



**Abortion Stigma Webinar Series** March 12, 2013

### **Abortion Stigma: Strategies for Contact and** Connection

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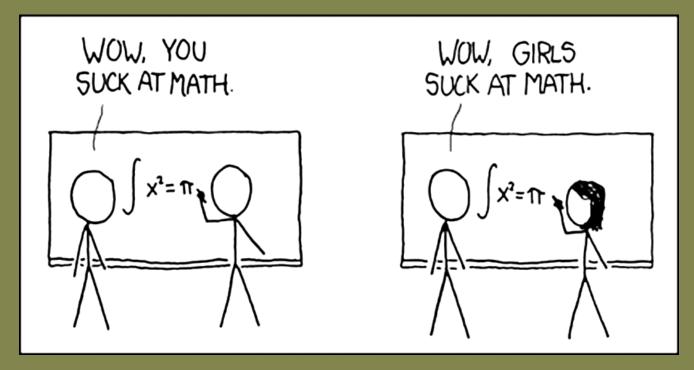




#### Stigma and Prejudice

No stigma

**Stigma** 



**Negative** attitudes

Inferior status



#### What is Abortion Stigma?



- Inferior status experienced by women who have had abortions, abortion providers, and others involved in abortion
- Prejudicial attitudes toward women who have had abortions, abortion providers and others
   who are involved in abortion



#### Abortion Stigma is Harmful

- Negatively affects women's mental and emotional health <sup>1</sup>
- Negatively affects relationships <sup>1</sup>
- Silences women's real experiences 2
- Contributes to social conflict, ideological entrenchment and political polarization <sup>3</sup>
- Stymies efforts to improve public health <sup>3</sup>



#### Contact Theory

Under appropriate conditions interpersonal contact is one of the most effective ways to reduce stigma and prejudice between majority and minority group members.



# The Optimal Conditions for Contact



- Equal status
- Common goals
- Intergroup cooperation
- Support of authorities,law or customs



#### Some Examples

- Gay student and heterosexual students at a US college<sup>4</sup>
- Muslims and Non-Muslims neighbors in the Netherlands<sup>5</sup>
- Racial attitudes toward between Black and white teammates on sports teams.<sup>6</sup>



#### Evidence about Contact Theory

- 80 years of evidence
- Meta-analytic study of 515 studies <sup>7</sup>
- Across multiple stigmas, contact reduces prejudice
- Greatest reductions were found around LGBT stigma
- Reductions in prejudice are generalizable



<sup>\*</sup>Pettigrew and Tropp. 2011. Meta-Analytic Test of Intergroup Contact Theory. Interpersonal Relationships and Group Processes.

# Contact Requires Some People to Talk and Others to Demonstrate a Willingness Listen





#### The Experience of Abortion Stigma



#### Worries about judgment

"I'm afraid I will lose an important relationship."

"My abortion discredits me."

#### **Isolation**

"I can't talk with the people I'm closest to about my abortion."

#### Self-judgment

"I feel like a bad person"

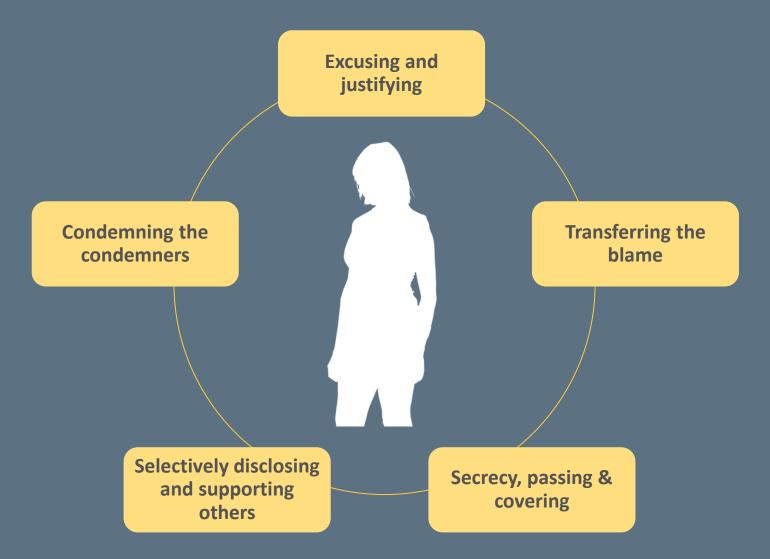
"I'm such a mess."

