

## Abortion, Motherhood, and Donald Trump

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Yvonne Lindgren, *Trump's Angry White Women: Motherhood, Nationalism, and Abortion*, \_\_Hofstra L. Rev. \_\_ (forthcoming, 2019), available at [SSRN](#).

In June, columnist [E. Jean Carroll](#) added her name to the list of women who have alleged that President Donald Trump sexually assaulted them, describing him raping her in the dressing room of a department store over two decades ago. [In response](#), Trump said that Carroll was “not my type.” The controversy revived a discussion from the 2016 election asking how a man with multiple credible allegations of sexual assault, recorded on audio boasting that he grabbed women “by the pussy,” received a significant proportion of women’s votes— according to exit polls, fifty-two percent of the votes of white women.

In *Trump's Angry White Women: Motherhood, Nationalism, and Abortion*, forthcoming in the Hofstra Law Review, Yvonne Lindgren provides a fascinating explanation rooted in the fights around abortion. She traces a shift in the anti-abortion movement’s tactics after [Roe v. Wade](#) to focus on protecting a specific traditional vision of white motherhood through to today’s political and legal conflicts. In her telling, this change in anti-abortion rhetoric laid the groundwork for modern conservative arguments that claim white nationalist motherhood as their standard in broader culture wars. Lindgren’s argument is not only persuasive in its own right, but also helps to explain other movements in the law to limit women’s autonomy within the family and promote a narrow idea of appropriate motherhood.

Lindgren begins by summarizing how anti-abortion arguments changed in the wake of *Roe v. Wade*. Initially the focus of anti-abortion activists was on the fetus and how abortion should be viewed as the murder of that fetal life. Citing Mary Ziegler’s research, Lindgren explains how activists shifted their focus from the fetus to the pregnant woman, arguing that abortion harmed women and motherhood as an ideal.<sup>1</sup> Phyllis Schlafly, famously succeeding in her fight to prevent ratification of the Equal Rights Amendment, trumpeted motherhood as the source of morality for American society that would be irrevocably weakened by a constitutional amendment protecting gender equality.

This shift focused upon mothers, but it also cast a particular vision of the family and gender relations within it. I have previously written about the power of hegemonic masculinity, telling men that they are insufficiently masculine if they do not conform to a specific idea of what men are supposed to be: focused on proving their masculinity by competing with other men and refusing to engage in any activities coded as feminine such as caring for children.<sup>2</sup> Lindgren’s article provides examples of this, such as Andrew Cherlin’s work describing the importance of stereotypical gender roles within the family for men who lacked power in the workplace.<sup>3</sup>

The call to protect this vision of a “traditional” family undergirds legal controversies stretching across family law today. Obviously, the abortion debate continues with increased legislative activity restricting access to abortion as state legislatures anticipate the Supreme Court revisiting and reversing *Roe v. Wade*. Increased legal restrictions on the conduct of women within a family unit can also be traced to the power of the nationalist family: attempts to broaden exemptions so that employers need not provide health insurance coverage for contraceptive methods, legal punishment for the actions of women taken while they are pregnant that might harm the developing fetus, and continued refusal to fund paid parental leave and childcare allowing women to stay within the workforce all trace back to what Lindgren describes as the socially constructed symbolic power of the abortion right. Lindgren’s conclusion, that the fight for abortion rights must include broader issues such as economic justice, helps to both explain current political arguments and point a way forward for progressive activists stymied by white women’s support for Trump and his political movement.

1. See Mary Ziegler, **After Roe: The Lost History of the Abortion Debate** (2015).
2. See Dara E. Purvis, *Trump, Gender Rebels, and Masculinities*, 54 **Wake Forest L. Rev.** 423 (2019).
3. See Andrew J. Cherlin, **Labor's Love Lost: The Rise and Fall of the Working-Class Family in America** (2014).

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