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Abstract

Historically the anti-abortion movement has opposed abortions through reference to the fetus' human status. However, recently there has been a rhetorical shift whereby abortion is criticized based on its alleged negative psychological impact on women, with some authors voicing concerns related to this medicalized repertoire undermining women's capacity to act as rational decision-makers. However, no research to date has systematically analyzed how women's agency over their abortions features in anti-abortion rhetoric. In this discourse analysis of interviews with 15 anti-abortion supporters, I explore how psychological concepts are employed to indirectly undermine women's agency to abort. Participants construct the termination of a pregnancy as psychologically damaging when women's agency is evident (e.g., in abortions or rape pregnancy abortions). Also women's choice appears as enforced by society, victimizing them and removing accountability over it. However, unintentional termination (e.g., miscarriage) is constructed as "natural" and psychologically harmless due to the lack of agency. Overall, the pathologization of abortion through reference to psychological trauma stemming from the exercise of agency allows anti-abortionists to naturalize motherhood and oppose abortions in an "objective", depoliticized, non-restrictive, and pro-woman manner, without explicitly disregarding women's ability to choose or breaching Western norms of autonomy and freedom of choice.

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Introduction

As a result of the Enlightenment, the modern individualized, Western subject is perceived as *agentic* - as possessing the rationality and ability to decide for personal and public matters (Allport, 1968). Conceptualizing the self in agentic terms provides individuals with a repertoire that enables individual and collective action (Meyer & Jepperson, 2000). Contemporary social psychological research assumes and operates on the basis of this dominant cultural norm, paying significant attention to collective action processes. This strand of research has been largely influenced by the concepts of identity and empowerment (e.g. Drury & Reicher, 2000; Stott & Drury, 2000; van Zomeren, Postmes, & Spears, 2008; Van Zomeren & Spears, 2009), as well as by the action orientation of language (Edwards & Potter, 1992; Potter & Wetherell, 1987), exploring how social actors rhetorically (re)define group categories in strategic ways when engaging in collective mobilization processes (e.g. Hopkins & Reicher, 1997; Reicher & Hopkins, 1996; Reicher & Hopkins, 2001; Reicher, Cassidy, Wolpert, Hopkins, & Levine, 2006).

In this article, I shift the analytic focus on the ways that social movement supporters negotiate the agency of particular actors of interest to act in their own terms, and particularly in instances when the latter act in ways that are counter-normative to the movement. This question becomes particularly important when considering Western values regarding individual autonomy and freedom of choice. More specifically, I focus on the abortion debate and explore how women's agency to choose abortion features in interviews with anti-abortion activists. Taking into account the dilemmatic and argumentative nature of social life (Billig, 1987; Billig et al., 1988), I examine how participants try to undermine abortion as a legitimate response to a pregnancy, without explicitly disregarding women's agency to choose over reproductive matters. Of particular interest are instances whereby participants employ medicalized (Lee, 2003) and psychological (Edwards, 1999; Edwards & Potter, 1992; Papastamou, 1986) discourses to construct women's choice in relation to their agency.

Considering the ongoing restrictions to the provision of abortion-related information (Boseley, Maclean, & Ford, 2017), as well as the increasing prevalence of psychological concepts in anti-abortion argumentation (APA, Major, & Association, 2008; Dadlez & Andrews, 2010), an analysis of how women's agency features in anti-abortion rhetoric is a topic worth exploring.

Constructing social problems and identity

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Social movements strive to mobilize support that will legitimize their actions towards specific social problems. However, social problems do not exist *a priori*; rather, if particular courses of action are to be proposed and mobilized, a social issue should be *actively constructed* as problematic, and this redefinition should be seen as legitimate (Blumer, 1971). Blumer's argument influenced subsequent sociological research on framing (cf. Benford & Snow, 2000; Snow & Benford, 2002). Frames refer to versions of social objects that '*help to render events or occurrences meaningful and thereby function to organize experience and guide action*' (Benford & Snow, 2000, p. 614), providing the lens through which certain issues, things, or events will be seen as relevant and important or not. Language and argumentation are central in mobilization processes whereby the content of relevant symbols and the context of the debate are redefined in an attempt to establish *who has what* at stake (Cobb & Elder, 1973; Elder & Cobb, 1983).

The centrality of language in constructing versions of reality also features within social psychology and is of direct relevance to framing analyses (Jasper, 2017) since it offers useful insights into the microprocesses of argumentation and problem construction. For example, the content, breadth and norms of social identities – who is 'us', 'them', and what the associated aims and preferred courses of action are – can be strategically manipulated for particular purposes (Reicher, Hopkins, Levine, & Rath, 2005; Reicher & Hopkins, 2001; Reicher et al., 2006). For example, when talking to an audience of medics, anti-abortion speakers attempt to present themselves as members of a common category with the former, frame the medical profession as aligned with the anti-abortion cause, and construct abortion as being at odds with the medical profession (Reicher & Hopkins, 1996).

