

Discussion Questions

Motherhood by Choice, Not Chance

Discussion Topics:

Motherhood by Choice, Not Chance can be used to generate discussion on a range of topics:

- Women's rights and human rights
- Abstinence-only vs. medically accurate safer-sex education
- Access to affordable birth control
- Availability of Emergency Contraception (EC)
- Health care and support services for low-income women
- Medical ethics
- Ideology vs. science
- Religion and tolerance
- Protection of individual liberties (the role of government and courts in legislating personal decisions)

Discussion Questions:

This guide is intended to give you ideas for topics to discuss after you and your guests or students have watched the film. While we hope this guide is helpful, we believe that the best discussion questions are the ones that you and your guests find interesting, whether or not they are included here.

Access to Contraception and Information: Then and Now

Lana was 17 years old, married, and already a mother. She was told by her doctor that another pregnancy would be dangerous to her health, yet she was not given birth control information. She soon became pregnant again, and chose to seek out an illegal abortion to save her own life. During much of the time that abortion was illegal, contraceptives were also illegal.

- What role do people's feelings about contraceptives play in the debate over reproductive freedom?
 - People can have complex feelings about birth control; what makes contraception such a volatile issue for some people
 - Given people's complex feelings about contraception, what responsibility, if any, does government have in regulating how these entities handle the coverage and supply of birth control?
 - a. insurance companies
 - b. pharmacies and individual pharmacists
 - c. family planning clinics

- What role does sex education play in the debate over reproductive freedom?
 - If appropriate, present a brief update on the current trend toward teaching abstinence-only, instead of medically accurate safer-sex education. See “Reproductive Rights at Risk” for some basic facts and links to relevant sites.
 - What effect do you think medically accurate sex education might have on a child's decisions about becoming sexually active?
 - What different roles could schools, family and clergy play in a well-balanced education, which includes sex-education?
 - What position do you think government should take in offering or eliminating sex education?

Physicians’ Dilemmas: Then and Now

Dr. Boyd, who performed safe illegal procedures, describes the difficult position in which he found himself during the years when abortion was illegal.

- What were some of the costs to doctors who did illegal abortion? Their rewards?
- Now that you have seen the film, how does what you have learned affect the way you view health practitioners who perform abortions today?
- If you were a doctor when abortion was illegal, what might you have done if you were approached by a desperate woman with an unplanned pregnancy?

Today, abortion is legal, but some hospitals (nearly all Catholic hospitals) do not allow the procedure. Even in hospitals where the procedure is permitted, some staff members refuse to support abortion practitioners because of their moral beliefs.

- If a staff doctor refuses to provide abortions in a hospital which permits them, what position or actions, if any, do you think the hospital administration should take?
- What should the role of government be in protecting each individuals’ and each institutions’ decisions as to whether or not to perform abortions when these positions are in conflict?

Parental Notification Laws

Many teens do not want to tell their parents about an unintended pregnancy. Although abortion is technically legal in all fifty states, there are many states where teens cannot get a legal abortion without parental consent or notification.

- What might be some of the potential consequences of requiring parental notification for teen abortion?
- What role should the government play in fostering communication between a young woman and her parents, if they are in conflict, about terminating an unintended pregnancy?
- If you were (or are) a parent, how do you think you would respond if your child chose not to tell you about her situation if she became unintentionally pregnant?

Learning from History

Lola Huth died from a self-induced abortion. Her sister, Freddie, tells Lola's story, then says, "We all have to start telling these stories."

- What is the value of young people hearing about the back-alley days?
- What is the value of people sharing their own stories?
- If abortion is made illegal again, how do you think that could affect the number of abortions performed? The safety of those which are performed? The feelings women have about seeking an illegal abortion?

Conclusion:

The film ends with the question, "*If you don't live by what you believe, what are you living for?*" Conclude your discussion with ideas for action. Here are some examples:

1. Sign up for Planned Parenthood and NARAL email Action Alerts at

<http://www.saveroe.com> and <http://www.naral.org>

Type in your email address and join the action network to stay informed and take action on current issues.

2. Call, email, or write to your elected officials about the importance of reproductive rights.

Find and contact your elected officials at

<http://www.congress.org>

3. Talk to five friends about the importance of access to full reproductive health services and medically accurate safer sex education.

Give them this film, or tell them they can view it on-line at

<http://www.thepowerofchoice.net>

Suggestions for special guests to invite to your screening:

- **Someone to speak about women's equality**
A representative of the American Association for University Women (AAUW) or similar organization, to speak to women's empowerment, access to education, and access to full and accurate information
- **A local elected official who supports women's rights**
To describe the status of current and pending legislation regarding reproductive rights
- **A local pro-choice clergy leader**
To speak to the termination of a pregnancy as a moral decision
- **A local physician who provides abortions.**
To describe why he or she provides abortions as part of his or her practice
- **Someone who works with teens in your community.**
A school counselor, adolescent therapist, or community center leader to speak about the reality of teen sexuality and the need for medically accurate safer-sex education
- **A legal expert on reproductive and/or civil rights issues.**
To clarify the role of the states, the federal government, and the Supreme Court; to give a summary of current laws concerning reproductive rights; to discuss the reasons and logic of both sides in the debate over "Roe vs. Wade."