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"Imagine You Are a Film Director...": Using Hypotheticals to Elicit People's Implicit Attitudes about Abortion

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ABSTRACT
Early on, researchers discovered that people's talk about their attitudes and their behavioral manifestations often did not match up. In other words, asking directly about one's attitudes does not necessarily reflect attitudes implicit to one's behavior. This may be particularly relevant for socially contentious topics like abortion. Because some attitudes are not directly observable, researchers must figure out how to study them. Most attitude research has been conducted using large-scale surveys and questionnaires. While some survey research has posited scenarios through which respondents can manifest their attitudes, typically, asking people to construct hypothetical narratives is not common practice. However, for this study, we analyzed 155 in-depth interviews conducted in 2021 with English- and Spanish-speaking U.S. adults, asking interviewees to imagine making a movie or documentary about abortion. We used follow-up questions to dive more deeply into the details of their imagined films. These films were remarkably similar despite the interviewees' placement on a quantitative spectrum of abortion attitudes from anti-abortion to endorsing reproductive choice. The authors used reconstructive techniques such as meaning field and reconstructive horizon analysis to articulate implicit attitudes central to the imagined films—those attitudes included "abortion is a choice," "imagined gender assumptions about women," and "abortion itself is unspeakable," among others. These attitudes were pervasive regardless of the interviewee's explicit abortion stance. These implicit attitudes emerged through the hypothetical opportunity to talk about abortion. Thus, this methodological paper primarily explores the potential of using hypotheticals in studying particularly polarized or sensitive attitudes.

KEYWORDS: Abortion, hypotheticals, qualitative analysis, implicit attitudes

Because attitudes of any sort are not directly observable, social scientists must use inferential methods to study, articulate, and understand attitudes, particularly those concerning contentious or sensitive matters. The methodological contribution of this study is to demonstrate

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the use of hypotheticals through personal in-depth interviews to get at the subtle and complex aspects of one's attitudes toward culturally/politically sensitive and/or polarized topics. We use abortion attitudes as our case in point. In the U.S., abortion is described as a highly polarized and politicized topic, as reflected in contemporary legal state landscapes. People in the U.S. struggle to talk openly about their abortion attitudes.

In this critical qualitative study, we articulate people's nuanced and complex understandings of abortion as indicated by inviting participants to engage in an imaginative process. We focused on how abortion attitudes were invoked through the use of a hypothetical question: "Imagine you are making a movie or documentary about abortion–tell me all about it." Such hypothetical questions allow interviewees to indirectly and unconsciously share complicated attitudes. We show that such an indirect approach allows participants to draw on their own implicit conceptions and suppositions relative to abortion while simultaneously avoiding the need to socially manage how they are presenting their own identities or committing to possible future actions through their expressed attitudes.

Our study is critical in that we draw on critical theory to describe how attitudes are communicative achievements. A communicative orientation toward attitudes complexifies our contemporary understanding of the epistemological nature of attitudes. Furthermore, we offer a critical alternative to the mainstream study of attitudes by exemplifying the possibilities and potential for the use of hypothetical narratives.

Why This Case: A Brief Look into Understanding Challenges in Studying Abortion Attitudes

The history of the study of attitudes in the U.S. is tightly conjoined with the history of American social psychology (Allport, 1933; Briñol & Petty, 2012). For decades, social psychologists presumed that attitudes—defined as an "evaluation of individuals…have regarding people, groups, places, objects, and issues" (Briñol & Petty, 2012, p. 285)—impact decisions and actions. The methodological implication was that attitudes could be both predictive of and inferred from an individual's choices and behaviors. Unfortunately, there was a persistently non-existent correlation between the attitudes one espoused and the behaviors one engaged in (see Wicker, 1969). Though the concept of attitudes has changed over time, it has continued to pose thorny methodological challenges particularly with respect to explaining (a) changes/stability (Dillehay et al., 1966), (b) the role of social desirability in attitude formation (Fishbein & Ajzen, 2010), and (c) the extent to which an attitude can be an unconscious/automatic response as well as a deliberative one (Zajonc, 1968). We want to highlight two important concerns that our own approach to the study of attitudes addresses. Firstly, Ajzen and Fishbein (2000) argued that one methodological problem might be that attitudes are studied at a general level while a behavior is observed with greater particularity. With respect to abortion, researchers have responded to this concern by studying attitudes in more complex correlational ways, for example, determining under what circumstances a person might endorse legal abortion and under what circumstances that same person might oppose legal abortion. Our study afforded participants opportunities to provide contextual details that were relevant to their particular ways of thinking through how one might actually behave. Secondly, Fazio proposed that attitudes can be both implicit and explicit, theorizing that methods for tapping into implicit aspects of attitudes would vary from those used to study the deliberative or explicit aspect of one's attitudes (Fazio, 2007; Fazio, Sanbonmatsu, Powell, & Kardes, 1986; Fazio & Zanna, 1981). This is particularly important for the study of socially sensitive topics such as abortion. Deliberative measures are powerful ways to examine

easily retrieved evaluative associations, but not without smuggling in other cognitive processes such as impression management or concerns for social desirability. Moreover, deliberative measures also fail to adequately capture the more implicit, automatic, or less conscious attitudes in an explicit way (Dijksterhuis et al., 2008; Fazio, Jackson, Dunton, & Williams, 1995; Fazio & Olson, 2003). Interestingly, Greenwald & Banaji (1995) found that people could hold distinctly different implicit and explicit attitudes toward the same object. If this finding holds more generally, it could help us better understand the lack of correlation between behavior (which might be more tightly connected with implicit attitudes) and explicit attitudes as typically measured through surveys. Dijksterhuis et al. (2008) went so far as to suggest that measures of implicit attitudes tended to assess the "true" stored attitude. These two concerns point to a need for methodological advances.

We sought to expand the methodological landscape in attitude research by studying attitudes known to be complex and socially sensitive. We know that abortion attitudes are more complicated and multi-dimensional than typical polarized descriptions suggest (Hans & Kimberly, 2014; Jelen & Wilcox, 2003; Jozkowski, Crawford, & Willis, 2021). Most studies have focused on the explicit aspects of one's abortion attitudes, for example, regarding one's support or opposition to the legal availability of abortion. In cases of pregnancies resulting from rape or sexual violence, or those involving health-related risks, people tend to endorse legal abortion to a greater extent than in other circumstances (Bowman & Goldstein, 2021; Jozkowski, Crawford, & Willis, 2021; Smith & Son, 2013). In this example, we can see that Ajzen and Fishbein's (2000) point about the different levels of specificity is partially dealt with. However, the findings do not allow us to specify the implicit connections across these specific conditions (Fishbein & Ajzen, 2010). We argue that a broader approach, capable of generating subject-specific relevant context and articulating implicit or automatic aspects of one's attitudes, is important to understanding attitudes, especially complicated and socially charged attitudes.

Issues with explicating implicit attitudes are complicated by the needs one might have to manage how others think about them. Impression management and social desirability concerns are known to obstruct abortion attitude research. Briñol and Petty (2012) concluded that it would be "methodologically transformative" to develop ways for participants to "bypass social desirability concerns in the study of attitudes" (p. 303). We positioned interviewees as hypothetical movie makers in order to offer them an open-ended opportunity to create relevant narrative contexts and establish the contextualization that is salient for them with respect to their attitudes Thus, drawing on abortion attitudes as its case, our primary contribution is methodological as we address the problems of both understanding the behavioral contexts and eliciting the implicit aspect of attitudes.

The Use of Hypotheticals in Qualitative Studies of Attitudes: Theoretical and Methodological Underpinnings

We provide three sets of methodological underpinnings for the current study. First, we argue for a turn to narrative studies of attitude, using abortion as the case. Second, we articulate the critical communicative action theory that serves as the theoretical framework for our study of attitudes. Third, we present the contemporary use of hypotheticals in qualitative studies.

