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Ultrasound and Abortion: Patients and Providers Speak

People describe how seeing a baby on ultrasound influenced their views on abortion.



Sarah Terzo · [Follow](#)

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There is a great deal of controversy about ultrasounds before abortion and whether they can influence a pregnant person's abortion decision. Research is mixed.

One study done by a pro-choice researcher found that only a small percentage of women change their minds after viewing ultrasounds in abortion clinics. Other studies, however, have come to different conclusions.

From the perspective of a pro-life person, of course, even one changed

mind results in a saved life.

A full discussion and analysis of the research might be a good subject for a future article, but it's outside the scope of this one.

In this article, I will share ultrasound and abortion stories from women who say that seeing their babies influenced them to choose life, as well as abortion providers who were affected by these images.

The Medical Reasons for a Pre-Abortion Ultrasound

Ultrasounds before abortions are routine in some abortion clinics. In others, they are performed only under certain circumstances.

Former Planned Parenthood worker Catherine Anthony Adair said the following in an interview:

At the time I worked for Planned Parenthood ultrasounds were only done if the woman was unsure of the dates of her last menstrual period, or if the doctor ordered one.

Women were not given the option of viewing the ultrasound.

Ultrasounds before abortions are actually good medical practice. Besides verifying the length of the pregnancy, which determines what technique of abortion and what instruments should be used, an ultrasound is one of the only ways to verify that a woman doesn't have a tubal or ectopic pregnancy.

A person may test positive for pregnancy, but really have a situation where the preborn baby is developing in the fallopian tubes and not in the womb. If this is not discovered, the tube can rupture, which is a major medical complication that can end in death.

There have been a number of cases of women who have gone to abortion clinics, left thinking they were no longer pregnant, and then later died from a burst ectopic pregnancy.

Some victims of this type of tragedy include Gladys Delanoche Estanislao, 28; Sherry Emry and Yvette Poteat, both 26, and Angela Satterfield, 23. These women all died when abortion providers failed to diagnose their ectopic pregnancies.

It's likely that most such deaths aren't reported publicly. We don't know how many people have died from ectopic pregnancy after an abortion. And we don't know how many have suffered injury and trauma but managed to survive.

Why Abortion Clinics Discourage Pregnant People from Viewing Ultrasounds

In most cases, when ultrasounds are performed, women are not shown the images unless they specifically ask to see them, and sometimes not even then. Numerous former abortion providers have attested to this, including Dr. Joseph Randall, who was quoted saying:

They [the pregnant people] are never allowed to look at the ultrasound because we knew that if they so much as heard the heartbeat, they wouldn't want to have an abortion.

The fact that Planned Parenthood and other pro-choice groups oppose any legislation that would allow a pregnant person the option of seeing the ultrasound screen further attests to this pattern.

Even in cases where the law says the pregnant person doesn't *have* to look at the ultrasound but must be given the option to look at it if they want to, Planned Parenthood has opposed it.

Referring to a bill supported by Rick Perry that would allow women a chance to see an ultrasound of their unborn baby if they wanted to before an abortion, former Planned Parenthood president Cecile Richards said the following:

Why is Rick Perry so cruel to women? ... Rick Perry is

running for president, and if he wins, you can bet he'll force this dangerous agenda on every woman in every state. If we don't stand up to him now, women may suffer the consequences for years to come.

Keep in mind that this bill would not have *forced* a woman to view an ultrasound; it only required abortion facilities to offer her the *choice* to do so.

In Planned Parenthood's world, allowing a pregnant person to see an image of her baby on the ultrasound screen is a "dangerous agenda."

Are Pregnant People Always Told the Truth?

Many people who have abortions don't know the truth about fetal development. To quote Catherine Anthony Adair again:

We never discussed fetal development. The baby was referred to as the "contents of the uterus" or a "clump of cells." on the rare occasion a woman asked about the size of the baby, I would tell her it was about the size of the tip of my pencil, regardless of how many weeks into her pregnancy she was.

Jewels Green, another former clinic worker, said:

When explaining the abortion, the word ‘baby’ was never used, rather ‘contents of the uterus, ‘the pregnancy’, or “products of conception” were the preferred terms to refer to the fetus.

The language of abortion counselors is often crafted carefully to avoid any reference to the baby. Even the term “fetus” is often avoided.

A 2012 NPR radio program interviewed abortion workers at a facility in England. In the interviews, the clinic workers never mention the word “abortion.” Rather, abortions were referred to as “treatments” — e.g., “the treatment room,” “treatment counseling,” etc.

Ultrasounds cut through all this evasive rhetoric. They show the reality of the preborn baby.

The Problem with Hiding Ultrasound Images

As for abortion providers’ statements that ultrasounds are “cruel” and “torture weapons,” anyone who’s listened to stories from women who regret their abortions has heard, over and over again, “I wish I knew what my baby really looked like,” “If I’d known my baby had a heartbeat, I wouldn’t have aborted,” “They didn’t tell me the truth,” and “I thought it was just cells.”

I know not all people who have abortions feel this way —maybe not even most. But some people do, and I have heard their stories too many times.