Psychological language can be of particular rhetorical potency in mobilization processes, since it can be mobilized to problematize social issues and promote one's political positions in a rather depoliticized, "objective" manner (Hopkins, Reicher, & Saleem, 1996; Ntontis & Hopkins, 2018). Similarly, emotion language can be used to or to work up versions of actions, identities, and events in flexible ways depending on speakers' orientations, connoting either rationality and authenticity or irrationality and subjectivity (Edwards, 1999). However, rhetorical constructions are not rhetorically potent by nature but should be worked up as factual and realistic, with speakers often employing psychological concepts to manage issues of stake and accountability (Edwards & Potter, 1992; Potter, 1996). For example, researchers have explored the rhetorical resources that social actors often mobilize to account for certain phenomena such as racism (Wetherell & Potter, 1992; Xenitidou & Sapountzis, 2018) and asylum seeking (Burke & Goodman, 2012; Every & Augoustinos, 2008;

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Kirkwood, Goodman, McVittie, & McKinlay, 2016). This strand of research also offers useful insights into the ways that social actors attend to and negotiate dilemmas of stake (Potter, 1996) and broader ideological dilemmas (Billig et al., 1988; Wetherell, 1998), such as the articulation of racist positions with the parallel disavowal of racism for oneself.

The literature cited above can be particularly insightful, especially when our concern is to explore how social actors define social issues (e.g. abortion) as problematic and worthy of mobilizing support towards resistance. Moreover, they can be useful in exploring the rhetorical resources – with an emphasis on psychological concepts – they draw on to characterize (and especially undermine or build up) particular categories involved in the debate.

Abortion in contestation

Considering the complex historical development of the abortion debate and its variation across different national and cultural contexts (Condit, 1990; Morgan, 1989), my aim is not to present a detailed timeline of the debate's evolution; rather, I will briefly outline the main arguments employed by the anti-abortion movement, paying attention to their rhetorical advantages or weaknesses in relation to the anti-abortion movement mobilizing support.

The issues raised in the abortion debate often extend beyond its status as an issue merely concerning health care (Purcell, Brown, Melville, & McDaid, 2017) and mainly concern the status of the fetus as a *human person*. One of the arguments employed to argue for the fetus' humanity and oppose abortion is based on a religious discourse of 'ensoulment' (Kelley, Evans, & Headey, 1993; Tribe, 1992), supporting that the presence of a soul in the fetus renders it a human being and thus positions abortion an illegitimate response to a pregnancy. Conceptually, Catholic figures and scholars from as early as the 18th century considered abortion to be a sin. However, despite that the embryo was treated as alive, it was not perceived as *de facto* possessing a fully-grown human soul. Rather, abortion was considered homicide only at later stages of development, when the process of 'hominization' had occurred (Maienschein, 2007). Nevertheless, religious repertoires were problematic for various reasons; the rise of secularism and the subsequent decline of religious sentiments made it hard to attract supporters outside religious communities as well as persuade women to not choose abortion (Hopkins & Reicher, 1992; Hopkins, Reicher, & Saleem, 1996). Moreover, anti-abortionists were accused of focusing on abstract religious doctrines and of ignoring pressing practical issues such as women's health (Hopkins & Reicher, 1992).

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The rise of feminist movements advocated for abortion as a women's right, which caused the anti-abortion movement to develop a different line of argumentation that focused on fetal rights (Daniels, 1993; Himmelweit, 1988; Hopkins et al., 1996). The fetus is claimed to possess the status of a human person (and the associated indispensable rights to life that come with it) while avoiding references to religious concepts (Cannold, 2002). Photographic imagery was used to support this construction by depicting the fetus as an individual, autonomous human being (Condit, 1990; Hopkins, Zeedyk, & Raitt, 2005; Petchesky, 1987), offering anti-abortion positions a sense of neutrality and objectivity. However, anti-abortionists were accused of focusing entirely on the fetus, presenting a one-sided symbiotic relationship, presenting women's bodies in a hostile way and finally removing women from the overall picture (Condit, 1990; Hopkins & Reicher, 1997; Hopkins et al., 1996; Stabile, 1992). Nevertheless, the importance of category definition (e.g. 'fetus' vs 'unborn child') is evident in its ability to shape public attitudes (Mikołajczak & Bilewicz, 2015) and by extend opinion-based group memberships with important implications for collective action (Bliuc, McGarty, Reynolds, & Muntele, 2007) (hence in this paper I refer to the protagonists of the debate as 'pro-abortion' and 'anti-abortion'.

