

**Paper: New York Times, The (NY)**  
**Title: Owing Up to Abortion**  
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*Abstract: Barbara Ehrenreich Op-Ed column says even though **abortion** is legal, women shrink from acknowledging their own **abortion**; notes that women who chose **to** end their pregnancy when their fetus is deemed defective see termination for medical reasons as somehow on higher moral plane than run-of-the-mill **abortion**; notes that at least 30 million American women have had **abortions** since procedure was legalized, but in 2003 survey, only 30 percent of women were unambivalently pro-choice; says this suggests that appalling number of women are willing **to** deny others right that they once freely exercised themselves; says freedoms that are exercised, but not acknowledged, are easily taken away (M)*

**Abortion** is legal -- it's just not supposed **to** be mentioned or acknowledged as an acceptable option. An article in The Times on Sunday, "Television's Most Persistent Taboo," reported that a Viacom-owned channel is refusing **to** run the episodes of a soap opera in which the teenage heroine chooses **to** abort. Even "Six Feet Under," which is fearless in its treatment of sexual diversity, burdens **abortion** with terrible guilt. Where are those "liberal media" when you need them?

You can blame a lot of folks, from media bigwigs **to** bishops, if we lose our reproductive rights, but it's the women who shrink from acknowledging their own **abortions** who really irk me. Increasingly, for example, the possibility of **abortion** is built right into the process of prenatal care. Testing for fetal defects can now detect over 450 conditions, many potentially fatal or debilitating. Doctors may advise the screening tests, insurance companies often pay for them, and many couples (no hard numbers exist) are deciding **to** abort their imperfect fetuses.

The trouble is, not all of the women who are exercising their right **to** choose in these cases are willing **to** admit that that's what they are doing. Kate Hoffman, for example, who aborted a fetus with Down syndrome, was quoted in The Times on June 20 as saying: "I don't look at it as though I had an **abortion**, even though that is technically what it is. There's a difference. I wanted this baby."

Or go **to** the Web site for A Heartbreaking Choice, a group that provides support for women whose fetuses are deemed defective, and you find "Mom" complaining of having **to** have her **abortion** in an ordinary **abortion** clinic: "I resented the fact that I had **to** be there with all these girls that did not want their babies."

Kate and Mom: You've been through a hellish experience, but unless I'm missing something, you didn't want your babies either. A baby, yes, but not the particular baby you happened **to** be carrying.

The prejudice is widespread that a termination for medical reasons is somehow on a higher moral plane than a run-of-the-mill **abortion**. In a 1999 survey of Floridians, for example, 82 percent supported legal **abortion** in the case of birth defects, compared with about 40 percent in situations where the woman simply could not afford **to** raise another child.

But what makes it morally more congenial **to** kill a particular "defective" fetus than **to** kill whatever fetus happens **to** come along, on an equal opportunity basis? Medically informed "terminations" are already catching heat from disability rights groups, and, indeed, some of the conditions for which people are currently choosing **abortion**, like deafness or dwarfism, seem a little sketchy **to** me. I'll still defend the right **to** choose **abortion** in these cases, even if it isn't the choice I'd make for myself.

It would be unfair, though, **to** pick on the women who are in denial about aborting "defective" fetuses. At least 30 million American women have had **abortions** since the procedure was legalized, mostly for the kind of reasons that anti-**abortion** people dismiss as "convenience" -- a number that amounts **to** about 40 percent of American women. Yet in a 2003 survey conducted by a pro-choice group, only 30 percent of women were unambivalently pro-choice, suggesting that there may be an appalling number of women who are willing **to** deny others the right that they once freely exercised themselves.

Honesty begins at home, so I should acknowledge that I had two **abortions** during my all-too-fertile years. You can call me a bad woman, but not a bad mother. I was a dollar-a-word freelancer and my husband a warehouse worker, so it was all we

could do **to** support the existing children at a grubby lower-middle-class level. And when it comes **to** my children -- the actual extrauterine ones, that is -- I was, and remain, a lioness.

Choice can be easy, as it was in my case, or truly agonizing. But assuming the fetal position is not an appropriate response. Sartre called this "bad faith," meaning something worse than duplicity: a fundamental denial of freedom and the responsibility that it entails. Time **to** take your thumbs out of your mouths, ladies, and speak **up** for your rights. The freedoms that we exercise but do not acknowledge are easily taken away.

Thomas L. Friedman is on leave until October, writing a book.

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