Sometimes a person who has had a past abortion gets pregnant again and is confronted with a picture of her new baby on an ultrasound screen. Then the lies are exposed, and she has to bear the full brunt of the knowledge of what she has consented to.

Abortion providers may be able to avoid the truth when counseling women, but they will not be there to shield the woman from the truth for the rest of her life.

Eventually, many of the women who are lied to in abortion clinics will learn the facts about fetal development, and the abortion providers will not be there to help them when this happens. Many times, the experience leads to depression and self-loathing.

So why do abortion providers avoid showing ultrasound images to women? Perhaps this is because, in one survey, up to 78% of women who saw an ultrasound of their babies chose not to have abortions.

When abortion-minded women see ultrasounds of their babies in the supportive environment of a pro-life pregnancy center, amazing things happen.

Ultrasound and Abortion Stories from Women

Here's a story from one crisis pregnancy center worker in New Jersey. A woman (we'll call her Gina) had been in the waiting room of the crisis pregnancy center while several of her friends encouraged her to keep the baby. When she came in for the appointment, however, she said:

No one can change my mind about getting an abortion! Not my friends in the waiting room and not that girl who just came in, and definitely not you.

The worker relates:

I let Gina know that was not my intention to force her not to abort but rather to present her with her options so she could make the best, most well-informed decision.

Gina and I met for about an hour and it was such a pleasant time. I got to know her and her family dynamics, life objectives, and relationship with the father of her baby.

I reviewed information on abortion with her and

invited her to listen as I discussed the options of parenting and adoption so that she could truly make the best decision for herself.

She welcomed the opportunity and afterwards thanked me for helping her to think about the pregnancy from other perspectives. But even after our time together, Gina was firm in her decision to abort.

Then Gina had an ultrasound, and it was life-changing!

Immediately after looking at the monitor, Gina looked at our nurse and me and said, “Yo, that’s it! That’s my baby!” (This was the first time she identified “it” as a baby.) “I can do this!” It was such a turn of events...

Gina carried the pregnancy to term and kept her child.

The Woman’s Choice Network is a pro-life organization that helps women who are facing unplanned pregnancies and encourages them to choose life.

In 2011, the network assisted more than 1,500 women. Of the 172 who saw their sonogram when considering abortion, 123 continued the pregnancy.

The center offers pregnant people who choose life “baby supplies, mentoring, assistance finding childcare and other help.”

Amy Scheuring, the executive director, said the following:

The sonogram is just the first step. It's day one of a two-year journey. Most of the work we will do comes after the sonogram...

We really leave it up to them, and we do have an occasional woman who doesn't want to look. But almost every woman, most every boyfriend, and almost every weepy grandma in the room looks at that screen. They want to see. And the most common response we hear is 'We had no idea.'

It should be noted that this pro-life facility, like most pro-life facilities, offers women ongoing help after they decide to continue their pregnancies. This is in contrast to abortion clinics, which take the woman's money, do the abortion, and send her home.

In another article, a married woman became pregnant at age 39 after she had already had all the children she wanted. She considered abortion but decided she would probably keep the baby. However:

Unfortunately, she says, her maternal instincts did not respond to reason: when a young friend placed her baby in her arms, she found herself looking with distaste into “a little scrunched face inspiring no tenderness, only intense tedium at the thought of tending him. What was I going to do with the baby I couldn’t return to his mother?”

[S]he was not sure — despite her reservations — what it would cost her emotionally to have an abortion if something were wrong. When told she had as much chance of having a miscarriage from the amniocentesis as she did, at her age, of having a Down syndrome child, she hoped for the miscarriage:

“That is until, lying on the table where the procedure was to take place, I saw the ultrasound scan on a

television monitor above me reveal the perfectly shaped head of the child I carried. I wanted that baby!”

Pro-life author Randy Alcorn recounts the following story, told to him by pregnancy center workers, in his book *Pro-Life Answers to Pro-Choice Arguments*:

Barb came to Cobb Pregnancy Services Tuesday wanting a verification of pregnancy so she could get an abortion. She was 16 weeks pregnant. Janet, her counselor, put in a video [The Eclipse of Reason] that showed the abortion procedure for a baby of this age. When Janet returned to the room, Barb was looking down and said “I can’t have no baby.”

Janet shared her regret concerning an abortion she’s lived with for more than 25 years. She then got permission to call me to do an ultrasound and show Barb her baby. The little girl was most cooperative to show even her mom’s untrained eye that she was alive, very active, and doing well inside her. She

opened and closed her mouth, had hiccups, laid back as if in a beach chair, stretching her little legs. She even held up her hands so Barb could count her fingers

Barb was visibly touched. When the scan was over, I asked Barb what her plans were. She replied, “I am going to have my baby.” I asked if the scan had made a difference, and she said, “Big time. I just came in here to get a pregnancy verification so I could go have an abortion.”

A woman who was considering abortion after a pregnancy resulting from rape agreed to a free ultrasound at a pregnancy center:

She was blinking. She was just hanging out, looking around, sucking on her thumb. ... It was so realistic, so lifelike. It looks like you can just reach right in there and pick up the baby.