A third line of anti-abortion argumentation includes the use of psychological language and concerns the newly-invented post-abortion syndrome (PAS; Speckhard & Rue, 1992). PAS was based on the concept of post-traumatic stress disorder and suggested that women could suffer negative psychological consequences following an abortion due to the disruption of motherhood and nurturance (Kelly, 2014; Lowe & Page, 2018). The existence of PAS was officially denounced by the American Psychological Association (APA et al., 2008), and so was the said psychological traumatic nature of abortions in general (Adler et al., 1990; Biggs, Upadhyay, McCulloch, & Foster, 2017; Dadlez & Andrews, 2010; Munk-Olsen, Laursen, Pedersen, Lidegaard, & Mortensen, 2011; Robinson, Stotland, Russo, Lang, & Occhiogrosso, 2009). Nevertheless, PAS was quickly diffused in public discourse and state policies (Kelly, 2014; Rose, 2011; Saurette & Gordon, 2013) and benefited the anti-abortion movement. First, the employment of psychological discourses allowed anti-abortionists to identify all post-abortive women as potentially traumatized and oppose abortion on the basis of 'objective' medical rather than moral criteria (Hopkins et al., 1996; Lee, 2003). Second, it allowed them to avoid characterizations of being 'anti-choice' and rather present themselves as pro-women and as representing their health and interests (Cannold, 2002; Friedman, 2013; Lee, 2003; Ntontis & Hopkins, 2018; Saurette & Gordon, 2013). A corollary is that supporters of

abortion were undermined as irrational and as harmful for women (Hopkins et al., 1996; Ntontis & Hopkins, 2018; Rose, 2011).

The lines of argumentation briefly outlined above vary by time, and cultural and national contexts. For example, whereas US anti-abortion rhetoric is critical of women, appeals to religious discourses and uses fetal-center arguments, anti-abortionists in Canada adopt a pro-woman position, avoid religious argumentation, and argue for the impact of abortion on women's mental health (Saurette & Gordon, 2013). On the contrary, Greek anti-abortion activists are closely connected to and attempt to drive change through the Orthodox Church, which as of the summer of 2019, decided to introduce a "Day for the Unborn Child", emphasizing the fetus' humanity due to its closeness to the image of God (Vice, 2019). Also, the definition of 'sin' varies across national contexts. Whereas in the US abortion is conceptualized as a sin due to 'murder', in Ecuador sin is based on objections to self-mutilation (Morgan, 1997). Thus, I do not attempt to make claims about the universality of anti-abortion rhetoric, but rather to explore its instantiation in the UK context (see Hopkins, Reicher, & Saleem, 1996; Hopkins & Reicher, 1992; Hopkins et al., 1996; Reicher & Hopkins, 1996) and perhaps in the US (see Lee, 2003).

Nevertheless, the various repertoires used to oppose abortion directly or indirectly address women's agency – their capacity to act – over their bodies. For example, the fetal-centered discourse that constructed the fetus as a baby and emphasized its right to life indirectly constructed women as rational albeit immoral decision makers whose unethical choice led to an abortion. However, others argue that the newly-adopted, women-centered, psychological discourse '*focuses on pregnant women's claimed lack of agency and consequent incapacity to ''really'' choose (with all that word connotes) abortion*' (Cannold, 2002, p. 172; emphasis added). By victimizing women and questioning their agency over their choices, undoubtedly anti-abortionists gain a political advantage. However, directly denying women's capability to decide over their bodies would possess a similar Achilles' heel to anti-abortion discourses: it would oppose Western norms of individual agency and would leave anti-abortionists open to accusations of restricting women's choice.

Agency and psychology

Denying one's agency to act for oneself contradicts the notion of *individuality*, the basis of the Western self and appropriate codes of conduct. The Enlightenment movement identified in humans rationality and agency to deal with their personal matters (Hamilton, 1992). Crucially, advocating for reason within the realms of everyday life meant promoting

tolerance and established the norm against prejudice, giving rise to particular rhetorical/ ideological dilemmas concerning the problematic nature of pre-judgment (Billig et al., 1988). Meyer and Jepperson (2000) argue that, in the post-Enlightenment secular periods that followed, the abandonment of religious narratives passed authority from religious figures to individuals themselves that were now perceived as able to act for themselves, for others, in the name of grand narratives (e.g. science, ethics, morality), in support of the imagined interests of non-actor entities within our particular cultural systems such as eco-system or nations, as well as in the name of *imagined potential actors* such as fetuses, social groups or classes (Meyer & Jepperson, 2000). Thus, individual and collective action can be seen as direct outcomes of the recognition of agency within the Western subject. The tautology of the Western individual self with agency assumes its presence within all Western subjects (Walkerdine, 2003), promotes the celebration of values such as autonomy and freedom of choice, and facilitates the concept of self-realization that can be achieved through particular psychological technologies (Rose, 1999).

Within the mainstream psychological literature, agency is a core tenet of social cognitive theory (Bandura, 2000, 2006). Bandura (2000), like Meyer and Jepperson (2000), identifies three forms of agency – individual, collective, and proxy. In his model, collective action is an outcome of collective agency – the belief that people can act together towards the realization of shared goals, with efficacy playing a key role. However, in the social psychological literature, agency often manifests as an explanatory concept or as a dependent variable. For example, Jay and Muldoon (2018) discuss how different modes of agency (independent vs. interdependent) employed by middle class and working class students accordingly can facilitate or become barriers to education. Research on collective action suggests that agency is an outcome of collective identity (Simon & Klandermans, 2001), whereas other researchers equate agency with empowerment that also stems from participants sharing a social identity (Drury, Cocking, Beale, Hanson, & Rapley, 2005; Drury & Reicher, 2005, 2009).

