**How *Cider House Rules* Conveys Abortion Policies**

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Our personal values and morals are fundamental in our decision making and we will undoubtably question these values throughout our life. *Cider House Rules* follows an unwanted orphan, Homer Wells, as he questions his own morals through his work as the protégé of the director of an orphanage, Wilbur Larch. Wilbur Larch runs the orphanage and works as an obstetrician and abortionist for mothers of unwanted children. The story is set in the early 20th century, so Larch is performing illegal abortions for these women. In the first half of the movie, Larch encourages Wells to learn abortions, so he can one day take his place at the orphanage. Homer questions the morality of abortions and decides he needs to leave the orphanage to see the world, so he leaves and begins working at a cider house with other farm workers. By the end of the movie, Homer is faced with a difficult moral dilemma and must reevaluate what is right and wrong. *Cider House Rules* is successful at conveying the moral dilemmas associated with the topic of abortion and displaying the need for nonrestrictive policies when it comes to abortion. As stated in the Crosson-Tower text, abortion is a controversial topic and must be dealt with by social workers, as it pertains to many client populations we work with (Crosson-Tower, 2016). Through the themes and issues showcased in *Cider House Rules,* an analysis can be made of policies and topics relating to abortion that affect Americas families and children today.

The film heavily covers the topic of abortion and how it affects the children of the orphanage and the mothers who come in. *Cider House rules* was set during a time where abortion was almost completely illegal in all 50 states, so the work Larch was doing was vital for the lives of women at that time. This is an important topic to explore, especially in the field of social work, because of its implications for the social, biological, and psychological factors of humans. Abortions have and always will be necessary for the health and safety of a woman's pregnancy, and access to abortions gives women their right for bodily autonomy. Using the National Vital Statistics data, studies have found that enacting a gestational age limit to restrict abortions was associated with a 38% increase in maternal mortality (Vilda, 2021). Studies also found that women forced to keep their child are more likely to stay in unhealthy relationships, suffer physical and mental health consequences, live in poverty, and have lower life satisfaction (Vilda, 2021). Anti-abortion policies are increasing in every state, which is putting women's and families' lives at risk. These policies are more likely to negatively impact lower socio-economic women and women of color. As seen in the film, abortions will not cease to exist if policies are put in place; the only thing that will decrease is safe abortions.

The effect of the anti-abortion policies is seen in the film and these examples parallel real life. The movie demonstrates how women are more prone to undertake non-medical abortions when the access to abortions by professionals is taken away. For instance, a woman comes into the orphanage after trying to perform an abortion on herself. This leads her to pass away from complications of the attempt. This is the sad reality for many women who are not able to receive a safe abortion, and restricting abortion laws more will lead to a devastating number of women receiving unsafe abortions and dealing with the adverse reactions of such. Abortions affected the orphans of the film, especially Homer. Larch gave women the choice to get an abortion or put her child up for adoption, but never coerced them to any option. The policies put in place at that time may have influenced women to give their child to the orphanage, rather than obtain an abortion. This affects the children of the orphanage because of the overflow of children that makes it difficult to get adopted and receive proper emotional and medical care. Many anti-abortion arguments assume mothers to put their child up for adoption, but they fail to acknowledge the ragged system that exists for unwanted children and the implications it has on the children.

The anti-abortion laws that existed at the time of the film, and persist today, are rooted in religious, patriarchal, and racist values and the intention to “save” children and control women's bodies. Abortion was not only accepted in ancient societies, but also a normal act, along with infanticide (Crosson-Tower, 2016). It was not until 1910 that abortion was illegal in the United States. During slavery, slave owners took Black women's right to get abortion away from them to control and dehumanize them. This practice of taking away a women's bodily agency led policy makers to completely eradicate abortion nationwide (Planned Parenthood, 2022). The restrictions that are put into place in many states are more likely to negatively influence poor people and women of color, while rich white people can obtain abortions regardless. This can be seen in the film when looking at Candys experience versus Roses. Candy was a white woman coming from the upper-middle class and had the money and support to obtain her illegal abortion. Rose, on the other hand, was not able to leave her father's care and was forced to get her abortion at the cider house. This medical racial disparity still exists today due to systemic racism, which causes Black women to be 2-3 times more likely to die from pregnancy related issues (Vilda, 2021). These values conflict with my personal values and morals and the values of a social worker. Social workers should follow the NASW code of ethics, which values the dignity and worth of a person, as well as self-determination (NASW, 2021). Social workers should be committed to being mindful of cultural and value differences and allow clients to make their own choices regardless of our personal values. In the movie, Larch said to Homer, “if you expect them to be responsible for their children, you have to give them the right to decide whether or not to have children.” This quote emphasizes the fact that women need to have control of their bodies if they are to be held accountable for their children. Access to abortions is a critical aspect of reproductive health of women and a human right.

After watching *Cider House Rules*, and inspecting further research, it is clear that policy changes need to be made to better fit our society and new models of health. The restriction of abortion rights is the most harmful of the following restrictions: limiting Medicaid funding to expand to abortion needs and requiring a physician's approval for the abortion (Vilda, 2022). These restrictions are imposed by 34 and 39 states, respectively (Vilda, 2022). These enactments limit the amount of people who can get abortions and target poor and marginalized populations. This is one of the many ways systemic racism exists in society, more specifically the health care system. Systemic racism will persist, and Black women will continue to suffer in the system, unless policy makers act and macro level change is enacted. Social workers have a duty to promote social justice, according to the NASW Code of Ethics, so lobbying and advocating for policies that can support women of color and pro-choice values is a way social workers can help in a macro way. It is also important for social workers to use updated models of medicine to support their clients and advocate for social change. The biopsychosocial model is a newly adopted model that suggests a medical condition is connected to one's social and psychological factors, as well as their biological factors (Hutchison, 2020). In the context of abortion, the biopsychosocial model can be used to understand why a person is getting an abortion and to provide the women with the tools she needs to improve her conditions and get the psychological help she may need after an abortion, which can be a traumatizing procedure. Advocating for social change and implementing models into their social work interventions is vital for social workers to help client populations suffering from the implications of current abortion restrictions.

*Cider House Rules* was a film about questioning morals and the laws that govern us. The cider house where Wells worked contained rules on a sheet for the apple pickers to follow. The workers of the cider house conclude that the rules are outdated and not what they live by. Larch asks Wells in the film, “I know it's against the law. I ask you, what has the law ever done for this place?” At the end of the movie, Wells uses what he learned from his fellow workers and decides that rules are not always right, but it is what you believe to be right. Wells challenges his own morals regarding abortion and ends up taking Larch's place in the orphanage as the abortionist. *Cider House Rules* is successful at portraying abortion and highlighting the need to make changes to our current abortion policies.

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