A Turn Toward Narrative in the Study of Attitudes

Our use of hypotheticals fits within the larger domain of narrative inquiry because we asked participants to describe a hypothetical movie or documentary (both of which are narratively constructed). Higgins and Sandhu (2014) claimed that narrative research is well-suited for the study of identities positioned through attitudes and beliefs. They explored language attitudes and language teacher identities using interviews, the most common method for engaging in narrative inquiry. Macnaghten et al. (2019) examined public attitudes on new technologies. They demonstrated that implicit attitudes could be articulated through narrative approaches, an improvement upon what was possible through quantitative surveys. Their analysis put implicit cultural assumptions about technology into discourse and showed how those assumptions were drawn upon when people constituted their attitudes. Valentine and Sadgrove (2014) examined attitudes toward racial differences using biographical narratives. Their participants had the autonomy to establish spatial, temporal, and dynamic contexts through which their encounters with racially different peers were experienced. In each of these cases, narrative approaches provided researchers with new ways to explore attitudes and attitude-attributions.

Most narrative studies on abortion involve people sharing/retelling their own experiences of considering/obtaining abortions or working at clinics where abortions are done (e.g., Allen, 2015; Becker, 2019; Combellick, 2023). Such studies are not considered studies of attitudes but rather of experiences. For example, Becker (2019) studied online narratives of 44 women who underwent abortions, whose stories carried cultural assumptions about both womanhood and motherhood. Moral conceptions of woman-ness were implicated in the retelling of abortion experiences by women themselves, characterizing women as *bad* or *good* through their re-tellings. Combellick (2023) specifically focused on how morality was implicated through abortion narratives. Combellick found that those who obtained abortions provided retellings of their experiences that mitigated anticipated social stigma. Moreover, people expressed complexly competing moral perspectives and ideologies within their narratives. The narrative structure allowed the participants to keep the inconsistencies and tensions alive rather than forcing these complexities into a polarizing dichotomy of identities as pro-life or pro-choice. With respect to this dichotomy, Allen (2015) found that "both 'pro-life' [and] 'pro-choice' websites articulated the perceived socially-acceptable tropes for talking about abortion" from those competing perspectives. The websites assumed a pro-life/pro-choice debate, creating narratives that implicated responses to the "other side." As such, regardless of the position, the narratives "drew upon similar" values, such as morality and motherhood (although conceptualized differently), and upon repertoires of larger religious and social movements" as indicative of a changing moral and social climate (Allen, 2015, p. 59). Allen's study (2015) explored a link between abortion attitudes and social values. This narratively emergent link was not visible through the more traditional approach to the study of attitudes. Narrative research provides scholars with an opportunity to examine attitudes within the more naturalistic context of sharing experiences and establishes a narrative link between identities (of which attitudes might be a subset) and storytelling.

A Critical Communicative Understanding of Attitudes

In contrast with, but not dismissive of, the conception that attitudes are stable mental objects, we turn toward a handful of scholars who have proposed a critical communicative conceptualization of attitudes. For example, Lalljee, Brown and Ginsburg (1984) proposed

studying one's attitudes as "expressive communicative acts." This approach resonates with Habermas's Theory of Communicative Action, which concurrently draws on Speech Act Theory and a theory of self in everyday life. Briefly, the speech act theory describes the ways speech is always DOING something. For example, one might tell their students, "I will have your papers graded by Friday." The illocutionary force represents the intention of the speaker or the speaker claiming an intention; illocutionary force is almost always implicit. In this example, we can understand the illocutionary force to be, "I *claim* that it is my intention to have your papers graded by Friday." Contemporary theorists propose that attitudes minimally carry a promissory illocutionary force (i.e., conveying or implying one's intent), and this is the intuitive reason why we want to link attitudes with behavior (Brandom, 1994). Hypothetical scenarios free up the illocutionary force from implicitly suggesting that one's attitudes would be displayed in one's actions. We situated our hypothetical question in a refracted context (Tavory, 2020) which provided interviewees with opportunities to fantasize, imagine, and narrate their attitudes into stories without the burden of expecting those attitudes to form a simple link to behavior. Instead, the refracted hypothetical context is an opportunity for interviewees to implicate nuances that they associate with their attitudes. The interviewee is free to create the hypothetical scenarios themselves and is not expected to be the subject of that scenario. A communicative understanding of attitudes allows for a more complex articulation of the meaning of one's attitudes, which is specifically being called for in the study of abortion attitudes (Marván et al., 2014).

Moreover, a communicative approach is consistent with thinking about the implicit and explicit aspects of one's attitudes. With communicative approaches, all explicit talk carries with it implicit assumptions, which can be either called into question by interlocutors or taken for granted and assented to (Brandom, 1994; Carspecken, 1996; Dennis, 2020; Habermas, 1985). How we interpret our own and others' attitudes meaningfully assumes a context for the communication that includes implicit suppositions. Interview methods rely on a communicative strategy to help researchers understand the interviewees' attitudes, experiences, values, and so forth.

The Use of Hypotheticals in Qualitative Interview Studies

Our interviews were conceived as communicative opportunities to co-explore participants' thinking about abortion. Interviews tacitly burden interviewees to present themselves honestly and positively as someone coherent and valid (Järvinen, 2000). Using hypotheticals in interviews can relieve interviewees of responsibilities to monitor one's self-presentation and sense of coherency within the interview context. For interviewees, this can create a communicative situation that focuses their thinking about the content rather than having to commit their words to a way of being for themselves (Järvinen, 2000; Jenkins et al., 2010). The most common ways in which hypotheticals have been used in qualitative interviewing involve providing the interviewee with realistic vignettes within which to situate themselves and provide thoughts/responses that indicate beliefs, values, and attitudes (Gourlay et al., 2014). In our study, we tried something different. We asked participants to create a hypothetical movie/documentary as if they were the movie maker, which provided them with more imaginative and open response possibilities. Our hypothetical question also provided interviewees with some degrees of separation between themselves and their own behavior, judgment, and/or social stigma.

This approach should avoid some common biases in attitude research.We know that directly asking for attitudes results in agency bias and desirability bias (Tavory, 2020). *Agency bias* is produced in an interview when the interviewee perceives a need to present a coherent and

consistent self/perspective throughout the interview and *desirability bias* occurs when an interviewee wants to meet expectations that they presume are held by the interviewer.

Hypotheticals have been used in a few studies of attitudes writ large. For example, some participants were put into researcher-created role-playing situations. These studies found that subjects were persuaded by the roles they enacted (Briñol & Petty, 2012). Also, researchers found that when people were asked "to imagine hypothetical events," they were more likely to expect such events would take place (Anderson, 1983; Petrova & Cialdini, 2008; Ross et al., 1977; Szpunar & Schacter, 2013). These examples used researcher-created hypotheticals and asked subjects to join in. Their shared focus was to explore the power such opportunities held for changing or persuading subjects' views. The idea was that hypotheticals could impact subjects' implicit attitudes indirectly. We found no attitude studies similar to ours reported in the literature. Interviewees' narratives invoked their taken-for-granted abortion conceptions through imaginary products, not through the retelling of actual experiences, and our analysis focused on how their implicit abortion attitudes were socially conceptualized rather than on what people might claim were their explicit abortion attitudes.

Data and Methodology

Data Collection

We interviewed 170 U.S. residents to understand their nuanced attitudes on abortion. Our interviews were a sub-study within a larger multi-method, multilingual investigation into the complexities and multi-dimensionalities of abortion attitudes in the U.S. In 2021 (prior to the 2022 Supreme Court decision in *Dobbs v Jackson* overturning a national right to abortion in the U.S.) our team launched a broad mixed methods sub-study that included a web-based survey (administered to 1,025 U.S. residents, available in both Spanish [n=204] and English [n=821]) with a follow up semi-structured, in-depth interview component (n=170; n = 60 Spanish and n = 110 English).

