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In the Fabric of Research: Racial and Gender Stereotypes in Survey Items Assessing Attitudes about Abortion

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We investigated the content of survey items to assess whether and how racist and sexist stereotypes are woven into the fabric of research on attitudes about abortion in the United States. We collected and analyzed a comprehensive set of survey items (456 items from 80 studies) used in peer-reviewed research published from 2008 to 2018 in representative and nonrepresentative studies of U.S. respondents. Our analysis was guided by historical narratives that have been influential in shaping representations of women and reproduction in the United States (e.g., the Moynihan Report). With this background, we developed three themes pertaining to how individuals' attitudes about abortion are measured: we found that items rely on (1) moral, (2) sexual, and (3) financial evaluations of women seeking abortion care. These themes highlighted implicit and explicit judgments of women, including representations of them as unwilling to partner with men and as fiscally and sexually irresponsible. We argue that survey items meant to objectively assess abortion attitudes draw on negative racial and gender stereotypes and that these stereotypes then travel widely under the veneer of scientific objectivity. Critical methods, such as the item bank analysis described in this study, are crucial to discern how inequality, prejudice, and discrimination can be reproduced in the

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fabric of research methods. In our discussion, we offer suggestions for researchers to reduce these and related forms of bias in survey-based abortion research.

Survey items can be understood not only as tools for collecting data on public opinion, but also as bases for informing and shaping public opinion. In this study, we focus on how stereotypes about race, gender, and poverty are embedded in the tools used to measure attitudes about abortion in the United States. We argue that negative stereotypes concerning Black women's sexual and reproductive lives have become embedded in survey items assessing why women get pregnant and why they seek abortion care. In this study, we turn our gaze away from the targets of public opinion and move toward the survey items themselves; combining historical analysis and close reading methods, we assess how abortion attitude measures have been written, the imagery used in items, and the ideologies that frame how survey participants think about abortion. This research builds on questions of knowledge production, methods, and measurement, including, for example, critical analyses of racism and sexism embedded in the practice of social science methods (Benjamin, 2015; Bridges, Keel, & Obasogie, 2017; McClelland & Fine, 2008; Tavris, 1993). Given the role of public opinion research in national conversations about abortion, researchers must not ignore the part we play in forming, and perhaps reproducing, inequalities in the name of measuring them.

Our central research question rests on whether studies about abortion, even if attempting to objectively measure people's attitudes, rely on stereotypes of women and assumptions about the centrality of marriage and "correct" family formations. As Roberts (1997) has argued, myths about reproduction and mothering are extremely powerful in U.S. histories. These myths circulate widely and try to explain what "we perceive to be the truth" (p. 16) about women and their capacities (to be citizens, to be mothers, and to make decisions for themselves). Most importantly, survey research about abortion often travels widely with the veneer of objectivity and the weight of "science." Hence, it becomes essential to analyze research practices for their role in reproducing "institutional illegibility," particularly of Black women (Cooper, 2015).

Scholarship on the relationship between negative *representations* and *harm* shape the questions we pursued in the current study. How researchers study people—research tools and theories of social hierarchy and categorization—have enormous implications for those that are repeatedly misrepresented in research. Cooper's (2015) articulation of intersectionality offers one example of how to imagine the reproduction of harm. Cooper's definition differs substantially from how psychological researchers often interpret intersectionality as a way to study a person's multiple intersecting identities and even those that argue for intersectionality's relationship to structural inequalities (e.g., Cole, 2009). Cooper shifts the focus to the systemic reproduction of *illegibility* in systems of "institutional power arrangements that make those identities invisible and illegible" (p. 10). In

other words, Cooper argues that intersectionality is not a theory of subjectivity, but is, instead, a theory that elucidates how specific subjects are made to be institutionally illegible. One example is through the repetition of stereotypes. Cooper's (2015) definition asks us to consider how, for example, social science methods are complicit in making some identities appear to be hard to know and hard to understand.

Similarly, Teo (2010) developed the term "epistemological violence" as a way to describe how representations in science can and do inflict harm. Epistemological violence directs us to examine normative practices in empirical studies in psychology "when interpretative speculations regarding results implicitly or explicitly construct the 'Other' as inferior or problematic . . . " (p. 298). While Teo's articulation of violence occurs in the moment of interpretation, we extend this to include data collection decisions as well. Teo (2010) argued that the intention of the researcher (to construct the "Other" as inferior) should not be considered, but instead, we should ask: who is negatively affected by consistent representations as inferior and problematic? Both Cooper (2015) and Teo (2010) highlight the harm that can come from (mis)representations in science and the role that knowledge production plays in framing certain subjects as inherently unknowable or inferior. Similarly, Fine (2012) has argued that researchers too often misrepresent the most vulnerable populations through developing narratives that describe people as "not doing enough" to help themselves (see also Sidanius & Pratto, 2001). Together, these scholars argue for greater attention to research practices and the potential for harm.

It has been well documented that the historical construction of women's reproductive rights is replete with narratives about women's lack, including their moral, sexual, and financial incompetence (Nadasen, 2007; Roberts, 1997; Rosenthal & Lobel, 2016). In this study, we ask whether these stereotypes structure the tools researchers use to assess public opinion on the topic of abortion. We relied on systematic review procedures to develop an "item bank" (DeWalt, Rothrock, Yount, & Stone, 2007) to study the widest range of survey items used to measure attitudes toward abortion from 2008 to 2018. We did not evaluate the items' psychometric properties. Instead, we evaluated their qualitative content, including words, imagery, and associations in the items. Prior research has shown how powerful item framing is in shaping participants' responses as well as negative evaluations of groups referenced in survey items (Nelson, 1999; Schwarz, 2007; Wittenbrink & Henly, 1996). We build on these findings to examine how studies of knowledge production are essential to understand the reproduction of stigma within social science research.

Studying the tools researchers use is necessary and is unfortunately, not often prioritized as an integral part of social science research. However, historical analysis of disciplinary methods has illustrated how assumptions about racial and gender inequality play a central role in the questions that researchers ask and the

kinds of projects social scientists pursue (e.g., Fine, 2012; Hegarty, 2007). We argue that creating and analyzing an "item bank" offers a set of critical methods for researchers. Critical methods are those that make the process of knowledge production more evident rather than less evident; they focus on collecting information about differences, variations, and imperfections in the research process (McClelland, 2018). Our study offers an example and a set of strategies for researchers to use when developing survey measures and/or assessing the measures they already use.

