



'I Just Had an Abortion'

By **TASHA FIERCE** (<https://www.ebony.com/author/tasha-fierce/>) January 12, 2015[f \(...\)](#) [t \(...\)](#) [G+ ...](#) [p](#) [in \(...\)](#)

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Last month, I had an abortion.

I've been a strident advocate for a woman's right to choose since I was a pre-teen, and it's still difficult for me to say those words. So many assumptions about my life can be made on the basis of that admission, and the shame is real. For White women in American society, the shame of having an abortion is mainly centered on their individual behavior. For Black women, our behavior reflects on Black folks as a whole, specifically other Black women—so the scope of the shame is much wider. An unintended pregnancy can call your responsibility into question, and regardless of your age, the specter of the stereotypical Black teenage mother casts a long shadow.

Black women's abortion rate is almost five times greater (http://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/preview/mmwrhtml/ss5808a1.htm?s_cid=ss5808a1_e) than that of White women, and the circumstances that led to my abortion aren't uncommon. I live in California, a state that has fully implemented the Affordable Care Act. The ACA mandates that insurance companies must cover contraception with no cost sharing. It doesn't govern how health care providers decide to run their practices, however. Due to rising insurance deductibles, many doctors now require that patients pay for services up front (<http://www.bloomberg.com/news/2013-10-14/patients-pay-before-seeing-doctor-as-deductibles-spread.html>) to ensure they get paid. It's up to the patient to wait for reimbursement from insurance companies. Women who purchase insurance through ACA exchanges or who have to use Medicaid often have difficulty finding a doctor that will even accept the reduced-cost policies (<http://www.usatoday.com/story/news/nation/2014/10/27/insurers-aca-exchange-plans-lower-reimbursements-doctors/17747839/>), because they pay out less to health care providers. I had insurance through my employer, but I still ran into the up front cost issue with most of my doctors, whether I was trying to get reproductive care or just general lab tests done.

I usually relied on condoms and contraceptive sponges as birth control, since the pill and other hormonal methods messed with my mood something awful. I looked into getting an IUD, but my doctor wanted me to pay the full \$700 for the device up front. Coming up with \$700 on the spot was not going to happen. I already had enough issues having to pay the premium for insurance I rarely used in addition to coughing up the co-pay and 20% of the cost of doctor visits. Bills, tuition, and day-to-day living expenses had to come first. I added an IUD to the long list of things I needed but couldn't afford.

We all know condoms and sponges are not 100% reliable, and as happens once in a while, my primary means of contraception failed. I took the "morning-after pill", but a month later I still hadn't started my period. I already had an appointment with the gynecologist scheduled for my annual check-up, so when I went, I took a pregnancy test. A few days later, I'm lying on the doctor's table staring at a blurry ultrasound screen and listening to her describing what I was seeing as the "gestational sac". I'm thinking to myself, For real? It's cliché, but I never thought I'd end up in this situation. My immediate reaction was to say get this out of me, now. Out loud. The doctor wanted to wait and see if the "situation" would resolve itself. She was going on vacation, so she had me make an appointment to see her in 3 weeks.

Within two days after I saw the doctor, I got laid off. The next day, I was hit hard with around the clock nausea and vomiting. I could barely keep water down. My doctor prescribed medication specifically for nausea and vomiting in pregnancy, but my insurance refused to cover it. I was practically praying for death. Over the course of a week, I had lost 7 lbs. I couldn't see myself surviving for another 2 weeks without eating. Plus, my insurance coverage was going to lapse before I'd be able to see the doctor again. I decided I just needed to find a low-cost clinic and have an abortion before my insurance expired.

My procedure was scheduled for 7 a.m. on a Sunday. Mornings were hellish for me because the nausea was at its peak—even if I hadn't eaten anything, I would dry heave for hours. My boyfriend, who was very supportive throughout the whole ordeal, got me out of bed and drove me to the clinic. I looked and felt haggard. As we pulled up, I noticed a group of White and Latino protesters outside the clinic shouting at patients entering. *Whatever*, I thought. *I've heard this crap before.*

When my boyfriend and I got out of the car and started towards the entrance, their shouting changed from the general fare to a targeted "Did you know abortion is the number one cause of death in the African-American community?" In my mental and physical state, I really was not prepared to quietly accept a bunch of non-Black people using my race to guilt me out of getting an abortion. I snapped. How I was able to scream "Fuck you!" with as much force as I did being as weak as I was, I don't know. That rage was strong. My boyfriend restrained me from responding any further and rushed me inside.

The abortion was successful, and I also managed to get an IUD installed while I was under anesthesia because the clinic I went to didn't require payment up front. I don't have any regrets about my decision, and I'm not "haunted" by it. It was the right decision for me, emotionally and financially. That exchange before I went inside haunts me, though.

Black women are blamed for a litany of ills that plague our community, and we're constantly disrespected for the choices we make regarding our bodies. On the one hand, a Black woman who goes through with an unwanted pregnancy and ends up having to use social services is shamed for being irresponsible and "leeching" off the system. On the other, a Black woman who makes the decision to terminate a pregnancy when they know having a child isn't the best idea can be shamed for endangering the future of her race. I'm concerned for Black women that seek abortion who aren't as comfortable with their individual decision as I am, and who may be shamed into changing their mind by anti-choice campaigns targeted at the Black community (http://colorlines.com/archives/2011/02/nyc_anti-abortion_ad_may_be_coming_down_--

_but_the_real_battles_just_begun.html). As with too many other experiences I've had that should be strictly personal, my abortion ended up being one more reminder that Black women are so often damned if we do, damned if we don't.

Tasha Fierce is a feminist writer, blogger, and Los Angeles native. Her work has been featured in Jezebel, The Huffington Post, Racialicious, Clutch, and Bitch Magazine. She blogs about race, politics, sex, and pop culture at Tastefully Ratchet. You can follow her on Twitter as @MissTashaFierce (<http://twitter.com/MissTashaFierce>).

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