

Forty years after *Roe v. Wade*

By [Steve Thorngate](#)

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Today is the 40th anniversary of *Roe v. Wade*. Amanda Marcotte [brings up a crucial point](#): while the cultural image of an abortion patient continues to be someone a lot like the title character in *Juno*, the reality has changed considerably.

Women under 20 now account for only 18 percent of abortions. The percentage of women without children seeking an abortion has dropped to 39 percent, and non-Hispanic white women only account for 36 percent of abortion patients. The only thing that hasn't changed is that women seeking abortion tend to be unmarried; around 85 percent of those seeking abortion aren't married. While the discourse around abortion still focuses on scared white teenagers, the reality is that the typical abortion patient these days is a twenty-something single mother of color.

The shift is the result of economic pressures and changing patterns of contraceptive use. Improved contraception use has led to a drop in the abortion rate for pretty much all groups of women since the 1970s. But in the early 2000s [, the National Center for Health Statistics found that while contraception use](#) in American women had been climbing for decades, it stalled in the 1990s. Loss of access for poorer women seemed to be the sole reason for this troubling trend, which led to an explosion in unplanned pregnancy, and therefore abortion.

I also appreciate [Mollie Wilson O'Reilly's brief post](#). I endorse every word of her first paragraph, in which she sings Gail Collins's praises, but it's her second I'll quote here:

The only time my fondness for Collins takes a hit is when she writes about abortion, and not only because we disagree. On that subject I find she writes, like so many other progressives, as though there are no difficult questions left, and support for unrestricted access to abortion is the only decent position a right-thinking, non-woman-hating person can hold. Obviously I'm a bit insulted by that approach. But I'm also disappointed whenever I encounter it. It doesn't

sound like an earnest attempt to grapple with a tough issue; it sounds to me like an attempt to convince oneself that there is no more thinking to be done.

See also Sarah Kliff's [highly informative set of charts](#).