Background

In building an argument about the role of stereotypes and their influence on survey research about abortion attitudes, we draw from research on individual attitudes and item construction (Schwarz & Bohner, 2001), framing and public opinion (Entman, 1993), and the influence of survey research on public discourse (Westbrook & Saperstein, 2015). Turning to studies of abortion attitudes, we offer a brief background on one of the major national surveys that has collected data on abortion attitudes since 1972—the General Social Survey (GSS). Lastly, we turn to the *Moynihan Report* (Moynihan, 1965), a highly influential policy text that has long played a role in the national imagination about poverty and Black women in the United States. When seen together, this cross-disciplinary set of literatures makes a powerful argument about the role that historically charged negative stereotypes can play in studies about abortion and the measures that have been developed.

Attitude Measurement

The study of attitudes has consistently highlighted the role of a person's cognitions, perceptions, emotions, and the close relationship between attitudes and behaviors (Allport, 1954; Schwarz & Bohner, 2001). Sociologists and psychologists (e.g., Campbell, 1950) have defined attitudes in terms of the "probability that a person will show a specified behavior in a specified situation" (Schwarz & Bohner, 2001, p. 436). However, the relationship between attitudes and behavior has been fraught (Ajzen & Fishbein, 2005). In other words, how accurately can we predict how a person will act from knowing something about their attitudes? The answer to this question is mixed and some have argued that how we ask questions matters a great deal (e.g., Schwarz, 2008).

Decades of research have shown that attitude self-report data are highly context-dependent and easily affected by subtle cues in how items are structured (Schwarz, 2007; Schwarz & Bohner, 2001). Respondents have been found to be influenced by minor changes in question wording, format, and item order and, in addition, these effects can differ by subgroup (McCabe & Heerwig, 2011;

Nelson & Kinder, 1996). Singer and Couper (2014) tested whether changes in item wording about genetic testing affected participants' attitudes toward abortion. Participants ($N = 1{,}570$) were randomly assigned to complete a survey that used either the term "fetus" or "baby" in a series of four items about abortion in the case that prenatal testing showed a genetic defect in the baby/fetus. Singer and Couper found significant subgroup differences across demographic characteristics (e.g., race, age, political ideology), with groups responding differently when "baby" or "fetus" was included in the item. These findings demonstrate that the words researchers use in surveys can shape how participants express their attitudes, and that specific word choices might be particularly influential when they have "ideological connotations" (p. 752), such as terms related to abortion (i.e., "fetus" and "baby").

Negative attitudes have been found to translate to negative treatment of outgroups. This body of research has focused on predicting behaviors, such as support of social policies and voting patterns (e.g., Fazio, 1990). For example, when individuals describe groups as having less social and political power, they also describe having lower feelings of empathy, lower evaluations of deservingness, and lower endorsement of distribution of resources for individuals in those groups (Hassell & Visalvanich, 2015; Nelson, 1999; Opotow, 1990). Callaghan and Olson (2017) found that White respondents who held prejudiced views about African Americans were less likely to support the "ordinarily popular" (p. 66) earned income tax credit program when the program was labeled as the "Earned Income Tax Welfare Credit" program and if they were falsely told that recipients of this program were more likely to be "poor, black, unmarried, and have children" (p. 73). In the "racialized" condition in which the name of the program included "welfare" and recipients were described in stereotypical ways, racial resentment scores were significantly higher.

The wording and structure of survey items can also influence how research participants report their own attitudes and biases. Wittenbrink and Henly (1996) manipulated how much participants thought they were seeing a "shared reality" about racial bias by changing how common racial bias appeared in the response options. In one study, participants were randomly assigned to read an item with a negative or positive frame with regard to beliefs about African American educational attainment. Those in the positive condition were asked: "What percent of the general public do you think agrees with the following statement: 'About 85% of Blacks between the ages of 20–40 have a high school degree.' 50% or less, 55%, 60%, 65%, 70% or more?" Those in the negative condition were asked the same question, but the belief of the "general public" was shifted lower, from 85% to 50% of Blacks achieving a high school degree, to appear that the shared belief was one of lower educational attainment. When the item was framed more negatively to suggest that other people held relatively negative beliefs about African Americans, those who had scored higher on the Modern Racism Scale before

the manipulation also reported more negative attitudes toward African Americans postmanipulation. Further, participants who had been exposed to negative item structures also perceived African American defendants more negatively using a hypothetical prison sentencing measure than did those in the positive information condition. In other words, the item frame affected subsequent judgments about African Americans more generally. Indeed, words matter.

Research on contextual cues in survey language highlights two important effects: (1) item structures can affect how negatively groups are judged and (2) items can "teach" someone how to think about a group and can lead to other negative judgments about those referenced in the item. These effects have largely been studied experimentally, testing respondents' answers when different frames are present. We extend this work by bringing a qualitative and historical analysis to the survey items used to assess abortion attitudes. Our aim in the current study was not to determine whether frames invoked in survey items influenced individual attitudes; as seen above, this finding is already well established. Instead, our aim was to identify and theoretically investigate a fuller range of frames that may be influential in research about abortion. This is especially important, given how widely survey research on issues such as abortion is reported in the news and the potential for survey research to influence and reproduce negative stereotypes that are already circulating in the social environment (Moy & Rinke, 2012).

Abortion Attitudes Research

Survey research about abortion attitudes in the U.S. dates back to 1965 (National Fertility Survey; Westoff & Ryder, 1965). The GSS began asking about abortion attitudes in 1972 and continues today. It is one of the longest running and most widely cited nationally representative survey that includes measures of abortion attitudes. The seven most commonly used GSS abortion attitudes items are listed in Table 1.

Because the GSS data are collected every other year, these seven items are often used to assess trends in public attitudes toward abortion in the United States (Rossi & Sitaraman, 1988; Smith & Son, 2013). While there have been notable shifts over time, responses to the GSS abortion items have remained somewhat consistent since 1972 (Smith & Son, 2013). This consistency is of note because in this time span, the issue of abortion has evolved. For instance, there has been a drastic increase in laws restricting access to abortion (Guttmacher Institute, 2018; Smith, Sundstrom, & Delay, 2020). The fact that the legislative climate has changed, while measures like the GSS show stability, suggests that the assessments are likely missing key aspects of individual abortion attitudes.

Three of the circumstances named in the GSS (defect, rape, woman's health) have been classified as "hard" reasons that are consistently supported by the majority of respondents, while three (low income, does not want more children,

Table 1. General Social Survey (GSS) Abortion Attitude Items

Please tell me whether or not you think it should be possible for a pregnant woman to obtain a legal abortion . . .
(a) If there is a strong chance of serious defect in the baby?
(b) If she is married and does not want any more children?
(c) If the woman's own health is seriously endangered by the pregnancy?
(d) If the family has a very low income and cannot afford any more children?
(e) If she became pregnant as a result of rape?
(f) If she is not married and does not want to marry the man?
(g) The woman wants it for any reason?

