

THE WINHAM PAPERS

1. The Real Reasons People Oppose Abortion (2017)

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The pro-life movement claims that it is their respect for all human life that leads them to oppose abortion. However, many of these people are adamant supporters of the death penalty and even more support gun "carry" laws that have significantly increased the rates of murder and accidental death by gun wounds. No, there are really 3 other reasons for all the opposition to abortion, although they have become tightly entangled over millennia. Taking each separately for the moment:

1) **Promote A Religion:** The world's religions constitute an "ecosystem" in which each competes with the others for a limited resource: members. The larger the membership, the more that religion has power, influence, and funds. If you doubt this competition, just go to an underdeveloped country and watch the opposing missionaries fighting, not always ethically, to recruit the most new converts. Given this fact, it is not surprising that most large and successful religions ban contraception, masturbation, homosexuality, and abortion. All of these, at least historically, threaten the addition of new members by current member reproduction. This is why the same people who oppose abortion typically want to ban the other three threats to competitive procreation. The only alternative strategy is to ban or exterminate the competition. There is, of course, ample historical evidence of even this latter approach.

Once a religion starts focusing on members' reproduction, it is an easy next step to insist on its control of the two main pleasures in life: food and sex. Imposing various restrictions on each of these guarantees that members cannot let a day go by without having to remember what religion they belong to. This helps to keep membership up by constantly reminding members of their fealty and duties to the religion. To be effective, these restrictions on sexual practices and eating have to be different from those of competing religions. This takes advantage of a natural human tendency to engage in tribalism to reinforce a religion's power and integration.

2) **Promote Paternity:** It is clear from thousands of studies of organisms with two sexes, one producing expensive eggs and the other cheap sperm, that the latter sex is invariably selected by evolution to spread its genes by inseminating as many of the former as possible, and the former to spread its genes most effectively by being careful who it accepts as a sperm donor. This process is seen throughout plants and animals, and humans appear to be no different. In culture after culture, men seek opportunities to copulate, and women tend to resist mating with just anyone. Some societies allow multiple wives, but only a few rare ones support multiple husbands. While many men likely only focus on the pleasure of sex, this pleasure was selected to encourage them to have sex often. These men are not consciously trying to increase their paternities, but that is what they are effectively doing. In some cultures, men do consciously and aggressively try to maximize the number of children they produce.

Allowing women access to contraception and abortion clearly undercuts men's freedom to maximize their paternities. This is why men often oppose these options. I was in a Latin country

when birth control first became available. Most of the men, even non-religious ones, opposed it, and so the women had to sneak into the new clinics providing the services.

3) ***Promote Family Inheritance:*** Evolution appears to have recognized that inbreeding has negative genetic consequences in most organisms. Studies of animals and plants have repeatedly shown various mechanisms to prevent mating among close relatives. In animals in which some sort of physical wealth such as a territory, food cache, or in humans, money can be passed on to the next generation, the problem of who should inherit the wealth is complicated by the need for inbreeding avoidance. In most animals faced with this problem, and in humans, the solution has been for one sex to inherit the wealth, and the other to leave the family to find a mate elsewhere. This rule is widespread in birds where males tend to inherit their father's territory or one nearby. And once humans settle down to farm or live in cities, they also tended to adopt inheritance by one sex and dispersal to marry elsewhere by the other. Presumably because protection of the wealth has often involved fighting, most human societies let sons inherit the wealth and married their daughters outside of the family. Since wealth also confers power, this makes males generally dominant in human societies to females. Unmarried females could often be traded for alliances or sold for more wealth and since males were dominant the females had no choice but to except their lot. Since those marrying these females would have no interest in raising children that they did not father, the dominant males in the family often insisted on strict chastity and virginity for the females they were trading off. This set up traditions in which males controlled and regulated the sexual behavior of their daughters and sisters, a tradition that persists today. While having an abortion rids an unmarried daughter of a child a future husband would not want, the very fact that she got pregnant on her own is a strong challenge to the traditions of male dominance of her sexual behavior. Not only does this affront the males who dominate her, but it threatens the opportunities for other females in the group to benefit by her being sold or traded as a virgin. So both sexes of their family are likely to oppose any effort by her to control her own sex life.

4) ***All of the above:*** As with other organisms, human traits rarely evolve independently of each other. A religion that builds its sexual prohibitions around the gene spreading and dominance biases of men will have a much more powerful influence than one that does not. Male dominance and male gene spreading naturally go hand in hand. None of the three factors have to be coordinated, but the social forces are strongest when they do.

Maybe I have a unique view from studying behavior in different animals, but even without that, any thinking person has to ask themselves whether masturbation is really an evil in this day and age. Similarly, the newest forms of birth control are so benign physiologically and so helpful to women trying to plan their lives that it is hard to see any real objection. Abortion is perhaps harder to accept emotionally, but if a woman is neither religious nor inclined to indulge the selfish interests of the men around her, is it really fair to force her to bring an unwanted child into this world? Of course, the abortion debate is not about fairness: it is about trying to perpetuate existing power by subsets in our society in spite of the growing pressures to undermine that power.

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