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'Wrap our arms around them here in Ireland': Social media campaigns in the Irish abortion referendum

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‘Wrap our arms around them here in Ireland’: Social media campaigns in the Irish abortion referendum

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DOI: 10.1177/09579265221088132
journals.sagepub.com/home/das**Simon Statham**

Queen's University Belfast, UK

Helen Ringrow

University of Portsmouth, UK

Abstract

The 8th Amendment to the Irish Constitution, which codified a near-absolute ban on abortion in Ireland, was ratified in 1983 and removed after a high profile campaign to ‘Repeal the 8th’ in 2018. This article analyses the language of the pro-choice group Together for Yes and the anti-choice groups Love Both and Pro-Life Ireland that campaigned to ‘Save the 8th’. We combine an application of the Appraisal framework with an account of conceptual metaphor in a Critical Discourse Analysis of the language of both campaigns on the social network platform Twitter. Both sides of the ‘Repeal Referendum’ strategically utilised language across a wide range of semiotic modes. This article assesses the specific role of social media language in the Irish abortion referendum and connects these strategies to the wider campaign tactics of both sides.

Keywords

8th Amendment, appraisal, metaphor, abortion, social media

Introduction

This article will analyse the tweets of Together for Yes, the group which campaigned to repeal the 8th Amendment to the Irish Constitution, and those of two of the main groups that tried to retain the Irish abortion ban, Love Both and Pro-Life Ireland. The analysis will utilise two models prominent in critical linguistics to investigate these tweets,

Corresponding author:

Simon Statham, School of Arts, English and Languages, Queen's University Belfast, 2 University Square, Belfast BT7 1NN, UK.

Email: s.statham@qub.ac.uk

providing a holistic insight into the operation of these Twitter campaigns. Of importance for both campaigns was the concept of morality; each group argued that they represented what was *right*. The Appraisal framework of Martin and White (2005) provides a methodology to investigate levels of morality through a type of stance known as ‘judgement’. The lexical-semantic focus of this model makes it particularly useful for this article given that on Twitter, where posts are generally restricted to 140 characters, words are at a premium and are selected for maximum strategic effect. The findings of the Appraisal analysis are augmented by a focus on the prominence of metaphor in the tweets. Following Charteris-Black (2019), who repurposes insights on morality from the social psychologist Haidt (2012) for linguistic analysis, we examine the operation of metaphorical constructions in our dataset. Haidt’s ‘foundations’ for moral judgements are particularly relevant given the moral claims made by the campaigns. The models of analysis and our dataset are discussed later in the article.

Arguably, no researcher approaches an investigation with a truly ‘neutral’ view. Critical Discourse Analysis in particular has a history of advocating for research that aims to address inequalities and make explicit the researcher(s)’s political position. With this in mind, we wish to assert our support for reproductive autonomy in Ireland and elsewhere. This article therefore uses terminology – ‘pro-choice’ and ‘anti-choice’ – which refers to abortion in terms of ‘choice’. Framing abortion through the language of choice was conceived in a 1972 report by the Association for the Study of Abortion (ASA), which proposed that ‘right to choose’ should be utilised to counter the ‘right to life’ terminology used by those opposed to abortion (Siegel and Greenhouse, 2010). To be ‘pro-choice’ clarifies that those in favour of reproductive rights and bodily autonomy are not ‘anti-life’ and offers a counterbalance to the ‘pro-life’ label adopted by the anti-choice lobby, particularly after the landmark United States Supreme Court decision in *Roe v. Wade* (earlier uses of the term were more general and were used, for example, by anti-war protestors who conflated positions opposed to violence with those opposed to abortion). The following section provides socio-historical context of the Irish abortion debate.

A brief history of abortion in Ireland

The 8th Amendment to the Irish Constitution guaranteed the ‘right to life of the unborn’ and when passed by a referendum in 1983 represented a system amongst the most restrictive in the world in terms of women’s¹ reproductive rights and bodily autonomy. The 8th Amendment did not ban abortion in Ireland but rather constitutionally ensured that prohibition of the termination of a pregnancy would be almost absolute. The act of abortion was already proscribed by the Offences Against the Person Act 1861 in Great Britain and this law was adopted by the nascent Irish Free State at the beginning of the independence process. Whilst born of a revolution in which women played an important part, the policies and principles of the Irish State, socially conservative and religiously dogmatic, were disproportionately harmful to Irish women. The Abortion Act 1967 made abortion legal in Great Britain but the legislation was not extended to the six counties which formed the State of Northern Ireland, where, despite legislation in 2019, access to abortion services remains heavily curtailed. The prohibition of abortion across the island of

Ireland was ‘in keeping with the conservative nature of both jurisdictions (RoI and NI), in particular, in relation to the status of women, reproductive rights and sexual morality’ (Earner-Byrne and Urquhart, 2019: 2). Fischer (2016: 833) notes that the ‘moral purity at stake in the project of Irish identity formation was essentially a sexual purity enacted and problematized through women’s bodies’. Journalist and campaigner Una Mullally (2018: 4) states that Irish women’s bodies were policed collusively so that to be a sexual being ‘stinks of guilt and shame and secrecy’.

De Londras and Enright (2018: 3) are clear that ‘the 8th Amendment was not legally necessary’; there was no unified movement campaigning for reproductive rights in 1983 and the stranglehold of largely Catholic conservatism was secure. Rather, the imposition of the 8th Amendment was ‘at once a pre-emptive strike against any further liberation for women, and a backlash against the limited liberation that had already occurred’ (De Londras and Enright, 2018: 3). This ‘limited liberation’ refers to the partial legalisation of access to contraception in 1979 which, instead of marking the beginning of a liberalisation reminiscent of the type gathering pace internationally, led to the galvanising of conservative groups which organised to quash any notion of reform in Ireland. One such conservative group was the Pro-Life Amendment Campaign (PLAC), formed in 1981 to secure the constitutional clause which would eventually be realised as the 8th Amendment. In numbers remarkably similar to those who voted to repeal it 35 years later, the 8th Amendment was supported by 66.9% of the Irish electorate. The significant text of the Amendment is:

The State acknowledges the right to life of the unborn and, with due regard to the equal right to life of the mother, guarantees its laws to respect, and, as far as practicable, by its laws to defend and vindicate that right.

