

Twitter and Hate Speech Against Abortion

CMNS Honours Project

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Introduction

While seemingly undetectable, the digital world has a large effect on social movements; to what extent will people go, in order to persuade and influence others online? Twitter is a popular platform for the expression of opinions and exchange of information, (De Zwart, 2018) and such information can influence online discourses surrounding political issues (Doan et al., 2022). The reproductive rights movement is a highly controversial and sensitive topic, which is why I chose to explore tweets surrounding critical or even hateful speech about abortion. Highly opinionated content may exist and alter or expand the opinions of Twitter users. This is a communication project because it examines how people interpret and interact with social issues through digital communications.

Online platforms are easily accessible - to passively and actively use - and I want to explore the type and quality of hate speech that exists, to understand how social media contributes to public discourses about important social issues. With the emergence of new abortion laws in the United States of America, I seek to understand how Twitter users discuss this topic, and the prevalence of hate speech on social media. For example, there was a study that analyzed the Twitter backlash on Georgia's abortion ban; by doing a systematic content analysis of tweets, it was noted that emotional responses to systemic gender oppression urged widespread mobilization to oppose the Georgia House Bill 481 - an American, anti-abortion law that passed in 2019 (Doan et al, 2022). This study proved the significance of online discussions, and how platforms such as Twitter have the power to evoke social change.

The freedom that Twitter allows for its users to express themselves has enabled a “pro-life” standpoint on the platform, which resists the legalization of abortion. Abortion is a highly controversial topic, and has been the center of many social movements that have both

supported and rejected abortion as a legal, medical procedure. As one can see, with the Georgia House Bill 481, seemingly low-stake discussions on Twitter may have large implications.

Therefore, taking note of the key discourses that exist on the platform today, will help us to understand where policies are heading tomorrow.

The desire to undergo an abortion is thought to be categorized in three different ways. First, to prevent unwanted parenthood in a social sense, which means to avoid the obligations and responsibilities of becoming a parent (Manninen, 2013). Second, to prevent the existence of one's genetic child, since mothers will often feel that they can not put their baby up for adoption since the idea of that individual existing in the world, where the mother did not care for them, is too challenging to bear (Manninen, 2013). Third, to establish the right to bodily autonomy, which means that a woman can freely decide what happens to her body (Manninen, 2013). The following quote, by former correspondent for CBS and ABC news, Gary Shepard, outlines how people understand the topic of abortion differently:

“People in favor of abortion-on-demand never, ever want to use the word “abortion.” But if you watch a “pro-choice” rally you’ll notice the applause lines always include a “woman’s right to choose” and “women’s access to health services.” To them, abortion is a health service for women. To us, abortion means a funeral service for the preborn baby. —Gary Shepard.” (as cited in Dombrink & Hillyard, 2007, p. 53)

One can see that the focal argument for abortion stems from the reproductive rights of women. This study however, examines the arguments against abortion, and how online anti-abortion advocacy is much more than just scientific facts and religious values, but the usage of specific language, tone, and images to make a point.

Literature Review

There is a strong link between media use and political engagement, with evidence that social media has increased the amount of discussions surrounding social movements (Wei, 2014). Despite the positive effects of media and the facilitation of democratic discussions, there are negative impacts due to the accessibility of media and the lack of monetization of inappropriate or aggressive content (Wei, 2014). Social media allows a space for people to share their opinions, but also means that rumors, misinformation, and hateful speech can exist (Jin & Austin, 2017, p. 390). There is also a greater threat for the spread of poor content because information can be posted on platforms such as Twitter, without the approval of anyone else (Jin & Austin, 2017, p. 69). “The freedom to publish in the public domain with no quality control and validation process, aided by the ease of and access to publishing, have affected the credibility of information disseminated and received.” (As cited in Cao et al., p. 838).

One case study looked at the public discussion of vaping during the COVID-19 pandemic (Lyu et al., 2021). They found that there were many conspiracy theories which contradicted one another; such information online can be confusing to a Twitter user (Lyu et al., 2021). The study recommends that greater efforts need to be made to correct misinformation online, especially during a public health crisis (Lyu et al., 2021). Many users also faced difficulty with which information to trust, and which information seemed to be the most popular or the most agreed upon (Lyu et al., 2021). Seeing one post with significantly more likes or retweets than another might influence a user to blindly follow the more popular advice and information. This can be applied to aggressive tweets about abortion as people spread misinformation about abortion, health risks, religious morals, and more; these posts can often be misleading and when they are

backed up with many likes and retweets, it is hard for a user to decide whether or not to trust the information.

Therefore, one can agree that social media has opened up political conversations to a larger audience, but one can also see that such conversations may include harmful content. For example, in this study I will be examining aggressive content from anti-abortionists. Busching, Allen, and Anderson determined that aggressive thoughts and communications can have consequences including less empathy shown towards victims of aggressive behavior (Busching, Allen, & Anderson, 2016). For the specific case of hate speech against abortion, one could understand how anti-abortionists have become less sensitive towards women who have experienced rape and unwanted pregnancies. The consistent and growing presence of online hate speech surrounding abortion discourses may have decreased sensitivities about women's rights and lived experiences.

Twitter is specifically interesting to examine because of its differences in how the platform allows users to share information. "Twitter is deemed to be less 'rich' due to its character limit. Information contained in tweets can also be quickly and easily 'drowned out' by new incoming messages." (As cited in Cao et al., 2021, p. 837). It will be interesting to examine how tweets fit into the narratives I have chosen, since they are limited by character count, and may not be as deep as posts from other social media platforms, such as Facebook.

A 2017 case study showed how the Islamic State of Iraq and ash-Sham (ISIS) used social media as a strong tool in motivating support (Benigni et al., 2017). While many people are not actively posting or commenting on ISIS tweets, their passive support (of following and viewing) has allowed the ISIS campaign to expand exponentially (Benigni et al., 2017). The study identified a community of over 22,000 Twitter users whose passive support made a difference,

and influenced more recruitments (Benigni et al., 2017). This case is useful to my study because it shows the effects of passive support. In my methodology section it is noted that I am examining aggressive tweets that have a high like count, because that makes those tweets more influential in the public discourse. The freedom to attract and connect with anyone online can have its own risks, instead of simply being a nice site to communicate with friends and family.

However, it is important to note how Twitter can create communities that are promoting positive social change. A study showed that the Twitter movement, #Palestine2Ferguson was a successful resistance against oppression, after it was announced that the officer, Darren Wilson, was not indicted for killing Michael Brown, an unarmed black teenager (Carroll, 2018). This movement is an example of a self-selected community, meaning a group of individuals came together because of a shared experience (Carroll, 2018). It is also relevant to note that with a limited character count on Twitter, an effective method to influence others has more to do with a large population of supporters, rather than long and wordy posts that emphasize a point in detail. Mass mobilization through a single hashtag is why #abortionismurder is not something to be taken lightly, and we are in an era where anything can become viral, and spread across many audiences.