Note. The seventh item regarding if a woman "wants it for any reason" was added to the GSS in 1977 in an effort to capture abortion attitudes that were not reliant on specific conditions (Smith & Son, 2013). For each of the seven questions, respondents are given the answer choices of "yes," "no," or "don't know."

and does not want to marry the man) have been classified as "soft" reasons that are generally opposed by the majority of respondents (Granberg & Granberg, 1980; Rossi & Sitaraman, 1988). Research supports the use of the GSS items as both a single scale (Barkan, 2014; Jelen, Damore, & Lamatsch, 2002) and two scales (i.e., "soft" and "hard" reasons; Arney & Trescher, 1976; Barnartt & Harris, 1982; Muthén, 1981). The GSS items have been found psychometrically reliable, across time and subgroups: "With reliabilities mostly above 0.80, these hot-button issues [including abortion] represent rather "mature" attitudes that were reliably reported" (Hout & Hastings, 2016, p. 991).

Researchers have called for further development of abortion attitude measures, including further analysis of order effects and lack of clarity in item wording (Jelen & Wilcox, 2003; Jozkowski, Crawford, & Hunt, 2018; Zigerell & Rice, 2011). Bumpass (1997), for example, found that respondents were more likely to support abortion with longer gestation periods or abortions that were chosen for "any reason" when these two options were presented at the beginning, as opposed to at the end, of a list of possible response options. Fewer studies, however, have explored how racial and gender stereotypes may shape abortion attitude measures. One important exception is Rossi and Sitaraman's (1988) analysis of the GSS. They argued that the wording of the GSS items had created two sets of situations in the public's mind: those circumstances that a woman has little or no control over ("She was the victim of disease, genes or a rapist," p. 275) and those that infer she acted irresponsibly ("she should . . . avoid sex or use effective contraceptives," p. 275). Importantly, the authors highlight the influential role of "socially unacceptable sexual behavior initiated by the woman" as instrumental in how U.S. respondents interpret acceptable conditions for abortion. This gendered analysis of the GSS items offers an important basis for the current study.

Race and Gender in Narratives of Reproduction

Across disciplines, and for decades, scholars have demonstrated the roles racism and sexism play in knowledge production (Benjamin, 2015; Bridges et al., 2017; Tavris, 1993). One of the most influential pieces to pathologize Black women and their reproductive bodies was *The Negro Family: The Case for National Action*, commonly known as the *Moynihan Report* (Moynihan, 1965). Daniel Moynihan, Assistant Secretary of Labor under President Johnson, sought to assess the state of Black families in the United States and argued that the matriarchal structure in Black families was to blame for the systemic poverty Black families experienced. By linking single, Black women with poverty and moral failures, the report developed a new chapter in the long history of racializing and gendering the (undeserving) poor; for example, concretizing the image of a Black "welfare queen" in federal documents years before it became a common trope in public discourse (Kohler-Hausmann, 2015).

Specific images from the report remain salient, namely "matriarchal structures," "increases in welfare dependency," and "irresponsible reproduction" (Moynihan, 1965, cited in Lenhardt, 2016, p. 352). All of these totaled what Lenhardt (2016) called a story of "failed citizenship" through nonmarriage. She argued that the report's aftermath is still felt as policy makers continue to seize on marriage and adherence to gender norms as the path to citizenship. "[M]arital norms determined the extent to which black female heads-of-household—the subgroup Moynihan focused on—were classified as hypersexual or nurturing, resourceful or domineering, 'good' or 'bad' citizens" (p. 353). Importantly, the *Moynihan Report* (1965) structured how social issues, such as those related to reproduction, were represented in U.S. policy as decontextualized behaviors enacted by lone actors making "bad decisions," separated from history and rationale.

One consequence of the *Moynihan Report* (1965), and its accompanying narratives about "correct" and "healthy" family structures, was sustained attention on incentivizing marriage in U.S. public policy (Bensonsmith, 2005; Lenhardt, 2016). For example, Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF), part of President Clinton's 1996 Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act, made marriage incentives federal policy and imposed new work requirements, caps on number of children, and time limits on families' eligibility for welfare benefits. Policy makers built these restrictions from stereotypes about African American families dispersed in the *Moynihan Report,* demonstrating ongoing efforts by the government to define, regulate, and restrain "inappropriate" motherhood (Onquachi-Willig, 2005; Schram, 2005).

These and other U.S. public policies have focused on Black families, Black women, and sexual morality; they have circulated and reproduced negative stereotypes of women as single, or unwed, and/or having children out of wedlock

(DeJean, McGeorge, & Stone Carlson, 2012; Smith et al., 2020). Women of color have been linked in the U.S. imagination with hypersexuality, irresponsible mothering, dependence on the state, and unstable family structures (Chavez, 2004; Gilens, 1999; Nadasen, 2007). Tied into these stereotypes are assumptions about women of color's incapacity to be "good" mothers (Roberts, 1997; Rosenthal & Lobel, 2016). Black mothers have been persistently characterized by media and policy as lazy, as "stealing" from the government, and importantly, as unable to care for their children (Killen, 2019). Roberts (1997) argued that these images were especially important because images of poor mothering were linked with stereotypes about Black women's excessive sexuality and fertility, making this a pernicious stereotype: Black mothers were perceived as liable to "spread" depravity and thus poverty through the "transmission of genes, thereby producing a generation of truants" (Killen, 2019, p. 6).

Current Study

In the current study, we theorized that historically charged frames might be present in abortion attitudes survey items that ask about individuals' attitudes toward motherhood, marital status, sexual relations, poverty, and children. Due to the high circulation and high salience of these images in the United States, we argue that these stereotypes about women, race, (im)morality, and fiscal irresponsibility shape the prototypical "woman" who is imagined when respondents are asked about their moral and legal attitudes toward abortion.

Starting with the question of how abortion attitudes have been assessed over the last decade, we sought to collect the widest possible range of survey tools. We used systematic review procedures (DeWalt et al., 2007) to produce a dataset of 456 items drawn from 80 studies on abortion attitudes over the last decade (2008–2018). Rather than reading the content of the items and responses alone, we used qualitative coding procedures to assess patterns in the questions that participants have been asked, including the structure, format, and imagery included within items. In contrast to the work on ordering effects and sampling (e.g., Bumpass, 1997), our analysis focused solely on the content of items with the aim of understanding the range of patterns included in contemporary abortion research. We term this approach "critical measurement analysis," which draws from feminist psychology and reproductive justice theory, both of which critically evaluate who is (in)visible in research on reproductive rights, health, and freedoms (McClelland, 2018; Ross & Solinger, 2017). The item bank enabled us to: (1) identify patterns in items used across a wide range of studies, (2) identify potential biases in existing items, and (3) identify areas that have been consistently overlooked in survey research.

