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BREAKING THE SILENCE: WOMEN'S STORIES AS AGENTS OF CHANGE FOR
ABORTION RIGHTS IN IRELAND

by

Kelsey O'Donnell

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for graduation with Honors in the International Studies

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Breaking the Silence:
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Kelsey O'Donnell

A thesis submitted under the supervision of Deirdre Egan at the University of Iowa in partial fulfillment of the requirements for graduation with Honors in International Studies

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Abstract

Ireland's abortion laws are among the most restrictive in the world. Since the ratification of the Eighth Amendment and subsequent constitutional ban on abortion in 1983, it is illegal to have an abortion in Ireland except in cases of a medical intervention to save a woman's life. There are many reasons why a woman may not want to carry a pregnancy to term, including risk to health, rape, incest, diagnosis of a fatal fetal abnormality, financial or family concerns, and despite the law, Irish women still have abortions. Each day, approximately twelve women and girls living in Ireland travel to England to access abortion services. In the past, the stories of the women who have had an abortion have been largely absent from the political debate. Today, abortion rights activists are focusing on bringing awareness to the community and reducing the stigma surrounding abortion. Contemporary activists are strategically including women's faces and stories through social media, arts, and culture to normalize abortion and shift public opinion. Women themselves are taking to Twitter and Facebook to share their experiences of abortion. The Repeal Project promotes women's stories on their website. The X-ile Project is putting a face to those that have traveled abroad to access abortion services. These projects highlight women's voices and stories, challenge the stigma, and help to normalize the abortion experience.

Introduction

Ireland's abortion laws are among the most restrictive in the world. Since the ratification of the Eighth Amendment and subsequent constitutional ban on abortion in 1983, it is illegal to have an abortion in Ireland except in cases of a medical intervention to save a woman's life. If a woman has an abortion in Ireland, she faces up to fourteen years in prison. There are many reasons why a woman may not want to carry a pregnancy to term, including risk to health, rape, incest, diagnosis of a fatal fetal abnormality, financial or family concerns, and despite the law, Irish women still have abortions. Each day, approximately twelve women and girls living in Ireland travel to England to access abortion services.¹

My personal interest in the abortion issue began when I arrived in Ireland from the University of Iowa for a yearlong study abroad program. Although abortion is controversial in the United States, I never thought much about it as it was always something that I knew was available to me if necessary. After getting involved with the student organization Amnesty International Society at University College Cork (UCC), I was shocked to learn about the abortion law in Ireland. I participated in the Abortion Rights Campaign's fourth annual March for Choice on September 26, 2015 in Dublin. With my friends from UCC and thousands of others, we marched through the city center calling for a repeal of the Eighth Amendment. Earlier that day, I met with members of Amnesty International Ireland and heard firsthand what activists are doing to make a change. Most importantly, I learned about the negative impact the law has on many women and their families.

It was during a discussion panel called Repeal the Eighth Amendment that I heard Gerry Edwards talk about the trauma his wife and family went through after a fatal fetal abnormality

¹ "Psychological, Physical and Financial Costs of Travel," *Irish Family Planning Association*, accessed April 29, 2017, <https://www.ifpa.ie/node/506>.

diagnosis. His wife, Gaye, was twenty weeks pregnant when she was told that there was no prospect of survival after the birth of their baby. Under the abortion law in Ireland, their only solution was to continue with the pregnancy until the end. He talked about the pain of Gaye being visibly pregnant, receiving congratulations and well wishes from strangers, while knowing that her baby was never going to survive. After receiving the worst possible news about a much-wanted pregnancy, they felt utterly alone and abandoned by their own country. They were forced to go to a hospital in Belfast, Northern Ireland, part of the United Kingdom, in order to receive care and support.² Unfortunately, their story is one among thousands of stories of women who have been impacted by the abortion laws.