(*Bunreacht na hÉireann*, Article 40.3.3)

The placing of the life of the mother and the unborn foetus on equal constitutional footing had the practical effect of reducing the constitutional status of a woman to ‘mother’ as soon as she became pregnant. De Londras and Enright (2018: 3) state that this subordinates the life of a woman to the life of an unborn foetus and that, owing to the ‘Amendment’s concentration on life as mere survival’, the ‘as far as practicable’ clause had little or no capacity to rationalise an Amendment which was not possessed of ‘ordinary constitutional principles of proportionality’.

The reactionary groups which pushed for the adoption of the 8th Amendment strived to stop what Bishop Kevin McNamara labelled a ‘contraceptive mentality’ from leading to abortion reform. Just as contraceptive reform, albeit limited to those who were married, galvanised conservative and religious groups around the single issue of abortion in the early 1980s, the 8th Amendment led to a galvanisation of groups which supported access to abortion in some form but hitherto were not possessed of a single piece of legislation upon which to concentrate a campaign. Ralph (2020: 23) reminds us that ‘up until the formation of the PLAC and their aggressive, outspoken pro-life campaign, the subject of abortion was rarely aired in Irish public life’, but after 1983 it was ‘permanently on the agenda’ and, whilst there was little forum for debate in the equally

oppressive North, the Irish Republic was increasingly 'forced to confront the issue of abortion' (Earner-Byrne and Urquhart, 2019: 77).

The campaigns to Repeal and Save the 8th and the role of social media

The campaign for Repeal was coordinated through a range of traditional methods, from the production of rights-based literature to marches and rallies, and was punctuated by several high profile legal cases. The 1992 'X case', in which the Supreme Court quashed a High Court injunction preventing a 14-year-old rape victim from travelling to Britain to undergo a termination, brought into focus the 'abortion trail' travelled by generations of Irish women, at the rate of 12 per day, to secure healthcare abroad which was illegal at home. Abortion travel was the 'escape hatch in Irish law' (De Londras and Enright, 2018: 4) through which the dual controlling institutions of Church and State maintained the outward illusion that there was no abortion in Ireland. Maintenance of this misperception relied in part on women remaining largely silent on their abortion experiences in the face of social and religiously-driven prejudice. Rossiter (2009: 23), in discussing the important support networks for Irish women in Britain less than decade before the 8th Amendment was repealed, notes abortion seekers had 'yet to speak in their own name'. What De Zordo et al. (2016) note as a marked shift in the 'protest logics' of Together for Yes, the umbrella organisation which brought together over 70 civil society bodies such as the Abortion Rights Campaign and the National Women's Council of Ireland, a significant tactic of the campaign for Repeal was to 'encourage first-person abortion story-sharing by women in their efforts to convince voters of their position' (Ralph 2020: 12). Arveda Kissling (2018) saw the role of women's narratives as representing the movement from a 'whisper to a shout'. Ruane (2000: 5) notes in 'all the talk and high rhetoric of the endless abortion debate, the story of Irish women is usually authored by someone else, with few women daring to speak for themselves, to become visible'. A key strategy in the campaign of Together for Yes was to give women this voice and visibility, often by engaging a 'panoply of digital tools and online platforms that extend well beyond the traditional media' (Ralph, 2020: 70). This article will therefore analyse how Together for Yes, Love Both and Pro-Life Ireland used Twitter in their campaigns.

The online discourse arena of social media was an important factor in an almost perfect storm of circumstance which contributed to the conditions in which the 8th Amendment was repealed. In the years before 2018 the veneer of moral authority exercised over Irish life by religious groups gradually reduced as a result of a procession of scandals that exposed the systemic conspiracy of child abuse orchestrated by the Catholic Church in Ireland. The publication of the Ryan Report in 2009, which contained oral testimony from survivors of Catholic industrial schools, was a significant moment for the separation of Irish society from the Catholic Church. Accusations of selfishness and cruelty often levelled at abortion seekers seemed increasingly hypocritical after the revelations of the Ryan Report, which were accompanied by similar details of the cruelty in so-called 'mother and baby' homes and the Magdalene Laundries and a succession of paedophile priest scandals, exposing the myth of church compassion. In a country which only legalised homosexuality in 1993 and divorce in 1995, the recognition of gay

marriage in 2015 and the extension of abortion rights in 2018 are notable occasions of social progression which would likely have proven impossible had the moral authority of the Catholic Church not diminished in the intermittent years.

In this changing social context, the role of social media was an important discourse arena where campaigners no longer relied on an Irish media landscape previously hostile to progressive voices. One notable example of the potential of social media was the account @TwoWomenTravel, which used Twitter to document the harrowing and yet banal experience of travelling to Britain for a termination in August 2016. An analysis by Bouvier (2019) shows that the replies to the tweets were marked by language of bravery and solidarity. The two women live-tweeted the abortion trail from early morning airport to abortion clinic to hotel room, habitually directing the tweets to @EndaKennyTD, the Irish Taoiseach. The online context of @TwoWomenTravel ensured a version of this narrative that was not edited by the mainstream press and that could be aimed at the government more directly than had been possible pre-social media. The decline in the authority of the Catholic Church liberated somewhat the positions of traditional media and politicians on abortion rights by 2018 and the support of these institutionally ascendant groups had never previously been available to campaigners for Repeal. Nonetheless, the role of social media was not insignificant. The journey taken by the two women of @TwoWomenTravel was a journey undertaken by an average of 5000 women per year but before social media it would have been impossible to communicate the narrative in this form and so widely: the account generated over 40,000 retweets in 2 days. Social media therefore opened up semiotic modes of wide-reaching campaigning through which Together for Yes were able to secure the momentum which eventually led to Repeal's success.

