

## **What's Wrong With "I'm Pro-Choice, But I Could Never Have An Abortion"?**

By Amanda Marcotte, RH Reality Check 8/21/2012

There are a number of phrases that smart progressives realize that you should always end with a period, and not with a comma followed by the word "but." Examples of phrases that are best excised from your vocabulary completely: "I'm not a racist, but..." And "I'm not a sexist, but...". Anything you say after the word "but" has been shown historically to swiftly disprove the first clause in your sentence. Now I think we should seriously consider adding "I'm pro-choice, but..." to the list. In theory, you can be pro-choice with a "but" added, but in practice, anything you tack on after that is unlikely to be helpful to the cause of keeping abortion safe and legal.

Take, for instance, the most common formation of "I'm pro-choice, but...", recently seen in this article at Salon ([http://www.salon.com/2012/08/17/27\\_and\\_never\\_been\\_kissed/](http://www.salon.com/2012/08/17/27_and_never_been_kissed/)) from a woman confessing that her anti-sex upbringing has brought her to the place of being 27 years old without ever having kissed a man. In the piece, she says, "I had no intention of having sex before marriage and, while I am pro-choice, I personally would never abort." You hear variations on this phrase all the time: "I'm pro-choice, but I could never have an abortion!" and it drives me personally nuts. Not because I think everyone should have abortions, by any means. If you never have a need to have one, that's a welcome thing, and congrats to you for successfully avoiding unwanted pregnancies that you had to terminate.

No, the problem with "I'm pro-choice, but I would never have an abortion!" is that, whether the speaker intends this or not, the message is that you believe that abortion is for Other Women. Lesser women. Your clear message is that while you think it's better if abortion is legal, you still think the women who have it are sexually immoral, and you're insinuating you're too good or smart to be caught in a situation where you have a pregnancy that you simply can't go through with. In this particular article, that mentality comes through loud and clear. After all, the writer is still living with the belief that pre-marital sex is wrong, and that women who only have sex within marriage are somehow superior to others.

"I'm pro-choice, but I would never have an abortion" undermines the pro-choice movement you claim to support. It dehumanizes women who have abortions, and reinforces the stereotype that women who have abortions are irresponsible, immoral, or slutty. After all, what's the point of making it clear that you would never have an abortion? It's about distancing yourself from them, implying that you're not like them. That you're more sexually pure or more responsible. Which feeds into the anti-choice narrative about abortion: That it should be banned because the kind of people who need that service are bad people who need to be punished for their sexual choices.

It's also annoyingly short-sighted to make a bold claim about how you just can't see yourself having an abortion. We live in a culture where women who admit to using the birth control pill out loud in public usually try to qualify it by saying they take it "for cramps" or "for headaches," and while these are legitimate uses of the birth control pill, the fact of the matter is that most women use it for contraception. But admitting out loud that

we are sexual beings who have sex for pleasure instead of procreation is hard to do. Even to ourselves, women often try to find a way to separate ourselves from those Other Women, by focusing on how we imagine we're moral and responsible, while casting others as less so.

The fact of the matter is most women sitting in an abortion clinic didn't imagine that they'd find themselves there, after all. It's all good and well to tell yourself that you don't have the kind of sexual encounters that lead to abortion, can you honestly look into your heart and say for absolute certain that this is true? Can any of us really claim to be so perfect as to never make a mistake that could lead to a pregnancy we're not ready to bring to term? Most women who say this are trying to suggest they simply don't have sex with men without being 100 percent willing to make a lifetime commitment, but even if you're so avid about this belief that you find yourself, like the Salon writer, as a 27-year-old virgin, can you ever really be so sure? Every week there are women sitting in abortion clinics who thought the guy they were with was The One. Every year, there are even married women who find themselves in abortion clinics because the marriages they thought were so secure turned out not to be. Life simply doesn't come with those kinds of guarantees. We may think we know what we'd do under tough circumstance, but really, until you've actually been there, you don't know for sure what you'd really do.

But even if you are absolutely positive you'd never have an abortion, you have to ask yourself: If you're pro-choice, why do you need to exclaim about how you'd never do it? What purpose can it serve but to stigmatize abortion further? Instead of imagining abortion as a terrible thing that only Other Women do, why not try to learn a little bit more about women who have abortions? You might find that they're not the irresponsible slatterns they're painted to be, but ordinary women just like yourself who just haven't been as lucky as you've been. For women tempted to set themselves apart from women who have abortions by saying they'd never do such a thing, I recommend checking out the 1 in 3 Campaign (<http://www.1in3campaign.org/>). Learn a little more about the women you're trying so hard to make other people believe you're not. You might find that they really aren't the irresponsible or less moral people your comment makes them out to be.