After my initial shock that something like this could happen to a couple in modern Ireland, I wanted to learn more about this issue. I consulted peer-reviewed journal articles and books to obtain background information on the history of society, law, and abortion activism in Ireland. However, I was particularly interested in learning more about the work of activists. For most feminists, safe and legal access to abortion is a human right, especially when necessary to protect a woman's life and health, if the pregnancy is the result of rape or incest, or if there is a diagnosis of a fatal fetal abnormality. To investigate the various projects and activities of contemporary activists, I looked at social media, including Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube, organization's websites, news articles from Irish and international news outlets, and online interviews with activists. I supplemented this research with information provided in video interviews with two activists working on the abortion rights issue in Ireland. While neither of them asked to remain anonymous, both of their names have been changed to hide their identities. Aoife Murphy has worked for the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission and has

² Shona Murray, "This is How Ireland's Abortion Laws Affect Women and Families," *Time*, June 9, 2015, <http://time.com/3912609/ireland-abortion-effects/>.

particular experience with Irish and international human rights law. Emily Bullen is a founding member of the Abortion Rights Campaign and has worked a lot with media to reduce the abortion stigma. Each interview was semi-structured, guided by a list of six open-ended questions (see appendix), and lasted approximately 45 minutes.

While initial efforts to overturn the constitutional ban on abortion focused on legal appeals to the European Union, today abortion rights activists are focusing on bringing awareness to the community and reducing the stigma surrounding abortion. In the past, the stories of the women who have had an abortion or who are significantly impacted by the abortion law have been largely absent from the political debate. Contemporary activists are strategically highlighting individual women's faces and stories through social media, arts, and culture to normalize abortion and shift public opinion.

History of Abortion in Ireland

In order to understand why abortion remains a critical issue in Ireland today, it is important to trace the political, economic, and social conditions of Irish society in the past century. Slow changes to Irish abortion law over the past one hundred and sixty years can be understood as due to the heavy influence of the Catholic Church on the Irish nation, as well as the subsequent shift in gender roles due the internationalization of the Irish state. The introduction of liberal values associated with globalization and late capitalism threatened traditional Irish identity. As a form of resistance to changing ideologies surrounding the role of women in society, the abortion debate came to the forefront of the political discussion in the 1970s and 1980s as a means of maintaining some sort of control over Irish social order. In the

following pages, I outline the history of abortion and reproductive activism in Ireland within the context of this changing society.

Dating back to the 16th and 17th centuries, Irish identity has long involved allegiance to the Catholic Church. Within this institution, women are associated with images of domesticity and maternity, seen more through their reproductive value to the nation than as individuals capable of a wide range of contributions to society. This image of Irishness as Catholic has justified the subordination of women in Irish society. The Church furthered a national heterosexual, family-oriented identity by teaching moral values in the context of traditional birthing and parenting norms. Women were seen as playing a key role in society because they reproduce and educate new members of Irish culture across generations. By controlling women's reproduction and sexuality, the Church aimed to control the future of the Irish nation.³

Historically, Catholicism has been strongly associated with Irish identity and nationalism.

The importance of the Catholic Church in Ireland can be recognized through its political and social influence. The Church in Ireland has always been adamantly opposed to anything threatening its positioning of the family unit as the center of society, including divorce, contraception, and abortion. This opposition manifested in bans on all three of these rights. The Offences Against the Person Act was passed in 1861, and effectively criminalized abortion under all circumstances. Until the Protection of Life During Pregnancy Act of 2013, this remained the basis of Irish criminal law on abortion.⁴ After the establishment of an independent Irish state, an identity with Catholic values and a special place for the Catholic Church was enshrined in the 1937 Constitution. Article 41 of the Constitution declared, "the State recognizes the Family as

³ Lisa Smyth, *Abortion and Nation: The Politics of Reproduction in Contemporary Ireland* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2005), 33-37.