Data

This article analyses tweets from the last 5 days of the campaign (20th–24th May 2018) of Together for Yes. The tweets are those posted by the campaign itself and number 272 posts, omitting the many tweets of endorsement and support from celebrities and ordinary citizens. We also analyse the 177 tweets from Love Both and Pro-Life Ireland in the same period. In terms of research ethics, these tweets are publicly accessible with a named account attached to them and so we reproduce examples here. Our sample is a focussed dataset to achieve the aim of exploring the tweets at a crucial time for both campaigns. For a comprehensive exploration into the themes of incivility and intolerance around this referendum on Twitter from multiple accounts and voices, we refer readers to the sample and study conducted by Oh et al. (2021).

As with most political campaigns, social media is a resource for sides which eventually lose as well as those who are victorious, so contrary to arguments for technological determinism (cf. Castells, 2012; Rosen, 2012), the medium itself is not necessarily definitive. In the case of the anti-choice movement in Ireland in 2018, it had lost the support of the government and mainstream media. Its association with the Catholic Church, which had ensured the dominance of its narrative for so long, was now a millstone rather than a boon. Being able to utilise Twitter was not sufficient to continue to deny Irish citizens bodily autonomy. But, like all linguistic resources in politics, such as speeches or pamphlets or

placards, one side may utilise these resources more effectively than the other and, in the context of other factors like governmental and mainstream media support, social media can make important contributions to victory and defeat. One week before the outcome of this election an *Irish Times*/IPSOS Mori poll found 17% of voters were undecided and 44% intended to vote Yes. When the day was carried, 66.4% supported Repeal so that a large majority of undecideds broke for the Yes side in the final week of campaigning. Securing the support of the ‘pro-choice anti-abortion middle ground’ (Ralph, 2020: 85) was crucial in this victory and Together for Yes adopted strategies which ensured the support of this demographic which can be retrieved from their tweets. In the analysis of Appraisal and Conceptual Metaphor Theory, tweets from Together for Yes are labelled ‘TY’, those from Love Both ‘LB’ and those from Pro-Life Ireland ‘PLI’.

Methodology: Appraisal and metaphor

Together for Yes made this campaign one about compassion for women and about addressing insufficient healthcare provision. They redefined and rejected certain anti-choice arguments, particularly the falsehood that abortion was not already routine for Irish women who were able to travel to access it. The sizeable Irish diaspora was targeted through some of the campaign’s most profound and iconic material, compelling citizens to come #HometoVote. The campaign of Love Both and Pro-Life Ireland adopted a nationalistic, anti-British position and specifically targeted proposed legislation for abortion as being too extreme. Their locally-focussed material contrasted starkly with their opponents’ international outlook. These opposing campaign priorities are reflected in the tweets of the final 5 days of campaigning and are analysed here through an application of Appraisal and Conceptual Metaphor Analysis.

The Appraisal system (Martin, 2000; Martin and White, 2005) is a lexical-semantic model which analyses how evaluation is encoded in language. The framework is ‘concerned with how speakers/writers approve and disapprove, enthuse and abhor, applaud and criticise’ and with ‘the construction by texts of communities of shared feelings and values’ (Martin and White, 2005: 1). In our analysis of the sample tweets, we consider how pro- and anti-choice campaigners communicate feelings and values about the Repeal Referendum in terms of evaluative judgement, one of three different types of evaluation categorised by the Appraisal system (alongside affect and appreciation). Judgement encodes stance about moral and ethical behaviour and is categorised into two different types depending upon the level of seriousness with which an action is viewed: social esteem and social sanction. Martin (2000: 156) states that social esteem ‘involves admiration and criticism’ whilst social sanction ‘involves praise and condemnation’ and Martin and White (2005: 52) offer the comparison of venial sins and mortal sins with social esteem and social sanction respectively. The former encodes judgements which are less serious and is subdivided into referents to normality, capacity and tenacity. Social sanction is subdivided into propriety and veracity. Evaluative judgement can be inscribed, directly rendered in text through, for example, an adjectival epithet like ‘dishonest’ or ‘callous’, or invoked through ideational tokens which, rather than directly judge, operate by implication of a judgemental response. For example, to describe a piece of legislation

as ‘limiting the rights to healthcare for Irish women’ would be to invoke a negative judgement of social sanction.

Application of the Appraisal framework to the tweets of the Irish abortion debate is particularly useful owing to this model’s focus on judgement, which addresses evaluations of how *right* something is. The essential position of Together for Yes is it is right that Irish women should have adequate access to healthcare and that the resultant suffering which has been caused by the denial of this access is morally wrong. For Love Both and Pro-Life Ireland it is right that the unborn be protected, therefore abortion in this vein represents a significant moral wrong. By considering these tweets in terms of the Appraisal framework, we can draw conclusions about how right or wrong aspects of the abortion debate are viewed by both campaigns.

