

# The Post-Abortion Review

Special Report

Elliot Institute, PO Box 7348, Springfield, IL 62791

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## Special Ten Year Anniversary Report

# The Bobbit Mystery Unraveled

On June 23, 1993, Lorena Bobbitt, a shy, ninety-five pound U.S. immigrant from Venezuela, cut off her sleeping husband's penis. Hyped by both journalists and comedians, her trial in January of 1994 was the world's #1 media event.

People were shocked, and grimly amused by the nature of her attack. Still, the aspect of this incident which perhaps most captivated the public was its psychological mystery. People could easily understand how an enraged woman might strike back at an abusive husband, and even attempt to kill him. But why, everyone wondered, had Lorena confined her attack to his penis? And what did she mean in her statements to police when she explained that her husband was selfish and wouldn't give her an orgasm? Did this mean that she mutilated her husband simply because he didn't satisfy her sexually? Or, as the defense claimed, was she just an abused and psychologically unstable person who, on that particular night, could not control an "irresistible impulse?"

Specific details of the case raised even more intriguing questions. For example, why did Lorena take the severed penis with her when she ran? And if, as she claimed, she had been the victim of John Bobbitt's emotional, physical, and sexual abuse for the three preceding years, why did she wait to attack him on that particular

night? Why did she refuse several offers for shelter? And perhaps most bizarre of all, why did she pause when fleeing the house to steal her house guest's video game?

Lorena's defense lawyers claimed the answers to these questions would never be fully understood. But actually, even at the time of the trial, Lorena's lawyers had far better answers to these questions than they chose to reveal. It would not be accurate to label this lack of full disclosure a "cover-up," since defense lawyers are under no obligation to reveal everything they know. (See "Why the Truth Was Buried.") But it is fair to say that the most important insights gained in this case have not been fully revealed to the general public—until now. (See "The Elliot Institute's Role in Uncovering the Mystery.")

In this special issue of *The Post-Abortion Review*, I will attempt to show that the key to understanding the many otherwise outlandish aspects of this case can only be found in understanding how Lorena was traumatized by a *coerced abortion*.

At the time of her abortion, Lorena exhibited at least eight of the high risk factors which reliably predict post-abortion psychological maladjustments. The resulting psychological trauma devastated Lorena and created a cycle of violence and abuse, between her and John, which destroyed their marriage. This culminated in Lorena's attack on John's sexuality exactly three years after the abortion—at a time when Lorena was suffering from a major post-abortion anniversary reaction which included anxiety attacks, depression, flashbacks, and psychosomatic symptoms.

In "A Story of Destruction: The Testimony" I have summarized the courtroom transcripts regarding the Bobbitt marriage leading up to and including the cutting incident. This is obviously an abbreviated account. Still, I have tried to outline the principal points of testimony in a way that reflects the claims of both sides.

In "Their Deepest Wound: The Analysis" I have drawn upon insights gathered from other cases of post-abortion trauma to give you my views of how the abortion affected Lorena, John, and their marriage. Finally, after a look at what the Bobbitt case teaches us about "Abortion and Domestic Violence" in general, I have offered my personal opinion as to whom the *most* guilty party was in this tragic case.

## Special Double Issue

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# A Story of Destruction: The Testimony

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In 1988, Lorena came to the United States on a visa with high hopes for becoming married and raising a family here. When this 19-year-old girl met the handsome John Wayne Bobbitt, sharply dressed in a Marine uniform, she was more than ready to believe that he was the beginning of her dreams come true.

They dated for a period of approximately ten months. Their dates were always chaperoned, as was customary in both Lorena's family and with the Castros, a Latin-American family with whom Lorena was living. Over the objections of the Castro family, Lorena and John were hastily married in a civil ceremony on June 18, 1989, shortly before Lorena's visa was due to expire.

## The Pattern of Jealousy

According to court testimony, the early months of their marriage were marked by displays of jealousy and possessiveness, by both parties. For example, a month after the wedding, John's family hosted a party at Niagra Falls. According to John's aunt, Lorena was jealous of John's attentions to a young woman at the gathering and took him aside for an angry scolding. The young woman, it turned out, was simply a close cousin.

Immediately after the family celebration, John's brother, Todd, returned to Lorena and John's apartment and, much to Lorena's chagrin, stayed over three months in the newlyweds' small apartment. The testimony furthermore implies that during this time John spent as much time going out to party with his brother as he spent with his wife. Eventually, Lorena asked Todd to leave. In the four following years, there were many similar long "stopovers," often without prior notice, from other friends or relations of John's, with similar results. Lorena clearly saw these long visits as burdensome and disruptive of their relationship.

John was even more intensely jealous. On a trip to Ocean City with Todd and a friend of Lorena's, Terri, John suddenly cut the trip short when passing men whistled at the two young women. John dragged Lorena off the boardwalk and insisted that all four would immediately return to Manassas. On the trip home, John again became enraged over men in passing cars who were presumably looking at Lorena, and he accused her of inviting their attentions. According to Lorena and Terri, this escalated into a physical fight between John and Lorena. Todd and John's

testimony denied that there was any physical altercation.

While there was testimony regarding one or two other conflicts during the first year, nothing of great significance was reported. There were signs of trouble, but both John and Lorena seemed convinced that their marriage was working and could be improved.

## The Trauma's Root

Anxious to expand upon her dream of having "a dream house, family, [and] children," Lorena deliberately became pregnant in the Spring of 1990. She did not tell John about her decision to discontinue taking birth control pills. She simply decided to surprise him, believing that a child was the greatest gift a woman could give her husband.

In her own family and culture, Lorena had witnessed many great examples of celebration when wives announced their pregnancies to their husbands. So she carefully prepared a special announcement for John. She bought a tiny baby's bib, waited for a private moment together, and gently laid it upon his chest, offering him the gift of her child.

It was then that her dream of creating a happy home and family was irrevocably shattered. Rather than bringing them closer together, as she had hoped, the news of her pregnancy drove them apart. John cursed at her. He insisted they weren't ready. They couldn't afford a baby. She would have to have an abortion.

Lorena pleaded, but he would have nothing to do with it. When she told him she would have the baby anyway, he threatened to leave her. She spoke to her friend and employer, Jana Bisutti, seeking support for her desire to keep her baby. But according to John, Jana supported the abortion, telling Lorena "she had a couple of abortions and it wasn't that bad." Besides, another employee was already pregnant and Jana didn't want two workers taking time off work. Lacking support from any quarter, and torn between her love for her child and her duty to her husband, Lorena gave in.

On June 15th, 1990, when she would otherwise have been busy planning to celebrate their first wedding anniversary, Lorena had an abortion. To ensure that the deed was done, John accompanied her to the clinic. When she asked him what it would be like, he told her they would stick needles into her arms. Because she was so

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terrified and distraught, a nurse had to move her away from John, whom Lorena testified was taunting and laughing at her. Despite this and other obvious warning signs, the clinic counselors and the abortionist did nothing to help Lorena, although it was clear that she did not freely want to have the abortion.

The loss of her child was a tremendous blow against Lorena's self-esteem, her idealism, and her dream of having a family "just like my family" in Venezuela. Aborting against her conscience, she was morally devastated. "I couldn't eat," she testified. "I feel like nothing—like the life is over. I feel—I feel like I was falling apart." She lost interest in activities she had previously enjoyed and experienced her first reported case of major depression.

John acted oblivious to Lorena's feelings. According to his perspective, Lorena only felt bad "the rest of the day, and then the next day. By the time we went to bed, she was all right.... I hugged her and told her, you know, just to forget about it. It's over you know." He figured that was all there was to it. What more could be said? And so the abortion became something they never talked about again. But this buried pain would continue to manifest itself in other ways.

## The Disintegration

One of the first ways in which the abortion affected the marriage was in their sex life. Lorena became sexually frigid, a common post-abortion problem. "I didn't want to sleep with him. I didn't want to see him."

