



#AbortionChangesYou:
A Case Study to
Understand the
Communicative Tensions in
Women's Medication
Abortion Narratives

KATHERINE RAFFERTY, PHD
TESSA LONGBONS, BA

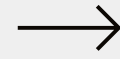


Charlotte Lozier Institute

**501(c)(3) research and education
institute of the Susan B. Anthony
List**

- Network of over 50 associate scholars
- Provides pro-life groups and policymakers with evidence-based information on life issues including abortion, women's health, prenatal diagnosis, perinatal hospice, stem cell research and health care policy





LIFE PERSPECTIVES

- 501 (c)(3) that provides education, research, and expertise to health professionals and care providers who offer support to individuals after reproductive loss
- [Abortionchangesyou.com](https://abortionchangesyou.com) is an anonymous website without political or religious affiliation to share one's narrative and process one's abortion experience
- [Miscarriagehurts.com](https://miscarriagehurts.com) is also an anonymous website to help individual's process their miscarriage and honor their child's life





PREVALENCE OF ABORTION

1 in 4

WOMEN HAVE REPORTED HAVING HAD AN
ABORTION IN THEIR REPRODUCTIVE
YEARS

Pellegrom et al., 2014

MEDICATION ABORTIONS

1 in 3

OF ALL REPORTED ABORTIONS ARE
MEDICATION ABORTIONS

Jones et al., 2019



Unique Features of Medication Abortion

Swica et al., 2011

LACK OF MEDICAL PRESENCE

TIME REQUIRED FOR ABORTION
COMPLETION

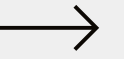
PERSONAL EXPERIENCES WITH
PAIN & BLEEDING AT HOME



Research Questions

- What topics are women discussing?
- What, if any, sites of struggle characterize women's medication abortion narratives?

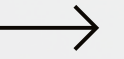




Baxter's (2011) Relational Dialectics Theory

Communication Theory Overview

- Studies the tensions within our everyday talk
- Social reality created discursively through power & privilege
- Power is located in the struggle between marginalized/centrifugal discourses and dominant/centripetal discourses
- Theory provides framework to study competing cultural norms/expectations that are discursively promoted



METHOD

CASE STUDY

98 BLOG POSTS

Posted between May 2008 - September 2018

CONTRAPUNTAL ANALYSIS

Study interplay among dominant and marginalized discourses in women's blog posts

ABORTIONCHANGESYOU.COM

Anonymous and not openly politicized & website has author who has had an abortion and publicly discloses her experience

