



## Warning: This is a Post-Roe Editorial



Dr. Kate Thomsen and Silky

*"Think for yourself, or others will think FOR you without thinking OF you."*  
—Henry David Thoreau

I was writing my article this month about light. How the cells of our bodies need and use light and the emerging new therapies in biophotomodulation. We are "light beings" after all and, it seemed so, well, "enlightening". But then came Friday, June 24 and all I could think about was darkness – the darkness of power, greed, discrimination, judgment and control. We are living in scary times. We don't have war in our streets and most of us have enough food and shelter. But there is high anxiety in the patients I am seeing and they admit to feeling as if something bad is happening – something they have no control over. I felt it first when I witnessed my medical colleagues have their freedom of speech suspended during COVID. I never thought I would see the intelligent exchange of scientific ideas obstructed. Medicine is about learning and challenging our current practices so we can do better for our patients and yet there was only one prescribed way we were told to think about COVID and all discussion to the contrary would be punished. It felt like the Orwellian thought police were enforcing conformity.

Then there was a flurry of election interference laws passed. Since the beginning of 2021, 18 states have passed 34 restrictive voting laws which appear to disproportionately affect voters of color. If democracy were a board game, any child could see that this was cheating. Why wasn't it stopped?

The mass murders in schools, killing innocent children and teachers – and we can't stop selling assault rifles? No we can't because the NRA needs the money from selling these weapons of mass destruction so that they can support and bribe our politicians.

I recently wrote about the pollutant PFAS in our water. The EPA has known about the deadly effects of these forever chemicals since at least 2012. They just tightened the lifetime health advisory levels for 2

of these globally widespread contaminants in drinking water from 70 parts per trillion to less than 1 part per trillion. But it is non-enforceable and there have been thousands of other perfluorinated compounds introduced to the market while the EPA has been deciding just how toxic PFAs are.

The revolving door of chemical industry executives in the EPA and the pharmaceutical executives in the FDA is common knowledge. Law makers and regulators have become the foxes guarding the hen house – and we all know it.

In the last month the Jan 6 hearings revealed what many of us suspected to be true is even worse than we expected. And when the Supreme Court allowed New Yorkers to carry concealed guns wherever they want to, it made me cancel any trip I thought I would make to New York City anytime soon. 8 million people with guns on a tiny island? I don't need to be there.

This is why we are scared and anxious. There is a cognitive dissonance; a mental discomfort that results from believing that our leaders work towards the best interests of the people but seeing the reality that it is only money and power that motivates them. A feeling that we are losing control over our lives – we can't control being exposed to toxins and guns, we can't have fair elections, and we can't have open discussions, disagreements, and alternative responses to our health care needs.

A friend of mine recited a quote recently. Something like "wisdom is the ability to see each instance in the broadest possible context..." I think that's why all this mental discomfort has been troubling me. Where is this going? Are we approaching fascism, with Bill Gates and his philanthro-capitalism being the largest private owner of farmland in the country (269,000 acres across dozens of states) and Mark Zuckerberg and his social media empire determining who to censor, the FDA trying to prohibit doctors from using ages old and proven effective nutraceuticals and botanicals by removing them from the marketplace? The uneven distribution of wealth in this country has given a lot of power to a few billionaires. Doesn't it feel like the feudal Lords are running the show and we serfs are just spinning our wheels? It feels like every day there's another assault on our freedom – another time to scratch my head and say, why is this happening? It's troubling.

Then comes the Supreme Court overturning Roe v Wade. This decision was made while the majority of the country supports Choice and the latest poll shows that 67% of women

do. That same poll reported that only 19% of Americans feel things in the country are going well. So I'm not alone.

The majority opinion of the Dobbs v Jackson Women's Health Organization written by Justice Alito declared that there is no longer a constitutional right to abortion – reversing the 1973 ruling. Abortion rights will now be determined by each individual state and 11 states enacted previously constructed bans ("triggered" into effect by SCOTUS decision) and 11 states have laws not yet in effect – that will ban or severely limit abortion.

Currently, by the age of 45, 1 out of 4 women will have had an abortion. This is not a rare occurrence. CDC data show that women with family incomes less than 100% the federal poverty level accounted for almost half of all abortion patients in 2014. In 2019 CDC data reported: women in their 20s accounted for more than half of abortions (The highest rates were among black women and the lowest rate was among white women.) 85% of the women were unmarried and 14% were married. Sixty-percent were already mothers.

