



# IS ABORTION “TOO POLITICAL”?

## ASSESSING UNIVERSITY REFERENCE BY FACULTY IN POPULAR US NEWSPAPERS

Madison Miller BS<sup>1</sup>, Alexa Lindley MD MPH<sup>2</sup>, Jevin West PhD<sup>3</sup>, Malaika Schwartz MPH<sup>4</sup>, Emily Godfrey MD MPH<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>School of Medicine, University of Washington, <sup>2</sup>Department of Family Medicine, University of Washington, <sup>3</sup>Center for an Informed Public, University of Washington, <sup>4</sup>IRB Human Subjects Division, University of Washington

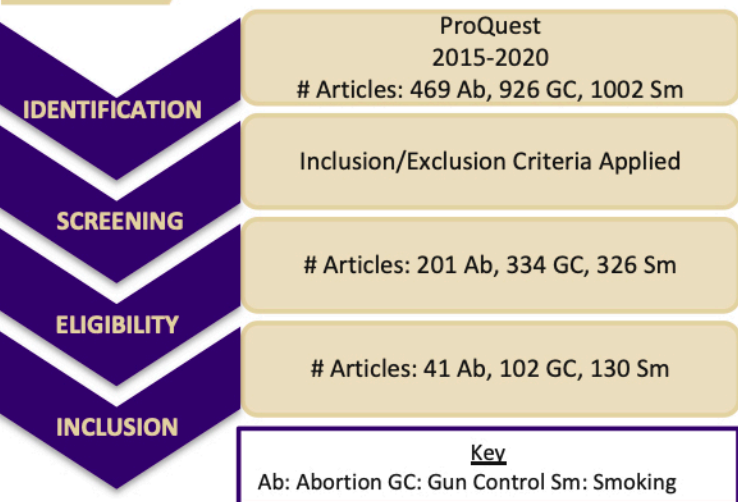
### BACKGROUND

- Abortion is a common<sup>1</sup> and safe<sup>2</sup> medical procedure
- In 2018, 40% of Americans expressed a high level of confidence in the scientific and medical communities<sup>3</sup>
- Popular media is a common and pervasive source of public health information<sup>4,5</sup> that influences attitudes and beliefs<sup>6</sup>

### PURPOSE

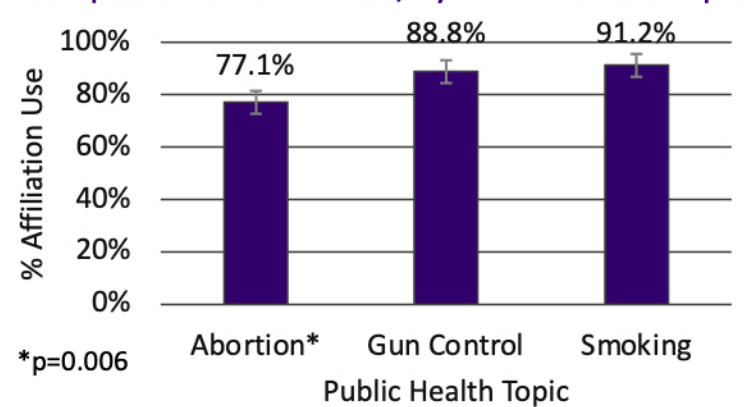
To quantify the proportion of faculty publicly utilizing their university affiliations in popular media when discussing abortion vs gun control (controversial) or smoking (less controversial)

### METHODS



### RESULTS

Proportion of Faculty University Affiliation Use in Popular Media Articles, by Public Health Topic



Faculty located at universities in the west were more likely to be quoted on abortion and university faculty based in the south were more likely to be quoted on gun control (p<0.008)

Faculty in more protected/prestigious positions were more likely to mention their affiliation than those in more tenuous/lower ranked positions (p<0.001)

### DISCUSSION

Faculty members speaking about abortion are significantly less likely to use their university affiliation in popular media

### WHY?

Possible reasons for lack of university reference:

- The University does not wish to be associated with a particular topic
- Concerns for faculty member safety
- Fear of retribution/risks to faculty promotion
- Faculty preference
- Limited word count
- Journalist’s decision

### WHY IS THIS STUDY IMPORTANT?

- Abortion is most commonly covered as a political issue, not a public health issue in popular media<sup>7</sup>
- Universities are important sources disseminating evidence-based information to the public
- Absence of university affiliation reinforces **the legitimacy paradox** and imparts negative consequences for women who have abortions, abortion providers, and abortion law and policy making<sup>8</sup>

**The Legitimacy Paradox:** “Although many highly trained, legitimate physicians provide abortion care, abortion providers continue to be depicted as illegitimate, deviant, or substandard doctors.”<sup>8</sup>