THREE FEMALE CODERS

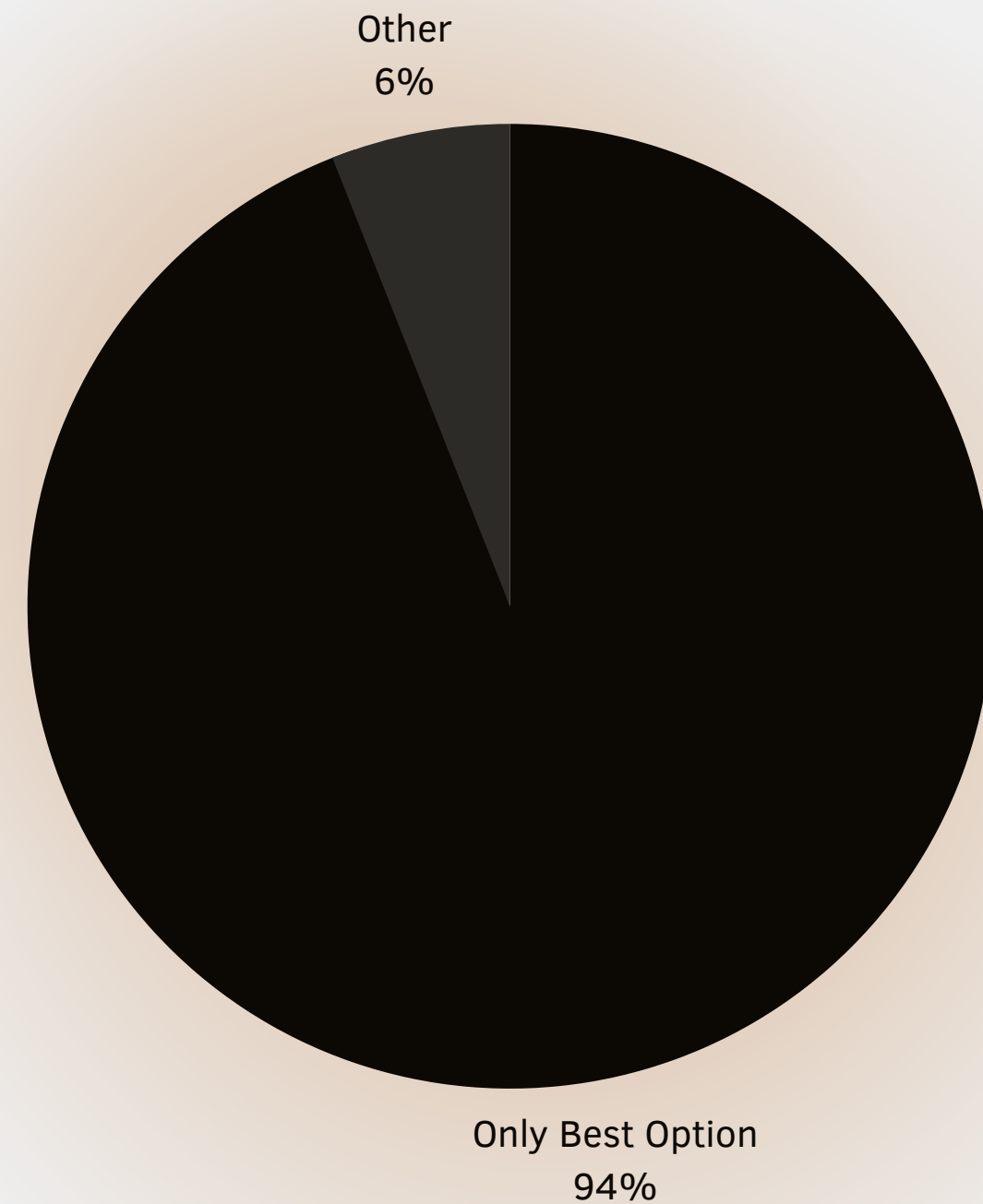
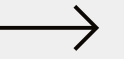
Presence of multiple feminine perspectives

M = 655 WORDS | 1.3 PAGES

Blogs ranged from 1 paragraph to 3 pages of single-spaced text

THEORETICAL SATURATION

Achieved at the 54th blog post, but continued to analyze all blogs and included exemplar quotes in Findings



"Only *Best* Option"