Method

Item Bank Development

To develop the item bank (Hahn et al., 2010), we systematically searched peer-reviewed articles published from 2008 to 2018 that measured attitudes toward abortion with U.S. respondents, including research on abortion decision-making, abortion education, abortion funding, and abortion provision. We used Google Scholar, PsycInfo, JSTOR, and PubMed; our search terms included "abortion attitudes," "abortion beliefs," "abortion knowledge," "abortion stigma," and "abortion views." While using the search term "attitude" proved to be most relevant for our research objectives, other terms proved useful as well: the term "belief" captured how people felt about abortion regardless of its legality; the term "views" often captured research about mandatory preabortion procedures (e.g., ultrasounds); the term "stigma" captured attitudes of abortion seekers, which informed the theoretical dimensions we developed for our final coding.

We relied on a range of relevant terms in order to develop a diverse and comprehensive database that spanned disciplines, research settings, and populations. Studies with smaller, nonprobability samples were included in our item bank alongside large probability studies; smaller studies often have greater flexibility in the development of new items and it was crucial to capture these items in our item bank. In addition, because abortion policies and the history of legalization differ widely across the world, we limited our search to abortion attitude research with respondents based in the United States. This decision allowed us to focus on the recent past and to focus on the specific histories and rhetoric surrounding women and reproduction in the United States.

In the event the exact wording for an item was not available, we contacted the corresponding author(s). We contacted 32 authors (July–September 2018) and received the exact wording of 152 items, which were added to our dataset. Twenty-four (out of 32 authors; 75%) responded to our queries with the survey instrumentation they used. We contacted authors weekly in the case of nonresponses for a maximum of three attempts.

Item Bank Sample

We extracted 456 items from 80 studies in our item bank (see Supporting Information for full list of studies). These items were published across disciplines including psychology, sociology, political science, medicine, and behavioral genetics. We focused on including all of the items that have been asked by researchers studying abortion attitudes published in peer-reviewed journals, not on including every study on abortion attitudes completed in the past 10 years. We were most interested in the breadth of unique items used to measure abortion attitudes, and

as a result, we did not include every study that has used data from nationally representative surveys, such as the GSS, or the American National Election Study (ANES). Given the sheer number of studies that use the GSS and ANES measures, these items would have been over-represented in our item bank if we had sampled for studies rather than items. This sampling decision to focus on survey item breadth allowed us to study the fullest range of items, rather than the fullest set of studies in the last decade.

We made several decisions about how to represent the GSS and ANES in our item bank due to their frequent inclusion in research; our aim was to include the widest variety of item content. In terms of the GSS, one study was included that analyzed the standard seven-part question on abortion attitudes described in Table 1 (Carter, Carter, & Dodge, 2009). In addition, one study that included the GSS item, "Suppose a test shows the baby has a serious genetic defect, would you, yourself want (your partner) to have an abortion if a test shows the baby has a serious genetic defect?" (Singer, Couper, Raghunathan, Van Hoewyk, & Antonucci, 2008) was added to the item bank.

In terms of the ANES, one study included two items from the Senate National Election Study: (1) "Do you think abortions should be legal under all circumstances, only legal under certain circumstances, or never legal under any circumstance?" and (2) "Would you favor or oppose a state law that would require parental consent before a teenager under 18 could have an abortion?" (Camobreco & Barnello, 2008). Another study included items from the Time Series Survey for the ANES: "Do you favor, oppose, or neither favor nor oppose abortion being legal if: (a) staying pregnant would hurt the woman's health but is very unlikely to cause her to die; (b) staying pregnant could cause the woman to die; (c) the pregnancy was caused by the woman having sex with a blood relative; (d) the pregnancy was caused by the woman being raped; (e) the fetus will be born with a serious birth defect; (f) having the child would be extremely difficult for the woman financially; (g) the child will not be the sex the woman wants it to be; and (h) the woman chooses to have one" (Liu, 2018).

Item Bank Analysis

To study patterns in the survey items, we used a combination of deductive and inductive coding methods. Inductive codes were developed through our initial reading of the item bank. Deductive codes were developed by reading arguments that were absent from the existing survey items, yet conceptually pertinent to our analysis. This included legal (e.g., Abrams, 2012), qualitative (e.g., Cockrill & Nack, 2013), and theoretical scholarship (e.g., Cooper, 2016). This set of literatures aided in developing codes that, for example, distinguished the framing of marital status (e.g., are women referenced as married or single?), how circumstances surrounding the abortion are described (e.g., is the first, second, or third trimester

referenced?), and the role of governmental regulation in women's decision-making (e.g., is the government referenced as "allowing" women to access abortion?).

The coding team consisted of the first two authors and an additional trained team member. Together, we developed 11 codes to assess the item content (i.e., *what* respondents were asked) as well as item structure (i.e., *how* respondents were asked; see Table 2). Following Terry, Hayfield, Clarke, and Braun's (2017) thematic analysis guidelines, we read through the items, giving each item equal attention through the coding process; we attached meaningful labels that were relevant to specific parts of the item, as well as the whole item and response options; multiple codes were attached when applicable; and lastly, codes were refined throughout the process and then reapplied to the entire dataset when necessary. Our coding procedure enabled us to organize and label several dimensions of each item. For example, content-focused codes such as the *decision-maker* code allowed us to track the various people and groups mentioned across the items (e.g., partners, doctors, family members), while structure-focused codes such as the *item construction* code allowed us to track word choices across the items (e.g., the use of hypothetical scenarios). This allowed for patterns to be assessed that appeared in the items and response options' content related to our research questions.

In the current discussion, we focus on four codes: *circumstances* (references to reasons, issues, or contexts surrounding real or hypothetical abortions and/or woman); *woman* (aspects of the woman, including her body, health, life, physical and mental health, relationships, as well as implicit and explicit attributions made about her and her mothering ability); *morality* (references to the morality; framing abortion as "right" or "wrong"); and *government and money* (references to governmental oversight, legislation, and public funding for abortion care).

We relied on the software program Dedoose (Sociocultural Research Consultants, 2018) to aid in coding. The unit of analysis consisted of each survey item and its response options; scales with multiple items were coded at the item level. We employed an open coding procedure whereby multiple codes could be applied to a single item (Elo & Kyngäs, 2008). The three coders individually assessed one third of the items (approximately 150 items) and kept a collaborative document to discuss questions that arose during the coding process. As a last step of the code checking procedure, 20% of each coder's codes were double checked by a second coder to identify any potential coding discrepancies. These discrepancies were discussed and resulted in further code refinement.

