

# The Rebirth of Women's Health

Imagine this. A woman walks into her local pharmacy to pick up her prescription of birth control. The cashier looks at her and asks a simple question: “Do you have insurance?” When she replies with a no the cashier types in a few numbers and replies, “That will be \$150.” After a raised-eyebrow sweep of the woman the cashier adds, “Hope it’s worth it.” You might laugh or be disgusted by the response of the cashier, but the main problem here is the *cost*. Without insurance this woman just had to fork out \$150 for a *one month* supply of birth control. And another thing. You might be thinking, “Wow, that woman really wants to have sex.” But birth control isn’t just for sex as so many people have the misconception of. That is why the Supreme Court decision to allow companies to refuse to finance birth control due to personal religious beliefs is neglectful and ultimately very harmful to the female population at large. Today I am here to uncover the truth behind the common misconceptions of birth control, explain the terrible ripple effects which can be caused by the Supreme Court’s decision, and let you know what you can do to help fix this mess and help woman get back the rights they should never have lost in the first place.

You’re probably all familiar with the Hobby Lobby controversy surrounding birth control. The case, *Burwell vs. Hobby Lobby*, which began in March of this year and was decided in June, dealt with the contraceptive mandate in the Affordable Care Act that required employers provide female employees with access to certain contraceptives. While Hobby Lobby still provides oral birth control such as the estrogen/progestin “Combined Pill” what they took to court was the mandate to provide emergency contraceptives (Ella and Plan B) and IUDs (or intrauterine devices) due to their belief that it was akin to abortion which conflicted with their religious beliefs. In a close 5-4 vote the Supreme Court ruled that corporations do not have to uphold the contraceptive mandate if they feel it violates their religious beliefs.

Let’s break this down step by step. The main reason Hobby Lobby didn’t want to support the emergency contraceptives and IUDs was because they felt it was akin to abortion. The medical definition of abortion is terminating a pregnancy resulting in the death of the embryo or fetus, embryo being defined as the implanted fertilized egg by day nine to eleven. By this definition these forms of birth control are *not* abortion. But if we go by the definition Hobby Lobby uses, that interfering with the implantation of the fertilized egg is of the same standing as abortion, then these forms of birth control are still not abortion with the exception of the copper IUD. According to the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists along with several other medical associations, “there is no scientific evidence that emergency contraceptives available in the United States and approved by the FDA affect an existing pregnancy.” What these emergency contraceptives do is prevent ovulation, aka meaning there is no egg to fertilize at all. That means of the four forms of birth control protested by Hobby Lobby only one of them even does what Hobby Lobby is against, preventing the implantation of a fertilized egg.

The reason Hobby Lobby feels this is such a big deal is because of their religious affiliation with the Catholic church, which had a ban on birth control reaffirmed by Pope Paul VI in 1968. But they are far vastly in the minority. A recent study of American

Catholic women has shown that 98% have used some form of contraception. As written by Tim Padgett in his article on the Catholic church birth control debate, Catholic women have decided, “in keeping with their faith’s precept of exercising personal conscience, that family planning is the moral and societally responsible thing to do—for example, preventing unwanted pregnancies and therefore abortions.” Backing this statement is the recent Public Religion Research Institute poll which found that most Catholics support the contraception mandate even for Catholic-affiliated organizations. So for Hobby Lobby to lay claim that their faith at large believes the way they do is not accurate; instead of a religious based argument it’s more of a personal interpretation of their faith that they based their argument on.

Putting that aside, many have argued that so what? Hobby Lobby banned four types of the extreme contraceptives, they still offer the regular oral pills. True, but the ramifications this has on society at large is enormous. By showing that banning of certain contraceptives thanks to religion is acceptable, claims are pouring in from other companies to feed off this mandate. There are already 149 for-profit companies whose cases are pending, some of which are hoping to ban all forms of contraceptives in their insurance plans. What this decision has invoked is the knowledge that if religious beliefs conflict with federal laws they can be exempt, a can of worms which shouldn’t be opened.

So far I’ve been addressing the issue as the public at large views it: that women just want birth control to have sex. As they would say, “It’s not vital health care, it’s just contraceptive.” This is another large misconception. Rachel K. Jones, researcher at the Guttmacher Institute, did a study called “Beyond Birth Control: The Overlooked Benefits of Oral Contraceptive Pills” to find out just how many women use birth control exclusively for contraceptive reasons. The result? Only 42%, less than half the woman who use birth control. Of the 58% who stated other reasons, 14% of the pill users—1.5 million women—use the pill for completely non-contraceptive reasons. Not only does the pill help regulate menstrual cycles, decreases menstrual cramps, and decreases acne, it also lowers the risk of anemia, lowers the risk for some cancers, treats endometriosis (or where cells from the womb grow in other parts of the body), and is treatment for polycystic ovary syndrome (PCOS). PCOS is a common endocrine system disorder in which small cysts grow on a woman’s ovaries. This causes hormone imbalances which start by causing mild symptoms such as irregular periods, fertility problems, and extra weight gain which can transition into serious health problems such as diabetes and heart disease if untreated. As such, women need access to treatment. This treatment being the birth control that is right for them. Birth control is not like a general medicine that any generic brand will fix. For some women using the generic brand can cause harmful side effects such as headaches, worsened mood, and weight gain. And beyond this sometimes there’s a very real medical reason for needing the specialized expensive brand. Winnie Williams of Minnesota has a teenage daughter with a benign brain tumor which is treated using a specific type of birth control. Without access to this birth control her daughter won’t be able to control her excessive bleeding and depression which stems from this brain tumor. Like the story I told at the beginning of the speech, without insurance the cost to afford the right birth control would be well beyond the range of Winnie to afford, let alone all the other average Americans working a low-end job. Still feel birth control is not vital health care? By trying to classify it as outside the scope of health care it not only

puts these women who need it to be healthy in trouble but is a slap in women's face, that their health care is not the same as everyone else's, that their health care is not *equal* to the standards set by society.

But how can we make birth control affordable to all? By reversing the Hobby Lobby decision and reinstating in full force the Affordable Care Act. How can this be accomplished? By *you* voting. After the decision came down in June Democrats made a push to overturn the ruling. However, due to the GOP control of the House, they were unable to overcome the filibuster and the ruling stayed in place. But this can all change after this month's elections. We need to get people voted in who will strive for women equality and not uphold this terrible ruling. It is up to us to place the proper people in positions of power to overturn this case. Be it Democrat, Republican, or other, the person you vote for should see the issue with this situation and work to fix it. But unless you get out and vote, the same people will stay in office and this terrible ruling will stay in place. We can fix this. We can get women the health care they deserve. But we must get out and vote in order to do so. So please, don't just walk away. Go out and help change this world for the better.