

Alternative Perspectives

Pro-Life and Pro-Choice: Finding Common Ground Within Your Congregation

By Kristen Curran, contributing writer for Alternatives Pregnancy Center

Somewhere along the line, human reproduction has become a highly political issue. It's something that has become "us" vs. "them." It's an issue that is so intimate, so important, and so essential to human civilization that I can't help but cringe when I think about how reproductive health has been boiled down to two distinct sides that are unable to converse with each other. In order to have meaningful conversation about important issues, it helps to do away with some of the logical fallacies that keep us from having a discussion in a respectful and meaningful way.

What are logical fallacies?

A logical fallacy is any type of argument that is flawed or misleading and is usually the result of someone trying to win an argument rather than come to an understanding. Learning to recognize logical fallacies can help you to recognize when a conversation is going nowhere and needs to change course. While there are many different types of logical fallacies, here are three kinds that labels like "pro-choice" and "pro-life" tend to create.

Ad hominem: Literally meaning "to the man," this argument shifts focus from the issue itself to the people involved in the issue. An example of this can be to focus attention on aggressive protestors (from either side), and say, "Look! Those protestors are so mean! They don't really care about helping women!"

Straw man: A straw man argument is when a person summarizes the opposing view in a way that can't possibly hold up (like a piece of straw). The person arguing attacks this weak or oversimplified version of the opposing argument to make their own argument look stronger by comparison. The labels "pro-life" and "pro-choice" can be used to create a straw man argument all on their own. If I say that I'm "pro-life" because I'm against killing innocent people, who could possibly disagree with me? Who would stand up for something as terrible as murdering children? Or, if I say that I'm "pro-choice" because I support the precept that people should have the freedom to make personal decisions for themselves, who could possibly disagree with me? Who would stand up for something as terrible as making free-will illegal? Making the opposing side out to be something crazy tends to immediately shut down conversation

Black and white: The black and white fallacy is when an issue is presented as only having two opposing sides. "Either you're a vegan or you hate all animals." "Either you recycle, or you want global-warming to destroy the world." Having the two camps of "pro-life" or "pro-choice" creates this type of fallacy because it presents each side as being composed of people who all believe the same thing; in reality, there are many opinions on life-ethics and reproductive health issues within each group.

So, how can we encourage productive conversations around life ethics and reproductive health?

Since reproductive health involves personal and intimate aspects of a person's life, it can naturally lead to strong emotions and difficulty in listening to an opposing point of view. My recommendation? *Find common ground*. Finding something in common with someone else can help erase the "us" and "them" mentality that leads to both people becoming defensive. Finding commonality can lead to productive and meaningful conversation.

Here are some potential "common-ground" points that people who are passionate about women's rights and reproductive health can get behind:

- Women deserve to make medical decisions free from coercion or manipulation.
- Women deserve easy access to mental health resources as well as physical health care
- It's important for women to learn about how their bodies work and receive accurate information about their health.
- Medical facilities need regulations and protocols to prevent people from being hurt or mistreated.
- Women may choose to get an abortion because they felt they had no other choice. It is important that women get the support that they need to care for themselves and their child.
- Sexual assault is a serious issue that our society needs to take seriously.
- All persons suffering due to domestic violence deserve the assistance and resources needed to leave their situation.

At Alternatives, we serve all people who walk through the clinic doors with nonjudgmental, compassionate care. While building relationships with our clients and patients, we educate on reproductive health in a way that helps a person feel valued and not shamed. A woman can safely express herself, her circumstances and feel safe in a conversation with our team. We offer free and confidential services that include pregnancy tests, options consultation, ultrasound, STD testing and treatment, Counseling After Abortion, and material assistance for new parents and their children.

To schedule a workshop that equips church leaders to have meaningful conversations around unplanned pregnancy and abortion within their church community, please contact Lori Ann Satriano Arfsten, Director of Communications & Community Development at 303.298.8815 or Lori@YouhavAalternatives.org.

For more information on any of our services, please contact us at YouhaveAlternatives.org/Contact-Us