Understanding how “pro-life” and “pro-choice” Twitter users discuss their stance is helpful in recognizing if my findings are aligned with other studies. A 2019 discourse analysis examined how women in Poland define their reproductive rights. Compared to other European countries, Poland is highly restrictive when it comes to reproductive rights; in fact, Poland had the lowest rates of abortion in Europe and abortions only occurred when the pregnancy endangered the woman's life, or other prenatal conditions existed (Paprzycka, 2019). However, that did not stop many women from having an abortion, the restriction in Poland just meant that

women had to go to a different country to seek medical attention (Paprzycka. 2019). Upon analysis of women's views of abortion, they found that rightist-conservative discourses are emotional and critical of women who agree with legalized abortion (Paprzycka. 2019). In comparison, leftist-feminist discourses focused on the right to choose, and refers to scientific facts and international laws to make a point (Paprzycka. 2019). Additionally, it exposed the voices of individual situations of women who needed or wanted an abortion (Paprzycka. 2019). The key difference is that "pro-life" discourses shame "pro-choice" discourses, and "pro-choice" discourses use reason and emotional depth to make a point.

Another study that was conducted in 2023 revealed the major components of hate speech. The study examined 70 different articles that were based on hate speech and found that hate speech is primarily political, and 98.57% contained words that related to politics (Sirulhaq et al., 2023). Therefore, much of the hate speech I encounter will most likely be in relation to politics, political leaders, and political values. Some discourses that present themselves in this study may be softer and more peaceful in nature, but discourses that are focused on American politics may use more hateful speech to be assertive in nature.

Ultimately this literature review raises many questions about how ideals that are noted in Twitter cases such as COVID-19, militant groups, and movements combating oppression, play-out similarly with the pro-life community. As well, how other studies of hate speech and abortion discourses align with my findings, to make for a stronger understanding of the "pro-life" narratives.

Research Question

Using Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), what are the main discourses around anti-abortion narratives on Twitter?

Methodology

I recognize that Twitter is a popular platform for political discussions, where movements and campaigns can be largely affected by online discourses. For example, Twitter played a large role in the 2016 presidential election; in 2016, Donald Trump's digital media director noted: “Facebook and Twitter were the reason we won this thing. Twitter for Mr. Trump. And Facebook for fundraising” (As cited in Müller et al., 2020). Therefore, I chose Twitter as a platform that displays different political views about abortion, as Twitter did with Trumps’ conservative campaigns.

I will look into studies regarding the influence of social media on one’s beliefs, as well as examining the effects of hate speech around abortion. To do so, I will conduct a discourse analysis approach by examining the hashtag #abortionismurder as it is aggressive and assertive in its stance against abortion. The discourse analysis will be multimodal, for it assesses different forms of communication including the textual and multimedia content.

Discourse Analysis is a micro-macro form of analysis and uses both text and talk, as well as the relevant surrounding semiotic resources, to formulate meaning (Strauss, 2014).

Micro-level observations of linguistic features include items such as adverbs, verbs, logical connectors, pronouns of inclusion or exclusion, metaphors, figurative language, and more (Strauss, 2014). The relationship between micro-level observations and semiotic media, (i.e;

images and videos) “...may combine to express macro-level messages of power, control, racism, hegemony, dominance, and discrimination.” (Strauss, 2014, p. 316).

Since the dataset as a whole is large, I will evaluate a set of 500 tweets selected based on the “most liked” metric; like count is used rather than number of retweets or comments because “liking” a tweet shows agreement or attraction towards the information shared. The like count is also a meaningful metric since it shows the influential level of the tweet. Al-Rawi, for instance, has used the like count in some of his studies involving social media research (Al-Rawi, 2014, p. 425). Therefore, the like count is useful in understanding how people choose to agree with online content.

Once I have evaluated the set of 500 tweets, I will organize them within major narratives that emerge using Grounded Theory. Grounded Theory is an inductive qualitative method of research, where data is systematically collected, then organized (Urquhart et al., 2010). Additionally, Grounded Theory emphasizes objectivity, and eliminates preconceived judgements. While the researcher may begin with some preconceptions, it is important to leave an openness to one’s analysis to ensure that the results are not forced (Gibson & Hartman, 2014). Grounded Theory’s function is to answer the question: ‘What is going on in this area?’ (Gibson & Hartman, 2014) where the area is an online space and Twitter users express and interact with opinions surrounding abortion.

Using this methodological approach will allow me to determine key themes about this social movement on Twitter, and understand the dynamics of online communication surrounding some political beliefs. “Discourse Analysis seeks to uncover the discursive processes through which ideologies are shaped and communicated, normalized, and propagated—ideologies which

involve hidden dimensions of power, control, injustice, and inequity, all of which typically go unseen and unnoticed because they are couched in what appear to be common-sense assumptions of social reality and “truth.”” (Strauss et al., 2014, p. 313). Furthermore, Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) will allow me to make connections between language and underlying ideologies that are produced in public discourse (Cabas-Mijares, 2023). CDA has the power to outline problematic social practices and reveal the dynamics that allow beliefs to circulate through society (Cabas-Mijares, 2023).

The five narratives that I have derived from the set of 500 tweets, are as follows:

1. Shaming and judgmental Christian values
2. Abortion is not healthcare
3. Defund planned parenthood
4. Justice for the born and unborn
5. Negative judgment towards leftists

Discussion

1. Shaming and judgmental Christian values

A population that has taken a strong stance against abortion on Twitter has been Christian conservatives, where the leading force of their arguments stem from emotion and moral values. Out of the set of the 500 most liked tweets under the hashtag #abortionismurder, the highest liked tweet within the *Shaming and judgmental Christian values* discourse had 3,614 likes, and the

lowest liked tweet had 70 likes. Therefore, it is not tweets that can influence online discussions, but it is the total 15,497 likes that make these tweets popular, seen, and justified.

Since science has replaced religion in its authority within public domains such as law, education, and special questions, Christian conservatives must remain true to their values, in order to have a fighting chance against science. However, it should be noted that Christian conservatives do not typically regard the Old Testament to answer moral questions about abortion, since the Old Testament has no clear teaching that definitively declares abortion to be immoral (Castuera, 2017). The way of the New Testament suggests that “Christians recognize two neighbors in every pregnancy, and they must seek mercy, love, and justice for both of these neighbors.” (Gorman, 1993, p. 29). Yet, both the New and Old Testaments share very little about the specific case of abortion, and the assertive stance against abortion has become a modern topic (Castuera, 2017).

A leading book in the modern ages of anti-abortion discourse has progressed the pro-life movement to both persuade and enlighten its audience. The book, *Whatever Happened to the Human Race?* by Shaeffer and Koop examines “anti-God” systems in modern society, and encourages the reader to take a stand against practices such as abortion. Barr discovered that most arguments in the book are based on the idea that humans were created by God, and therefore must follow the truths that God presents; “...we are treated to condemnation for not accepting the fundamental truths held by Shaeffer and Koop. We are upbraided for believing our senses and trying to think rationally.” (Barr, 1980, p. 254). Shaeffer and Koop oppressed modern logic and rejected traditions of mankind that do not follow Judeo-Christian theology (Barr, 1980).

