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Medical instruments for a surgical abortion are seen in this photo. (CNS/Reuters/Evelyn Hockstein)



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I was in high school when I first learned which of my extended family members had encouraged my mom to abort my very-much-alive disabled brother. At the time, I had just begun attending youth group, which was the first place I ever saw images of abortion. I attended my first Walk for Life. Those same youth leaders helped that same brother finally receive his sacraments of initiation, after he'd been denied them for almost a decade.

As I entered undergraduate studies at a small Catholic liberal arts school and pursued a degree in theology with an emphasis in disability, I confronted the historical reality that had galvanized me as a teenager: Abortion is implicitly eugenic. The disproportionate targeting of disabled fetuses for termination hinges on deeply violent assumptions around worthiness, rooted in capitalistic beliefs around productivity and conventional social futurity.

Put plainly? Disabled people may not learn, work, marry or procreate "normally," and that nonnormative lifestyle will inconvenience too many people. A disabled person may experience profound pain and social exclusion.

Regardless of whether or not these things are always and everywhere true (they are not), it is equally troublesome that people who hold these beliefs around disability often don't believe these circumstances are within their power or responsibility to change outside of abortion (they are).

Abortion was always going to be personal for me — the abortion topic always is — even when approached from different angles. One in four women will have an abortion, which includes treatments of ectopic pregnancies, tubal pregnancies and other forms of "spontaneous" abortion or miscarriage. And whether or not they personally experienced one, everyone knows someone impacted by abortion. It is this intimacy that has kindled the fire of many in the pro-life movement, including myself.



Pro-life supporters are pictured holding signs outside the High Court in Belfast, Northern Ireland, Jan. 30, 3019. (CNS/Reuters/Brian Lawless)

But then, in graduate school at a large secular research university, I began to study feminist, queer and crip histories and theories of the body. I began participating in more progressive religious spaces that emphasized Catholic social teaching and needs for social reconciliation.

Being in relationship with secular, pro-abortion feminists who were learning alongside me about the systematic underresourcing of marginalized groups — while the world's racial and medical disparities were being aired live during the COVID-19 pandemic — moved me into the place of intense nuance where I am now and that I believe undergirds a truly consistent life ethic: I am anti-abortion, but I do not think criminalizing abortions will stop them, because having access to abortions isn't what causes them.

Things that cause abortions: lack of comprehensive sex education, inaccessible health care, violence against women, religious shame and exclusion, familial rejection or coercion, and workplace inequalities including but not limited to barriers for advancement, disparities in pay and lack of paid parental leave or child care.

Making abortion illegal before addressing these injustices is going to kill women, because women will continue to have abortions, secretively and unsafely.

For the first time that I can recall in my years of being anti-abortion, tales of the pre-*Roe* world from women who lived it are being shared on a massive scale. (Many are circulating this New York Times article from January and sharing their own stories in the captions.) Social media is a flurry of back-alley horrors.

And in a post-COVID-19 society when young people are already experiencing a catastrophic mental health crisis, making abortion illegal is going to kill women in more ways than one.

Refusal to accept the reality of these dangers is resisting a nuance that is dire. You can accept the dangers of overturning *Roe* v. *Wade* are real and still be anti-abortion. I certainly am. None of these dangers changes that abortion is a deeply ableist system used to root out genetic differences based on bigoted sociocultural values. None of these facts change that I've seen disability-motivated abortion rhetoric devalue people at the cornerstone of my life. It is personal, but it is also necessarily systemic.

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The usual ethical discussion focuses on the morality of the abortion act itself, the immediate consequences, the circumstances and the set precedents. But if we have this conversation, we're starting in the wrong place. The nuance I'm arguing for is not about the morality of abortion, it is about the effectiveness of this particular tactic of assuaging it: making abortion illegal. This particular tactic is not going to work.

We can recognize that abortion being legal represents a certain form of public complicity in permitting a grievous sin to happen. But are we actually permitting it any less without changing the causes of abortion? To achieve the desired society in

which abortion is no longer permitted, we have to create a reality where abortion is no longer caused. We are complicit in those systems, too.

We need mandatory and comprehensive sexual education and accessible health care. We need to address income inequality and mandate paid parental leave. We need to demolish the prison industrial complex and stop criminalizing the poor and marginalized. We need robust community-based postnatal care and to crack down on violence against women. We need to revolutionize the way churches approach sexuality, that we might embrace and support sexually active women in crisis, regardless of their marital status.

I am still anti-abortion. And yet, it is amazing how quickly the solidarity comes with my pro-abortion loved ones the moment I articulate these nuanced beliefs: I am anti-abortion, and I do not want it to be illegal. This solidarity will be crucial to providing a safe haven for at-risk women, if *Roe* v. *Wade* is indeed overturned. We must all keep our eyes on the true culprits; we must shout about the real causes of abortion, together.

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