Why I Am Pro Choice

“The first rule of the politics of fear is that if you want to make something sound scarier than it actually is, you add the word culture at the end of it.”

These words from Brendan O’Neill made made me shrewdly smile and nod. It’s true, of course.

For instance, if you want people to be afraid of gang related violence, you only need the media to throw the words “Sudanese Gang Culture” around once before the 1.1% of crimes Sudanese people are accountable for in Victoria gets blown up in to an “epidemic”. If a politician were to say, “Australia is facing a dangerous knife culture”, a spectre would haunt the nation as people grew fearful against an inanimate object that gets used everyday. You use the words “jock culture” in a school and suddenly, in the eyes of the students and teachers, all the teenage boys on the sports teams are sexually crazed and unintelligent. The list just goes on and on.

So, it’s really no surprise to me that this is now the case with abortion. Abortion, according to the US National Health Library of Medicine, is simply a medical procedure to end a pregnancy. Add the C-word to it and you get the stigma and fear around abortions we see today.

The fact is, there is no “abortion culture”. There are abortions. Some women choose to have abortions. Others don’t. Yet, people are increasingly fearful of this “culture” built on a misconception; it simply does not exist.

As the Alabama State legislature reasoned last week, the law apparently needs to “protect life” from the careless intentions of women who seek such procedures. Titled the “Human Life Protection Act”, the bill compared the number of terminated pregnancies to the lives lost in the Holocaust and the Rwandan genocide. To people who support motions like these, the 75000 abortions performed in Australia every year are “alarming”.

Well, we don’t seem to be hearing of the 30,000 hysterectomies performed every year. Neither do we hear of the 30,000 vasectomies or the 1.7 million eggs discarded since IVF began in 1991. That’s around 60000 every year. But you don’t see the dangerous C-word attached to these procedures because theres no one out there who wants to create fear around them. But there are many who wants us to view abortions with dread, to be afraid of women who are not exercising their reproductive rights, but apparently murdering their children.

Maybe it has something to do with the fact that unlike other reproductive procedures, abortions so strongly oppose the idea of women wanting to be mothers. But it stands that just because an abortion defeats the societal restrictions placed on women to be wives and mothers, she has more freedom to do as she please with an embryo in a petri dish than a pregnancy in their own bodies.

It could also have something to do with the fact that the women that seek abortions are most commonly from minority groups in society. Is it these women “disregarding” life or is it us, as a society, continuing to disregard theirs? Unlike the primarily wealthy people who seek many

other reproductive procedures, it is usually women from low socio economic backgrounds who seek abortions. In the US, half were recorded to be below the federal poverty line. These are not just women from low income families - they're the most vulnerable and destitute in our society. Desperation in these women sees to them taking matters in to their own hands, and with abortifacient drugs so readily available nowadays, it's extremely commonplace.

The problem lies, however, that hospitals become scenes of criminal investigation. Where abortion is the crime, doctors become the detective. When an incorrect dose or unfit drug is taken, the woman winds up in the hospital. Instead of saving the bleeding woman in front of them, doctors are tasked with investigating if the bleeding is a result of a miscarriage or botched abortions. This is impossible so its base off suspicion, and who do they target most readily? The poor women.

This policy shows such an intense lack of care for the life of a woman. They become a property of the state and the law, rather than a sentient, breathing human being whose is in need of immediate medical care.

Knowing all of this — banning abortion do not make them go away and that without doctors to charge, we end up criminalising the poorest, most marginalised women — the debate over legalised abortions seems so misguided.

We have come to a world where we need laws to keep women safe as they access health facilities. We have come to a world, where in many areas, we criminalise women for choosing a viable health care option, when adequate education and contraceptives are not provided.

Some people may look at 75000 abortions and see reckless, life discarding culture. I see 75000 individual women. I see 75000 difficult decisions, riddled with turmoil, reason, probably a lot of tears. Human kind in its purest decision making glory. It stands that we have no idea what these women were going through when they came to this decision. You have no idea. The 25 white men who proposed the strictest abortion laws in American history have no idea. And I have absolutely none.

This is the very opposite of a culture programming women to behave in a particular way – it is individual women striking back against the hardships and difficult circumstances they face, taking control of their lives for the better.

This is why I'm pro choice. I'm not pro abortion. I don't care if a woman chooses to end or continue with her pregnancy. I do care, however, if it is she who gets to decides. Those of good faith involved in the debate, in it because they care about the women, know that the real issue is to deal with the cruel parts of the world that make women want to abort in the first place.

Why is this happening now? Why are seeing a rolling tide of legislation, most notably across the US, but also in other countries? Is it because of the recent progressive discussion around gender equality? Is it the lurking fear that women may be attempting to take control of their lives? Does the idea of changing established natural order in society disturb us so much?

These are the questions that must be addressed. I must admit, it's a scary time to be a woman.

It's not your body, and it's not my body, so why should it be our choice?