

abortion, where the abortion occurred against his wishes or he didn't know about it until afterwards (Rue, Coyle, & Coleman, 2007).

Research evidence suggests that men are more likely to feel despair after a pregnancy loss, including a pervasive sense of hopelessness, one of the signs of chronic grief (Stinson et al., 1992). It is apparent that men's lives contain greater attachments and are more profoundly affected by fatherhood than has usually been assumed.



### *Risks to Masculinity & Relationships*

Contemporary reliance on abortion as a “contraceptive back-up” may in fact be promoting male detachment, desertion and irresponsibility. According to Morabito (1991), abortion can actually encourage sexual exploitation of women. In this scenario, the male may view his partner's pregnancy as a “biological quirk corrected by abortion.”

When a male/female relationship experiences an abortion, it is likely that the following occur:

- (1) a reduction in self-disclosures by both partners, which decreases the intimacy necessary for relationship survival;
- (2) increased use of defensive communication behaviors (e.g., interpersonal hostility);
- (3) the development of partner communication apprehensiveness (fear translated into avoidance behaviors), the erosion of trust, and the evolution into a closed system of interaction as opposed to an open and dynamic one;
- (4) a loss of spiritual connectedness to God and to one's partner with the advent of guilt, shame and isolation.

There is a considerable price for both men and women when men feel they cannot talk about their experience of a partner's abortion.

One of the sad realities of abortion is how caring men, who try not to hurt the women they love, in fact hurt them by saying nothing when abortion is first mentioned in the crisis decision making process. Wanting to please, these men are rejected because they were judged deficient in true love for their partners.

### *Conclusion*

Abortion leaves indelible footprints in the texture of masculinity, in the recesses of a man's heart, and in his reproductive history. A father is a father forever, even of a dead unborn child. In the aftermath of abortion, the real choice for men is whether to accept this biological reality, grieve the loss and seek forgiveness, or to continue denying what is inwardly known and swell the ranks of the hollowed men. Irrespective of the law, both man and woman co-created the pregnancy, and both will live with the aftermath, regardless of how some may try to celebrate “choice.”

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The full-length version of this article is posted at <http://www.usccb.org/prolife/programs/rlp/rue.pdf>.



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# “THE HOLLOW MEN”: MALE GRIEF AND TRAUMA FOLLOWING ABORTION

*by Vincent M. Rue, Ph.D.*

*Hope and Trust in Life!*  
**RESPECT LIFE**

We are the hollow men  
We are the stuffed men . . .  
Our dried voices, when  
We whisper together  
Are quiet and meaningless . . .  
Remember us—if at all—not as lost  
Violent souls, but only  
As the hollow men  
The stuffed men.

T.S. Eliot, “The Hollow Men” (1925)

Abortion has become a personal and social eraser of choice for our unwanted, ill-timed, and “defective” offspring. With mainstream mental health professional associations encouraging this procedure by advising that it is psychologically safe, women and men have embraced abortion as a stress reliever. Yet the evidence is mounting that abortion carries serious and significant mental health risks for many women.

What about the impact of abortion on men? With some 45 million abortions in the U.S. since 1973, this is not a rhetorical question. The sheer numbers represent a potential mental health shockwave of personal and relational injury.

More than anything else, the U.S. Supreme Court has shaped the role of men in abortion. The Court has held that a woman’s right not to procreate trumps a man’s right to procreate, making his involvement in the

abortion decision irrelevant. In *Planned Parenthood of Missouri v. Danforth* (1976), the Court dismissed the validity of a husband’s involvement in his wife’s decision. No state allows a husband to be informed of his wife’s impending abortion.

### *Emerging Awareness*

Growing interest in how abortion impacts individuals, their relationships and families is evident today. The first-ever conference on men and abortion took place in 2007, 34 years after the Supreme Court legalized abortion. Since then, media reports highlighting various aspects of this subject have appeared in the *Los Angeles Times*, *The Nation* and other publications.

### *His Abortion Experience*

Men’s responses to abortion are varied, like men themselves. How abortion impacts men is complicated by the decision-making that precedes the abortion.

For men who pressure or encourage the women they care about to have an abortion, troublesome feelings can emerge later on. In *Evangelium Vitae*, Pope John Paul II made it clear that by leaving her alone to face the problems of pregnancy, he indirectly encourages such a decision on her part to abort (no. 59).

In a national web-based study of 135 men who have experienced an abortion, 48% of



men stated that they opposed their partner’s abortion and 69% reported moderate to very high stress following the abortion (Rue, Coyle, & Coleman, 2007).

### *What Does The Research Show?*

While there is much we don’t know about men and abortion, there are some 28 studies on men’s reactions to abortion that are informative. In one study, most men felt overwhelmed, with many experiencing disturbing thoughts of the abortion (Shostak & McLouth, 1984). Research evidence suggests that men are also less comfortable expressing vulnerable feelings of grief and loss, instead either saying nothing or becoming hostile. And of course, because no abortion occurs in a relational vacuum, the consequences of these two factors have considerable implications for men’s relationships with women.

In a review of how abortion impacts relationships, Coleman, Rue & Spence (2007a) reported: (1) men tend to exert greater control over the expression of painful emotions, intellectualize grief, and cope alone; (2) men are also inclined to identify their

primary role as a supporter for their partners, even after an abortion, and even if they opposed the decision; (3) men were more likely to experience feelings of despair long after the abortion than women; and (4) men are more at risk for experiencing chronic grief.

The best evidence indicates that a minimum of 10-30% of women who undergo an abortion report pronounced and/or prolonged psychological difficulties attributable to the abortion. These adverse psychological outcomes include guilt, anxiety, depression, sleep disturbance, relationship problems, substance abuse, symptoms of post-traumatic stress, and increased risk of suicide. Male responses to a partner’s abortion include grief, guilt, depression, anxiety, feelings of repressed emotions, helplessness/voicelessness/powerlessness, post-traumatic stress, anger and relationship problems (Coyle, 2007).

Psychological injury in men following abortion is likely underestimated due to men’s propensity to avoid self-disclosure. Preliminary findings in a new study found four out of ten men experienced chronic post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) symptoms, occurring on average 15 years after the abortion. Certain factors predict whether men are more likely to experience abortion as traumatic: where the pregnancy was desired by them or their partner, where someone else pressured their partner into