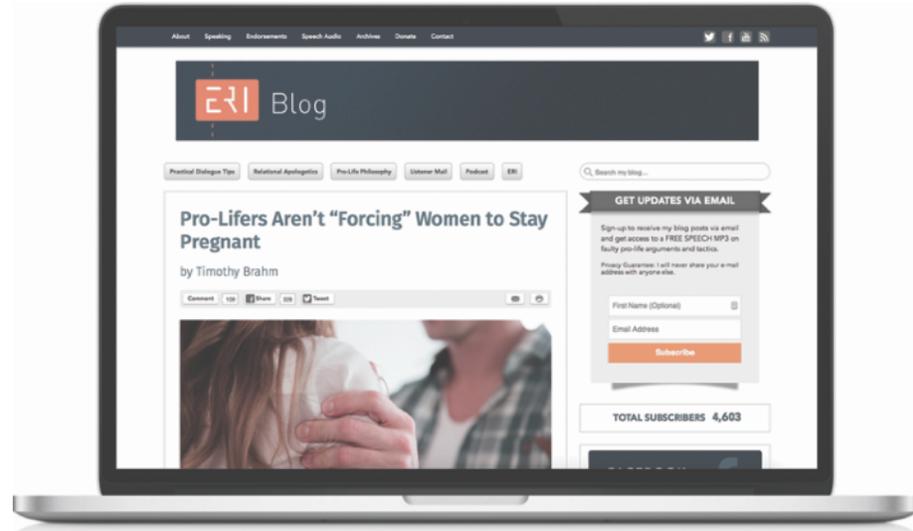


This article first appeared at the Equal Rights Institute blog.



## Pro-Lifers Aren't "Forcing" Women to Stay Pregnant

By Timothy Brahm

Pro-choice advocates constantly describe the intentions of pro-lifers with the word "force." "Pro-lifers want to force women to stay pregnant, force them to have babies, force them to go through pregnancy, force them to be a parent." All of these statements are common, and all of them are false.

The word force implies a threat. It implies violence. It implies aggression. It's a tragic irony given that the aggression, violence, and threatening behavior doesn't come from pro-lifers, it comes from doctors killing babies.

The pro-life position is simple: you don't get to kill people, very young embryos are people, so you don't get to kill embryos. It's very straightforward.

It is true that by saying "don't kill the embryo," **other things naturally follow from that**, such as "go through pregnancy, give birth, and either raise the child or give him to someone else who will." **But that isn't the same as forcing someone to do these things.**

If it sounds to you like I'm just playing semantical games, consider the following case:

Molly has a five-year-old son with special needs named Jason. The father isn't in the picture. Molly doesn't want to have to deal with the difficulty of raising her son anymore. She wants to be able to go out and party and travel and have more of a social life. She comes up with a plan to kill Jason and have it appear that he died of natural causes. Molly confides in her friend Debbie about her plan. When Debbie objects that it would be immoral for Molly to kill her son, Molly fires back,

**Molly:** So you're saying that you want to force me to raise a child? You want to force me to take care of a disabled child against my will? You want to force me to be a parent? You want to force me to have a hard life? You want to force me to not finish my degree? You want to force me to give up my dreams?

**Debbie:** No, I'm not saying any of that. Just give him up for adoption or something.

**Molly:** So you want to force me to give him up for adoption? You'd force me to go through something that emotionally difficult? You'd force me to always wonder where he is and feel guilty for leaving him? And you'd

still force me to be a genetic parent. What kind of a friend are you?

**It is misleading, intentionally or unintentionally, to respond to someone saying "don't kill a child" by saying "you're forcing me to do something."**

Debbie didn't force Molly to become a parent, Molly is already a parent. Being opposed to a parent murdering their already existing child is very different than forcing someone who doesn't have an existing child to cause a new child to come into existence. This is part of the way this rhetoric is cheating. It draws upon the obvious wrongness of rape, forced marriages, or other circumstances where one is forced to be a parent against their will. It uses ambiguous phrasing that subconsciously draws to mind those obviously wrong things and tries to pretend that they are morally comparable to the abortion debate. I think many pro-choice people that use this language aren't conscious of these unfair comparisons, but the unfair comparisons are there, and it's part of why this language has so much rhetorical force.

