

Ethics of Abortion: Marquis on Impermissibility

Ethics: Bioethics (Fall 2014)

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To Start



- Rules of civil, academic engagement
- Beginning thoughts on the nature of the debate?
 - What reasons are given?
 - Sources of tension?

Getting Some Facts on the Table

- ❑ **Embryo:** fertilized egg in the process of development from conception until end of 8th week of gestation
 - ▣ From beginning of 3rd month of pregnancy until birth, called a **fetus**
- ❑ **Contraception:** behaviors or devices used to prevent pregnancy
- ❑ **Emergency contraception:** post-coital contraception that can prevent pregnancy within limited time window; does not affect established pregnancy

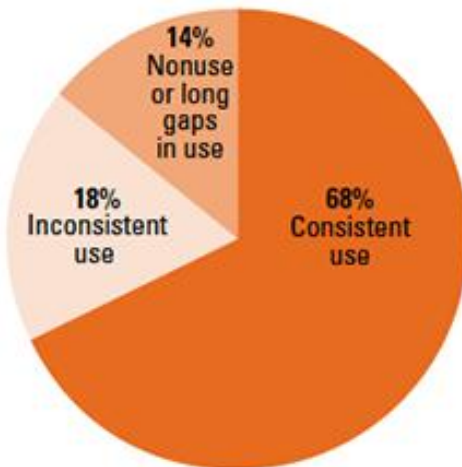
Getting Some Facts on the Table

- **Abortifacient:** drug that induces abortion
- **Roe v. Wade:** 1973 case, ruled as unconstitutional a state law that banned abortion except when saving life of the mother; states only permitted to protect life of fetus starting in third trimester
 - “Zone of privacy” as central consideration
- **Viability:** when fetus has sufficient likelihood of living outside the womb; usually around 24 weeks

Modern Contraception Works

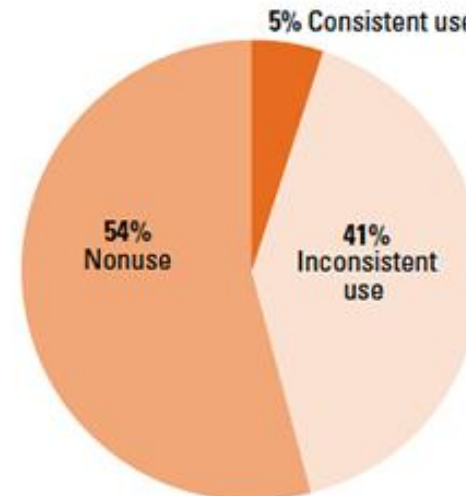
The two-thirds of U.S. women at risk of unintended pregnancy who practice contraception consistently and correctly account for only 5% of unintended pregnancies.

Women at Risk
(43 Million in 2008)



By consistency of method use all year

Unintended Pregnancies
(3.1 Million)



By consistency of method use during month of conception

Notes: "Nonuse" includes women who were sexually active, but did not use any method of contraception. "Long gaps in use" includes women who did use a contraceptive during the year, but had gaps in use of a month or longer when they were sexually active. "Inconsistent use" includes women who used a method in all months that they were sexually active, but missed taking some pills, or skipped use or incorrectly used their barrier method or condom during some acts of intercourse. "Consistent use" includes women without any gaps in use who used their method consistently and correctly during all months when they were sexually active, including those who used a long-acting or permanent method.

