

Abortion Stigma

What is it and how does it affect women's health?

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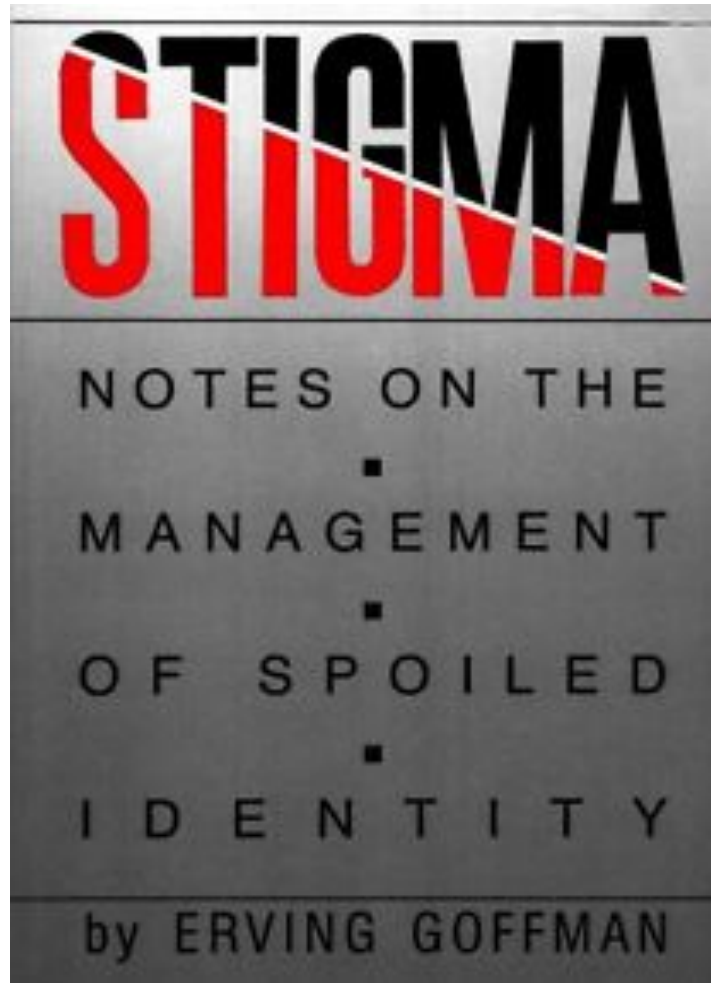


 innovating education
in reproductive health

Overview

1. The sociological definition of stigma
2. What is abortion stigma?
3. How abortion stigma affects women and providers
4. How stigma affects abortion care
5. How abortion stigma can be decreased

What is stigma? (Sociologically Speaking)



- Classic book written in 1963
- Erving Goffman changed the way social interaction is studied
- How he described stigma
 - “an attribute that is deeply discrediting”
 - person is “reduced in our minds from a whole and usual person to a tainted, discounted one”