In the application of Appraisal in the next section we establish the main strategic approach taken by both campaigns, exploring the role of evaluative judgement. Certain strategies also made significant use of conceptual metaphor to figuratively represent the Repeal Referendum, particularly the acts of voting and campaign organisation. The Appraisal analysis will therefore be augmented by an analysis of those parts of each campaign which utilise metaphorical mapping. Metaphor is particularly useful to investigate Irish abortion rights as it has a long-documented role in aiding to conceptualise shared beliefs, values and ideologies within groups or institutions, including in religious contexts (cf. Semino, 2008: 34; see also Charteris-Black, 2004, 2019; Koller, 2017). Our approach to metaphor is in the tradition of Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT; Lakoff and Johnson, 1980, 2003; see also Charteris-Black, 2004). This approach considers metaphor as a mapping between an accessible ‘source’ domain and an abstract ‘target’ domain. For example, the concepts of LIFE and LIFE DECISIONS can be conceptualised as a JOURNEY with certain PATHS to take (see Giovanelli and Harrison, 2018: 22–26 for a clear overview of CMT). We explore how familiar metaphors have been refashioned and reemployed in the context of abortion rights in Ireland, with reference to the previous Appraisal analysis and existing literature on metaphor. One such piece of existing research is Charteris-Black (2019). As part of Charteris-Black’s (2019) analysis of Brexit (including campaigning and the referendum), he applies social psychologist Haidt’s (2012) six dimensions of so-called ‘foundations’ for moral judgements to the ‘frames’ of his metaphor analysis. Given the significance of moral judgement in the campaigns’ language, illustrated by the prominence of evaluations of social sanction established by the discussion of Appraisal, insights provided by Haidt’s dimensions are particularly apposite. Although Haidt’s original work involved telling people invented stories that might violate these foundations and analysing their reactions, Charteris-Black (2019) repurposes them for linguistic analysis in a way that proves particularly effective here, especially as the themes around abortion often relate to moral judgements. Haidt’s (2012) foundations (the six ‘taste receptors’) are as follows (from Charteris-Black, 2019: 59):

1. **Care/harm**; this is the desire to protect others – especially vulnerable groups, such as children or the elderly, cute animals or endangered species.
2. **Fairness/cheating**; this is grounded in altruistic feelings towards unknown others, for example insisting on their right to free education and healthcare with expectations of reciprocal

altruism – that is, that these others will act in equally altruistic fashion towards you and your group in the future.

3. **Loyalty/betrayal**; this is tribal loyalty towards a social group or team with which individuals identify.

4. **Authority/subversion**; this is the view that a society requires hierarchies so that those who do not follow the rules are reprimanded by those responsible for enforcing these rules.

5. **Sanctity/degradation**; this is based on emotions such as disgust towards dead or decaying matters or towards behaviours such as incest that seem to challenge basic rules of morality. These may have their origin in resisting the spread of microbes, or genetic deformity.

6. **Liberty/oppresion**; this prevents attempts by one group to dominate another and is the basis for freedom fighters everywhere but is in tension with the Authority foundation: it is what pushes people to unite together against bullies and tyrants.

It should be noted that the Haidt's foundations are intended to further theorise the Conceptual Metaphor Analysis where applicable and, within the constraints of this article, do not constitute a full application of this model.

Appraisal in the Irish abortion campaigns on Twitter

By considering those elements of both campaigns which are judged in the tweets of Together for Yes and Love Both and Pro-life Ireland, several themes are identifiable which reflect key campaign strategies. In this section we analyse how these strategies use evaluative judgement and in the next section we expand on this account by discussing those tactics which employ metaphor.

One prominent Repeal strategy was to combat the anti-choice view of abortion as immoral by counter-arguing that to deny a woman's right to choose was uncompassionate, which could be redressed by a Yes vote. As demonstrated by the metaphor analysis below, votes were conceived as commodities which could be utilised to affect a tangible outcome. In terms of Appraisal, social sanction: propriety is prominent in tweets which implore voters to embrace 'compassionate change' (TY7), 'bring compassion home' (TY8), 'be caring and compassionate' (TY18) and 'provide compassionate healthcare' (TY21, 65, 76, 148, 180, 190, 253). Twenty-one tweets mention 'compassion' whilst seventy tweets refer to 'care'. The Repeal movement sought consistently to expose that 'idealised standards of sexual conduct were only ever a fantasy in reality' (Ralph, 2020: 28) to demonstrate that abortion was a part of Irish life even if the act remained illegal in Irish law. Fifteen tweets address abortion in the context of reality, for example, 'abortion is a reality' (TY12), 'bring our laws into line with reality' (TY62), 'the reality of Irish abortion' (TY220) and 'the reality that we have abortion already in Ireland' (TY252). The fact that the act of abortion, as outlined in the metaphor analysis, is not conceived figuratively in these tweets reinforces the literal reality of abortion in Irish life. The reality of abortion was central to the arguments of the pro-choice groups which were brought together under the Together for Yes banner in 2018 and establishing this reality allowed the campaign to

highlight that the denial of services was the denial of support. In Appraisal terms, this campaign argument brings together social sanction: veracity – addressing the ‘reality of abortion’ and making positive statements of truth, often as categorical assertions (‘abortion is a fact’ (TY12), ‘abortion is a reality’ (TY147)) – and social sanction: propriety. Statements which call on voters to ‘support women’ (TY11, 20, 21, 38, 39, 77, 139, 209), ‘supporting women at home’ (TY12, 65), ‘make Ireland a safer place for women and girls’ (TY13), ‘improve care in this country’ (TY14) invoke social sanction: propriety by referring to states of being which are morally right and which could be achieved by voting Yes. ‘Support’ occurs 43 times in the sample tweets.