Restricting access to legal abortion does not result in substantially less abortions – but it dramatically lowers the number of safe abortion procedures. This has been seen globally. In 1993 Poland started restricting abortion access but the numbers of procedures have remained consistent despite the bans. The state abortion bans being put into effect here will be most burdensome and unfair to low-income women and women of color. Travel cost, time off from work and childcare costs will prohibit many women from getting to an abortion-legal site. This can only exacerbate our already vast disparities in wealth and health.

Most of these abortion bans do not have exceptions for rape and incest. Put yourself in those shoes – can you imagine the emotional pain you will live with for the rest of your life? Here's some statistics (See RAINN.org):

- 1 in 6 American women have survived an attempted or completed rape in their lifetimes.
- A person with a disability is 2 – 3 times as likely to be a victim of sexual assault or rape than a person without a disability
- Over 80,000 inmates experience sexual violence in prison or jail every year – 60% are perpetrated by jail or prison staff
- 99% of perpetrators of sexual violence will walk free
- 13% of female rape survivors will attempt suicide

- It has been estimated that a survivor of sexual violence who was abused as an adolescent will lose ~ \$241,600 of lifetime income

Is rape or sexual violence towards women not enough? Why would you take away her choice? She needs to heal – not be punished.

What are we going to do with pregnant incarcerated women who are forced to carry to term? They may also be a victim of rape – carrying another inmate or prison staff's child. And what about women in the military? Will they be discharged if they cannot carry out their duties while pregnant? How will they get enough time off to get to an abortion legal state – if they are allowed to do so? If they are forced to carry to term, who will provide child care?

There are provisions in the state bans that allow for abortion when it is necessary to preserve the life of the mother. There are no guidelines about that – putting doctors and women in a precarious situation. Many health conditions are not life threatening early in pregnancy when abortion would be an option but the course of the condition is known to worsen as the pregnancy progresses (autoimmune conditions, preeclampsia, e.g.). How long does one have to wait to decide if a condition is life-threatening to the woman so she can terminate the pregnancy?

More and more young women are getting cancer these days and if a pregnant woman has a cancer that is stimulated to grow under the influence of the hormones of pregnancy, can she have an abortion – even though the cancer may not be life threatening at the time it is discovered? What if the oncologist is recommending a cancer therapy that would be toxic or potentially lethal to the fetus but lifesaving to the mother. Seems like a no-brainer to me that a woman should be able to choose in those instances, but these bans are harsh.

These restrictive abortion laws are punitive: Doctors being charged with felonies and losing their license? Women being punished as well ignoring the fact that they may have come to the ER with symptoms of a miscarriage, not a self-induced medical abortion. And the idea of incentivizing bounty hunters to find these evil doctors and evil women doing this evil deed is outrageous!!!

Imagine you realize that adding another child to the family would be a financial or emotional burden to you and your spouse (who may have to take on a second job) and the other children (who will become latchkey kids as you have to work 1 – 2 jobs as well). You are already financially strained and can't afford

the time and expense to travel to get abortion services. You carry your pregnancy to term and never get out of the cycle of poverty. Our society has not supported low-income mothers and families well and provisions to do better have not materialized.

The TurnAway study compared pregnant women who were carrying an unwanted pregnancy and could get an abortion with those who were turned away from abortion services (usually for clinic policies on gestational age limits). These women were followed for 10 years. The women who were denied a wanted abortion experienced long term physical health and economic harm. Some tried dangerous acts causing harm to themselves. The children whose mothers were denied abortions were also affected. They were less likely to achieve developmental milestones including language, gross motor, and fine motor skills.

My mother had a child out of wedlock. The father was a neighborhood boy. She did not have choice – she had shame. My father was a single father after his wife died of polio. Their marriage was a marriage of convenience. It was not a happy environment – he was domineering and she was meek and depressed. My mother put up a good front but she was depressed her whole life. Consequently I have an ACES score of 5 – that's relatively high. The higher your Adverse Childhood Experiences Score the more likely you are to suffer from chronic health and behavioral conditions later in life. I am a cancer survivor.

Lack of choice for my mother, years of having no locus of control, had a profound effect on her psyche. And these effects last for generations. We have been taught and believed that we have freedoms – freedoms to have control of the important aspects of our lives. It looks like things are changing and we might not be so free. No wonder we are anxious and scared. Time for all us "light beings" to shine our lights!

*"The world will not be destroyed by those who do evil but by those who watch them without doing anything."*  
— Albert Einstein

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