**Ambivalence Towards Abortion**

It is often contested that the single most important period in the abortion debate, is the Supreme Court decision of Roe v. Wade in 1973. In actuality, the discussion of abortion has been going on since long before Roe v. Wade ever reached the Supreme Court. Along with a discussion of abortion, comes a *condensational symbol*, involving questions of moral theology, human life, gender roles, and sexual morality (Fried, 1988). Public attitudes towards abortion have been a hot topic for generations and have interested social researchers for many years. Most Americans have an opinion on abortion, and a substantial majority indicate that the issue is important to them (Jelen and Wilcox, 2003). “Abortion is a classic *easy* issue” (Carmines and Stimson, 1980, p. 5) of which people of all genders, races, and socioeconomic statuses, can easily form opinions without extensive knowledge of the immediate subject. Moreover, abortion is one of the few issues that consistently appear to influence voting behavior at all levels of government (Jelen and Wilcox, 2003). Given its extensive coverage in the media and its ability to persuade voters and spark debate, still, at least “at the aggregate level, abortion attitudes have...been remarkably stable over time” (Wilcox and Riches, 2002, p.31).

“In 1996, 45% of the American public thought that an abortion should be available to a married woman who wanted no more children” (Ladd and Bowman, 1997, p. 276). This may be true for an overall conceptualization of attitudes towards abortion, but a more micro-level “analyses of public opinion polls…found inconsistent gender differences in attitudes towards abortion” (Craig and O’Brien, 1993, p. 39). Women have more polarized views than men; women are more likely than men to believe that abortion
should be always legal or always illegal, whereas men are more likely to agree with more moderate positions (Ladd and Bowman, 1997). Surprisingly enough, most research to date shows that women lead men in the rejection of traditional gender roles as it relates to abortion (Scott et al., 1996).

Educational attainment is one of the most reliable predictors of respondents’ views on abortion, with highly educated respondents of both sexes supporting legal abortion (Kenny 1993; Ladd and Bowman, 1997). Some research offers a compelling argument for why highly educated women support legal abortion: they are more likely to engage in meaningful activities other than motherhood (Luker, 1984). Furthermore, “highly educated women are more likely to see unwanted pregnancies as potentially threatening to a woman’s well-being and financial security” (Luker, 1984, p. 22). The affect of education may also be related to declining religiosity or a greater individualism among those with more education (Bellah et al., 1996).

Religion has also proved to be an important variable and key player to consider when compiling research on attitudes towards abortion. “Religion is tied to abortion attitudes in complex ways” (Strickler and Danigelis, 2002, p. 344). Evidence points out that being Catholic has a negative effect on abortion approval. Additionally, conservative Christians also tend to oppose abortion (Cook et al., 1992). Respondents, who are either Jewish or unaffiliated with religion, tend to have higher levels of support for abortion rights than Christians (Ladd and Bowman, 1997). With a deeper contextual analysis, it becomes apparent, that with respect to religiosity, Christians who state that religion is very important to them are much more opposed to abortion than those for whom religion is not so important (Craig and O’Bien, 1993).
Age is another important factor to consider when examining people’s attitudes toward abortion. The effect of age on abortion is one which is usually construed by public opinion and often based on faulty reasoning and bias. Opinions and attitudes towards abortion in regards to age actually illustrates an interesting pattern. “While bivariate analysis suggests that older people are less likely than younger people to approve of abortion rights” (Ladd and Bowman, 1997, p. 344), a “multivariate analysis reveals that this pattern is reversed after controlling for other socioeconomic and attitudinal variables” (Kenny, 1993, p. 244). Interestingly enough, older people are more accepting of abortion than their younger counterparts (Strickler and Danigelis, 2002).

In a context where attitudes towards a particular social phenomenon can be easily misinterpreted and used inappropriately, views on abortion must be looked at through a spectrum of social attitudes and statistical data, to truly formulate conclusions in regards to the social movement of abortion. Furthermore, it is important to recognize that there exists a confluence of factors that help contribute to our understanding on why some people hold favorable attitudes toward abortion while others do not.