

Privilege VS Change: Why We Need To Reconsider Our Movement For “Bodily Autonomy,” Which is Perhaps Non-Universal

While securing the right to bodily autonomy is imperative, it is equally as important to consider the historical context of this right, and how it polarized women inter-domestically—promoting privilege rather than universal liberty.

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(courtesy of bpr.berkely.edu)

The act of “making a change,” though taxonomically defined as modifying or altering an entity, piece of loose legislation, or perhaps even something as simplistic as a garment to match soundly with your attire, implies refinement. One does not alter an entity to prove it useless and unworkable: one does not attempt to overturn a piece of loose legislation to place themselves at a disadvantage in the context of rights and liberties: one does not select a different article of clothing to prove that very article incompatible with the rest of the ensemble. In the context of civil rights and perhaps even the attempt to overturn a narrative, an act that is multifaceted and specific to conditional circumstances, refinement is not the only factor which dresses the centerpiece of change: rather intersectionality, difference, and perhaps even area(s) of common ground, are the factors which entwine this intricately-weaved centerpiece. This means that in order to affect change which is universally beneficial and refining, the elicitor(s) must first consider the narratives of those overhead and buried beneath: they mustn't march with their feet in the mud, lolloping over the narratives that blanket themselves within, nor should they boot the dirt to the curb, where the footprints of their predecessors are gaping, unadorned, and inconsistently embraced by collapsed cement.

Although there is no set arithmetic on which change is successfully computed, there are variables which must be factored into the efforts at hand to ensure that change is not simply analogous to “redefining the narrative for the few,” and undermining the voices, needs, and values of the many. Prioritizing the few paves the way for unlevel privilege or polarization. It is on the basis of polarization that “change” is only affected for the benefit and refinement of those who are able to amplify their own voices, while those who have not yet been passed the microphone remain unheard. An example of this unsuccessful computation of change is second wave feminism, specifically surrounding that of women’s reproductive rights. The present day overturning of [Roe VS Wade](#) has traced over the chapters of history which highlight lack of constitutional backing for what should be considered an inalienable right. It is now that every state maintains free reign in determining whether or not a woman (or an individual with a female anatomy) is capable of referring to their right to privacy and right to choice: two factors formerly solidified in the initial Roe Vs Wade decision (circa 1973), as well as the Casey VS Planned Parenthood decision (circa 1992). This recent decision has wet the pallets of women’s rights activists, and promoted their thirst for a proper overturning, where bodily autonomy is a guarantee rather than an inconsistent privilege. What a majority of these Women’s Rights Activists do not understand is that there is duality to this court case: being stripped of the right to choose or the right to privacy, while a grave manifestation of the patriarchy, is an issue which proves rather miniscule relative to the unadorned end of the spectrum: the end on which women of lower socioeconomic status and women of color stand. This is not to invalidate the rights and concerns of those privileged white women, however it is somewhat of a “wake-up call,” for those who coin themselves as “feminists” in the first place.

Contrary to popular belief, the right to privacy and choice is not the only set of reproductive rights which have been manipulated by the United States jurisdiction. Rather the enduring notion that women of lower socioeconomic standing and color should be “policed” in terms of how they choose to honor their right to bodily autonomy, is too a relevant narrative: with incentives focused entirely on the aspect of abortion, rather than, say eugenics, this issue has remained unaddressed for a near century. Eugenics, taxonomically speaking, is the act of “selecting desirable human characteristics in order to improve future generations, typically in reference to the human species,” according to [britannica.com](#). This gene-selective process has been actively practiced (in the United States) for a mere century: however in the present day, the manifestation of this practice roots itself in the advent of technology. Meaning that instead of forced sterilization, or barring a demographic (entirely) from reproducing, the genetic makeup of an unborn fetus can be manipulated in order to “eradicate” disease, or unfavorable attributes, which may challenge a specific social norm or institution. Whether or not we are discussing eugenics in the past, present, or perhaps foreseeable future, it is important to note that it is rooted in not only the desire to control reproductive rights, but also the desire to nurture and even bolster the white institution--specifically throughout the mid to late 1900s. For one, upper or middle class white women were expected to abide by the “Cult of Housewifery,” and the narrative of bearing children, so as to ensure that they were cultivating a hearty white-populace.

