The landmark Supreme Court case, Griswold v. Connecticut (1965), gave women more control over their reproductive rights while also bringing reproductive and birth control issues into the public realm and more importantly, into the courts. Bringing these issues into the public eye allowed additional questions about the reproductive rights of women, such as access to abortion, to be asked. This court case laid the groundwork for later cases such as Eisenstadt v. Baird (1972) and Roe v. Wade (1973).

Estelle Griswold, the executive director of the Planned Parenthood League of Connecticut (PPLC), and Dr. C. Lee Buxton, the director of Yale University’s infertility clinic, were charged and convicted in 1962 of violating the 1879 Connecticut anti-contraception law. This anti-contraception law made it illegal for any person to use contraceptives or help another person obtain contraceptives. Any person found guilty of violating this law could be fined and/or imprisoned. The law itself was the primary issue being contested in the Griswold v. Connecticut case.

On 29 March 1965 the oral argument of the case began with Fowler V. Harper, Tom Emerson, and Catherine Roraback as the attorneys for Griswold and Buxton and Joseph Clark as the attorney for the state of Connecticut. Emerson argued that the right to privacy was implicit in the US Constitution in the First, Third, Fourth, Fifth, and Ninth Amendments. He then went on to point out the need for the justices to make an expansive decision regarding this case in order for it to apply in subsequent cases. The decision came on 7 June 1965, by a vote of 7?2, reversing the lower courts conviction against Griswold and Buxton as well as deeming the 1879 Connecticut anti-contraception law unconstitutional. It was found unconstitutional because it violated the right to privacy which was said to be contained in several sections of the Bill of Rights. The decision in the Griswold v. Connecticut case gave a constitutional right to privacy to married couples with regards to birth control. However, this decision did not apply to single women seeking contraceptives but would eventually open the door to the issue.

The controversial court case Griswold v. Connecticut brought women’s reproductive rights to the forefront. Not only did it articulate a constitutional right to privacy, it also set the stage for Eisenstadt v. Baird, which allowed the right to privacy to encompass unmarried women as well as married women, and Roe v. Wade, which gave women the right to terminate a pregnancy.

Sources

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