

In Denial

By Teresa Sicree

The behavior of abused women is perplexing to most people who are not professional counselors or police officers. “Why,” we wonder, “does she deny that she is being abused? Why does she defend him? Why does she blame herself? And why, oh *why*, doesn’t she just *leave*? After all, isn’t this what any *normal* person would do?”

Psychologists, if not the rest of us, have long recognized something called the Battered Women’s Syndrome. Women with low self-esteem are more likely to end up in abusive relationships, and abuse also damages the self-esteem of any woman who experiences it from someone she loves. Abuse also can damage her social skills, cut her off from her social contacts, and make it harder for her to even try to defend herself. After enough time and abuse, she will no longer think, let alone act the way a normal person would. There are four recognized stages of the Battered Women’s Syndrome: denial, guilt, enlightenment, and responsibility. Only in the last stage is she usually able to escape.

In the pro-life movement we are likewise perplexed by the behavior of people in the feminist movement and other organizations that support abortion. “Why,” we wonder, “do they deny that women are being abused at abortion clinics? Why do they always defend the abortion industry? Why don’t women who have been injured by abortions come forward? And why do they stand for this?”

We should not be so shocked by this, though. The behavior of pro-abortion women and women’s groups exactly mirrors the behavior of women suffering from Battered Women’s Syndrome.

The first stage is denial. Here the battered woman refuses to admit, even to herself, that she is being abused. She excuses the abuser’s behavior. This may be because the abuser is manipulating her or because the acts of abuse are hidden from view.

Where do we see this denial about abortion? The most obvious place is the denial that abortion has any negative effects on women at all. The National Abortion Federation denies, for example, that Post Abortion Syndrome even exists, yet multiple studies show that up to 65 percent of post-abortion women have symptoms of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. They also have higher rates of other mental illnesses than women who gave birth, including a suicide rate up to six times higher for teenagers who have had abortions. Planned Parenthood has claimed that abortion is fourteen times safer than childbirth, even though Dr. Byron Calhoun has shown that there is no evidence for this claim. (He points out that, ironically, abortion deaths are often lumped together with *all other* maternal deaths. So, *of course*, the maternal death rate looks worse: the whole is *always* greater than a part.)

Sadly, this denial extends even beyond the abortion industry. In their book, *Complications: Abortion’s Impact on Women*, Angela Lafranchi and her co-authors state that around the world “..induced abortion is now a commonly-accepted risk factor for breast cancer— except in North America, where it is denied chiefly for political reasons. In 2003, the National Cancer Institute held a workshop with 100 experts and concluded that early abortion did not increase the risk of breast cancer and did not need to be studied further. They ignored the fact that 35 out of 73 studies published internationally showed a statistically significant positive link between early abortion and breast cancer.

Abortion supporters also excuse the bad behavior of abortionists. Major media outlets in America tried to ignore abortionist Kermit Gosnell’s murder trial. When this was no longer possible, Planned Parenthood representatives blamed his behavior—on pro-lifers!

Like a case of domestic abuse, some instances of abuse at abortion clinics go unnoticed. That is, until someone like activist Lila Rose and her group LiveAction go in undercover with a hidden camera. They have filmed multiple abuses at Planned Parenthood facilities, including employees offering to cover up a prostitution ring of underage, illegal immigrants. Planned Parenthood denies most of these claims and minimizes the others.

Abortion supporters like to call themselves “pro-choice,” but even a title like this is a form of denial, for 64 percent of women who have had abortions feel as though they were coerced into having one.

They are all in denial.

Denial is not just a passive state. It can lead people to aggressively promote the very thing that they are denying, requiring society to join them in denial. In his essay, “Revenge of Conscience,” J. Budziszewski argues that if a person denies doing something wrong, the normal action of his or her conscience are warped. He writes that a conscience held down in denial redirects its force into justifying its actions and recruiting others to imitate them.

Battered women who move past denial are often mired in guilt. They believe that they deserve the abuse they are suffering. We can see this in women who have been injured by abortionists but refuse to prosecute or come forward because their guilt makes them think they deserve to suffer.

Battered women who finally realize that the fault lies with their abusers and not with themselves move into the stage called enlightenment. They are not, however, ready to take action to escape the abuse. They may be afraid of life without their abuser or his financial support.

The Supreme Court actually echoed this philosophy when they decided, in *Planned Parenthood vs. Casey*, to keep abortion legal while admitting it may have been wrongly decided. The Court wrote, “For two decades of economic and social development, people have organized their intimate relationships and made choices that defined their views of themselves and their places in society on the availability of abortion in the event that contraception should fail...An entire of generation has come of age free to assume this concept of liberty.” The Court was “enlightened” but only the way a battered woman is. It failed to reach the last stage, which is responsibility.

Here the battered woman finally gets the courage to act and escape her abuser. Some former abortion employees have reached this stage, such as NARAL founder and former abortionist Dr. Bernard Nathanson and former Planned Parenthood clinic director Abby Johnston. But these people are too few and far between. Most abortion supporters are still stuck in denial. We need to reach out in truth and love and break the cycle of denial. Enough women—and unborn children—have been battered.

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