These individuals were deemed “fit mothers,” on the basis of their skin color and the wealth they boasted, and were encouraged to reproduce consistently in order to nurture the next generation of “fit” Anglo-Saxons. On the other hand, women who were leveled lower on the socioeconomic “food-chain,” or women of color, were physically barred from reproducing. Coerced sterilization, including but not limited to hysterectomies, forced termination, or implantation of an IUD or contraceptive, was prevalent and promoted the downward trajectory of the non-white-population bell-curve. The incentive behind the government essentially “double-dipping” into the reproductive rights of women throughout the nation, was to establish a “mold of racial perfection,” as coined by ihpi.umich.edu, and prevent “racial suicide,”--which is essentially the languish of one, more favorable race--from ensuing. Based on the aforementioned, both white women and women of color were inherently disadvantaged. They were perceived as reproductive and coerce-able chattel: they were forced to surrender their bodily autonomy at the feet of nurturing the white institution, reinstituting gender roles, and dismantling a demographic which would possibly jeopardize the white institution. Women’s reproductive organs were (and are in the present day) universally being rung dry and even tattered into miniscule, inoperable fragments by the filthy phalanges of the United States jurisdiction. White women were suffocated by the noose of child-bearing and domestic duties, without any leeway for educational or occupational opportunities, while women of color or lower socioeconomic status were smothered by the inability to bear their own children. This narrative has only translated into the present day, where bodily autonomy is a matter of societal status and race, rather than a universal inalienable right.

Needless to state, there was, spanning from the mid 1900s onward, a warrant for change. While the two-fold of reproductive injustice was recognized, incentives and movement(s) for compensation were solely rooted in ONE narrative: this was, of course, the narrative of the white, privileged women. Second wave feminism took the wheel and proposed large-scale, national organizations that would bolster the reproductive rights of white women or women of privilege exclusively. Margaret Sanger, the founder of Planned Parenthood, which functions as a non-for-profit that provides reproductive health care--abortions, guidance, medical assistance and wellness check ups, etc--to all women within reach, while noted as an individual that demolished the confines of the “Cult of Housewifery,” based this entire organization off of “species breeding,” and the cultivation of the “white institution,” as highlighted by [a revocation of honoring the founder, and a clarification of incentives, pursued on behalf of Planned Parenthood](#). While there was license to honor the reproductive freedom(s) of white women, there was no guidance provided to women of color or lower socioeconomic status (in the forefront, of course, when Sanger was initiating this organization). This meant that “a universal movement for women’s reproductive rights,” was truly analogous to the amplification of the voices of the privileged, while failing to factor in the narratives of women of color or lower socioeconomic status. Therefore, while the grievances of the privileged upper class were being consoled and perhaps mediated, the practice of coerced sterilization continued onward: with nearly 31 states in the present day boasting forced-sterilization as a legality.

An arguable narrative is presented on behalf of Audre Lorde, in her speech, [*The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House*](#): in which she highlights the importance of intersectionality and making change collectively on a basis of DIFFERENCE. For change that involves one group of already-privileged individuals, the “master’s tools,” per say, does not trickle down or even address the grievances of the underspoken. It fails to recognize the struggles of the many, and merely perpetuates divide. It perpetuates PRIVILEGE, rather than change, for change is not concentrated within one demographic: change is not established at the expense or overshadowing of the other. In that regard, the establishment of Roe Vs Wade and Casey Vs Planned Parenthood truly only bolstered the rights of the spoken: the rights of those with a microphone in hand and a porcelain sleeve which would promotes their recognition. While the women whose voices and grievances were silenced continued to be fronted with forced sterilization and abuse of their own reproductive anatomy. In the present day, with the recent overturning of Roe Vs Wade, the two fold of eugenics and forced child bearing is reintroduced: and it is on this basis that universal change is warranted. For clarification, change based on difference and honoring of all narratives, is warranted, not concentrated change which mirrors privilege for the few and disadvantage for the many. Accounting for and incorporating all narratives and hardship(s), emphasizing intersectionality and disregarding imminent difference in class or race, is what must be pursued in order to ensure the reproductive justice(s) of all women , and the right to privacy, choice, and denial of sterilization. For if change made on the basis of difference is not pursued, it is those of color and those of lower socioeconomic status that will fall subject to further injustice, at the feet of the “master’s tools” (white, privileged individuals) that will perhaps be granted liberties on the sole basis of their exclusive advocacy.

Sources

- [Npr.org](#)
- [lhpi.umich.edu](#)
- [Britannica.com](#)
- [www.plannedparenthood.org](#)
- [*The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House*, authored by Audre Lorde](#)