In general, progressive liberals use logic to fight for women's rights and quality of life; this logic continues to change and evolve as new science and data is presented. Christian conservatives, on the other hand, continue to provide the same argument stated above against abortion, since God has always revealed the same truth. For example, *Whatever Happened to the Human Race?* was published in 1979, and the following tweet (received 72 likes), posted in 2019, uses the same argument against abortion:

“The word “Pregnant” is not in the Bible. The Bible calls it “With Child”. Enough Said!
“Let God be TRUE and every man a liar!” #abortionismurder” (Twitter)

Readers who oppose this tweet may feel that it lacks a strong argument, since it forces the reader to believe in a power greater than themselves, where this power is always right and is the only means of identifying a real truth. However, Broom offers a modern take on science and logic that opposes the idea that science can answer the big questions that involve meaning and purpose. Since science is a human activity, it is limited by the human as to what it can accomplish (Broom, 2018). “Science can never sketch for us the ‘big picture’ simply because it is trapped within the very system it is endeavoring to describe and explain.” (Broom, 2018, p. 197). Thus, scientists who make pronouncements about issues such as the existence of God on the basis of evidence are limited by their prejudice and their claims lack real knowledge (Broom, 2018). While Christian conservatives require one to believe in a power greater than themselves, people who use logic and science in their pro-choice arguments, are only applying the scope of human knowledge, which is limited and does not reflect the bigger picture of life and meaning.

It is clear that Christian conservatives base their arguments on the Bible and the truth of God; their arguments lack logic, but include emotional depth, persuasiveness, and call-to-actions.

For example, the following tweet (received 72 likes) portrays their participation in anti-abortion discourses:

“America lost its soul & conscience when abortion was legalized. Think about the babies screams as they're ripped & torn from their mothers womb if you question this. Pray for the lost babies & the life they didn't get to live. #AbortionIsMurder #thursdaymorning”
(Twitter)

Lewis examined religious groups such as evangelicals, and explained their fear of no longer being the active cultural force in America. He said that many Christian conservatives view themselves as the persecuted minority, and being overthrown by secular leftists (Lewis, 2017). He also expressed that their minority status would have allowed Trump to gain more support in his presidential campaign in 2016, as his beliefs would have allowed the cultural tide to turn back in the favor of Christian conservatives (Lewis, 2017). Since Christian America is turning into a post-Christian America, minorities such as evangelicals are protecting their political rights since the secular community is a perceived threat to them (Lewis, 2017). The fear that their nation is losing its religious beliefs has made them take a stronger stand for what they value and believe in (Lewis, 2017). Therefore, the tweets that are posted by Christian conservatives under the hashtag #abortionismurder, show a strong and emotional stance against abortion.

While many Christians worry that America is losing its religion, church-state relations have highly influenced politics in recent years. A 2016 study by Pew Research Center noted that religious people, other than Christians and Jews, favored Clinton over Trump by a 33% difference (Martinez, 2016). Lewis stated, “These issues – abortion and church-state relations – are two of the central issues of the cultural divide in American politics.” (Lewis, 2017, p. 62).

Since the Trump era, there has been more pronounced assaults on abortion access and the strength in each state has led to an increase on abortion restrictions (Wilson, 2021).

There is a lot to be said about strength in numbers, passive support, and comradery. For example, the perceived threat to Christian conservatives of a post-Christian America has led them to take a stronger stance against practices that do not align with their beliefs. Therefore, they bring-in emotion and aggression into online platforms, and pursue political leaders that can uphold their religious values. Using hashtags such as #abortionismurder, allows them to find each other, and build an online community that influences others and shows other Twitter users the importance of God and the consequences of ignoring God's truth. Additionally, they can repost tweets such as the following one that was originally written by Donald Trump:

“Every child is a sacred gift from God.” (Twitter)

Reposting and liking is nearly as influential as writing the tweet itself. A tweet with no views, likes, comments, reposts, is not going to add anything to online discussions. However, even a repost of a Trump tweet, has the power to attract and agree with thousands of Twitter users. Since Christian conservatives feel the need to be assertive in their stance against abortion, it has created an online discourse of shaming and judgemental tweets that are based on Christian values, and Gods' truth.

An interesting lens that the Christian conservatives community has adopted is that abortion is anti-women. In comparison, many pro-choice enthusiasts would say the opposite, as forcing women to have their babies does not prioritize the woman and what makes sense for her and the future of that baby; especially when considering women who have experienced rape. A tweet under the hashtag #abortionismurder contained an image (Figure 1) of Mother Teresa, and included the following quote:

“Abortion kills twice. It kills the body of the baby & the conscience of the mother. Abortion is profoundly anti-women. Three quarters of its victims are women: Half the babies & all its mothers. ~ Blessed Mother Teresa of Calcutta ~” (Twitter)



Figure 1: Image of Mother Teresa

The pro-woman narrative in anti-abortion discourse has become increasingly popular in the 21st century, as it is suggested that abortion is harmful to women, both physically and psychologically. Where the focal narrative of anti-abortion discourse used to be about the fetus and their right to life, it has now shifted to include alleged concerns for the mother. However, it is relevant to note that this narrative transformation is more so a strategic tactic that is used by anti-abortion legislators and advocates to “...soften political behavior and beliefs that are seen as hostile toward women, especially during a time where there is an unprecedented amount of anti-abortion bills introduced in the states.” (Roberti, 2021, p. 207).

The public's perception of the pro-woman narrative was compared to the fetal personhood narrative in a 2020 study by Roberti and Morgan. Respondents, from the USA, reacted more positively to a prompt that employed the pro-woman narrative, especially when it regarded the empowerment of women (as cited in Roberti, 2021). In comparison, the fetal personhood narrative did not receive as much support and empathy (as cited in Roberti, 2021). These results show the power of successful communication and how a certain frame can have a significantly different outcome on the perception of an issue (as cited in Roberti, 2021).

The Twitter quote from Mother Teresa above uses both the pro-woman and the fetal personhood narratives to emphasize the negative results of abortion. To say that a mother who has an abortion loses her conscience is presumptuous and shameful; the tweets that are written and supported by Christian conservatives continue to evoke a judgmental tone. We can identify that throughout decades, Christian conservatives continue to share the same values and beliefs, but may feel the need to use all the resources they can to contribute to political discussions, in order to represent the values of a shrinking population of Christian conservatives.

2. Abortion is not healthcare

The second prominent discourse within the set of 500 most liked tweets reference shaming medical professionals and some women for believing that abortion is a form of healthcare. Out of the set of the 500 most liked tweets under the hashtag #abortionismurder, The tweets related to this discourse received 23,321 likes; the highest liked tweet had 1,700 likes, and the lowest liked tweet had 68 likes.

The Alliance for Hippocratic Medicine is an organization that protects vulnerable life, at early and late stages, and believes in practicing medicine morally; they explained in a 2022

message that. "...abortion treats no disease process and carries significant potential harm for women." (p. 121). They explain that women who have abortions have higher risk of preterm delivery in future pregnancies, mental health disorders, breast-cancer, and even death (The Alliance for Hippocratic Medicine, 2022). Thus, this narrative is based on the idea that abortions are not essential, and do not protect the babies' health, nor the mothers'. The following tweet, posted in 2020, (received 127 likes) portrays this discussion:

"VICTORY! Ohio Abortion Clinics Ordered to Stop Killing Babies: Abortions are Not "Essential" Surgical Procedures #AbortionIsNotHealthCare #AbortionIsMurder"

(Twitter)

Twitter users that participated in this discourse also discussed the importance of women taking care of their health and their babies' health throughout their pregnancy, by being mindful of their daily choices and consumption habits. For example, a tweet (received 109 likes) under the hashtag #abortionismurder, contained an image (Figure 2) of a woman protesting outside an abortion clinic; she is wearing a shirt that has the following message written on it:

"I'm 19 weeks pregnant. I'm not supposed to... drink alcohol, change cat litter, eat raw fish, smoke, or ride roller coasters...because it harms my baby. But I can walk into THAT building and have my baby killed." (Twitter)



Figure 2: Abortion clinic protest

However, pro-choice and pro-life advocates are discussing abortion as healthcare in completely different ways. Pro-life advocates are emphasizing that killing a human being is immoral, and should not be a medical practice. Pro-choice advocates are arguing that if abortion is illegal and all abortion clinics are closed down, people with unwanted pregnancies will return to the old ways of abortion, which are highly unsafe for the mother (D'Agincourt-Canning & Ells, 2019).