Following multiple rounds of pilot testing (late 2020 and early 2021) and protocol revisions, we conducted the interviews used in the present sub-study (fall 2021). The interviews were semi-structured, which means that not all questions on the protocol were asked to all interviewees, and interviewers were trained to phrase questions in ways that aligned with the interviewee's talk. Interviews were conducted virtually using Zoom®; once participants provided informed consent, interviews lasted between 60 and 90 minutes. All interviews were audio-recorded and professionally transcribed. Spanish interviews were also translated into English. However, all interviews were analyzed in the language they were conducted. Participants were compensated for both the survey and the interview. All protocols and procedures in this study were approved by the Institutional Review Board of Indiana Univeristy and the National Opinion Research Center (NORC).

Five of the eight interviewers are bilingual in English and Spanish, including two native Spanish speakers. All interviewers were graduate students, postdoctoral researchers, or professors with experience in qualitative research. The second author was one of the native Spanish interviewers. Interviewers created a digital research journal for each participant where they wrote a pre- and a post-interview memo reflecting their impressions immediately upon conducting the

interview. Pseudonyms were assigned and the data were uploaded into a password protected Dedoose® software program.

The Movie Question: "Imagine you are a film director…"

The interview protocol gathered information regarding participants' beliefs, feelings, attitudes, and opinions about abortion. The present study focuses on our hypothetical question, generally articulated like this: "Imagine you are a film director, and you are producing a movie or documentary on abortion. I would like to hear all about that movie or documentary.*"* This question provided an opportunity to explore how people's conceptions of abortion were implicated through a hypothetical question that did not require them to link themselves and their abortion attitudes to the response. Interviewers asked the question using slightly different wordings and located it in slightly different places or left it out at their discretion in line with our use of a semi-structured interviewing style (Carspecken, 1996).

Sample Characteristics

From the original survey, 54.1% of respondents volunteered to participate in a one-on-one follow-up interview, from which 170 participants were selected to represent a complexity of abortion attitude indicators and demographic characteristics (see Table 1). The specific sample for this paper is 155 (35% conducted in Spanish) because in 12 interviews, the movie question was not asked due to time constraints, and in three interviews, respondents chose not to answer the question.

Table 1
Sample Characteristics

		N=155	%
Language	English	101	65%
	Spanish	54	35%
Gender	Woman	90	58%
	Man	65	42%
Age group	18-29	18	12%
	30-44	57	37%
	45-59	48	31%
	60+	32	21%
Primary Race-Ethnicity	White/Caucasian or European American	58	37%
	Hispanic or Latina/o or Hispanic American or Chicana/o	63	41%
	Black or African American	17	11%
	Other	10	6%
	Bi Racial/Multi Racial	7	5%
Political Party	Lean / Not so Strong / Strong Democrat	74	48%
	Don't Lean/Independent/None	29	19%
	Lean / Not so Strong / Strong Republican	52	34%
Word Of God*	Yes	66	43%
	No	52	34%

	Unsure	37	24%
Number of children	No children	39	25%
	1 child	25	16%
	2 children	53	34%
	3 children	24	15%
	4-6 children	14	9%
Abortion identification	Slightly / Moderately / Completely Pro-Choice	52	34%
	Equally pro-choice and pro-life	29	19%
	Slightly / Moderately / Completely Pro-Life	55	35%
	Neither pro-choice nor pro-life	9	6%
	Prefer not to answer / (Skipped)	10	6%
Abortion support**	Support	81	52%
	Opposition	70	45%
	(Skipped)	4	3%
Abortion Experience***	Yes	78	50%
	No	62	40%
	Don't Know	15	10%
US Region	Northeast	20	13%
	Midwest	32	21%
	South	61	39%
	West	42	27%

Note. *Do you believe there is a religious text that is the literal word of God? **With respect to the abortion issue, do you support or oppose abortion? ***Please indicate whether you or someone close to you have experience with abortion.

Analytical Approach

The first two authors collaboratively conducted the analyses in two layers using Dedoose®. We (the first two authors) met weekly to discuss and debrief the ongoing analyses. To develop our analytic approach, we coded and analyzed three interviews together. Then, we each analyzed the assigned interviews on our own and met to discuss those analyses. All analyses were collaboratively conducted by the first two authors. We engaged in dialogue through our regular meetings and had access to a shared Dedoose file where we could also leave memos and notes for one another.

The first layer of analysis had two steps. Initially, we inductively coded the data using Labov's (1973) narrative structural analysis and Carspecken's (1996) critical reconstructive analysis (Dennis, 2018, 2020) to document the tendencies in how interviewees created their movies. We used Labov (1973) to organize the coding according to structural elements: (i) type of movie (e.g., fiction, documentary), (ii) presumed purpose of the movie (e.g., to persuade, to educate, to share multiple perspectives, to imagine alternative futures), (iii) genre of the movie (e.g., drama, science fiction, autobiography, for fictional movies), (iv) plot, (v) characters featured, and (vi) expressed values/ideals. Then, we used Carspecken's (1996) reconstructive horizon analysis and meaning field analysis to code the meanings within each movie according to the structural elements. These codes were emergent. For example, one of the codes within the structural element of "plot" was "woman, who against all odds, decides not to get an abortion."

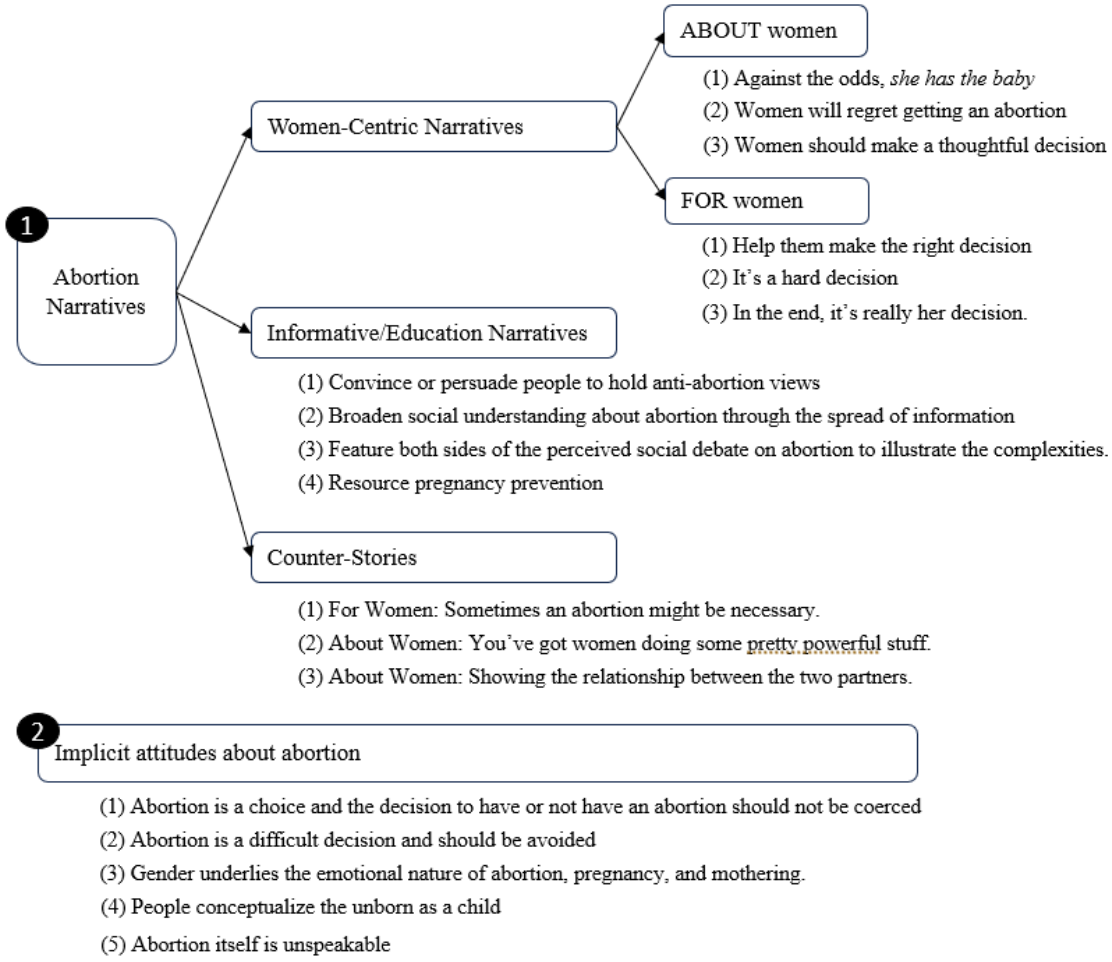
This code was reconstructed across the story of the movie as told by the interviewee. Perhaps the interviewee said this directly, but perhaps the interviewee said something like “even though she was young and poor and was in an abusive relationship, still she decided to keep the baby.”