Apparently John did not recognize that this sexual withdrawal was a sign of a broken and bruised spirit which needed healing. Instead, he saw her refusals as willful spite. According to Lorena's testimony it was at this time that the episodes of forced sex began. This included at least one case of anal intercourse, which was painful and humiliating for Lorena. Thereafter, she testified, he would use the threat of anal intercourse to intimidate her. (It is noteworthy that John may have been using this non-reproductive sex act as a tool to warn Lorena away from becoming pregnant again without his consent.)

A month after the abortion, John insisted on buying a house. Perhaps he saw this as a form of restitution for the abortion. But it quickly became apparent that not only could the house not replace Lorena's baby, it was going to break her under a load of debt. Within six months after the abortion, John left the Marine Corps. The money he made from subsequent jobs he kept for himself. Lorena had to pay for the house and other joint expenses from her own income. When she could no longer do this, she began to steal. She stole manicuring supplies from her employer so she could work a seventh day each week out of her home. She stole \$7200 in cash from her employer. She shoplifted clothing.

All this stealing, she explained, was intended to please her husband, to prove that she was trying to make things work out. John, however, was not impressed. Instead, he insisted that she

return the supplies and admit her embezzlement, which she was then required to work off.

After the abortion, their fighting became more frequent, violent, and petty. While there was conflicting testimony describing the events of Thanksgiving Day of 1993, the following account is a reasonable reconstruction. John was watching football on television. Lorena wanted her visiting mother to see a parade, so she changed the channel without asking his permission. John then went to the roof to disconnect the antenna. Lorena locked him out. John kicked in the door. He went to the bedroom and did not join them for Thanksgiving dinner.

With the television not working Lorena announced that she and her mother were going to go out to see a movie. To spite her, John took her keys and disabled her car's engine. She followed him to get her keys, or to use his car, but he drove off

and she was knocked to the ground. She called the Marine Corps and filed a complaint.

This was just one of many fights, often bruising and violent, which occurred with increasing frequency. Some witnesses claim seeing Lorena hit and scratch at John. Only one testified actually witnessing John's violence toward her, perhaps because, as Lorena claimed, John was very good at restraining himself when other people were around. Several witnesses, however, did see extensive bruising on Lorena's body on different occasions. These facts, combined with the fact that John chose to work as a barroom bouncer and had joined the Marines knowing he would be trained to kill and disable, clearly discredit his claim that he does not "believe in violence."

During the following years there were many calls to 911. On one occasion, in February of 1991, she called 911 and John was arrested. He responded by swearing out a complaint against her. Both cases were dropped or dismissed.

By this time, there was a great rift between them. They would not spend time together in the evenings. Instead, John would play with his computer or watch TV late into the night, and then come to bed demanding sex. Eventually, John began taunting Lorena telling her about an extramarital affair.

With their marriage in tatters from all their fighting, her stealing, and his womanizing, John left her for six weeks in the spring of 1991 to live with his family in New York. After a brief reconciliation that summer, he went back to his family again in October. He returned to visit her for a few days in May of 1992.

During this separation, they frequently talked by phone. John's family testified that Lorena badgered him with calls pleading for him to return, promising him that she would stop the stealing. Lorena claims she only called to demand his help with their financial obligations. Records from 911 dispatch show that she called to make one or more complaints against John even during this time when he was gone. In any event, after making mutual promises to reform their behaviors, they reconciled in September of 1992.

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## Lorena had classic symptoms of an anniversary reaction associated with her abortion.

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## Short-Lived Hopes

It would appear from the testimony that the Bobbitts had a period of relative calm after this reunion. During this time, they stayed with friends, first at the Castros and then the Beltrans. The only fight of this period which was the subject of much testimony occurred on New Year's Eve.

Lorena worked late that night. When she returned, she expected to go out with John, as they had discussed. But John had already left to party with some friends. She was angry at being neglected, especially on New Years Eve when they were supposed to be beginning the rebuilding of their marriage. When John returned home late in the morning, he wanted to make love. Obviously, she wasn't in the mood. A fight erupted that spilled into a public room. Accusations flew, but witnesses at the Beltrans were unable to confirm who was hitting whom.

In April of 1993, they moved into their own apartment, the one at which the cutting incident took place. For a time, Lorena had renewed hopes of finally being alone again to build their marriage and start their family. But only one month after starting their "new life" together, John announced that his friend Robbie would be coming to live with them for a while. John even had plans for building an extra partition in their one bedroom apartment—to give them some more privacy.

Lorena saw the writing on the wall. Once again she would be burdened with another long-term "house guest," one with whom John would spend his nights partying. Plus, around the same time, John began working as a bouncer at a night club. This choice of jobs angered Lorena, who feared that he would be flirting with women—and would be the object of their flirtations. Neither of these concerns was unreasonable, considering both his past infidelities and his striking good looks.

Lorena threw down the gauntlet, threatening divorce. If Robbie moved in, she would move out. To thwart John's construction of an extra wall, she warned the building's superintendent who immediately forbade it.

In early June, she began paving the way for a divorce by attempting to tape record his abusive language. John discovered the tape. Lorena testified that this led to a fight which ended in his raping her and her scratching his face. Around this time, Lorena stated, John also threatened that if she ever left him he could still find her and have sex with her anytime, and in any way, that he wanted. After this incident, if not before, Lorena began talking to friends and neighbors about John raping and beating her. Though she received numerous offers for shelter, she refused these opportunities to get away from him.

## The Anniversary

On June 18th, their fourth wedding anniversary, and three days after the third anniversary of the abortion, Lorena went to visit Dr.

Susan Inman, her family physician. She was hyperventilating and complained that she was filled with anxiety and experiencing cramping. She was having gastrointestinal problems. Her hands were shaking, and she couldn't concentrate on her work. She was suffering from insomnia. (All of these are classic symptoms of an anniversary reaction associated with post-abortion PTSD.)

When Dr. Inman asked if she was under some source of stress, Lorena complained she was having problems with her husband. When asked if he was hitting her or hurting, she said no. She did however say that he was having sex with her without her permission. Dr. Inman suggested that Lorena should contact Protective Services if she needed help.

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**The experts unanimously agreed that the abortion had devastated Lorena.**

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On that evening of their anniversary, they had sexual intercourse. As always, John testified it was consensual. He swore that he never forced himself upon her, at any time. On the other hand, Lorena says she told him "No" and swears that he raped her in the hall,

telling her, "Forced sex excites me."

The next day, Saturday, Lorena went to work. Nothing of major consequence was reported as having occurred on this day.

## The Houseguest Arrives

On Sunday morning, Father's Day, they again had sexual intercourse. This time, Lorena says, it was with her consent. She, and her defense psychiatrist, however, state that she only reluctantly gave her consent because she feared being raped or abused if she refused.

During, or shortly after this, Robbie arrived at their apartment. After a brief greeting at the door, Lorena asked him to leave for a while so she could have privacy. She testified that she had not known that he would be arriving that day. Robbie left to make a phone call and then returned and went to the pool with John. A while later, Lorena went to the pool to ask John's help in finding her keys.

John testified that Lorena wanted him to return to the apartment because Robbie had interrupted their lovemaking and she had not yet achieved an orgasm. He swore they made love a second time, and then he returned to the pool. Lorena denied this and stated that they only looked for her keys. Robbie dozed by the pool while John was gone. When he finally went up to the apartment, he testified, John and Lorena were both there and "were kind of like smirking." Lorena again asked Robbie to leave, saying she needed privacy. He left for lunch and when he returned Lorena was moving boxes out of the apartment.

Lorena was taking the boxes to the apartment of Diane Hall, a neighbor. She ate dinner with Diane that evening and spoke of the rape on Friday. Diane offered to let her stay in her apartment. Lorena declined the offer. Lorena testified that she refused this and other offers of shelter because Robbie was staying at the apartment and John was always careful not to attack her when

others were around.

