



*Your Story*  
**MATTERS**  
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Columnist

## Contemplations from a woman in between

In my job it is an undeniable fact that legislation and policies directly impact the emotional well-being of my clients, and admittedly, myself. Amid our national division and contention, many of my clients have reported feeling powerless, disheartened, silenced, and unnerved.

With suicide rates, depression, and reported levels of stress on the rise, it is short-sighted to blame rising mental illness only on individual pathology rather than acknowledge the societal systems and policies reinforcing our national unrest.

In my work, the majority of my clients are women and girls. My youngest client is five years old while my eldest are in their 80s. I have the privilege of hearing stories across generations, backgrounds, faiths, and political beliefs. While each client is unique, the themes of powerlessness, trauma, and self-doubt resurface again and again.

I would consider myself to be a “woman in between.”

Perhaps I can blame this on being a classic, peacemaking middle child, where a slight bit of resentment lies, but wherein also lies the need to methodically evaluate both sides, appreciate nuances, and an unrelenting curiosity to know somebody’s story.

I resent labeling and believe labels can often be limiting. I think I might subscribe to the “common sense and decency” political party if I ever thought that could exist in politics. I prioritize my faith and spirituality, but have difficulty committing to any specific set of beliefs. I enjoy brief urban excursions where I pretend to be a version of hipster and fancy, but I feel most at home in the solitude of sagebrush and mountains. I worry daily about the wrong people having access to firearms but relish the chance to be hunting in the wilderness with my rifle on my back. My playlist is varied: from hip-hop to alternative to country.

I am a “woman in between” and when it comes to abortion, my opinions are scattered on both sides of the fence. I don’t like it. I think it is sad, but I also think that women and girls far too often find themselves in places of desperation, powerlessness, and self-preservation that unfortunately make the tasks of carrying a child and motherhood daunting, if not seemingly impossible. And so, for too many women and girls, deciding whether to follow through with pregnancy or not comes down to survival on a physical, psychological, and spiritual level.

Women and girls have for far too long been well acquainted with the feeling of powerlessness. This past week alone I think I sat with

five clients of all ages who for the first time disclosed being sexually assaulted. Additionally, women frequently describe feeling taken advantage of in other ways — at their workplace, in the home, and the many times that others have tried to capitalize on their gifts of hospitality and empathy. As a provider, you develop unique ways to empathize while also guarding yourself from the emotional intensity. Every so often, the heaviness hits and I find myself escaping to the woods, blasting my music on random backroad drives, or exhaling my frustration to be beat of my horse’s hooves.

What unsettles me most is how our autonomy as women continues to be threatened. Women around the world continue to battle for the right to drive, the right to choose their partner, the right to express their sexuality, the right to consent, and the right to financial decision-making. We have been seen as property, as inferior, as hyper-emotional, as objects. While in some parts of the world there have been great gains, in others time seems to be standing still.

Unfortunately, in the United States, having a child can be one of the greatest threats to our autonomy.

For too many women, having a child poses considerable risks. While these risks may be more or less present depending on the woman, they should not be dismissed or ignored while we try to safeguard the lives of the unborn but do little to

address the systemic pressures creating these endemic risks in the first place.

Here are the facts:

1. The United States has the highest maternal mortality rates of any developed country.
2. While other developed countries have seen a steady decline in maternal mortality, mortality has increased in the United States.
3. Black women have a maternal mortality rate three times higher than white women.
4. Only 12 percent of mothers have access to paid leave.
5. While men are known to make an average of 6% more on their paycheck per each child, women are known to lose 4% per each child.
6. Throughout the country, the annual cost of infant childcare can be equal to, if not more expensive than, a year of college tuition.
7. Nearly half of all women who have abortions live below the federal poverty level.
8. 1 in 3 women will experience sexual violence in her lifetime.
9. Postpartum and mental health supports are lacking

nationwide.

10. Abortion rates in countries with the most restrictions are higher (37 per 1,000) versus countries with the least restrictions (34 per 1,000).

Perhaps the questions we should be asking are: How can we come together to minimize these risks? How can we make motherhood less daunting? How can we honor the unborn, but also prioritize the health and wellness of future mothers? Are we holding men and boys as accountable to the fate of our unborn as we are women and girls? It seems that men can abort their responsibility as fathers without legal consequence — is this fair? How are we addressing sexual violence? What about poverty, parental leave, mental-health supports, and affordable childcare?

Ultimately, the abortion debate has simply been another opportunity for division, sweeping generalizations, and ‘otherizing.’ The concept of addressing root causes that so significantly impact the health of mothers, children, and families might, despite the contention, hopefully bring unity.

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