Love Both and Pro-Life Ireland, on the other hand, routinely refused to acknowledge that abortion was already a reality but rather ‘Ireland under the 8th Amendment was imagined as an exceptional state in the “civilised world”’ (Browne and Nash, 2020: 58). By denying the presence of abortion except in the extremely limited circumstances permitted, the anti-choice movement was able to focus on what repeal of the 8th Amendment would mean for the perception of reality which had held for so long in Ireland. The phrase ‘abortion on demand’ carries connotative meaning which strongly invokes judgements of negative social sanction: propriety in an Irish context and beyond. It is arguably for this reason that the pro-choice side did not focus on ‘abortion on demand’ per se, which has led in turn to criticism of the legislation which eventually set out the conditions for abortion access post-referendum (see further De Londras, 2020; Ralph, 2020; Statham and Ringrow, forthcoming). The phrase appears 23 times in our data. Denying the reality of abortion and presenting a post-Repeal landscape as one which would be marked by ‘abortion on demand’ was problematic for many reasons, not least because it ignored the thousands of Irish citizens accessing abortion outside of the State every year. However, this was a potentially effective campaign strategy. Browne and Nash (2020: 62) state that ‘on demand’ ‘implies that abortion is an unnecessary, consumptive choice’ which invokes the ‘spectre of the “bad” woman who uses abortion as contraception’. This tactic of refusing to acknowledge the reality of abortion was used by Love Both and Pro-life Ireland to characterise any repeal legislation as both ‘too extreme’ and ‘too British’.

Through inscriptions of social sanction: propriety Love Both and Pro-Life Ireland bemoaned that ‘Abortion on demand for 12 weeks is TOO extreme’ (LB10), ‘what the government has proposed is too extreme’ (PLI45, 85) and referred to an ‘extreme abortion proposal’ (LB106). These groups were clear that the ‘Government’s proposal is far too extreme’ (LB19) and ‘extreme’ occurred 31 times in the dataset. The No side do not offer alternatives which would likely be given in terms of social esteem: normality nor do they utilise social esteem to critique the proposed legislation in any detail here. Instead, they forego the ‘criticism’ of esteem for the stronger ‘condemnation’ of social sanction. The Love Both and Pro-Life Ireland campaigns construed the referendum as a threat to a non-existent reality; by stating that ‘#8thref isn’t about abortion in limited cases’ (LB2, 6, 8, 11, 16, 20; PLI61, 62) they refer only to a view of abortion which is in line with an anti-choice perception. For Together for Yes, the referendum was attitudinally constructed through a type of Appraisal known as positive appreciation: valuation. The vote was presented as a historic and profound opportunity to affect change: it is a ‘once in a generation opportunity’ (TY3), ‘once in a lifetime chance’ (TY6), ‘once in a

lifetime opportunity' (TY13) and a 'once in a lifetime change' (TY14). The next section will outline how the act of voting was conceptually constructed as a resource possessed by individual voters. Together for Yes acknowledged the reality of abortion and utilised social sanction to construct a post-Repeal society where we could 'wrap our arms around them [Irish women] here in Ireland' (TY17) whilst Love Both and Pro-life Ireland used social sanction to condemn as too 'extreme' a referendum which would create 'abortion on demand'.

This threat of 'abortion on demand' had held for generations. Supported by Church and State, anti-choice regimes had successfully maintained an argument that legislation would lead to abortion as a 'casual option for women' and in 2018 they 'resurrected the "floodgate" trope that accompanied the majority of Irish liberal-based reforms from divorce to contraception' (Earner-Byrne and Urquhart, 2019: 126). Political arguments which present the threat of dystopian outcomes often succeed because they are highly emotive yet require no statistical proof. Two core things, however, were different in 2018. As discussed, the moral authority of the Church was at an all-time low and the voices of those who had experienced the cruelty of the status quo had now emerged as powerful forces. Together for Yes gave prominence to abortion stories in their campaign and could therefore dismantle the no-abortion position presupposed by anti-choice groups. Because abortion was already a reality, arguments which were based on a 'limited circumstances only' standpoint were much less effective, if not irrelevant.

Alongside arguments that the legislative changes would be 'too extreme', anti-choice groups adopted a nationalistic stance that consistently characterised the proposed changes in terms of the abortion environment in Britain, where the procedure has been legal for over half a century. Tweet 12(LB) includes a video of a local councillor who says the legislation will be 'even more extreme than Britain' and Tweet 10(LB) includes an interview with a GP condemning the 'British style' regime being proposed. Tweet 70 (PLI) connects 'unrestricted abortion in Britain' to 'ever increasing numbers of abortions being performed on disabled unborns' and includes a URL to an article on burkeanjournal.com. Tweet 95 (PLI) casts doubt on the mental health grounds of the proposed legislation, stating that 'British abortion providers admit that mental health grounds in Britain means social abortion in practice'. 'Social abortions' has the same judgemental power as 'abortion on demand' for an anti-choice audience. Casting Britain as 'sexually wanton and materialistic' (Earner Byrne and Urquhart, 2019: 59) was a longstanding mainstay of conservative voices in Irish society which were able to exploit hostility to Britain after centuries of colonial oppression. To be able to demonstrate that something is 'British' is a moral condemnation which invokes negative social sanction: propriety. Videos accompanying Tweets 6, 8, 11 and 16(LB) which assess the proposed legislation as operating on the 'same grounds as Britain' and on 'similar grounds to Britain' (LB20) invoke negative social sanction and represent a longstanding tactic of anti-choice figures. A member of the conservative Fianna Fáil party once described the contraceptive Bill as threatening the 'quality of life for which generations fought and died' (Hug, 1999: 107) whilst during the highly divisive campaign to impose the 8th Amendment in 1983, abortion had been described as 'a wrong that the English do to the Irish', with one declaration saying that 'the abortion Mills of England grind Irish Babies into Blood that Cries out to Heaven for Vengeance' (Fletcher, 2001: 577). Love Both and Pro-Life Ireland were somewhat less

poetic than well-established narratives in Irish nationalism which linked patriotism with moral or religious propriety, but their consistent invocation of negative social sanction by casting the changes being proposed as making Ireland be ‘on the same grounds as Britain’ relied on similar assumptions. They exploited the ‘geographical and cultural distinction between England and Ireland’ to assert an ‘Irish moral distinctiveness and to frame anti-abortion activism in Irish republican, anti-colonial and nationalist terms’ (Browne and Nash, 2020: 58). The Yes side sought to expose a fundamental contradiction in the anti-choice argument around abortion travel. Tweet 20 invokes negative social sanction: veracity against ‘some who oppose repeal [who] don’t have a problem with women relying on the UK system’. As discussed above, part of the reason Ireland was able to maintain an almost total ban on abortion for so long was the silence surrounding the morally stigmatised abortion trail. The State’s ‘reliance on exporting abortion’ (De Londras and Enright, 2018: 5) and the increased willingness of those who had experienced abortion travel to acknowledge this fact significantly undermined central anti-choice arguments.

