

Abortion-Positive Campaign Falls Flat From Incoherence

By Amanda Marcotte



Italian women protest efforts to block experimental trials of RU-486 in 2005

ANDREAS SOLARO/AFP/Getty Images.

The past year has seen a dramatic shift in mainstream feminist rhetoric around the ever-present question of female sexuality, as demonstrated by the loud-and-proud defense of Planned Parenthood in the wake of the attempted Komen defunding. Instead of shyly highlighting the desexualized health care Planned Parenthood offers, defenders at places such as **Planned Parenthood Saved Me** spoke bluntly of needing abortions, STD care, and even wanting contraception not for socially acceptable reasons such as regulating menstrual cramps, but so they could have sex without getting pregnant. Slut Walk gave women an opportunity to say they deserve to be sexual without being raped for it. Even Hollywood got in on the fun with the release of *Bridesmaids*, a movie based on the radical notion that women can make crass blow-job jokes, too.

I suspect that Women on Waves was thinking of all this when **they decided to seize the moment** by releasing a hoax-ish ad campaign that is overtly pro-sex and pro-abortion. The campaign, coordinated with the Yes Men, is called alternately **Diesel for Women** or Misopolis. The intention behind the ad is to both draw attention to a woman's right to abortion no matter where she lives and also to the poor working conditions for women working in clothing factories of the sort Diesel owns. To these ends, the ads show glamorized women flaunting sewing machines and measuring tapes while taking abortion pills, with slogans such as "Abortion pills, a gift from God" and "Say goodbye to coat hangers." It's a definite departure from the mainstream feminist rhetoric defending choice, where women who get abortions are often portrayed as weeping and rending their clothes at the difficulty of their decision, an obvious ploy to get more sympathy in a world where we like women better if they're suffering. These ads have the benefit of being closer to reality, as well as being more in line with in-your-face feminism. While abortion can be a difficult decision, it's rarely experienced, especially with early term abortions, as a tragedy. The most **common feeling women experience after an abortion is relief**, and when they do suffer, it's often more because of the stigma attached to abortion than because of the abortion itself. Ads like this that align abortion with how it is in the real world---a welcome solution to the problem of unintended pregnancy---could relieve what suffering there actually is.

All of which is why I'm sad to say that these ads don't work very well. It's not Advertisement because they identify abortion as a good thing for women who need it, but because the message is muddled and confusing. The ads are both supposed to be about abortion and inhumane factory conditions, but the conflation of the two makes the ads read as if they're suggesting that abortion pills would solve the problems of women working in sweat shops. If anything, **the problem of forced abortions** is more of a concern for sweat shop workers, confusing the issue even further. Women on Waves should have had an ad campaign that addressed either abortion or poor working conditions in factories, but putting the two together just creates a big mess of nothing. Let's hope the next ad campaign that addresses the abortion issue with courage can also do so with coherence.

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