The second layer, like the first, involved two steps and depended upon the analysis of the first layer. We started by naming the patterns that emerged through the analysis of the coding (e.g., that some movies had only one character–a woman). Identifying such patterns was crucial to the last step. We reconstructed implicit assumptions and conceptualizations of abortion that were implicit to the patterns (e.g., having an abortion would always be a difficult decision). All reconstructive analyses followed the principles of Carspecken (1996) and Dennis (2020). Each layer of analysis included the first two authors in collaborative dialogue.

Findings

We present findings in two sections. First, we present a set of narratives in story form. These narratives were reconstructed from the details and descriptions of movies and documentaries across the interviews, drawing on our initial analyses. Second, we articulate the reconstructed assumptions embedded in the narratives we analyzed. The findings are relevant to the methodological interests because they illustrate what can be produced through this approach to the study of implicit attitudes. See Figure 1 for a visual description of this presentation of findings.

Figure 1
Outline of the Findings



Abortion Narratives

We present key narratives people drew on to create their movies. We organized the narratives into two main groups according to identified patterns: (1) narratives characterized as *woman-centric* (centered on the woman as the focus of the abortion story) and (2) narratives that centered on *providing information or educating audiences* about abortion. Lastly, we report on counter-stories that were raised through the narratives. Most of the stories were women-centric.

Women-Centric Narratives

The main character, and often the only character, in our interviewees' abortion movies were women, named and described as such[2]. Women-centric narratives tended to be told either

[2] Women are not the only people who seek abortion, however, most of our interviewees and much of the literature invokes the gendered category of "woman" when describing those having abortions. We want to carry the tension of both being gender inclusive and acknowledging that by and large those who have abortions are women and have lived lives that are socially recognized through that gendered category. Being a woman in a society that is not gender neutral has meaning that we do not wish to erase.

ABOUT women or *FOR women*. In the stories *about women*, key features included the emotional labor and difficulties involved in abortions, pregnancy-related decisions, and experiences. These narratives tended to invoke a deficit orientation–particularly around the idea that the pregnant person lacked agency and was vulnerable and/or needy. Movies in this group also tended to emphasize the presumed unavoidable negative outcomes derived from abortion decisions. In contrast, there were also other stories about women that seemed to explore a multitude of experiences and potential outcomes rather than a story of a vulnerable main character. We share those stories in a section on stories meant to inform/educate society.

We also present stories *for women*, which often aim to help a woman make the "right" decision. The women-centric narratives assumed that, in the end, it is the woman who should decide whether to have an abortion. For example, regardless of abortion attitudes, our interviewees' movies indicated that it was wrong for women to be coerced or forced to have abortions. In this section, readers will learn of women-centric narratives that are (1) *ABOUT women* while targeting a general audience and (2) *FOR women* that target potential abortion-seeking women as an audience. Both categories of narratives are women-centric in that women are the sole, main, or primary focus of the abortion movie/documentary.

About Women Narratives. There were three distinct narratives *about women* that were told across the various movies and documentaries: (a) Against the odds, she has the baby; (b) Women will regret getting an abortion; and (c) Women should make a thoughtful decision.

Against the Odds. We heard many stories about pregnant women who found themselves contemplating abortions. The pregnancies and abortion considerations were described as stressful and difficult, but in the end, the person decided to keep the baby (which in some cases offered redemption). In Nathaniel (a 33-years-old man)'s movie, the mother was an alcoholic or drug abuser who

> end[ed] up doing something that they shouldn't have been doing. She decides not get an abortion. She's tired of the same old cycle and she somehow knows that if she doesn't keep the baby, 'it will eat her up' and she would just continue the cycle of addiction. Instead, she recovered on her own and raised her child. … I believe having her child is what got her through to recovery. … She wanted to abort it at first, and she decided to keep it. And it ended up being the best decision she made because she got clean, and stayed sober, and raised her child.

Like Nathaniel, interviewees created other plots centered on life changes for the better.

Regret. A second group of narratives *about women* emphasized that women would regret getting an abortion. They did not always end the same way, but the feeling of regret unified the abortion experiences of the pregnant protagonists. Sometimes, the stories ended with a woman not getting an abortion, realizing ahead of time that she would "regret the decision" and that "there are other options." Other narratives described women getting an abortion and afterward experiencing life-altering regret. Michelle, a 70-year-old woman shared with us:

> I would focus in the after effects that it has on women. … It comes back to them through their life. 'Why didn't I just keep my baby? Why did I have to have it aborted?' What if it was a scenario, they had their baby [a pregnancy] aborted and then five, 10 years later, they get married and want to start a family. Then she can't get pregnant. And, then, she's going to really wish that she would've not had that abortion. … Wouldn't you just

> have to be so coldhearted and callous if you didn't have a regret at some point in life later on?

Being Thoughtful. The third type of *about women* narrative is closely linked to the previous narrative as it puts the focus of the films on how getting an abortion is not a decision that should be made "lightly." Generally, our interviewees described women who contemplated abortion but ultimately, through a thoughtful and responsible decision-making process, avoided obtaining one. Our interviewees tended to judge a woman as morally deficient if she failed to take the decision "seriously." Sometimes, narrators included off-handed, morally-pejorative comments about women who kept making the same "mistake" and "used abortion as birth control." For instance, Elena, a 43-year-old woman, suggested a film showing women in different circumstances seeking abortion, where one of them was a woman using abortion "almost as birth control" versus others who sought abortions for health reasons or due to rape. Elena's distinction furthered her idea that a woman who obtained an abortion for health reasons had invested some thought in making a tough decision, whereas a woman who equated abortion with birth control was being unthoughtful and frivolous with her pregnancy decisions.

For Women Narratives. Now we move on to present a second group of women-centric narratives—those we identified as being *for women*. Participants seemed to create these stories to help an audience of women who could potentially be in a position to consider seeking an abortion. There were three different *for women* narratives: (a) Help them make the right decision; (b) It's a hard decision; and (c) In the end, it's really her decision. Notice that these *for women* narratives all revolved around decision-making, implicating the role of choice in the way people conceptualized abortion stories.

Make the Right Decision. Some interviewees created movies with an explicit purpose: "helping women reach the right decision—and keep the baby." Many of these narratives were oriented toward helping women do "what they knew" was the right thing–namely, avoid an abortion. The illocutionary force of these narratives revolved around making sure women knew what abortions entailed (in sometimes rather graphic language) and the negative consequences of abortion. What distinguished these stories from others providing information was the way in which they were oriented toward getting the women to feel a certain way and, for the most part, realizing that doing the right thing meant avoiding abortions. For example, Rosalía, a 19-year-old woman, explained her movie as follows:

> … my film that I make would be against abortion and would try to make a point… let's say "persuade" for my audience and that at the end of the documentary they think again about the decision of an abortion; and for that I would put, let's say, what it is scientifically from conception that it is already a life. It will be with images, videos, so... showing that it is not only a fetus, that it is already a life. It already has little eyes, it already has a heart, it has a spinal cord, and all that. I also would look for people who have had abortions for them to give testimony of how their lives have been impacted after having the abortion and if they have repented... people who say "I wish I had had more information," or had more maturity to make a decision. …so that my audience would see that they are real people… how they feel, how they have suffered, what was the aftermath of what happened and to try to prevent them from making a decision like them.

