

The Understanding of Abortion

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## **Campaign Proposal**

The abortion controversy has sparked moral, legal, and religious questions for centuries, and it remains one of the most divisive debates in the United States today. I aim to explore how American college students—particularly ones on a private Jesuit campus located in one of the nation’s largest Democratic-leaning cities—perceive abortion.. In this essay, I will analyze college students’ reactions to several media campaigns promoting abortion. I will research how college students inform themselves about this debate, and how this knowledge affects their opinions surrounding abortion. The three main elements that I will consider include political viewpoints, religious affiliation, and stance on gender roles. Furthermore, I will study the general knowledge surrounding unplanned pregnancy. This will help me to better understand currently what the public knowledge about the options that women have during unplanned pregnancies, as well as opinions regarding these options. This study will utilize focus groups to obtain research directly from the words of participants.

In this study it is crucial to analyze not only communication research surrounding public opinion and knowledge of abortion, as well as the psychological research surrounding it. From various journals it is evident that abortion is a morally complex and difficult issue to discuss. To better understand public knowledge and the impact a participants upbringing may have on their opinions and knowledge of abortion I will ask questions surrounding their political opinions as well as religious views.

## Literature Review

The stigmas surrounding abortion continue to afflict today's society. Even in jurisdictions that have legalized abortion, many women feel unable to seek this procedure because of the negative societal views surrounding it. Anti-abortionists use harmful and guilt-inducing speech, like the concept of 'good' and 'bad' abortions. Kosenko, Winderman, & Pugh define this dichotomy as such: "'Good' abortions are seen as necessary but regrettable and the women who have them as sympathetic and pitiable. In contrast, women who have 'bad' reasons for terminating their pregnancies or have multiple abortions are seen as irresponsible, selfish and morally bereft" (Kosenko et al., 2019). Many of the stigmas surrounding abortion are based on circumstance and justification. This rationale unfairly categorizes motive to terminate a pregnancy, judging some women more than others for the same action. However there is no moral grey area: any woman seeking an abortion should be allowed to, regardless of reason. . Understanding the stigmas that exist regarding abortion were crucial to consider before conducting my focus group.

According to the Pew Research Center, in 2017 "a significant proportion (44%) of the U.S. population believe[d] that abortion is immoral... Reproductive rights activists and scholars argue that these negative views of abortion and the women who have them constitute abortion stigma" (Kosenko et al., 2019). These harmful beliefs increase the risk of violence against medical practices like Planned Parenthood that offer abortion services: "Abortion stigma has been linked to negative outcomes, including fatal attacks on abortion providers and acts of domestic terrorism at abortion clinics" (Kosenko et al., 2019). Abortion stigma is not limited to social ramifications—nearly 90% of abortion clinics have reported attempts of physical violence.

Furthermore, “Most pro-life supporters are nonviolent, pursuing their agenda by legal and political means. However, the fact of antiabortion clinic harassment and violence cannot be ignored. This harassment is often systematically organized; includes arson, death threats, kidnapping and murder; and has distinct religious overtones” (Russo & Denious, 1998).

The former President of Planned Parenthood, Gloria Feldt, believes that misinterpretation of abortion law causes a lot of the negative opinions. . It is important to understand the legality of abortions, as established by the landmark U.S. Supreme Court decision in *Roe v. Wade*:

1. “States cannot place any restrictions on abortion during the first trimester except to require that the abortion be performed by a physician.
2. During the second trimester, the state's interest in the woman's health entitles it to regulate abortion only in ways necessary to protect maternal health.
3. During the third trimester, after fetal viability, the state may regulate or proscribe abortion except where it is necessary, in appropriate medical judgement, for the preservation of life or health of the mother” (Miller, 2008).

Women's rights activists view *Roe v. Wade* as a milestone for female reproductive rights, however examining Justice Blackmun's rhetoric in the trial paints a different picture. Although the Supreme Court ruled that states cannot place restrictions on abortion during the first trimester, the language of the decision is anything but feminist. For example, “Justice Blackmun's concluding thoughts do not mention a woman's right to reproductive choice. Instead, the Court concludes its opinion with the qualified, venerated and decisive physician and his right to practice medicine, affirming the philosophy, once again, that the institutions of

patriarchy and medicine, with their continued privileges, are valued above women” (Gibson, 2008).

