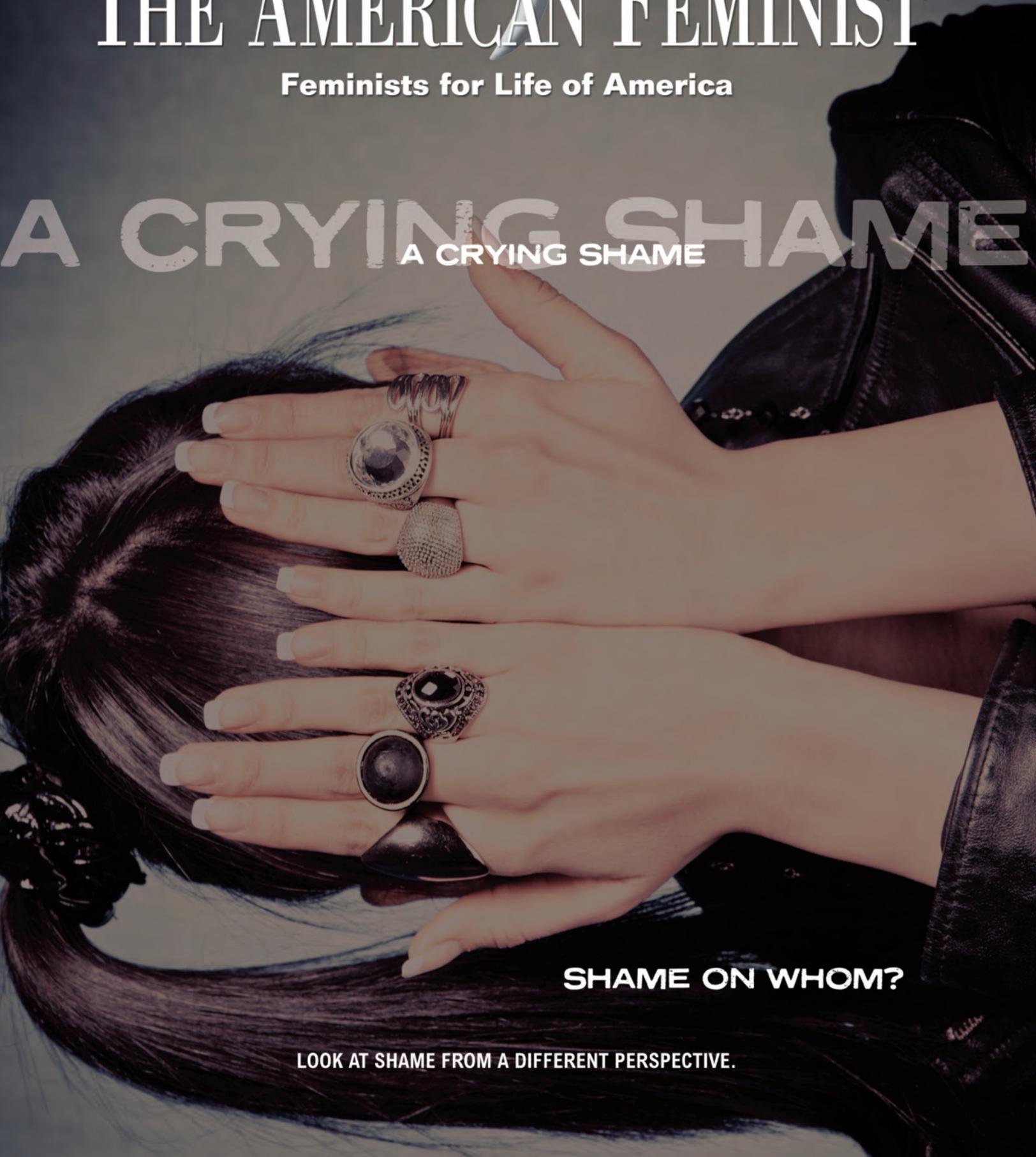




# THE AMERICAN FEMINIST<sup>®</sup>

Feminists for Life of America

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Spring/Summer 2014

# THE AMERICAN FEMINIST®

*A publication of Feminists for Life of America*

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Established in 1972, Feminists for Life of America is a nonsectarian, nonpartisan, grassroots organization that seeks real solutions to the challenges women face. Our efforts are shaped by the core feminist values of justice, nondiscrimination, and nonviolence. Feminists for Life of America continues the tradition of early American feminists such as Susan B. Anthony, who opposed abortion.

Feminists for Life of America recognizes that abortion is a reflection that our society has failed to meet the needs of women. We are dedicated to systematically eliminating the root causes that drive women to abortion—primarily lack of practical resources and support—through holistic, woman-centered solutions. Women deserve better than abortion.

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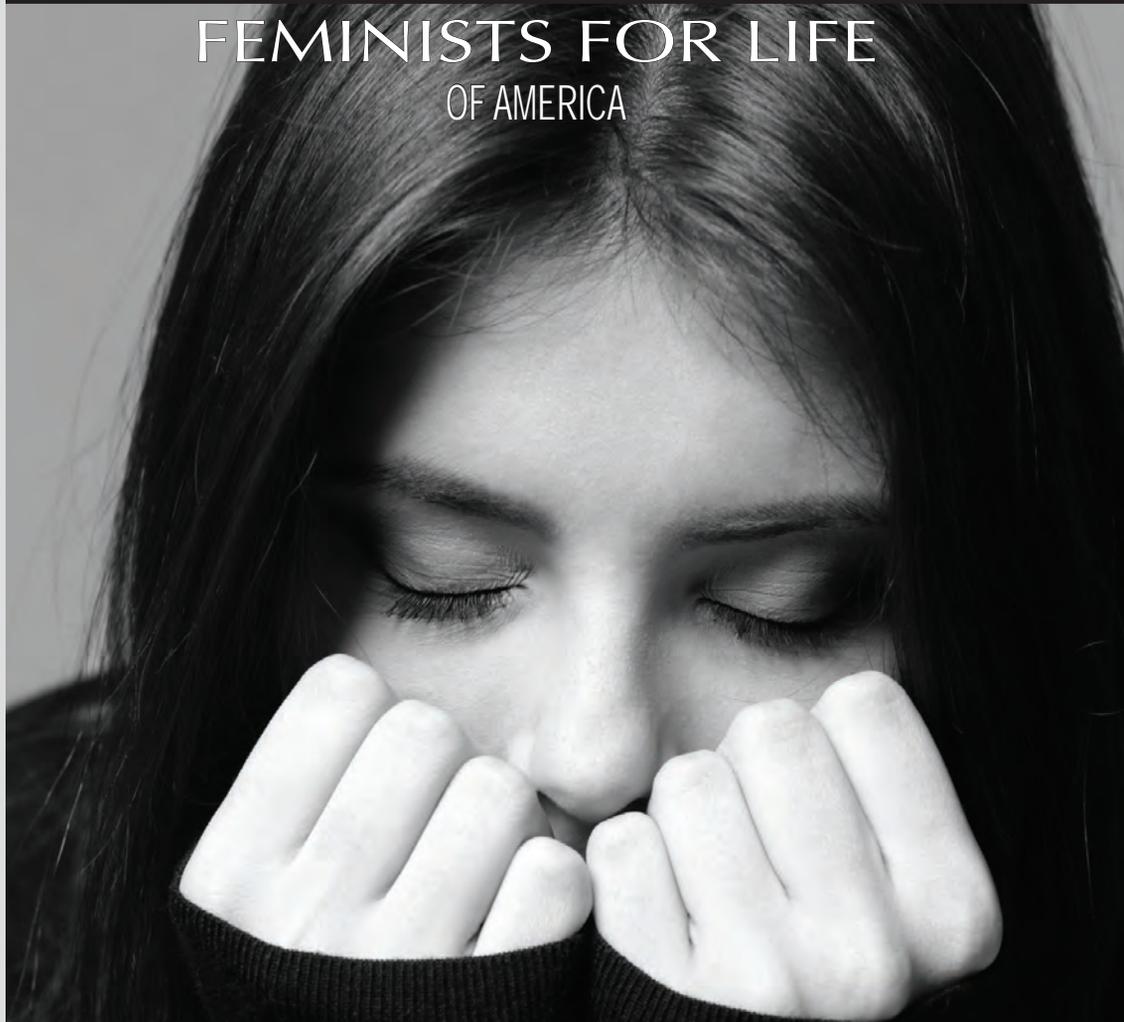
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“When a man steals to satisfy hunger, we may safely conclude that there is something wrong in society—so when a woman destroys the life of her unborn child, it is an evidence that either by education or circumstances she has been greatly wronged.”

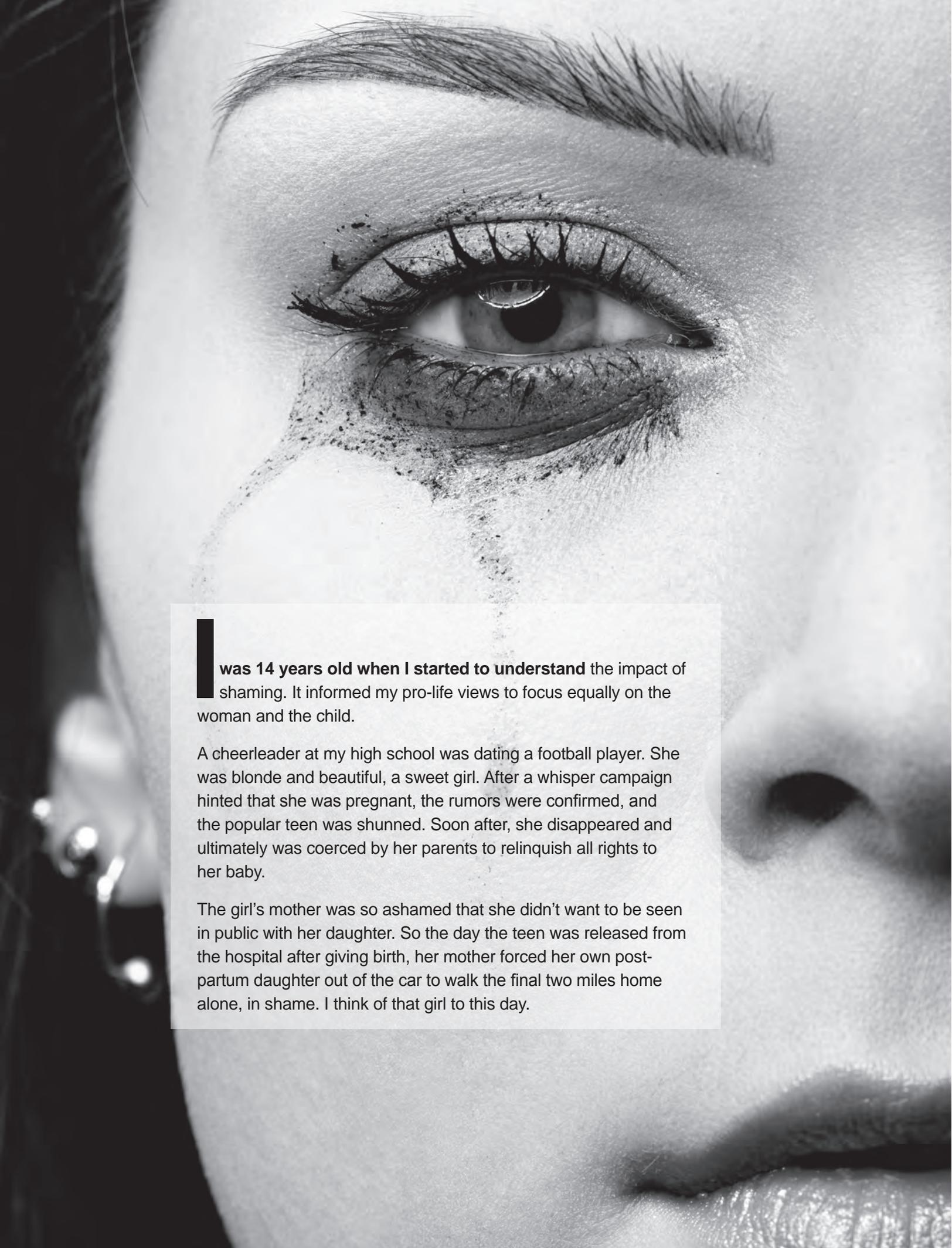
—Mattie Brinkerhoff, *The Revolution*, 2 September 1869

# FEMINISTS FOR LIFE OF AMERICA



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**I** was 14 years old when I started to understand the impact of shaming. It informed my pro-life views to focus equally on the woman and the child.

A cheerleader at my high school was dating a football player. She was blonde and beautiful, a sweet girl. After a whisper campaign hinted that she was pregnant, the rumors were confirmed, and the popular teen was shunned. Soon after, she disappeared and ultimately was coerced by her parents to relinquish all rights to her baby.

The girl's mother was so ashamed that she didn't want to be seen in public with her daughter. So the day the teen was released from the hospital after giving birth, her mother forced her own post-partum daughter out of the car to walk the final two miles home alone, in shame. I think of that girl to this day.

A few years later, *Roe v. Wade* changed everything. Girls – or their parents – could avoid being shamed by hiding their pregnancies and having an abortion. It became a secret shame, because if they ever told, then people would know they had sex and an abortion. Many of these women still live a lifetime with their secret in fear of being shamed.

Shaming extends to big families as well – from cruel remarks to outright discrimination. As a teen I admired the beautiful large family with a dozen happy children with the last name of “Fish” and a house on Pool Lane (seriously). But increasingly after *Roe*, I would see people treat large families with scorn and hostility – as if they were taking something from the rest of us.

Society has determined that poor women, too, have “no business” having babies they can’t afford. They got the message. Most abortions are now performed on those who are the poorest among us.

When I started working at Feminists for Life, there had just been horrible incidents of teens who committed infanticide. Similar stories emerged, and they all had one thing in common. For these teen mothers (and sometimes fathers), the shame of having their parents and other people know they’d had sex was unbearable. Rather than endure that shame, the teens ended the lives of their own infants. Others dropped them off at churches in hope that they would be found. Some paid for that decision in prison, a sentence far worse than any whisper campaign or parental disappointment or anger.

The highest prices of shame are often paid by women and children in the developing world – where women have no vote, little voice, or diminished strength. Women and children are brutalized or even killed by dishonorable cowards, who may include their own relatives.

In so many circumstances, international or domestic, societies shame pregnant women and rarely remember the man’s role in creating children even in the most extreme circumstances. Women who were raped have often been treated shamefully, as if they had to prove to us it wasn’t their fault. Rather than think of the horror imposed on her by the rapist, too many first wonder what she did to “ask for it.”

When women and men don’t do everything “perfect and planned” as society dictates, women or their children suffer and can even die as a result.

## Shaming—rather than loving—destroys lives.

I am proud of the work that we have done together at Feminists for Life to address the lack of resources for pregnant women, parents, birthparents, and victims of violence. But a voice has kept nudging me. FFL needed to shine a light in the darkness, to expose what happens when women get the opposite of support.

It’s time to take inventory of the shamers (including ourselves, if we have participated in shaming), make amends when we can, and create a culture that replaces shame with unconditional love, support, and life.

Because women deserve better,



Serrin M. Foster  
President





# coping with shame, guilt, & fear

by Dr. Margaret Leonhard, Psy.D.

About 25 years ago I worked in a clinic. One day a nurse told me that a college student (whom I will call Meg) had just left the clinic after coming in for a pregnancy test. The nurse said the test was positive, and she had given Meg cab fare; Meg left the clinic for Planned Parenthood for an abortion. When I told the nurse that I was pro-life, she responded that if Meg didn't have an abortion, she would have had to drop out of college. She would have no time to process the fact that she was pregnant; no time to think about the consequences of all of her options; no time to think about how she might talk to the baby's father or her parents about her pregnancy; no time to think about how she might be able to continue with her pregnancy as well as school; no time to find out what resources were available to help her to carry her baby to term and after; no time to realize that many young women have been in her shoes; no referral to the clinic psychologist to help her to process her feelings; and no time to consider the short- and long-term consequences of having an abortion, including post-partum depression.

I can imagine that Meg responded to the news that she was expecting with fear, which would be a reasonable response: pregnancy was not in her plans, and if not handled with love and support, it could derail her education, her career, her financial stability, and her self-image. I can imagine that she experienced feelings of shame and guilt. I can also imagine that she might have felt overwhelmed by a mix of confusing emotions and wanted it all to just go away.

All emotions can at times become overwhelming. Whether positive, negative, or a mix of both, our emotions can feel tangled. At times we need to just sit with them, quietly and with mindfulness, so that they might become untangled and clearer in our hearts and minds.

Understanding our feelings helps us to understand ourselves and to make healthy decisions. Fear, shame, and guilt share common qualities; in fact, shame and guilt are frequently thought of as being different words for the same emotion. However, each is unique. All three lead to emotional and physical symptoms of stress. Many people

use defense mechanisms to avoid recognizing and having to respond to them. However, fear occurs in response to a future, real, or imagined threat, while shame and guilt occur in response to an event in the past.

**The important difference to remember between shame and guilt is that shame refers to a painful feeling about oneself regarding an event or decision one has made, characterized by a strong sense of disgrace, real or imagined dishonor, or belief that the person has brought dishonor upon themselves or significant others. In contrast, feelings of guilt can be characterized in terms of remorseful awareness or self-reproach, or a feeling of responsibility for having caused pain to another.**

Awareness of an unplanned pregnancy might initially cause fear for how the pregnancy might be perceived or responded to by those in our lives whose opinions have great meaning to us. We may feel shame for our actions whether they involve sexual activity that was less than responsible, not living up to our sense of self, or terminating a pregnancy. While feelings of shame for becoming pregnant might generally resolve following the initial shock of discovering the fact that one is pregnant, the shame of having an abortion can last a lifetime. Similarly, feelings of guilt related to becoming pregnant might quickly resolve, while feelings of guilt for having terminated the pregnancy can also last a lifetime.

Rather than “getting rid of it as soon as possible,” one should take time to sit quietly and “be present” with the truly life-altering event that is pregnancy; making decisions out of fear is never wise. The practice of mindfulness techniques is very useful in allowing a person to think clearly and develop a sense of agency or courage to face important life events. Mindfulness techniques are ancient and include meditation, self-reflection, and self-monitoring. They help us to become more aware of our thoughts, feelings, and physical self and allow us

to develop feelings of courage to face life’s challenges. Increasing our feelings of courage also leads to an increase in our feelings of self-efficacy, or the belief that we are capable of effectively managing events in our lives, and by doing so can improve the quality of our lives.



“For the ‘shamers’ it is important for them to examine their own motives and make amends to the person whom they have judged – or better yet to stop before they open their mouths,” says FFL President Serrin Foster. “We have seen the damage from shaming others in the forms of coerced abortions, the shunning of pregnant women and mothers, and, in the most extreme cases, the shamers carrying out ‘honor’ killings while the shamed commit infanticide. Shame on the shamers!”

Allowing our decisions to be controlled by fear, shame, and guilt only perpetuates these negative feelings. In contrast, facing our challenges not only helps to develop our coping skills and improve the quality of our lives, but also allows us to be better equipped to manage challenges across our lifespan. ●



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that it clicked. Shame prevented them from celebrating a date, a date less than nine months before the birth of their first child.” But how has that changed in the past 75 years?

Audrey\* tells the story of her pregnancy in the late 1980s: “I was 15 when I found out I was pregnant. I remember my parents being devastated ... not by the fact that I was pregnant, exactly. They were ashamed of what people would think. The morning after I told them, my mom woke me early and told me to get ready. She didn’t say a single word to me in the car or the waiting room of the clinic. In the doctor’s office she demanded I get an abortion – to the doctor, to me, to the nurse, to anyone who would listen. I was mortified. I didn’t know what I was going to do, but I knew I didn’t want an abortion. I got up, walked out of the clinic and all the way home. Two days later I was on a bus to an unwed mothers’ home in another state. The experience didn’t make me change the decision I made, but it forever changed my relationship with my mother.”

Few daughters have the courage to stand their ground, however. All too often, young mothers are frightened and choose the path of least resistance. “When your family is so ashamed of you that they can’t even look you in the eye, you just want [the pregnancy] to go away,” shared Tamika,\* who was 17 when she became pregnant. “My mom was so relieved when I had my abortion that she took me shopping that afternoon. She rewarded me for killing my child, her grandchild. I don’t think I ever forgave her for that.”

Through years of therapy and participating in Project Rachel through her local church, Tamika has come to terms with her decision. “I can’t blame anyone else for the decision I made, but I still wonder what it would have been like if I hadn’t felt so guilty. I needed my mom to love me and my child, not put me in a position where I would feel the guilt for the rest of my life.”

The guilt and shame of being pregnant doesn’t always end in abortion. Many young women hide their pregnancies in an attempt to avoid judgment.

Shayla, mother to two-year-old Elijah, was 20 when she became pregnant. “I hid my pregnancy from my family until I was nearly three months along. My family was not

Pregnant teens and college students are certainly not a new phenomenon. According to a 2008 Guttmacher Institute publication, 7 percent of 15- to 19-year-olds become pregnant each year in the United States. By the time college-aged pregnancies are included, the rate jumps to 10 percent.

The shaming that goes along with it isn’t new either. The personal experiences told below date back decades. For generations, young women have faced the issue of shame, both real and perceived. This shame has come from family, friends, clergy, and complete strangers. It has pressured them into making decisions they might not have made without it – hiding their pregnancies, making adoption placements, losing touch with people they care about, and sometimes even choosing abortion.

“I was in my early twenties before I realized that my grandparents, who were childhood sweethearts, never celebrated an actual anniversary date, just the year,” shared Molly\* (name changed for privacy). “It wasn’t until my aunt was celebrating her birthday one March

happy with me and made me wish I could have hidden it longer.” Parents aren’t the only ones to provoke a sense of shame. Sometimes it’s other people in the young mothers’ support systems and even strangers. “I hid my pregnancy from church members and friends for as long as I could. I did not gain much weight through most of my pregnancy, so as long as I wore baggy clothes, most people couldn’t tell,” Shayla continued. “My church family found out when I was nearly seven months along after my pastor asked when I was due. Most of my school friends did not even know I was pregnant until I posted pictures of Elijah on my Facebook page.”

On a personal note, I was shocked at the liberty taken by complete strangers when I was pregnant. “Tsk. Tsk. Tsk. Babies having babies.” “You should have known better.” Then there was my personal favorite, “How will you find a man to marry you now?” Huh?!? All of these and more were directed at me, or whispered within earshot, when I was pregnant with my oldest child. That last gem was from the cashier in the checkout line.



What they didn’t realize was that I had a man. Well, sort of. I was in college, but I was also married. My fingers had just gotten too chubby to wear my wedding ring. It seemed to happen most often in the grocery store and church. To avoid the sideways glances, pitying faces, and disapproving looks, I stopped going to church.

Unfortunately, not getting groceries wasn’t an option. I tried to avoid going alone, dragging my husband (and his wedding ring) along with me whenever possible.

But while these total strangers were trying to shame me for being “unmarried” and pregnant, I didn’t need their judgment. If anything, I needed their help. I wasn’t the only one.

**Shaming is not a preventative act when the young woman is already pregnant. That ship has sailed, and there is nothing you can say to her that she hasn’t already said to herself.**

Patrice was 19 and in her first semester of her sophomore year in college when she became unexpectedly pregnant. “I was devastated because I was the first person in my family to leave our small town and go off to college. By the time I graduated from high school, three of the girls in the group I ran with were pregnant. But no one really said anything to them. In fact, they were harassed less because they weren’t going off to college. It seemed that all the scandal and condemnation was thrown at me.”

Just a month before she turned 16, Michelle\* became pregnant. She hid her pregnancy from her parents until she was five months along. “I went to a friend’s house in [another town] and then had all my doctor’s appointments there, and I hid it from my parents and most of my friends. I called my mom and dad and told them I was pregnant five months later. They were very disappointed in me and were in denial. The baby daddy wanted me to get an abortion but I am against it ... I felt very scared and alone. I thought I wouldn’t be a good mom because I was still a kid myself and just thought I wasn’t ready quite yet. I dropped out of high school when I found out I was pregnant so I never did get a reaction from teachers or anything, but I lost a lot of friends.”

Marie\* was planning on heading to college the fall after she found out she was pregnant. “My friends spent a lot of time trying to convince me that going off to college was a sell-out, especially now that I had a baby. They didn’t think I had a chance to finish college before, and now with a baby, there was just no way.” How did their

reactions help Marie or her child? We should Refuse to Choose® between young mothers and their children, and they should refuse to choose between their children and their educations.

The next time you find out a young woman is pregnant, whether you know her or not, take inventory of how you react. Even if you make comments out of earshot, what are you saying to your friends and daughters who may later face an unplanned pregnancy? You may forget your shaming remarks, but they won't. If you're directly shaming her, think about the purpose. Shaming is not a preventative act when the young woman is already pregnant. That ship has sailed, and there is nothing you can say to her that she hasn't already said to herself. To be pro-woman and pro-life, you need to swallow any unhelpful feelings and judgments and provide love and support. The vast majority of women choose abortion because they lack the emotional support and financial resources they need to have the child. Don't be a part of the abortion problem; be a part of the solution. ●



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Help FFL help women and children! Your monthly donations provide core support as FFL works to bring about positive, holistic change. To begin your monthly contributions, visit [www.feministsforlife.org/support](http://www.feministsforlife.org/support) or fill out the electronic transfer form below and send it (along with a voided check) to FFL. Donations will be debited on the first business day of each month and will be put to work immediately by FFL. Your participation helps FFL continue the tradition of the early feminists—pro-woman and pro-life!

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*Thank you!*

TAF07-14



## shaming women around the world *by Laura Klucik*

**A**mina Bibi was an 18-year-old college student. She was also a survivor of a gang rape. In March, hopeless after learning that charges were dropped against her five attackers, Amina set herself on fire in front of her local Pakistani police station. Burned over 80 percent of her body, Amina later died. Self-immolation by rape victims is not uncommon in Pakistan; rape cases are rarely prosecuted.

In Pakistan, as well as many societies of the world, particularly India, the Middle East, and parts of Africa and Asia, the publicly perceived “honor” of the family trumps everything – and everyone. The standing of the women in the family directly affects the standing of the men. Should a woman be perceived to be shamed by the actions of another, such as through rape, or is perceived to be shamed by her own action, such as through an extra-marital affair, **the price she pays for family honor to be restored is violence.**

This so-called “honor-based violence” (HBV) includes assault, forced marriage, rape, acid attack, or murder, such as being doused with kerosene and set on fire. HBV can occur for any of the following: choice of sexual partner, choice of marital partner, pre-marital affair, extra-marital affair, same-sex relationship, choice of dress, interaction

with opposite sex, dowry approval, and issues related to land. While the known number of “honor killings” is 5,000 each year, many go unreported. About 90 percent of these killings of women are at the hands of their own families.

Again in the name of honor, this time in India, one woman’s in-laws forced her to have six abortions in eight years, and another woman’s husband beat her with a hockey stick and bit her face to the point of disfigurement. The reason? They were pregnant with girls in a culture that strongly prefers sons. It is estimated that 700,000 girls are aborted every year in India, and female infanticide is responsible for a 75 percent higher mortality rate for girls between the ages of one and five than for boys of the same age.

In addition to gender preference, other strong cultural customs and taboos exist regarding virginity and sex. These make the shame and stigma of being raped especially acute. A survey of literature on rape as a weapon of war reveals that “[Rape] victims are shunned by their families and communities and many become pregnant as a result of their rapes.” (Cassandra Clifford, May 2008) Rape is currently being used as a weapon of war in Syria, Sudan, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Myanmar, and the Central African Republic. Whether a raped mother keeps

her child or terminates her pregnancy, she “struggle[s] with the feelings of hate and shame regarding the conception” and, in the case of an abortion, “may also face guilt and mental anguish for the loss of a child, or due to a conflict of moral or religious beliefs.” (Amanda Pinto, November 2013)

Shame plays a central role in international sex trafficking as well. Sex traffickers, also called human traffickers, use a variety of methods to “condition” their victims, including the threat of shaming them by revealing their activities to their family and their families’ friends. If a woman reveals that she has been forced into the sex trade, she is considered tainted and will be shunned for bringing dishonor on her family and her community. The isolation further entrenches her in that life. According to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Sex Trafficking Fact Sheet, the psychological risks of sex trafficking include: shame, self-loathing (complex post-traumatic stress disorder), suicidal thoughts, and suicide. The Fact Sheet lists miscarriage, sexually transmitted diseases, sterility, and forced or coerced abortions as some of the many physical risks faced by sex-trafficking survivors. That government officials are ashamed to admit trafficking is happening in their nations makes efforts to combat it through legal means that much more challenging.

Isolation and shaming also have a terrible effect on women in countries where the female is blamed for becoming pregnant outside of marriage. In Rundu, Namibia, for example, these expectant mothers live such isolated lives that they have to avoid going into town, causing them to miss pregnancy check-ups.

What can be done to address such problems when individuals, communities, cultures, and even nations experience this crippling, killing shame? Working toward solutions is hugely challenging and often controversial.

Abortion is often demanded as a “solution” for women

around the world, and pregnant women are forced by family members to have abortions because of the perceived shame the pregnancy brings. Some women’s advocates tell survivors of war rapes resulting in pregnancy that terminating their pregnancies is necessary in the name of justice or “reproductive rights.” One report calls bearing one’s child from a war rape “forced maternity.” The former head of the U.S. Agency for International Development goes so far as to advocate the U.S. government funding of abortions for foreign victims of war rape. On the other hand, the further violence of abortion can increase a woman’s shame and add guilt. In addition, the woman can lose the one positive thing that came out of the trauma of her rape, her innocent child.

A mother’s loss of a child also comes about from another solution, that of “baby boxes” or baby safe havens (BSH), through which a baby can be surrendered anonymously with no questions asked. In many cultures a child of the “wrong” gender or one born with disabilities or serious illnesses can cause intense shame to

the mother and family. BSH are in use in China, Russia, South Korea, Canada, Pakistan, the Philippines, India, South Africa, Japan, and a dozen European nations. In China alone it is estimated that 10,000 babies are abandoned each year. In South Korea it is believed that having a baby out of wedlock is deeply shameful, and a woman in this situation can be pressured by her family to have an abortion or to place her child for adoption; many use baby boxes. Proponents say that BSH and baby boxes save children from being left in sewers, snow drifts, or the trash. Others say that the mere existence of BSH encourages abandonment and that the care of these vast numbers of abandoned children overloads private and public institutions. Human rights groups argue that the children should know their parentage and also that these methods go against key provisions of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. The United



*Baby safe havens are in use in China, Russia, South Korea, Canada, Pakistan, the Philippines, India, South Africa, Japan, and a dozen European nations.*

Nations can also show that “in some cases it’s pimps, a male relative or someone who’s exploiting the woman” who is using the baby box to dump her child.

The solutions mentioned above focus on the symptoms, not the problem, which is largely shame with cultural roots so deep that often death is preferable. Since according to psychiatrist James Gilligan, “shame motivates the wish for concealment,” shame must be brought into the open. Increasing public awareness through social media and education is critical. But because these cultural and religious mores, “honor” concepts, and social stigmas which brutally hurt women and their children are deeply held and centuries old, it likely will take generations to remove them. In addition to awareness, immediate short-term solutions must include protection for victims and potential victims as well as victim/survivor treatment and advocacy. Television programs and media campaigns can put pressure on societies and governments to create long-term law-based solutions. Since victims are often putting their lives at risk if they speak out, the catalyst for long-term solutions may have to come from international pressure, both to protect women (and others) who report violence and to punish perpetrators.

There is some movement here. For example, India’s recent passage of tough penalties on rapists and fast-tracking of rape cases holds promise for a start toward abolishing those crimes. Regarding sex-trafficking crimes, the passage of U.S. Representative Christopher Smith’s bill “Trafficking Victims Protection Act of 2000” (TVPA) works toward ending the cycle of shaming and violence. Initially funded at \$95 million, TVPA and its subsequent reauthorizations include provisions for law enforcement, prosecution, and incarceration of perpetrators; victim recovery programs; education programs; and annual reporting linked to foreign aid and business contracts of perpetrator nations.

In addition, as of April 2014, 159 nations had ratified the United Nations Palermo Protocol of 2000 to “prevent, suppress and

punish trafficking in persons, especially women and children.” These steps are crucially important, and more of the same is needed to expose and eradicate these global barbarities and to protect women.

Amina and thousands of others like her around the globe are desperate. The shame leveled against them incites a violent reaction. Shame leaves women, and often their children, dishonored, disavowed, disfigured, destroyed, or dead. Women deserve better. ●

## ПОЗОР ХУЖЕ СМЕРТИ

Shame is worse than death.

*Russian Proverb*





shaming  
**large families**  
by Susan E. Thomas

In Thomas Malthus's *An Essay on the Principle of Population* (1798), he predicted that food would run out by 1890. In order to avoid mass poverty, he recommended causing the deaths of "extra" children and those who were impoverished already, saying:

"All the children born, beyond what would be required to keep up the population to this level, must necessarily perish, unless room be made for them by the deaths of grown persons ... We should facilitate, instead of foolishly and vainly endeavoring to impede, the operations of nature in producing this mortality ... Instead of recommending cleanliness to the poor, we should encourage contrary habits ... and court the return of the plague."

In 1968, Paul Ehrlich of Stanford University wrote: "[We need] compulsory birth regulation ... [through] the addition of temporary sterilants to water supplies or staple food." And, in 1984, William Aiken wrote, "... massive human diebacks would be good. It is our duty to cause them. It is our species' duty, relative to the whole, to eliminate 90 percent of our numbers."

Today, fear of overpopulation is woven into the fabric of our collective sense of moral responsibility. Since 1960, the average family size in the U.S. has been on a path of steady decline – from 3.67 in that year to 3.12 in 2013. European countries reported a shockingly low rate of 1.38 in 2005. Families with four or more children are scarce, causing people to gawk at the mother towing a line of little ones through a grocery store or restaurant.

Comments like “Are they all yours?” “Do they have the same father?” “You know what causes that, right?” and worse, shame the mother – telling her she is an anomaly, worthy of pity or contempt. I uncovered the following first-hand testimonies to this reality:

- “We were referred to as a ‘circus’ when passing by a perfect stranger at a flea market.”
- “I was told by an aunt that we are overpopulated enough. If I wanted to be around lots of kids, I should do something useful, like become a teacher.”
- “We often get turned down to stay in RV parks because of our family’s size.”
- “A random lady behind me at the check-out line ... said, ‘Maybe if you didn’t have so many kids you wouldn’t need that welfare help.’”
- “... when I had a miscarriage, [my mother-in-law] told me ... it was God’s way of telling me I’d had enough.”
- “... not one single person, including family, EVER welcomed news of a new baby with joy. It has ALWAYS been, ‘Are you serious? You’ve got to be kidding me!’ and worse.”

- “... I was considered not feminist enough because I had too many children! And when they suspected that I was not a proponent of abortion, I lost my job.”
- “My Ottawa doctor told me she would not have me as a patient if I did not have an abortion.”

In order to protect future generations from suffering, we quite often – in a baffling twist of logic – propose killing them in the womb. **In fact, 60 percent of American women seeking abortion already have one child, more than 30 percent have two or more, and 75 percent of aborting women abort because they have others to support (including children).** But many demographics experts believe our social conscience is way off base. Dr. Nicholas Eberstadt, a political economist, reported, “Human numbers on the planet in the 20th century almost quadrupled ... and over this same period of time, the international inflation-adjusted price of rice and wheat and corn dropped by about 70 percent.”

Population debates aside, mothers of large families need not be shamed nor feel ashamed at all. One mother of six shared an inspiring encouragement she received from an elderly man in a restaurant:

“I know a lot of people probably thought you would come in here and make a loud mess, but I had six kids and didn’t take any [guff], and it looks like you guys don’t either! You have a nice and polite young family!” ●





shaming  
birthmothers  
*by Jen Hawkins*

**M**ercifully, Feminists for Life phrases my actions 13 years ago as “placing my baby for adoption.” But the shame associated with “giving him up” can still sting. It doesn’t have to.

Underemployed in March of 2000, I visited the local free clinic with flu-like symptoms. My shock at testing pregnant was only eclipsed by the staff’s astonishment when I asked about adoption. One nurse corrected me twice – surely I meant *abortion* – before sighing wearily and referring me to a “counselor.” She greeted me as follows:

“You don’t really want to go through a pregnancy, do you?”

“I’m here to talk about adoption –”

“Adoption is just so hard, honey. Are you sure abortion is a ‘no’? Well, a fetus can sense when it’s ... unwelcome and self-miscarry. Spirit can always re-enter another body, a better time ...”

And so on. Amazingly, she’d granted my fetus the capacity to kill himself without granting him a rightful *self* to kill (let alone preserve).

“You can still *will* it gone, honey,” my counselor said.

No doubt this woman meant to spare me the shame of publicly “giving up” (backing out, forsaking) a baby. Certainly there are few bodily states more overt than advanced pregnancy. And while abortion is falsely touted as the surgical equivalent of “out of sight, out of mind,” adoption leaves witnesses – in my case, a sarcastic, elf-eyed redhead who cracks his knuckles to 80s pop.

But like those who would “protect” women from information on fetal development and abortion’s dangers (thereby denying their right to informed consent), my counselor not only undermined my son, she underestimated me. Thanks to my son, I would gain a sense of purpose and resilience I may never otherwise have found.

I didn’t know it then. I knew I lived in a filthy walk-up with no bathroom. I was hopelessly in love with an abusive alcoholic whose cut-rate vasectomy had failed. I had no family or community ties. **I knew adoption was viewed, at best, as “quaint” – a bygone, vaguely religious relic, like prairie bonnets or prayer cards. At worst, adoption was considered ruthless child abandonment. But I also knew the person growing inside me was already precisely, irreplaceably, himself – and my whole body was rising to bear witness.**

Others treated my swollen belly as an unseemly lapse in feminine hygiene – with shudders and averted eyes. If I had a nickel for every person who asked “Why not get an abortion?” I could have afforded to keep my son. Days were spent agonizing over adoptive candidates’ profiles. Nights were spent waddling after the father to various bars, where his friends blew smoke in my face and cracked dead-baby jokes. Where all the liberated women thanked God they weren’t “breeders” or “brood cows.” Rumor had it I got pregnant in order to “trap” the father, but of course he never threatened to leave until I was carrying his child. Ultimately, *I left him*. But not until I realized the life I was leading was unsafe for a baby did it occur to me to save myself.

I eventually restored contact with my family and entrusted my son to an aunt and uncle through open adoption; the arrangement holds unique sorrows and joys. I went on to teach poetry at the local teen-parent center, interview national luminaries for my college radio station, and graduate *magna cum laude* with two degrees and a record number of scholarships.

I can’t say the shaming ended with my son’s birth. Honored to help at-risk mothers voice their fragile hopes and valid fears, I nonetheless taught under a gag rule: the principal warned me to lie about the adoption, my so-called “betrayal.” At my son’s christening, a stranger wrenched him from my arms on behalf of his “real family.” I’ve since learned that the fear that crazed birthmothers will abscond with their newborns is common among adoptive parents. All would do well to remember, as one birthmother has said, that placing a child in “a better situation ... takes a great sense of perspective and humility.” Few women would jeopardize the infant to whom they have already devoted so much.

**Painfully, those most denigrating of my non-violent choice have been women. I blame fear.** While men can relegate pregnancy to that murky “female troubles” zone, most women confronted with my story can’t help but ponder what their actions would be under similarly inopportune circumstances. A woman’s refusal to be alienated from her unborn – from her own dynamic body – is a radical act with profound social and political implications.

For a while, the grief of adoption can wring a woman out like a rag. But then she remembers that instead of remains cooling in a biohazard bin, there exists a warm, vital being in a cradle, dreaming. Instead of irreparable absence, there are first steps, first words, first crayon scrawls and poems, inside jokes and valentines. And each year, instead of marking an absolute ending, she celebrates a birthday. ●





shaming  
sexual assault  
survivors  
by Joyce McCauley-Benner

“She shouldn’t have dressed like that; she was asking for it.”

“They were drinking; what did she expect?”

“She let her hair down; I thought she was flirting.”

“It’s she said versus he said.”

These are the familiar statements heard by survivors of rape all too often. Inevitably, shame is intricately linked to rape. Not only has the perpetrator committed an act of horrific violence against the victim, but society (sometimes unconsciously) hinders the healing process with statements like those above. A victim is often left feeling unworthy and at fault, and, most detrimentally, *ashamed*.

**“They were drinking; what did she expect?”**

Many rape crisis centers help survivors identify the impact shame has on them. The Family Crisis Center of Northwest Iowa notes:

“Feelings of shame may also affect her decision to report the crime to the police or to reach out for help. Because of actions which occurred prior to the assault (e.g., hitchhiking, drinking) she may believe others will blame her. She may also believe her previous sexual experiences and details of the assault will be scrutinized.”

Discussing rape is hard enough, but knowing that demanding questions may follow makes it even harder, and many victims often choose not to speak about it at all. Incest survivors feel the same burden, especially when reputations of family are at stake or when the assault starts at a young age and the victims are not even aware of what is happening to them.

When pregnancy results from rape or incest, it is harder to stay silent. Many friends and family members respond to such news with a referral for abortion. Why? Well-meaning people often confuse terminating the pregnancy with erasing the abuse that was suffered. They don’t want the victim to be “burdened” with the “rapist’s child.” Even these thoughts are tied closely with shame and can unwittingly contribute to more shame for the victim. We do not want to burden her with the reminder of the rape. This thought is so ingrained in our societal consciousness

that until recently, very few states had laws that protected survivors and their children from rapists getting custody. Most people assume pregnancies from rape are terminated or should be terminated. Yet abortion cannot and will not take the pain, or the rape itself, away. It simply is not possible. Abortion only terminates a pregnancy. The rape still happened. Secondly, a child is an individual. What that child represents to his/her mother is often love and healing and is not valued only by that singular event, but by everything that comes later. However, due to this shame mentality, for those who do choose to have their child, a tumultuous journey begins.

In the online blog, *Surviving the Memories*, a woman who became pregnant through rape explains her own journey:

“Unfortunately, people in whom I’d confided decided to spread the tale abroad, which made it very difficult. I recall that many times, stepping outside the door with my pregnant belly was an exercise in shame, because I was so afraid of what other people thought. I felt very, very dirty.”

As the pregnancy continues, the assault can no longer be hidden or silenced. It must be dealt with, not only by the survivor, but by those around her.

Incest victims are often subjected to abortion in order to cover up the assailant’s crimes. A personal friend, Suzanne (name changed for privacy), began experiencing abuse by her stepfather when she was 6. At age 9, she had become pregnant due to her early maturing and his constant abuse. She was immediately taken to an abortion clinic, where the family reported she was 14. No crime was reported, and after the abortion was performed, she was sent home. When it happened again at age 11, Suzanne hoped someone would notice a problem and she secretly hoped the clinic would turn in her stepfather. She was sent home again, having had her second abortion before she was even a teenager. It was easier for the clinic and the family not to deal with the shame of the situation. They thought they had done Suzanne a favor, but Suzanne’s shame only grew, fueled now by her own questions of whether it was her fault, since no crime was reported.

The source of shame lies in silence and confusion. When crimes are hidden, they can perpetuate. When feelings and

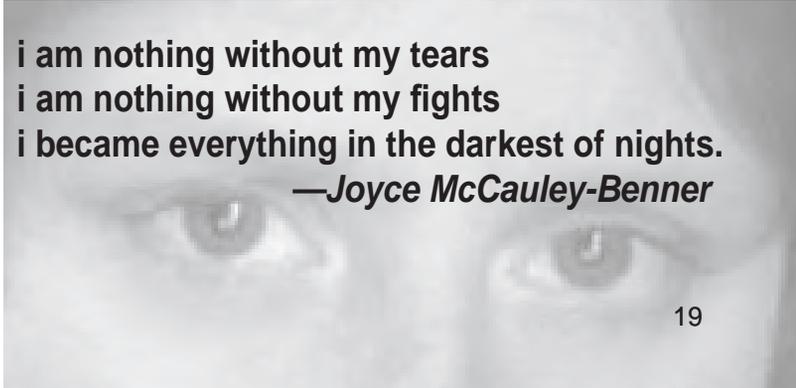
situations are not discussed in a healthy way, shame grows. Suzanne did not understand anything that was happening to her and no one intervened. Even adult survivors have to learn not to blame themselves and not to let society’s judging questions cloud their own self-worth.

The rape survivor came to this wonderful conclusion about her pregnancy from rape. She continues in her blog:

“At first, I felt that what had happened was a cosmic joke. I thought my body had betrayed me. But it didn’t; it simply did what a woman’s body does when it’s fertile and producing an egg that is fertilized by sperm. In a funny way, what helped me make sense of it was this: A man can produce semen anytime he wants, but I only produce an egg for 24-48 hours a month. Therefore it was primarily my body and not his act that called my baby into being. This isn’t an attempt to deny the horror of being raped, or the contribution of that to the pregnancy. But if he’d raped me shortly before or after he did, I wouldn’t have [gotten] pregnant – my body determined that, and this way of making sense of it has been enormously empowering for me.”

In my own journey of victory over violence, I, too, came to a new conclusion. Regardless of whether the father of my baby was the rapist or my boyfriend (I did not know until after the birth), I did know who his mother was – and she was me! How could I allow yet another piece of myself to be taken away? That knowledge was enough!

Shame of pregnancy from rape or incest is fueled by our fear of digging deep into this issue – from the work needed to eradicate sexual violence, to the offering of an outpouring of resources and support. We must be willing to do this hard work, we must be willing to talk about this hard issue, and most important, we must be willing to stop the judgment – of victims, of ourselves. Only then are the fires of shame extinguished. ●



**i am nothing without my tears  
i am nothing without my fights  
i became everything in the darkest of nights.**  
—Joyce McCauley-Benner

# shaming poor mothers

by Julia Smucker



“It is disgusting that someone would chose [sic] to go out of their way to create more children they cannot afford and cannot properly care for.”

“You should have to have a certain amount of income to have a baby!”

Such comments are particularly blunt examples of the hostility often directed against mothers who are poor, whether they receive assistance from family, local agencies, the federal government, religious communities, or community resource centers including pregnancy resource centers – or go without asking help of others and struggle to make it on their own. These all-too-common attitudes highlight a disturbing pair of social stigmas: on choosing life for one’s child under difficult circumstances, and on needing help in the first place.

Former FFL intern and College Outreach Program Coordinator Chaunie Brusie faced this form of shaming when she was pregnant as a senior in college. She qualified for a government program to help women, infants and children (WIC) and used food stamps, which brought her peace of mind that she would get the best for herself and her baby. Her peace of mind was turned to shame, however, when she was publicly humiliated by the cashiers and people standing in line for accidentally choosing the “wrong” brand of cereal – one not covered by WIC. In her letters to FFL President Serrin Foster, which were later published in FFL’s magazine *The American Feminist* (Fall/Winter 2008), Chaunie asked “Why should one mother be treated differently than another? Does one mother deserve to be pitied, while the other celebrated, simply because of age, status, or circumstance? Is there any wonder why women are driven to abortion?” She added, **“A woman should be commended, not condemned, for doing all she can to support herself and her child during school.”** Today Chaunie is a registered nurse working part-time in a labor and delivery ward, author of “Two Tiny Blue Lines” about her unplanned pregnancy, and an FFL speaker. She and her husband are looking forward to welcoming their fourth baby.

Sadly, not all stories of the disparaging of poor pregnant women and mothers end on such a hopeful note. At worst, the consequences have included systematic efforts “to purify the gene pool and lessen the welfare burden of ‘defective’ individuals,” as a recent editorial in the Jesuit magazine *America* has summarized. In a chilling summary of the history of the eugenics movement in the United States, the editors go on to report, “Between 1907 and 1981, 63,000

Americans deemed insane, feeble-minded, criminally inclined or otherwise ‘unfit’ were sterilized at the hands of state eugenics boards. Most of the victims were poor women, and a disproportionate number were people of color.”

A subtler variation of the social pressure against childbearing for poor women argues not from their inherent “defectiveness” as such, but from the tragedy of children being born into poverty. In a February editorial in the *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, Andrea Levy expresses profound misgivings about “the prospect of forcing children into a world in which we can’t guarantee food or protection – let alone love.” Setting up a harsh dichotomy between being pro-life and pro-poor (or even, ironically, pro-life and pro-child), Levy writes, “I myself do not believe that the soil of my salvation could be composted upon the suffering lives of women and children.” She concludes that she is pro-choice because she “revere[s] children,” a conclusion that is premised on the unquestioning assumption that for certain children, a life of poverty is the sole and inevitable alternative to being aborted. While Levy’s argument may at a certain level be motivated by compassion, a response by Ohio FFL member Marilyn Kopp highlights how this line of reasoning, too, devalues the poor. Kopp responds,

“Deciding that someone’s life has no value because she might be poor or abused is not a workable standard. Do we really want to tell those children that they are better off dead? We need to address poverty by finding solutions to eradicate poverty, not to eradicate the children of poor people.”

Levy’s acceptance of injustice as an inevitability, to which abortion is the only alternative, is reminiscent of *Roe v. Wade* attorney Sarah Weddington’s argument, which – as FFL President Serrin Foster pointed out on the 40th anniversary of the Supreme Court decision – rightly decried the lack of resources available to low-income women who become pregnant (including students, who are rarely financially independent), but failed to consider the possibility that this injustice could actually be changed.

Foster says, “Many women, especially poor and pregnant women, have gotten the message, ‘Shame on you. Don’t make that baby our problem. And if you can’t figure it out then get an abortion.’” According to the Guttmacher Institute,

Planned Parenthood's former research arm, 61 percent of women who have abortions are already mothers. Sixty-nine percent are economically disadvantaged. "Abortion represents failure on many levels," added Foster.

When women lack the means to provide for themselves and their children, making pregnancy the problem only masks the systemic problem of poverty. Likewise, **stigmatizing the need for help only obscures life-affirming options for women who face such need.** To overcome this double bind requires both tangible support structures and broader social attitude checks, in order that no woman is pressured into the cruel choice between a life of deprivation for her child and no life at all.

What if, instead of shaming women for parenting while poor, more focus was put on a pathway out of poverty? "Education and support by fathers are two essential ways to eliminate the feminization of poverty. Connecting poor women – including those who already have dependents – to pregnancy resource centers that can lead women through the maze of private and public resources is also imperative as we work toward ending abortion among those at highest risk," says Foster.

Raising families out of poverty is far better than exacerbating the problem by treating the very need for help as a cause for shame. ●

### Support from Fathers to Prevent Poverty

FFL successfully advocated the 1995 Child Support Act to stop coerced abortions and the feminization of poverty among mothers and children abandoned by fathers. Instead, we encourage fathers to support the children they helped to create. FFL's "You Have Better Choices" brochure informs men of their rights and responsibilities and tells pregnant women what they need to know if a man attempts to coerce a woman into an abortion by threats to withhold child support.

### Education to End Poverty

Feminists for Life's flagship College Outreach Program seeks to help pregnant women, parents, and birthparents complete their education, since college education has been statistically connected to reduction of poverty rates among single mothers. FFL's Pregnancy Resource Forums have been held on top college campuses from coast to coast and inspired the Pregnancy Assistance Fund, which distributes grants to states to implement on-campus programs to help pregnant women, parents, and birthmothers.

One model program inspired by Feminists for Life's College Outreach Program is Mira-Via, formerly Room at the Inn, a maternity home adjacent to Belmont Abbey College in North Carolina that focuses on caring for those at highest risk in a loving, shame-free zone. At FFL Pregnancy Resource Forums moderated by Foster in April 2014 at Wofford College and Converse College in South Carolina, Mira-Via Executive Director Jeannie Wray drove home the importance of raising women out of poverty by helping them complete their education: **"Nearly 40 percent of single mothers with children under the age of 18 live in poverty, even if they have a high school diploma. But if they manage to get a college degree then the number drops to 9 percent."**

### End Coercive Policies Proven to Triple Abortion Rates Among Poor Women

In 1995, FFL fought the so-called mandatory "family cap" in welfare reform. "We feared cutting off benefits for the children of poor women would lead to tragic choices. Sadly, we were proven right. In an experiment on poor women and children in New Jersey that received a waiver to test the child exclusion provisions, government coercion worked," said Foster. According to a study by Rutgers University, while pregnancy rates among the overall population decreased, abortion rates increased significantly – up by 1,400 in four years. In fact, City University of New York researchers concluded that after welfare reform, poor women were more than three times as likely to have an abortion.

### Get (or Give) Help Now

"Raising Kids on A Shoestring" is a national directory published by FFL that is filled with free and frugal resources and creative solutions for pregnant women, expectant fathers, parents – including adoptive parents and parents with special-needs babies – birthparents, and their counselors. It is available online for free at [www.feministsforlife.org/RKOAS](http://www.feministsforlife.org/RKOAS) or you may order individual or bulk copies at [www.feministsforlife.org/covetablestuff](http://www.feministsforlife.org/covetablestuff).



# shaming women into abortion

by *Kristen Walker Hatten*

Planned Parenthood’s website is carefully designed to have a psychological effect on the visitor: the muted blues and browns, the friendly and helpful tone, the attractive and happy models – it all comes across as calming, authoritative, compassionate, and informative. But not *too* informative.

The most cleverly crafted pages are the ones addressing a woman’s two “options” besides abortion: adoption and parenting. Here are a few excerpts from a feature called “Some Questions To Ask Yourself If You’re Thinking About Adoption:”

- What would it mean for my future if I had a child now?
- Can I accept not being my child’s primary parent?
- Would I consider abortion?
- Am I prepared to go through pregnancy and childbirth?
- Will I be able to cope with the feeling of loss that I may have?
- How do I feel about other women who choose to place their children for adoption?
- How important is it to me what other people will think about my decision?

A pregnant visitor to this site might get just enough of this subtle shaming and fear-mongering to get her in the clinic door, but surprisingly, many post-abortive women agree that no one at the clinic directly shamed them.

“The shaming I witnessed was never in direct interactions with patients,” says Jewels Green, post-abortive mother, former clinic worker turned pro-life advocate. “In the lunchroom the staff would talk about patients, and the negative attitudes were often reserved for those mothers who changed their minds and chose to continue their pregnancies.”

The average clinic worker probably feels sympathy and concern for the abortive patient. “The abortion facility where I worked made no strategic use of ‘shaming’ whatsoever,” says Green, past editor of FFL’s magazine, *The American Feminist*. “In the years I worked there every patient was treated with dignity and respect, and I mean it.” She goes on to point out the vast difference between clinic management – often focused solely on the bottom line and how to grow it – and the worker making an hourly wage, coming into constant contact with patients and feeling compassion for them.



***“For the most part, we do the shaming for them.”***

“While I now find the brutal reality of abortion morally abhorrent and indefensible, the majority of clinic workers believe they are providing a necessary service that will ultimately help these women and their families,” says Green.

So do abortion providers run a shame-free business? Not on your life. They use shame; in fact, they *require* it. But for the most part, we do the shaming for them.

*How many kids do you already have? How old are you? Aren't you still in school? Haven't you ever heard of a condom? Your life will never be the same. You honestly think you can do this? I don't see how you even have a choice.*

A clinic worker doesn't need to say any of these things to an abortion-minded mother if her parents, the baby's father, her siblings, her friends, and her mentors are all saying it for them.

(Although it's worth noting that Planned Parenthood's self-questionnaire about adoption, though more artfully executed, has a similar effect.)

“I did feel shame in my pregnancy because I hid my pregnancy and the abortion from family,” says post-abortive mother Johanna Young. “The shame was not caused by the people at the clinic though, but rather my baby's father and the stigma caused by society towards a young, unmarried mother ... I was afraid of disappointing my parents with my pregnancy, who sent me to college with high hopes for my future. I was afraid of what people would say and do, and how they would treat me ... I didn't feel like I had enough support to get through my pregnancy, keep the baby, and still succeed in life.”

And so it goes: a young woman, deeply ashamed of her pregnancy, goes into a clinic and comes out ... even more ashamed.

“After my abortion my shame skyrocketed,” says Young, “because not only did I have a secret pregnancy, but also a secret abortion in addition to that ... I couldn’t hide it anymore so I started having angry outbursts when under stress, which only added more shame because I was embarrassed with how I acted during my outbursts.”

Young’s shame spiral is not uncommon. Alongside “guilt,” it is the most common word one sees in corresponding with post-abortive women. It is there before the abortion, driving her to it, and it is often stronger afterwards.

“After my abortion, my shame increased exponentially. It was overwhelming and coalesced with my guilt and conspired to kill me,” says Jewels Green, one of many women who attempted suicide after an abortion.

**The good news: Without shame, the abortion industry couldn’t exist.**

**The bad news: We are a long way from a culture in which every pregnant woman is celebrated with, comforted, and supported.**

The ashamed woman seeks an abortion, feels more shame, and often finds herself right back at the clinic for another abortion, her lack of self-worth having driven her to make decisions she never intended to make again. It’s quite telling that, according to the Guttmacher Institute, 45 percent of abortions are performed on women who have already had one.

The good news: Without shame, the abortion industry couldn’t exist.

The bad news: We are a long way from a culture in which every pregnant woman is celebrated with, comforted, and supported. Until we get there, shame will keep driving women and their children into the arms of an industry that only gains when women lose. ●

# Ask Serrin



**Q.** My daughter just told me she is pregnant. I haven't stopped crying. She is in high school making good grades and had everything ahead of her. Now what?? I am stunned that she threw it all away for a moment, but I am also pro-life and want to support them both. What do I do to help her make the best decision? I am still her mom!

**A.** I know you are mourning the loss of the life you expected for your daughter, but we also celebrate the life within your daughter – your grandchild.

Invite her to talk to a counselor at a pregnancy resource center near you. They can be a huge help in making the best nonviolent choice for your daughter and grandchild. You don't mention how old your daughter is. There is a big difference between the capacity of a 13-year-old and an 18-year-old. Is the best choice to marry? To be a single parent? Would you consider raising this child as a grandparent? What about placing the baby for adoption (open, closed, or semi-open so that she gets updates)?

Whichever she chooses, her education should be a part of the plan. Then respect and support her decision.

Know this: Pregnancy is a detour. With your support it won't have to be a dead end.

**Q.** I am a father and was pretty much devastated when I recently learned that my daughter was pregnant. My wife and I married because we got pregnant. I did everything possible to raise my daughter so that she would be protected from shame and spared from this. I wanted the best for her! How am I supposed to react? I feel like I have failed.

**A.** You are still her father. Now you are a grandfather, too. Put yourself in her shoes, the ones that likely danced on your shoes when she was little. Few of us measure up perfectly to our parents' dreams for us. Release the shame, anger, and

disappointment by talking to a trusted adviser or counselor. Stand by her. Love her. Support her. Support them. That's what fathers – and grandfathers – do. She is probably quite scared and needs her dad more than ever before. Inside she is still your little girl. Trust me when I say that if you are there for her, it will turn out better for everyone.

**Q.** My son got someone pregnant, and it wasn't even his girlfriend. He hasn't "manned up," so he is having his paycheck garnished. He wants nothing to do with her or his own child. I want to know my grandchild! Do I have rights?

**A.** Laws vary from state to state, and then judges (who have a lot of latitude) will take many factors into consideration. Check with an attorney who specializes in family law. Prepare for that meeting by looking up your state in this chart of state statutes regarding the rights of grandparents: <http://www.elderlawanswers.com/grandparent-visitation-rights-12130> But going to court should be your last resort.

Before you consider legal action, try reaching the mother directly (or through her parents if she is a minor) or perhaps through a mutual third party. Tell her that you want to be a loving grandparent. Offer to help her and your grandchild to the extent you can (without throwing your son under the bus). Hopefully she will welcome your support.

As your son matures, hopefully he will welcome his child into his life. Meanwhile, do what you can to encourage your son to look on his child as a gift to embrace, not a problem from which to run.

**Q.** I learned that my daughter had an abortion, despite being raised in a pro-life family. We always told our kids that if anything happened they could come to their mother and me. What did we do to deserve this? More important, what did my grandchild do to deserve this? My daughter doesn't know that



[www.Facebook.com/FeministsForLife](http://www.Facebook.com/FeministsForLife)

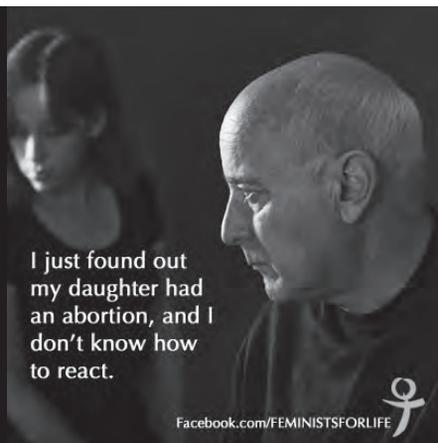


[Facebook.com/FeministsForLife](http://Facebook.com/FeministsForLife)

I know, and I can barely look at my own child. I feel like an utter failure.

**A.** You have my heartfelt sympathy for your loss. I am not sure of the circumstances that drove your daughter to make this decision. Maybe she felt that she would fail you if she had a baby. Perhaps she, like others, had an abortion so that you wouldn't know that she had sex. I wonder if the father of the child coerced her into this decision. Maybe she thought she didn't have the resources to parent and didn't consider adoption – or simply didn't believe in her own strength.

No matter the reason, recognize that you are in mourning. This is a loss. It is natural for you to feel disappointed and even angry. Anger masks pain. It is important that you work this out with someone other than your daughter, so that in the end you still have a good relationship with her. Please consider talking to someone who understands this kind of reproductive grief, such as Project Rachel, Rachel's Vineyard, or a qualified counselor. Forgiveness is a gift that you can give yourself as well as your daughter.



**Q.** When I was younger I heard my neighbor sobbing through the thin apartment walls. I knocked on her door to ask what was the matter. She could barely get the words out. She was pregnant and on her own. Even as a grown woman she couldn't face her parents. The shame was too great. And she feared losing her job. How could she care for the baby and work full time, too, she asked? I had no answers. So I decided to help her out of a jam and brought her to Planned Parenthood. I lent her the money for it. I took her home and gave her a box of tissues and some alcohol to dull the pain. Now I know I could have helped her in other ways and I feel such regret. She moved away and neither one of us kept up the friendship. I don't know what happened to her, but if she is reading this now, I hope she knows that I am truly sorry. Is there anything else I can do to make up for this?

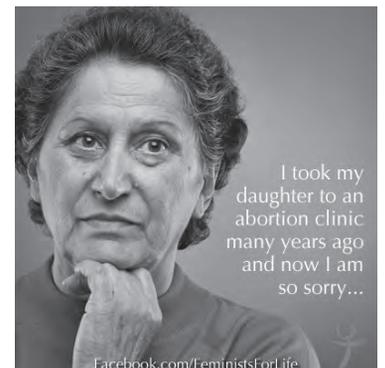
**A.** There are times when we all wish we could go back in time to do better, but all we can do is move forward. Think about what you can do in your own life to help someone in a similar situation through a donation of time or resources to a pregnancy resource center. Ask them what they need. Share FFL's "Raising Kids on a Shoestring" with parents and expectant

parents. Support adoption, as well as workplace and school policies that empower pregnant women, mothers and fathers, and birthparents. Put an FFL bumper sticker on your car that tells people you believe "Women Deserve Better than Abortion." And treat yourself as you would someone else if she came to

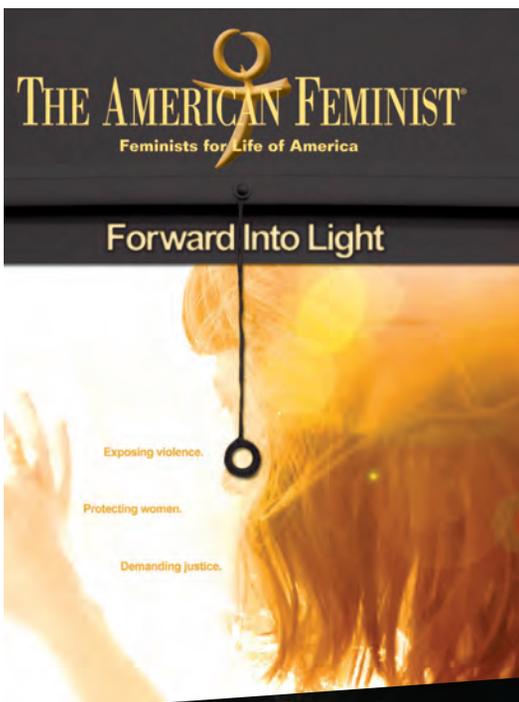
you with this story. Forgiveness is a gift. If you can't let go of this loss, please talk to someone in your faith community, a pregnancy resource center, or a professional who understands the spectrum of reproductive grief.

**Q.** I took my daughter to an abortion clinic many years ago and now I am so sorry. I will never know my grandchild, but worse, I decided what was best for my daughter to avoid the shame and chose abortion for her. She didn't have the strength to take control of the situation and I dictated the outcome. We are estranged and I want to make amends. Please advise. We never EVER talk about this.

**A.** There is so much hurt when we talk about abortion. I can't tell you the number of times I have heard from other well-meaning parents (and friends and boyfriends and counselors, etc.) who thought abortion was the only choice or the best solution. That is the terrible legacy left by the *Roe* and *Doe* decisions. Still, I am sorry for your loss, your family's loss, your daughter's loss. This is a wound that will never truly heal without forgiveness. Ask your daughter to forgive you, tell her you love her, and no matter her reaction you can choose to forgive yourself. Consider talking to a counselor first, especially one who is trained in reproductive grief, such as Project Rachel, Rachel's Vineyard, or another qualified counselor. Remember that ultimately this is about her, not you. If she is not ready to open up, give her time.



*If you have a question for FFL President Serrin Foster and would like to get feedback from FFL Facebook followers, post a question on FFL's Facebook page: [www.facebook.com/feministsforlife](http://www.facebook.com/feministsforlife)*

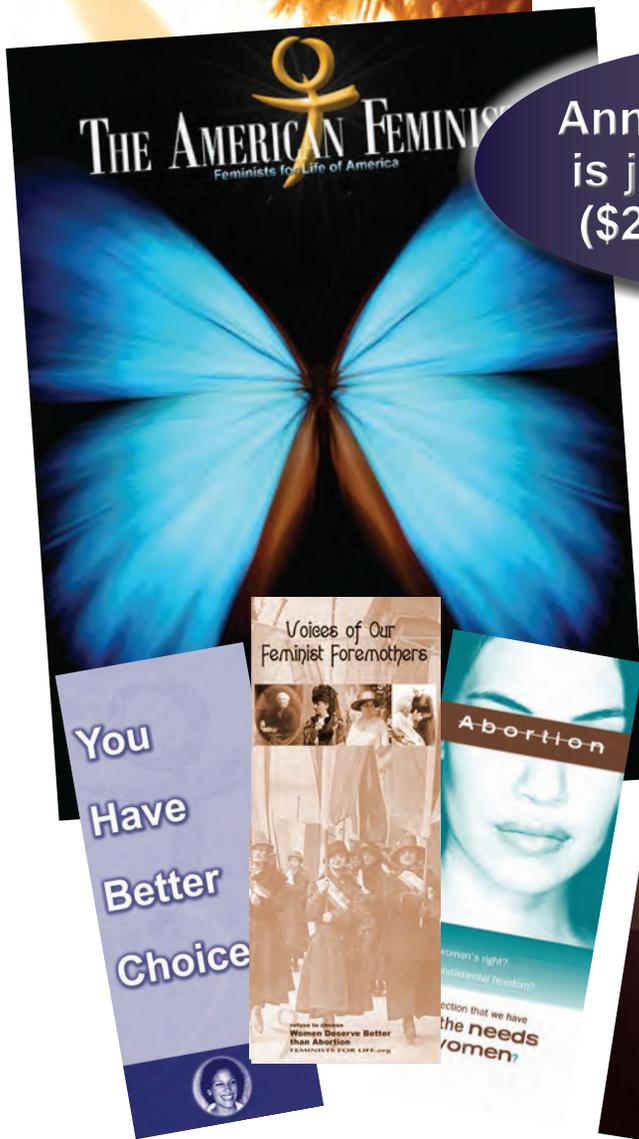


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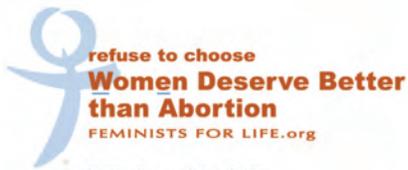
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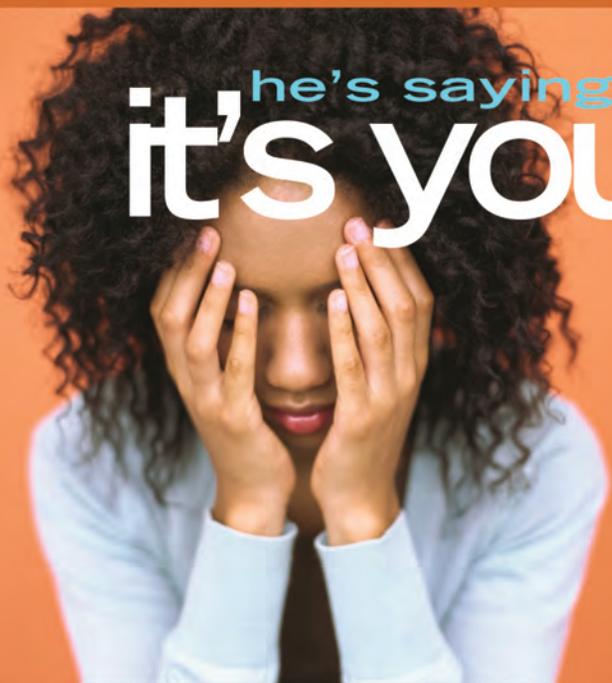


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