lacking in humanity", they also argue in favour of that women receiving a termination, given that she would "...probably be doing everyone a favour" by not becoming a mother.

It is important to note, however, that women in this group were extremely reluctant to sit in judgement of other women's motives and intentions for aborting. Abortion was seen by them as a highly personal decision, one grounded in the highly complex and personal nature of the woman's life. There was, in fact, a profound trust women in this

group expressed in the moral nature of women's intentions and motives in choosing termination. For instance, Lucy and Judith's assertions that women, in Lucy's words, "don't look at abortion so easily". In addition, women in this group stressed the importance for women to feel comfortable with *their own reasons* for choosing termination. Charity, for instance, argues that the abortion decision must be "purely up to the woman" because:

I think a woman has to feel she's doing the best for the baby growing inside her, and if she feels that that's terminating the pregnancy, then there can be no argument. Because that's up to her. (2/12)

However, a similar sense of ease with the motives and intentions of men who might want to exercise power in termination decisions was not in evidence. In wrestling with one of the implications of ectogenesis, that men as contributors of half of the genetic material comprising the fetus could seek power in decisions concerning unwanted pregnancy, women expressed both hurt and anxiety at the prospect of men obtaining equal power to them in decisions regarding the fate of the fetus. Alison expresses well the sense of distrust women had of male motives and intentions in seeking the power to decide the fate of the fetus when she says such power "...would just be an ego trip for him". Similarly, Margot's assertion that 70% of men "could care less" about a baby that resulted from a "one-night stand" attests to women's suspicion regarding the depth of male concern about fetuses/children. In fact, several women argued that men already exert a good deal of power in decisions about pregnancy by refusing to support women to have the children they have conceived together. Moreover, a number of women agreed with Callie that the inability of women to avoid "deal[ing]

"with" pregnancy gives them the right to decide the fate of the fetus, regardless of the capacity of technology to sever fetuses from their bodies alive<sup>51</sup>.

Women in this group expressed indignation at the possibility that their capacity to choose to terminate their fetus might be replaced in the future by a capacity to choose only evacuation to an ectogenetic womb. Forcing women to become mothers, they believe, would not cause damage to the maternal/fetal-child unit, but would deprive women of the full range of options to which they have a right as independent autonomous human beings. For example, in response to Alison's claim that women are "built to carry and give birth", Frances replies sharply:

I'm not sure that's women's role either. I probably won't engage in that role at all, but that doesn't mean I don't have an alternative role. [It's a] capacity, it's a possibility...We can choose. (3/8)

If women are deprived of the "full range of options", Frances threatens, they will "take...action" to ensure they can decide "...when, where, how and why to have a child".

### Women Opposed to Abortion Rights

For women in this group, the dilemma of unwanted pregnancy seemed less acute. This should not be surprising given their resolution to the problem - to keep the child - is less ethically contentious than termination. Many women opposed to abortion rights expressed a similar sense of maternal responsibility as described by women in the other group for the well-being of the fetus and the child it could become. The agree

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<sup>51</sup> Catriona McKenzie makes a similar observation about the asymmetry of paternal and maternal responsibility in pregnancy that results from the woman's bodily connection to the fetus. See McKenzie, C. "Abortion and Embodiment" (*Australian Journal of Philosophy*, 70:2 June 1992), p. 141.

with women in favour of abortion rights that mothers are responsible for the care and protection of their fetuses and children, and that if a woman has a child, she should be the one who raises it. Women in this group thus reject adoption and ectogenesis, both because they constitute the abandonment of the woman's duty to protect a vulnerable being, and because they indicate a woman's abandonment of her maternal responsibilities to her child. But for women in this group, not only would a good mother not abandon her child to adopted parents, or worse her fetus to a machine, she also would not terminate the life of her fetus through abortion. For women opposed to abortion rights, in other words, the only morally legitimate outcome for a woman facing an unwanted pregnancy is for her to gestate, birth and raise her fetus/child.

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In sharp contrast to women in favour of abortion rights, women in this group were highly suspicious of the motives and intentions of women seeking to terminate their pregnancies. Women who preferred their careers, their ski trips or their holidays in Europe were constantly cited as examples of women with the sort of inadequate value systems that lead them to value the material aspects of life above their role as mothers, and thus choose abortion as a solution to unwanted pregnancy. The value system that enables women to choose abortion for "convenience" is impugned by women opposed to abortion rights not only because it leads women to abort their fetuses, but because it is likely to result in damage to any future children the woman may have. Remember Susan, who notes that if a woman aborts for "convenience", a future child

...will then...feel my attitude towards them is 'oh well, whenever it's not convenient I forget you. I do my thing, that's the most important thing in my life'. Children aren't silly, it's not what you say it's the attitude you have towards them.

The view of motherhood described by Susan, where her children are "her life" and "the important thing" again calls on notions of motherhood that dominate Western cultural discourse. But while for women in favour of abortion rights, a woman who feels unable to assume the mantle of motherhood (perhaps because of the demands of her career or other priorities) can legitimately seek an abortion, women in this group believe that women who have priorities other than motherhood are morally suspect by definition. Thus, a good mother is one who values her role (or her potential role) as a mother beyond all other aspects of life, placing her children (and potential children) above her own interests, ambitions and goals as an autonomous human being. For a good mother, in other words, there is no such thing as an *unwanted* pregnancy, only an *unexpected* one. And a good mother's response to unexpected pregnancy is to willingly make room in her life for the new arrival. Martina's discussion of her inability to relinquish her second child despite being unable to afford it, and Sarah's insistence that she would "find some way to keep" any baby that resulted from an unintended pregnancy are evidence of these sorts of values.

The attitude of women in favour of abortion rights to men also differed sharply from women opposed to abortion rights. Whereas the former were both suspicious and resentful of men's actions and attitudes around children and women's reproductive capacities, women in the latter group believed men should be an integral part of any decision a woman makes about the fate of her pregnancy. A large part of these differences can be explained by the different assumptions both groups of women made about the men under discussion. Whereas for women in favour of abortion rights, "men" were assumed to only be the *genetic* fathers of the fetuses women carried,

women opposed to abortion rights assumed "men" were either the husbands or partners of the pregnant woman and thus had more than a genetic connection to the fetus. These different assumptions are likely to be derived from different value sets held by the groups regarding marriage and family and the place of reproduction vis a vis these institutions<sup>52</sup>. It is possible that were women considering the same sort of men, either those with which they are involved in an intimate relationship or those who are relative strangers, their responses to the proper role of men in decisions about unwanted pregnancy in a world where ectogenesis is a reality would be more similar<sup>53</sup>. Certainly, the strong sense of dislike and distrust of the male-dominated scientific and medical professions was shared by women in both groups.

Despite the capacity of ectogenesis to preserve fetal life, it was soundly rejected by women opposed to abortion rights. Because good mothers gestate, birth and raise their own fetuses/children, ectogenesis was seen by women in this group as an expensive alternative for women to "negate" their maternal responsibilities to their fetuses. Women in this group feared that women might attempt to utilise the ectogenetic womb to assuage their guilt about abortion, and thus were insistent that fetal evacuation be understood to constitute the same sort of maternal abandonment of responsibility for the fetus, and display the same sort of mistaken maternal values, as did abortion. Grace's description of ectogenesis as "an easy cop out" for women who wish to

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<sup>52</sup> Luker's work on abortion activists clearly delineates the differing value systems in these areas held by activists on both sides of the conflict. See: Luker, (*Op. Cit.*).

<sup>53</sup> Obviously, without future research it is impossible to do more than speculate on the responses of women in these cases.

"negate their responsibility" to bear and raise their fetuses/children is an excellent example of this line of reasoning.

While both sets of women agree that it is a bad mother who abdicates responsibility for her fetus/child, they disagree on what maternal actions constituted such an abandonment. Or, to put this proposition positively, they disagree about what a good mother would do. For women in favour of abortion rights, a woman who has the right sort of intentions and motives in choosing to terminate the life of her fetus through abortion is seen to be both accepting and properly acquitting her maternal responsibilities to her fetus/child. For women opposed to abortion rights, on the other hand, nothing less than a commitment by the woman to gestate, bear and raise her fetus/child constitutes an adequate acquittal of the woman's maternal responsibilities. For women in favour of abortion rights, ectogenesis, like adoption, is problematic because it preserves the life of the fetus/child, creating a being in which the woman stands in the responsible relationship of mother. For women opposed to abortion rights, the preservation of the life of the fetus is a necessary but not a sufficient condition for a moral response by a woman to unwanted pregnancy. This view says that not only must women preserve the life of every fetus they conceive, they must accept responsibility to gestate, bear and raise each of these fetuses/children.

Thus, what women in favour of abortion rights intend when they terminate a pregnancy is to terminate the life of their fetus. Abortion for these women, in other words, is not a severance procedure, but rather a justifiable act of killing from care. On the other hand, women opposed to abortion rights desire to criminalise abortion

not only to preserve the life of the fetus, but to force women to mother the fetuses/children they conceive. The abortion morality described by women in this study goes a long way towards explaining their response to the prospect of ectogenesis. For both women in favour of abortion rights and women opposed to abortion rights, ectogenesis is not seen as a solution to the abortion conflict. For women in favour of abortion rights, ectogenesis is problematic because it preserves the life of the fetus, and with that life, a woman's maternal responsibilities. For women opposed to abortion rights, ectogenesis is a concern because it provides women with another way to avoid their responsibility to gestate, bear and raise the children they conceive.

**Chapter 6**

## **RECONCEPTUALISING THE ABORTION DEBATE: TAKING WOMEN'S PERSPECTIVE SERIOUSLY**

### **The Problem with Severance Theory**

It is now time to look at the implications of the abortion morality described by women for both the conservative and severance theoretical positions on abortion.

Although the conservative position grounds its opposition to abortion in a belief in an overriding fetal right to life, the focus of women opposed to abortion rights interviewed for this study<sup>54</sup> is not on the status of the fetus, but rather on the motives and intentions of the aborting woman. This is not to say that conservative women are unconcerned about the preservation of fetal life, but rather that the preservation of fetal life is a necessary, but not a sufficient condition for a woman's response to unwanted pregnancy to be ethical. For these women, it is necessary that a moral response to unwanted pregnancy entail not only the woman's preservation of the life of her fetus, but her commitment to gestate the fetus within her body to term, and to bear and raise the child it could become. Abortion, for women in this group, like adoption and

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<sup>54</sup> For the sake of simplicity, I will henceforth refer to women opposed to abortion rights and women in favour of abortion rights interviewed for this study as simply "women opposed to abortion rights" and "women in favour of abortion rights" or "conservative" and "liberal" women.

ectogenesis, constitutes *in most cases* an unjustified abdication by a woman of her maternal responsibility to care for her fetus and the child it will become.

The fact that abortion is impermissible for conservative women in most, but not all cases, is the strongest piece of evidence for the view that it is the motives and intentions of the aborting woman, not the destruction of fetal life, that constitutes the fundamental wrong of abortion for these women. Conservative women reluctantly allow that abortion may be permissible, or the aborting woman not blameworthy, in cases where pregnancy is the result of rape or incest (the so-called "hard-cases"), despite the obvious fact that the status of the fetus should not be contingent on the manner in which it was conceived. The reason why these women deem abortion to be permissible, or not blameworthy, in the "hard cases" is because of their assessment that women in these situations, in abandoning their maternal responsibility to care for their fetus/child, are not implicitly rejecting motherhood as the central role in their lives. This message, of course, is what women in this group believe to be implicit in the abortions women have for reasons of "convenience", and the main aspect of abortion they find ethically unacceptable.

So too does the rejection by these women of ectogenesis as an alternative to abortion support the contention that for women in this group, it is the motives and intentions of the aborting woman that define the permissibility of abortion. Thus we see conservative women soundly rejecting ectogenetic technology, despite its capacity to preserve fetal life, because of their perception that the motives and intentions of the

vast majority of women who would utilise the technology would be to abandon their maternal responsibility to care for their fetuses.

The central tenant of the severance position, that abortion is essentially a severance procedure, has also been shown not to correspond with the views of women in favour of abortion rights. The notion that abortion is either right or wrong, its morality contingent on the relative rights of fetus and mother, is conspicuously absent amongst these women's reasoning. Instead, an abortion morality is proposed that evaluates the morality of abortion based on the motives and intentions of the aborting woman. Rather than the relative lack of *rights* of the fetus, or the relative surfeit of rights of the mother in regards to the fetus, being the focus of women's moral concern, it is the nature of a woman's *responsibility* to care for her fetus and the child it could become that is the central moral dilemma women describe. Like conservative women, in other words, they are concerned about what a good mother would do when faced with an unwanted pregnancy.

For liberal women, abortion is morally acceptable if the woman makes a decision, from a perspective of care, that the impact of having the child on her maternal/fetal-child unit will be negative. It is morally unacceptable, in these women's minds, if she fails to make the decision from this perspective and with respect to these sorts of concerns. Ectogenesis, like adoption, was seen as problematic for these women *precisely because it preserved the life of the fetus*. The autonomy women in this group

want<sup>55</sup> to exercise over their reproductive capacities, in other words, was not the right to free their bodies from unwanted pregnancy, but the right to decide whether or not they would become mothers.

Both Gerald Paske<sup>56</sup> and Steven Ross have speculated about a moral right of women<sup>57</sup> to refuse to become parents. Ross argues that the "special range of emotions"<sup>58</sup> fetuses and the children they could become engender in their mothers means that some women would prefer the death of their fetus to life lived apart from it during its gestation, and after its birth. He contends that what severance theorist Thomson's violinist scenario<sup>59</sup> obscures is the particular and intimate relationship women have with their fetuses, and desire to have with the children they could become:

What lies on the other end of the kidney machine is indeed a person but - and this brings us to what I take to be the underlying assumption

<sup>55</sup> It should be noted that the majority of women in this group believe that the legal right to abortion they currently enjoy in Australia enables them to make decisions not only about the state of their bodies, but about the fate of their fetuses. Many of them expressed shock and surprise when they came to understand that the philosophical basis of the legal right to abortion may be limited in scope to a right to bodily autonomy.

<sup>56</sup> Paske argues that "biological parents have the right not to have a child" and that "in the relevant cases this right gives them the right to have the fetus destroyed". See Paske, G. "Sperm-Napping And The Right Not To Have A Child" (*Australian Journal of Philosophy*, 65:1, March 1987). Interestingly, a recent ruling by the Tennessee Supreme Court introduces into the legal sphere the right not to be a parent proposed by Paske. In the *Davis* case, Junior Davis sought to stop his former wife from donating the embryos created from his sperm and her ova being donated to another infertile couple because as an emotionally scarred orphan, "he could not abide being ignorant of the fate of his own offspring and being unable to establish a relationship with him or her". The Court found for Davis as the "party wishing to avoid procreation", citing the "...relative anguish of a lifetime of unwanted parenthood" as the basis for its ruling. A female commentator noted that the case illustrates the truth of the old expression that if men could have children, abortion would be a right. See: Smothers, R. "Court Gives Ex-Husband Rights on Use of Embryo" (*New York Times*, June 1 1992).

<sup>57</sup> Ross correctly notes that the introduction of a genetic basis to justifications for not wanting to become a parent would be hard to restrict to the female parent alone. There would be little doubt that some feminists would find cause for concern in the advancement of this justification for abortion as it would have the capacity, in the case of an ectogenetic gestation where the woman's bodily autonomy was not an issue, to give fathers equal power in deciding the fate of the fetus. McKenzie has made arguments against this conclusion on the basis of the asymmetry of women and men's "decision responsibility" regarding unwanted pregnancy. See McKenzie, (*Op. Cit.*), p. 141.

<sup>58</sup> Ross, S. "Abortion and the Death of the Fetus" (*Philosophy & Public Affairs*, II:3, 1982), p. 236.

<sup>59</sup> See Chapter 1 for a more complete discussion of Thomson's argument.

here - this person is a stranger....this way of seeing the fetus is insupportable. Holding to it leaves us unable to account for a certain range of emotions and attitudes the fetus characteristically elicits<sup>60</sup>.

In other words, the particularity of the maternal/fetal-child relationship must be taken in to account when considering the moral meaning of abortion; a particularity that is at least partially defined by the emotions fetuses elicit in their mothers. Thus, while typically there would be little argument about the immorality of a person who attempts to secure the death of a harmless independent being (Thomson's argument regarding the impermissibility of "slitting" the throat" of the violinist should he survive once detached from the body of the life-supporting woman), it may be permissible for a woman to seek the death of *her* harmless independent *fetus* through refusing to utilise the ectogenetic womb, if in saving the life of her fetus she would be violating her conviction that "she and not anyone else ought to raise whatever children she brings into the world"<sup>61</sup>.

*and that she would  
be unwilling to bring  
into the world a  
child she couldn't  
raise properly.*

Ross's arguments clearly speak to the notion of "killing from care" as it is the value women place on their fetuses that motivates their desire to ensure their deaths. The desire to bring about the death of one's fetus, says Ross, is

bound up with the most central values the person holds: one wants very much to be a certain kind of *person*, that is, the sort who has children only when able to raise them oneself in an environment one finds right<sup>62</sup>.

It is, in other words, vital to women that they parent their own children, and that their children are parented well. If this situation can not be brought about, then the most

<sup>60</sup> Ross, S. (*Op. Cit.*), p. 235.

<sup>61</sup> Ross, S. (*Op. Cit.*), p. 240.

<sup>62</sup> Ross, (*Op. Cit.*), p. 241.

caring action women in this group believe they can take is to terminate the life of the fetus. For women, Ross proposes, the intent in choosing abortion is not to harm the fetus, but rather to bring about the situation "...antecedent to pregnancy where there simply was not a child and consequently no one with whom to either succeed or fail as a parent"<sup>63</sup>.

It is important to note that while a women who aborts for these reasons is not necessarily selfish or callous<sup>64</sup>, neither is she self-effacing. She sees her own need (to mother her own child - significantly entangled in her moral sense of herself) as critical, both because of its importance to her, and because of her belief in the interconnection between her well-being and the well-being of her fetus/child.

It is interesting to ponder what characteristics of a fetus give rise to a woman's sense that it is "hers", and thus that she is responsible for its well-being. Ross argues that it is the woman's genetic contribution to the fetus that is the crucial factor in her sense of herself as that fetus's mother. Unfortunately, the data available from the current study does not establish whether women's sense of a fetus as "theirs" derives from their genetic link with the fetus, their gestational link with the fetus, neither of these links, or some combination of the two.

Ectogenesis was rejected by women in favour of abortion rights as a solution to their unwanted pregnancy because it constituted an abandonment of their maternal

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<sup>63</sup> Ross, S. (*Op. Cit.*), p. 241.

<sup>64</sup> Ross asserts similarly. Ross, S. (*Op. Cit.*), p. 240.

responsibility to care for their fetus. In addition to having similar concerns about ectogenesis as they did about adoption, women were also concerned about the experimental and technological aspects of an artificial womb. For many women, in fact, the evacuation of one's fetus to a machine constituted a more significant abandonment of one's responsibility than did the abandonment constituted by adoption. This was because in handing a fetus over to a machine, the woman is faced with worries about, as Jacinta puts it, the fetus being "chopped up" by the medical/scientific profession, worries she would not have were she relinquishing her child to a couple for adoption.

Underlying the abortion morality articulated by women in this group is a view about the moral nature of the fetus, and of death, that is in line with women's characterisation of the abortion dilemma in the language of responsibility rather than rights. In other words, there is a belief underlying the view of women in favour of abortion rights that to take the life of the fetus is not the moral equivalent of taking the life of an adult, and that life is not in all cases a more preferable outcome to death. The fate of the fetus, in other words, is seen as interconnected with and dependent upon the fate of the mother, regardless of whether the interconnected and dependant state of the fetus is perpetuated through continuing pregnancy. Thus, liberal women believe that if a woman is unable to fulfil what she believes comprise her maternal responsibilities to her fetus/child, it is better for the maternal/fetal-child unit that the fetus be terminated. Far from being a punishment of the fetus/child, abortion in this view is a safeguard against the creation of a child whom the woman believes would be better off not being born.

Some might find this view, that it is better from the fetus's point of view not to exist, to be an extraordinary notion. This idea, however, seems to be based on a number of interconnected beliefs expressed by women in favour of abortion rights. The first, already mentioned, is the women's belief that the taking of fetal life is not the moral equivalent to the taking of adult life. This belief derives from an understanding of the interconnected nature of maternal and fetal well-being - a connection that exists regardless of whether mother and fetus are physically linked by pregnancy. If the mother feels unable to provide her potential child with the sort of life she wants for it, she believes it is against this<sup>65</sup> child's interests to come into existence. While this quality of life assessment made by the mother of the prospects for her maternal/fetal-child unit clearly include the fetus, the fetus does not feature as an independent autonomous being with full rights.

It might be claimed that a women who believes her fetus should not be born because she is unable to provide it with the sort of care she feels it should receive, would necessarily believe it acceptable to terminate the life of her born child if she became incapable, or discovers she was in fact always incapable, of providing it with the sort of life she wants it to have. Although the issue of infanticide was not discussed by the women interviewed in enough depth to draw conclusions about their beliefs regarding the morality of the practice, my sense is that women in favour of abortion rights would look askance at infanticide in most cases because they would find it difficult for a woman to justify why she waited so long to decide she was unable to continue

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<sup>65</sup> I am *not* arguing here that women are making an assessment based on the outcome for what Singer and Kuhse call the "next child". My reading of the data is that women's concerns are for the particular fetus/child she carries within her at the time of her deliberations. For a discussion of the interests of the "next child" see Singer, P., Kuhse, H. *Should The Baby Live: The Problem of Handicapped Infants* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), p. 155 -161.

her obligations to care for her fetus/child. Similar reasoning would underscore the lack of comfort a number of women expressed in late abortions. For instance, Charity notes that she'd rather terminate than go through the trauma of adoption if it was in "the early stages of pregnancy":

Q: When you say early on, at what point becomes late?

Well, I suppose you'd have to make the decision early on anyway...

Q: Is there a point for you that you think of as being too late to have a termination?

I'd imagine when you're really pregnant, six months or so.

In other words, if responsibility for the fetus is to be terminated, women in this group seem to feel that a good mother would terminate that responsibility as soon as possible, and consequently that a continuation of the pregnancy means the woman has accepted the responsibility to continue to nurture and bear the fetus, and raise the child. Support for the idea that the problematic aspect of late abortions and infanticide is the woman's reneging on the responsibility she seems to have accepted by continuing the pregnancy comes from Annette, here responding to scenario 4, an intentionally pregnant woman seeking an abortion to go to Barcelona:

If I'd decided, I would have made the commitment to that child, and that's my commitment. and that would be a commitment I made with strength, not just a trip to Barcelona. I've made the commitment already by deciding to have the child, that's pretty powerful for me. That's it...

Thus, the value accorded to older fetuses and infants is not connected with any intrinsic properties of the fetus, but the difficulty women would have in accepting that a woman who waited so long to terminate was acting responsibly. If this interpretation

is right<sup>66</sup>, it would lead to women in this group responding more sympathetically to instances where women do have good reasons for seeking a late termination, or the death of their infant. For instance, if a poor women is sincerely unable to raise the funds for the abortion procedure until her pregnancy has advanced to the second trimester, or safe legal abortion is not available to the woman throughout any stage of pregnancy, liberal women would be likely to support these late interventions because the woman's need for them does not indicate her failure to act responsibly towards her fetus/child.

Supporting evidence for the view that women might find infanticide permissible in cases where the woman has no way to terminate the child prior to birth comes from Janine:

I find infanticide quite an interesting idea...most children or a lot children do die off before 4 in primitive societies or societies without technology.

However, it is also possible that women would reject infanticide, despite the mother's intentions and motives, because of an attribution of moral significance to birth. In "The Moral Significance of Birth"<sup>67</sup>, Mary Anne Warren argues that the difference between abortion and infanticide is that one is done to a fetus, and the other to a child born. Once a child is born it no longer has an exclusive relationship with its mother, but becomes a member of the moral community. Warren argues that once the fetus becomes an accepted member of the moral community, it is impermissible for its

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<sup>66</sup> I would like to stress again that there was insufficient data to draw any definitive conclusions about the nature of women's moral assessment of late abortions and infanticide. The ideas here are speculation only, and would need to be substantiated by further research.

<sup>67</sup> Warren, M.A. "The Moral Significance of Birth" (*Hypatia*, 4:3 Fall 1989).

mother to kill it. However, Warren's reasoning permits infanticide if it is done immediately after birth, in the period before the infant bonds more strongly with its mother, or begins a bonding process with members of the moral community<sup>68</sup>.

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<sup>68</sup> Again, Warren's view is presented as one way that women might view birth, and the difference between fetuses and children born. The data from the current study is insufficient to support this view, or any others as far as infanticide is concerned.

### What We Already Know: Paying Heed to Women's Abortion Morality

Several of the conclusions of the current research are supported by other empirical data into women's abortion morality<sup>69</sup>.

In her lucid and insightful book *Abortion and The Politics of Motherhood* (1984), Kristen Luker interviews the political activists on both sides of the abortion controversy in the United States. Her central conclusion is that the current debate around abortion is marked by such "rancour and intransigence" because abortion is

...a referendum on the place and meaning of motherhood...While on the surface it is the embryo's fate that seems to be at stake, the abortion debate is about the meanings of women's lives<sup>70</sup>.

Clearly the nature and importance of motherhood is a theme that is explored extensively by women in this study. I have argued that the central concern expressed by women in considering the morality of abortion is what a good mother would do when faced with an unwanted pregnancy. For women in favour of abortion rights, a good mother would choose to terminate the life of the fetus rather than continue to gestate and then bear a fetus/child she felt unable to raise herself in an environment she found right. For women opposed to abortion rights, a good mother gestates, bears and raises all the children she conceives, perceiving her maternal role to be of paramount importance in her life. The position of conservative women, that it is a moral imperative for pregnant women to become mothers, has enormous implications for the roles women can assume in society outside of motherhood. If, in other words,

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<sup>69</sup> Due to space constraints, my review of research in this area will be brief and thus, will inevitably not cover all the relevant issues raised by this work, or where the current research diverges from these findings. I have tried, however, to focus my comments on those areas that seem to me to be most relevant to the concerns of this paper. Readers are advised to return to the cited research itself if fuller understanding than provided here is sought.

<sup>70</sup> Luker, (*Op. Cit.*) p. 194.

women must terminate all other life commitments (work, schooling, etc.) in favour of motherhood should they accidentally conceive, they are unlikely to be seen as an attractive candidates - in comparison to less encumbered males - to undertake these commitments. For women in favour of abortion, many of whom see their careers or other positions they fulfil outside of motherhood as either of equal or greater importance than their role as a mother or potential mother, the conclusions of conservative women are both oppressive to women, as well as personally threatening.

Luker comments that women in favour of abortion rights

...see women's reproductive and family roles ...as potential barriers to full equality. The organization of society, they argue, means that motherhood, so long as it is involuntary, is potentially always a low-status, unrewarding role to which women can be banished at any time. Thus, from their point of view, control over reproduction is essential for women to be able to live up to their full human potential<sup>71</sup>.

There are two premises contained in the beliefs of pro-choice women expressed here. The first is that *pregnancy* prevents women from "living up to their full human potential", and the second is that *forcing women to raise children* prevents them from achieving their potential. There is little doubt of the validity of the first premise, insofar as pregnancy, especially in its advanced stages, limits women's ability to fully participate in other areas of their lives<sup>72</sup>. However, one might answer the second premise by pointing out that a woman who was unable to abort would still be able to live up to her full human potential if she was willing to adopt her child to willing parents. Although Luker does not tease this issue out, it is possible that the belief underlying the argument by pro-choice women, that a lack of safe legal abortion

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<sup>71</sup> Luker, (*Op. Cit.*) p. 176.

<sup>72</sup> The reason for this can often be the perception of others that the woman is unable to fulfil the roles she has previously undertaken, as much as the woman's actual incapacity to fulfil these roles.

means that women will be unable to fulfil their potential as people, is premised on the unstated view that women have a responsibility to raise the children they bear. Thus, women who would be legally obliged to bear the children they conceive because of the lack of availability of safe legal abortion, would then feel morally obliged to raise the children they bear. Because the aim of Luker's research was simply to present and explicate the views of abortion activists, she does not pose questions to her participants designed to expose these underlying beliefs. However, it is the belief of this researcher that a fuller exploration of the views of the pro-choice women in Luker's study would reveal a similar position to that of women in favour of abortion rights interviewed for the current research; namely that it is morally unacceptable for women to continue to gestate and to birth children they do not wish to raise. If the women in Luker's research did take this position, their view that the lack of safe legal abortion forces women to become mothers, and thus limits their potential to do other worthwhile things with their lives, becomes easier to understand, as the availability of adoption (as we have seen in the current research) does not alleviate for women their sense of moral responsibility to raise the children they conceive and bear. However, because Luker does not explore these issues in her interviews, the thinking behind the beliefs of pro-choice women in this area can only be speculated on.

Conservative women, for their part, reject abortion<sup>73</sup> because it devalues motherhood, and by so doing degrades and undermines their central life choices. Luker notes that women opposed to abortion rights believe that:

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<sup>73</sup> The exceptions to this general rule are outlined in Chapter 4, and briefly discussed in Chapter 5.

...women who choose to be in the public world of work should eschew the role of wife and mother, or, if they marry, should be prepared to put the public world of work second to their role as wife and mother...to try to balance a number of competing commitment - especially when parenthood gets shuffled into second or fourth place - is both morally wrong and personally threatening<sup>74</sup>.

Luker argues that the view women hold on the status of the embryo/fetus accords with their interests in the current American debate about "the role of children and women in...society". I believe the current research suggests that a similar argument could be made about the nature of the abortion debate in Australia.

Rosalind Hursthouse also makes a number of insightful observations about the nature of abortion morality that accord well with the current data. Hursthouse notes that abortion is a "unique moral problem"<sup>75</sup>, with which current philosophical literature has "got badly out of touch"<sup>76</sup>. It is her view that the status of the fetus is not "...relevant to the rightness or wrongness of abortion"<sup>77</sup>. What is relevant to a moral evaluation of abortion, says Hursthouse, is to ask what is "...the mark [of a person] with the right attitude...and what manifests having the wrong attitude" towards pregnancy and its outcomes. It is to consider, in other words:

...the particular sorts of reasons women have for wanting abortions. For it is the reasons people have for doing things that reveal them as callous, self-centred and so on, or not<sup>78</sup>.

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<sup>74</sup> Luker, (*Op. Cit.*), p. 170.

<sup>75</sup> Hursthouse, R. "Virtue Theory and Abortion" (*Philosophy and Public Affairs*, 20:3 Summer 1991), p. 236

<sup>76</sup> Hursthouse, "Virtue Theory..." (*Op. Cit.*), p. 237.

<sup>77</sup> Hursthouse, "Virtue Theory" (*Op. Cit.*), p. 236.

<sup>78</sup> Hursthouse, R. *Beginning Lives* (Basil Blackwell, 1987), p. 208.

The strengths of Hursthouse's approach are myriad. Firstly, she recognises that (all) abortions are neither right nor wrong, but that the morality of an individual abortion is contingent upon the manner in which the woman makes the abortion decision. Hursthouse also recognises that a fetus is not a person, and thus causing its death through abortion is not the equivalent of "coldbloodedly" causing the death of another "adult, communicating, conscious human being with...his own family and friends, interests, hopes and plans"<sup>79</sup>. Further, Hursthouse notes the momentous nature of pregnancy and its outcome, which results in a woman becoming a mother; a role in which she will remain, in some senses, for "...the rest of [her] life"<sup>80</sup>.

In addition, Hursthouse raises a crucial issue in the moral evaluation of an abortion that was only raised peripherally in the current research due to the nature of the scenarios presented to the participating women. This is the importance of including in evaluations of abortion morality an evaluation of the actions that led to pregnancy in the first place. A close analyses of women's moral response to the Competition scenario, for example, shows that it is not only the athlete's abortion that women find morally repugnant, but the manner in which she became pregnant. For example, Gillian's dismay regarding this scenario is directed both at the intentional nature of the athlete's pregnancy as well as the intentionality of her abortion:

But getting pregnant in order to kill the baby! Doing it intentionally just doesn't seem right...Having a baby to kill it, there's no you in that...

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<sup>79</sup> Hursthouse, *Beginning Lives* (*Op. Cit.*), p. 205.

<sup>80</sup> Hursthouse, *Beginning Lives* (*Op. Cit.*), p. 206.

Similarly, Jacinta's discussion of the morality of the athlete focuses on the unacceptable motivations she had for becoming pregnant:

...it's just for gold....it is absolutely deliberate, there was no mistake. I see people who get repeatedly pregnant, and through not using contraception. I don't think that they are necessarily deliberately not using contraception, it's something in their make-up that is preventing them...but to get pregnant to win a race, that's off. (2/20)

Often, in other words, a decision to abort might reflect the sort of respect for life and "understanding of the intrinsic value of being a parent" that Hursthouse believes crucial to a moral abortion decision, but the actions of the woman that *led* to the pregnancy might reflect those of a less than virtuous person. Says Hursthouse:

...reflection on [abortion] amounts to reflection on one's sexual activity, and one's choices, or the lack of them, about one's sexual partner and about contraception. Sometimes one will have nothing to blame oneself for here. But very often one will. And then there will be a further sense in which the abortion is wrong; right as the decision may be, it will not be the decision that the perfectly wise and virtuous woman would have made in the circumstances, because she would not ever have got herself into those circumstances<sup>81</sup>.

Hursthouse's approach to abortion morality differs from current feminist, rights-based and utilitarian approaches to abortion, all of which she rejects:

...to think of abortion as nothing but the killing of something that does not matter, or as nothing but the exercise of some right or rights one has, or as the incidental means to some desirable state of affairs, is to do something callous and light-minded, the sort of thing no virtuous and wise person would do<sup>82</sup>.

Certainly, the moral justifications for abortion provided by women in favour of abortion rights relied neither on the concept of overriding maternal rights in relation

<sup>81</sup> Hursthouse, *Beginning Lives* (*Op. Cit.*), p. 335.

<sup>82</sup> Hursthouse, "Virtue Theory..." (*Op. Cit.*), p. 238.

to the fetus<sup>83</sup>, nor on utilitarian beliefs<sup>84</sup> about abortion's capacity to maximise utility.

Nor did women on either side of the debate contend that the embryo was without value, and thus that abortion was a morally neutral act. Recall, for instance, Janine's assertion that abortion is

...not a light issue. And I think it's a moral issue. I...still think that it's not morally wrong to abort fetal tissue at two months, but nevertheless, it's not a light issue.

Rather, women believed the intentions and motives of the aborting woman are central to any evaluation of the morality of her action. For example, Gilligan's condemnation of the athlete in the Competition scenario as "cold" because of her intentional conception of an unwanted pregnancy (cited above), and Carey's angry rejection of the description of abortion as the "toss[ing] of the fetus] in the garbage" because it mischaracterises her motives and intentions in choosing termination:

I didn't toss it in the garbage...it sounds very callous and my decision was not a callous one. It was not unthought about, it was not clear and it certainly wasn't indifferent.

The one issue that might be taken with Hursthouse's approach is in regard to the nature of judgements that should be made of women's actions leading to unwanted pregnancy, and the solutions they choose to resolve unwanted pregnancy. While Hursthouse is somewhat unclear about who might make such judgements of women on these counts, her work suggests that it would be legitimate for onlookers, with a minimal amount of information, to pass moral judgments on women's situations and the choices they make. My own beliefs, that only women can judge the morality of

<sup>83</sup> Rather, as I have discussed above in relation to Gilligan's work, women's emphasis is on their *responsibility for the fetus*.

<sup>84</sup> Women's reasoning regarding the legality of abortion was, however, distinctly consequential in nature. See Chapter 4 for examples of this reasoning, and Chapter 5 for a fuller discussion of its nature.

their actions around the creation and resolution of unwanted pregnancy, accord well with those expressed by Charity:

...I think a woman has to feel she's doing the best for the baby growing inside of her, and if she feels that that's terminating the pregnancy, then there can be no argument. Because it's up to her...

The one area in which I am uncomfortable with Hursthouse's work, in other words, is her apparent willingness to pass judgement on the morality of women's actions leading to unwanted pregnancy, and the choices the woman makes to resolve the situation, without knowing the level of detail about the woman's situation and her motives and intentions I believe necessary to make such judgements. In fact, it my contention that such a level of detail can only be known by the woman herself, as decisions around sexual partners and encounters, contraception and abortion are grounded in the most intimate and complex circumstances of a woman's life. This is not to say that in becoming pregnant and choosing abortion a woman can not be acting without wisdom or virtue, but that only the woman herself can truly know the morality of the situation in which she finds herself, and the decision she makes to resolve her situation. The value of Hursthouse's work is its provision of ethical concepts relevant to women which *they* can utilise to evaluate the morality of their behaviour around unwanted pregnancy and its resolution, not to provide outsiders with ways of judging a woman's most intimate choices.

Similarities also exist between the current findings and Carol Gilligan's understanding of women's abortion morality. Included in Gilligan's book, *In A Different Voice*, are the researcher's findings from the "abortion decision study", in which women were

interviewed during the first trimester of pregnancy at a time when they were considering abortion, and then again at the end of the year following their choice.

Gilligan concludes from this study that women's construction of the abortion dilemma

...defines the moral problem as one of obligation to exercise care and avoid hurt...the expression of care is seen as the fulfilment of moral responsibility<sup>85</sup>.

Gilligan posits that women's moral reasoning, emphasising responsibility and care, fundamentally differs from the male moral perspective with its focus on rules and rights. One of the many examples Gilligan provides to illustrate this point is the different ways boys and girls resolve conflict in game playing. Whereas boys successfully resolve disputes that arise in the course of games, often seeming to enjoy the "legal debates as much as they [do] the game itself"<sup>86</sup>, in the face of conflict girls chose to dissolve the game, subordinating "...the continuation of the game to the continuation of relationships"<sup>87</sup>. Although psychologists since Freud have interpreted such male and female differences as proof of the underdeveloped nature of female morality, Gilligan argues instead that it reflects the different, though not necessarily inferior, moral priorities of women. Whereas for men morality consists of the resolutions of conflict with compassion and empathy, and without inflicting hurt, men understand the moral resolution of problems to involve the deliverance of justice to all parties through adherence to negotiated rules.

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<sup>85</sup> Gilligan, C. *In A Different Voice* (Harvard University Press, 1982), p. 73.

<sup>86</sup> Gilligan, (*Op. Cit.*), p. 10.

<sup>87</sup> Gilligan, (*Op. Cit.*), p. 10.

Thus, in order to resolve the dilemma provoked by the conception of an unwanted pregnancy, women tend to shy away from legalistic debates about the nature of their rights vis a vis the fetus (i.e. does the fetus have a right to life? Does my right to bodily autonomy override any rights to life held by the fetus), and focus instead on the nature of their responsibility to care for the fetus within them, which could become their child. Gilligan notes that women's focus on relationships means that the impact of the birth of the child on their relationship with other children or a partner also figure importantly in the choices they make to resolve unwanted pregnancies. For women, says Gilligan, the abortion dilemma is seen in terms of conflicting responsibilities, with moral maturity leading women to increasingly complex understandings of the nature of the relationship between self and others, and the conflict between selfishness and responsibility.

The construction of the moral problem of abortion by women in the current data as one of the nature of her responsibility to herself and her fetus-child as an interconnected unit, as opposed to one of the nature of her rights and the rights of the fetus as entities in opposition, is supportive of Gilligan's thesis. However, because the focus of Gilligan's work is on moral *development*, philosophers may feel unsatisfied with the manner in which Gilligan evaluates the justifications for abortion given by women in her study<sup>88</sup>. In tracing women's moral construction of abortion through three perspectives, Gilligan argues that each represent an increasingly complex understanding of "...the relationship between self and other...[and] selfishness and

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<sup>88</sup> Janet Smith is one philosopher who has written of her discomfort with Gilligan's interpretation and evaluation of women's moral reasoning about abortion. See Smith, J. "Abortion and Moral Development Theory: Listening with Different Ears" (*International Philosophical Quarterly*, 28:1 Issue 109 March 1988).

responsibility"<sup>89</sup>. However, in reading the moral reasoning around abortion of the younger women Gilligan interviews, one can not help but wonder whether Gilligan's unevaluative<sup>90</sup> description of the reasoning of a number of young women as "survival-oriented", would not be more accurately described by the more evaluative "callous" and "light-minded" used by Hursthouse. Of course Hursthouse wisely points out that in describing the reasons of some young women for choosing abortion as "self-centred", "callous" or "light-minded", one must keep in mind that

The young are, in a way, callous and light-minded, but only in a way that is natural to youth. It would be foolish to deny that many young women who have abortions [for these sorts of reasons] develop into sensitive, serious-minded people...<sup>91</sup>

In other words, while it is important to both accurately describe the reasons behind the motivations of young women (which Gilligan does), it is equally important to describe the moral nature of these decisions accurately (which I believe Gilligan does not), regardless of the lack of flattery implied in the description chosen<sup>92</sup>.

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<sup>89</sup> Gilligan, (*Op. Cit.*), p. 105.

<sup>90</sup> It is not completely accurate to contend that Gilligan makes *no* moral evaluation of the reasoning women advance regarding abortion. There is an implicit moral evaluation being made in Gilligan's creation and categorisation of women's reasoning into three levels, survival orientation, self-sacrifice orientation and what she calls "goodness to truth". For Gilligan, however, an abortion decision is morally mature and thus morally acceptable if it meets the basic criteria of being voluntary and autonomous in nature. Ethicists might feel that these two characteristics, while no doubt necessary, are not sufficient conditions for an abortion decision to be moral. However, it would perhaps be more accurate to describe Gilligan's moral evaluation of women's decision-making as minimalist rather than non-existent.

<sup>91</sup> Hursthouse, *Beginning Lives* (*Op. Cit.*), p. 333.

<sup>92</sup> As I have argued above, it is my belief that only women themselves can accurately assess the moral content of their actions and decisions around unwanted pregnancy and abortion. What I am objecting to here is Gilligan's refusal to introduce into her discussion of abortion morality the terms it seems her own participants utilise to describe the moral nature of their choice because of the unflattering nature of some of these terms. For instance, one woman in Gilligan's sample describes her response to her pregnancy as "selfish", while another admits that she had no thoughts about her pregnancy other than that she "didn't want it". Yet Gilligan makes no moral *evaluation* of these sorts of comments, *describing* them only as ones that are "survival-oriented". See Gilligan, (*Op. Cit.*), p. 76 and 75.

### **Making Abortion Theory Relevant**

Academic history reveals that the disciplines now known as psychology and philosophy were a united discipline. I would like to argue that the loss to philosophy of its empirical basis has not benefited philosophical reflection as far as it's relevance is concerned. In order to make philosophy relevant, it is vital that philosophers have an understanding both of the different ethical issues that concern different people, and the varied lenses people use to view and make sense of the moral conflict in their lives. This is where psychological and sociological research methods become important tools for ethicists to utilise, both as the first step to the conceptualisation of new moral issues, and a critical step in the re-conceptualisation of stagnant ethical problems such as abortion. To help people solve moral problems, it is imperative that ethicists understand the nature of those problems as understood by the people who experience them. The only way to understand the way others view the moral issues in their lives, is to ask them.

For ethical reflection on abortion to be relevant to women - the people who actually struggle with this difficult moral issue in their lives - it must address the issues *women* believe to be critical in the decision-making process. And while ethical theorists are not bound to concur with the rectitude of women's moral framework and conclusions, they should at least be bound to acknowledge this framework as one that actually assists women in making sense of abortion as a moral issue. If in fact, they find themselves in disagreement with the approach of women, or the conclusions that result from this approach, they should also be bound to articulate these disagreements as opposed to simply ignoring the existence of an alternative - and clearly authentic -

point of view. Continuing debate about the moral status of the fetus abandons unhappily pregnant women to their own devices, without the option of pursuing more formal ethical guidance to both clarify the issues at hand, and facilitate an ethical solution to their quandary.

Carl Elliot notes that the application of normative ethical theories to particular practical problems "does not work":

It is difficult to say how a theory can be applied, or even whether it should be applied, if it is alien not only in content but in structure to the way that people are accustomed to making their moral choices<sup>93</sup>.

What I am suggesting is a reconceptualisation of abortion morality by ethicists that begins with an understanding of the issues and concerns of women facing abortion decisions in their lives. Certainly I believe that if this sort of reconceptualisation is not to be undertaken, some sort of explanation is in order, for certainly as it stands, English-speaking abortion theory is irrelevant to women's moral needs.

Certainly one way the irrelevance of much philosophical abortion theory to women might be justified is to claim that ethical theory should or need not concern itself with relevancy to affected constituencies because the goal of ethics is other than to assist people to chose ethical resolutions to moral problems. Carl Elliot, for example, argues that while it is feasible for ethics to address the question of "...what sort of policy we

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<sup>93</sup> Elliot, C. "Where Ethics Comes from and What to Do about It". (*Hastings Center Report*, 22:4 July-August 1992), p. 30. Peter Singer's application of utilitarianism to animals, (and similar expansions in application of moral theory) are not the object of Elliot's argument here. In fact, Elliot praises Singer for "...point[ing] out inconsistencies in conventional moral thinking which....[have resulted] in real changes in moral values". However, Singer's achievement lay in his ability to convince followers of an already accepted theoretical framework (utilitarianism), to apply that theory to a group previously considered outside its sphere of moral concern. Elliot's point is concerned with the alien nature of both the content and the *structure* of moral theory to the way people usually make moral decisions.

want in general for our society"<sup>94</sup>, it is more difficult for ethical theory to have a impact on people's moral values, because such values are not chosen "at will"<sup>95</sup>.

My point here is that if ethicists chose to reject my recommendation regarding the reconceptualisation of ethical abortion theory, debate about the proper role of ethical theory should be generated as a result of this refusal. The inadequacy of current ethical theory on abortion should not be ignored by ethicists, in other words, but either justified or altered.

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<sup>94</sup> Elliot, C. *Op. Cit.*, p. 31.

<sup>95</sup> Elliot, C. *Op. Cit.*, p. 31.

## **APPENDIX 1**

### **Recruitment Advertisements**

#### ***Abortion and Technology***

#### **The Centre for Human Bioethics at Monash University**

Women are needed to participate in group interviews on the topic of current abortion practices and upcoming medical developments in this area. Participants will be asked what they believe women's intentions are when they abort, and for their responses to new neo-natal technology. The research is the thesis component of a Master of Bioethics.

All women of childbearing age are welcome. You do not need to have had an abortion or be an "expert" on any of the issues. All viewpoints on the abortion issues are welcome. All information and the identify of participants will be kept in the strictest of confidence.

Your involvement would be greatly appreciated, and all efforts will be made to arrange times and places suited to your busy schedule. Please contact Leslie Cannold on 537 2373, day or evening hours, for further information.

## **APPENDIX 2**

## **Explanatory Statement**

My name is Leslie Cannold, and I am a graduate student undertaking research as the final component of my Master's degree. This research is being undertaken at Monash University under the direction of Professor Peter Singer and is concerned with women's moral responses to the impact of technology on abortion.

The interview session will last approximately one hour. It is expected that the results of this research will be published. However, in order to protect your privacy, you will be assigned a pseudonym, or false name. This pseudonym will be assigned to you immediately, and I will use it to identify you in both my personal notes and any published material. Nothing to identify you individually will be released.

Either at the beginning or the end of the session you will be asked to fill out some details (the **Demographics** form). These will help me describe the nature of the group when the results are reported (for example, all women participating were aged between 20 and 50). Again, none of these details will be used to identify you in my notes or any published material.

If you would like to know where the results have been published, please put your name and address on one of the envelopes provided, and I will notify you.

After we are finished today, you are welcome to stay for a "debriefing". The debriefing will consist of an explanation of the academic justification for this research, and my hypothesis. I will also be happy to answer any questions you have at this point.

If, after reading this, you decide you would rather not participate, please feel free to go at any time. If you do agree to participate, please sign both consent forms attached to this sheet. I will also sign both forms and detach one of them for my records. The other one is for you.

Thank you very much for your time today.

Leslie Cannold

c/o Centre for Human Bioethics or 40 Clyde Street  
Monash University St Kilda 3182  
Clayton 3168 Tel: 537 2373

## **APPENDIX 2 (Continued)**

### **Consent Form**

#### **Consent Form (Participant's Copy)**

I freely consent to participate in the "Abortion and Technology" study to be conducted by Leslie Cannold-McDonald in the manner detailed on the attached Explanatory Statement.

X...

Signature of Participant

X...

Signature of Interviewer

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#### **Consent Form (Researcher's Copy)**

I freely consent to participate in the "Abortion and Technology" study to be conducted by Leslie Cannold-McDonald in the manner detailed on the attached Explanatory Statement.

X...

Signature of Participant

X...

Signature of Interviewer

## **APPENDIX 3**

### **Questionnaire**

*NAME:* \_\_\_\_\_

1. *HOW OLD ARE YOU?* (Please answer accurately) \_\_\_\_\_
  
2. *WHAT WOULD BEST DESCRIBE YOUR POSITION ON ABORTION?*
  - a. Opposed to abortion in all circumstances - no exceptions
  - b. Opposed to abortion in most circumstances - a few exceptions where in favour.
  - c. Undecided/Indifferent
  - d. In favour of abortion rights in most circumstances - a few exceptions where not in favour
  - e. Totally in favour of abortion rights - no exceptions
  
3. *WHAT IS THE HIGHEST EDUCATIONAL QUALIFICATION YOU HAVE OBTAINED?*
  - a. School Leaver
  - b. VCE/HSC
  - c. TAFE Course
  - d. College Diploma
  - e. University Degree - Undergraduate
  - f. University Degree - Graduate

**4. *WHAT IS YOUR MARITAL STATUS?***

- a. Single
- b. Married/De Facto
- c. Divorced
- d. Widowed

**5. *HOW MANY CHILDREN DO YOU HAVE?***

- a. None
- b. One
- c. Two
- d. Three
- e. Four or more

**6. *ARE YOU A FULL OR NEARLY FULL TIME HOMEMAKER?***

- a. Yes
- b. No

**7. *HAVE YOU EVER HAD AN ABORTION?***

- a. Yes
- b. No

8. *WHAT IS YOUR HOUSEHOLD INCOME?* (If you are your partner are temporarily unemployed, please put your usual household income)
- a. \$0 - \$20,000
  - b. \$21,000 - \$35,000
  - c. \$36,000 - \$50,000
  - e. \$51,000 - \$75,000
  - f. Over \$76,000

Thank you.

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