Differencing opinions regarding religion, science, and personal ethics make abortion an extremely controversial and contentious topic. “Measuring public opinion is difficult, particularly when the subject is complex and has moral and religious overtones,” and abortion is no exception (Adamek, 1994). Framing is essential to ensure accurate research, especially when collecting public opinions about reproductive rights. For example, “if a question on abortion is framed so as to emphasize a woman’s right to make legal choices about reproduction, the responses overwhelmingly favor the legal availability of abortion” (Blendon et al., 1993). Framing can be utilized to develop focus group campaigns as well as to convince participants to have a pro-choice opinion. Framing the questions positively toward female rights will help persuade participants that reproductive rights are essential.

Systemic patriarchy has long propagated the struggles that women face regarding their reproductive rights. For starters, “The emphasis on factual information and on garnering professional support indicates a professional slant... thus, the argument stayed in the hands of doctors and lawyers. Because few doctors or lawyers were women or minorities, this tactic also assured that abortion decisions would remain in the hands of white males” (Zurakowski, 1994). Pregnancy is something only women experience and therefore should be decided by females. Men should not have authority over women’s bodies.

Further, many scholars note the failure to understand the actual medical procedures of abortion influencing negative opinions of reproductive rights. The common rhetoric is often misleading therefore creating inaccurate knowledge of legislation. Ultimately, “The law fails to

safeguard women because it does not contain an exception to protect their health. This law is not about abortions performed late in pregnancy. Forty states and the District of Columbia already ban third-trimester abortions except when the life or health of the woman at stake. The abortion ban's supporters have used misleading rhetoric to mask the fact that it bans safe and medically-appropriate abortions" (Miller, 2008). This quote ultimately explains the lack of knowledge of lawful abortions. Miller explains the majority of people are not educated correctly on these issues, therefore having opinions that do not recognize the necessary rights for women.

It is clear that proper framing, measuring public opinion, and gauging prior knowledge need be considered when conducting focus groups. The Americans United for Life polled citizens and asked in which situations would abortion be acceptable or unacceptable: "Of eleven situations posed (including rape, incest and fetal deformity), the only one eliciting majority support for abortion beyond the first trimester was if the woman's life is endangered by the pregnancy" (Adamek, 1994). Although a dated resource, this study helps to understand the history of abortion ethics and how it translates to current social opinions of abortion. Other factors like prior knowledge as well as religion and personal values tend to greatly influence an individual's opinion about abortion. One study compared the family and context factors regarding abortion attitude during adolescence and measured the participants and their opinions twenty years later, when respondents were between 21 and 38 years old (Pacheco & Kreitzer, 2016). This study found that "childhood religious service attendance and maternal gender roles are significant predictors of adult abortion opinions" (Pacheco & Kreitzer, 2016). Religion and household gender roles strongly influence an individual's stance on abortion—even in adulthood.

Scholarly research supports the need to address the abortion debate in America, as it continues to denigrate the rights of women over their own bodies. Female reproductive rights have sat in the hands of males for too long. Many people that do not support the pro-choice stance are unable to put themselves in the situations of pregnant females, and they base their harmful opinions on misinterpretations of abortion legislation. Likewise, proper education regarding unplanned pregnancy options are not clearly laid out in public media campaigns for individuals to shape their own informed opinions. My campaign will emphasize the option of abortion, as well as share the different options that are available for an unplanned pregnancy. Overall my campaign will empower women to make the right decision for their specific situation and have a more open-minded view of abortion.

## **Methods**

In the first focus group I asked several questions regarding abortion and the opinions surrounding it. These are the questions I asked. Preliminarily we asked all participants where they obtain their news from. This was important for many of our political campaigns because it will give us a sense of where they lay on the political spectrum. Similarly we asked where they identify themselves on the political spectrum. Of the participants, 5 said they identify as Democrat and 3 identified as independent. This was important for us to note because many of our political campaigns may need to be altered depending on which party our participants align with. The questions particular for my topic are as follows.

1. What do you know about the process of getting an abortion? If you don't know anything that's okay, feel free to say you don't know or no comment.