The present study

In this article, I treat agency as a topic of analysis and focus on the ways that members of particular groups negotiate the agency of others to act on their own terms. Despite in broad agreement with Cannold (2002), I argue that anti-abortion supporters cannot directly oppose women's agency over their choice to terminate their pregnancies, since this would lead them to oppose Western norms about the individuality of the self. At the same time, I disagree with

the claim that the simple invocation of a psychological repertoire will automatically lead to the dismissal of women's agency. Rather, what should be closely investigated are the micro-processes of how anti-abortionists talk about women's choice to terminate a pregnancy, how they attempt to dismiss the agency of the latter without breaching modern norms of freedom of choice, and the role of psychological concepts within the arena of argumentation. This will unavoidably entail the negotiation of particular rhetorical and ideological dilemmas such as managing a tolerant profile while promoting repressive anti-abortion positions (Billig et al., 1988).

Method

Participants and interviews

Fifteen anti-abortion supporters were interviewed in Scotland in 2014-2015. Participants were nine female and six male anti-abortion supporters living in three major Scottish cities. Five participants identified as English, three as Irish, and seven as Scottish. The age of twelve participants ranged between 18 and 26 years old, while three participants were in their mid-40s. Seven participants were employed, six were undergraduate and two were postgraduate students. One participant willing to discuss his opinions of the anti-abortion movement acted as a gatekeeper for me to gain access and interview three further participants. I identified the rest of the sample through anti-abortion Facebook groups. I contacted them and asked whether they would be willing to discuss women's experiences of abortion and the positions of the anti-abortion movement. Participants were active in local anti-abortion groups across the three cities and some participated in weekly silent vigils on the central town squares.

The interviews followed a semi-structured format (M length = 44 minutes, SD = 24, total duration = 617 minutes) and were conducted in participants' working offices or in cafeterias. Apart from two participants that were interviewed as a couple, the rest were interviewed individually. Interviews were audio-recorded with participants' consent and were fully transcribed. Ethical approval was given by the University of Dundee, UK and all participants have been given pseudonyms. The interviews primarily focused on women's experiences of abortion, the anti-abortion movement's positions, as well as other social actors implicated within the broader debate that surrounds abortions, such as feminists and medical professionals. Some questions were not pre-planned but were added after data collection had begun.

Despite myself identifying as a supporter of free access to abortion, the atmosphere surrounding the interviews was friendly and mutually respectful. Participants were not tricked

into believing that I was an anti-abortion supporter – in certain instances I was asked and was clear about my pro-abortion stance, which did not cause any problems in the interviewing process. Also, due to the controversial nature of the topic under consideration, in certain occasions I introduced counterarguments where appropriate, which assisted me in gaining a more thorough view in the discursive strategies and resources employed by anti-abortion supporters. I consider that interview data can be used to explore public anti-abortion rhetoric. Participants were fully aware of my 'outsider' and researcher status. Therefore, and as it will become apparent in the analysis, it is very likely that participants identified the issues at stake (e.g. in relation to their public profile) and formulated their responses in ways appropriate for public consumption, using arguments common in public anti-abortion argumentation.

Analytic procedure

My analysis draws on the discourse analytic tradition in social psychology (Potter & Wetherell, 1987; Wetherell & Potter, 1992). On the one hand, I was interested in micro-processes of accountability management, the construction of realism, and the employment of psychological concepts (Edwards & Potter, 1992; Potter, 1996). However, I was also interested in top-down, macro-processes and hence was influenced by post-structuralist strands of analysis that concern positioning as well as the historicity and ideological roots and implications of the discourses employed by participants, so I used Critical Discursive Social Psychology (CDSP hereafter; Edley, 2001; Wetherell, 1998; Wetherell & Edley, 1999).

I present the results in two sections; first, I present extracts in which women's agency is directly implicated to the termination of the pregnancy (e.g. abortions or abortions following a rape pregnancy). Next, I discuss instances where women's choice is not directly related to the termination of the pregnancy (e.g. miscarriages). The links between women's agency (or its lack thereof) over abortion and following trauma were common strands of argumentation, which justifies the format of the presentation.

Results

Agency over the termination leads to psychological trauma

Women's active role in terminating a pregnancy was treated as a precursor to trauma:

Extract 1

Agency and post-abortion "psychological trauma"

> **Ian**: It would be my understanding that it [abortion] would [affect women]. I think everyone reacts differently, it would, I think that trauma of essentially killing your child or fetus has to have an effect.

Abortion was commonly constructed as traumatic for women. Despite moderating his argument through hedging ('I think', 'it would') and extreme case formulations ('everyone') to guard against counterarguments of women unaffected by their abortions, Ian advances a version of abortion as murder ('killing'). The representation of the fetus as a 'child' indirectly positions women as mothers and carries connotations about norms between the pair (e.g. nurturing relationship). Meanwhile, the parallel identification of both the 'child' and 'fetus' categories is used to place emphasis on the act ('killing') rather than on the label ('fetus' vs 'child') and the debate associated with it. Overall, action taken by women to terminate the pregnancy was sometimes treated as counter-normative and as disrupting the natural process of motherhood (also see Ntontis & Hopkins, 2018). Thus, women's agency was constructed as self-harm, which allowed anti-abortionists to legitimize their positions without directly referring to issues surrounding women's choice.