I often tell pro-choice people in my conversations, "If we had the technology to

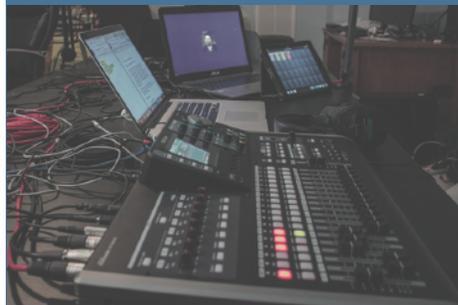
'Star Trek' beam the child into an artificial womb environment that it could survive in, I would be fine with the woman walking away and never having contact with the child again. I'm not trying to control women or punish them for having sex or anything like that. I just don't want her to kill the kid, and unfortunately, when a woman is pregnant with a kid, there are only two options. Either she kills the kid, or she goes through pregnancy and the child lives (obviously the child may also die unintentionally in a miscarriage)."

Saying "don't kill" has consequences. For Molly, it means a difficult life. For women who are considering abortion, it means any number of tough things, like dropping out of college, the pain of childbirth, the pain of placing a child for adoption or the hardship of raising a child. But the person who says "killing is wrong" is not forcing these consequences on her any more than a person who says "bank robbery is wrong" forces someone to be in poverty.

The abortion debate is very complicated. This article is not attempting to respond to bodily autonomy arguments or address every aspect of feminism and how it relates to abortion. My concern, for the moment, is with misleading language and how it affects people's minds.

In some misleading sense, it's true that Debbie is forcing Molly to be a parent, have a difficult life, etc. It's close enough to an accurate statement that it's understandable how someone would think that phrasing fits and then become attached to it. In the same way, it's kind of true that pro-lifers are forcing women to be parents, but only in the same misleading way. Even a pro-choice person should agree with me that it is misleading to say that Debbie is forcing Molly to be a parent, and if it is misleading language in that case, then it is misleading in the case of pro-lifers and abortion.

## Podcast Update



If you haven't subscribed to our public podcast yet on iTunes, you should! Here are some of our most downloaded episode titles from the last quarter:

- > Q&A Session with Rock for Life Activists - Part 2
- > FULL COURSE PODCAST: Listener Mail - Questions About Confirmation Bias
- > Abortion Images: A Case for Disagreement without Division

## Personal Note to Rachel's Friends and Supporters

I am so happy to make the announcement that I will be officially moving to North Carolina in January 2018! Many of you have been asking me about the move date so I am thankful to have an answer! I know that the rest of the ERI team will be very excited to have me available full time. We have been preparing for many future projects which will finally begin come January. Getting involved with the pro-life movement is one of the best things that I have done with my life and the idea that I will be able to help others do the same is such a blessing. The opportunity is unbelievable and I love having you all be a part of it with me.

The friendships that form from living with people have an intimacy which isn't present with friends who have never been roommates. At St. Catherine's House, because we live as a community in a discernment house connected with the Church we share faith and friendship at a time when we are trying to make the biggest decisions which will affect our lives. One of

these women I met through SCH is my dear friend, Helen. She is the kind of friend that you feel like you know so well right away, but she predictably surprises you in a wonderful paradox of exciting conversation. On September 23rd I was able to witness Helen marry her husband Brian! A whole group of both past and present St. Catherine's House women were able to attend to the out of town wedding together. The community is so strong and supportive. Congratulations to Mr. and Mrs. Hawersaat!

In October, my friends Elora and Mike had their first son Killian baptized! He is such a good natured baby with charming smiles and a relaxed personality. I first held him when he was only 6 weeks old! Of course, I will admit I have purposely sat by them at Mass so I can hold him. Congratulations to Killian!

~ Rachel