2. What are your personal political beliefs surrounding abortion? Do you support it, are you against it?
3. Do you think there's enough information about obtaining a safe abortion?

These questions were designed to test student's knowledge overall on the facts regarding abortion.

The overwhelming response to the first question was they did not know a lot about obtaining an abortion. Specifically, I clarified the question to ask how one would go about obtaining an abortion, not the medical process of abortion. Of the 8 participants, 6 stated in some form that they are "not too sure" how they would go about it. And 5 mentioned something about going to Planned Parenthood, but not knowing what exactly they would do there.

My next question about abortion opinions received quite unanimous results. Of the participants, 8 responded that they were pro-choice, while only 1 claimed they were pro-life. What was interesting however was one respondent's answer was pro-choice, however they explained that "it's complicated because of the way that I was raised, it will be wrong to do it". However, when taking their own perspective, they chose to be pro-choice. This is when I had the idea to ask a question about where they learned about abortion or gained their opinion. Because political opinions often transfer from generation to generation it was interesting to see that although the person who responded pro-life and her explained their opinions were in regards to the way they were raised.

The final question seemed to be the least respondent of the three. This question was inspired by the passion focus group. The question asked about the current information out there on the dangers of vaping. This question inspired me because when I responded I shared the



plethora of ads I have seen that are anti-smoking/anti-vaping.. This question asked about the amount of information currently out there regarding abortion. Because Planned Parenthood is a very visible organization I thought respondents would share the lack of information out there, considering participants were not knowledgeable about unplanned pregnancy options.

However, the results of this question were not what I expected. The majority of respondents shared that they feel as though there is certainly enough information out there. One participant specifically shared that they think there has been “adequate information that’s been distributed through streamlines of different areas...but I feel like there’s a need for people to be more...just desire to go and find their own information and what they need rather than worrying about how much more information needs to be out there”. This was interesting because this participant saw this as a non-public issue that people should be addressing if and only if they need the information.

Other respondents shared similar ideas that the information is there, but only if you look for it. One shared “I would assume that there’s a decent amount of information out there especially for people that may not have the like, resources, or people and support to go find it, but with places like Planned Parenthood, it seems pretty accessible to get information”. This was an important response because this participant shared further that information is out there, one just must seek it. Another participant shared “I think, like, if you look for the information you can find a lot of it, but it’s not like right in your face like, you actually have to look for it”.

This is where I confirmed my idea to educate the public surrounding unplanned pregnancy options because clearly the information is not public knowledge. Evidently, participants understood the vast amount of information that is available, however they

recognized that this information is not currently on the public agenda to educate people. From this initial focus group I gathered valuable information that will help me to develop my campaign materials.

For my next steps in building my campaign materials I think it is crucial that I use an infographic for one of my materials. This will serve as the main form of education regarding what Planned Parenthood does exactly, and where to get more information. From specific research in the focus group it is apparent that individuals are unlikely to seek out extra information unless absolutely necessary. This is the purpose of the infographic, it will share direct insights about Planned Parenthood, so users are not required to visit [plannedparenthood.org](http://plannedparenthood.org) to learn things. However, the link to the Planned Parenthood website will be included on all three campaign materials should anyone wish to seek extra information that the graphic does not include.

My other materials I want to be less text-oriented. This will include graphics, photos and large-type text. I think this may work at grabbing my audience's attention better, than the infographic. Although the infographic is extremely valuable to my campaign I think not all users will take the time to actually read the information on the graphic. In these graphics I want to utilize images of females specifically, and rhetoric that empowers women to make the best choice for them. Although my study has shifted from the legality of abortion to more so public knowledge surrounding abortion it is essential to encourage women to make the choice that is right for them. In my literature review I shared the legality of abortion and specifically how this has changed over time. In my graphics I want to ensure that abortion is listed as an option, because in most cases it is a safe and reliable option for an unplanned pregnancy. Further,

because my audience is senior students of a university in southern California, the option of abortion rings true in the majority of cases in California.