At this point it is worth noting the conflicting feelings Lorena expressed in her testimony regarding Robbie's presence. On one hand, Robbie's presence made her feel safer. On the other hand, Lorena consistently testified that it was the issue of Robbie's visit, not the abuse, which had finally prompted her to move out and seek a divorce. She apparently believed his presence was disruptive of their efforts to rebuild their marriage. She saw him as just the latest in the string of John's relatives and friends who became long-term houseguests. Thus, it would appear that she both resented his presence, and the distraction he offered John from her, but she also felt safer from abuse while he was in the apartment.

On Monday, Lorena went to the Courthouse and filled out papers to obtain a Protective Order against John which would have required him to leave the apartment. The clerk asked her to wait while the order was typed, but she declined and left. She did not return that day, or the next, to complete the process.

On Monday and Tuesday she told additional acquaintances of the abuse she had been enduring and of her intention to leave John. Again, she refused their offers of shelter. During these two days, Robbie testified, John and Lorena were mostly ignoring each other. At some time during these two days, Lorena stole a \$100 bill from Robbie's wallet. She subsequently explained that she did so because John owed her money.

## The Cutting Incident

On Tuesday night, John and Robbie went out drinking until three in the morning. When he returned, both Lorena and John recall, they exchanged a few words and then he joined her in bed and fell asleep for about an hour.

According to John, when he woke to adjust the covers he saw Lorena sleeping in her lingerie and he began caressing her. "I wanted to perform but I was too exhausted. . . . I rolled over and I was on top of her. And then I remember that she put her knees up, and she put her arms around me, and then I just fell back off to sleep." He subsequently claims waking up briefly on his back and she was fondling him, but again he fell back to sleep. The next thing he remembers is waking up with her at the side of the bed, two swift pulls on his groin, and then the cutting.

Lorena's testimony is that when John first awoke he pulled off her underwear and forced himself upon her. She asked, "What are you doing?" and told him "I don't want to have sex." He ignored her and proceeded to rape her. After he was done, he rolled over and went to sleep. She got out of bed, put her underwear on, and went to the kitchen to settle down and get a glass of water. By the light of the refrigerator she saw the knife and began to have a flashback experience in which she remembered the abortion, the fear of "syringes to go through my bones and I was going to die," the first time he raped her, the

anal sex, and the "insults and bad words that he told me."

The next thing Lorena is able to recall, in her testimony, is driving. She was approaching a stop sign and found her hands occupied and unable to manage the turn. It was then that she realized she had John's severed penis in her hand. Horrified, she threw it out the window and continued driving to the beauty parlor where she worked. When she tried to go into the building, she discovered that she still had the bloody knife in her hand. She screamed and threw it into a trash can. After washing her hands, she drove to her employer's house. From there the police were contacted and the location of the penis and knife were disclosed.

While the penis was being surgically reattached, Detective Peter Weintz had a taped interview with Lorena. Lorena told Detective Weintz what happened in greater detail than she was later able to remember. Psychiatric experts for both the defense and prosecution would appear to agree that her subsequent lack of memory was genuine. There was disagreement, however, as to whether or not the details Lorena told Detective Weintz were genuine memories or simply her attempt to reconstruct for herself what must have happened.

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## Lorena testified that she had a flashback to the abortion experience.

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Did the trauma of the that evening's events cause her memory to fade, or did it completely block her memory in the first place? Following are excerpts from that tape.

"[After John raped me] he pushed me away like when he finished like he did it before. Sometimes he just push me away, make me feel really bad because that's not fair, that's not nice.

"I went to the kitchen to drink water. . . . And I turned my back and I—the first think I saw was the knife. Then I took it and I was just angry. And I took it and I went to the bedroom and I told him—he shouldn't do this to me. Why he did it. Then I said I asked him if he was satisfied with what he did. Then he said he doesn't care about my feelings. He did say that and I ask him if he has orgasm inside me because it hurt me when he made me do that before. He always have orgasm and he doesn't wait for me to have orgasm. He's selfish. I don't think it's fair, so I pull back the sheets and then I did it."

Among the other bizarre, but perhaps very meaningful aspects of this case, is the fact that when fleeing the house that night, Lorena took Robbie's Game Boy, a pocket video game, with her. She does not recall doing so, but it was in her possession and subsequently returned to Robbie.

## The Psychiatric Testimony

Expert witnesses for both the prosecution and defense agreed that in the weeks before the cutting incident, Lorena was experiencing a period of major depression. All of the psychiatric experts were also in agreement that at the time they examined her she was suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). They were also in unanimous agreement that the abortion had a devastating impact on Lorena. None, however, were willing to

specify precisely what traumatic experience had precipitated this mental condition. Instead, they based their diagnosis of PTSD upon a general history of physical abuse.

Three of the four testifying experts believed that symptoms of PTSD were present at the time of the cutting incident. The fourth, Dr. Evan Nelson, a witness for the prosecution, argued that the PTSD symptoms were only evident *after* the cutting incident.

The psychiatrist who testified for the defense was Dr. Susan Feister. It should be noted that another expert working for the defense was a psychologist who is an expert in fields of trauma and post-abortion issues. (See “The Elliot Institute’s Role in Uncovering the Mystery.”) While this traumatologist assisted Dr. Feister in identifying additional symptoms which supported the diagnosis of PTSD, Dr. Feister was hostile to view that the coerced abortion was the primary trauma which lay at the root of Lorena’s PTSD.

Dr. Feister’s hostility to the view that abortion can be traumatic mirrors that of the many persons in the psychiatric professions. This antagonism is often arises from political views favoring unrestricted abortion. Some therapists fear that any admission that abortion traumatizes some women will be used to regulate abortion.

Another motivation for denial of abortion related trauma is more personal. Many therapists have a personal investment in the abortion decisions of others—clients, loved ones, or themselves. If such a therapist admits that abortion may cause psychological problems, he or she must then confront the fact that any abortions which they have advised or “blessed” may have ended up injuring their patients rather than helping them.

In any event, while it should be noted that Dr. Feister would probably disagree with my analysis of this case (see “Their Deepest Wound”), her testimony actually provides additional evidence in support of my thesis.

Dr. Feister testified that, at the time of the cutting, Lorena “suffered

from major depressive disorder, she suffered from post traumatic stress disorder, and she suffered from anxiety disorder, that is panic disorder.” Lorena had a strong religious belief that abortion was a terrible sin. “She felt, in her words, that it was like killing the baby. She felt extremely guilty about having the abortion and she became quite depressed for several months after the time she had the abortion. . . . She felt very ashamed of it.”

In her overall diagnosis, Dr. Feister described Lorena as having strong feelings of worthlessness and “excessive guilt.” She also had “reoccurring thoughts of death, thinking about the possibility of suicide, but did not have any specific plan and did not wish to really harm herself or kill herself.” As an example of self-destructive behavior, Dr. Feister described one incident in which Lorena was driving recklessly down the highway while “reliving one of her rape experiences.” It was not until honking horns brought her to her senses that Lorena pulled off to the roadside to cry and compose herself.

Lorena also had a shortened sense of the future. “Lorena described very vividly that she would never have any children and felt that there really was no future for her at all.”

It was shortly after the abortion, Dr. Feister testified, that “the violence took a very ominous turn for the worst.” Their altercations had previously occurred about once a month. At this time, however, she estimated the incidents of violence began to occur weekly, and eventually twice a week or more. The fighting also involved greater levels of violence. “It was not uncommon,” Feister testified, “for him after he had beat her to try to comfort her, promise that he would be better in the future, and then attempt to have sex with her and often forcibly have sex with her.”

This concludes my summary of the relevant testimony. In the accompanying article, “Their Deepest Wound” I will attempt to explain how the events and emotions described in these court transcripts can best be understood from the perspective of abortion’s impact on women, men, and family systems.

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## Their Deepest Wound: An Analysis

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Lorena Bobbitt’s abortion was unwanted. It violated her moral beliefs and signified the destruction of her dream to have a family just like the one in which she had grown up. It was an attack on her self-identity and her maternal self.