I know they have a heartbeat at 4 to 6 weeks, but it still doesn't feel as real to you until you see a human.

It amazed me.

She kept her baby.

I never thought I could love or bond with a child [who] was conceived under such horrible circumstances, but that's where we don't give God enough credit. I look at her, and I don't even see him. She's beautiful and perfect.

Another crisis pregnancy center worker recalls a woman who came running into the pro-life center sobbing after a Planned Parenthood worker accidentally allowed her to see the ultrasound screen before her abortion.

Immediately upon seeing her baby on the screen, the woman knew she could not go through with the abortion and sought refuge in the pro-life clinic.

On November 2, 2012, the organization 40 Days for Life, which arranges prayer campaigns and protests outside abortion clinics, told the following story:

A woman had made the long drive from another county for an abortion appointment. She was one of

the first to arrive that day, walking past the vigil participants and into the building.

As she was leaving, the volunteers noted that she might have been inside long enough for the abortion. They also noted that she was crying, so one of them asked her, “Is there anything I can do to help?”

“I couldn’t do it,” the woman said. “They were doing an ultrasound, so I asked if I could see it. At first, they refused, telling me ‘you don’t really want to see it.’ But I insisted ‘yeah, I do want to see it, because if I can see it ... maybe I won’t do it.’”

She was right. Once she saw her nine-week baby on the ultrasound screen, she knew that she couldn’t go through with the abortion.

Abortion Providers Who Were Influenced by Ultrasound

Ultrasounds are a liability to abortion clinics in another way as well. Clinic staff can be disturbed by the picture of the baby on the ultrasound screen.

One example is that of Joan Appleton. When talking during a conference in Chicago, Illinois sponsored by the Pro-Life Action League about the reason she left her abortion clinic, she said:

And I too had seen an ultrasound abortion. It was, we did first trimester, this was late first trimester, probably early second trimester, really, we could look to 13.7 weeks. Give or take.

I can't remember offhand what the specific problem was, but we wanted to do the abortion by ultrasound, to make sure that we did indeed get the entire, all the baby.

The terminology was that we wanted to make sure we had the entire pregnancy. I handled the ultrasound while the doctor performed the procedure, and I directed him while I was watching the screen. I saw the baby pull away. I saw the baby open his mouth.

I had seen Silent Scream a number of times, but it

didn't affect me — to me it was just more pro-life propaganda. But I couldn't deny what I saw on the screen. After that procedure, I was shaking, literally, but managed to pull it together, and continue on with the day.

“The Silent Scream” was a video by former abortionist Dr. Bernard Nathanson. He recorded an ultrasound video of a baby being aborted. The film was made in the 1980s.

Appleton did not leave her job right away — but this incident was pivotal in convincing her that abortion was wrong.

Dr. Stuart Campbell performed abortions for years, but the new, vivid, 3-D ultrasound images changed his mind:

Even a fetus lying there dead doesn't convey the horror that one experiences seeing a baby moving its arms and legs, opening its mouth, sucking its thumb, and then thinking, gosh, somebody wants to, you know... It looks so vital. It has changed my view. I don't think there's any doubt about that.

Dr. Campbell no longer performs abortions.

Dr. Randall, quoted before, testified to the following:

I think the greatest thing that got to us was the ultrasound. At that time, the ultrasound, or soundwave picture which was moving, called a “real-time ultrasound,” showed the baby on TV.

The baby really came alive on TV and was moving. And that picture, that picture of the baby on ultrasound bothered me more than anything else ... We lost two nurses. They couldn't take looking...

He said this at the “Meet the Abortion Providers” conference sponsored by the Pro-Life Action League.

The phenomenon of abortion clinic workers leaving after seeing ultrasounds has been so prevalent over the past several decades that major medical publications have addressed the problem.

According to an [article in *ObGyn News*](#) quoted by author and researcher Rachel MacNair:

Staff members [in abortion clinics] also may be affected by sonographic images and may need opportunities for venting their feelings and reconfirming their priorities...

Conclusion

Alison Herwitt, NARAL Pro-Choice America's director of government relations, told a reporter the following while discussing a bill that would allow government grants to crisis pregnancy centers to purchase ultrasound machines:

They don't want them to go to Planned Parenthood, where they'll get their full range of options. They just want them to go to crisis pregnancy centers, where women will be exposed to this weapon at taxpayers' expense.

Herwitt has spoken the truth. Ultrasounds are a powerful weapon against the lies and deceit of the abortion industry.

Some pro-choice people deny the humanity of preborn babies. But surprisingly, many pro-choice leaders have admitted abortion ends a life.

[Learn more in this short, free ebook.](#)

Sarah Terzo is a supporter of the Consistent Life Ethic, a philosophy that values all human life. CLE supporters oppose capital punishment, war, euthanasia, and abortion, work against poverty, and advocate for racial justice. We oppose all forms of legalized killing.

Read more about the [Consistent Life Ethic here.](#)

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