BY AGE 45
ABOUT
HALF  OF AMERICAN WOMEN
WILL HAVE AN UNINTENDED
PREGNANCY

AND NEARLY
1 IN 3  WILL HAVE AN
ABORTION



U.S. WOMEN

Who Have Abortions

69% 
ARE ECONOMICALLY
DISADVANTAGED

6 IN 10 ALREADY HAVE A CHILD



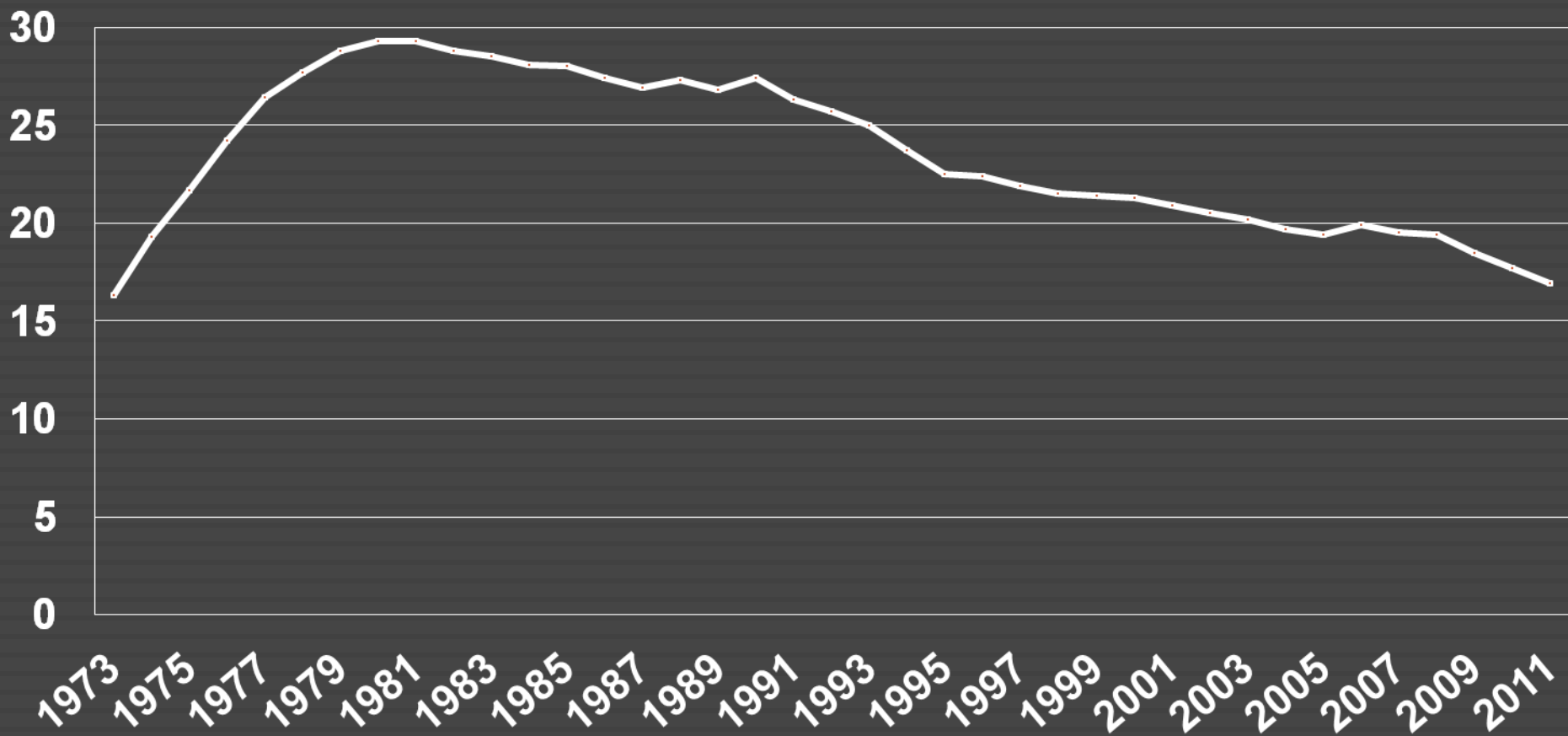
88% 
HAVE THEIR
ABORTION
IN THE FIRST
12 WEEKS
OF PREGNANCY