These tweets are also emblematic of the locally-focussed campaign strategies of Love Both in particular. Tweets 2, 6, 8, 11, 16 and 20(LB) are accompanied by videos of usually young women representing different Irish counties and speaking out against the apparent extremity and ‘Britishness’ of the Bill. The use of younger voters in these videos was designed to counteract an impression that anti-choice voices were restricted to older people. Adopting a county-based focus allowed Love Both to appropriate county loyalties and identities which are well-established in other areas of Irish society, particularly Gaelic Games. Supporters of Repeal were judged therefore as being not just disloyal to one’s country but also disloyal to one’s county, which ‘needs to have its voice heard’. The examination of metaphor in the next section will expand upon how the A COUNTY IS A PERSON metaphor was used to construct perceptions of loyalty and betrayal. Each of the 26 Irish counties eligible to vote in the referendum (residents of the six Northern counties are recognised by the Constitution as Irish citizens but, often controversially for Irish nationalists, cannot vote in Constitutional referenda) constructed almost identical videos like this for the campaign. Videos from seven counties were re-tweeted on the final day of campaigning, presumably selected owing to electoral mathematics. For example, Roscommon (as part of the Roscommon-Galway constituency) was the only area to oppose gay marriage in 2015 and Donegal was the only county not to back Repeal of the 8th Amendment. The inclusion of the video from Dublin, which is presented by a seemingly privileged male student, is an anomaly given Dublin’s overwhelming pro-Repeal electorate and the fact that the Yes campaign consistently represented lack of abortion access as a feminist issue.

Whilst the campaign of Love Both was markedly nationalist, these tweets demonstrate that the Together for Yes campaign was internationalist. Rather than adopt a view of Ireland as composed of individual counties, the Yes side cast Ireland as a country with a global presence but failing to provide modern standards of healthcare. A profoundly poignant aspect of Irish identity is connected to the emigrant tradition and the Irish diaspora, the generations of Irish people who have travelled in their millions to countries around the world and who live in communities retaining close ties to Ireland. In 2015 the campaign to legalise same sex marriage successfully appealed to Irish citizens abroad to come ‘home to vote’, a campaign strategy replicated with particular importance by

Together for Yes. Some of the most powerful campaign material produced by Together for Yes involved recasting the emigrant experience as a return journey to Dublin, which also links emotionally to the importance of travel in the Irish abortion journey (see further Statham and Ringrow, forthcoming). Travelling home to support Repeal was linked explicitly to the concept of solidarity at the core of the pro-choice movement and evaluatively constructs an argument through social sanction that it is 'right' to support Irish women. This is manifested in the 'care' and 'compassion' tweets discussed above and is also evident in tweets reminding voters that a 'woman you love needs your YES tomorrow' (TY3) and 'think of the women in your lives and think of their lives and trust them' (TY9).

Conceptual metaphor in the Irish abortion campaigns on Twitter

The discussion of Appraisal establishes the main campaign strategies of Together for Yes and Love Both and Pro-Life Ireland and analyses how evaluative judgement is used as a means of persuasion in our dataset. Both campaigns also used metaphor to conceptualise specific elements of the Repeal Referendum and in this section we expand upon the observations of the Appraisal analysis through an application of Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT). Our approach to CMT is an adapted version of Knapton's (2013) framework: conduct a close reading of the selected data; mark metaphorical expressions (using MIP, metaphor identification procedure, from the Pragglejaz Group²); and group metaphorical expressions according to their conceptual metaphors (see Ringrow, 2020a, 2020b). We focus primarily on the target domains for: ABORTION; ABORTION RIGHTS; THE REFERENDUM; VOTE/VOTING; THE CAMPAIGNS; and THE CAMPAIGNING ORGANISATIONS (i.e. as agents of the campaigns above).

In the key campaign strategies established by the discussion of Appraisal, we can identify links between these foundations for moral judgement and the campaign tactics. Together for Yes viewed legislation for abortion as closely connected to the provision of care and perceived the extension of abortion rights as liberating Irish women from an oppressive status quo that ignores the realities of abortion. As established above and expanded upon below, Love Both and Pro-Life Ireland viewed these rights as a betrayal of county and country. In the following analysis, we also draw on Haidt's (2012) dimensions where they connect to our metaphor identification.

Abortion

In the selected tweets, there are no references to the procedure of abortion itself, such as how the act is performed, by either group. This might be unsurprising for Together for Yes, whose overall campaign focussed more on lack of access to support for abortion. It is noted in the Appraisal analysis that abortion is referred to through categorical assertions in terms of it being a literal fact, in Tweet 12(TY) ('abortion is a fact') and Tweet 16(TY) ('the reality of abortion') for example, but there was little to be gained strategically by focussing on the procedure itself. The anti-choice groups, on the other hand, did explicitly address the procedure of abortion at other times in their campaign.

One such controversial example was their use of arguably graphic (and contested) images of foetuses on placards. There are a few possible explanations for the lack of references to the procedure of abortion in the tweets analysed here. Love Both and Pro-Life Ireland could have been trying a slightly different tactic nearer the end of their campaign by focussing more on (apparent) shared community values (see later discussions of county affiliations). They may also have wanted to avoid content that could be flagged as ‘sensitive’ or ‘distressing’ vis-à-vis Twitter guidelines.