#### **Community condemnation**

"Most of my community thinks abortion is murder."

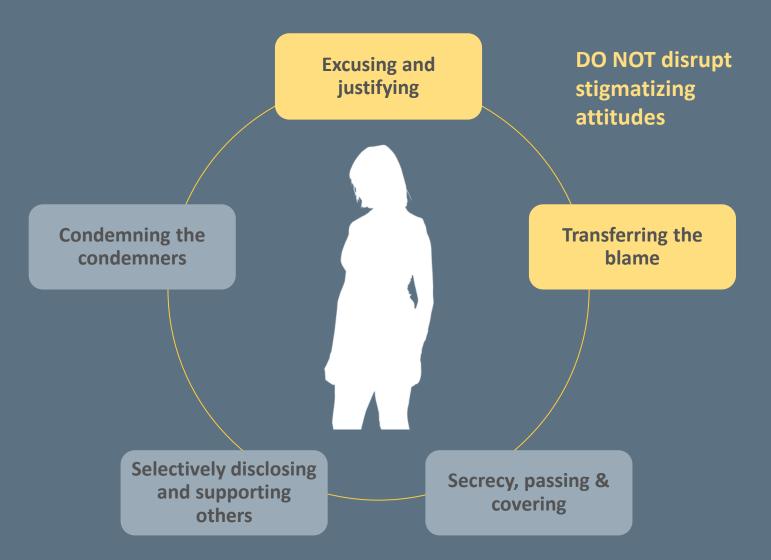


#### Common Responses to Stigma



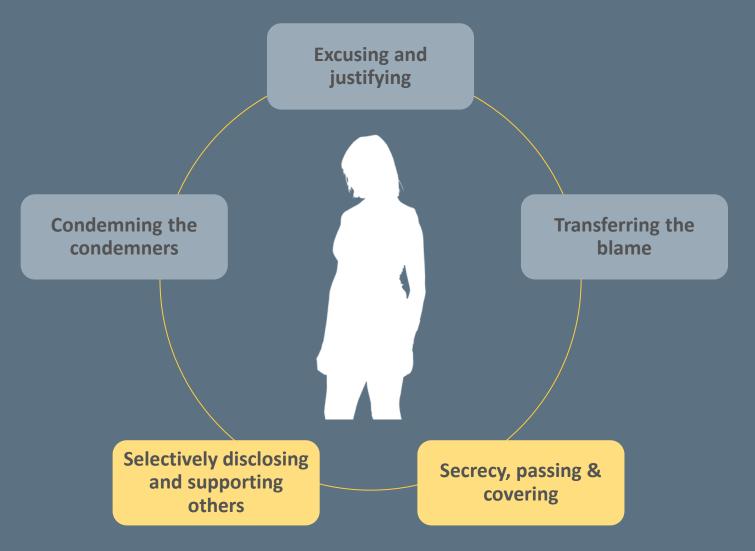


#### How Women Manage Stigma



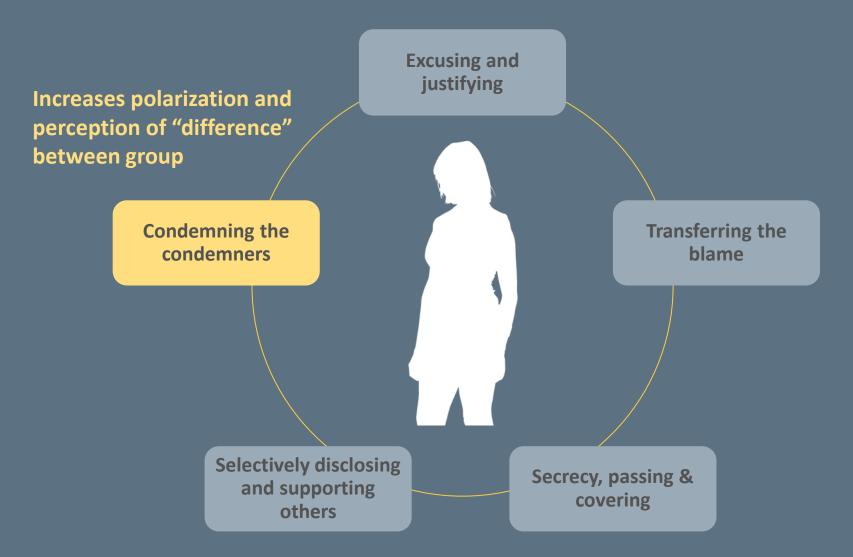


#### How Women Manage Stigma





#### How Women Manage Stigma





#### Different Levels of Prejudice





#### What are the conditions?



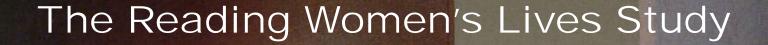


# Revisiting the Optimal Conditions for Contact



- Equal status
- Common goals
- Intergroup cooperation
- Support of authorities,law or customs





