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## Let's Talk About Sex, Not Abortion

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the decline of “family values,” all the while spouting a woefully limited notion of family in which the lives of women are routinely and systemically undervalued. There is hypocrisy at the core of this trumped-up debate about family values, and in *Pro* Katha Pollitt exposes it. This is a book to give your friends and family who might be in the loosely pro-choice or loosely anti-choice “muddled middle.” With *Pro*, Katha Pollitt unmuddles us. |

## Let’s Talk about Sex, Not Abortion

Loretta Ross, *Atlanta*

**I** have often wondered whether the pro-choice feminist movement would have been stronger and won more victories if we simply proclaimed ourselves to be the “pro-sex” movement, against the “anti-sex” movement. If we had, I’m sure we would have had many more supporters of all genders, and we would have cleaved our opponents down the middle of their hypocrisy. We also could have more clearly revealed their implacable hostility to any framing that brought together the words “women” and “sexual pleasure.”

This would be extremely advantageous as we withstand the endless “war on women” waged by Republicans and Blue Dog Democrats. It would also contest the ravages of a neoliberal economic system that manipulates white supremacy to protect the wealth of the elites from the rest of us by delineating whose bodies and freedoms matter. We are facing a Luddite-like war on sexual freedom in which antimodernity forces are trying to push the rest of us back into the nineteenth century so that we are distracted from challenging the rapacious greed of the 1 percent in the twenty-first century.

Katha’s book offers a refreshing opportunity to visit this not so flippant pro-sex question again, because while feminists have made it much safer to have an abortion since the days of the dreaded coat hangers before *Roe v. Wade*, we have not made it safer to talk about abortion. In fact, it is possible that more abortion shaming is taking place now in the era of birth control than before, when women admittedly had fewer birth control options. Back then, women were accused of being moral failures if they chose a risky abortion; nowadays they are accused of both moral and intellectual failings (why didn’t she just use birth control, a condom, common sense, etc., if she just had to have sex?).

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It is possible that respectability politics kept the feminist movement from loudly embracing the pro-sex possibilities of women's empowerment through abortion and birth control. Fearful of being called licentious, selfish sluts, we sometimes fell into the conservative trap of speaking about abortion as the unfortunate dilemma of respectable women facing difficult choices. We hoped to keep abortion "safe, legal, and rare," to use the Clintons' centrist Democratic framing. Somehow our respectability politics didn't protect Sandra Fluke, who was slut shamed by Rush Limbaugh.

Respectability politics also did not protect women from having every part of our private bodies up for public scrutiny and debate. More politicians think they should legislatively dictate what goes in and comes out of our vaginas than ever before. I am admittedly a crass person, but if you're not helping me change my sanitary napkins every month, what are you doing down there without my permission? This proud slut says, "Back the fuck off!"

Katha's book calls into question why there is so much contempt for women, our freedoms, and our human rights. She correctly says that "self-determination, independence, and active decision-making" are lauded in white heterosexual men but for no one else in our society (32–33). She then gets to the point of the book: to reframe the way we think about abortion by characterizing it as a positive social good. It's at that moment that I became somewhat bemused by her arguments. Is Katha herself seduced by the myth that the fight over abortion is really about abortion? She says no but then wades into a set of stale arguments about abortion, personhood, myths, and misogyny. I don't agree that the muddled middle she is targeting needs more explanations about the antiabortion movement's illogical inconsistencies, because we've tried that strategy many times before. Instead, they may need an inclusive, radical declaration from feminists of what we are fighting for instead of what we are against. We are fighting for the freedom and autonomy to express ourselves sexually—the same human right that men enjoy—and to do so without shame or blame.

I would have preferred that Katha actually offered a total reframing of the debate and started from a sex-positive platform, much like the reproductive justice movement does. In fighting for the right to not have children, to have children, and to parent the children we have in safe and healthy environments, the reproductive justice movement is unapologetically demanding sexual autonomy, economic and political power, and reproductive freedom for all people. As a radical approach to reproductive politics, the reproductive justice movement fearlessly claims that sexual pleasure is a human right. All individuals have inalienable rights to body sovereignty and the necessary social supports to realize these human rights.

In making these claims, the reproductive justice movement seamlessly links many intersectional issues, such as demands for universal child care, a living wage, freedom from violence by individuals or the state, and a health care system that includes everyone. As writer Cynthia Greenlee once told me, “Reproductive justice is a promiscuous concept that will sleep with any idea promoting our human rights.” It is a concept available to Katha that she briefly explores near the end of the book, but she understates its power to transform the abortion debate from its frigidly frozen impasse.

So let’s be boldly and fiercely pro-sex. We need brilliance like Katha’s to offer ways to do this using her lively, engaging writing style to reach millions of readers. Let’s revive and revise our old feminist slogan and demand, “Sexual pleasure without apology!” That’s a real reclaiming of abortion rights. |

## Reproductive Justice 101

Rickie Solinger, *New York City*

**I** f I needed to pull a book about abortion off a shelf and hand it to a young person who didn’t understand what legalization has done for women and what withdrawing legal status would definitely do to women, this is the book I’d reach for. Katha Pollitt has mapped out ways of thinking about the issues—abortion and religion, motherhood, personhood, fetuses, and other key topics—that this young person I’m trying to save needs to consider, particularly in light of the threatening legislative and judicial insanities we live amid (more on the way) as well as the political cowardice. Pollitt’s thinking is clear, and her writing is friendly and interesting. In all of these ways, this is a book that contemporary antiabortion politics has forced into existence right now.

But this young person I’m trying to save, I’d have to enroll her in *Reproductive Justice 101* at the same time that I handed her *Pro*, or else she’d miss out on the revolution that’s restructuring reproductive politics in the United States and elsewhere. This revolution is, in fact, decentering abortion as the keystone issue, even while its adherents fight hard to maintain legal and accessible abortion. Reproductive justice says that in order to live safe and dignified lives with meaningful possibilities and opportunities, all women must have the right to decide whether to get pregnant and stay pregnant. If they decide to stay pregnant, they must have the right to ad-