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Abortion Rights Rhetorical Analysis

Abortion is the “the deliberate termination of a human pregnancy”, according to Oxford dictionary. For decades, parties in the United States have been debating on whether or not abortion should be legal. Is it humane? Is it moral? Is it safe? Is an unborn baby’s life more important than the mother’s? These are the questions asked, causing a never ending debate. Responses used to sway opinions; Rhetoric used to persuade. In this Analysis we will look into how rhetoric is used in the Abortion rights movement to influence the opinions of both the public and in law.

Abortion has always been a topic of controversy in US history especially since the law was widely made up of Christian components. Where, biblically, abortion shouldn’t even be considered since it is against God’s will as it is believed that he has given life to the unborn baby and that life should be handled seriously because they could carry on the Lord’s discipleship. Psalms 127: 3-4 NLT states, “Children are a gift from the Lord; they are a reward from him. Children born to a young man are like arrows in a warrior’s hands.” In non-religious terms this means that an abortion takes away a child’s chance to achieving something on their own and for themselves, hence the “pursuit of happiness” in the US Constitution.

Even though most of society from early times in U.S. history was against the idea of aborting pregnancies, of course it didn’t stop people from not wanting to give birth to their child and finding unsafe ways to kill the fetus. Even today, social issues like rape, incest, age, social status, healthcare and sexual relations viewed as inappropriate; plays a huge part in many women wanting to terminate their pregnancies. In some cases men forcing abortions on women¹. Before Roe vs Wade, which was the

¹*Men influence abortion decisions, too: Column.* (2013, June 17). USA Today. Retrieved November 16, 2022, from <https://www.usatoday.com/story/opinion/2013/06/17/gary-bauer-and-daniel-allott-on-forced-abortions/2432769/>

Supreme Court case that decided that the right to privacy in the 14th amendment also protected abortion, women would self-induce abortion due to the inaccessibility of safe abortions. Some common methods of induced terminations are trauma to the abdomen, ingesting mixed herbs, injecting lead or detergent solutions, and the infamous coat hanger².



During protests on reproductive rights, protesters would usually hold up signs and use other forms of rhetoric to express their opinions on the issue at hand. Rhetoric is language mainly used with intention to persuade and move an audience.

The picture included is an example of rhetoric used by a protester to share their Pro-choice opinions on the effect of abolishing abortion. This visual uses every aspect of the rhetorical triangle; Ethos, Pathos, and Logos, depicting a bloody coat hanger as a dark symbol of the era before Roe v. Wade. This uses Logos, since it appeals to the interest of all the pro-life protesters because coat hanger abortions are widely known as a dangerous outcome of women not having access to safe and affordable abortion. The hangers have some words attached to them describing the costs of using the coat hanger abortion method such as “Infertility” and a women’s “Life” this uses Ethos since it teaches the purpose of this visual. This historically known method is used to evoke emotion and share a “we can’t go back” message, which is Pathos.

This protester also uses other rhetorical strategies, in the creation of this visual, such as “Cicero’s canons of rhetoric”. Style and delivery were two things that stuck out to me in this visual since the creator definitely thought about the presentation of this visual especially with the blood that usually associates with Life and death along with the bloody hands holding up the hangers assertively, almost as if the protester is forcing their message on the audience. This is an effective use of rhetoric because it not only

²Saultes, T. A., Devita, D., & Heiner, J. (2009, November 10). *The Back Alley Revisited: Sepsis after Attempted Self-Induced Abortion*. Natural Library of Medicine. Retrieved October 24, 2022, from <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2791734/>

helps educate the audience but is presented in a way that clearly communicates its purpose to persuade and has the potential to move the audience.

On the other side of the abortion debate are those who believe abortion should be illegal, this side is called Pro-Life. In a YouTube video titled “Pro-life millennial women speak out” by a Christian channel named “America - The Jesuit Review”, seven women with different political associations all speak on why they are Pro-Life. But



one unnamed lady shared a personal story of her own mom, who walked away from an abortion appointment while pregnant with her. She says “I am someone who survived an abortion attempt. My mom walked out of a hospital, minutes before she was scheduled to have an abortion with me.”

This video used all of Aristotals 3 appeals. Young people shared their supportive opinions on Pro-life ideas to appeal to their interest, Logos, of the millennial generation since it makes them subconsciously relate themselves to those in this video. The story from the abortion servivor is Pathos because it appeals to emotions. People may feel sad or relieved after she shared her story especially when she says “Nothing that I've ever done...would have been possible if I was not given the right to life”. This video had a purpose to inform millennials that despite young people being more liberal than their parents many are Pro-life. They did a great job using Ethos by having stating fact like “65% of millennials” say that their “Pro-life” and then interviewing real life millennials to share their thoughts & stories on why they don’t agree with abortion³. This was an effective use of Rhetoric because though its overall purpose was to inform, just like the previous example, it carried out a good strategy to persuade the audience but without being too overpowering in a way that can confuse the purpose to move and educate with imposing beliefs on their audience.

³ *Pro-life millennial women speak out*. (2016, October 27). YouTube. Retrieved November 16, 2022, from https://youtu.be/Y_enzePQ85c