By understanding how her abortion traumatized Lorena, we can understand why she mutilated John in the way she did. From this perspective, it can be seen that everything Lorena did that night had great significance, at least on a subconscious level.

Because the effects of the abortion on Lorena and John were multidimensional, the following discussion will look at the incidents of that night from several different angles.

### The Anniversary Reaction

The most obvious connection between the abortion and the cutting incident is one of time; the attack occurred almost exactly three years to the day after the unwanted abortion. This is highly significant. Studies at both the Medical College of Ohio and the Elliot Institute, have found that between 30 and 50 percent of women who suffer from post-abortion psychological disorders experience increased physical or emotional reactions on the anniversary dates of the abortion or due date of the child.<sup>1</sup>

Anniversary reactions often include major depression, anxiety, headaches, abdominal cramping, eating irregularities, sleeping

difficulties, gastrointestinal symptoms, or complaints relevant to the reproductive system. The symptoms which Lorena reported to Dr. Inman on June 18th clearly follow the classic pattern reported for post-abortion anniversary reactions. The emotional stress associated with this anniversary reaction increased the risk that Lorena would experience a “mental snap” at this time.

It is also likely that Lorena experienced symptoms of an anniversary reaction in June of 1991 and 1992. While symptoms at these times were not specifically discussed in the testimony, we do know that in June of 1991 Lorena had a pregnant customer at her salon. She recalled that seeing this woman touched her deeply. Lorena started telling the woman how happy she was for her that she would be having a baby. She then began explaining to her how sad she was in her marriage and how her husband would beat her. The only testimony regarding specific events of June 1992, when John was gone, is the claim of John’s family members who testified that Lorena frequently called him begging him to return.

## Replacing the Wanted Child

It is very common for women who have had an abortion to develop an intense desire to replace their lost child by becoming pregnant again. As many as 13 percent becoming pregnant again within twelve months.<sup>2</sup> This desire for a replacement pregnancy often includes a profound need to become pregnant by the same man. He alone can offer her an “exact duplicate” of the aborted child. The woman may even make efforts to duplicate other circumstances connected with the prior pregnancy, such as becoming pregnant around the same season of the year.

It is clear from the testimony that Lorena desperately wanted to have children. She saw children as integral to the purpose of marriage and essential to her fulfillment as a woman. Thus, after their reconciliation, when they were moving into their new apartment in the spring of 1993, Lorena had renewed hopes that she could rebuild her dream. It would be “fitting” for her to become pregnant again that spring.

But instead, only a month after moving to the new apartment, John announced that he was letting Robbie move in with them. She saw this as proof that nothing would change. She decided she would have to divorce John, either because she couldn’t go on with him, or because she hoped it would, in the end, change him.

This decision to divorce John may have offered Lorena some hope for escaping the endless cycles of violence, but it may also have increased her anxiety about never being able to replace her aborted child with a sibling. The thought of leaving John forever was forcing her to confront the *finality* of her abortion.

This desire for a replacement child, combined with her belief that divorce was wrong, helps to explain why Lorena did not leave John sooner. It may also explain why she delayed the process of

moving out until after Robbie had actually moved in.

With regard to this issue of desiring children, it is noteworthy that Lorena told Dr. Feister she had a great fear that she would never have children. Such a fear is not normal for a 21-year-old woman. It makes sense only in the context of a common fear of women who have had abortions; they fear God will punish them by depriving them of children, or that He may even harm the children who have already been born.

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## The desire for a replacement child helps to explain why Lorena didn’t leave sooner.

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## The Sexual Amputee

Abortion has a dramatic impact on a woman’s view of her sexual and maternal self. Every woman who has had an abortion has experienced the

extremes of both a life creating process and a life destroying process—all within the confines of her own body. In many cases, this unnatural death experience may become psychologically connected with the woman’s view of sexual intercourse or her own sexuality. This connection may produce either a fear or an obsession with her sexuality—or both.

After the abortion, Lorena became sexually cold toward John. “I didn’t want to sleep with him. I didn’t want to see him.” Her frigidity dramatically aggravated marital tensions, especially since John, by all accounts, was not a very sensitive lover. His approach toward sex, by his own description, excluded foreplay and was focused on satisfying his immediate urges. Sensitivity and open communications were not his strong suits.

When Lorena became sexually withdrawn, John became frustrated and demanding. If he had any clue as to why Lorena was withdrawn, he chose to ignore it. The suspicion that she was withdrawn because of the abortion may even have aggravated his guilt and anger. In any event, Lorena’s testimony indicates that the first incidents of forced sex and sodomy occurred shortly after the abortion.

This experience of frigidity after an abortion is a common problem. According to two studies, sexual coldness was expressed by 33 percent of aborted women within nine months after their abortions, and an additional 14 percent developed sexual coldness four to five years later.<sup>3</sup> The aversion to sexual intercourse can occur because of antagonism toward the male, or men in general. Or it may arise out of a fear that if the woman becomes pregnant again she will need to have another abortion. Rather than risk another abortion, she avoids sex.

Guilt over a prior abortion can also become an impediment to subsequent sexual relations. For some women, acts of intercourse serve as a connector to repressed guilt over a prior abortion. Intercourse is associated with pregnancy which is associated to abortion which is associated to guilt. This linkage to guilt creates an aversion to sexual intercourse because it makes her feel “dirty” or unpleasant in some other way.

Dr. Victor Calef has concluded that some women may experience a husband’s request or permission for an abortion, as a rejection of her sexuality.<sup>4</sup> Similarly, psychiatrist Theodor Reik has suggested

that the psycho-sexual trauma of abortion has an unconscious meaning comparable to that of castration for a male.<sup>5</sup> The experience of a woman who called the Pregnancy Aftermath Hotline in Milwaukee confirms these clinical assessments. This woman told the hotline counselor that she felt “castrated” by her abortion; she felt as though she were a sexual “amputee.”

It takes no leap of imagination to see how a woman, such as Lorena, who on an unconscious level felt that she had been sexually mutilated by her abortion, would in moment of bitter passion attempt to “castrate” her husband. Lorena’s subconscious decision to limit her attack to his penis, I would suggest, may have reflected an “eye for an eye” form of justice. He had robbed her of her fertility; she robbed him of his.

### **The Phallic Symbol and the Game Boy**

On the night of the cutting, Lorena fled with the penis still in her hand. Why? Dr. Feister suggested that since John was attacking her with his penis, Lorena, on a subconscious level, was merely taking away her attacker’s weapon. There may be some validity to this view, but it is not convincing because there is no reason to carry off a disabled weapon.

The “penis as weapon” theory is also defective because Lorena did not have strictly negative emotions toward it. The testimony shows that Lorena clearly wanted true intimacy with John, not just rapid-fire intercourse. She also wanted to become pregnant again by John. At the same time, she felt deeply violated whenever John forced himself upon her, and she felt especially degraded by and fearful of his attempts at anal intercourse.

This mix of emotions has all the makings of an approach-avoidance conflict. She feared his penis because of the pain and abuse she had suffered, but she also desired its life-giving ability. Thus, while Lorena may have cut it off because it was a “weapon,” she took it with her because it was a phallic symbol. It symbolized her desire to be pregnant. On another level, it may have even represented “her baby.”

This theory is supported by perhaps her most bizarre act that night. When Lorena ran from the house, in what was certainly a hysterical panic, she paused only long enough to grab two things. First, her car keys, which makes sense. They were needed to complete her escape. Second, she grabbed up Robbie’s Game Boy, a hand-held video game. Why?

Remember that (1) Lorena was experiencing an anniversary reaction

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## **The Elliot Institute’s Role in Uncovering the Mystery**

On December 12, 1993, I read a report stating that John Bobbitt had pressured Lorena into undergoing an unwanted abortion. Given the substantial number of cases in our files where women and men reported the onset of domestic violence post-abortion, I did not find this news at all surprising. The fact that many women feel sexually mutilated by their abortions, however, seemed especially relevant.