Some of our interviewees talked about really wanting women to know what they were getting themselves into. Sometimes, this had to do with using sensitive imagery related to fetal

development or an actual abortion procedure. Mario, a 45-year-old man, makes this point with the aim of promoting contraception and other preventative measures.

> Well, I would do a story about a girl in high school or elementary school that... well both, a girl and a boy who protect themselves, how to protect yourself so this doesn't happen, right? I would make the scenes about how they perform the abortion more explicit so that they see all the risks and all the... the risks they run and also what happens with the baby, so that they will be more aware, right?

Hard Decision. Across the spectrum of abortion stances, many movies emphasize the difficulty of the decision. Such movie narratives focused on the presumed pressure and challenges women have when considering or facing an abortion. In the following story from Cameron, a 39-year-old man, the interviewee wanted to highlight the internal work that goes into making an abortion-related decision.

> I'd focus more on kind of the interpersonal dealings… because that's kind of where I think about something like this, it's a very personal decision. And whereas you might talk to other people about it in your family or your community to make the decision or to be validated or to, whatever. It's still going to be a very personal decision. So … I wouldn't do so much conflict between people in the movie. And I feel like it would progress to the end where the person was able to make a decision and feel safe and not worry so much about what's going on around them and being able to make that choice for themselves.

These narratives differed from those where the narrator is trying to help the woman make *the right decision*—that is, the decision to avoid obtaining an abortion. Instead, these stories were primarily about encouraging women to make the choice that was best for them with the deep assumption that the decision would be difficult for any woman. Indeed, a number of participants refused to provide an end for their main character's decision-making process and stated that their goal was to ask the audience to put themselves in the shoes of the one having to make the decision. This approach implies that there is a correct decision for each woman, personal to that woman and right for her even if it is hard to make. Being *for women* (rather than *about women*), these movies positioned their plots as an opportunity for people to examine their own lives as only they would know for themselves how to resolve such a difficult decision. These movies differed from the ones we categorized as "*about women*: Women should make a thoughtful decision" because these narratives had more to do with thinking through the individual details of one's situation.

Her Decision. A few interviewees told strong tales of varying circumstances through which a woman might consider having an abortion. Janice, a 59-year-old woman, described multiple scenarios relevant to her movie through which abortion decisions were always the woman's "because it's her body." Also, Kathleen, a 58-year-old woman, produced a variety of pregnancy contexts, claiming that she didn't know what the woman should do in those situations, and she didn't have the right or obligation to tell other women what they should do. She believed the decision was "[N]one of my business," and she didn't want her movie to de facto "tell somebody what to do." One more example was Darius, a 68-year-old man who spoke in passionate terms about showing rape situations, marriage situations, and so on in his movie with the goal of establishing "It's a woman's choice to do what they want to do when it comes to abortion." These movies foregrounded how the intersection of experience and feelings contribute to pregnancy decision-making.

Summary. Some of the women-centric narratives were told *for women*, and others were told *about women*. Both sets of stories portray a woman facing an abortion decision as the primary and often lonely character of their movies. Frequently, the women were depicted as vulnerable. Moreover, interviewees predominantly assumed that good women would never want to have an abortion even if, in the end, she decided that was the best decision due to difficult life circumstances. However, the illocutionary force differed across these two sets. Unlike narratives *about women*, narratives that were *for women* were more sympathetic and had the movie-making interviewee positioning themselves more with their women protagonists. The distinction between narratives *about* and narrative *for women* coupled with the women-centric foci indicates an implicit role one's attitudes toward women play with respect to one's abortion attitudes.

Informative/Education Narratives

Some of the movies were designed to "educate" the social public about abortion. With this as a guiding purpose, interviewees provided narratives that were indicative of what they took to be important facts about abortion. We interpreted these movies, often documentaries rather than fiction-based, to focus on educating the general public, speaking more to society as a polarized whole. These narratives implied a participant's perception of gaps in the public's understanding of abortion. We organized the following narratives according to their purposes to: (1) Convince or persuade people to hold anti-abortion views, (2) Broaden social understanding about abortion through the spread of information, (3) Feature both sides of the perceived social debate on abortion to illustrate the complexities, and (4) Resource pregnancy prevention.

Persuasive. Some interviewees had a goal of persuading society that an anti-abortion perspective is right. For example, Lorelei (a 65-year-old woman) noted that her movie would center on Christians at abortion clinics talking with mothers before they go in to have abortions to provide them with the information they needed to avoid an abortion.

> There's been several women who have looked back on their life who had abortions that would have never had them had they been more informed about several things–about how God doesn't want you to have an abortion, that there are other options, what it does to your body…and that there's always support out there for those that feel there's no other way out.

The movie itself aimed to persuade society that abortions are wrong and unnecessary. Dorothy, another woman in her 60s, suggested a movie "[B]ased on what I believe. And so, I would hope that I could put in supporting documentation and things for supporting my belief on it." For example, she wanted people to realize that if they support abortion, they too could have been that baby who was aborted.

> [H]ow does she feel? She could have been not here because somebody decided to kill her off before she even had a chance at life… So that's probably something I would definitely bring to the table to say, look, you think that this is nothing and here's a human being that is here because somebody changed their mind about it and allowed that baby to live.

Dorothy created a documentary because she expressly wanted to "give more credence to things that are based on fact than a fictional thing's a good thing."

Spread Information. Another set of narratives involved informing people about abortion, from pro-choice or pro-abortion perspectives, with the assumption that, in general, people were misinformed regarding the safety and risks of abortion or just did not really empathize with the

situations or people who got abortions. There was, then, a desire to provide facts. Marisol, a 35-year-old woman, explained, "The factual information would be good, like from lots of different viewpoints of abortion and maybe education on the process of how abortion works." Similarly, Georgia, a 32-year-old woman, told us,

> I would focus on the medical side, for sure. It's important to have safe secure access for women that need them, women that want them, whichever. But I really think the medical necessity side should be shown more and then the aftereffects of. I guess leading up to it, you know, the decision, the planning, the situation that got them there and then the after effects. People are so judgmental." … "So I feel like if we could make them understand why it's needed maybe that would help.' I think a lot of times, people who are opposed to abortion … have the wrong impression of what an abortion is and what it does... But if we could show it, and maybe make it possible for the world to understand why abortion is needed–maybe that would help.

Both Sides. Other interviewees created movies or documentaries that sought to show a variety of women faced with a range of different pregnancy scenarios who might be in a position to consider having an abortion. These movies produced complex sets of truths, life experiences, systemic challenges, and situations through which moviemakers hoped viewers would be educated. In general, these movies focused less on particular outcomes of the decision-making process and more on the process itself. Similarly, the moviemakers were interested in providing the audience with a range of facts and information instead of a particular point of view, acknowledging the complexity of the abortion debate. According to Brett, a 34-year-old man, the facts would come from those people who had experiences with abortion-related/pregnancy-related decisions. These movies/documentaries served to challenge an oversimplification of abortion through the typical pro-life/pro-choice binary. Hillary, a 61-year-old woman, suggested a value-neutral film even though she identified as "completely pro-choice,"

> I don' t think it should be pro-choice as much as I might like that. I don't think that's necessary or effective. I think it would be interesting to interview both people that go to rallies that are pro-choice and pro-life, or whatever …. because … it would be interesting to interview both those kinds of people…I would have a vast variety of women telling each of their individual stories, women who decided both pro, to go through with it, and women who changed their mind and didn't, and what their reasons are. Just to show everyone that women are not a monolith and our circumstances are not a monolith. So people recognize each individual has a right to make the decisions that they need for their life. So I wouldn't necessarily take a position. I don't think… I want women to share their stories and that's what my movie would be about.

