Pro Choice (Abortion): The Influence Of Social Media Sites

Webster defines abortion as the termination of a pregnancy after, accompanied by, resulting in, or closely followed by the death of the embryo or fetus. This can vary from the spontaneous expulsion of a human fetus during the first 12 weeks of gestation, better known as a miscarriage, to the induced expulsion of a human fetus. Throughout time, there has been a controversy on whether abortions are right or wrong, but who helps us make these decisions? In society, we like to believe that we make our own choices. We make ourselves believe that we should not or we do not let the opinions of others affect how we feel about a situation. However, our decisions are influenced by many things around us. These may vary from our parents, peers, or even an employer or teacher. But today, society's biggest influence comes from social media. Social media sites such as Facebook and Twitter, use graphics and false news to change both women's views and choice of abortion. We believe what others post and/or tweet, and we allow it to influence what we previously thought or agreed with. With that being said, who's really making the decision?

Women have been shamed in the media for various things. The choice of what to wear, how to look, or what jobs we should or should not do, have all been influenced by social media. However, the choice of abortion has been influenced the most by social media sites. Today we have what authors Anuradha Kumar, Leila Hessini, and Ellen M.H. Mitchell call abortion stigma. Abortion stigma is the moral worlds in which abortions take place including controversies about reproductive physiology, normative sexuality, policies related to abortion (its legal status, how it should be paid for, and who is the ultimate decision-maker), cultural and religious norms, demographic and political trends and family dynamics (3). These discussions are mostly seen on social media sites by people who usually don't have the authority to speak on the subject. However, most people are not going to search to see if the information is factual which can lead to the decision going in either direction. Social media often portrays the moral disapproval or religious objections that lead to negative judgments of women who have abortions (Marecek). This forces women who have considered the process to change their minds because they don't want to be shamed by the media. Studies have shown that women who terminate their pregnancy because of social disapproval, which are mostly teens, struggle to arrive and go through with the decision of abortion (4). This is because they have seen what the media has done to previous women and aren't sure if they can go through with the process or survive the after-effects.

Social media has an impact on people's views on abortion in many ways. Last month, research group Advancing New Standards In Reproductive Health (ANSIRH), released Abortion Onscreen in 2018, which found that not only did media dispel commonly held myths about abortion, but they also humanized and destigmatized the experience (Nguyen). Sites like Facebook show many videos of women having abortions with sad music in the background or the removed fetus on the operating table after the process. People also post negative comments and bash women who have had abortions and/or plan to. Fake statistics are also posted on these sites. Things like the number of women who've died after the process, how many abortions happen a year, and/or the number of women who regret the process, have all been wrongfully stated on social media. Again, nobody stops to check if the statics are real, so statements like these spread and often affect women's decisions. However, social media also

sometimes supports the pro-choice movement. Some pages/groups post things like “it is your body” that tells people it's okay to do it. Social media is more biased towards the anti-abortion movement, but it provides opinions from both sides which leads a woman's decision in either direction. Recently, actress Busy Philipps started the “#youknowme” movement on twitter which got over 10,000 retweets. Here, women who’ve had abortions speak about why, how, and the after-effects of the procedure. Actress Linsey Godfrey tweeted it was because she wasn’t in a financial/emotional place to have a kid, she made the choice to have an abortion (Garrand). This allowed women to feel okay about their decision and let them know that they are not alone. The tweet also encouraged women to not feel ashamed about their decision or about considering it.

Overall, social media plays a huge part in our opinions and how we make our decisions. Whether we believe it or not, nobody has their own steady opinion. Our opinions and/or decisions are all based on the opinions and/or decisions of someone or something else. For example, we use sites like Facebook and Twitter to back up what we already believe or to find new beliefs. Social media has been affecting how women view abortions and their choice of getting one for years. Because of public opinions, graphics, and false news, women have changed what they previously believed to be the best option, to what society believes to be best. Social media doesn't always do this in a harmful or shameful way. Sometimes sites, such as Twitter, encourage women to be okay with whichever decision they choose to make. There are also groups/pages to join with women who've made the same decision as you or are dealing with shame from the media. These sites are filled with famous people, such as actors, who have done what you may be considering or have already done. This encourages women to believe that it is normal and nothing to be ashamed of. Therefore, social media both encourages and shames the thought and decision of abortions. However, it is up to us to decide how much and what to believe from these sites.