Next, I consider how participants talk about agency over the process of abortion as harmful for women:

Extract 2

Dan: […] before the method of abortion would have been by vacuum aspiration, so a long tube with a sharp end would, like a kitchen implement, you put it in when you want to make, chop meat or something, you know that is exactly what it makes and but now it's much more chemical. And when that method of abortion was first coming along, even the company that made it, the chairman said that this is a terrible psychological ordeal, this is the guy that made abortion pill because he said from a psychological point of view if you go into a hospital this is something the doctor did to you. If it's three pills there that you take and swallow and put in your own mouth, you know it's much harder to rationalize that this is something that happened, 'this is something that I did to myself'

Women's agency also featured in different methods of abortion. Dan first uses vivid description ('chop meat', 'sharp end') to create an unpleasant image of abortion through vacuum aspiration. He then discusses the second method ('pill') and compares it to the first

one along the lines of their psychological impact on women. Despite its apparently less unpleasant character, the 'pill' is constructed as more harmful for women due to women's agentic state over the process. Whereas in vacuum aspiration women are positioned as lacking agency over the process ('something the doctor did to you'), with regard to the pill women are positioned as active agents of their abortions ('you take and swallow and put in your own mouth'), which is depicted as impacting on their coping processes ('much harder to rationalize'). Thus, abortion was de-legitimized through reference to the traumatic outcomes of agency, which was reformulated as a form of self-harm.

In other occasions, agency was de-legitimized based on the impact it can have on others:

Extract 3

Jennifer: there are also men that, like, suffer from a lot of things like emotional trauma and things after an abortion because

Interviewer: Really?

Jennifer: Well there are cases of that because they feel they've lost a child too and there are, if you'd look it up online, I'm sure there are testimonies of guys and they did have an abortion against their wishes and of course it's not their body but, so I'm not saying that we should be allowed to stop, you know, stop women from doing things but we should recognize that men and other family members, not just the fathers can also be affected by abortion, because, just as if a child, there was a miscarriage of a child that died can affect men and even grandmothers or whatever. It's not just the mother, so it's, should be a whole [inaudible] not just the woman's body, it's the child and the wider family place.

In certain occasions, it appeared that men were also constructed as victims of abortion, and, in the case of Jennifer, the trauma was depicted in psychological terms. Explicating upon her initial statement, Jennifer identifies embryos as children and indirectly positions men as fathers, which allows her to warrant a version of abortion as parental loss. She uses systematic vagueness ('there are cases of that', 'there are testimonies of guys') to avoid providing further details, while leaving it up to me to establish the veracity of her argument ('if you look it up online'). The naturalization of fatherhood has multiple functions; First, it constructs abortion as incompatible with fatherhood – a father would never kill his child ('against their wishes'). Second, this incompatibility is explicated in terms of

psychopathology arising in men. Finally, and most importantly, it undermines abortion as a legitimate choice for women to respond to a pregnancy by identifying women's agency (and men's lack of agency) as the precursor to the trauma. By attempting to promote an argument that could have been heard as illiberal and as restricting women's choice, Jennifer faces a dilemma of stake (Edwards & Potter, 1992) and an ideological dilemma (Billig et al., 1988) between individual liberty and intolerance. She overcomes the stake dilemma through a disclaimer ('of course it's not their [men's] body', 'I'm not saying we should stop women from doing things') before accounting for her illiberal positions by emphasizing the emotional damage that family members can suffer due to women's actions. Thus, potential accusations of intolerance towards women's choices are avoided through the pathologization of women's choices and calls for consideration of further injustices.

Women's agency was also discussed in relation to abortion after rape:

Extract 4

Anna: […] the trauma happened because of the rape, not because of the child and I'm not saying that a mother would necessarily have to keep her child or, but I think like adoption is certainly an option and, but it's a very difficult question. I think when so many people use that question they create again a kind of societal stigma against rape and things that you can't possibly keep your child if it's been conceived in rape and so it becomes like a norm, it becomes like a show held belief but if you conceive during rape you have to abort it because all of society thinks that that child is valueless.

Interviewer: Yeah but I think that if she has the, she's raped and she has a trauma from this, if she has an abortion isn't there a chance that she might actually feel better or more relaxed (Anna: umhm) let's say.

Anna: But it could also cause more trauma, well, so, it could also cause, not only has she had the pain of being raped but she's also having the pain of having to admit a really difficult decision because of that, it's almost like you're giving back, the rapist has control over her body, now she has to abort a child, now she has to go through a medical procedure because he attacked her.