Only Choice vs. Other Alternatives

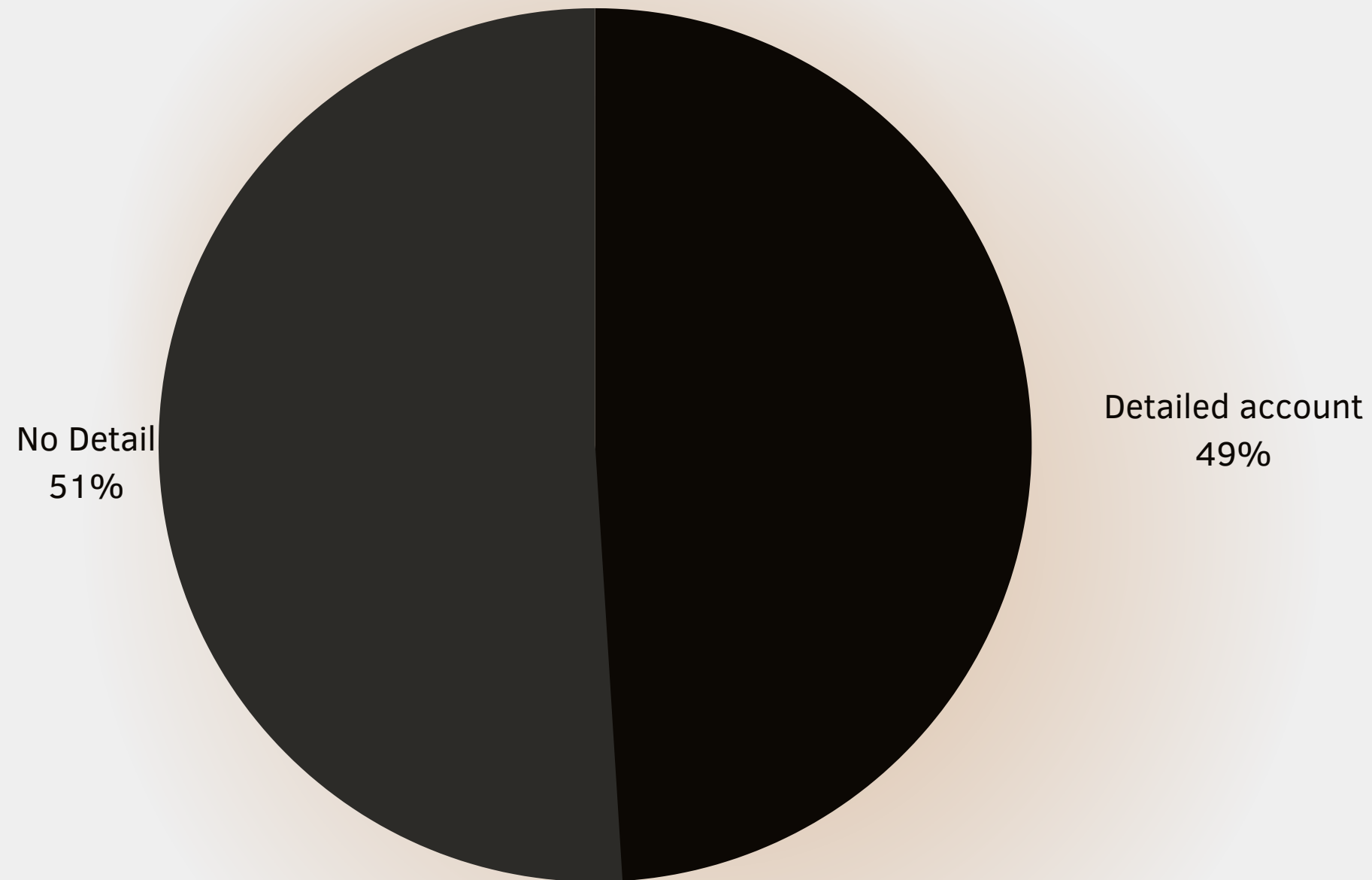
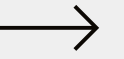
Possibility of keeping baby was negated by reasons warranting the need for a medication abortion:

- financial instability
- bad timing,
- not ready for children
- lack of support



“They all tell you ‘it’s your choice’ in the moment, *but* you don’t feel that it is. Being unable to afford it, unable to tell your loved ones, not having the help or feeling unable to support a child. When your partner doesn’t want it like you do. All these things push you, blind you to a decision that you don’t realize will destroy you” (8-23-17).

THE DECISION: *ONLY CHOICE VS. OTHER ALTERNATIVE*



My *Detailed* Story

Unprepared vs. Knowledgeable

"I felt her come out" (1-8-16).

"I was in so much pain on the bathroom floor" (3-15-18).

"The pills made me vomit, lose control of my bowels, sweat, faint, pass out, and go into full labor" (10-9-09).

"I lay on my bed in the fetal position" (9-5-15).