Abortion rights

Whilst Together for Yes did not conceptualise abortion rights through metaphor, anti-choice groups did however draw on the conceptual metaphor formula *ABORTION RIGHTS ARE A MOVING ENTITY*, where ‘this’ in several tweets refers to abortion rights (although, arguably, the anti-choice side would reframe ‘abortion rights’ as ‘murder’). These tweets are formulaic; the content is basically identical but the county names have been changed (see later discussions of the emphasis on county affiliations): ‘Only a NO VOTE can stop this’ (six occurrences: LB2, LB8, LB11, LB16, LB20). The ‘NO VOTE’ here works metonymically to stand for the person who is voting. This metaphor makes use of the *SOURCE-PATH-GOAL* schema, as we can trace a trajectory or *JOURNEY* from a starting point (i.e. the current restrictions to abortion) along a path towards an intended destination (i.e. a referendum result that legalises abortion). Voting ‘no’ would derail this intended destination and can therefore be viewed as an obstacle or detour in the path to the preferred outcome for this group (cf. Giovanelli and Harrison, 2018: 14–15). This use of the moving entity metaphor for Love Both helps to emphasise that this is something that needs to be urgently halted, so that the final destination of legalised abortion access cannot be reached. In other contexts, progress is often conceptualised as forward motion (Charteris-Black, 2004); we could argue here the No side would want to halt what some might see as progress.

The referendum

Whilst anti-choice tweets do address the referendum directly in this dataset, including through use of the hashtag #8thref, metaphors relating to the referendum itself were only found in the Together for Yes tweets. These metaphors tended to describe the referendum as a physical entity or at least as something with physical or material properties. ‘One day can change everything’ (TY6) enables the conceptualisation of the referendum as a physical agent able to change the properties of something else (metaphorically, here, reproductive rights and the broader Irish social and political landscape). Lakoff and Johnson (2003: 31, 170) argue that events are often viewed metaphorically as substances, containers, or substances in a container; meaning these activities can more easily be both described and quantified. This *CONTAINER* metaphor occurs in the Together for Yes tweets as *THE REFERENDUM IS A BOUNDED OBJECT* or *THE REFERENDUM IS A SUBSTANCE IN A CONTAINER*: ‘This referendum will be tight’ (TY1). There is a similar example of ‘The vote tomorrow will be tight’ (TY14) where the vote is being used as a synonym for ‘the referendum’ itself (in contrast with the *VOTE/VOTING* concepts discussed in the next section). ‘Tight’

suggests a difficulty in containment, highlighting the importance of the situation in the final countdown to the referendum.

Vote/voting

The act of voting is also described as a substance with physical properties that could potentially be quantified (cf. Lakoff and Johnson, 2003: 31, 170), with the conceptual metaphor formula *A VOTE IS A COMMODITY* recurring in both the Together for Yes and Love Both tweets:

- ‘A woman you love needs your YES tomorrow’ (TY3)
- ‘We need every YES vote there is’ (TY10)
- ‘A yes means a better Ireland for women’ (TY11)
- ‘We need your NO vote’ (LB9)
- ‘Don’t wait. . . your NO vote is needed now!’ (LB7)

If a vote is a commodity that can be given, it may also be viewed as a limited resource (cf. Lakoff and Johnson, 2013: 9). In the context of this referendum, this is literally true: citizens each have one vote and one such opportunity to use it. There may also be a sense of slight detachment here: consider ‘we need your NO vote’ in comparison to ‘we need you to vote NO’; the latter seems to be more directly connected to the target addressee. The broader Save the 8th campaign was essentially arguing for the status quo (i.e. no change) in an extremely politically charged context. There are parallels here with the Remain vote in the Brexit referendum: Charteris-Black (2019) suggests a broader range of framing strategies and lexical innovation were available to the Leave campaign because they were offering something perceived as new and different (see also Buckledee, 2018).

The campaigns

The campaigns themselves were referred to by Together for Yes in the following two tweets:

- ‘[. . .] one last push to bring compassion home’ (TY8)
- ‘This is it, the final push for yes’ (TY13)

These tweets correspond with the two (related) conceptual metaphor formulae: *PROGRESS IS FORWARD MOTION* and *CAMPAIGNS ARE WAYS OF MOVING ON THE GROUND* (cf. Charteris-Black, 2004). This highlights the physicality (‘push’) of the final momentum of the campaign, which contrasts pointedly with the ‘stopping’ of abortion rights mentioned in the previous section. The use of ‘push’ indicates a force-dynamic schema: we have a metaphorical extension (from a physical interaction) of ‘push’ as a movement towards a certain outcome of this referendum (Hart, 2011; see also Talmy, 2000). In terms of the interactional roles of the participants in this process (following Hart, 2011; Johnson, 1987) the *force entities* are the Yes voters who enact intrinsic force towards the action. Yes voters as a collective therefore play an interactional role in actioning change.

There may be an additional journey metaphor in the first ‘push’ example, as compassion is conceptualised as something that can be brought home (to Ireland). As discussed in the Appraisal analysis, a theme repeatedly present in the Yes campaign was the role of the Irish diaspora who were targeted consistently to come ‘home to vote’. In addition, Earner-Byrne and Urquhart (2019: 127) argue that the Together for Yes campaign focussed on the ‘3 Cs’ of Compassion, Care and Change. The use of the word ‘compassion’ corresponds to Haidt’s foundation 1. **Care/Harm** (the desire to protect others), suggesting that abortion seekers are not currently protected in Ireland and the Appraisal analysis demonstrates how to be ‘caring and compassionate’ was central to the social sanction of several tweets.