73% 
ARE RELIGIOUSLY
AFFILIATED

58%
ARE IN THEIR
20s

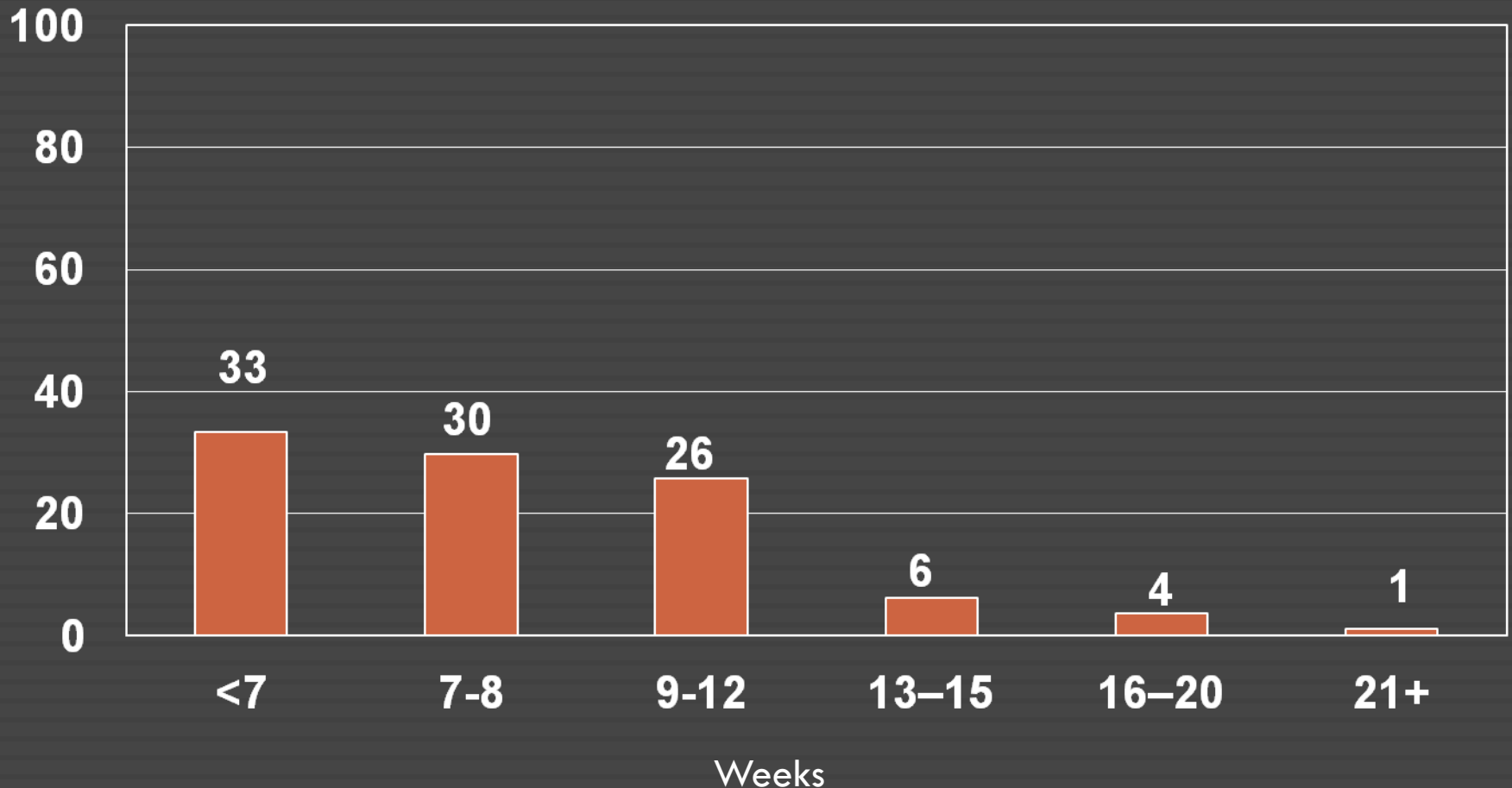
In 2011, U.S. Abortion Rates Reached Their Lowest Level Since 1973

Abortions per 1,000 women



Abortions Overwhelmingly Occur Early in Pregnancy

% of abortions



Most Important Reasons Given for Terminating an Unwanted Pregnancy



Concern for/responsibility to other individuals	74%
Cannot afford a baby now	73%
A baby would interfere with school/ employment/ability to care for dependents	69%
Would be a single parent/ having relationship problems	48%
Has completed childbearing	38%

Some Ethics Basics

- Ethically impermissible
 - ▣ Can still track degrees of *egregiousness*
- Ethically permissible
 - ▣ Can still track what is *morally problematic, moral residue*
- *Prima facie* (vs. absolute)
- Direct vs. indirect duties

Marquis: Wrongness of Killing

- “The change in my biological state does not itself make killing me wrong. The **effect** of the loss of my biological life is the loss to me of all those activities, projects, experiences, and enjoyments which would otherwise have constituted my future personal life” (189)
- **Value of individual’s future**
 - ▣ Need to be distinct individual (not cluster of possible sperm/ovum combinations)
 - ▣ Future “like ours”...
 - ▣ **ONLY** providing a **sufficient condition**— could be other reasons for abortion’s impermissibility

Value of Future

- Not just *any* future
 - ▣ Must be **valuable**
- Not specific to human beings
 - ▣ Just needs to have certain features
- Does not need to be *subjectively* valued by the individual
 - ▣ “it is the loss of the goods of one’s future, not the interference with the fulfillment of a strong desire to live, which accounts ultimately for the wrongness of killing” (196)

Discussion Questions

- Do you think any side of the abortion debate can succeed without addressing distinctions among and criteria for personhood/human being/sanctity of life?
- Marquis argues that the presumption against abortion is “as strong as the presumption that killing another adult human being is wrong” (194). Do you think he has established *this* point?
- What are some instances where you think, based on Marquis’ argument, that abortion *could* be morally permissible (the rare cases)?
- Is Marquis’ argument compelling?

Additional Resources

- Tables and charts from
 - <https://www.guttmacher.org/media/presskits/abortion-US/graphics.html>
- Information about state laws:
 - http://www.guttmacher.org/statecenter/spibs/s_pib_OAL.pdf



Questions? Comments?