Pregnancy Prevention. Lastly, films were created to serve as resources for pregnancy prevention. This kind of educational film emphasized empowering women and couples to make informed decisions that were largely conceptualized as medical rather than moral. Madeline, a 63-year-old woman, highlighted the co-responsibility of men and women in preventing pregnancies and described her documentary like this:

> I think my documentary would be a what if, what if I started in elementary school and high school, teaching people about parenting responsibility,

> that boys, men, girls, women are both responsible for their choices and that there's consequences, teach them how they could live a life where there's not an unexpected pregnancy because they have all the information they need to have children when they're ready … maybe information way before and tools can help the outcomes so that abortion isn't even an issue... tools about what boys and girls, men and women can do like birth control of all sorts. But also, it's also a man's responsibility, what can the guy do to prevent pregnancy?

Summary. The educational/informational films promoted (tacitly and explicitly) similar generalized claims as the women-centric narratives. Likewise, the educational/informational films situated abortion as having negative consequences. They largely assumed that people, in general, don't know what really happens when a person gets an abortion. They also characterized abortion decisions as hard and requiring thought and care. Interviewees' films tended to hold two interesting implications regarding one's abortion decisions. Namely, for our interviewees, abortion decisions implied the kind of person the woman was AND/OR the lack of information/support available to the woman. The educational films assume that there are multiple perspectives and experiences regarding abortion. Movies that oriented through judgments of women (for example, a good woman would never choose an abortion) tended to center the outcome of pregnancy-related decisions rather than the process. In contrast, movies oriented toward pregnancy-related choices emphasized the decision-making process over any particular outcome.

Interviewees' movies/documentaries predominately erased the experience of pregnancy. Even though pregnancy itself provides the context for an abortion decision, what it means to be pregnant (and birth) was not acknowledged. The women-centric narratives and the educational narratives did not deal with pregnancy nor birth. Even those that did not promote motherhood, such as documentaries about birth control, refrained from talking about the experience of pregnancy and birth. Moreover, the movies/documentaries also managed to avoid actually depicting abortion itself.

Counter-Stories

We considered a narrative to be a counter-story if either the assumptions that underpin it or the arc of its plot were oppositional to the movie/documentary line trends we described above. For example, many of the stories described above erased the experience of pregnancy. A counter-story, in that case, would be a movie or documentary that articulated the experiences of being pregnant. Counter-stories constitute a critique of mainstream ways of storying abortion. In this section, we report on the three most common counter-stories. While the counter-stories were predominantly told in a woman-centric fashion, their purposes were to inform the audiences and challenge taken-for-granted assumptions about both abortion and the women who might seek it. This pattern of telling counter-stories by focusing on women highlights the extent to which abortion was tethered to our interviewees' thinking about women.

For Women Counter-Story: "Sometimes an Abortion Might be Necessary." There were a few movie narratives about women that centered on the idea of abortion as necessary, thereby downplaying the aspect of choice and emphasizing the point that women might not experience an abortion as a choice but rather as the only thing one could do. In these movies, our interviewees told stories of women who *must* get an abortion because of their circumstances. Inés, a 27-year-old woman, provided the following example:

> … if I were to make a movie, I would like to have several scenarios with people in different circumstances. And the message I would like to convey is to show that abortion is not a bad thing, it depends on your circumstances. So, in the film, I would like to show people who are poor, who have no way to keep a baby. A girl who was sexually abused, different scenarios to illustrate that you cannot generalize everyone's circumstances. And the message that I would like to show is that, I do not think that abortion is a bad thing, and that people should be penalized in each situation... I feel that not all people have the ideal circumstances to bring another person into the world.

These circumstances were like those that are typically mentioned as making a pregnancy decision difficult, such as rape, bad relationships, and other challenging life situations. This counter-story contrasted with the quite common assumption across interviewees' movies that abortion was avoidable and unnecessary—rendering *choice* as pivotal. In this vein, those holding an anti-abortion perspective seemed to assume that one should choose not to get an abortion, and those that did endorse abortion as an option assumed that the right to choose whether to get an abortion should be available. As such, according to both perspectives, abortion is still a choice. In contrast, this set of counter-stories assumed that needing an abortion might not always be experienced as a choice.

About Women Counter-Story: "You've Got Women Doing Some Pretty Powerful Stuff." These narratives countered the assumption that abortion was *always* a hard decision met with negative consequences by promoting, instead, the idea that a woman (and potentially the world) could benefit from a woman having an abortion. In these narratives, we find contradictions to the common stories portraying abortion as having negative consequences and as women having sole responsibility. Alisha, a 35-year-old woman, wanted her movie to glamorize abortion. She offered that

> [I]f you make it glamorous, you've got women now being the vice president and stuff. You've got women doing some pretty powerful stuff. … go and do something more meaningful. Go and plant trees everywhere, go and save the ocean, go and do something else that will save the world, other than making a kid. … tell the story of a woman saving the world through sustainability and then she meets this guy and they're doing their sustainable thing together…they're going to do something major or really nip global warming and nip the deforestation in the bud. Then she finds out she's pregnant …. So her and the dude sit down, they're thinking about it and thinking about it. They love each other… but the baby is going to stop their mission to save the world through sustainability. Then she gets an abortion. Then they go … and come up with something that's so ground-breaking. It would have to be like that.

These counter-stories assumed that something good could come for the woman and the world precisely because she obtained an abortion. Samuel, a 67-year-old man, described a movie where the main protagonist

> has two children now, let's say they are in school and the house, she's making her payments, she's a single mom and she has a great job. And if she gets pregnant, it might ruin her chances for promotion, it might get her hours cut, or her status in this office might be lowered because they all

> know she's a single mom and she's pregnant. So, I think she would have to make a decision, and I think for a woman like that, the abortion pill would be definitely a plus.

According to Samuel, the woman can avoid a series of life struggles by obtaining an abortion.

About Women Counter-Story: "Showing the Relationship Between the Two Partners." Renae, a 66-year-old woman, described various pregnancy scenarios that she would include in her movie.

> I think it would have to do with, perhaps a high school girl and her first love. She gets pregnant. And then the two of them deciding how this is going to impact their life, and what choices they're going to make in relationship to the pregnancy. And, of course, I'm a fairy tale person and I would want them to get married and have the baby in the pathway […] But perhaps just them, I would like to see her keep the baby and maybe see the struggles, and maybe how they don't end up together. But he is still being responsible as a father and taking part. Or maybe even her giving birth to the child and giving it up for adoption, and a happy ending one way or another. […] Her just deciding that, that's something, a responsibility that she's not ready for, or she didn't plan on it. Wanting to go further her education, and he agrees because he's not ready to settle down and make that commitment. Those are all possibilities.

Consistently, she referenced the partners making decisions together. Such stories countered the many others about the lone woman who needed support, who might otherwise go alone. This set of counter-narratives assumed that the woman was already part of a social network that was relevant to her life path across myriad decisions, including those regarding pregnancy. The distinction between these counter-stories and the movies that included supportive characters such as boyfriends and parents is how the roles were conceptualized. In these counter-stories, the relationship functioned in a unified way, where the couple was seen as making decisions together and the pregnant woman was not responsible for the decision.

Across the three counter-stories, the "countering" elements orient toward a woman who is not conceived of as selfish, irresponsible, or immoral regardless of pregnancy-related decisions. It is interesting that the counter-stories highlight the character of a pregnant woman in positive terms. The counter-stories are also counter-stigmatizing.