Results

The data within each of the codes were analyzed in light of our main research questions about the role of item framing (i.e., implicit cues and images) and the role of stereotypes about women and race in the item content. We developed three themes that reflected different forms of evaluating women's reproductive

Table 2. Codes, Code Definitions, and Exemplar Items

Code	Code Definition	Exemplar Item
Circumstances Surrounding abortion and/or woman	Circumstances, reasons, or explanations surrounding real or hypothetical abortions, as well as conditions surrounding the woman.	"Please tell me whether or not you think it should be possible for a pregnant woman to obtain a legal abortion if . . . there is a strong chance of serious defect in the baby?"[1]
Woman	All references to "woman," "women," and "mother," including items that ask about all aspects of the woman (e.g., her body, her health, her life), including her physical and mental health, and her relationships. Also includes implicit and explicit associations and attributions made about her (e.g., her sexuality, her ability to mother).	"Abortion is acceptable if the woman cannot take care of her child."[2]
Government & money	Government, legislation, law, and decision-making. Also includes references to who/what pays for abortion procedures (e.g., employer insurance, federal insurance programs).	"Do you think federal insurance programs should cover abortion in instances when the woman's health is in danger?"[3]
Spirituality	Spirituality and religiosity, including implicit references to spirituality (e.g., sin, soul) as well as references to God or other religious figures.	"Abortion is a sin against God."[4]
Feelings, attitudes, beliefs, behaviors	Feelings, attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors (on their own or in relationship with one another). Also includes items that ask for affective and/or cognitive evaluations of situations and people, and/or any references to behaviors that someone might take as a result of their evaluation (e.g., vote).	"Do you personally believe that abortion is morally acceptable, morally wrong, or is not a moral issue?"[5]
Morality	Moral evaluations of woman seeking abortion, abortion itself, including anticipation of (potential) moral judgment from others (e.g., feelings of guilt or shame). Evaluations can come from self, others—real or imagined.	"Do you personally believe that abortion is morally acceptable, morally wrong, or is not a moral issue?"[6]

(*Continued*)

Table 2. Continued

Code	Code Definition	Exemplar Item
Want & need	References to whether the pregnant woman seeking abortion wants or needs an abortion, and/or wants to have children or not.	"It should be legal for a woman to obtain an abortion if she wants to have one for any reason."[7]
Decision maker(s)	All person(s) imagined as having or making a decision regarding abortion. Could include woman, those near her, as well as those imagined to have role in abortion decision.	"Spousal notification should be required for married women."[8]
Object(s) of abortion	References to what/who is being or imagined to be aborted.	"I think it [abortion] is the same as killing a baby that's already born."[9]
Termination language	All references to how termination of a pregnancy is described, including terms such as "safe," "elective," "not necessary," "unwanted," or "forced."	"Abortion is a legitimate health procedure."[10]
Item construction	Characteristics of the item (how the item is written, constructed, or how content is ordered), including the response options.	"Would you, yourself want (your partner) to have an abortion if a test shows the baby has a serious genetic defect?"[11]

Note. References for items:
[1] Carter et al., 2009.
[2] Rice et al., 2017.
[3] Swigger, 2016.
[4] Kandola and Egan, 2014.
[5] Mohamed, 2018.
[6] Mohamed, 2018.
[7] Smith, 2016.
[8] Dodge et al., 2016.
[9] Foster, Gould, and Kimport, 2012.
[10] Ely, Flaherty, Akers, and Noland, 2012.
[11] Singer et al., 2008.

decision-making. These themes offer three interpretive lenses with which to view the patterns within the item bank. The *moral evaluation* theme included items that referenced moral evaluations of women and/or abortion, including both explicit and implicit evaluative language. The *sexual evaluation* theme included items that referenced women's sexual behavior, their relationship status, and previous unintended pregnancies. The *financial evaluation* theme included items that addressed references to government oversight and financial responsibility for abortion costs and health care more generally.

Moral Evaluations

Morality appeared across the item bank in items that asked about respondents' attitudes, beliefs, feelings about abortion itself, moral judgments about abortion occurring in varying circumstances, and items that asked respondents about their friends', families', and community members' moral evaluations of abortion. This theme included the use of the term "moral" in abortion attitude items, as well as morality cues that were more subtly worded. These included asking if abortion was "OK," "acceptable," "should not be allowed," and "wrong." These additional terms, while not explicitly directing the respondent to report their moral evaluation, nevertheless similarly position the respondent as making a decision about abortion that relies on a personal assessment, drawing on some set of (unstated) judgments.

We found that moral evaluations items resulted in a shift of focus: from the abortion, to the woman herself (e.g., her career, her education, her marital status, being too poor). As a result, the respondent was asked to make moral evaluations of a woman and the circumstances she was operating within, using moral frameworks as one of the main guides for attitude assessment. One might contrast this set of assumptions, for example, with making moral evaluations of diminished reproductive protections (e.g., poor sex education, lack of birth control, role of gender inequality in sexual decision-making) rather than evaluating a woman and what appear to be solely her decisions.

Items that tap moral evaluations create a specific type of relationship between the respondent and abortion decisions. These items ask respondents to evaluate an imagined woman (even if she is not explicitly mentioned in the item) and weigh a variety of factors when making a moral evaluation about her abortion. For example: "Would abortion in the case of pregnancy that was the result of rape or incest be morally acceptable?" (Bennett, McDonald, Finch, Rennie, & Morse, 2018). This item structure of asking a respondent to evaluate abortion in a series of "unfortunate events" positions respondents as moral arbiters of the woman and her circumstances, which may or may not make seeking an abortion "OK" or "acceptable." For example, items that linked moral and abortion evaluations such as "Abortion is acceptable if the woman cannot take care of her child" (Rice et al., 2017) and "Is it OK for a woman to get an abortion if she can't afford

another child?" (Woodhams, Hill, Fabiyi, & Gilliam, 2016) conflate the woman, her (economic, social, relational) conditions, and the abortion itself. As a result, it is not clear whether the moral evaluation reported by the respondent is about the woman, the abortion, or the scene in which a woman is not able to take care of her child. This conflation is important because it potentially leads to inaccurate measurement of the relationship between morality and abortion attitudes.

Sexual Evaluations

The sexual evaluations theme described how women's sexual lives were portrayed in the item bank. This included, for example, how they became pregnant, references to sex, their relational status, and the erasure of men and their responsibility for pregnancy. Items referenced women's relational status using a variety of frames, including references to being "unwed," "single," "unmarried," and "does not want to marry the man." While these descriptors may seem mundane, their repetition signals the centrality of marriage as the correct site of pregnancy and abortion decisions. For example, one set of items presents Angela, a mother of two children, who is considering an abortion. Respondents were asked if "abortion should or should not be an option for her" (Hans & Kimberly, 2014). One scenario describes Angela as single and indicates she is getting an abortion because "she had no relationship with the man she slept with." The phrase "slept with" forwards several aspects of Angela: she is sexually active and perhaps sexually promiscuous since she does not have a relationship with this man. The man's sexual life (and shared responsibility for the pregnancy) is present, but he is not held morally or sexually responsible in the item.