#### Book clubs: Join a UCSF study

The University of California, San Francisco is interested in observing how women talk about pregnancy experiences in the context of a book club. Discussion topics may include birth, abortion, adoption, infertility, contraceptives, and single parenthood.



Participants will read and discuss the book

Choice: True Stories of Birth, Contraception, Infertility, Adoption, Single Parenthood, and Abortion. Book club meetings will be audio-recorded by a research assistant. Participants will then be asked to fill out surveys regarding their personal history and experiences with the book club. A small group of participants will be interviewed about their experiences in the book club.

You will be compensated for participating. Researchers will provide refreshments for the book club event and each participant will receive a copy of the book and a \$10 Amazon gift card. Interview participants will receive \$30 Amazon gift cards.

Participants must be female, 18 or older, a member of an existing book club, and an English speaker. Interested? Have any questions? Contact field researcher Kate Cockrill, MPH: cockrillk@obgyn.ucsf.edu; 510-986-8935.



Advancing New Standards in Reproductive Health (ANSIRH) is a research unit of the Bixby Center for Reproductive Health Research & Policy at the University of California at San Francisco (UCSF).

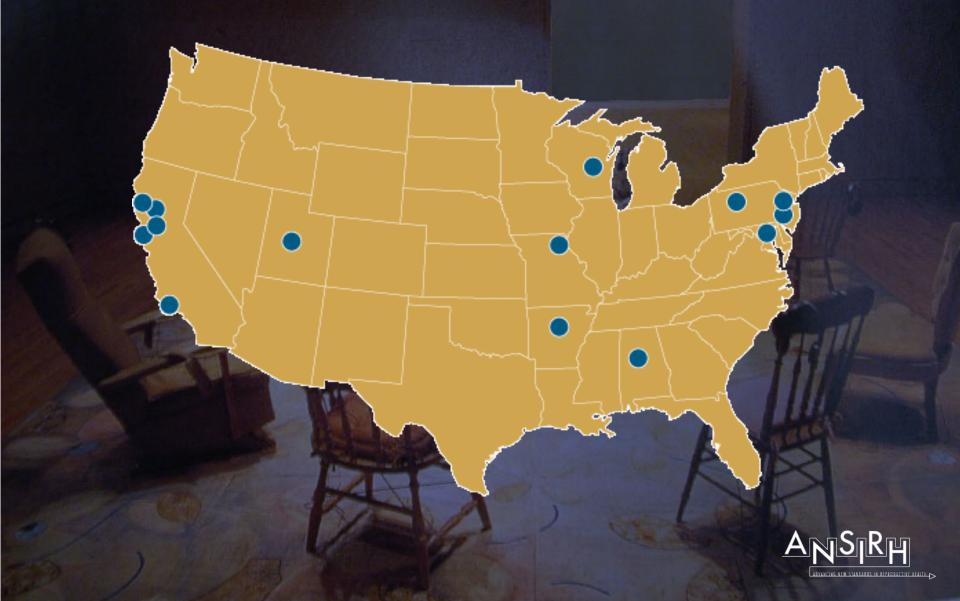


### Reading Women's Lives

- Mixed methods
  - Group observation
  - Surveys
  - Interviews
- Pre- and post-Book Club evaluation
- Connected observation data with survey and interview data