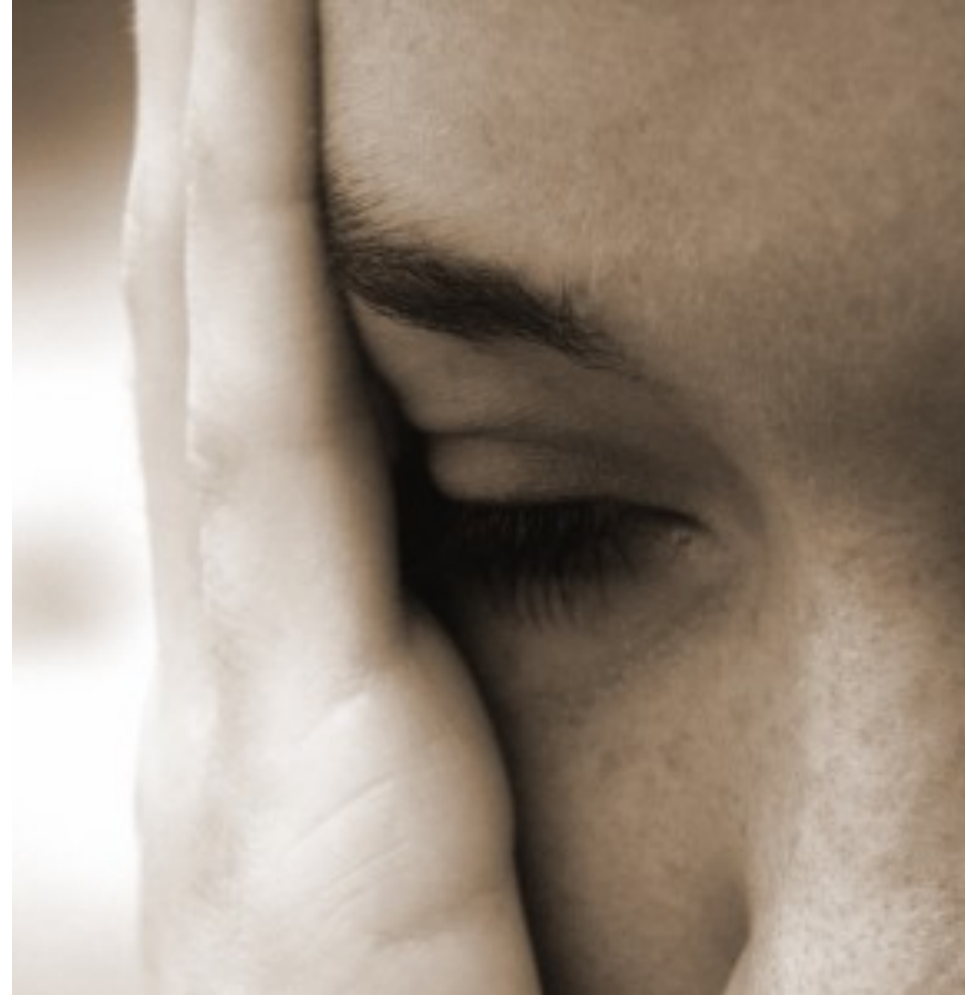
What becomes stigmatized?

A thing?

A job?

A person.

How do people manage
stigma?



What is abortion stigma?

“A negative attribute ascribed to women who seek to terminate a pregnancy that ‘marks’ them as inferior to ideals of womanhood.”

