

# Pregnant at Harvard?

I still remember freshman orientation, when the Office of Student Life had us all bond with our entryways by sending us on a dorky scavenger hunt through Harvard's plethora of campus resources, from the Bureau of Study Counsel to the Office of Career Services to Room 13. In the Women's Center, my friends and I giggled awkwardly at the rainbow condoms and joked about a brochure entitled "Pregnant At Harvard?" I never dreamed that it would be relevant to my life. And yet two and a half years later, I walked sobbing out of a clinic in Boston after having an abortion.

Okay. Rewind needed.

When I came to Harvard, I was very much the stereotypical Harvard freshman. I fit in well with the high school student body presidents, star soccer players, first violinists, and newspaper editor-in-chiefs. I'd never done drugs. The most I'd ever had to drink was a glass of champagne with my parents. I had a steady boyfriend of two years. Life wasn't picture-perfect; it never is. But mine was almost scarily wholesome.

College was a whole new world in so many ways. I drank for the first time. I partied every weekend. My adoringly sweet high school boyfriend and I broke up right around Thanksgiving of freshman year. But I had a social life, good grades, and exciting extracurriculars.

And soon after, I fell in love with a boy who was perfect for me—the type of soulmate that everyone dreams of finding at Harvard. He was my intellectual equal and shared both my romance and my quirky sense of humor. And he made me feel crazily and unquestioningly in love. We could spend hours working on problem sets or hours tearing up a dance floor, we finished each other's jokes, and we could look at each other and know exactly what the other person was thinking. More than that, we understood each other in a way that no one else ever had. He told me he wanted to marry me. The feeling was mutual, and I eventually ended up losing my virginity to him. Like life, relationships aren't ever perfect. But we were the type of relationship that everyone wanted to have.

This past fall, something changed. We started having arguments about every little thing. I would say "I love you," and then get angry and then confused and then sad. I still loved him, but something felt overwhelmingly different and I didn't know how to express it in words. Eventually, he'd had it. He told me that I wasn't the girl he fell in love with, and he broke up with me.

I spent weeks sobbing about losing the love of my life, the one person who had promised to always be there for me. I couldn't eat, I couldn't sleep, and I couldn't concentrate. I didn't know what was wrong with me. I eventually started having strange nightmares and vomiting up random foods. I realized I had skipped a period that should've happened before the breakup. But even then, I thought my sadness was the underlying cause.

Looking back, it seems obvious that my symptoms were classic pregnancy indicators, clues we all learn in ninth-grade health class. I wasn't stupid. But perhaps I was in denial.

Even after two more missed periods, I still hadn't realized that my ever-changing feelings were hormonally induced mood swings, that the vomiting was morning sickness, and that the changes to my body were a pregnant glow. It wasn't until I was getting dressed and noticed a visible stomach bump in the mirror that I finally came to terms with the truth.

I took two pregnancy tests, just to be certain. I spent the night by myself, crying. The very next day, I skipped class and went to an abortion clinic, where I officially learned that I was almost four months pregnant. My ex-boyfriend had apparently broken up with a girl who was a month and a half pregnant with his child.

All I desperately wanted was to have my boyfriend back. I wanted him to hold me and let me cry into his chest, for him to tell me that everything was okay even though it wasn't. But by the time I found out the truth, it was too late to get him back. He had started dating another girl two months after we broke up. I couldn't tell him. I couldn't tell anyone.

So I called the clinic and made an appointment for a week's time. That week was the hardest of my entire life. I hid underneath baggy sweaters, convinced that someone would notice how round my stomach had gotten. I was pale and withdrawn, and skipped almost every class to cry in my bedroom. I woke up every day praying that I was having some extended nightmare. I wasn't.

I headed to the clinic a week later with just a book, a water bottle, my Harvard ID, and a locket containing a picture of my ex-boyfriend and me. The procedure didn't take long. It wasn't even that physically painful. But when it was over, I screamed. I couldn't stop screaming. As I write these words, it has been over a month since the abortion—and on the inside that screaming hasn't stopped.

This isn't Mean Girls—I'm not going to tell you, "Don't have sex. You will get pregnant, and you will die." But what I will say is that, yes, there are nights when I wish I could die, when I look in the mirror and hate myself with every fiber of my being. There are nights where I stay up holding the locket, the one piece I have of both my ex-boyfriend and my child, and just cry hysterically. There are nights where I try so hard to convince myself that life is worthwhile by talking myself to sleep with thoughts of stargazing and dancing and laughter, but no matter what I think about I can't get rid of an all-encompassing sense of pain.

And part of what makes it so hard is there is no one to help me deal with that pain. I wish that I had support. I wish that someone would tell me I'm not a horrible person for making the choice that I did, or say that they sympathize with my agony. But I can't tell anyone, even my family, about my abortion or my child. I did end up telling my ex-boyfriend. I wanted him to realize that we'd never actually been broken. I sobbed into his chest and confessed everything. I told him about my guilt and my pain. He still didn't take me back. He told me to tell him if anything was seriously wrong, but he didn't support me when I needed him and reached out for help. Maybe now I'm just too messed up for him, or anyone else, to deal with.

It is frightening how hard it can be to find support at Harvard. I was shocked by how easy it was to hide my pregnancy. No one, not even my roommates or best friends, noticed how I suddenly started wearing exclusively baggy clothing, or how I kept cancelling plans last minute so I could

cry in my room. No one noticed that I was vomiting on a near-daily basis, though I passed it off as “a winter bug” for weeks on end.

We’ve talked before about how here at school, we’re so wrapped up in our own lives that we forget to pay attention to others. We ignore the little signals from our friends that something could be amiss, even if we don’t realize that we’re doing it. I think I truly wanted someone to notice that something was wrong. I wanted someone to ask if I was okay, to tell me that I wasn’t acting like myself—because, really, I wasn’t.

We know there are a million campus resources, no matter what you’re going through. But sometimes when you can’t see a light at the end of the day, actively reaching out is impossible to do. You want someone to come to you.

And it’s easier to take the issue and shove it under the rug. I’ve tried to cope with my situation by distracting myself with other boys; my ex uses his current girlfriend to pretend that everything is normal. Sometimes reality is too hard to deal with, and finding any escape seems like the only plausible option. This—telling my story—is a way to say that no matter what you’re going through, even if you can’t reach out for help at this point, you’re not the only one. You are not alone.

If you saw me today, you’d never guess what I’m hiding. You’d see me heading to class with an oversized backpack, or studying in Lamont, or dancing at a final club, or laughing in the dining hall while surrounded by friends. I look happy. But on the inside, I’m still screaming. The odds of getting pregnant while engaging in the safe sex that my boyfriend and I engaged in are one in a million. Then again, so are the odds of getting into Harvard.

I wonder if that “Pregnant At Harvard?” brochure is still sitting untouched in the Women’s Center. Maybe I should’ve picked it up freshman year.

***Editors’ Note:** We made the decision to run this op-ed anonymously due to the private and intensely personal nature of its content. It is our hope that this piece will bring to light issues that affect members of our community.*

—John A. Griffin and Molly L. Roberts, Editorial Chairs

—Steven S. Lee, President