

**Between the Lines: Seeking  
True Culpability**  
by Mirah Riben

Otto Kirchner, Baby Richard's biological father, gave a poignant televised interview recently showing the child's seemingly healthy adjustment. Baby Richard is safe and sound at home with his birthparents...or is he? Having lost the final appeal, the prospective adoptive parents are now planning a federal appeal on the grounds that Richard's fourteenth amendment rights have been violated.

A recent television magazine show took a poll in regard to Baby Richard and found that 93 percent of its audience favored the child staying with "the only mother he ever knew." There are multiple reasons to explain this mass knee-jerk reaction on the part of the public. First, it is not simply a "natural" reaction. It has been well organized and orchestrated. "The Save Baby Jessica" contingent which quickly formed into the "De Boer Committee" has now become "Hear Our Voice: Save Our Nation's Children." If you call their 800 number you will hear messages updating callers on the latest court cases needing letters and supporters. When shows air, when editorials and articles are going into print, they line up the responses before the story is even out.

Writing about pollsters who manipulate statistics for those like Fundamentalists who are attempting to present not being allowed to pray in schools as religious persecution, newspaper columnist Susan Estrich, said: "Language has become an instrument of manipulation, not just a means of expression." The Pro-Life and Pro-Choice movements have shown amazing adeptness at using language to achieve political objectives.

No one knows the effects of manipulative language as well as birthmothers. [Birthmothers have watched] the battle for the prized title of "real mother" [and listened] to the more subtle forms of linguistic manipulation such as "make an adoption plan." Estrich concludes: "It's one thing to fight a battle of ideas and lose on the merits. That's democracy. It's quite another to lose because the other side is more skillful in the

packaging. The threat to our democratic institutions is not that technology allows people to communicate their opinions more easily, but that leadership comes to be defined as the more effective manipulation of public discourse. In politics, he who controls the question determines the answer. It's power to the pollsters and those who use them, not to the people."

We need to be mindful and ever vigilant of these subtle distortions of semantics.

### Scapegoats

Single mothers are a particularly vulnerable target right now. They are scapegoats, labeled the cause of the nation's financial and moral problems. Instead, one could argue that single mothers are the end result of the nation's financial problems—victims of poverty.

In order to combat hatred directed toward single mothers, we need to be aware of the real agenda

underlying the push for morals. The real agenda is a backlash against feminism and a desire for a return to patriarchal rule and control. Why else would those opposed to unwed mothers on welfare likewise vehemently deny these same women access to birth control and pregnancy termination?

One reason is pure hate: they want the sinners punished, and they know adoption is a much more painful punishment than

destroying the evidence of "sins." But we need to go further and ask why? What is the real "sin" they are seeking punishment for? If the sin was that of fornication, why are only mothers, who are trying to deal as best they can and take responsibility for their children, being punished? Why are fathers getting off Scot free? If morality is the issue, are men not equally as immoral? Don't they deserve to be "punished" for their sins, such as breaking the law with underage girls, or lying, coercing, or forcing women to become impregnated?

Perhaps the real sin is not fornication. The sin is not needing a man, managing to get by without one. The sin is daring to be self-sufficient, maintain personal control, and/or raise children without a husband/father/bread-winner in control in a male-dominated world. We need to constantly remind those blinded by

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**What is the real "sin"  
single mothers are  
being punished for?  
Why aren't fathers  
held accountable?**

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