Additionally, pro-lifers not only shame the mother for indicating that abortion is healthcare, but they are also shaming abortion providers for their perceived lack of conscience and moral high ground. Medical practitioners who provide abortion care have been stigmatized, threatened, harassed, and ostracized for their work. D'Agincourt-Canning and Ells explain that pro-lifers see abortion providers in two ways: either they do not understand what they do, because they lack moral foundations and cannot discern right from wrong, or they know what

they are doing, and they are monsters. However, D'Agincourt-Canning & Ells explain the perspective of an abortion provider, and how it is vastly different from what pro-life enthusiasts are making it out to be. Abortion providers are "... devoted to their patients, to compassionate care, to public health, to practicing evidence-based medicine, to generating the research base for evidence-based practice, and to women's civil and human rights." (D'Agincourt-Canning & Ells, 2019, p. 198).

A key difference between the arguments made by pro-life and pro-choice enthusiasts is the inclusion of different perspectives. For example, when a pro-lifer makes an argument against abortion, they group all women and all abortion providers together. They do not make a point of understanding a woman's lived experience, and are more concerned with the idea that abortion is killing babies. However, pro-choice enthusiasts consider each woman and her situation, such as women that are pregnant at a young age and are ill-prepared, or women who have been raped. The following tweet (received 74 likes) exemplifies how pro-lifers are assuming that all women make an active choice to continue with sexual intercourse, regardless of the known consequences.

"Yet she was "ready" to become pregnant. #AbortionIsMurder" (Twitter)

Yet the main question here is: Was a woman who had been raped "ready" to become pregnant? Further, how does that woman feel, as someone who has just survived rape and is now shamed for wanting an abortion? Pro choice enthusiasts believe that pregnancy resulting from rape is an injury to women, and abortion has the ability to assist in healing that injury (De Iskālar, 2022). A 2015 study, for example, analyzed mental health among women who had a pregnancy resulting from rape, where the mother kept her child. The study showed that 48.6% of women had depression, 57.9% had post-traumatic stress disorder, 43.3% had anxiety, and 34.2%

were reportedly suicidal. (Scott et al., 2015) Yet, pro-life enthusiasts do not agree that abortion is healthcare, as one can see by the following tweet: (received 707 likes)

“We need to examine our collective conscience as a nation when this barbarism is couched as medicine’s ability to “help this young lady...& facilitate her decision to not be a parent at this time.”” (Twitter)

The state of Texas has especially seen drastic changes in reproductive health policies; the implementation of the Senate Bill 8 (SB8), in 2021, banned abortion beyond embryonic cardiac activity unless it was a medical emergency (Carroll et al., 2022). Additionally, there was an aid and abet clause, where anyone who was helping a woman obtain an abortion could face a civil lawsuit for at least \$10,000 (Carroll et al., 2022). However, because of this law, many abortion providers and clinicians have stopped providing counseling services about pregnancy options, since they were worried about the aid and abet provision (Carroll et al., 2022). Consequently, fear and misinformation began to spread about pregnancy options and decision making (Carroll et al., 2022).

In a 2022 study, *The New England Journal of Medicine* found that Texans who had medically complex pregnancies endured struggles finding helpful and trustworthy information about their available health options. For example, one woman received a fetal diagnosis of spina bifida and trisomy 18; when her physician would not offer any termination options, she said, “When you already have received news like that and can barely function, the thought of then having to do your own investigating to determine where to get this medical care and to arrange going out of state feels additionally overwhelming.” (as cited in Arey et al., 2022, p. 389). The study distinguished that physicians will have different interpretations of SB8, and therefore resulting in unequal access to care (Arey et al., 2022).

In June of 2022, the US Supreme Court overturned *Roe v. Wade*, which originally made abortion access a federal right in the United States; since it has been overturned, there are more looming threats that exist in the realm of reproductive rights (Carroll et al., 2022). “Texas SB8 is a predictor of care disruptions now that *Roe v. Wade* is overturned. The constraints on both patient and provider autonomy will expand.” (Carroll et al., 2022, p. 369). As one can see, the reproductive rights movement is regressing, and as more state policies and laws restrict access to abortion, more states are expected to follow in this direction.

The narrative — *Abortion is not healthcare* — exists because pro-life advocates do not always take into account different communities, and how we can positively shape the future for them, by learning from our past. An abortion provider from the USA noted that black communities have historically faced issues with reproductive exploitation and forced births. Peacock explained that history often repeats itself, which means that it is likely that marginalized groups will suffer again, from policies that they do not have control over. “As I think about a post-Roe America, I feel that truth.” (Peacock, 2022, p. 70). Marginalized communities have often expressed that they are the ones that experience the most consequences from policies that are made by white, middle-class people (Montoya et al., 2022).

In particular to marginalized communities, Crisis Pregnancy Centers (CPCs), are staffed by white, middle-class people, and target their marketing towards younger generations, and especially of color and low socioeconomic status. CPCs are nonprofit organizations that appear as healthcare clinics that intend to discourage and limit abortion access; they are often referred to as “pregnancy support centers” or “pregnancy resource centers.” (Montoya et al., 2022). These centers will sometimes exchange free services for Bible studies or abstinence seminars (Montoya et al., 2022). “Many CPCs appear in internet searches for abortion, which adds to patient

confusion regarding what types of services and counseling they will be provided if they present to one of these facilities.” (Montoya et al., 2022, p. 759). CPCs are very prominent, especially in the USA; as medical practitioners begin to close their doors to women needing pregnancy counseling, it is more likely that women will mistakenly turn to CPCs for assistance. CPCs use Christian conservative values to influence pregnant women; while many pro-life advocates believe that abortion is not healthcare, CPCs offer the appropriate “healthcare” that aligns with Christian conservative values.

One can see that if a pro-life enthusiast wanted to take into account women’s lived experiences, the pro-life argument would weaken, and therefore, it is in the best interest of pro-lifers to exclude women’s lived experiences when partaking in online discussions. The following tweet (received 241 likes) portrays this ideology, and shows the power in referring to the babies’ life, rather than the mothers’.

“Abortion IS NOT women’s health, IT’S MURDER!! Anyone who says it’s not is peddling extremist ideology - not science - and has no business using taxpayer’s money to kill innocent babies.” (Twitter)

3. Defund Planned Parenthood

The third narrative frowns upon Planned Parenthood, suggesting that government funding towards preventing child birth should be terminated. Planned Parenthood is a nonprofit organization that is a leading provider of sexual and reproductive health care; with more than 600 health centers across the USA, Planned Parenthood offers both educational and health services for women to make decisions about their pregnancies (Planned Parenthood, 2022). Out of the set of the 500 most liked tweets under the hashtag #abortionismurder, the tweets related to this

discourse received a total of 15,823 likes; the highest liked tweet had 10,000 likes, and the lowest liked tweet had 70 likes.