⁴ "Abortion in Ireland: Legal Timeline," *Irish Family Planning Association*, accessed April 29, 2017, <https://www.ifpa.ie/Hot-Topics/Abortion/Abortion-in-Ireland-Timeline>.

the natural, primary, and fundamental unit group of Society,” while article 44 notes the Catholic Church as the “guardian of the faith professed by the great majority of citizens.”⁵ The Catholic Church largely controlled education, healthcare, media, and domestic relations, and had significant influence on economic and political policies. Many social services were provided by voluntary organizations under Catholic control. The Censorship of Publications Act in 1929 made it illegal to publish and distribute information on contraception, the Criminal Law Act of 1935 made it illegal to sell or import contraception, and a marriage bar in 1932 prevented married women from working in the education and civil service sectors to promote domestic duties. In concurrence with these acts, the Fifteenth Amendment of the Irish Constitution banned divorce.⁶ These legal actions not only indicated the hegemony of conservative, Catholic values, but also affirmed the primary role of women in society as conserving the traditional family and the sanctity of life from conception.

The budding of feminist activism in Ireland occurred as a broadening of international engagement and a questioning of the legitimacy of the Catholic Church led to significant social changes. Ireland joined the European Economic Community in 1973, which is a secular, liberal political association.⁷ This led to increased foreign investment, and an influx of immigrants who contributed to a multiethnic environment by bringing differing values and cultural traditions. With industrialization, the Irish economy moved from an agricultural base to one more focused on industry. This economic development brought change in social policies as well. The Irish Government shifted more towards the social welfare model adopted by several European countries and invested more in social services, reducing some of the influence the Catholic

⁵ Jennifer Dewan, "The Practice of Politics: Feminism, Activism and Social Change in Ireland," (PhD diss, Columbia University, 2008), 74-80.

⁶ Dewan, "The Practice of Politics", 79-80.

⁷ Smyth, *Abortion and Nation*, 8.

Church previously had in this area. As more employment became available in urban areas, more women started entering the workforce and family size decreased. For example, in 1973, the marriage bar that prevented women from working in the civil service was removed.⁸

Additionally, a secularization of Irish society began to take hold. Although large numbers of the population still identified as Catholic, church attendance began to decrease and the popularity of religious vocations declined. This was partly due to the internationalization of Irish society but it was also a result of the eruption of several scandals within the Church. Multiple stories of sexual abuse and pedophilia by leaders of the Church emerged, which significantly undermined the authority of the Catholic hierarchy. Many Irish people pointed to the hypocrisy of the Church's values on morality, sexuality, and family and the legitimacy of the Church was called into question.⁹ The influence of the Catholic Church remains important today but these events accelerated a rethinking of traditional social roles in Irish society.

The first wave of feminist activism in Ireland after the Second World War focused on a campaign for access to contraception in the 1970s. The issue of contraception was nearly as divisive in Irish society as the current issue of abortion and there was a lot of resistance to legalization. Access to contraception was limited to a few doctors prescribing it as a menstrual regulator, but all importation was illegal. Irish Women United and Irish Women's Liberation Movement focused on fighting a battle to change the law as well as spreading information about contraception and handing out free condoms. Family planning clinics emerged in several cities to offer advice and provide contraception.¹⁰ By 1979, contraception was made legal for married couples, but it wasn't until 1985 that it became legal for all people over the age of eighteen.

⁸ Dewan, "The Practice of Politics", 101-116.

⁹ Ibid., 137.

¹⁰ Jennifer Schweppe, ed, *The Unborn Child, Article 40.3.3 and Abortion in Ireland: Twenty-Five Years of Protection?* (Dublin: Liffey Press, 2008), 17-19.

Widespread availability of contraception in Ireland didn't occur until 1993. The women's movement gained momentum at the end of the 1970s, including other issues such as violence against women, employment law, and the legalization of divorce.¹¹ It was with the rise in women's activism and the changing social environment that the topic of abortion was pushed to the forefront of politics in the 1980s.

A key reason for the push for an abortion referendum was the influence of abortion activism in Britain and the United States. