

## **Reconciling the Irreconcilable: Overcoming the Dichotomized Perspectives that Hinder Progress in Reproductive Health**

Jen Kotrady

2011 Rhodes Institute for Regional Studies

Memphis, Tennessee, hosts increasingly negative and harmful rates of sexually transmitted diseases (STDs), unintended pregnancies, and infant mortalities.<sup>1</sup> For instance, the Memphis area reported an HIV rate that doubled the national rate in 2009, and that same year Memphis ranked first of fifty Metropolitan Statistical Areas in rates of Chlamydia, Gonorrhea and primary and secondary Syphilis.<sup>2</sup> Additionally, while the national teen pregnancy rate remains at 10%, the rate for Memphis doubles the nation's rate at 20%, and even reaches 26% in some areas of the city.<sup>3</sup> The tragic prevalence of diseases and unintended pregnancies mainly affects the working poor and minority groups. Shelby County contributes the majority of sexual health issues in the state, and thus calls for action from both pro-choice and pro-life groups in this area to improve these reproductive health care anomalies.<sup>4</sup>

Values regarding sex and women's reproductive health issues intertwine with religion, as several religious groups advocate fundamental beliefs that directly influence the decisions women make about their bodies. In Memphis, the diversity within and between religious groups helps shape the culture of the city, contributing to such things as the progressive strides made by

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<sup>1</sup> Center for Research on Women: MemTV, Memphis Teen Vision, Teens, Teen Pregnancy, Memphis. Web. 1 July 2011. <<http://www.memphis.edu/crow/MemTV.php>>.

<sup>2</sup> "Friends For Life: Statistics." *Friends For Life*. Web. 21 July 2011. <<http://www.friendsforlifecorp.org/statistics/>>.

<sup>3</sup> "Memphis Teen Pregnancy Rate Passes National Average." *ABC24 Local News*. Web. 21 July 2011. <[http://www.abc24.com/news/local/story/Memphis-Teen-Pregnancy-Rate-Passes-National/zLObDyFxr0-5\\_LWsUodVA.csp](http://www.abc24.com/news/local/story/Memphis-Teen-Pregnancy-Rate-Passes-National/zLObDyFxr0-5_LWsUodVA.csp)>.

<sup>4</sup> Marks, Bridget. "Pro-Choice Interview #1." Personal interview. 22 June 2011\* The identity of the informants will remain anonymous with pseudonyms.

Martin Luther King, to the innovative music of Sun Studios, and finally, the decisions women face about unwanted pregnancies and sexual activity. Thus religion complicates the already nuanced binary between pro-choice and pro-life thought. Institutions on each side interact with various churches and religious facilities in order to provide proper outreach to women and their families. This reveals the interplay between reproductive health and religion, and it is imperative to understand how this connection could allow the necessary co-existence for both groups. Memphis provides a unique backdrop in asserting the necessity for both, based on its wealth of religion and epidemic of issues related to reproductive health.

The examination of several pro-choice and pro-life clinical institutions in Memphis has revealed that both groups seek to accomplish the same goal of reducing complications brought about by sexual activity and to educate women so as to eliminate unwanted pregnancies and abortions. These institutions offer education and medical services to women and men in Memphis, and thereby actively uphold their respective outlooks through health care. Based on the severe rates of HIV, STDs, and unwanted pregnancies, this city simply cannot afford to be subjected to the dichotomized notion of women's health. The disagreements between pro-life and pro-choice groups prevent progression in the reproductive health care of Memphians, who need comprehensive direction and education more urgently than ever. Memphis would most benefit from a collaborative effort from both groups, in order to fully educate and cater to the countless citizens affected by reproductive health adversities.

### **The Pro-Choice Philosophy**

Pro-choice institutions represent a vital component for the flourishing of women's health in Memphis. These facilities offer options for abortion, gynecological examinations, and

contraception. They provide abortion as a medically safe option for women with unintended pregnancies, and they also inform patients of parenthood or adoption. Abortion may be performed in two ways: by In-Clinic procedure or pill. The In-Clinic procedure may be completed by two methods, known as “Aspiration” or “Dilation and Evacuation.” Aspiration eliminates safely the fetus before 16 weeks via a vacuum, after the uterus is carefully examined. Dilation and Evacuation is the safe method for women who choose to abort 16 weeks after their last missed period. The in-clinic abortion is technically a medically minor procedure. Complete in minutes, the woman enters a recovery room for about an hour before she can return home. Most women are able to return to their jobs and daily life by the next morning.<sup>5</sup> Alternatively, the “abortion pill” is offered to women who are nine weeks along or less in their pregnancy. The pill, known as Mifepristone, eliminates progesterone, a hormone necessary for the maintenance of the uterine lining, without which the developing fetus could not survive. Several days later, the woman takes a second medication, Mifepristol, which empties the uterus and aborts the fetus.<sup>6</sup> Two weeks later, the woman follows up with the doctor, ensuring that the pill successfully completed the abortion. In the event that it did not, the healthcare provider will reevaluate all options with the patient. Prior to *any* abortion, a woman will discuss *all* options, including abortion, adoption, or parenthood, with the healthcare provider.<sup>7</sup> The pro-choice facility ensures that that the woman makes a choice regarding her pregnancy with which she is comfortable, and fully made on her own. If the woman is not firm in her decision or seems to receive outside

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<sup>5</sup> What Happens During an Abortion: In-Clinic Abortion Cost." *Sexual & Reproductive Health - Sex Education - Planned Parenthood*. Web. 3 July 2011. <<http://www.plannedparenthood.org/health-topics/abortion/in-clinic-abortion-procedures-4359.asp>>.

<sup>6</sup> "The Abortion Pill: Mifepristone and Misoprostol for Early Abortion." Web. 1 July 2011. <<http://www.fwhc.org/abortion/medical-ab.htm>>.

<sup>7</sup> Marks, Bridget\*. "Pro-Choice Interview #1." Personal interview. 22 June 2011\* All informants will remain anonymous with a pseudonym.

pressure to receive an abortion, she will be asked to reevaluate and the procedure will be postponed until the patient is fully ready.

Pro-choice facilities also provide information on and access to all contraception methods. One agency in Memphis explains in detail the known forms of contraception, with statistics that demonstrate their success rates. For instance, they explain that a vasectomy and Intrauterine Device will each result in less than one pregnancy out of one hundred attempts, while spermicide and fertility charting each result in 25 out of 100 attempts. The facility also provides information on the cost range, which can be altered based on income. The institution does not debunk any method in particular, as they want to educate women and men on all methods so that they make the right choice regarding their particular lifestyles or health needs. Thus, the contraception education embodies the overall pro-choice philosophy. Women have the right to choose their method of preventing pregnancy, and therefore must be educated on all options. The institution strives to teach men and women how to prevent pregnancy with medicinal, surgical, and natural methods, as each individual may have a different preference or need. The “choice” of this philosophy embodies the options for monitoring her sexual activity, rather than those for unwanted pregnancies.

### **Pro-Choice in Memphis**

In recent weeks, rallies at a pro-choice church protested the Tennessee legislature’s recent attempts to limit women’s health and abortion rights. One pro-choice agency employee, Bridget Marks\*, explains that the purpose and setting of the rally demonstrated “how Memphians live.”<sup>8</sup> She means that Memphis exhibits an open-minded atmosphere that maintains a sexually active population, yet one that also embodies a religious environment that defends the

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

citizens in their decisions about their bodies. While this may seem to clash with traditional religious thought, the pro-choice groups have found support from various clergy, and therefore can better relate to the women of Memphis whose religion is deeply embedded within their decisions about their bodies and pregnancies. With a way to coexist with the religious, predominantly Christian traditions, the pro-choice institutions serve a vital role in the Memphis community. Perhaps most valuable to the Memphis citizens are the education and testing methods that they offer, as these provide both preventative measures for diseases and infections and immediately bring to light one's need for treatment. Additionally, Memphis has one of the highest abortion rates in the country.<sup>9</sup> The pro-choice institutions understand the travesty of this statistic, and want to minimize this number as much as possible. However, they must offer abortion to the women who feel that this is the best option for their lifestyle in the event of an unintentional pregnancy. Their comprehensive education offers a means for women to take precautions in order to prevent the pregnancy, thus these institutions are crucial in improving Memphis' dire status in reproductive health.

Based on the unfortunate statistics regarding sexually transmitted diseases, unwanted or teen pregnancies, and the inability to afford sufficient healthcare, pro-choice institutions play a vital role in making progressive strides for reproductive health in Memphis. Such entities are aware of the cofactors that lead to unhealthy sexual activity. These include domestic violence, lack of familial support, and lack of self-esteem. In order to prevent the consequences of unhealthy reproductive practices, these facilities must readily educate the Memphis youth on their options for sex and pregnancy. Hence, they often host sexual education classes for youth groups, schools, and other teen and child organizations. They adapt their

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid

teachings based on age group and the number of classes they have taught to one particular group. Additionally, for teenaged women who are already pregnant, the class provides pre- and post-natal education. The essential goal of this program is to reduce the rate of infant mortality in Memphis through education on how to enrich pregnancy, and to provide assistance dealing with potentially harmful environments, such as those that are domestically abusive or drug-ridden. Another unique aspect of pro-choice education is how class offerings cater to different demographic groups. For instance, one facility offers classes to Hispanic women and families who want to learn about issues such as proper pre-natal and infant care, safer sexual activity, how to discuss sexual health with their children.<sup>10</sup> This variety of educational efforts adapted to different groups demonstrates their ultimate goal of helping the Memphis community at large with making thoughtful decisions about their sex life. People will ultimately decide for themselves when and how they will engage in sexual activity; pro-choice institutions make it their duty to provide detailed information regarding the consequences of such actions.

In addition to offering comprehensive education to women, the pro-choice agenda extends their services to multiple demographics. The pro-choice thinkers believe that all citizens need to be fully educated on safe sexual behavior, despite background or sexual orientation. One pro-choice institution offers classes to the gay and lesbian community of Memphis. These classes educate homosexual youth and young adults on safe sexual behavior, while simultaneously providing a safe haven for the attendees to discuss openly their sexuality. These classes bode well with the pro-choice outlook, which strives to educate all people on safe sexual activity in a non-discriminatory manner regarding race, class, or sexual orientation. In addition to sexual

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid

education, this pro-choice facility also offers STD testing in a LGBT community center.<sup>11</sup> This partnership further supports the open-minded pro-choice outlook that must provide proactive resources to people of all sexual orientations, far extending past issues regarding abortion. Their collaboration is essential because both groups experience pressure and criticism from the conservative political systems that dominate Tennessee. Oftentimes, pro-choice groups and gay rights activists band together for protest, such as the one mentioned previously at one of Memphis's liberal churches. The collaboration and mutual support of the gay community and pro-choice thinkers encompasses the progressive mindset that some sectors of the Memphis community maintain. Furthermore, this relationship demonstrates the vitality of pro-choice institutions in Memphis, who support underrepresented groups in need of essential sexual education.

One of Memphis' gravest issues is the astonishing rate of teen pregnancies. This dismal situation prompted activism from a variety of reproductive health centers. Particularly, the launch of NoBaby.org occurred as a response to this circumstance, with support from several pro-choice groups. The philosophy of this initiative encourages girls to remain abstinent until fully ready to engage in intercourse, both emotionally and with the proper education. They campaign this message online and throughout the city, with posters that read: "Can we try it without a condom?" "No, baby." Their goal is to empower teen girls in Memphis with the knowledge that sexual activity requires protection and emotional readiness. Likewise, in order to prevent such tragic statistics in the future, pro-choice agencies must educate the Memphis youth immediately. They encourage girls to attend teen-friendly classes on reproductive health, and

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid

centers for STD testing if they are sexually active. This site demonstrates pro-choice collaboration to make a proactive, long-lasting impact on the Memphis youth.<sup>12</sup>

### **Pro-Choice and Religion**

Based on the pro-choice institutions' stance on abortion, contraception, and other controversial women's reproductive health issues, they are challenged in their outreach to religious women. However, several Christian ministers assert that the pro-choice outlook is fully acceptable to God and within scripture. The ministers believe that values regarding life are always relevant to their context, even those taught in the Bible. One Presbyterian minister, Tom Daniels\*, asserts that while his views on contraception, pre-marital sex, and abortion puts him in the minority among clergy, he stands firm that a woman's choice is permissible to God.<sup>13</sup> This minister believes that the Bible calls us to integrity and high standards for our decisions on sexual activity, yet these are not necessarily only fulfilled through marriage. He believes that men and women should use caution and high sense of self when engaging in sexual activity, but that it is simply unrealistic to expect celibacy until marriage from this generation at large. He believes that premarital sex is sinful when one engages in it as a "willful disregard" of another human, or in a degrading manner. He states, "Sexuality is one of the hungers of life. It can be indulgent, or an addiction, but it can also be healthily managed."<sup>14</sup> Hence, the pastor asserts the innateness of sexuality should be maintained righteously, but it will only cause more harm than benefits when wholly condemned by religious officials.

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<sup>12</sup> "Get Protection." *No Baby*. Web. 3 July 2011. <<http://www.nobaby.org/get-protection/>>.

<sup>13</sup> Daniels, Tom.\* "Pro-Choice Interview #2." Personal interview. 8 July 2011. \*All remains will remain anonymous with pseudonyms.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

The pastor also discusses the act of abortion as completely within the woman's right to choose. Several conservative, pro-life thinkers utilize an argument for the sanctity of life, that God knows us before birth and expects us to uphold his value for fellow humans. The pastor argues, however, that unwanted children are *against* the sanctity of life. In other words, the term "life" has been defined too broadly by conservative thinkers. He argues that conservatives define life too narrowly. In order to preserve the sanctity of life, we must help those who endure anguish, in situations such as unintentional pregnancies.<sup>15</sup> During these trying moments, the woman or family must be provided with support and freedom to choose what is best for their lifestyle. In such a case, abortion preserves the sanctity of life of the mother, her family, *and* the unborn child, who may have suffered tremendously. The pastor believes that God wants us to break free from what binds us, or to emerge from servitude.<sup>16</sup> Any woman who undergoes abortion can certainly turn to the Christian faith for support, and she should not be condemned for her decision that she felt was best for her life.

The time of abortion can also be a time for women to increase in faith, and to place more faith in God than ever before. In a sense, a woman with an unintentional pregnancy often understands her situation as on the "threshold of life and death."<sup>17</sup> Daniels\* understands that during these times, women and their families turn to their spirituality or personal relationship with Christ. This prompts a growth process, as the tumultuous time allows for a reevaluation and expansion of values. Daniels\* believes that the flexibility of scripture welcomes and supports women who must make urgent decisions about their bodies. God's hopes for the human condition allow us autonomy over our own lives, such that we may make our own decisions and

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid

<sup>16</sup> *Galatians. The New Oxford Annotated Bible*. 4<sup>th</sup> ed. Oxford UP, 2010. Print.

<sup>17</sup> Daniels, Tom\*. "Pro-Choice Interview #2." Personal interview. 8 July 2011. \*All informants will remain anonymous with a pseudonym.

rely on him during periods of stress. In other terms, God would not want us to feel imprisoned. Therefore, the abortion, while a termination of life, can also be “life-affirming.” The woman need not feel eternally tied down to the consequences of sex, nor should she feel that she has abandoned the Christian values in any sense.<sup>18</sup>

### **Pro-Choice in the Bible**

The strain that lies between religious values of pro-life and pro-choice clergy is the debate over authority of scripture. Daniels\* states that the interpretation of the Bible differs, and this divergence formulates the basis of disagreement between the groups. The pastor believes one must understand that “a different world is coming,” when approaching scripture. The Bible was a product of an austere culture, whose values were subject to evolve. Daniels\* states “We should not be surprised that the cultural values of the Bible will change.”<sup>19</sup> He asserts that while the spirit and love of God is eternal, the Biblical context and ideals are ever-changing to mold to contemporary culture. In other terms, the Spirit of God allows for the change of context and values. No matter the generation, God calls on humans to rely on Him for a given set of contemporary issues.

The pastor highlights Galatians as a key scripture for understanding this evolution. The passage reads, “For freedom Christ has set us free. Stand firm, therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery.”<sup>20</sup> He interprets that this verse asserts human autonomy, and repulses slavery and servitude that drives anguish. The pastor states that for women, this verse confirms that they are free to choose the fate of the unborn child in the event of unplanned pregnancy. To place restrictions on this choice is a form of “slavery” imposed upon women. Furthermore, the

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid

<sup>19</sup> Ibid

<sup>20</sup> *Galatians 5:1. The New Oxford Annotated Bible*. 4<sup>th</sup> ed. Oxford UP, 2010. Print

passage reads, “By contrast, the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. There is no law against such things.”<sup>21</sup> This verse demonstrates God’s forgiving spirit, and the expectations He has for us as His most prized creation. People are not to enslave each other with dichotomous arguments, but to understand that God’s eternal love and patience calls for humans to affirm their lives through freedom.

The difference in Biblical interpretation further deviates in understanding the actions and words of Jesus and Paul. While it seems difficult for Christians to not attempt to emulate these iconic figures, Daniels\* asserts that we must recall that they were extreme ascetics, and their actions regarding celibacy and fleshly matters are not necessarily universal. Paul states, “To the unmarried and the widows I say that it is well for them to remain unmarried as I am. But if they are not practicing self-control, they should marry. For it is better to marry than to be aflame with passion.”<sup>22</sup> The pastor claims that according to staunch pro-life thinkers, this verse intends to steer unmarried people away from carnal concerns. It formulates the belief that pre-marital sexual behavior is a sin. Regardless of this interpretation, the pastor asserts that these conservative readers negate Paul’s utter radicalism. His lifestyle was so far removed from that which most of us know, in terms of our interactions with modern surroundings and secularism. Most Christian lives today are disparate from the radical lifestyle of Jesus and Paul. Thus, Daniels\* believes that the New Testament does not support the commonplace family values that the pro-life group believes it teaches us to uphold. It cannot be construed so literally, as our culture and worldviews have evolved drastically. Rather, Christians should view these teachings as a reminder for the

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<sup>21</sup> *Galatians 5:22. The New Oxford Annotated Bible.* 4<sup>th</sup> ed. Oxford UP, 2010. Print

<sup>22</sup> *1Corinthians 7:8-9. The New Oxford Annotated Bible.* 4<sup>th</sup> ed. Oxford UP, 2010. Print

sexual integrity needed for a positive, healthy life that each individual controls for himself or herself.<sup>23</sup>

Another key pro-choice scripture comes from the wedding banquet parable in Matthew. This passage demonstrates the role of women and its complete evolution. It reads, “Now there were seven brothers among us; the first married, and died childless, leaving the widow to his brother. The second did the same...down to the seventh...In the resurrection, then, whose wife of the seven will she be? For all of them had married her.”<sup>24</sup> The pastor interprets this passage to contain a deeper, universal meaning than just asking about the fate of the woman. Essentially, the speaker inquires about what will happen to the world, or humankind, at its end. Jesus replies, “You are wrong, because you know neither the scriptures nor the power of God. For in the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven.”<sup>25</sup> Daniels\* believes that Jesus corrects the man’s concerns about the finiteness of the woman, as a mere wife to these seven men. Upon death, she and all worthy humans will enter the kingdom of God, where their souls will dwell eternally. People will “belong” to no one upon entering heaven. The pastor asserts that the woman as the property of man, therefore, proves to be an arbitrary and temporary stipulation of earth. The Kingdom of God, however, eliminates such boundaries and supports that there is “a world coming where these things don’t matter.”<sup>26</sup> Furthermore, Daniels\* states that the concept of arriving to God’s kingdom opposes the family values that many conservative thinkers uphold, such as maintaining the wife as the domestic, subjective unit of the family.<sup>27</sup> This pro-choice interpretation shows that these gender roles and

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<sup>23</sup>Daniels, Tom\*. "Pro-Choice Interview #2." Personal interview. 8 July 2011. \*All informants will remain anonymous with a pseudonym.

<sup>24</sup> *Matthew 22:25-28. The New Oxford Annotated Bible.* 4<sup>th</sup> ed. Oxford UP, 2010. Print

<sup>25</sup> *Matthew 22: 29-30. The New Oxford Annotated Bible.* 4<sup>th</sup> ed. Oxford UP, 2010. Print

<sup>26</sup> Daniels\*, Tom\*. "Pro-Choice Interview #2." Personal interview. 8 July 2011. \* All informants will remain anonymous with a pseudonym.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid

female inferiority are only earthly matters that misunderstand life's ultimate purpose. Thus, women should know there is a higher purpose that overshadows these stipulations, and they should feel empowered to rise above and make just decisions that benefit their particular lifestyles.

### **Pro-Choice and Religious Clients**

Pro-choice organizations are committed to helping their patients sort through religious concerns, even though the employees of the institutions are not religious officials. Bridget Marks\* explains that the staff at the organization where she works are trained in providing resources and helping women explore their spiritual questions if they express religious conflict when considering abortion. Additionally, these staff members and volunteers are encouraged to read *Sacred Choices and Abortion*, a book that grapples with how the pro-choice outlook exists within religions that antagonize various women's health options. Marks\* states that it is important for these staff members to be educated on these religious perspectives in order to accommodate a "region like ours."<sup>28</sup>

In the event that a woman struggles with faith issues following an abortion, staff of the pro-choice clinic will refer her to *Exhale*, a talk-line service that helps the woman and her family heal emotionally and discuss openly matters of faith. *Exhale* has counselors that provide support to these women and walk them through any questions regarding their abortion and religious conflict.<sup>29</sup> This and another pro-choice organization both utilize a resource entitled *Faith Aloud*. Religious officials founded and lead this agency, which directly addresses the acceptability of abortion within various religious faiths, as supported through their interpretation of religious

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<sup>28</sup> Marks, Bridget\*. "Pro-Choice Interview #1." Personal interview. 22 June 2011 \* All informants will remain anonymous with a pseudonym.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid

texts. The organization believes, “Faith Aloud wants every woman to feel confident and happy after her decision...We believe that women are good, created in the image of God, and able to make difficult decisions. We believe this power to make personal decisions is good and given to us by God.”<sup>30</sup> Clearly, the organization is driven by officials who view the woman’s right to choose as a positive, God-given affirmation. While the staffs of pro-choice organizations do not have religious authority, they are thoroughly trained to guide women and help them understand aspects of their faith that will influence the fate of the pregnancy. The organizations do not want the women to endure a procedure that they do not see fit for their lifestyle, but they want to offer support and reassurance through these faith based resources when necessary.

While pro-choice groups want to eliminate the occurrences of unwanted pregnancies, they want women to feel empowered and supported upon their decision to proceed with an abortion. The abortion procedure is oftentimes emotional and conflicted; thus one pro-choice agency offers a journal in the clinic waiting room for women to express their feelings and offer words of encouragement for other women. Most of the comments have religious tones, or refer directly to God. The journal shows that women undergoing abortion or other reproductive health issues seek intense religious refuge, as well as mutual support, when facing these trying decisions. The pro-choice facilities acknowledge the spiritual struggles women endure, and fully strive to provide the most empowering resources available that help women stand firm in their decisions.

### **Pro-Choice: Now more than Ever**

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<sup>30</sup> Counseling: Faith Aloud: Promoting Reproductive Justice through the Moral Power of Religious and Ethical Communities." *Faith Aloud*. Web. 21 July 2011. <<http://www.faithaloud.org/faith/faith-counseling.php>>.

The variety of demographics, appalling rates of reproductive infections and diseases, and a youth at risk of an unhealthy future provide the baseline for the critical need of pro-choice thought in Memphis. Abortion represents but one of numerous vital services offered by pro-choice institutions. While conservative and ultra-religious groups attack the option to terminate pregnancy, one must recall that pro-choice clinics also offer services that promote preventative healthcare for sexually transmitted diseases, a safe haven for underrepresented groups, basic women's health services that eliminate risk of non-STD related issues that only benefit citizens of Memphis. Not only do these institutions represent a woman's right to choose and freely command her body, but they encompass social justice at large. Sexual education and health services simply must be available to all people, including men and women of all ages, income, race, and sexual orientations. The pro-choice groups offer services that profoundly influence the decisions that people make about their sexual activity, to which they otherwise would not have access. These underrepresented groups are those that would be most adversely affected by reproductive health anomalies or unwanted pregnancy, as they cannot afford the proper treatment or pre-natal care. Therefore, they must be offered adequate knowledge on sexual health that will prevent these tragedies. Pro-choice agenda is imperative to Memphis because it directly grapples with the major issues regarding reproductive health that have endangered the city's population. The right to choose, therefore, extends far past a woman's decision regarding her unborn fetus, or even her contraception method. It is her fundamental right to adequate healthcare, *all* humans' rights to choosing their sexual partners, electing to undergo testing for life-threatening STDs, and seeking proper education on all sexual activity.

### **The Pro-Life Philosophy**

Christianity serves as the driving force for many pro-life institutions and governs their overall outlook on sexual activity. They do not offer contraception, but value abstinence as the essential means of birth control. They claim to stress abstinence in order both to prevent pregnancy and strengthen the emotional state of a woman. However, their stance on sex does not cause them to condemn women who unintentionally become pregnant and utilize the institution's services. They eliminate judgment and serve women in the spirit of Christ. An administrative employee of this organization, Anna Jones\*, stressed that their sole concern for the woman is her pregnancy, and it is the concern of the institution to help her affirm the life of her child. In the event that the woman struggles emotionally, she may opt for their pregnancy counseling, which helps her connect with God to facilitate her decision. The main purpose of the counseling is to provide a professional who will listen to the woman, which oftentimes is not available at home. They help women turn to God, and reassure her that God's plan will alleviate her unpreparedness and see her through her unintended struggle. Overall, this pro-life institution feels that educating women on the life-giving options will release them from a "culture of death" and thereby contribute to a society of "healthier women."<sup>31</sup>

The pro-life thinkers understand the issue of abortion as a violation of every human's right to life. They believe that humans must defend the unborn fetus's right to live, despite the mother's lack of intent to procreate. One pro-life institution of Memphis adopts this viewpoint and strives to educate women on their options to preserve the life of her child. Hence, they help women understand the value of parenthood or adoption. Not only does this institution counsel unintentionally pregnant women, but it also offers medical services such as ultrasound and testing for sexually transmitted diseases. Additionally, they offer post-abortion counseling for

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<sup>31</sup> Jones, Anna\*. "Pro-Life Interview #1." Personal interview. 28 June 2011. \*All informants will remain anonymous with a pseudonym.

women recovering emotionally from terminating the pregnancy. The philosophy of the organization is to serve women in a nonjudgmental manner; they do not condemn women for considering abortion, yet they stress the values and rewards of keeping the child. They consider their patients as “at-risk” for abortion, and are very open with them about the spiritual and lifelong benefits of keeping their child.<sup>32</sup>

### **Pro-Life in the Medical Clinic**

When a patient arrives, the previously mentioned pro-life agency immediately offers her a free pregnancy test. As she awaits her results, the patient may speak with a health care provider or client advocate about abortion and her sexual decisions in the past. They teach her about the type of abortion she would have based on the present trimester of her pregnancy. Additionally, they educate her on the unreliability of contraception, as they support abstinence as their primary form of birth control for spiritual and physical reasons. These educators are very open with the patients, and attempt to help them with decisions to improve their lifestyle. If the pregnancy results confirm a positive test, she will be offered an ultrasound. This serves as a means of dating a pregnancy and is vital also because it determines whether or not the pregnancy is normal or ectopic. Ectopic pregnancies are those in which the embryo implants and grows in the fallopian tube or abdominal cavity rather than uterus, and merits an immediate abortion. Such a pregnancy would otherwise result in the death of the fetus, and likely the mother, so the pro-life clinics understand the need for the medical abortion in this case. The patient may choose whether or not to view her ultrasound, although she inevitably hears its heartbeat.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid

<sup>33</sup> Smith, Erica. \* "Pro-Life Interview #2." Personal interview. 30 June 2011. \*All informants will remain anonymous with a pseudonym.

If the patient continues to consider abortion as a viable option, the pro-life clinicians will offer her an STD test. These will show if she has any health issues that will adversely affect an abortion, although such tests are offered at abortion-providing clinics as well. Following the ultrasound and STD screening, she may choose to undergo a counseling session, which helps her weigh the options and attempts utilize spirituality for guidance. If she leaves unsure of how she will handle the pregnancy, the institution asks her to follow-up with them in two weeks to meet with a client advocate. The client advocate must get to know the patients so that they are fully comfortable and feel welcomed into the service. Interestingly, the client advocate and other counselors have had personal experience with abortion, which allows them to better relate and communicate with the clients. The advocate provides a personal support system that the patient may not otherwise have at home, and is essential in her time of crisis.

Christian spirituality is offered to women to help them cope during this turbulent time, and to help them understand the benefits of choosing life even during an unintended pregnancy. Most of the clients are Christian, although the majority of them are unsure of a specific doctrine that they follow. The counseling helps the woman realize the benefits of turning to God when afraid or tentative about the future, and emphasizes that God has a plan for all, even when it does not seem to suit us. Unwanted pregnancy constitutes an exceptionally vulnerable time for women, and they desperately need an open environment in order to think clearly and cope with overwhelming emotions. The counselors thus explain the benefits of life and life-affirming options to these women, as their vulnerability causes them to be receptive to any options. This

counseling will continue if the mother chooses life while she develops a plan for her pregnancy.<sup>34</sup>

### **Pro-Life: Why *not* Abortion?**

Pro-Life embodies the idea that the fetus has the right to live, despite the circumstances of the mother having sex before she is able to support a child. Although pro-life agencies feel that pregnancies must be kept, this group feels passionately that women need to be cared for and supported throughout the decision process. However, the group steers unintentionally pregnant women away from abortion options because they want to preserve the Christian ideal of the sanctity of life. According to the pro-life theological view, because God knew us before we are born, life is sacred and viable from conception onward, and to intentionally terminate that life is morally flawed. In addition to giving a voice to the fetus, the pro-life group condemns abortion because it simply “hurts women.”<sup>35</sup> This group understands abortion to induce internal, emotional conflict for women, who in turn find it difficult to forgive themselves. Hence, abortion is unfavorable because it lasts forever, and may have been decided upon impulsively. Pro-life followers believe that Christian women experience the most turmoil following an abortion, based on the Christian ideals that condemn their actions from the pro-life viewpoint. Thus, just as the institution adamantly opposes the option to end fetal life, it offers refuge for those women that chose abortion with post-abortion counseling. A clinical employee, Erica Smith\*, states that the overall philosophy of these counseling sessions is that the women are “forgiven and set free” and need to be embraced during their time of internal regret.<sup>36</sup> One pro-life group in particular reaches out to previous patients who received abortion from a pro-choice based clinic. They

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid

<sup>35</sup> Ibid

<sup>36</sup> Ibid

understand this is a vulnerable time for women who may benefit from the message of the Gospel or friendly, emotional embrace. The pro-life groups oppose abortion because it ends the life of a defenseless fetus, and causes emotional strain for the mothers. Despite this opposition, they understand all women's potential need of refuge during a confusing and chaotic unwanted pregnancy.

## **Parenthood**

Pro-life institutions clearly stress parenting as one of the methods for handling an unwanted pregnancy. The employees at the previously mentioned pro-life facility empathize with the patient's fear and panic, yet they feel that parenting is one logical consequence of sexual activity. Following her decision to continue the pregnancy, the patient will keep in close contact with the client advocate for emotional support and to ensure that the mother makes healthy lifestyle choices throughout the pregnancy. These counseling sessions will be one-on-one, and women are encouraged to attend various parenting classes as well. The classes teach women about pre-natal care, such as healthy dietary and lifestyle requirements, the labor and delivery process, and how to care for newborn infants. Upon attending these classes, women earn "points," which can be used to "purchase" various items to care for the child. The institution has a large closet full of donated baby clothes, strollers, diapers, cribs, and more. Thus, this point system allows for lower-income women to obtain the necessary materials for newborn care, which are otherwise costly.<sup>37</sup> The education and assistance provided to women who choose to parent embody the agency's life-affirming outlook, which extends past merely choosing to not have an abortion. Effective pro-life thought understands that the choice of life must provide an unready mother with the resources that encourage her to care properly for herself and the fetus,

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid

provide her with accurate information on the labor and delivery process, and teach her how to amend her lifestyle and care for a newborn. This pro-life organization includes in their understanding that pregnancy and infant care is fiscally, physically, and emotionally taxing, in that they provide outlets to appease all of these issues, while maintaining their steadfast belief that the upkeep is less costly than the termination of a pregnancy.

### **Adoption**

Despite the pro-life disapproval of aborting an unborn fetus, they are fully aware that a woman may simply not be able to parent. She may be too young, emotionally suffering, or in a position where she must focus her attention and energy to an aspect of life other than a child. In this case, the pro-life groups stress adoption as a way for an unready mother to keep her baby and relinquish it to the care and support it needs from another loving family. Hence, one pro-life agency of Memphis collaborates with an adoption agency. Women who seriously consider adoption may browse families in a portfolio, who have been pre-screened as acceptable adoption parents by the pro-life institution. These couples have certain requirements, such as they must both attend a Christian, Biblically-based church. They must be married for at least three years, and sign a statement of doctrine that affirms their belief in Jesus as Savior and dedication to the sanctity of life. Therefore, the families eligible for adoption must guarantee that the child will grow in a Christian tradition that promotes the life-affirming principles that brought the child to that particular home in the first place.<sup>38</sup>

After these families confirm their core beliefs, the adoption agency of the pro-life institution requires the couple to complete an adoptive parent application, three interviews (two

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<sup>38</sup> Jones, Anna\*. "Pro-Life Interview #1." Personal interview. 28 June 2011. \*All informants will remain anonymous with a pseudonym

in the adoption agency and one in the potential adoptive home), a family profile, and a questionnaire and letter to the birth mother for the portfolio. The birth mother or family chooses the adoptive family after emotional and spiritual guidance from the pro-life institution and a meticulous screening process. While the birth mother may initially choose adoption for her child, it is fully possible and legal for her to decide to parent at any point in her pregnancy or at birth. It is common for women to grow more attached to the baby throughout the pregnancy, and therefore decide they are ready to parent or that they are not emotionally ready to relinquish the infant.<sup>39</sup> The pro-life institution acknowledges the emotional complications that accompany the adoption process, and they fully support whether or not the mother follows through with the adoption decision. Therefore, the pro-life agency dedicates itself entirely to its clients who may endure a multitude of stressors that directly affect the fate of their life-affirming pregnancy. Adoption allows the mother to give life to her child while enriching the family life of a couple that cannot have children on their own. Pro-life thinkers assert adoption as a positive option, although they do not deny the complications it may entail.

### **Abstinence: The Only Fully Reliable Contraception**

Pro-life groups believe that the only effective and completely reliable way to avoid an unwanted pregnancy is through the practice of abstinence. They recount this belief to youth and their own clients. As a healthcare provider, Smith\* claims that the pro-life clinics offer the most meaningful insight because abstinence demonstrates the interplay between simple reproductive science and Christian faith. Abstinence is the only way to guarantee avoidance of pregnancy, while oral contraception, condoms, IUDs, and all other methods contain an element of error or

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<sup>39</sup> Smith, Erica.\* "Pro-Life Interview #2." Personal interview. 30 June 2011. \*All informants will remain anonymous with a pseudonym.

risk. Simultaneously, they contend that God wants His followers to remain celibate as an act of piety, as conservative Christian thought purports that sexual activity prior to marriage is a sin and distraction from submitting to God.<sup>40</sup> Therefore, this pro-life medical group encourages the clients as well as young girls to trust God in His view of the celibate life, that they should abstain from sex as long as they are unmarried and not in a stable position to raise a child.

The pro-life thinkers claim abstinence as a model for the unmarried life because it protects women emotionally and physically. Sexual activity often occurs in teen girls who have low self-esteem or some skewed sense of self-worth. They claim that abstinence will both increase the girl's image of herself while building her trust in relationship with God through mutuality. Oftentimes girls claim they engage in sex with their significant others because they are in love or claim they will one day marry that person. Upon counseling and client advocacy appointments, one agency challenges these clients to abstain from sex for twenty-one days with their boyfriends. Interestingly, they find that most girls' relationships do not last through this three-week course, which supports their claim that sex creates false impressions of love and stability, and that one is not ready for such feelings until married.<sup>41</sup>

### **Pro-Life in Memphis**

The astonishing teen pregnancy rate in Memphis, which became readily apparent in the beginning of 2011, merited the necessity for information on healthier choices regarding sex. The problem reached national news, and the increasing number of pregnant teens called for local government to spend over 4 million dollars on school programs led by social workers to assist

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid

<sup>41</sup> Ibid

these teen mothers and keep them as current as possible in their school work.<sup>42</sup> While this teen pregnancy epidemic prompted the formation of many pro-choice organizations that educated girls on proper use of contraception and sexually transmitted diseases, pro-life groups were called upon to ease the situation as well. Five large, public high schools called upon a pro-life institution to discuss the benefits, or even necessity, of premarital abstinence. This pro-life group's goal was to teach about sexual integrity, and to help girls understand the traumatic consequences of an unwanted pregnancy. Surprisingly, two of these public high schools allowed this group to incorporate their faith into the lecture. Both of these schools consist of primarily African- American students. The other three schools prohibited the pro-life agency from utilizing faith in their session, and are predominantly white. Smith\* lectured the group, and stated that this posed a challenge for the presentation as faith is an essential component of their philosophy. She confirms, however, that it is entirely possible to lecture on abstinence from a secular, medical perspective. By abstaining from sexual activity, one eliminates the risk of disease, pregnancy, complications that arise from pregnancy, and emotional strain.<sup>43</sup> In addition to speaking to these high schools, this pro-life institution hosts abstinence education sessions for local youth groups at various churches, which are largely non-denominational or Baptist.<sup>44</sup> Clearly, the reproductive health and pregnancy issues that heavily consume Memphis desperately call for any education that can improve the present situations and statistics. Pro-life groups offer an austere and powerful message on the benefits of abstinence that would prevent the reproductive health complications that hinder the lives of many Memphians.

### **Pro-Life and Religion**

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<sup>42</sup> "Teen Pregnancy Epidemic? Memphis Officials Say No, But Do See Problem : The Two-Way, *ibid*

<sup>43</sup> Smith, Erica.\* "Pro-Life Interview #2." Personal interview. 30 June 2011. \*All informants will remain anonymous with a pseudonym

<sup>44</sup> Jones, Anna\*. "Pro-Life Interview #1." Personal interview. 28 June 2011. \*All informants will remain anonymous with a pseudonym

Unlike non-religious pro-choice clinics, pro-life agencies build their philosophy on Christian principles. While the more secularly-oriented individuals may assume that this Christian perspective condemns premarital sex and abortion as unforgiveable sins, the agencies emulate Christ in order to embrace and welcome women to cope with their situations. While this outlook certainly appeals to mostly Christian women, one facility attracts several Muslim women each year.<sup>45</sup> Hence, while the pro-life tradition remains rooted in Christianity, it welcomes other faiths to explore the pro-life perspective and their methods for helping young women during the stressful time of pregnancy. Erica Smith\* emphasizes that the facility's primary goal is to offer Christ-like, open-minded services to women of all faiths, rather than evangelize those who have differing beliefs. She explained to me that often women of other faiths, such as Islam, express curiosity in learning more about Christianity, since it forms such a fundamental aspect of the pro-life thought. The employees explain the Gospel and how they value a relationship with God, yet in no way do they try to "convert" any non-Christian. Such opportunities bring the employees and administrators closer to God, as it gives them an opportunity to explain their core beliefs to people nonnative to these particular Christian values.<sup>46</sup> The Christianity that drives the pro-life institution allows them to embrace women of any background, in the same open mind of Christ. The Bible immensely influences the majority of their thought, particularly for abstinence, abortion, and adoption.

### **The Bible and Abortion**

Nowhere does the Bible directly attack the notion of abortion, nor do pro-life groups claim that there is a direct condemnation of the act. Rather, pro-life Christians focus on God's

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<sup>45</sup> Smith, Erica.\* "Pro-Life Interview #2." Personal interview. 30 June 2011. \*All informants will remain anonymous with a pseudonym

<sup>46</sup> Ibid

lack of distinction between the born and unborn, His unfathomable Love of both, and how to treat human beings, God's highest valued creation. The core pro-life justification stems from the principle that God made us in His Image.<sup>47</sup> This declaration of love and worth is further supported in Acts, when God invests so much of His Love and Himself into His creations. Acts reads, "From one ancestor He made all nations to inhabit the whole earth, and He allotted the times of their existence and the boundaries of the places where they would live, so that they would search for God and perhaps grope for him and find him—though indeed He is not far from each one of us."<sup>48</sup> In the pro-life Biblical interpretation, Paul describes to the Athenians the meticulous labor that God put forth to create nations of humans. He determined their generations and places to live, and instilled in them a desire to know more about and grow closer to God. Essentially, God's love for humankind and creation formulates the founding philosophy of the life-affirming group. Because humans belong to God, He determines our Values.

To eliminate a fetus, according to the pro-life groups, is to destroy one of God's creatures that He intended to Love and progress through life. The abortion is a form of not valuing life, which God states causes suffering among society. One institution supports this claim with Psalm 106, which describes the immense chaos that the Hebrews in Egypt underwent when they ignored God. It reads, "They poured out innocent blood, the blood of their sons and daughters, whom they sacrificed to the idols of Canaan; and the land was polluted with blood. Thus they became unclean by their acts, and prostituted themselves in their doings."<sup>49</sup> The blood pollution seems to reflect the pro-life's idea of abortion, as a violent termination of an innocent life. This causes discontent and struggle, which parallels with the pro-life organization's key idea that abortion causes suffering among women. To continue the practice of abortion, which exists as a

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<sup>47</sup> *Genesis 1:27. The New Oxford Annotated Bible*. Vol. 4. Oxford UP, 2010. Print

<sup>48</sup> *Acts 17: 26-27. The New Oxford Annotated Bible*. Vol. 4. Oxford UP, 2010. Print

<sup>49</sup> *Psalms 106: 38-39. The New Oxford Annotated Bible*. Vol. 4. Oxford UP, 2010. Print

result of unrighteous, premature sex, would continue to divide people and prompt angst within society.

The immense love that God has for His Self- Reflected human beings, combined with the expectations God attributes to humans due to the preconceived idea of them, supports the God-affirming nature of pro-life thought. Abortion terminates the sacred, undeserving life and negates God's intentions for human beings. There are several other forms of non-negotiable practices in one conservative pro-life group, such as euthanasia, stem-cell research, human cloning, and homosexual marriage and relationships.<sup>50</sup> Hence, one sees the extensions of pro-life ideals that are promoted by Biblical foundation. The sanctity of life encompasses the right to life from the formation of an embryo onward, according to the Will of God.

Because the Bible provides a foundation for the value of human life, it is no surprise that pro-life organizations find that it also supports adoption. Ephesians declares that God knew us before we were born, and that he wanted to adopt us through the works of Jesus Christ. Christian pro-life thinkers believe that God wanted us to prosper through this adoption. Ephesians reads, "He destined us for adoption as his children through Jesus Christ...In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace that he lavished on us."<sup>51</sup> God adopted humans into the Christian family, which they can better understand through the acts of Christ. Adoption, therefore, is a principle that formulated Christianity as a whole, as it is a direct act of God. Therefore, humans need a mother and father for guidance and as a means to develop a relationship with God through Christ. They expound the idea of God as the Ultimate Adopter with a passage from Jeremiah. It reads, "For surely I know the plans I have for you, says the Lord, plans for your welfare and not for harm, to give

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid

<sup>51</sup> *Ephesians 1:3-6. The New Oxford Annotated Bible*. Vol. 4. Oxford UP, 2010. Print

you a future with hope.”<sup>52</sup> Pro-Life organizations interpret this passage as descriptive of the meaning in human life that God determined before birth. This verse seems to particularly appease birth mothers who are enduring the adoption process, as it recounts God’s plan that will keep the child safe under His Plan. This reassures them that while sometimes events do not work out according to expectations, there is a solution to any problem, no matter how chaotic. Although the pregnancy was not intended, it does not mean that there is not a suitable, loving family that could properly and care for the child.