### **Campaign Description**

To better study the public knowledge surrounding abortion, as well as educate unplanned pregnancy options I created three original campaign materials. My three campaign materials were mainly public service announcements that would appear on billboards or social media. Specifically, Appendix A material 1 would appear on a billboard, while Appendix A materials 2 and 3 will appear on a social media platform such as Instagram. These three materials were created with the overarching intention to educate the public on options surrounding unplanned pregnancy and overall empower any individual that is going through this process.

For Appendix A material 1 I opted for a billboard poster. This would be a physical advertisement placement in a strategic location to reach my audience. This poster is specifically targeting females that are experiencing unplanned pregnancies, or know someone dealing with an unplanned pregnancy. More generally, this poster is supposed to educate the female public to visit the Planned Parenthood website to evaluate the different options of pregnancy. I utilized a graphic of three females, one with a fist in the air, to help establish the idea of Planned Parenthood as a support network for women experiencing pregnancy. The text on this specific graphic reads “Pregnant? You have options”. In smaller text it says “Pregnant and unsure what this means for you? Consider your options. Visit [plannedparenthood.org](http://plannedparenthood.org)”. I used these words specifically to keep the words to a minimum, but still leave a lasting impact.

Overall, from this focus group it was apparent that although students knew that resources were out there, they were not seeing resources confronting them on social media or in the general media. This is crucial to recognize because building my campaign meant that my materials would need to be presented on mediums where young people would see these materials. Because of this I chose to present one of my materials on a billboard and the other two on Instagram. I think these are great modalities for millennials specifically to see my content.

My second material is an infographic that shares information about Planned Parenthood. This infographic was designed to match the theme of material 1 so that there is a general aesthetic of this campaign. This graphic shares that 1 in 5 women in the United States will visit Planned Parenthood in their life. I felt this was important to include because I know two of my participants in the focus group are pro-life and anti-abortion. I included this information because I wanted these two individuals to recognize that although Planned Parenthood does often play a role in abortion, they do so much more than just that. The information in the graphic further explains the number of years Planned Parenthood has been providing sexual education. Also it shares percentages of services that Planned Parenthood provides. Of all services, 42% are STI/STD testing and treatment, 34% involve contraception and only 3% are abortion. This felt right to include because it shows the many services that Planned Parenthood provides, aside from just abortion services. I would hope the two specifically that are pro-life recognize from this graphic the importance of Planned Parenthood for *all*, not just those seeking out abortion services. For my other participants I want to educate on the variety of services that Planned Parenthood provides to better their knowledge on this organization.

My third graphic I wanted to be more of an Instagram story with less information on it. For millennials specifically it is evident that they will not likely take the time to read information on graphics. Although my prior graphic did have a lot of information, I wanted to ensure that other graphics had little text and were more image based. This image is a woman, with no face with the text “Pregnant? You have options.” This graphic specifically was meant to be a simplified version of material 1. This would be perfect for an application like Instagram or Twitter where users could click or swipe for more information.

I hope from this graphic viewers feel inclined to swipe or click for more information that will bring them to the Planned Parenthood website.

### **Audience Response Data**

In the second focus group I presented my original campaign materials to the participants. I wanted these materials to have an impact on the participants in a positive way. I wanted these materials to not only educate on what the options are in the case of an unplanned pregnancy, but also to boost the confidence of anyone that is in the circumstances of an unplanned pregnancy.

Overall, the materials went over with the group very well. Appendix A, material 1 was the most popular by far. In the group discussion participants felt that material 1 was a lot more positive than other unplanned pregnancy information they had seen previously. One participant shared “I think the best thing that they did in this campaign was that it’s like rhetoric that they’re using, a little more positive and less scary. Which often something that you often don’t see in propaganda about or advertisement about abortion or Planned Parenthood.” They continued to

share “I feel like if I was in a situation, I would feel a little more hopeful and I think willing to go see what my options were rather than just be paralyzed by such an obviously difficult decision”.

Other participants shared that they thought the images were very appropriate for the campaign. One asked “That first photo, is it like suggesting women uplift..women uplifting each other”. This was not something I had intentionally noticed, I thought the photo of the women was a symbol of unity, but the audience noticed this image in specific. Another respondent added “No, I noticed that I think that like even though it’s not exactly what it’s supposed to be...I do think it alludes to that. And I think that’s what I’m talking about, like, it’s just more welcoming than other abortion information I’ve seen before”. This was a very valuable response from the focus group that confirmed material 1 as a strong aid in my campaign, as well as the unintentional image that stood out to the focus group participants.