The GSS asks respondents about how they feel about abortion when "the woman is married and does not want any more children" and when "the woman is not married and does not want to marry the man." These wording choices (in two of the seven items; see Table 1) center a woman's marital status as a primary gauge by which to evaluate her life, her pregnancy, and her abortion decision. Other items highlight women's inability to mother by invoking their precarious financial situation ("The family has a very low income and cannot afford any more children") and presenting women as sexually irresponsible ("She already has too many children"). These images of women having "too many" children draw on associations of "hyperfertile" women that have been used to historically vilify women of color (Volscho, 2010) and beg the question: too many children for what or whom? These word choices are important signifiers that carry connotations, drawing on long histories of race, gender, and reproduction in the U.S. context. The measurement issues here are important to note: it is uncertain with these and similar items whether respondents are reporting on their attitudes about women in general, attitudes about women's sexuality, sex outside of marriage, and/or

the issue of abortion when framed by images of women making "irresponsible" decisions (i.e., about their marital status, having too many children, etc.).

Financial Evaluations

The financial regulation theme allowed for analysis of items that asked about attitudes toward abortion, attitudes toward poor women, and/or attitudes about government spending. The funding of abortion has long been a place of tremendous disagreement in the United States (Boonstra, 2007). The systematic peeling back of federal funding, as seen in the Hyde Amendment, *Harris v. McRae* (1980) and *Rust v. Sullivan* (1991), has meant that who pays for abortion remains one of the key areas for debate in the United States.

Items repeated associations between abortion, money, and poor women, for example, "The government should not cover the medical costs of abortions for poor women who cannot afford the procedure" (Begun & Walls, 2015). Several word choices stand out: the use of "poor women" as the singular group to be assessed, the use of active voice to center "the government" as a funding entity, and one that will "cover the costs" of those who "cannot afford the procedure;" each of these signify item design decisions that mirror and reinforce rhetoric of governmental support of "poor" women who make "bad" decisions. The financial evaluation theme allowed us to analyze how a fiscally irresponsible woman was invoked in item content. This repeated association between women and poverty would also likely become racialized; research has shown that respondents are more likely to imagine people of color when asked to imagine "poor people" (Cox & Devine, 2015; Lei & Bodenhausen, 2017). Brown-Iannuzzi, Dotsch, Cooley, and Payne (2017) studied people's mental representations of welfare recipients and found that when individuals think about welfare recipients, they tend to imagine an African American who appears lazy, incompetent, as well as less human, less agentic, and to have less mental experience than a nonwelfare recipient.

In our item bank, it is important to note that irresponsibility does not appear in the item content. However, we found that patterns in item wording cued images of irresponsibility, especially when these patterns were interpreted through historical references of women's reproductive and financial decision-making (e.g., the *Moynihan Report,* 1965). For example, individual women are referenced in the items ("cannot afford another child," "cannot take care of her child," or is "financially unable to support the child"). These wording choices frame a woman who is both financially poor and a bad mother, linking her economic and familial "failures" while assessing a person's attitude about abortion. Structural circumstances on the other hand (e.g., having a low wage job, not having completed high school) are missing from items that ask respondents about funding and abortion.

In addition to descriptions of women, this theme also allowed for analysis of how funding for abortion was described. Some items relied on terms such

as "public funding," while others inquired about use of "government funding," "federal insurance programs," "free public health care," and "taxpayer funding," all of which draw on rhetoric of welfare and government. Some items named specific public programs that required that respondents knew enough about public funding to answer truthfully (e.g., "Medicaid should cover enrolled women [for abortion];" Dodge, Haider, & Hacker, 2016). Other items asked respondents to consider abortion in context of health care: "The United States government should be responsible for providing abortions as part of free, public health care" (Canan & Jozkowski, 2017). This item is an example of presenting public funding as something that all people benefit from, not only those who are poor or financially unstable, while still tapping an individual's attitude about abortion, funding, and issues related to access. In contrast, some items ask about federal funds only under certain circumstances (e.g., "Do you think federal insurance programs should cover abortion in instances when the woman's health is in danger?" Swigger, 2016). This structure, similar to the moral evaluations discussed above, asks the respondent to judge the circumstance surrounding the woman and evaluate who should pay for the abortion. Similar issues arise here with the accurate measurement of abortion attitudes. It is not clear whether the attitude being reported is about abortion, a woman in a health crisis who is pregnant, a woman who relies on federal funding, government spending on abortion, or government spending in general.

Discussion

We set out to theorize and study relationships between U.S. history, measurement, and individual attitudes. Our aim was to examine how surveys about abortion attitudes, which tap individuals' ideas about marriage, sex, and poverty, are framed by historical discourses and ideologies about race and gender. We join the discussions of policing what is considered "legitimate" reproduction and motherhood in this special issue on reproductive justice; this includes policing women of color in the United States and abroad (Grabe, Ramirez, & Dutt, 2020; Smith et al., 2020), transgender and nonbinary individuals (Riggs & Bartholomaeus, 2020), people with larger bodies (LaMarre, Rice, Cook, & Friedman, 2020), emerging adults (Grzanka & Schuch, 2020), and those who breastfeed in public (Huang, Sibley, & Osborne, 2020).

In this study, we focused on how African American women have been historically represented as undeserving, inattentive to marriage and gender norms, and fiscally irresponsible (Lenhardt, 2016). We developed an item bank as a way to investigate patterns in how researchers have written survey items, their wording choices, and the implicit cues in item language. Our findings of moral, sexual, and financial evaluations in the item bank demonstrate that abortion attitude measures reinforce negative stereotypes of women, women of color, reproduction, and abortion through the survey instrument itself. As a result, abortion attitude items

tap into and potentially serve to perpetuate respondents' racist and sexist ideologies. Negative stereotypes create a set of social cues that shape who is imagined when respondents are asked about their moral and legal attitudes toward abortion. This means that survey responses may not accurately capture individuals' attitudes about abortion, but instead, reflect individuals' attitudes about race, gender, and deservingness.

Dispersion of Bias

As abortion research moves quickly and frequently from survey item to news item, this creates what we term a *dispersion of bias*. Survey items that appear to be simply measuring attitudes make historically meaningful links, weaving and reweaving connections between "poor" mothering and Black women (Killen, 2019; Roberts, 1997). Dispersion results from high rates of reporting on abortion research; bias results from the constant repetition of negative stereotypes. Polling data (and the survey items they rely on) appear objective to the viewing public and, for this reason, are frequently included in news coverage (Boudreau & McCubbins, 2010; Turcotte, Medenilla, Villaseñor, & Lampwalla, 2017). Craig (2014) argued that polls are associated with greater objectivity because they do not "emanate from either party" (p. x) and are imagined to be unaffected by political ideology. As a result, survey items and polls have a unique influence on public perception.