### **Pro-Life: Now more than Ever**

Unintentionally pregnant women call upon pro-life facilities in order to receive utmost spiritual guidance and to understand more about the benefits of keeping the child. The spiritualities of these agencies, as well as support from the personable counselors and advocates, will allow for steadfast guidance for the patients. Women who endure this stressful period are in dire need for consistent support that teaches them how to improve their quality of life, which had been compromised due to sexually related issues. While preaching abstinence ignores other effective birth control methods, many women and teens will adopt it as their preferred contraception due to past emotional or physical strain brought on by sex. The pro-life agenda’s austere message regarding pre-marital sex will demonstrate that the issues of young pregnancy can be eliminated entirely through abstinence. Their message is crucial because it also empowers young women to understand the value of self-esteem, a lack of which contributes to girls engaging in sexual activity in the first place. Girls who are not sexually active could find refuge and justification in the pro-life outlook, and therefore never experience sexually transmitted disease or unwanted pregnancy. Those who are sexually active will learn to use more caution,

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<sup>52</sup> *Jeremiah 29:11.. The New Oxford Annotated Bible*. Vol. 4. Oxford UP, 2010. Print

and reevaluate their actions and sense of self-worth before intercourse. Given this generation's open mind about sex, abstinence is the less popular means to prevent pregnancy. Yet pro-life agencies encourage women to fully evaluate this option, as it prevents the plethora of reproductive health concerns that dominate Memphis today. Therefore, the city could undoubtedly benefit from thorough teaching on the sole method that fully prevents STDs and abortion.

### **The Co-Existence of Pro-Life and Pro-Choice**

Memphis's acute and unfortunate reproductive health trends call for the utmost effective way to help women make "life-affirming" decisions about their body. Interestingly, this is a term utilized by both sides. For the pro-choice thinkers, a woman may choose abortion as a "just, life-affirming" decision for herself *and* the unborn fetus.<sup>53</sup> Perhaps she is in a phase of life where she cannot afford to parent for the sake of finances, education, or emotional state. Meanwhile, she may not even be in a proper stage to undergo the burdens of carrying a pregnancy to term with the physical and emotional exhaustion it entails, all to relinquish her child entirely through adoption. Pro-life agenda utilizes the avoidance of abortion as "life affirming," but the meaning of this term extends past this decision. A woman must affirm the life of her child as well as her own through a healthy lifestyle and spiritual growth. Thus, each group calls for women to make a decision that most highly values her own life. The two agencies diverge in their understanding of what upholds this self-affirmation. This holds especially true for Memphis, a city tattered by sexual lifestyle complications. Therefore, now more than ever these two groups must reach out and present their core values. The decision to have sex or terminate a pregnancy is immensely personal, and many girls feel straddled between the two dichotomized groups. The two agencies

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<sup>53</sup> Daniels\*, Tom\*. "Pro-Choice Interview #2." Personal interview. 8 July 2011.\* All informants will remain anonymous with a pseudonym

must peacefully exist so as to accomplish each of their goals helping girls make “life-affirming” decisions. To debunk each other’s philosophies indirectly disregards the decisions that women ultimately will make about their bodies, which each institution claims to “respect.”

The unusually high rates of reproductive health issues in Memphis, such as exceedingly high teen pregnancy and sexually transmitted disease rates, call for a redirection on how to approach and educate citizens on decisions regarding sexual activity in a more collaborative manner. Both pro-life and pro-choice agendas have methods that can steer women toward making the best choice for their lifestyle. One can observe this through the education of high school girls on teen pregnancy. The launch of the public service message, “NoBaby.org,” provided resources for all types of contraception and testing methods. This allows girls to understand all of the ways they can engage in a healthier sexual lifestyle and encourages girls’ self-worth so they can “say no” to any of their partner’s requests with which they are not comfortable. Meanwhile, pro-life groups have been called upon by these same target high schools to provide extensive education on abstinence. Several liberal thinkers dismiss this idea as idealistic and old-fashioned. But factually speaking, it is the *only* method that completely prevents pregnancy and infections. Girls of religious faith may adhere to this message, which helps initiate the elimination of this pregnancy epidemic. The dire teen pregnancy situation simply calls for whatever means necessary to prevent the issue in the future, thus it is necessary to thoroughly educate on the one birth control method that prevents both pregnancy and disease one hundred percent. Each group targets the same audience, and effective, non-combative education from both sides will achieve the mutual goal of lowering diseases and unintended pregnancies.

Religion, particularly the Christian faith, seemingly finds room for both agendas as well. There will continue to be divergent ideas of scriptural interpretation, as each sees God as the ultimate supporter of one form of thought. While one group claims God wants us to affirm our lives through the freedom of decision, and the other claims God's preconceived idea of humans necessitates the giving of life, neither side claims that God will stop loving or trusting a woman based on her decisions or thoughts. Programs such as the post-abortion counseling show that the pro-life agencies understand God as eternally open and forgiving. By no means is abortion the one-way ticket to hell, but perhaps it represents a call to affirm the lives of God's creations from that point onward. On the other side, it may be difficult to understand how Christianity, a religion that strives to please God aside from self-interest, allows for the decision to terminate life. Yet pro-choice thinkers purport that the forgiving language of the Bible, the eternal spirit of God, and an understanding of the Bible's context, demonstrate the freedom from enslavement God wants us to have. A woman may feel imprisoned by her unexpected pregnancy, but the decision is solely about her situation and her body, and God will remain with her despite the outcome. Like her unborn child, she too is a preconceived human, and therefore one of God's most valuable creations. She must therefore affirm the life that she knows best. Core values of Christianity can justify any woman's decision regarding her lifestyle and her health needs.

## **Conclusion**

The reproductive health situation and vast religious population in Memphis, Tennessee, demonstrate the need for a collaborative coexistence of pro-choice and pro-life groups. The two groups continuously oppose one another, and yet they both seek the same goals. Both agendas strive to educate and empower women with knowledge on how to live the utmost sexually healthy life, and to eliminate unwanted pregnancies that result in abortion. The groups need to

focus on ways that women can feel entirely justified in their decisions about their sexuality and pregnancies without feeling condemned by the “opposite” avenue. Fortunately, Memphis demonstrates improvement in the conjoining of the two groups. Anna Jones\* described a progressive interaction with an employee at a pro-choice clinic, which resulted in a collaborative effort for adoption. Essentially, women who seek the pro-choice agency in hopes of keeping their child may be transferred to the pro-life clinic and adoption agency.<sup>54</sup> While it seems unclear if this pro-life agency refers its clients to the pro-choice agency for affordable women’s health care, the director of this pro-choice group is hopeful about the future of this relationship. Efforts such as this must continue on local and national levels, as they can provide bountiful resources and efficient help for women in need of redirection for their sexual health. Such a teamed effort would value the spiritual and health needs of women and their families universally, and could profoundly help people make informative decisions about their sexual health.

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<sup>54</sup> Jones, Anna\*. "Pro-Life Interview #1." Personal interview. 28 June 2011. \*All informants will remain anonymous with a pseudonym