Implicit Attitudes about Abortion

Because interviewees were asked to describe a movie, the narratives that were elicited necessarily carried assumptions about abortion, expressed both implicitly and explicitly. The most prominent assumptions were articulated across movie themes, purposes, and types. Reconstructed assumptions relevant to abortion included that (1) abortion is a choice and the decision to have or not have an abortion should not be coerced; (2) abortion is a difficult decision and should be avoided; (3) gender underlies the emotional nature of abortion, pregnancy, and mothering; (4) people conceptualize the unborn as a child; and (5) abortion itself is unspeakable.

Abortion is a Choice

The implicit assumption that abortion is a choice held for both those who endorse/don't endorse legal abortion according to their interviews. For those who wanted to limit access to abortion, choice came up through the idea that one could ALWAYS CHOOSE not to get an abortion, making the point that abortions are (largely) unnecessary as well as wrong and inherently a choice people are making, thus something people have control over. For those who endorsed abortion access more broadly, the choice was described as medical or personal. Across narratives, forced abortions were clearly established as wrong, regardless of the interviewee's abortion stance. Interestingly, participants' narratives implicitly erased pregnancy and birthing as participants predominantly discussed "choice" regarding abortion in terms of its outcomes related to its child-bearing possibilities, often failing to acknowledge pregnancy and birth in the process. Indeed, in movies where the protagonist chose motherhood "against all the odds," the decision was revealed to have been good/right for the mother, with the focus being on the outcome of motherhood. Consistent with these frequent failures to acknowledge pregnancy and birth in narratives, participants did not explicitly indicate supporting forced motherhood. However, some narratives seem to imply this by suggesting motherhood was the right choice.

Another ramification of this *choice* assumption was its link to morals–that is, abortion was rarely conceived as a neutral option. Instead, selecting abortion was predominantly conceived of as both necessarily hard and inevitably indicative of the morality of the decision-maker. Across those who were more likely to endorse decisions to have an abortion, the narrators sought to help audiences better understand the women who might be likely to seek abortion as if to help people better understand their decisions and their circumstances.

Importantly, there was a subset of counter-stories through which abortion was not described as a choice but rather as a necessity. In these movies, interviewees described abortion as necessary medical care—care that saved the mother's life or care for the unfortunate demise of a fetus. In these narratives, the protagonists in these movies did not experience their abortion as a *choice*.

Abortion is, Almost Always, Perceived as "A Hard Decision" That "Should Be Avoided." According to our analysis, there was consensus on the idea that abortions should be/can be (1) prevented, when possible, through contraception or (2) avoided through alternatives to abortion (parenting or adoption). Indeed, regardless of whether the person thought that abortion was immoral or, conversely, that abortion was sometimes necessary, there was a shared perception among our interviewees of abortion as an undesirably difficult decision that would inevitably result in life-long regret and adverse mental health outcomes. The burden for this "difficult" decision rested with women, according to our interviewees as participants' films referred exclusively to the abortion decision-making process of women—for example, from a pregnancy test to the abortion decision—and often participants seemed to neglect/ignore women's contextual circumstances before/after the pregnancy/abortion when constructing their movies. Indeed, participants' movies did not consider the reasons or situations in which the unplanned pregnancy happened. The observed generalized lack of context for women's lives denoted a tendency to put the focus on and prioritize the fetus/unborn child over the woman's circumstances.

Decreasing the overall number of abortions was relevant to movies that aimed to solve social problems known to contribute to a woman's decision to obtain an abortion, arguments that abortion does not really solve problems or make things better, and more general assumptions that most people would want to see abortions avoided. For example, an abortion might be the result of

a tragedy like rape, a difficult relationship, poverty, or poor health. Solving the instigating factors contributing to the decision to have an abortion could decrease the number of abortions that are sought. No movies told of a world that was better overall because of abortions; however, most of the movies suggested that having an abortion was not a solution to whatever the source of the problem. Instead, our interviewees principally depicted abortion to be an unnecessary or ineffective answer to a larger problem.

Gender Underlies the Emotional Nature of Abortion, Pregnancy, and Mothering. The emotional or affective aspect of abortion, pregnancy, and mothering decisions was described in gendered ways. The difficulty in making a decision to have an abortion was largely attributed to how it would feel to have to decide to end the "life" of the fetus and how one would feel regret if they decided to go ahead with an abortion. The emotions involved for women seeking abortion were often over-simplified (for example, believing that all women would regret getting an abortion). Women who were valorized in the movies were those who, against all odds, did not obtain an abortion. These depictions portray women as mentally, emotionally, and morally "strong" in proportion to their vulnerabilities. Sympathetic patriarchy was evidenced as interviewees believed it was in the best emotional interest of the women in their movies to avoid an abortion. Often, interviewees seemed to judge the morality of their female characters based on how their protagonists felt. For example, if a woman felt good about an abortion, she was typically cast as a less-than-moral or not-so-good character. Alternatively, women who felt badly about abortion, sometimes so much so that they opted not to have an abortion, were portrayed as moral, good characters. This assumption was also visible in narratives where a woman who has more than one abortion was described in morally pejorative terms—someone irresponsible who failed to learn from earlier mistakes.

Women contemplating abortion were also depicted as vulnerable characters who often lacked income, education, maturity, responsibility, or a partner. In addition, vulnerable female characters were predominantly portrayed as unsympathetic. Hence, the blame/responsibility for the pregnancy and abortion decision-making was often applied solely to them, which seemed to override compassion that might have been voiced regarding the situations of vulnerability—poverty, abusive relationships, and so forth. In sum, women were usually portrayed as lacking agency in the abortion decision-making process (in contrast, for example, with counter-stories of a strong woman who makes an abortion decision knowing what is best for her life). We were surprised that most movies in our study had only one character—a pregnant person, usually referred to as a *woman*. The fact that most movies were women-centric is interesting because it denotes how many participants envision abortion as a woman's issue, aligning with the gender stigmatization of abortion and pointing to women as solely responsible/blameworthy for unwanted or unintended pregnancies and potentially echoing claims that abortion is a "woman's issue." Other studies have similarly reported on the perception of abortion as a stigmatized behavior, with women predominantly burdened with both the blame and responsibility of such "*undesirable"* decisions (Bueno et al., 2024; Jozkowski, Mena-Meléndez, Crawford, & Turner, 2023).

The Fetus is a Child. When interviewees' movies focused on respecting and protecting life, they were nearly always referring to the life of the fetus *as a child*. Such conceptualizing renders the pregnant person *already a* parent. This assumption—that the fetus was already a child—is central to the way in which morality was implicated through movie narratives. There was a lack of empathy and compassion toward the pregnant person in favor of the fetus/baby across many of our participants' movies/documentaries. Perhaps, most importantly for our interviewees, conceptualizing the fetus as a child necessarily contributed to the assumption that abortion

decisions would be presumably hard (for any moral person) because abortion presumably ends a life. This common implicit attitude about life was supported as a "belief" relevant to one's abortion attitudes. Even those supportive of access to legal abortion tended to struggle with this aspect of their abortion attitudes. Some participants created films where the protagonist had a "last minute change of mind," inspiring women to avoid an abortion because they felt progressively, emotionally bonded to their "child" either as a result of the pregnancy advancing or the main character encountering/witnessing other children.

Abortion as Unspeakable. Abortion was surprisingly absent from abortion-related movies/documentaries, which has implications for the study of abortion attitudes. One of the participants said that abortion is just not something one talks about, though she argued that it shouldn't be taboo. Despite being asked to create a movie or documentary about abortion, interviewees, instead, tended to present films that included "all the options" or imagined characters contemplating abortion but ultimately choosing parenting or adoption.