The first question that should be asked is: How does the USA's federal government fund Planned Parenthood? Planned Parenthood uses programs and insurance providers such as Medicaid, which is one of the countries' largest sources of health insurance (Sommers, 2017). Medicaid is especially centered towards low-income families, and pays for over 40% of US births per year (Sommers, 2017). Medicaid reimburses health providers for services such as cancer screenings, contraception, and abortions. Anti-abortionists are making a call-to-action on Twitter, to defund programs such as Medicaid; the dissatisfaction with federal funds being used for Planned Parenthood services is depicted in the following tweet (received 121 likes):

“FACT: #Democrats know that OUR tax dollars allocated to #PlannedParenthood will NEVER help any woman PLAN to actually BECOME a PARENT.

#DefundPP

#AbortionIsMurder

#AbortionIsRacist

#StopEugenicRacism

#StopInfanticide

#ChooseLife

#AllLivesMatter” (Twitter)

The following tweet (received 76 likes) portrays the hatred towards Planned Parenthood:

“Planned murderhood wants the public to believe an educated decision is a bad thing.

#AbortionIsMurder” (Twitter)

The second question that should be asked is: How much money is being used to fund Planned Parenthood, and what are the economic disadvantages? The Center on Budget and Policy Priorities reported in 2023 that 24% of federal tax dollars (~\$1.5 trillion) go towards health insurance, including Medicare, Medicaid, Affordable Care Act (ACA), and the Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP). This percentage accounts for the largest tax expenditures from the US government, which is why it has raised issues about expenditures on Planned Parenthood. Currently, anti-abortionists do not need to worry about unnecessary abortions being funded due to the 1976 Hyde Amendment, which prevents Medicaid from funding abortions unless the pregnancy resulted from rape, incest, or endangered the woman if she carried her fetus to term. (Ziegler, 2012) However, one does not know if the Hyde Amendment will continue to be renewed by Congress in future years, and in which case unnecessary abortions may be funded. Despite the Hyde Amendment, many anti-abortionists do not agree that abortions should be funded whatsoever, even in special cases.

According to the Congressional Research Service (CRS), in 2021 approximately 8.6% of the USA population did not have health insurance, and the rest of the population used private or public (such as Medicaid) health insurance (CRS, 2023). According to their data, this number has continued to decrease, as opportunities for public health insurance present themselves (CRS, 2023). Moreover, Medicaid uses the most of its expenditures on long-term services such as home health care, nursing care facilities, continuing care retirement communities, and residential care (CRS, 2023). One can conclude that many people are benefiting from insurance opportunities, and that while anti-abortionists may be dissatisfied that the US government is funding programs that support Planned Parenthood, many of these funds are going towards other health services.

Pro-life enthusiasts also make a key argument against the way that people approach the term “baby,” “with child,” and other terms that suggest that the mother is carrying more than a “clump of cells.” For example, the following tweet (received 233 likes) is proving that women will refer to the fetus they are carrying to term by calling it their “baby,” but if a woman wants an abortion, she refers to her baby as nothing more than “fetal tissue,” “cells,” etc. In which case, only when it is convenient for the mother will she call it her “baby.”

“Question for all you parents out there. When y'all were expecting, did y'all have a "baby" shower, a "fetal tissue" shower, or a "clump of cells" shower?

Asking for #PlannedParenthood, #StemExpress, and abortion activists everywhere.
#AbortionIsMurder” (Twitter)

Hence, when parenthood is planned, the fetus can be referred to as the “baby,” but if the pregnancy is unwanted, the term “baby” is no longer used. Another argument that pro-life advocates have made also has to do with the language that is used when addressing the fetus. The following tweet (received 208 likes) contains a quote that says:

“If abortion isn’t murder, why is it considered a double homicide when a pregnant woman is killed?” (Twitter)

This discourse was interesting as it bases more arguments on the premise of facts and logic, whereas other discourses, such as *Shaming and judgmental Christian values* pushes emotion and judgment on readers who agree with the legalization of abortion. However, while the *Defund Planned Parenthood* discourse uses more concrete evidence to make a point, it does not mean that this information is correct, especially when it is posted on Twitter, and could easily be false or misleading. Other studies have shown that while a large portion of federal tax dollars

go towards healthcare, increasing healthcare coverage may decrease overall unexpected healthcare costs.

For example, a 2006 study proves how Medicaid coverage for contraceptive services would reduce unplanned pregnancies, abortions, and unplanned births, while also decreasing public-sector costs; the study was done by the Guttmacher Policy Review (GPR) which is an organization that examines sexual and reproductive health policies in the USA. (Gold, 2006). By expanding eligibility to women who have an income of 200% of the federal poverty level, more women would therefore have access to contraceptive methods and the abortion rate would decrease (Gold, 2006). This avenue would cost approximately \$800 million, but would prevent approximately \$2.3 billion on unplanned births, which equates to \$1.5 billion in savings (Gold, 2006). GPR also estimated that 500,000 women would avoid unplanned pregnancies, and 200,000 abortions would be prevented (Gold, 2006). Senator Hilary Clinton had said that the best way to reduce abortions is not by making it illegal, but by preventing unplanned pregnancies through education and accessible health care (Gold, 2006).

Another tweet (received 70 likes), shared discontent with government funding towards Planned Parenthood:

“Thought for Today

IMHO pro choice means supporting a womans right to choose birth control not infanticide. Accepting this practice and funding it with tax dollars makes us all complicit.

Just saying. . .

#abortions #AbortionIsMurder #SaveTheChildren #SaturdayMorning” (Twitter)

This tweet also included an image (Figure 3) and quote from civil rights leader, Martin Luther King Jr., which said:

“How can the “Dream” survive if we murder the children? Every aborted baby is like a slave in the womb of his or her mother. The mother decides his or her fate - Martin Luther King Jr.” (Twitter)



Figure 3: Martin Luther King Jr. quote

This tweet is implying that USA taxpayers are forced to assist mothers who are murdering their unborn children, including a quote from a civil rights leader that is linked to ideas found in the fourth discourse. Pro-choice advocates will often emphasize women’s right to choose (“her body her choice”) and in comparison, pro-life advocates will defend the civil rights of the unborn; Both sides of the discussion discuss standing up for civil rights with the latter group clearly using religion as their framework.

The final focal point of the “Defund Planned Parenthood” (DPP) argument addresses the significance of the family by Christian anti-abortion groups. While many women may not feel prepared to raise their child, it does not mean that abortion is the only option. In some households, the mother recognizes that she can not financially or emotionally support the

newborn baby, and therefore must abort it. A pro-life tweet (received 98 likes) ridicules the notion that babies must be aborted if they will not be properly supported upon birth:

“We don’t want you to be poor, hungry, or unwanted. So we’ll just murder you instead. Because we care.” (Twitter)

The principle solution that pro-lifers suggest is adoption; when a mother has her baby and puts it up for adoption, the DPP claims that she is providing another family the opportunity to raise a child, especially for other couples that cannot get pregnant. For example, the following tweet (received 10,000 likes) describes the positive outcome of adoption:

“Adoption is the best decision my birth mom ever made. Abortion wasn’t the answer. It’s the baby’s body and the baby’s choice. I’m glad she understood that and gave me a chance to live and make something of myself.

