

Abortion Clinic Defense: A Testimony

September 18, 2020



I escort patients at an abortion clinic. My role is to be a friendly face, ready with an open umbrella when patients arrive, to escort them in and out past anti-abortion protesters. I do my best to bear the brunt of the abuse, shielding my patient both physically and emotionally. Some hide behind my umbrella, some walk defiantly inside while I smile proudly at them, some just seem bewildered— all have made the decision to come to the clinic. Here, I have seen firsthand how the patriarchy harms everyone.

I have been doing this work for a long time, though I didn't always know it. I was born and raised in the Evangelical Church, where purity doctrine is held as high as Jesus Himself: sex is only permitted within the confines of a legally binding marriage between one man and one woman. We girls were to keep ourselves pure for our husbands. Not only were we responsible for our own choices, we were responsible for not tempting the boys with how we dressed and behaved.

One of the girls in my youth group got pregnant. She couldn't bear the shame her extremely conservative family would heap upon her for being an unwed mother— held up as a disgraced example (for the rest of her life) to her siblings of what not to become, believing no one would ever want to marry her now that she was "damaged goods." So she had an abortion and I covered for her. She never told anyone except me and the doctor.

Many anti-abortion protesters come from a similar background. Those who've had abortions are placed front and center to wail and plead with patients about the psychological torture they'll endure for life if they go through with it. Statistics show that less than ten percent of people regret their abortions, but these facts don't matter when one believes they're "saving babies." Anti-abortion women refer to themselves as "post-abortive" and call out dire warnings to patients as they enter and exit the building. I often wonder if they'd still regret it if their families and churches hadn't told them they should.

There's a very young woman who comes regularly with her infant. She told me, crying, "You're a baby killer, would you kill my baby? He is no different. Go ahead, judge me for being a teen mom. Yeah, I'm unmarried. I got pregnant and chose life."

I wanted to tell her I support her. She's not a slut and fuck them for making her feel ashamed. If a teenager wants to have a baby and needs a ride to her prenatal appointment, I got a car, hit me up. Wanna let me rock your baby while you hang out with your friends for a few hours? I love taking care of babies!

But I can't help her. I couldn't talk to her or even give her an encouraging smile. I had to just stand there, stone faced, bearing witness to her attempt to shame other women. She has internalized the patriarchy, she does not recognize it and cannot see beyond it.

In a way, she humanizes the need to liberate women as part of class struggle. But my compassion for these people only goes so far. I also wanted to tell her to put sunscreen on her very red baby and take him home, he's overheated. And to quit crying at and pleading with my patients, she's harassing them.

Each individual has their own reason for seeking an abortion. As a clinic escort, that is not my concern. They're there because they're pregnant and don't want to be. I help them gain access to the health care they need. But I know that women from vocally pro-life families can be driven to seek an abortion out of desperation to keep their sexual history a secret. I sometimes wonder if they might have made a different decision if their families had been willing to support them as an unwed parent. (I use the word "parent" because I have made inclusive language a habit. But the term "unwed" is most often applied to mothers, rarely fathers. She's an unwed mother, a teen mom.)

Many times, the reason is a complex one— poverty. Access to health care, prenatal and a continuum of care after birth until death, is a luxury for those who can afford it. Add to that a lack of affordable housing and education, and the prospect of raising a child under these conditions is daunting. The pro-life movement sneers at this as not a valid justification. "You got yourself into this, you did it to yourself, now accept the consequences of your actions." But children are full human beings in their own right, they are not punishment for sex.

Some protesters bring and weaponize their children. After one such instance, I felt compelled to write about it in my journal.

Trigger Warning: child abuse

Dear little boy,

The image haunts me... two adults pointing down at you asking over and over, "Can we kill him? Can we murder him?" I saw your eyes widen. You looked scared and I was powerless to protect you. Later, I smiled at you and you smiled back at me... I'm worried I got you in trouble for that. I won't make eye contact with you next time— not because I don't like you anymore, but because I am afraid to endanger you.

I reported everything I witnessed to Child Protective Services today. I'm trying to send someone to help you since I can't do it myself. I don't know your name but I love you. Hold on.

He was six and a half years old, being used as a weapon against abortion. His guardian brought him the following week, and I never saw him again. His guardian still comes to the clinic but I don't

know what happened to him.

Anti-abortion protesters are abusive towards male-presenting people who bring their partners for an abortion. Women who have an abortion are murderers but their partners are cowards. Men scream “real men protect women and children!” at these faithful, supportive partners. He is a coward for helping her— for not stopping her— you’re not a real man if you’re not controlling her body. The patriarchy and toxic masculinity is very much a part of the pro-life movement.

If anti-abortion protesters truly cared about ending abortion, it would be far more effective to alleviate poverty. Living wages, affordable housing, free health care (medical, mental health, dental, vision, addiction treatment, etc.), affordable/free education beyond high school, all help to reduce abortion rates. Studies consistently prove that comprehensive sex education and access to contraception is the number one way to prevent teen pregnancy and abortion, but the same churches insist upon abstinence-only curriculum in the public schools and continually block legislation that might provide these things.

Pro-lifers tear down women. All of us. Even their own. They call themselves pro-life, but they’re really just pro-control. They care nothing for quality of life outside the womb. They would rather stand between a person seeking health care and reproductive justice than stand between a bulldozer and a tent that is someone’s home. They would rather pray on the street corner for all to see than quietly do what they can to ease human suffering and end the cause.

And in all of this, there is still my patient, who is just trying to get to the door for their appointment.