Even in our few documentary examples, where people explicitly wanted audience members to learn what "really happens" in abortions, abortion details were omitted. There was a presumed gruesomeness to abortions that people seemed to want to avoid when talking about abortion. Thus, the unspeakability of abortion practices/procedures creates a potential space for misinformation.

Discussion and Conclusion

In this section of the paper, we discuss four methodological points with implications for future studies. The four points involve: (1) the unspeakability of abortion as a methodological problem; (2) A potentially weak link between implicit attitudes and facticity; and (3) the possibility that attitude complexity can be, at least partially, understood through the juxtaposition of implicit and explicit attitudes. In each subsection, our findings are discussed in light of contemporary scholarship and implications for future research. A brief conclusion follows the discussion.

The Unspeakability of Abortion as a Methodological Problem

The unspeakability of abortion indicates the social taboo against explicit talk directly about abortion and suggests that other such socially-laden topics might benefit from a more implicit approach to their articulation, particularly with respect to attitudes. This unspeakability of abortion might impact the ways in which abortion attitudes are researched because it decreases the ways in which researchers are able to explicate or critique the social imaginary of abortion. Furthermore, it leaves unmasked the idea that abortion (most of which occur early in pregnancy and many are not surgical (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention [CDC], 2021) is so awful that one would not want to visualize or imagine it. As such, they would prefer their narratives end with a decision other than abortion, suggesting perhaps that when people contemplate abortion, they concurrently contemplate other, potentially more preferable, options. In sum, the fact that participants avoid depicting abortions altogether in their films suggests that talking or thinking about abortion is, for many, an uncomfortable conversation.

When a topic is taboo or not talked about explicitly, it can be difficult to study. One might be left with trying to put words into the mouths of participants (as we might see in forced response surveys), or we might see coding that refuses to "read" too much into participants' responses. Both of these methodological responses leave the topic under-explored. Open-ended, hypothetical questions coupled with reconstructive analytic approaches seek to put implicit meaning into

discourse. Since our study also failed to make it possible for all but a handful of interviewees to talk specifically about abortion in the creation of their films, we are left to wonder if this has to do with the lack of knowledge about what actually happens in abortion or with the lack of value placed on what happens in the conduct of an abortion (in lieu of valuing the effects of the abortion). We call for more research on taboo or hard-to-talk-about phenomena in the study of attitudes.

A Potentially Weak Link Between Implicit Attitudes and Facticity

Contrary to our findings singling out women in abortion stories, the literature shows that the majority of partnered women discuss abortion decisions with their partners (Vandamme et al., 2017) and generally value the support that they receive from men (Foster et al., 2012). Furthermore, according to Jones and Jerman (2017), of those seeking abortions, roughly 45% were single compared with 44% who were married/cohabitating. Additionally, many young people who experience unintended pregnancy and contemplate abortion do so with their parents' knowledge and input (Ralph et al., 2014). As such, despite the portrayal of women experiencing and making these decisions alone among our participants' movies/documentaries, research suggests that, more often, pregnant people seek input from important others in their lives. Importantly, the storylines depicting abortion did not conform to those facts.

People believe the general public "needs to know the truth" about abortion. Some of our interviewees reflected conflicted and complex views about abortion in which *pros* and *cons* were depicted, and the protagonists' pregnancy outcome decisions were left open. However, most participants aimed to send an openly anti-abortion message through their movies under the promise of sharing the "truth" with the general public, making sure the general public knew the presumed negative consequences associated with abortion. The depicted negative outcomes were anchored in pieces of misinformation (e.g., abortion is dangerous to the pregnant person, abortion causes infertility) (Doan et al., 2018; Licskai, 2022; Pagoto et al., 2023). These findings are not entirely surprising given that previous studies have largely demonstrated how common misinformation and disinformation related to abortion myths is (Berglas et al., 2017; Littman et al., 2011), which is related to the fact that people's pregnancy and abortion-related knowledge levels tend to be low (Bessett et al., 2015; Swartz et al., 2020).

It is interesting that facts are considered important to our abortion knowledge, and yet there is a proliferation in the gaps and misinformation made available through the public discourse on abortion. Basic "facts" do not always align, but the forums for open and free debate where everyone is open to learning are rarely provided or depicted as part of the public and political landscape of the U.S. Abortion research has not clearly examined the apparent disconnect between the "factual" knowledge disputes (which itself involves varying conceptualizations of abortion, life, and so forth) and the way attitudes are distributed across the population. This raises an interesting question about the extent to which facts impact one's implicit attitudes. This link deserves study.

The Possibility that Attitude Complexity Can Be, at Least Partially, Understood through the Juxtaposition of Implicit and Explicit Attitudes

We know abortion attitudes to be complex, and our study indicates that, in part, the complexity is articulated through an explication of implicit aspects of one's abortion attitudes.

Those implicit attitudes do not conform to simple correlations of variables one might associate with explicit abortion attitudes.

Our analysis concurs with other studies suggesting that abortion is a complex and multidimensional issue and that abortion attitudes are similarly complicated (Hans & Kimberly, 2014; Jozkowski, Bueno, LaRoche, Crawford, Turner, & Lo, 2024). Many abortion attitude studies explore differences across participant demographic characteristics, but the nuances of these differences remain murky. Research could explore why these differences are murky and non-polarized by using a multi-method approach to explore both explicit and implicit attitudes.

When looking across the implicit attitudes presented in 5.2 of the findings, it becomes clear that certain assumptions hold across explicitly claimed abortion attitudes (i.e., people who support abortion access provided pro-choice like plotlines for their movies, and people who oppose abortion envisioned more antiabortion stories). However, the nuances and variability of those assumptions might warrant further investigation. For example, the notion of choice made explicit in the pro-choice pole of the public discourse, was more nuanced. Indeed, those who created movies/documentaries where abortion was avoided assumed that abortion was indeed a choice, and they depended conceptually on the idea that choosing not to have an abortion was the right thing to do—implicating the morality of the chooser. Alternatively, a few of the movies endorsing abortion presented scenarios where abortion would not be experienced as a choice—the particular circumstances that are often used as conditions under which abortion might seem more acceptable across a spectrum of abortion attitudes, conditions such as maternal life risks.

Conclusion

Using a hypothetical question freed interviewees from sticking directly to something they were willing to claim as their own attitude. It allowed them to demonstrate complexities in their own thinking or knowledge about abortion without having to present their attitudes as explicitly incongruent or uncertain. In so doing, we learned more about the intricacies of their thinking (broader than, but inclusive of, their attitude designations). We conclude that hypotheticals in qualitative research elicits a deeper layer of people's inner attitudes. With respect to abortion attitudes, our analyses indicated some common cultural conceptions relevant to interviewees' ways of thinking about abortion, including (but not limited to) their stated abortion attitudes. Most of the stories were woman-centric, with a traditional definition of woman as a sex-typed person with a uterus. As such, the assumptions about and characterization of women becomes critical. Only a small minority of movies depicted strong women. The decision to obtain an abortion was consistently described as necessarily hard—with the implication that only morally weak women would not find it difficult to make such a decision. Most of the narratives focused on decision-making without necessarily reflecting on the pregnant person's contextual circumstances surrounding that decision-making process. The complexities of interviewees' perspectives toward abortion were evidenced in movies/documentaries that depicted multiple scenarios, outcomes, or cases. These findings have not been generated through the more typical survey-oriented approach to the study of attitudes.

The paper contributes to the methodological literature on the study of attitudes by taking seriously a complex view of *attitudes* involving both explicit and implicit aspects. Implicit attitudes must be indirectly tapped and analytically reconstructed in order to put them into discourse. Our paper demonstrates one way to do this with attitudes we know are complicated and socially-valenced. As an exploratory study, we are encouraged that the use of open-ended

hypotheticals provides research participants with an opportunity to build in context-specific applications of their attitudes with the freedom from the need to manage impressions or be concerned about the social desirability of their narratives.

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