#AbolishAbortion #AbortionIsMurder” (Twitter)

Evangelical Christian journalist of the 1990s, Marvin Olasky, had described abortion as a war on adoption that has been brought-on by feminist thought police and abortion activists (Idzik, 2022). This idea is used in modern anti-abortion rhetoric, where adoption is described as a frictionless substitution for abortion (Idzik, 2022). The following tweet (received 228 likes) also mentions adoption as a suitable “choice” for mothers:

“So you claim you are "Pro-Choice." ?

You also have available to you

1) choice of abstinence

2) choice of adoption

3) choice of parenting

#AbortionIsMurder

#ChooseLife” (Twitter)

However, pro-choice advocates will often express that while adoption can often be a successful substitute for abortion, many mothers may not want to endure the physical and emotional toll of carrying a fetus to term when they are not planning on keeping the baby (Idzik, 2022). The next tweet (received 198 likes) under the hashtag #abortionismurder, presents adoption as the only moral choice when deciding between adoption and abortion:

“Please do your part in ending abortion! It is modern-day child sacrifice and is tainting the land with innocent blood and ruining lives of the living and ending the lives of the innocent. #ProLife #AbortionIsMurder #Adoption #FosterCare” (Twitter)

The *Defund Planned Parenthood* discourse presents many different arguments to planned parenthood, which can be narrowed down to the following explanation: taxpayer dollars should not be used to support Planned Parenthood, especially when there are other options for mothers who do not wish to keep their baby. However, one can note from this review that by investing more dollars into contraceptive methods, (especially for low-income women) the USA can ultimately decrease expenditures on unwanted pregnancies and unexpected births; perhaps federal funding for Planned Parenthood is the real solution to decreasing abortions.

4. Justice for the born and unborn

The fourth narrative was the most prominent narrative and argues for the civil rights of not only the born, but the unborn as well. Out of the set of the 500 most liked tweets under the hashtag #abortionismurder, the tweets related to this discourse received a total of 30,140 likes; the highest liked tweet had 2,500 likes, and the lowest liked tweet had 65 likes.

Many philosophers talk about the ethics of abortion in relation to the notion of personhood, that being whether or not the fetus is an actual person (Greasley, 2017). Understanding if the fetus is a person can allow us to discern if the unborn deserves civil rights. Many abortion opponents believe that personhood begins at conception; since a fetus is considered a “person,” it is separate from the mother and what she wishes to do to her body (Greasley, 2017). Additionally, once a heartbeat is detected, anti-abortionists will claim that abortion is immoral, as exemplified by the following tweet (received 127 likes):

“Aren’t you considered dead when your heart stops and can’t be restarted? So.. if a heart is beating isn’t that the sign of life? #abortionismurder” (Twitter)

Twitter users that contributed to the *Justice for the born and unborn* discourse have explained that the fetus is not the mother’s body, and therefore deserves its own set of rights. This is exemplified in the following tweet which also contained an ultrasound (Figure 4) of a growing fetus (received 216 likes):

“#MyBodyMyChoice is a fallacy. The fetus has its own DNA. That means, that the baby inside of a mother is a unique individual, not part of the mother's body. #AbortionIsMurder” (Twitter)



Figure 4: Ultrasound

This discourse reflects on the expression “my body my choice” that is advocated by pro-choice enthusiasts. A tweet (received 103 likes) with an image (Figure 5) of a young man holding a poster said:

“Abortion has never been about “choice” ... It’s about escaping the consequences of your choices by taking all choices away from another human being.” (Twitter)



Figure 5: Anti-abortion poster

However, prenatal personhood is often refuted by philosophers such as Ronald Dworkin who argues that the fetus does not possess mental life, and it can not be considered a person when it does not have interests of its own (Greasley, 2017). Other than mental activity, scientific development of the embryo is regarded when addressing personhood. It can be noted that only 45% of sperm-egg unions contribute to live births, and the remaining percentage ends in miscarriage (Beckwith, 2007). Thus, it can be argued that the individual human being does not exist at conception, especially when there is a possibility of twinning, recombination, and cells becoming complete entities (Beckwith 2007). “While the zygote is the beginning of a genetically distinct life, it is neither an ontological individual nor necessarily the immediate precursor of one.” (Beckwith, 2007, p. 77). Accordingly, the early embryo may not be considered an individual being, and abortions that happen during this time do not neglect the right to life of the unborn individual. Even so, other philosophers do not feel the need to distinguish the notion of personhood, as they have created their own rationale for the pro-abortion standpoint.

Judith Thomson, an American philosopher, is known for her famous violinist analogy when discussing moral issues about abortion. With this analogy, Thomson has determined that even if a fetus is a person, abortion is still permissible. The violinist analogy depicts a scenario where you are kidnapped and hooked up to the body of a famous violinist (Thomson, 1971). You did not consent to this, but if you allow his blood to filter through your body for nine months, you will save the life of the violinist (Thomson, 1971). Thomson said that it is permissible for you to unplug yourself from the violinist (as an analogy for a woman having an abortion) because if the doctor said, “Granted you have a right to decide what happens in and to your body, but a person's right to life outweighs your right to decide what happens in and to your body.” You would find yourself outraged that you cannot prioritize yourself and your own well-being (Thomson, 1971, p. 49). However, one may refute this analogy because you are simply letting the violinist die, versus the mother actively killing her offspring (Bernstein & Manata, 2019). Furthermore, being hooked up to the violinist was unconsensual, and in many cases a woman willingly chose to have sexual relations. In the specific case of rape or an unplanned pregnancy, this analogy is a strong argument for abortion being permissible.

Another philosopher, David Boonin, expanded Thomson's argument for abortion by using the legal case *McFall v. Shimp*. McFall needed a bone marrow transplant to survive aplastic anemia, and only one test came back showing compatibility for a transplant (Boonin, 2019). Shimp was his cousin and initially agreed to the transplant, but later changed his mind and canceled the procedure (Boonin, 2019). McFall attempted to sue Shimp, but the judge dismissed the case because McFall did not have the right to Shimp's bone marrow (Boonin, 2019). Hence, this argument explains that being a person does not give one the right to use another person's body for survival. Boonin explained that to agree with the outcome of the *McFall v. Shimp* case,

is to agree that a fetus that was conceived due to rape, contraceptive failure, or unprotected sex, can be aborted because it does not have the right to use another person's body for survival (Boonin, 2019). Although the principles of bodily autonomy are upheld when a woman can make her own choices about her pregnancy, as with Shimp's bone marrow, there is a clear difference between the two cases: Shimp was compelled to proceed with the treatment to save someone else's life; a pregnant woman is compelled to proceed with a treatment to end someone else's life.

Boonin and Thomson have both explained that even if a fetus is considered a human being, abortion is still permissible; the following tweet (received 116 likes) uses a quote by former President of the USA, Ronald Reagan, to ridicule the pro-choice standpoint:

“I've noticed that everyone who is for abortion has already been born — Ronald Reagan #AbortionIsMurder” (Twitter)

In opposition to Boonin and Thomson, an American writer, Don Marquis, argues that even if a fetus is not considered a human being, abortion is immoral (Hendricks, 2019). Marquis has determined that killing a fetus deprives it of a future life, such as the one that we all have. This action alone is wrong, and hence, one does not need to further discuss the unresolved questions such as the personhood notion (Hendricks, 2019).