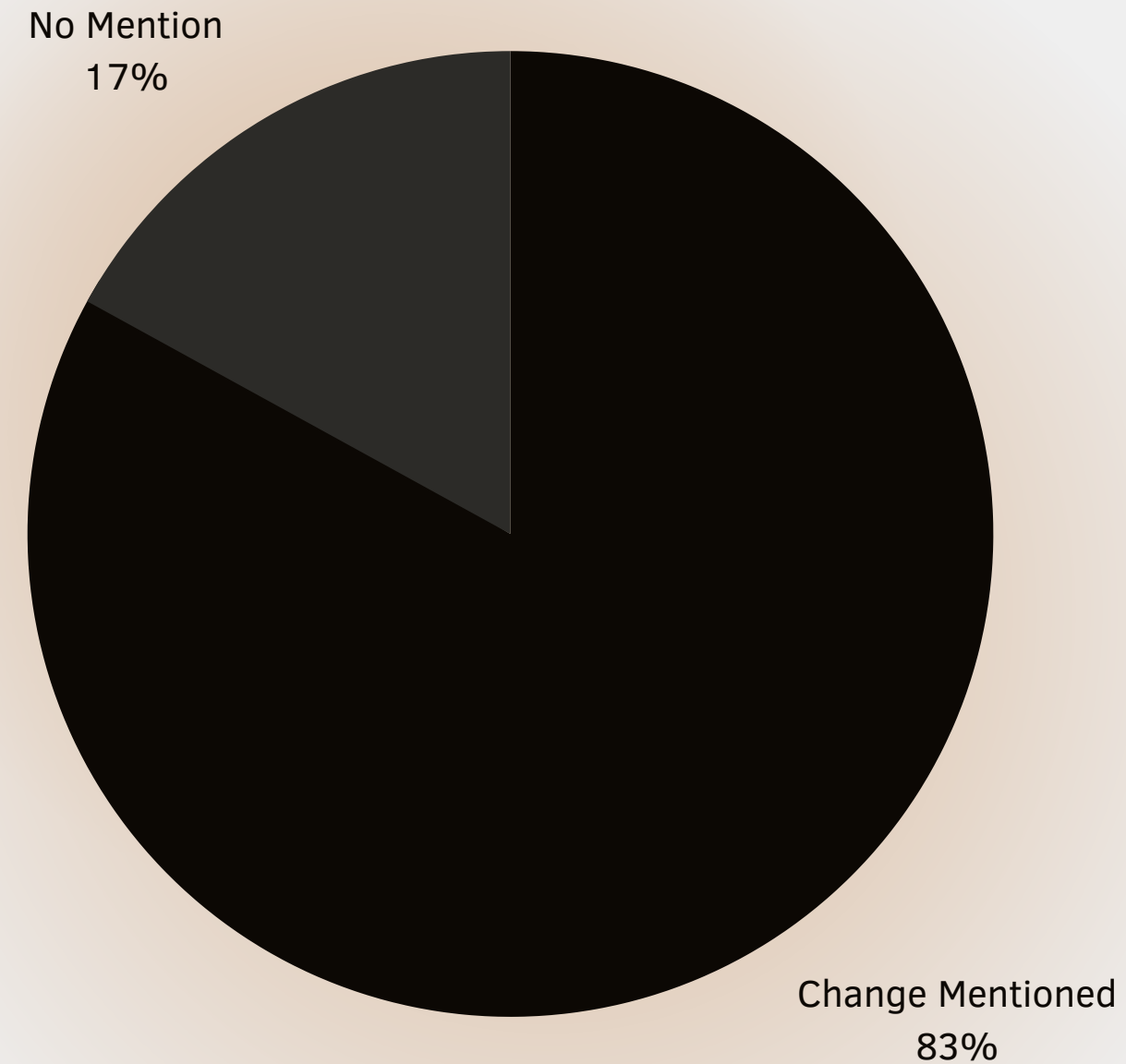
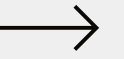
"I just popped some pills and got a period" (7-1-15).

"The actual process of taking the pill was frightening but not as bad as I imagined" (9-8-15).



“I knew to expect blood clotting, *but* nothing could’ve prepared me for seeing her body. It was the color of my own skin, and was actually starting to look like a person” (1-8-16).