Another respondent shared the way in which my campaign material emphasized female reproductive rights. Specifically, a woman’s right to abortion. This participant said, “ I think the colors make it like a really kind of like a friendly reminder of saying like, if you want to have an abortion you can do it and you’re in the right to do it”. This comment specifically helped me to better understand that my material is having a positive impact on emphasizing female reproductive rights. Because of this I understood that my materials, specifically the aesthetic of my materials, was a very strong aspect of my campaign.

The only suggestion that I did not feel would directly add to my campaign was a comment advising me to include a video. The participant shared “Just from seeing the other examples of like the last focus group, I kind of liked the aspect of having not just photos like a video or like a clip of something because I feel like it makes things more interactive than just like

three things you have to read”. Although I think video content made sense for other campaigns, in my campaign specifically I was not looking to create a material that was not something to just look at. What I mean by this is I wanted all of my materials to be aesthetically pleasing and uplifting and I don’t think I would have been able to maintain my specific aesthetic in a video format. This was important to my campaign because the majority of participants commented on the positive impact the aesthetic had on my campaign.

Further, the overall look of my materials stood out to my audience. One participant shared “Also what I like is the simplicity of all the images is kind of just easily laid out and you know there’s not too much on the page or photo”. This was helpful because although I ended up revising material 2, the other two materials were successful in grabbing the audience’s attention, and still informing them without the use of too many words. From this feedback on my campaign material when I revise material 2 I want to include images over text, while still educating and sharing important information to my campaign.

Overall, the audience had positive feedback to share about my campaign materials. There were very few responses of negativity, only feedback sharing advice for how to make my campaign material even stronger. From the focus group it is evident that my campaign materials educated individuals on options regarding an unplanned pregnancy, as well as emphasized that in this situation they have options and resources to reach out to if they need help. Above all it serves women as a way to understand there are resources out there for them and they don’t need to go through something like this alone.

**Discussion/Results**

This study was very interesting in the unexpected findings. In initial research I wanted to better understand the knowledge of the public surrounding abortion, however through my research I found more information about the reasoning behind abortion opinion and knowledge. Two respondents in particular mentioned the way that they were raised has affected their opinion of abortion. This is not surprising considering personal upbringing, religion and household gender roles are major factors in determining political opinion (Pacheco & Kreitzer, 2016). One of the participants stated they were pro-life because of the particular way they were raised, while the other participant shared they were raised to think abortion is morally wrong, however their own personal opinion is pro-choice.

The participant that shared they are pro-life stated their reasoning as “I’m against abortion because of the way I’ve been raised and the way I feel like things of that nature shouldn’t be handled in that style. So I obviously know there’s a choice people have and it’s their right but that’s just my opinion”. I think from this it is evident that this participant acknowledges that it is not their decision to make for others, however they individually feel that abortion is immoral. The participant that was raised to be pro-life responded to the question asking if they were pro-life or pro-choice with “Um, I don’t know, it’s complicated because of the way that I was raised, it will be wrong do it. But now, like thinking in my own perspective, I’ll definitely be pro-choice”. This is very important to recognize because from my scholarly research it is evident that religion can play a vital role in opinions of abortion. However, as people continue to grow and have new experiences their opinions and knowledge may change.



Overall I see this campaign as fairly successful, however some minor edits will make my campaign even stronger should I have the opportunity to conduct another focus group. The participant participation further shared positive ways I could alter my materials to build a stronger campaign. One respondent shared “I don’t know if you have like a phone number or like a list of locations or something. Maybe that like gives them that like active step to take. Or like the next step to take would be cool to see. So they like know exactly like where to go for that information”. This was a very helpful response because it allowed me to notice a strong gap in my campaign materials. All of my materials had the website for Planned Parenthood, yet they were lacking in having a very concrete way to gather information.