The campaigning organisations

The target domain of the campaigning organisations themselves was only found in the Love Both tweets, using the formula COUNTRIES ARE PEOPLE/A COUNTY IS A PERSON, which is a slight variation of the common conceptual metaphor NATIONS ARE PEOPLE (cf. Chilton and Lakoff, 1995; Musolff, 2016). Here, nations are seen as a kind of mini-state, reinforcing this well-established delineation of Ireland along county lines. The content of these examples was again very formulaic, as these tweets had been adapted slightly to change county names but still represented a unified campaign message:

- ‘County Louth needs to have its voice heard’ (LB2)
- ‘County Donegal needs to have its voice heard’ (LB20)
- ‘County Westmeath needs to have its voice heard’ (LB6)
- ‘County Laois needs to have its voice heard’ (LB8)
- ‘County Limerick needs to have its voice heard’ (LB11)
- ‘County Offaly needs to have its voice heard’ (LB16)

Whilst specific counties are mentioned here, which may have been strategic in the final stages of the campaign as suggested by the Appraisal analysis, these tweets actually refer to the No campaigns within those respective counties. In a way, the county is therefore seen as *standing for* the No campaigns and as speaking for them metonymically, as part of a constructive collective identity. These campaigns stand for the anti-Repeal views of their selected counties. In this way, as Musolff argues:

[. . .] nation personifications help to create an image of a unified social collective that is able to ‘speak with one voice’ and ‘act’ as a singular, independent agent. Such an image is more advantageous than a ‘polyphonic’ self-presentation as the basis for efficient diplomatic action.

(Musolff, 2016: 104)

In terms of the Haidt foundations, this county affiliation corresponds with **3. Loyalty/Betrayal** (tribal loyalty towards a social group or team with which individuals identify) as this metaphor is used as a way of voicing (and reinforcing) a shared collective identity and belief along familiar county lines (whether this identity is shared or not is another

matter). As Musolff (2016: 113) argues in relation to the *NATIONS ARE PEOPLE* metaphor, this metaphor is often used to (over)simplify a complicated issue; to reduce it to something that can be easily articulated and solved. In this case, County X is presented as being against Repeal and county citizens must vote accordingly. Elsewhere, however, such as in the appropriation of recognisable iconic-like images of 'Mother Ireland' being against the 8th Amendment on banners at Repeal marches, there were instances of *NATIONS ARE PEOPLE* where 'Ireland' is conceptualised as saying YES. The broader Together for Yes campaign focussed more on Ireland (including citizens abroad) coming together as one nation to enact change.

Conclusion

From the above CMT analysis, we can identify shared, similar uses of metaphor between the two groups in their conceptualisation of *A VOTE IS A COMMODITY*: a limited resource that one can 'give' in order to enact change, stop change, or (more broadly) to demonstrate their views. Other divergent uses of metaphor included Love Both's use of *COUNTIES ARE PEOPLE* to present a shared, county-level perspective on abortion, and Together for Yes' conceptualisation of the Repeal campaign as a forward move towards progress (including *CAMPAIGNS ARE WAYS OF MOVING FORWARD ON THE GROUND*). In the context of Brexit, Charteris-Black (2019: 15) argues that the EU referendum provided the ideal framework for setting up 'them' and 'us' groupings. Whether metaphors are used by opposing groups in similar and divergent ways, they help to conceptualise and reinforce the ideology and worldview of that particular 'side' (Charteris-Black, 2019: 15), and this is precisely the pattern found in the CMT analysis of the pro-choice and anti-choice tweets.

The conclusions of the CMT analysis build on our previous Appraisal findings. Particularly, it is illustrated that both campaigns for and against the repeal of the 8th Amendment utilise evaluative judgement in the form of social sanction to construct the Repeal Referendum as, on the one hand, about the provision of healthcare at home and, on the other, as extreme to an extent which compromises both moral propriety and national identity. For Love Both and Pro-Life Ireland, repealing the 8th Amendment was envisaged as bringing 'abortion on demand' on the 'same grounds as Britain' and the electorate was implored to give the *COMMODITY* of a No vote so that each county could 'have its voice heard'. Together for Yes presented the referendum, perhaps with a nod to the socio-historical circumstances of Ireland since the decline of the moral authority of the Catholic Church, as a 'once in a generation' opportunity for change. By voting Yes, the electorate could satisfy a moral obligation to 'make Ireland a safer place for women and girls'; the referendum was an opportunity to be 'caring and compassionate'. At the core of this argument was establishing that 'abortion is a fact' through statements of social sanction: veracity. A key campaign strategy of Together for Yes was to use the voices of women themselves to confirm the 'reality of abortion'. Failure to provide services at home then becomes a question of **Care/Harm** and repealing the 8th Amendment offers protection for Irish women, a group made profoundly vulnerable by the amendment and by generations of shame and secrecy which founded it.

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Notes

1. As with the work of De Londras and Enright (2018), our terminology in this article includes all abortion seekers, including trans and non-binary Irish citizens.
2. See https://www.lancaster.ac.uk/staff/eiaes/Pragglejaz_Group_2007.pdf for a detailed explanation of the Pragglejaz (2007) method. One of its aims is to provide more transparency and systematicity to CMT.

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Author biographies

Simon Statham is Lecturer in English Language and Linguistics at Queen’s University Belfast. He is author of *Redefining Trial by Media* (Benjamins, 2016) and co-author of *Language and Power* (Routledge, 2019).

Helen Ringrow is Senior Lecturer in Communication Studies and Applied Linguistics at the University of Portsmouth. She is author of *Language of Cosmetics Advertising* (Palgrave, 2016) and co-editor of *Contemporary Media Stylistics* (Bloomsbury, 2020).

Appendices

Tweets are retrievable through the Twitter accounts of Together for Yes (@Together4yes), Love Both (@lovebothireland) and Pro-Life Ireland (@prolifeireland).