On December 28, two weeks before the trial was to begin, I contacted a member of Lorena’s defense team. I suggested that her abortion might be the key to understanding the psychological trauma underlying the mutilation.

As a first step in investigating this hypothesis, I asked him to compare the date of the attack to the date of the abortion. The attorney immediately recognized that the attack had occurred almost three years to the day, after the abortion. In addition, he told me, Lorena had gone to see her doctor complaining of anxiety attacks and psychosomatic stomach cramps just a few days before the assault.

At his request, I sent additional background materials and an outline of my analysis, much of which has been incorporated into this issue of *The Post-Abortion Review*. Also, at his request, I arranged for one of the nation’s leading experts on post-abortion trauma to examine Lorena. During the two weeks remaining before the trial, this therapist interviewed and counseled Lorena for twenty hours and provided an additional eighty hours of work in helping to prepare the defense.

All this was done with the understanding that the defense team would allow the PAS expert to testify at the trial. Unfortunately, this never happened. (See “Why the Truth was Buried.”) The defense attorney subsequently told me, however, that this expert played an important role in helping to show the psychiatrists who did testify, for both the prosecution and defense, that Lorena was suffering from PTSD.

In addition, the post-abortion therapist helped to stabilize Lorena’s emotional state before the trial. We subsequently expected that Lorena would continue to receive

treatment from this PAS expert after the trial. (It was my personal hope that after receiving good post-abortion counseling, Lorena would one day choose to tell her story in full.) Unfortunately, the court ordered Lorena to receive treatment from another therapist, one who probably does not have any familiarity or expertise in post-abortion issues.

At the last report, Lorena was still receiving court ordered therapy. Obviously, I have no way of knowing whether or not the therapy has been productive. If Lorena remains trapped by the shame and trauma associated with her abortion, she may never be able to give her testimony to the public.

Based on the known facts, it is my professional opinion that Lorena’s abortion lies at the root of the violence which occurred in the Bobbitt household. To support this analysis I have drawn upon the public record and typical patterns reported by post-abortion couples. I have not had access to any confidential disclosures which Lorena or John made to their therapists or attorneys.

to her abortion, (2) she was internally grieving over the fact that she would never be able to replace her aborted child because she was going to divorce John, (3) she had just experienced flashbacks to the abortion when picking up the knife, and (4) she was shocked and confused about everything that had just happened.

With these facts in mind, I would suggest that as Lorena was just reflexively grabbing up symbols of her aborted, wanted child. In her hands she clutched both a phallic symbol and a child's toy, which even by its very name—Game Boy—symbolized the missing “Little Boy” she so desperately wanted. When fleeing the house, then, she was, on some subconscious level, simply trying to take “her baby” with her.

## Loss of Maternity, Loss of Purity

Lorena was raised in an ardently Catholic culture. The testimony suggests that Lorena's Catholic faith was not of paramount importance in her life: she was not married in the Catholic Church, attended a non-Catholic church with John, used birth control pills during their first year of marriage, and probably used some form of artificial birth control after the abortion. Nonetheless, her Catholic heritage clearly had a formative influence upon her and profoundly affected her views of marriage, divorce, and abortion.

An understanding of this Catholic heritage adds an additional insight as to why Lorena felt so totally degraded by her husband. In brief, John robbed Lorena of both her maternity (through a coerced abortion) and her purity (through forced sex and sodomy).

To grasp the importance of this two pronged attack on her identity, one must understand that in the traditional Catholic culture both virginity (purity) and maternity are highly valued. They are the essence of womanly virtues. One of the reasons the Virgin Mother is so highly esteemed by Catholics is that she retains the dignity of Virginity while also attaining the honor of Maternity. Every Catholic girl is encouraged to imitate the Virgin Mother in at least one of these ways.

Traditionally, then, when a Catholic woman gives the gift of her virginity to her husband (which Lorena did) it is with the anticipation that her husband will in turn bless her with the gift of maternity. Thus, in marriage, the good Catholic girl sees herself as moving from one pedestal of honor, for virgins, to another pedestal, for mothers.

In addition, according to this Catholic view, a faithful wife is still pure, though no longer virgin, and should be treated with treated with dignity, respect, and love by her husband. The wife's submissiveness to her husband is protected by the just demand that he love her and treat her as he would his own body (Eph 5:28). When this ideal of mutual respect, love, and service does not occur, both husband and wife are called upon to accept suffering in imitation of our Lord's own uncomplaining passion. By patient suffering, they may hope to reform and save both

themselves and their spouse.

It is quite possible, then, that because of her devotion to the permanence of marriage, Lorena may have been able and willing to tolerate John's verbal and physical abuse, if at least she had been allowed the dignity of being a mother. Moreover, in addition to being robbed of her maternity, she had also been subjected to unnatural and impure sexual acts which, she may have felt, robbed her of her purity. Thus, Lorena may have felt stripped of everything which defined her womanhood—both her maternity and her purity.

## Approach or Avoid?

Many aspects of Lorena's testimony reflect that she was frequently caught up in approach-avoidance conflicts. She felt safer with Robbie in the apartment, but she did not want Robbie to live with them. She wanted to be pregnant, but she feared that if she became pregnant John would make her have another abortion. She wanted emotional intimacy with John, but she did not want John's barbaric approach to intercourse.

I believe that many of the statements which Lorena made to the police can only be understood in the context of this approach-avoidance conflict she

had with regard to sexual intimacy with John. For example, when telling the investigator that John had forced her to have sex on their anniversary, Lorena complained that John “just only wanted to have sex because he—he wanted his own satisfaction and that's not fair. Sex should be mutual....” And even on the night of the cutting incident, she explained that when he took her underpants he left her top on, complaining, “If he wanted to make love, he should have asked me or took, you know, everything off.”

These are not the words of a wife who is totally opposed to intercourse with her husband. They are the words of a woman who wants her husband to love her, not use her. They reflect her anger and frustration over the fact that he would seek to satisfy himself without regard to her emotional needs—her desire to mend their hurts and to replace their lost child.

## All Mixed Up

Lorena also told police that when she returned to the bedroom, knife in hand, she tried to talk to John. “Then he said he doesn't care about my feelings. He did say that and I ask him if he had orgasm inside me, 'cause it hurt me when he made me do that before.”

What is she referring to that happened “before?” Is she complaining that his orgasms physically hurt her? No, because she doesn't even know if he had one. If they were normally hurtful, and she felt no pain, she just would have assumed that he did not have one. Instead, she is demanding to know *if* he had one. Why? Because an orgasm would mean sperm, which she connected to pregnancy, which (especially on this anniversary of the abortion and after flashbacks to the abortion in the kitchen) she connected

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**One woman testified she felt  
“castrated” by her abortion  
— like a sexual amputee.**

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to her abortion “cause it hurt me when he made me do that before.” Her question to John, then, may have been reflecting both her pain about the prior abortion and her fear that if she became pregnant again John would force her to abort again.

Remember, Lorena’s mind was flooded with a mix of emotions and memories. In trying to articulate her thoughts to the police, and at the same time trying to conceal the source of her shame, she may have been mixing into the word “orgasm” the concept of becoming pregnant. Such a confusion over word choices would also be aggravated by the fact that she had only been speaking English for a few years.

If there was such a mixing of meanings, the following statement four hours after the cutting incident also becomes more clear. “He always have orgasms and he doesn’t wait for me to have—to have orgasm. He’s selfish. I don’t think it’s fair.” In translation, this may have meant that John was brutishly demanding his own sexual satisfaction, and she was being denied not only sexual intimacy but also her right to have the child created by his orgasm, which was not “fair.”

Finally, it is worth noting that when Lorena described the moments before she picked up the knife to Dr. Feister, she said, “I felt that the whole world was in my body.” Is it not likely that in choosing to describe the magnitude of her feelings with the phrase “the whole world was in my body” Lorena was once again reflecting feelings associated to her abortion flashbacks? Is it not likely that she was reaching to describe the enormity of her body’s ability to give life and the enormity of what her body was missing. A child, a family, her dreams—her “whole world”—all of these had both lived and died “in my body?” In those few moments, her body, perhaps her uterus in particular, was the focal point of all her emotions.

## The Rape and Abortion Link

There are numerous examples of women who describe that their abortions felt like a degrading form of medical rape.<sup>6</sup> Indeed, abortion even resembles rape in that it involves the painful examination of a woman’s sexual organs by a masked stranger who is invading a woman’s sexual organs.

For many women this experiential association between abortion and sexual assault is very strong. Both abortion and rape can cause feelings of guilt, depression, resentment of men, lowered self-esteem, and feelings of being “dirty.” Both feel powerless, and no longer in control of their bodies.

Because of this strong experiential connection, women who have been victims of sexual assault are at much higher risk of suffering severe post-abortion trauma. The abortion aggravates and worsens prior psychological burdens.

The converse is also true. The sexual assault of a woman who previously had a traumatic abortion experience may trigger the

onslaught of unresolved abortion issues which become mixed in with her feelings regarding the assault.

In trauma theory, psychologists describe these associations as “connectors.” Connectors are anything which prompt a mental connection back to the traumatic event. They can be a sight, a sound, a smell, a person, or a time. For example, anniversary reactions occur because the anniversary date, month, or season, serves as a connector.

Thus, when John forced himself on Lorena that night, Lorena experienced yet another connector back to her abortion. She felt out of control, forced to satisfy John’s selfishness without regard for what she really wanted. Though the forensic evidence was inconclusive as to whether or not John actually completed the sex act, that issue is really irrelevant. Whether he climbed on her for only a few minutes before falling back to sleep, or whether he brutally raped her for an hour, in either event Lorena would have felt used, violated, and out of control—just as she did when she had the abortion.

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## Rape and abortion victims often feel powerless and not able to be in control.

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## PAS, PTSD, and Balloons

Many therapists use the term post-abortion syndrome (PAS) as a designation for PTSD in cases where an abortion is the underlying trauma. But because of the political nature of abortion, most psychiatric associations and many therapists refuse to entertain the idea that abortion can be traumatic. Nonetheless, the clinical experience of hundreds of therapists confirms that it can be.

Furthermore, a study by Catherine Barnard of women who had previously had abortions at a Boston clinic three to five years earlier found that 19 percent suffered from diagnosable post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).<sup>7</sup> Approximately half had many, but not all, symptoms of PTSD, and 20 to 40 percent showed moderate to high levels of stress and avoidance behavior relative to their abortion experiences.

A study by David Hanley, et al., of 105 women in outpatient mental health care similarly found that abortion related distress fell within the “classic PTSD symptoms of intrusion, avoidance, and hyperarousal and that these symptoms can be present many years after the abortion.”<sup>8</sup>

During Lorena’s trial, all the testifying psychiatrists agreed that Lorena was suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). While none of them were willing to specify any particular traumatic event which initiated the symptoms of PTSD, the evidence shows it was only after the abortion that Lorena experienced depression, guilt, suicidal tendencies, and sexual abuse.

By way of an analogy, PTSD can be likened to air filled balloon. The precipitating trauma creates a psychic pressure, inside this mental balloon, which wants to break out. As long as the balloon is intact, the pressure can be kept inside. But it takes a lot of

energy, expended in the form of denial, repression, and avoidance behaviors, to hold the pressure back.

Inevitably, there are leaks which cause intrusive memories, obsessive behavior, or reenactment. These leaks demand the expenditure of more energy. If the pressures which are bound inside that mental balloon are never released in a controlled fashion, such as in therapy, they will continue to cause ongoing problems as more leaks develop, are patched, then develop again. Or worse, the pressure may eventually result in a violent explosion.

To belabor the analogy, three things can happen which will result in an explosion—the rubber can begin to degrade and crack, the pressure inside can build up because of outside heat, or a bump against a sharp edge or pin can break the rubber. Actually, all three of these can happen at the same time. For example, only the slightest bump can break a balloon if it is overinflated and the rubber is old and petrified. I would suggest that all three of these stresses factors were at play the night of the mutilation.

First, Lorena’s “trauma balloon” was already overinflated by the heat of compounding circumstances: (1) she was having an anniversary reaction to the abortion, (2) Robbie’s presence was destroying her plan to rebuild their marriage, and (3) she was preparing to divorce John, which meant she would never have her replacement child.

Second, the “rubber balloon” containing these pressures was worn thin. Her coping skills had become frayed by three years of constant stress and fighting with John. She was exhausted and depressed.

Third, John had once again forced to do what he wanted without regard for her own desires. It hurt, just as the abortion had hurt. It was unfair, just as the abortion was unfair. He was verbally insulting her, just as he had insulted her when she announced her pregnancy, just as he had insulted her when she had the abortion.

And the balloon broke.

## The Fragmented Self

Psychiatrist Joel Brende, a well-known expert in the field of PTSD and PAS, believes many victims of trauma suffer from the fragmentation of the “self.” This fragmentation of the personality can occur when feelings of self-blame and shame are simply overwhelming. In words that could easily serve as a profile for Lorena, he writes:

“A [trauma] victim feels violated, abandoned, betrayed, ashamed and fragmented. . . . The victim feels fragmentation (“not together” “feeling empty inside”), has a sense of inner deadness, or deep internal shame. . . . A victim experiences loss of innocence, physical well-being, and sense of ideals. . . . When a victim feels betrayed by someone *who should have been supportive, he or she* feels shame and distrust—and erects a ‘wall’ around his or her feelings. Internal shame alters the victim’s self-concept and damages self-

esteem, self-integrity, personality, and the quality of interpersonal relationships. It causes the victim to become depressed, unstable, emotionally fragile, distrustful. . . .<sup>9</sup>

It is noteworthy that Lorena told Dr. Feister that at the time of the cutting, she had “a lot of anger at herself and guilt.” Dr. Feister dismissed the notion that Lorena had any reason to feel guilt or anger at herself. She instead concludes that Lorena was merely turning these emotions back toward herself because she could not express them toward John, her abuser.

It is more likely, however, that Lorena truly was angry at herself, because she had given in to the abortion.

This was the source of her greatest guilt and all the anger that goes with it. This is what she was having a flashback to; this was the trauma which was causing her anniversary reactions.

When such feelings of shame cause a loss of self-integration, Dr. Brende explains, the “self” can be split into five fragments: Ego, Protector, Child, Victim, and Aggressor.

Such fragmentation predisposes the person to unstable and destructive (sadistic, masochistic, abusive, and battering) relationships.... He or she becomes overprotective or easily angered, causing further victimization behavior.... Survivors who have been so shattered often become victims of repetitive self-destructive symptoms, behaviors, and interactions with individuals, particularly their closest friends and relatives.<sup>10</sup>

This tendency to “replay” or “reenact” events, emotions, or even psychological conditions, associated with a trauma can be particularly self-destructive. For example, Lorena’s abortion trauma began at the time John rejected the pregnancy and demanded an abortion. This involved a major domestic argument. Subsequent domestic disputes may have been more frequent and emotionally charged because they became entangled with aspects of reenactment.

Over half of women who report post-abortion maladjustments report that “Because of my abortion experience, I underwent a dramatic personality change,” with almost all reporting that the change was for the “worse.”<sup>11</sup> Such personality changes often include, as described by Dr. Brende, the “loss of innocence and ideals,” a symptom which is associated with a fractured self.

In Lorena’s case, an example of this loss of ideals may have led to her involvement in stealing. Given her traditional and conservative background, such stealing would seem extremely uncharacteristic. On the other hand, after her abortion, she, like many similar women, probably saw herself as “fallen from grace.” Perhaps even unredeemable. How could stealing compare to having killed one’s own child? A little more shame and guilt would hardly be noticed.

## The Abandoned Child

Because the testimony centered on Lorena, most of this analysis has been focused on Lorena’s reaction to the abortion. Though

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**It is likely that Lorena was angry at herself for giving in to the abortion.**

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there was very little testimony regarding John's background, personality, and psychological condition, it is worth reflecting on what little was disclosed in the court transcripts.

When John was five years old, he and his brothers went to live with relatives. According to his aunt and surrogate mother, "we took them out of a bad home life. His mother wasn't mentally capable of taking care of him." No mention was made of his father.

It is likely that John had unresolved emotional issues regarding this "abandonment" by his biological parents. It is known that he suffered from a learning disability, attention deficit disorder.

It is also possible that John saw Lorena, who had a maternal, nurturing personality, as a mother-figure. If so, this subconscious association may have transferred to Lorena both his expectations for an idealized mother and his latent resentments toward his real mother.

John clearly expected Lorena to take care of him. He expected her to handle all the household tasks; plus, he wanted her to support him financially. He was also very jealous and possessive of her. Even during the times they were separated, he would try to arouse her jealousy by describing his affairs with other women and comparing their lovemaking to hers. Only a week before the cutting incident, he was still trying to impress her by insisting that she should come watch a fight he was going to have with another man in the parking lot.

This jealous possessiveness toward his mother-figure wife may also account for John's immediate reaction of hostility when he learned Lorena was pregnant. He may have been upset about much more than the financial expenses of having a child. The sudden news of her pregnancy may have aroused a fear that this baby would be competing for his wife-mother's attentions. He would be redefined as a father-husband rather than the child-husband he wanted to be. John was afraid of being displaced once again.

Lorena describes at least two incidents after the abortion when John kicked her in the stomach. This may have been simply an arbitrary point of attack. But it is also possible that, on some level, John was striking at the source of their pain—Lorena's womb, whereby their unborn child had entered into and forever changed their lives.

While John Bobbitt did not testify regarding his own feelings subsequent to the abortion, we should not ignore the possibility that he too was experiencing guilt and remorse. Studies show that the vast majority of men do so, and much more so than is generally realized.<sup>12</sup> If John was troubled by the abortion, it is likely that he would blame his negative feelings on Lorena. It was her fault that she got pregnant; her fault that she ended up "needing" the abortion; her fault that he felt guilty.

As an "abandoned child" John may also have resented Lorena for

having "abandoned" their child. Even though he had insisted on the abortion, he may subsequently have blamed her for not having been strong enough to keep their baby—just as his own mother had not been strong enough to keep him.

In any event, it is probable that John realized, at least on a subconscious level, that the abortion had dramatically changed their relationship. It had made Lorena withdraw from him, emotionally and sexually. It was also a source of many unspoken resentments which was being translated into anger toward one another.

In short, the abortion affected both Lorena and John, both directly and through their interactions. When Lorena had conceded to John's demand for an abortion, she had done so hoping that an abortion would save their marriage. Instead, the abortion quickly turned their problematic marriage into a full-blown nightmare.

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## John probably realized, at least subconsciously, that the abortion had changed their marriage.

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### Notes

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7. Barnard, *The Long-Term Psychological Effects of Abortion* (Portsmouth, NH: Institute for Pregnancy Loss, 1990).
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# Abortion and Domestic Violence

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There is an important connection between violence in the womb and violence in the home. Certainly not every abortion leads to domestic violence, nor is every case of domestic violence rooted in the trauma of a prior abortion. But it is not a coincidence that the rates of abortion and domestic violence have risen together during the last twenty-five years. The evidence supporting a correlation between abortion and violence between women and men, at least for some couples, is so compelling that it is beyond dispute.

Perhaps the two key elements related to post-abortion violence are (1) increased levels of irritability, anger, and rage, and (2) increased tendencies toward risk-taking, self-destructive, and suicidal behaviors.

In an Elliot Institute study of 260 women, 53 percent stated that after their abortion “I started losing my temper more easily,” and 48 percent stated “I became more violent when angered.” Self-hatred, hatred of the male, and hatred of men in general, were all significantly correlated to each other.

In this same sample, 56 percent reported experiencing suicidal feelings, with 28 percent actually attempting suicide one or more times. Approximately 37 percent described themselves as “self-destructive” with another 13 percent “unsure,” that is, unwilling to rule out that they had become self-destructive.

Suicidal tendencies and self-destructive behavior were statistically associated to shorter tempers and increased levels of anger and violence ( $p < .00001$ ). In turn, short tempers and self-destructive behavior were also significantly associated with feeling less in touch with one’s emotions, feeling unable to grieve, faking displays of happiness, and feeling less control over one’s life.

This constellation of problems, an increased tendency toward violence, emotional detachment, and self-destructive behaviors, would appear to be exasperated by the study group’s dramatically increased rate of drug and alcohol abuse subsequent to abortion.

## The Abused and the Abusers

Violence begets violence. So it is not surprising that women who become more rage filled after their abortions are also more likely to become the victims of violence. For example, Carol St. Amour writes:

“I was a very open-minded, pro-choice feminist... [But after my abortion] I hated myself and Jim so much that I could no longer keep it inside. I was very pathetic, instigating fights between us,

saying things like he loved his ex-wife and children more than me and our dead baby. We went for secular counseling during this time. Our therapist said that I was experiencing a mourning period and overwhelming grief. To me it was a baby, my baby. To Jim it was a products-of-conception blob, a problem. He understood my feelings, but he couldn’t handle it.

“In November, during a bitter fight, I grabbed a 12-inch butcher knife and cut up his good brown suit, stabbing at it and crying. He began hauling things out of the house, leaving and taking his possessions with him. I was furious. We began throwing things at each other, spitting, name-calling.

“As I watched him load OUR car with his things, something clicked in me that I wanted to kill him. I lunged at him with the butcher knife, and he hit me as a full-grown man would hit when fighting with another man.

“He picked up an oxen yoke from the porch (I collected antiques) and used it as a baseball bat on me. It knocked me off my feet and drove me six feet into the house. There I lay, I couldn’t move. My kids were running around screaming, crying, and attacking

him, hitting him for hurting me.”

Cycles of violence such as this are common. Studies of domestic abuse have found that women are substantially more likely to initiate violence than men, as confirmed even by the women studied. Because of their greater strength, however, the hitting done by men causes more damage. But researchers have also found that to offset this advantage of strength, women are more likely to resort to the use of household weapons, such as boiling water or knives.

One explanation for why women may be more likely to initiate violence is that women may be more likely to perceive men as able to “take it.” Women may feel that their punching and scratching does not significantly hurt the larger and stronger male.

Another possibility, however, is that women may be more likely to use their partners as means of self-punishment. A woman who is self-destructive or suicidal, but afraid to deliberately harm herself, may be more likely to become involved with a violent man. She may also be more likely to provoke or attack her spouse, simply because she doesn’t care if she gets hurt. Indeed, she may even feel that she deserves to be hurt. According to one post-aborted woman:

“One night during a drunken spree, he held a knife to my chest. I told him to kill me, that I wanted to die. I had nothing. No parents, no husband, really, no baby, and no self-respect. How *could* he respect me? I had killed our child. How could I look at myself in

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**It’s not surprising that women who become rage-filled after abortion are more likely to become victims of violence.**

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the mirror every day? I was a murderer. I truly wanted to die.”

This woman’s self-esteem had been destroyed by her abortion. She believed that she deserved to be punished, and she was prepared to accept this punishment, and even destruction, at the hands of her husband. Having been too weak to protect her child, she subsequently felt too weak to protect herself.

This problem of self-punishment by proxy may also involve masochistic issues. For a woman who has become emotionally dead because of post-abortion trauma, her outbursts of rage may be the only emotion which she can truly feel. She may, therefore, continually expose herself to cycles of violence because they help her feel connected with reality.

In the immediate aftermath of violent episodes, she and her male partner can both feel the sadness, the pain, and the grief that they have been keeping locked inside. But even in these moments, their emotions are held at arm’s length, repackaged under the label of domestic violence rather than post-abortion grief.

The most troubling concern of domestic violence counselors is that so many abused women stay in abusive relationships. In many of these cases, the best explanation for this victimizing behavior may be found in the self-punishing aspects of post-abortion trauma. Therefore, until domestic violence counselors begin to address the underlying problems associated with post-abortion trauma, they may never help this group of women escape from the cycle of violence in which they are trapped.

## Back to the Bobbitts

Having laid the groundwork throughout this special issue of *The Post-Abortion Review*, it is now time to draw upon the testimony and insights described herein to summarize what I believe is the most plausible description of the dynamics which created an atmosphere of violence in the Bobbitt household.

Immediately, and for several months after the abortion, Lorena became severely depressed. She had a lack of energy, lack of enthusiasm, and a lack of joy. This was drag on John’s “let’s party attitude.”

It was also an indictment. Every time he reached to touch her and she pulled away, every time he saw her sitting with her head down in a sad depression, he was reminded of his guilt. He didn’t like feeling guilty. He blamed her for making him feel guilty. He blamed her for getting pregnant in the first place. They each felt anger and resentment toward the other.

Lorena also became sexually cold toward John. This created additional anger and guilt. He insisted that she was his wife and owed him sex. She refused. He forced himself upon her. These fights further increased the levels of anger, shame, and guilt which both felt.

At the same time, a pattern was becoming established. This cycle

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# Why the truth was buried

There are many reasons why the defense team for Lorena Bobbitt chose not to fully explore the known relationship between Lorena’s abortion and her attack on John. Most of the following explanations were conveyed to me by principals in the case.

First, the job of the defense team was to gain Lorena’s acquittal. It was not their job to fully discover or reveal the truth; it was sufficient to simply show that the prosecution has failed to prove its case “beyond a reasonable doubt.”

Second, it is often prudent for defense lawyers to withhold relevant information. In this specific case, the attorneys were presenting a temporary insanity defense. Therefore, “too much” explanation of Lorena’s frame of mind could backfire.

Leaving the more bizarre aspects of the case unexplained could actually strengthen the insanity defense. The jury could only attribute them to the “mysteries” of a disturbed mind.

Conversely, if the jury gained too much insight into why Lorena acted the way she did, this might inadvertently lead the jury to conclude that Lorena had a particular motivation for her attack on John. This would undermine their “irresistible impulse” defense, which by definition means an act which lacks any rational motivation.

Third, the single overriding strategy of the defense team was to show that John Bobbitt was a brutal wife beater. They wanted to portray Lorena as the sympathetic victim and John as the despicable sadist.

They wanted the jury to believe that even in her moment of temporary insanity, Lorena was only defending herself. Everything that happened was really John’s fault. With his years of abuse he had “loaded the gun”; with his rape that night he had “pulled the trigger.” Given this strategy, too much emphasis on the abortion would distract the jury from seeing John as cause of his own destruction.

Fourth, the issue of abortion is highly emotional and contentious. It would be difficult to predict and control the jury’s reaction to a defense which claims that abortion can cause a severe psychological disability. There was a risk that emphasizing the trauma of the abortion might provoke a backlash from pro-abortion jurors who might reject this entire defense as simply “anti-choice” propaganda.

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## Abortion and Domestic Violence, from page 14

would turn into a macabre dance of violence and intimacy.

Withdrawn and bitter, Lorena was emotionally dead inside, self-destructive, and suicidal. She would somehow antagonize John, either deliberately or simply because she no longer cared. After all, she believed that she and John both deserved to be punished for what they had done. Then, after every brutal fight, John would try to comfort her. He would promise to never let it happen again, promise her a better future, and then make love to her.

In these moments after the violence, Lorena was perhaps able to see John the way she wanted him to be: sensitive, apologetic, and filled with remorse and grief. It was only then that she could feel emotionally connected with him. It was only then, during this open display of sorrow, that she could feel emotionally connected to herself. Only then were her emotions real and authentic. This was pain and grief exactly like all that she was keeping bottled up inside herself.

And then, when John was making his sorrowful promises to fix their problems, Lorena was briefly able to resuscitate her dreams of building up a happy home and family. Then, last of all, in the moments of apologetic lovemaking which followed, she could imagine how she would welcome the gift of a replacement baby.

Of course, Lorena would have preferred that they could make this connection without going through the route of violence which got them there. But it may not be too much to say that these moments of shared guilt and intimacy which followed the violence are what kept them together. It was a pattern which could only have a tragic ending.

## Why the Truth Was Buried, from page 14

Fifth, two sources confirm that one member of the defense team was particularly hostile to any inclusion of the post-abortion expert's testimony. One source described this hostility as arising from a "personality conflict," while another source attributed it more directly to an ideological mismatch.

According to the latter source, this one defense attorney objected to any testimony which might undermine the public's perception of abortion's safety. In short, this attorney may have believed that blaming John for Lorena's emotional breakdown was politically correct, blaming it on her abortion was not.

*This issue has been a special reprint of our Spring-Summer 1996 issue. More information on post-abortion trauma, including research findings, personal testimonies from post-abortive women, and commentary, is available on our web site at [www.afterabortion.org](http://www.afterabortion.org).*

*The Bobbit case is also discussed in Chapter 8 of the book "Forbidden Grief: The Unspoken Pain of Abortion," by Theresa Burke and David Reardon. Visit [www.forbiddengrief.com](http://www.forbiddengrief.com) for more information or call 1-888-412-2676 to place an order.*

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# Who Was Most Guilty?

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After John and Lorena were both tried and acquitted, a reporter asked Lorena, “So, Americans want to know, who was the guilty party?” Without any hesitation or guile, Lorena answered, “We both were. We’re both guilty.” (Even in this answer, we may be hearing echoes of Lorena’s guilt over the abortion.)

Few would argue with her answer. Still, what frustrates me most is that there is a third party, one who has never been named, who is more liable for what happened to the Bobbitts than either Lorena or John.

The most guilty party of all was the abortionist who negligently performed an unwanted abortion on a patient who was clearly at high risk of experiencing severe post-abortion maladjustment. The abortionist not only failed to protect Lorena from John’s pressure, he or she also failed to explain to John that a coerced abortion would traumatize Lorena, cause her to develop deep emotional resentments against John, would most likely make her emotionally detached, self-destructive, and sexually frigid toward him. In short, the abortionist and clinic counselors should have told Lorena and John that if they went through with that abortion, it would very likely destroy their marriage.

The abortionist did not explain these facts to Lorena or John. This proves that either the abortionist was negligently ignorant and incompetent, or the abortionist deliberately concealed relevant information from the couple and carelessly exposed them to known and avoidable risks.

While the abortionist could never have predicted that Lorena would end up cutting off John’s penis on the third anniversary of the abortion, everything else was predictable. Lorena matched at

least eight characteristics which reliably predict psychological maladjustments after an abortion. It should have been obvious to anyone who was familiar with the literature, which an abortionist is obligated to be, that abortion would cause emotional harm to Lorena, and consequently cause injury to her marriage and John.

This was unquestionably a contraindicated abortion. There was no medical justification for performing it, and there was every ethical reason for refusing to do so no matter how much John may have insisted upon it. The only proper medical recommendation, in this case, would have been a referral to marital counseling.

## The Greatest Guilt and Greatest Tragedy

So, Lorena, if you are ever asked again who the guilty party was, it is proper to say that you and John both share in the guilt. But most of all, the guilt falls upon your abortionist—someone who, in principle, was under a physician’s obligation to protect your physical, mental, and marital health. Instead, he or she was nothing more than a medical prostitute who performed a contraindicated abortion simply because you had the money to pay for it. Neither you nor John could possibly have known all the havoc your unwanted abortion could cause to your lives. It was the abortionist’s job to protect you, but instead he or she deliberately and knowingly exposed both of you to great injury.

The greatest tragedy of all is that hundreds of abortionists, like yours, Lorena, are doing the same thing, to other couples, every hour of every day. And they will continue to do so until they are finally made liable for all the injuries they have inflicted on millions of women, men, and families in our nation.

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*Elliot*  
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