Since in public discourse a rape pregnancy can automatically be perceived as traumatic for women, it was common for anti-abortion participants to identify the causal factor of the trauma outside the pregnancy itself. In this case, Anna refers to the pregnancy as a 'child' and juxtaposes it to the rape, identifying the latter as the causal factor of trauma. This allows her

to separate between rape and pregnancy as well as to depathologize the pregnancy and remain in line with the norms of the anti-abortion movement.

Anna also faces an ideological dilemma between individual liberty and intolerance (Billig et al., 1988), since she is trying to promote an argument against abortions in a context that advocates for freedom of choice. To avoid the dilemma and guard against accusations of being intolerant, Anna starts with a disclaimer ('I am not saying that […]') before stating that a rape pregnancy should be continued and followed by adoption. Moreover, to avoid blaming women for terminating rather than continuing rape pregnancies, Anna proceeds to an external attribution by identifying society as the immoral agent that stigmatizes and eventually shapes women's decisions. Thus, even though women are treated as agents, responsibility for their actions is located within a broader framework that serves to victimize them and absolve them of blame.

Common also were arguments against the psychological benefits for women that aborted a rape pregnancy – an abortion was not constructed as a remedy to the rape, but rather as a second trauma ('she's also having the pain'). Another participant explicitly said that an abortion after rape '*is a trauma on top of a trauma*'. Anna recontextualizes the psychological nature of the choice to abort after rape from something positive ('might feel better or more relaxed') to something negative ('the pain', 'a really difficult decision'). Moreover, women are not positioned as genuinely deciding to abort but as 'admitting', which undermines the strength and value of their choice. Agency and control over one's body again played a major role in Anna's account. Abortion following rape is not constructed as giving women agency and control over their body but is rather framed as a loss of control ('you're giving back') and as control by the rapist. Thus, despite choosing to abort, women are not constructed as the actual agents ('she has to abort', 'has to go through a medical procedure') and cannot be held accountable for their actions.

In this section I focused on how anti-abortion supporters linked women's agency over their abortions with psychological trauma as a means of de-legitimizing it as a valid means of responding to a pregnancy. Next, I explore how anti-abortionists discuss the termination of a pregnancy in which women had no agency whatsoever, and how this is related to psychological trauma.

Unintentional termination as not traumatic

Essentially, an abortion and a miscarriage carry a common characteristic – the process of pregnancy is terminated. Also, while women in both instances might experience some

distress, this should not be pathologized and referred to as a syndrome (Dadlez & Andrews, 2010). Nevertheless, participants themselves distinguished between women's responses to the two instances:

Extract 5

Interviewer: Do you think there are any differences between how women process an abortion and then women who go through a miscarriage?

Gemma: Yeah definitely, it's accepted for a woman to grieve a miscarriage, it's not accepted for women to grieve an abortion.

Gemma accounted for differences in the coping process between the two instances in terms of norms of appropriate social conduct. The absence of a specific subject that endorses such norms ('it is accepted') allows Gemma to present her statement as universal rather than only applying to her own group. Thus, social permission to grieve appears as conditional, depending on the responsibility that women had over the termination ('accepted to grieve a miscarriage', 'not accepted to grieve an abortion'). This allows Gemma to condemn abortion on the basis of societal judgement linked to women's responsibility over it, rather than through without explicit reference to anti-abortion argumentation.

In other cases, participants explicitly related agency over a termination with psychological trauma:

Extract 6

Jennifer: things might sometimes be worse for women that had abortions cause they didn't have a miscarriage, cause they might be, feel like guilty whereas if you have a miscarriage you mourn, it's just, it happened naturally and there's nothing you could have done to prevent it.

And:

Extract 7

Interviewer: About the issue of miscarriage, I think I heard in a talk, can a miscarriage actually hurt a woman as much as an abortion? Or it's.

Maria: Well, the woman in the miscarriage will have the grief and the loss and she may have some aspects of guilt thinking 'did I do something' ehm, 'to cause the

miscarriage' but for the woman in abortion, she is the one that everyone has said that it was her decision to make (I: oh) and ehm, [inaudible] 'I was the one who walked through the door'

In extract 6, despite that both miscarriages and abortions are characterized as distressing for women, the latter are undermined by being represented as particularly damaging ('things might sometimes be worse for women that had abortions'). The speaker accounts by differentiating between the feelings that can arise following the procedure. Miscarriage is constructed as a natural process over which women have no particular agency ('there's nothing you could have done to prevent it'), with mourning being identified as the expected outcome. However, abortion is constructed as accompanied by a different emotional response, that of 'guilt', which, juxtaposed to the repertoire of 'miscarriage as a natural process', identifies women's intentionality as the causal factor. Guilt as a form of regret, de-legitimizes abortion through women's supposedly own psychological reactions rather than on political grounds and allows Jennifer to undermine women's agency without explicitly disregarding their ability to choose – the choice is undermined by being constructed as damaging in itself rather than through political argumentation.

Similarly, in extract 7, Maria associates miscarriages with negative feelings such as grief, loss, and guilt. However, guilt after a miscarriage appears as qualitatively different to guilt that follows an abortion; while women in a miscarriage feel guilt in terms of any possible unintentional action that caused the termination of the pregnancy, guilt in an abortion is constructed as stemming from women's active choices, formulated through active voicing ('I was the one who walked through the door') as well as from social appraisals of the action that position it as normatively illegitimate ('everyone has said that it was her decision to make'). Discourses of 'nature' and therefore lack of agency are juxtaposed to discourses of human agency and are treated as the decisive factors of women's psychological responses, and as speaking the truth about the inappropriate character of abortion (cf. Ntontis & Hopkins, 2018).

Finally, a detailed account of the role of agency in determining trauma following the termination of a pregnancy comes in extract 8:

Extract 8

Bill: Miscarriage can be too severe psychologically and certainly cause psychiatric problems in some incidences, ehm [inaudible] but that's going to happen in a number of

instances, we can't prevent miscarriages, if we can reduce these miscarriages, but the evidence would suggest that the adverse consequences of miscarriage are those associated with the death of a newborn child and an older child and it's a question of dealing with grief and loss, those, an abortion, in an abortion grief and loss are confounded with a sense of responsibility towards the loss, perhaps blame others for placing her in a position where she had to take that choice. The miscarriage isn't something determined by the woman's choice, an abortion at least in the popular discourse is a thing that woman chooses even in situations where it's the last things she wants, she is trying to resist it, she is trying to avoid it but at the end of the day if you buy the society tells you that was your choice and that's very hard for women, it's difficult.

Bill constructs both miscarriages and abortions as having the potential to psychologically harm women. However, as noted earlier, it would be against the interests of the anti-abortion movement to equate the impact of abortion with the impact of miscarriage, particularly when a main concern is the promotion of post-abortion syndrome as a particular outcome of abortions. To put it in another way, when an embryo is not anymore inside a woman's body, anti-abortionists need to specify under what conditions women will suffer trauma or not in a way that defends their political stance without claiming interest over women's choices – or avoiding the ideological dilemma between freedom of choice and control over one's body by external factors. Bill frames the topic in terms of prevention; if both miscarriages and abortions are traumatic for women (and Bill particularizes by saying 'in some instances' to avoid counter-arguments that refer to unaffected women), preventing these from happening will reduce the psychological strain. However, as Bill clearly states, it is precisely the lack of agency ('isn't something determined by the woman's choice') that leads to grief and loss. Moreover, the embryo is constructed as a 'child' implicitly positioning the woman as a mother. Like other participants, through referring to the lack of agency Bill implicitly naturalizes miscarriage and therefore depathologizes its psychological impact. On the contrary, abortion is discussed in terms of women's agency over it. As a result, it becomes traumatic because women took up this option, or because it is not natural ('confounded with a sense of responsibility'). This statement however leaves Bill open to a potential accusation of blaming women for their choice. As a result, he proceeds to a description which, one the one hand acknowledges women's agency, but, on the other hand, constructs this agency as influenced by external factors. This is manifested in Bill's account

in which women 'blame others' for forcing them to have an abortion ('placing her in a position where she had to take that choice'). Women's attribution of blame to external agents for their abortion serves to ethically remove responsibility for the choice and render women unaccountable for their actions. Bill further positions women as victims by constructing their psychology during the choice in negative terms ('last thing she wants', 'trying to resist it', 'to avoid it'). The decision to abort is not an "actual choice", but rather a normative response to societal norms that is reframed as a choice ('the society tells you that was your choice').

Discussion

In this article, I explored how the agency of women over their choice to abort features in anti-abortion rhetoric. Despite agreeing with researchers arguing that the psychological discourse can strip women off their agency (Cannold, 2002), I suggested that such a dismissal would not be explicit – rather, anti-abortionists would closely attend to Western norms of individual autonomy. Research (in the Canadian context) has argued that anti-abortionists adopt a modern, individualistic, pro-woman stance (Saurette & Gordon, 2013). This study complements such findings by arguing that, in line with this modern approach, agency is not dismissed at face value; rather, an exploration of the microprocesses surrounding the construction of the choice to abort shows that it is indirectly undermined through psychological trauma that manifests when women act upon their bodies in non-normative to the movement ways. This allows anti-abortionists to depoliticize the debate and manage a pro-woman profile.

In line with previous research (Hopkins et al., 1996), participants employed psychological concepts to oppose abortion. These were intertwined in complex ways with women's agency, so that abortion could be undermined without explicitly disregarding the latter. Women and embryos were positioned as mothers and babies (Hopkins et al., 1996; Hopkins et al., 2005; Ntontis & Hopkins, 2018) warranted the construction of abortion as traumatic, undermining the choice through its pathologization (rather than opposing it in explicitly political grounds). Similar was the case for trauma following various methods of terminating a pregnancy (e.g. pills), for trauma to the wider family, or for trauma following rape pregnancies; acting upon one's body in counter-normative (to the anti-abortion movement) ways was pathologized, undermining the decision to abort through emphasis on self-trauma. When anti-abortionists faced the risk of blaming women as unethical for their choices (and thus distancing them from the movement), they constructed the decision as (in)directly enforced from society, removing accountability from women. On the contrary,

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involuntary termination of a pregnancy did not automatically result in trauma – rather, it was intentionality over the termination that was treated as inherently traumatic. Thus, anti-abortionists do attempt to undermine women's agency in general, but only regarding certain actions – that is, from aborting. Extending previous research (e.g. Ntontis & Hopkins, 2018), we show how agency is linked to intentionality over motherhood; the capacity to act in terms of continuing the pregnancy is celebrated and is even treated as healing. This shows that anti-abortionists are sensitive to cultural norms, manifested in the ideological dilemmas that become apparent in their argumentation (e.g. freedom vs control).

The present analysis also helps bridge the gap between social movement studies and social psychology (cf. Jasper, 2017). Social psychology, and particularly its discourse-oriented tradition, can enrich framing analyses by exploring the rhetorical micro-processes that surround framing issues and the employment of psychological concepts in political debates. The analysis clearly shows the importance of considering social norms when investigating such processes – norms do not simply operate in a psychological background guiding activists' cognition but are actively attended and enacted upon. Considering how framings can shape decisions (Mikołajczak & Bilewicz, 2015), exploring how psychological concepts can be used to pathologize and restrict people's agency to act upon their bodies is a pressing concern. This is even more significant in instances of collective mobilization, where opposing groups strive to attract specific group members to their causes and steer them away from acting in terms of their opponents.

However, psychological discourses can have broader implications for the social and political sphere that are of direct relevance to political psychology and the study of social movements. Nikolas Rose (1996) has extensively discussed the expansion of psychology into all domains of social life, and the psychologized rhetoric of social movements cannot be excluded. Drawing heavily on Rose's work, psychological discourses not only depoliticize debates (e.g. Hopkins et al., 1996; Ntontis & Hopkins, 2018), but offer a novel means of conceptualizing social issues and effectively governing the social actors involved. I argue that claiming psychological expertise offers anti-abortionists authority that previous religious or ethical discourses did not. Psychology enables the authority exercised by anti-abortionists to appear in a rather ethical and therapeutic manner, emphasizing and respecting the purported nature of the individual. Thus, rather than attempting to persuade women to alter their decisions, anti-abortionists construct a therapist-patient relation and any criticism towards one's agency is not perceived as the violation of the latter but as a claim of truth. In the post-Enlightenment era when human agency is taken for granted (Meyer & Jepperson, 2000), the

adoption of psychological frameworks allows anti-abortionists to exercise power of women's actions while supposedly respecting their freedom. The latter is not negated, but any power exercised upon women occurs on the basis of the rationality that psychological expertise offers (Rose, 1996). Thus, *psychology grants anti-abortionists the ability to undermine women's agency without explicitly disregarding their ability to choose* – it renders their agency an area for psychological colonization and control. In this paper I argue that the discourse-oriented social psychological strand of research possesses invaluable theoretical, methodological, and analytical tools to explore those processes and strengthen the link between the sociological and social psychological exploration of political debates and by extent collective mobilization (cf. Jasper, 2017).

The study however is not without its limitations. The one-to-one interviews and my explicit pro-abortion position meant that no counter arguments were really offered other than prompts to facilitate discussion. It is very likely that due to norms against prejudice the same participants could have tailored their arguments to fit discussion with a non-supporter, but in closed settings the lines of argumentation could be completely different. Also, due to the nature of the interviews, we cannot know how the same arguments could be received by women or supporters of abortion. Psychological discourses might be more potent compared to religious ones, but their actual ability to shape public understandings of abortion and mobilize the public cannot be assumed. Last, the study is dependent on the UK context where psychology plays a key role in everyday life. However, anti-abortionists in other Western or non-Western contexts could refer to women's agency in completely different ways drawing on their respective cultural repertoires. Even within the Western context, the anti-abortion argumentation is still flexible and draws on both religious, ethical, and psychological repertoires.

Future research could address how agency features in the discourse of pro-abortion activists. Also, of importance is the exploration of how particular dismissals of the agency to abort (e.g., on ethical or psychological grounds) are perceived by opposing groups. Of interest would also be the ways that women's agency features in public anti-abortion talks. Arguments might be radically different when accounting for in public audiences, so ethnographic work might be needed. Finally, since the topic concerns women's agency, future research could explore how women themselves talk about their own choice to abort and the factors that shaped their decisions.

Overall, I have shown how psychological discourses allow anti-abortionists to undermine women's agency without explicitly disregarding their ability to choose abortion.

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Agency over the termination features as the causal factor of trauma, whereas unintentional termination is characterized as natural and thus qualitatively different to an abortion. Psychology provides a repertoire that victimizes and removes accountability from women, depoliticizes the debate, and allows anti-abortionists to exercise repressive politics in a therapeutic and ethical disguise, managing a pro-women profile. The consideration of how social actors attend to social norms and cultural standards when negotiating the agency of particular group members is of particular importance to researchers of political psychology and social movements.

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