# Reading Women's Lives: 14 Book Clubs Enrolled

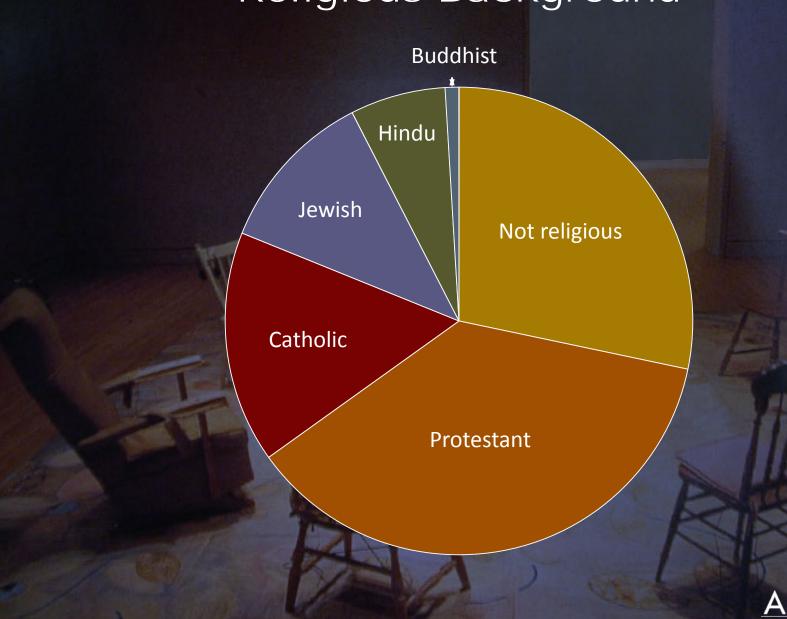


### Reading Women's Lives

- 121 participants
- 14 book clubs enrolled and observed
- Age range: 23-76 years old women (median age 47), 7men (50's and 60's)
- Race/ethnicity: 92 White, 12 Asian, 8 African American women, 2 Middle Eastern



# Religious Background





## Pregnancy Experiences from Survey

Women reporting (#)		Percentage of total	
Pregnancies	81	75%	
Births	73	68%	
Miscarriages/still births	32	30%	
Abortions	19	18%	
Adoptive mothers	2	2%	
Birth mothers	1	1%	



# 77% of Book Clubs Contained an Abortion Experience



# 15 out of 19 (79%) Women shared their abortion with their Book Club



#### **Abortion Disclosure**

"I really identified with so many of those stories ... they triggered a lot of memories. At one point I started crying and I don't even remember which story — I think it was the story about the miscarriage ... I've had five miscarriages. And I'll put it out there, I had an abortion when I was 22. So, there were two or three little touchstones for me ... so many moments when I thought, "Oh, my god, that's me."



### The Importance of Visibility

"I'm a really private person; I don't really share a lot with anyone. But this sort of showed me the benefit of putting yourself out there because you don't know who you would end up connecting with or what similar experience you might share with someone that least expects it. And so it made me be more cautious of how I look at people and what I assume about people and what their experiences are."



### Sharing and Listening

"We have all told our stories to each other ... it feels really good. It builds relationships, it makes you understand each other more, it makes you feel more connected."

—A participant who had previously had an abortion

"This was different than other experiences I have had talking about abortion ... because there was someone there who had had one ... Abortion is not black/white. You can't just dismiss someone who has had one."

—A participant who identified as "pro-life"





# Contact Theory: Feeling Thermometer A Mother 92 Women in General 91 100

### Average Pre-Test Scores



**Inconsistent Birth Control** 

41

**Pregnant Teen** 

66

A mother

92

**Women in General** 

91

**Three Abortions** 48

**One Abortion** 

75

**Pregnant Smoker** 

23

Reduced Pregnancy

59

Stigma



### Average Pre-Test Scores



Room for Change



#### Did Scores Increase Post-Intervention?

Description	Increase in Score Post- Intervention*
Inconsistent Birth Control	0
One Abortion	3
Pregnant Smoker	4
Pregnant Teen	4
Abortion for Abnormal Fetus	5
Reduced Triplet Pregnancy	5
Three Abortions	12

Yes



<sup>\*</sup> All values statistically significant at p<0.05

#### Biggest Difference Among Most Prejudiced

		Average	
	Average	Increase	% of people
	Increase in	Among <b>Most</b>	scoring
Description	Score*	Prejudiced*	under 50
Inconsistent Birth Control	0	8	45%
One Abortion	3	27	7%
Pregnant Smoker	4	8	73%
Pregnant Teen	4	18	11%
Abortion for Abnormal			
Fetus	5	29	11%
Reduced Triplet Pregnancy	5	22	45%
Three Abortions	12	22	55%



<sup>\*</sup> All values statistically significant at p<0.05

#### Limitations and Caveats

- Sample lacks diversity
- No control group
- Book lacks diversity
- Stigma still exists
- Doesn't work for everyone
- A lot of data left unexplored



#### Questions?





#### A Lot of Experience

Miscarriage and IVF. No kids.

