

## **Understanding the GAP Between Pro-Life and Pro-Choice**

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What does abortion and the Genocide Awareness Project (GAP) mean to you? Radical pro-lifers on a mission to victimize women who have abortions? Violent pro-choicers violating another's right to free speech? Or two groups of people who believe strongly in their perspective on abortion, and are willing to go to certain lengths to make sure their voices are heard? Before you take a definitive stand on the issue, it's important to understand the fundamental differences that divide pro-life advocates from pro-choice defenders.

In general, there are two types of abortion. If an embryo or fetus dies in the womb and is expelled by the woman's body, it is called a spontaneous abortion or miscarriage. This is a type where, because of some biological complication, the pregnancy is aborted. When a woman decides to end her pregnancy voluntarily, she has an induced abortion. Through certain medical treatments and/or procedures, the woman chooses to expel the embryo or fetus. In essence, the issue of abortion revolves around the intended termination of a pregnancy before a baby is born.

For pro-life advocates like Stephanie Gray of UBC's Lifeline, abortion is a moral issue. "We're talking about, 'Is the unborn a human person?' and if I could give you hard evidence to show you that, and the evidence you give doesn't refute my evidence correctly, then we're talking about human beings, and a moral issue, where there is a moral right and a moral wrong." She says in an interview with Perspectives.

Her view is that abortion is the termination of human life, and that is immoral. She asserts that while medical professionals can define the functional start of human life—the first heart beat, or the first brain wave—the fundamental fact is "from the moment of conception, you have a unique individual human person who has a different genetic code from the mother, and while is dependent on the mother, is a separate human being... [It's] the moment of conception when you know you have a unique human being that's begun its life and will grow and develop just like a newborn child," Gray says.

It's with this fundamental conviction that Gray and fellow members of Lifeline decided to bring GAP to UBC. Knowing that abortion is a topic few people are willing and/or interested in discussing openly, they thought that bringing the GAP displays to UBC would bring abortion front and centre. Using GAP would seem appropriate as its purpose, according to the Center for Bio-Ethical Reform's website, is to "make it as difficult as possible for people to continue to maintain that an unborn baby is not a baby and abortion is not an act of violence which kills that baby." The GAP displays are graphic in nature to serve this point. The reasoning behind the displays and the name itself—the Genocide Awareness Project—lies with the thesis that abortion is a form of genocide, or a form of

systematic destruction of a human group deemed by the exterminators as undesirable. It is for this reason that GAP compares, for example, the victims of the Jewish Holocaust with aborted fetuses.

Pro-choice advocates, however, would argue to the contrary. While pro-lifers like Gray emphasize conception as the basis of a human person, pro-choicers tend to disagree with such a position. While both sides would agree that the unborn fetus is human and alive, they disagree upon the definition of a human person. Gray noted the acronym SLED describing the four differences between a born and unborn child. The 'S' stands for 'Size of the child;' 'L' for 'Level of development;' 'E' for 'Environment;' and 'D' for 'Degree of dependency.' Gray noted that size is an inadequate difference to use as an excuse to have an abortion. Also, the level of development is irrelevant to pro-lifers based on the argument that just because a fetus does not have certain functional qualities of a born child, it does not mean one can terminate the fetus. The environment of the child, or location, is also irrelevant, as well as the degree of dependency of the child, since the child will be dependent on the mother before and after birth.

The area of contention lies in the environment or location of the baby, and the degree of dependency. The pro-choice argument emphasizes the importance of location because of the legal aspect involved. They assert the logic that two independent individuals cannot occupy the same space and obtain equal rights. Thus, a woman who is pregnant chooses to give the baby the right to life, liberty and happiness at the expense of her own right to life, liberty and happiness. Thus, during the pregnancy, the mother has control over her body on whether to keep the pregnancy-to exercise her rights-or not. Once the baby is born, it becomes a separate entity protected under law and morality, so therefore it is illegal and immoral to kill it. While the baby is still dependent after birth, it is not strictly dependent as a fetus is-requiring the mother constantly to survive. Pro-choice advocates make the distinction between the physical dependence of the fetus and the social dependence of the born child.

Pro-choice advocates emphasize the importance of human consciousness, or awareness of one's self, in defining a human person. They disagree with the statement that since the embryo or fetus is human that we must protect it. The common example is that hair and skin are human but they, as the unborn baby, do not have consciousness, therefore, they are not persons. They note that while newborns do not have consciousness until a year or more after birth, they are still protected under law and morality since they are separate human entities, unlike the unborn fetus inside the mother. Pro-lifers emphasize that the fetus nonetheless is a person with potential to have consciousness, but is denied the opportunity to exercise that potential due to abortion.

Perhaps the strongest evidence in the pro-choice arsenal is the individual woman herself. They emphasize the woman's right to control her own body, and note that ultimately the rights of the living, conscious human woman supercede the rights of the potential person within her.

According to the Planned Parenthood website, women have abortions mainly because they are not prepared personally, psychologically, economically, or professionally. Gray says, "We aren't saying it's not going to be difficult and it's going to be easy [to continue a pregnancy], but we're saying is that killing a human being is wrong and we have to help you no matter how difficult it will be. In the long term, it is more beneficial with the woman to go through with the pregnancy, and if she feels she couldn't for the rest of her life, grow up with the baby, then they can put up the child up for adoption. There are alternatives to keeping the baby yourself." Gray understands that some women will have an abortion to protect themselves from the repercussions of parents, boyfriends, or society in general, but she says, "We need to show women love, and if we give them more love, no matter how difficult it will be in the long term, it will be a more fulfilling and compassionate answer."

Pro-choicers resent the fact that pro-lifers use graphic and/or harsh tactics to 'scare' a woman from having an abortion, but Gray says, "people can and will change their minds if they're intellectually honest, and if they are provided and presented with the evidence to show that the unborn child is a human person. And I think that some people believe it's a totally relative issue that will never be solved because they don't want to accept the fact that we are talking about a human life that in some way society is responsible for hurting."

Clearly, abortion is an issue that strikes at the very heart of human life and it is up to you to decide where you draw the line at what constitutes a human person and whether abortion is a morally right or wrong act. But ignoring the issue simply because the issue is a heated one, or because you don't agree with the tactics and methods used to share their message, does no one a service. As graphic and as "extremist" as GAP may be, it fulfilled its function of drawing attention and starting dialogue on a difficult and contentious social issue.