One can detect that there are many different ways to argue for the right to life of the unborn: whether prenatal personhood is significant, the moral implications of killing life, the right to bodily autonomy of the mother, and so forth. It is evident that within the *Justice for the born and unborn* discourse, pro-lifers believe that life begins before birth, and therefore must be protected. To fully display their remorse for policies that support legal abortion, they have

adopted a term called the “American Holocaust,” where abortions in the USA are being compared to Nazi Germany.

With the caption, “History repeating itself? #ProLife #AbortionIsMurder” a tweet (received 112 likes) has two side-by-side images (Figure 6): the image on the left has a picture of Nazis having a lively conversation with the caption, “It’s not murder. Jews aren’t actually people” and the image on the right has a picture of a pregnant woman talking to someone who had an abortion who is saying, “It’s not murder. Babies aren’t actually people.” (Twitter)



Figure 6: American Holocaust

A 2011 film titled *180* represents this idea of the “American Holocaust.” Hitler’s Holocaust, which killed around six million Jews, is compared to the American abortion holocaust, which has killed about 53 million unborn babies in 38 years (Bohon, 2011). The movie begins with a scene in Nazi Germany, where you are ordered to bury Jewish families; it then morphs into a movie about abortion and asks the audience. “How do you feel about abortion?” as it presents dead Holocaust victims and bloody aborted babies on the screen

(Bohon, 2011). Many audience members who agreed with a woman's right to choice later did a full "180" after seeing that in no circumstance should it be okay to kill a human life, whether it be an unborn baby, or a Holocaust victim (Bohon, 2011). The film *180* became viral, and had many people completely shift their stance on abortion (Bohon, 2011). Anti-abortion advocates are using the same ideologies from this film to provoke pro-choice advocates to understand what "pro-choice" really means — stripping "choice" away from other lives.

One remarkable argument that is made throughout this discourse compares abortion laws with gun laws in the USA. One tweet (received 330 likes) shared:

"Anti gun, pro @PPact [Planned Parenthood]? I see forceps to be more dangerous than firearms. #DefundPlannedParenthood #AbortionIsMurder #MarchForOurLives #guncontrol" (Twitter)

Another tweet (received 159 likes) offered a comparison between the violence that occurs when guns are legal versus abortion being legal:

"Children killed in US:

Abortion = 2,000 per DAY

Guns = 1,000 per YEAR

#GunControlNever #AbortionIsMurder #ChildrenUnderAttack

Abortions kill 300x more kids than guns do. So if you want to be consistent, I'm assuming you want them banned too." (Twitter)

Although it does seem strange that people advocate that guns should be banned in the USA but abortion should be legal, the way in which this argument against pro-choice enthusiasts is being framed is quite relevant. Pro choice advocates may wish for guns to be illegal because

weaponry can cause mass killings and invoke unnecessary violence. While this can be said about abortion, pro-choice advocates are saying that in some cases, abortion is necessary, and a woman has the right to decide what happens to her body and the life that she created.

Morality is not meant to be a formula, pattern, or consistency, and if it was, these discussions and rationales would not be needed to make such decisions. The right to life has a simple sound, but is clearly much more complicated than what we can try to understand.

5. Negative judgment towards leftists

The fifth and final discourse projects dissatisfaction, aggression, and resentment towards leftists, which includes both Canadian liberals and US democrats. Feminism had been an upper-middle class phenomenon among republican women, but shifted between from the republicans to the democrats in the late 20th century (McKenna, 2006). In 1980, the democrats endorsed a license to abortion and also proclaimed their firm support with *Roe v. Wade* decision. “For the Democrats, abortion was “a fundamental human right”; for the new Republican Party, unborn children deserved protection under civil rights law.” (McKenna, 2006, p.73). With this decision, many catholics began to shift their political stance, leaving the majority to be right-leaning today, but still divided between the two parties. After 1980, a severe difference between the republicans and democrats came to exist on the topic of abortion.

The discussion of this discourse focuses on two methods which pro-lifers have used to argue against abortion under this discourse. The first method is by using logical fallacies to undermine the arguments and beliefs of liberals and democrats; the second method is by attacking specific political leaders in the US and Canada to persuade other Twitter users. Out of the set of the 500 most liked tweets under the hashtag #abortionismurder, the tweets related to

this discourse received a total of 16,214 likes; the highest liked tweet had 552 likes, and the lowest liked tweet had 65 likes.

One can see that using specific logical fallacies means that Canadian conservatives and US republicans do not need to create a strong argument against abortion, but more so an argument against the people who stand for abortion. Displaying left-leaning people as irrational and against religious values have been key frameworks of this discourse. For example, the following tweet which received 111 likes, attempts to paint liberals as being atheist, or perhaps even demonic:

“#TinyLivesAtStake #AllLivesMatter #AbortionIsMurder #DefundPP

Ever notice everything deemed evil by God liberals are for?” (Twitter)

In many cases, tweets within this discourse prefer to attack leftists, than refute leftists pro-choice arguments. This is known as the Ad Hominem Fallacy, which is the case of attacking your opponent instead of their arguments (Wijze, 2003). For example, the following tweet (received 109 likes) has a quote from Justice Clarence Thomas who is talking about Democratic President, Joe Biden:

“Justice Clarence Thomas on Joe Biden:

“One of the things you do in hearings is you have to sit there and look attentively at people you know have no idea what they’re talking about.”

#JoeBiden #AbortionIsMurder” (Twitter)

The previous tweet makes no real claim against something that Biden has said, but instead, describes Biden as an incompetent leader. Even so, for someone who is less familiar

with politics, and the platforms and policies of certain leaders, this could persuade a Twitter user to blindly agree that Biden is a poor leader.

Additionally, conservatives are comparing abortion to other forms of murder, to equate abortion with something that a majority of Americans stand against. This could be linked to the Red Herring Fallacy, where the facts that present themselves have little relevance to the topic of abortion (Gula, 2002). The following tweet (received 109 likes) compares abortion with the lethal injection:

“This makes me Ill. I can't believe any rational person is ok w/this. If you are against the #deathpenalty you shld be against #abortion #infanticide #WakeUpAmerica #AbortionIsMurder #MAGA #Team_1776 #TWGRPS

Socialist democrats say you can't give lethal injection to serial killers, pedophiles, rapists, school shooters but you can give a lethal injection to an infant. Take a moment and let that sink in.” (Twitter)

While the tweet uses facts to prove a point, the discussion of the death sentence has different sets of ethics and is distracting from the real discussion at hand. Furthermore, a 2013 study examined public opinion on cultural policy issues, and found that there is a negative correlation between Americans' sentiments about the death penalty and their sentiments about abortion (Mulligan et al., 2013). Hence, it is very much possible for an American to disagree with the ethics of the death penalty, but agree with women's ability to obtain an abortion. The ethics of the death penalty does not have a significant relationship with the ethics of abortion, and by discussing the death penalty as if it was the same thing, this Twitter user is simply distracting from the real discussion of abortion.