Westbrook and Saperstein (2015) analyzed the measurement of sex, gender, race, ethnicity, and sexuality in four U.S. national social surveys. They argued that it is important to study patterns in national survey items because these large efforts at data collection often set the standard for newer research and have an enormous reach in terms of circulation. They also argued that, in effect, national survey items teach people how to think about survey research more generally: "more than 22,000 journal articles, books, and PhD dissertations are based on the GSS [the General Social Survey]; and about 400,000 students use the GSS in their classes each year" (NORC, cited in Westbrook & Saperstein, 2015, p. 539). Their analysis indicated that national surveys produce what they call a "hypergendered world" through the constant repetition of essentialist ideas about sex and gender, including language cues that ask about only men and women, brothers and sisters, and husbands and wives.

Thus, while national surveys appear (and are often imagined) by the public and policy makers as objective, critical researchers have found a more biased picture (e.g., Hegarty & Buechel, 2006). Like Westbrook and Saperstein (2015), we argue that through the sheer repetition from trusted sources, survey and polling data can become "social facts," integrated into U.S. public discourse through news outlets, academic publishing, and legislation (i.e., creating a dispersion of bias). This dispersion is important because researchers have found that information that appears to be objective and circulates widely can cement stereotypes, making

them even harder to change (Lewandowsky, Ecker, Seifert, Schwarz, & Cook, 2012; Merton & Wolfe, 1995). Building on these findings, we share the concerns of other researchers who argue that studies of public opinion are high stakes endeavors, as policy makers use survey data to inform legislation (Fine, 2012; Grzanka & Frantell, 2017).

Moving Forward

Our findings highlight three potential concerns in the assessment of abortion attitudes. If imagery associated with racism and sexism is threaded through abortion research: (1) abortion attitudes are measured inaccurately, yet these data still often guide national discussions; (2) abortion research may continue to frame Black women as illegible through the repetition of negative stereotypes about their sexual and reproductive lives (Cooper, 2015); and (3) research on abortion may indeed help to spread these negative stereotypes, through news coverage and high dispersion of national poll data, reinforcing historically charged negative imagery.

Several challenges remain for researchers writing items that aim to assess what and how people think about abortion. Our findings indicate that they need to be attentive to historically charged cues that link negative stereotypes about women of color, motherhood, and poverty. In order to tap considerations of abortion itself, and not racist and sexist ideologies about who is imagined to be a "good" woman, it is essential to keep several (and sometimes competing) interests in mind. In addition to psychometric concerns and scholarly norms associated with item and scale development, one must also consider the layers of meaning that have accumulated, for some silently and for others violently, in the words that are used in research. Without prioritizing investigations of the tools that are used—in other words, how people interpret, respond, and imagine worlds in response to the questions that are asked—researchers risk repeating racist and sexist tropes and calling it psychometrically sound.

Research Recommendations

For researchers who are interested in item and scale development in the field of abortion and reproductive justice, we have developed recommendations that build on and extend from the analysis described above. The recommendations extend measurement "best practices," which include general principles that help to ensure questions are clear, easy to understand, and reduce potential bias. For example, items should be constructed using accessible vocabulary (Rossi, Wright, & Anderson, 2013). Survey items should also be short, avoid double-barreled structures, and the use of double negatives (Payne, 2014; Rossi et al., 2013). Survey items should generally avoid presenting one side of an argument (e.g., "Do you think abortion should be illegal?") and instead specify alternative options

(e.g., "Do you think abortion should be legal or illegal?" Rossi et al., 2013). In addition, attention should be paid to the role of order effects in surveys (Schuman & Presser, 1981).

Finally, steps should be taken to establish that the scales or items have content validity. Content validity has been described as an evaluation of a test and its constituent items; "How can we evaluate score-based inferences without first evaluating the assessment instrument itself?" (Sireci, 1998, p. 103). This evaluation involves assessing how measures "represent the intended domain . . . the credibility, the soundness, of the assessment instrument itself for measuring the construct of interest" (Sireci, 1998, p. 103). Content validity is important to consider when evaluating measures where there is considerable disagreement about meanings, definitions, and interpretations of a construct, such as abortion (Messick, 1989)—especially when interpretations of the instrument may be influenced by one's own (or another's) political marginalization (McClelland, 2010).

In addition to these best practices, we have identified several key areas for researchers studying abortion attitudes and similar concepts. These suggestions contribute to accurate measurement in ways that are distinct from more commonly understood evaluations of reliability and validity. We turn here to arguments that have forwarded greater attention to histories, power imbalances, interpretations, as well as the social cues that organize meaning making in ways that may be outside of a researcher's awareness, and as a result, are not captured by measures of reliability (see McClelland, 2010, 2011, 2017 for a discussion). Our suggestions described more fully below include: expanding the range of circumstances examined relevant to abortion, avoiding passive voice, investigating the role of antecedents (i.e., what came earlier in a person's timeline), and prioritizing the study of participants' interpretations through the use of cognitive debriefing.

These suggestions may seem unwarranted to some; they ask a researcher to consider additional aspects of measurement that are assumed to be covered in existing best practices. Our suggestions require that a researcher be historically minded, attuned to socially derived meanings, and include qualitative analysis as a necessary and valued component to survey design development, testing, and revision. In short, these suggestions also require that survey researchers be more uncertain about their methodological precision. The cost for ignoring these suggestions is *high*—for those who are continuously cast as pathological in survey items, for researchers who continue to inaccurately measure abortion attitudes, and for everyone who depends on accurate assessments of this important public health and public policy issue.

Expand the range of circumstances. We encourage researchers to expand and critically examine the circumstances that are included in abortion "scenarios" (e.g., "pregnant as a result of rape"). While this item structure may follow current legislation in the United States (e.g., exceptions for rape and the health of the

woman), it does not allow for insight into the complexity of abortion attitudes outside of these conditions. We encourage researchers to expand the kinds of circumstances that are studied. Scenarios might include, for example, the woman becoming pregnant even while trying preventative measures (e.g., birth control failures). It also includes avoiding item language that may position the woman as acting without context (e.g., "she does not want to marry the man"). Contexts that might be added include fear of violence in the relationship, lack of economic support, and other factors that do not draw on stereotypes of women as rejecting men out of hand or as a result of "matriarchal structures." Expanding the range of circumstances also includes developing research questions that ask about which scenarios are included, why, and what scenarios are missing, yet would offer respondents additional ways to consider the conditions surrounding women seeking abortion care.