THE MEDICATION ABORTION PROCESS: *UNPREPARED VS. KNOWLEDGEABLE*



Changes YOU

Relief vs. Regret

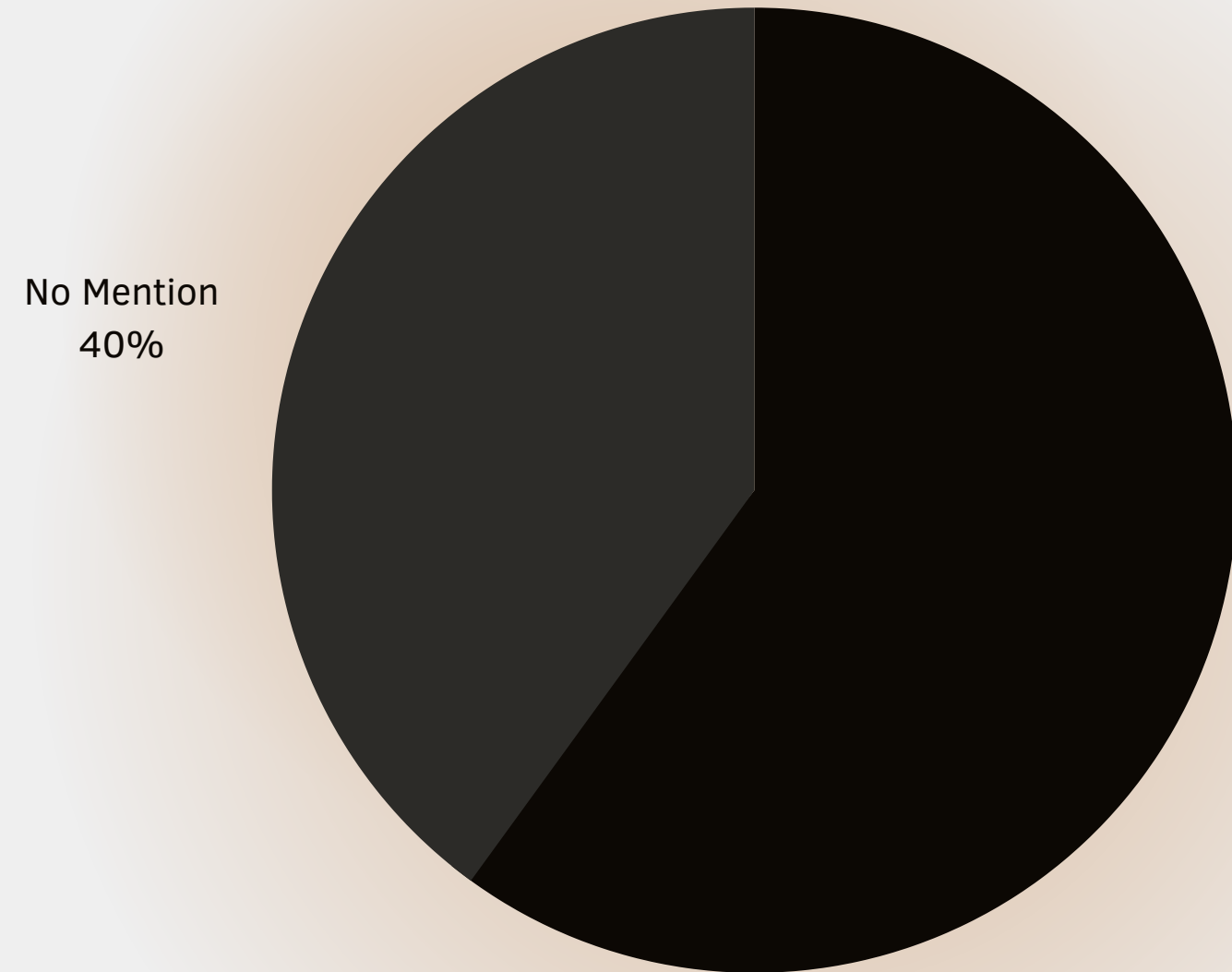
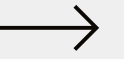
Lots of changes mentioned including:

- impact on emotional health
- relationship with their spouse/partner
- new perspectives on their general views of abortion
- their outlooks on the future and what life entailed



“At first it all seemed like a weight had been lifted and everything was okay, *but* then I started to feel really sad and low and now all I do is think about how many weeks pregnant I would have been and what my baby would look like and I miss so much” (4-26-2020).

AFTER ABORTION IDENTITY: *RELIEF VS. REGRET*



Managing Silence

Silence vs. Stigma

Even though women were able to openly self-disclose their medication abortion experience in an anonymous online platform, many women felt muted by their loved ones due to feelings of shame, embarrassment, or lack of support.



“I try to talk about it with my family and the baby’s dad *but* they all tell me it’s in the past” (10-28-17).

MANAGING THE STIGMATIZING SILENCE: *SILENCE VS. OPENNESS*



Significance of *Findings*

01

PERSONAL-PRIVATE & SOCIAL-POLITICAL

While a women's abortion story is personal and privately experienced, understanding and talking about this experience is dependent upon larger social discourses that remain politically charged.

02

COMPLEX NARRATIVES

Women's abortion experiences are dynamic, and no singular narrative fully encapsulates nor defines each woman's individual experience and the emotions felt.

03

TENSIONS REMAIN MUTED

Tensions surrounding these dialectical struggles with talking about one's medication abortion experience remain muted from public discourse and political debate.

CONCLUSION

THE LARGER DISCOURSES PREVALENT WITHIN BOTH THE RIGHT TO LIFE *AND* RIGHT TO CHOICE MOVEMENTS IMPACT THE LIMINALITY OF WOMEN WHO ARE CONTEMPLATING A MEDICATION ABORTION AND AFFECT THEIR OWN NARRATIVE RE-CONSTRUCTION AND SENSE-MAKING AFTER HAVING HAD A MEDICATION ABORTION.





Thank You!

www.familyhealthcomm.com