Another tweet (received 110 likes) painted liberals to be uneducated by quoting former President of the US, Theodore Roosevelt. By referencing Roosevelt, a trusted leader, the Appeal to Authority Fallacy is upheld, where the audience is influenced by the information because it comes from an important figure (Gula, 2002).

“To anger a conservative, lie to him. To anger a liberal, tell him the truth. — Theodore Roosevelt.” (Twitter)

Other than using logical fallacies as a method to diminish left-wing beliefs, right-wing discussions have focussed on specific leaders within this discourse, to shame their campaigns and policies. Political figures such as Chelsea Clinton, Nancy Pelosi, Elizabeth Warren, Kamala Harris, Barack Obama, Justin Trudeau, and Joe Biden were key people that were mentioned repeatedly. For example, the following tweet (received 219 likes) shows hatred towards Nancy Pelosi, an American politician:

“Pelosi opposes the death penalty for criminals but is in favor of the death penalty for the innocent unborn children unable to defend themselves. Is this twisted & perverted reasoning only present in morally depraved individuals? #AbortionIsMurder” (Twitter)

Describing abortion as the “death penalty” is a powerful way of making democrats appear immoral, where they are sentencing innocent lives to death; in comparison, democrats would argue that while the fetus’ life will terminate, it is to protect the reproductive rights of the mother, rather than killing a life for no justifiable reason.

Another tweet (received 187 likes) has framed Elizabeth Warren, an American politician, to appear ruthless and insensitive about the topic of abortion:

“Elizabeth Warren compared killing a baby in an abortion to “getting your tonsils out.”

This is an attack on the dignity of human life. No person who believes that should be anywhere near the Oval Office!

#prolife #AbortionIsMurder” (Twitter)

This line is somewhat taken out of context, as Warren said in an interview for a women’s magazine, *Marie Claire*, “When abortions are illegal, women don’t stop getting them— they just risk their lives to do it,” Warren then noted, “Today, thanks to Roe, getting an abortion is safer than getting your tonsils out. Before *Roe v. Wade*, many women turned to back-alley butchers to end their pregnancies.” (Ertelt, 2018)

Thus, while the tweet is correct in what Warren said, it is framed in a context that is misleading. Warren was explaining that illegal abortions are unsafe, and legal abortions are as safe as removing one’s tonsils; if abortions are going to take place regardless of the law, women should have the opportunity of having a safe procedure. However, the tweet made it seem that the moral severity of having an abortion is the same as taking one’s tonsils out, making Warren appear that she does not care for the lives of the dead fetuses.

Another tweet (received 149 likes) under the hashtag #abortionismurder tagged Kamala Harris, which addressed an earlier discourse — *Abortion is not healthcare*.

“@KamalaHarris: YOU’RE mistaken if you think women in America BELIEVE

#Abortion is “healthcare”. #AbortionIsMurder #TinyLivesAtStake

#AdoptionNotAbortion” (Twitter)

Here we can see that Twitter is a lively platform for political debate, where anyone in the world of any status can interact with discussions from major leaders and policy makers. It should

be noted that this tweet claims to be speaking on behalf of all women in America which is untrue and misleading, and lacks any evidence as well. Telling Harris that she is incorrect does not therefore make this Twitter user correct; attacking an argument without offering a counter argument is not an argument in itself.

Between logical fallacies and attacks on leaders, this discourse uses surprisingly little evidence against abortion; while this may seem like a desperate attempt at demoralizing abortion, the 16,214 likes speak for themselves — just because it is a weak or non-existent argument does not mean that it does not have the power to influence.

Conclusion

The results of this study showed that the focal discourses around anti-abortion narratives are: *Shaming and judgmental Christian values*, *Abortion is not healthcare*, *Defund planned parenthood*, *Justice for the born and unborn*, and *Negative judgment towards leftists*. These discourses reveal that there are many different levels, arguments, and perceptions when it comes to anti-abortion advocacy.

A critical finding from this research relates to the absolutist categories of “pro-life” and “pro-choice”; it can be noted that in 2013, only 8% of Americans agreed with the absolute “pro-life” position, and only 31% of Americans agreed with the absolute “pro-choice” position (as cited in Rye & Underhill, 2020). In 1993, Allen and Griffin determined that there are two other categories that should be used when classifying peoples’ beliefs about abortion. Other than “pro-choice absolutist” and “pro-life absolutist,” they found “dilemma situationist” and “regulated situationist” to be relevant (Allen & Griffin, 1993). “Dilemma situationist” refers to someone who prefers to abstain from abortion but is still in favor of choice (Allen & Griffin,

1993). “Regulated situationist” refers to someone who does not feel negatively about abortion, but believes that the restrictions of the procedure should be regulated (Allen & Griffin, 1993).

Within the five discourses that were present in my Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), it is clear that while all 500 tweets came from posts under the hashtag #abortionismurder, these posts came from individuals with completely different lived experiences, religious values, and education; to classify all these Twitter users in a “pro-life” category, is restrictive and does not reflect a comprehensive set of opinions. One can see that even the five discourses were focused on an array of topics such as healthcare, religion, politics, and so forth. Since there are many angles to the anti-abortion stance, there is plenty of room for future research to be done.

My research allowed me to investigate the principle arguments that are made against abortion, but it would be interesting to discover how opponents react with these arguments; future research can examine how opponents of the anti-abortion discourse interact with anti-abortion posts. This potential future research would uncover where online abortion debates are heading, and how that may affect policies that are made on a state or even national level.

Another research pathway could examine how images and videos that support anti-abortion advocacy impacts adolescents. Especially in today's age where young children, preteens, and teenagers have access to social media, hateful and controversial posts on platforms such as Twitter may have an even greater impact on the way that they view abortion. For example, a Canadian white nationalist murderer, Nathaniel Veltman, had run over a group of Muslims in his car, because he had an urge to kill them (Gillis, 2023). It was noted by the *Toronto Star* that Veltman was shown images and videos of aborted fetuses as a child, and led him to strongly believe that abortion is murder (Gillis, 2023). As he grew older, other displays of aggression towards groups of people, such as minorities, presented themselves; thus, when

people are shown sensitive content at a young age, this could have lasting effects on the way they view the world. Should Twitter make greater efforts to monetize content or restrict users that are underage? Ultimately this future research would allow us to understand how sensitive content about abortions impacts young minds, who are the future of this country and will affect the policies that will govern society.

There are three focal limitations that are prevalent in this project. First, the short timeframe restricted the depth of the research that I fulfilled. With more time, I would be able to evaluate more tweets that are aggressive in nature; more tweets would be able to further validate the findings that I encountered. Second, I only focused on aggressive tweets, and did not examine communications on other social media platforms. Perhaps there are stronger communities on Twitter, or other types of information elsewhere that I am not considering. Third, I only examined tweets that are in English, which also affected the geographical location of the tweets. Therefore, the findings from this study could be dependent on items such as culture and social environment.

Lastly, I would like to thank my supervisor, Dr. Ahmed Al-Rawi for his support, guidance, and knowledge throughout the process of completing my Honours Project for the School of Communications at Simon Fraser University.

Ethics

Since the Twitter content is found in the public domain, there are no ethical issues regarding conducting this study since it is non reactive in nature and as long as I ensure users' online privacy.

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