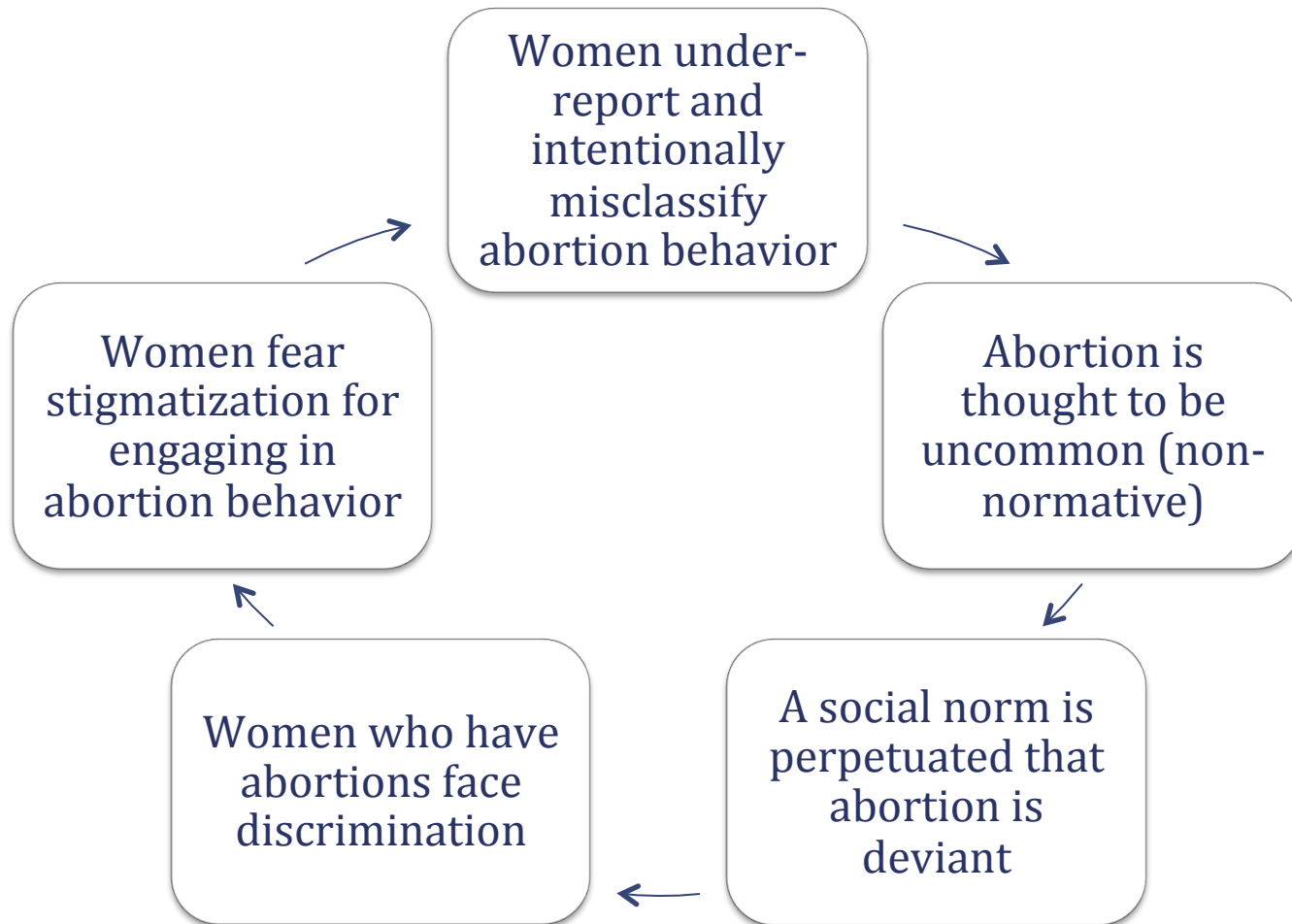
Women who have abortions are often regarded as:

- Selfish
- Promiscuous
- Irresponsible
- Heartless
- Abnormal



Women hide abortion

The Prevalence Paradox



How Abortion Stigma Affects Women

Women may

- feel shame and loss of self-worth
- become isolated
- fear telling loved ones they need help (economic, medical, childcare, etc)
- Avoid/delay seeking necessary care entirely

Why Abortion Stigma Matters for Public Health

- Shame = Secretive
- Secretive = Less social support
- Less social support = difficulty accessing safe and timely care

Thus, in abortion-restrictive settings, stigma may contribute to...

- Unsafe abortion
- Bad outcomes for women

How Stigma Affects Abortion Care

U.S. context is legal but highly controversial:

- Abortion is not well integrated into other ob-gyn care
- Abortion clinics can be segregated and vulnerable to legal and violent attacks

Countries with laws that support abortion access:

- Less stigma=
 - more normalization of abortion care
 - public funds for abortion
 - less vilification of women and providers

How Stigma Affects Abortion Care

“the abortionist”

- A historically stigmatizing label
- providers avoid abortion

Abortion restrictive settings:

- Provider shortage
- More illegal abortion
- Illegal abortion compounds stigma surrounding abortion

How Abortion Stigma Can Decrease

- Telling abortion stories
 - TheAbortionProject.org
 - TheAbortionDiaries.org
 - EndAbortionStigma.org
- Offering compassionate care
- Creating professional alliances



In Conclusion



- Abortion stigma “taints” women and providers
- Creates a prevalence paradox
- Deters providers
- Segregates care
- Compassion and community are essential