I have two children and several miscarriages.

...And I have two sons

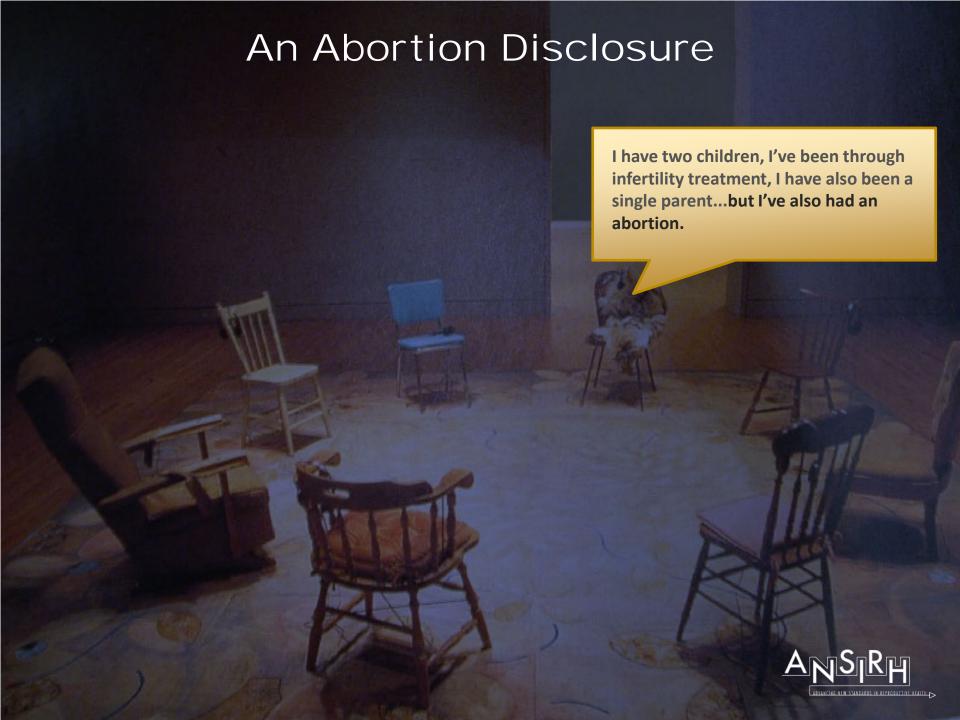
A son. Never got pregnant again.

Two children; a son and his wife just went through IVF

Two stepsons, two biological daughters and a son who I gave up for adoption when I was in high school.

I have had three pregnancies: three daughters.









# A Sea Change



### Acknowledgements



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All the Essayists in **Choice** 

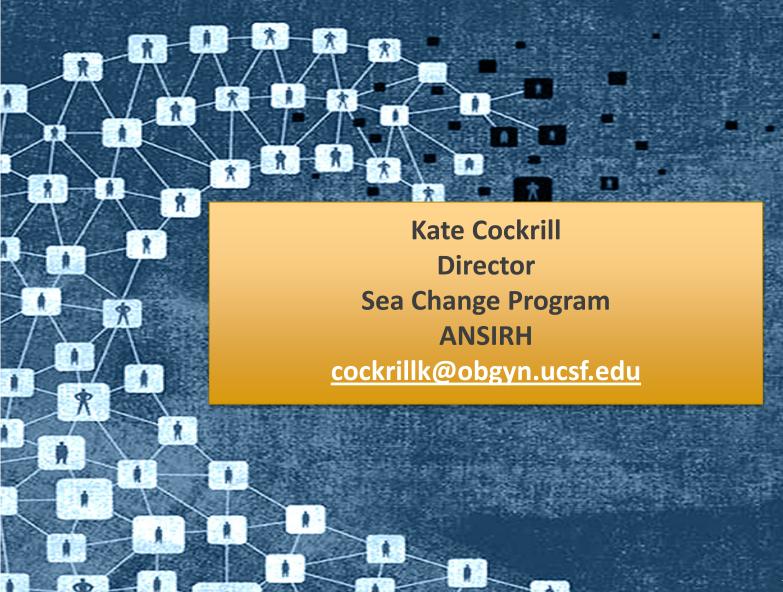
#### **Research Interns:**

Poonam Pai Steph Herold Becky Michelson

All the study participants



#### Let's Connect





#### References

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