Avoid passive voice. The use of passive voice is especially important in research on abortion, where passive voice constructions frame women as having made themselves pregnant. For example, an item from the ANES asks, "Do you favor, oppose, or neither favor nor oppose abortion being legal if . . . the pregnancy was *caused by the woman* being raped" (Liu, 2018, emphasis added). The passive voice of this item positions the woman as participating in her own rape. For comparison, consider alternative wordings such as, "the woman was raped by a man and became pregnant as a result" or "a man raped a woman and caused her pregnancy." By including the assailant in the item and changing it from passive to active voice, the item becomes a clear example of how item wording is a crucial mechanism for the circulation of information and the implicit values communicated through survey research. In his study of passive voice in rape research, Bohner (2001) found that participants used passive voice more often to describe a rape scenario when they had higher rates of rape-myth acceptance and perceived higher responsibility of the victim and less responsibility of the assailant.

Investigate the role of antecedents. Lastly, we encourage abortion researchers to address the antecedents to abortion, in other words, those conditions that precede an abortion decision. These might include social, sexual, financial, and relational antecedents such as a violent partner, limited sex education, and policies surrounding access to effective contraception and Plan B (Fine & McClelland, 2007). Without greater attention to these prior circumstances, there is too little information about the set of cascading policies that put women in the position of needing an abortion. The absence of abortion attitude measures that take this larger set of conditions into account continuously positions women in the present without describing the policies that put them there. To address this absence, we encourage researchers to develop items that ask respondents about their attitudes

toward other relevant policies like sex education in an effort to document these connections. In addition, we encourage the development of items that position a woman within a larger set of policy conditions (e.g., "What are your views on abortion if a woman was not correctly taught how to avoid pregnancy?").

Study respondents' interpretations of items. Researchers should study how individuals interact with measures and document the nuanced and often unrecognized ways meanings differ across individuals and groups. Methods such as cognitive debriefing (Rosenbaum & Valsiner, 2011), self-anchored ladders (McClelland, 2017), and other mixed methods designs (e.g., Shammas, 2017) allow investigators to examine how people feel, think about, and imagine others and themselves in relation to survey items. In abortion research, for example, a close examination of who comes to mind when answering the item "Please tell me whether or not you think it should be possible for a pregnant woman to obtain a legal abortion if . . . the woman wants it for any reason?" would enable researchers to understand what people imagine is included in this scenario, what are the associations with the word "want" in this item, and who is imagined to "want" an abortion. Similarly, asking respondents about how they respond to the item, "The government should cover the medical costs of abortions for women who cannot afford it," would allow for analysis of who is imagined to not be able to afford the procedure (and why), the imagined costs associated with an abortion, and the imagined role should the government play in abortion provision.

The first step in developing this kind of research question is to assume that there are associations and meanings in survey responses that are not immediately obvious to a researcher and that these meanings vary in ways that are unexpected. Asking respondents about what and who they imagine when answering items would be a crucial step in understanding what is left out of survey responses and what needs to be better developed in order to capture the full range of individual attitudes. In studies that asked participants about what images or details came to mind when answering survey questions, researchers have found that they often misunderstood responses and misinterpreted data as a result (see McClelland & Holland, 2016).

For example, in her study of Arab and Muslim students, Shammas (2009) found that students reported relatively low rates of discrimination, which was unexpected given the high rates of "anti-Arab and Islamophobic discourse . . . in mainstream American society" (Shammas, 2017, p. 100). In order to "unravel the ambiguities within the survey data" from her 2009 study, Shammas (2017) analyzed focus group data to understand why Arab and Muslim students might underreport experiences of discrimination. Participants explained that they did not report discriminatory experiences for several reasons, including fear of repercussions from noting discrimination experiences on a survey, assumptions that nothing would change if they reported, and worries about being seen to be

"making a big deal" out of something. This example demonstrates how researchers might bring a level of skepticism to research results and look more closely at how participants respond to survey items. This kind of work requires developing a wide range of critical methods that are designed to be curious about what people think about when answering questions rather than the more common measures of reliability and validity used in research (e.g., pretest/posttest designs; see McClelland, 2017). This kind of research could help bring insight to the substantive biases due to interpretations of survey measures (Schuman & Scott, 1987) and method biases that can lead to systematic patterns of response differences (Liu, Lee, & Conrad, 2015).

Limitations and Future Directions

Our item bank focused on studies that included only U.S. respondents. This focus offered us the ability to assess items used in U.S. contexts where abortion has been framed both rhetorically and legally as a moral issue (as opposed to, for example, a health care issue). This design decision, of course, limits the potential to apply our findings to other places in the world. Because national abortion policies differ widely, combined with specific national discourses relevant to race and gender, it would be important for researchers considering developing an item bank to be attentive to national context(s) of interest. Findings from one policy context are likely not generalizable across national borders. In addition, our decision to develop the greatest breadth of uniquely worded items in the item bank, while it offered the widest perspective, did not allow us to drill down on the frequency of specific items such as those used by researchers relying on GSS or ANES items. This meant we could not analyze the rate of repetition of these items or their influence in research on abortion attitudes. This would be an important area for future research.

It is important to note that our interpretations of the items and themes in this study are situated in a particular set of theoretical investments, as are all interpretations. Other researchers might draw a different set of meanings from the same items. Our argument here is for researchers to consider the role of historical narratives that are present, but may be outside the scope of how survey items are often evaluated. An important next step would be to investigate people's perceptions of items and empirically investigate the range of associations that are in addition to the historical threads included in this study. We took the items at their face value, as would a study participant sitting down to take a survey. For this reason, we did not assess whether item wording choices were designed to capture specific aspects of communities where studies were conducted, although these kinds of connections would be an area for future researchers to explore.

Lastly, we want to reiterate that for survey researchers, the suggestions included here might appear to be in conflict with (or extraneous to) current best

practices in survey development. Best practices in survey research have developed with little attention to the history of ideas and survey researchers often have little training in historical or qualitative analysis, which may make these suggestions appear outside the scope of survey designs. We are not suggesting that best practices be abandoned; rather best practices should include these additional methods and perspectives. The shared aim here is to increase what we know about people's attitudes and develop more and better procedures for doing so. Our contribution is to expand who and what is considered prioritized when developing research methods.

Conclusion

Measurement tools contain meanings and assumptions that often remain out of sight of the investigators who rely on them. Without systematic and interpretive analysis, these patterns can be difficult to see as they are often spread across many studies and over long periods of time. Because survey researchers often focus on issues of response rates and item and scale reliability, too little attention is paid to the socially and historically meaningful cues included in survey research tools. Our methods and findings in this study aim to provide crucial information about how inequality, prejudice, and discrimination can be "baked in" and reproduced in the fabric of psychological research.

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Supporting information

Additional supporting information may be found online in the Supporting Information section at the end of the article.

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