Because of this response I opted to revise materials 2 and 3. In this revised version (see Appendix B) I included the three different options of an unplanned pregnancy: parenthood, adoption or abortion. I think this made the material much stronger because anyone that sees this graphic will quickly know what their options are, rather than the theoretical approach on my other graphics saying just “you have options”. I hope this will bring to the forefront education of what the options are, rather than just being discrete. The other material I revised was only a minor revision. I decided to add a QR code to material 3 with the text “scan the QR code to find a Planned Parenthood near you or visit [plannedparenthood.org](http://plannedparenthood.org)”. I think this was important to add because it allowed for a way to more seamlessly incorporate the Planned Parenthood website, as well as make the process of getting to that website simpler. The QR code I think would be very successful at aiding in additional information as well because viewers may simply scan the code and see exactly where their nearest clinic is. These edits are crucial to the future success of my campaign and the participants' opinions are truly valuable in creating a successful campaign.

Overall, the campaign material received a positive reaction from the audience. The minor edits I made will only enhance my campaign and make my overall goal and message clear.

## **Conclusion**

In the beginning stages of developing my campaign I wanted to focus on reproductive rights of females in the United States compared to gun purchasing laws. However, as I continued to research I did not find research comparing the two. Due to this I altered my campaign idea to surround the event of an unplanned pregnancy and educate the public on their rights, as well as their options. This is a relevant topic because abortion continues to be a controversial topic throughout the United States. Further, from research it was evident that public knowledge was not extensive surrounding abortion and other unplanned pregnancy options.

In this study I learned the surprisingly small amount of information participants had around abortion. Further, many did not know their specific options in the case of an unplanned pregnancy. I think this study was extremely eye-opening in recognizing the lack of public media messages toward the education of unplanned pregnancy options. Before completing this study my knowledge was not extremely vast, however I was shocked to learn that females were not educated on what to do in the instance of an unplanned pregnancy for themselves. Moreover, this campaign is important not only for the knowledge of the mother, but also for those around them. The education in my campaign is crucial for the general public to understand because someone they care about may go through a situation like this.

Future research that could be done includes measuring the impact of these specific media campaign materials, or similar materials. It would be interesting to see if specifically designed

materials would encourage women to educate themselves on their options in the case of an unplanned pregnancy. This could be measured by interviews, as well as how many visits to [plannedparenthood.org](http://plannedparenthood.org) the materials encourage. Future researchers could learn from this campaign the lack of public knowledge surrounding abortion. It was not surprising that males knew less about abortion specifically, however it was interesting that females in the focus group did not know much more than males.

I feel as though my research conducted is valuable to understand further progressions toward female reproductive rights. To pass legislation of the legalization of abortion, regardless of the situation, one must understand the psychology of pro-life supporters.

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Appendix

Appendix A

Material 1

Pregnant?

*YOU  
HAVE  
OPTIONS*

Pregnant and unsure of what this means for you?  
Consider your options.

VISIT [PLANNEDPARENTHOOD.ORG](http://PLANNEDPARENTHOOD.ORG)



## PLANNED PARENTHOOD

42%

OF SERVICES ARE  
STI/STD TESTING  
AND TREATMENT

34%

OF SERVICES INVOLVING  
CONTRACEPTION

3%

OF SERVICES THAT ARE  
ABORTIONS

103 YEARS OF PROVIDING  
SEXUAL EDUCATION

5.4 MILLION PROVIDED  
WITH SEXUAL AND  
REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH  
CARE PER YEAR

1 IN 5



WOMEN IN THE U.S. HAS VISITED  
PLANNED PARENTHOOD

VISIT [PLANNEDPARENTHOOD.ORG](https://www.plannedparenthood.org)

# PREGNANT?

**You  
have  
options.**



Visit [plannedparenthood.org](https://www.plannedparenthood.org)

Appendix B

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# ***Pregnant & scared?***

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CONSIDER YOUR OPTIONS.

1. Parenthood

2. Adoption

3. Abortion



YOU ARE NOT ALONE

VISIT [PLANNEDPARENTHOOD.ORG](https://www.plannedparenthood.org)



# PREGNANT?

**You  
have  
options.**



Scan the QR code to find a  
Planned Parenthood near you or  
visit [plannedparenthood.org](https://www.plannedparenthood.org)

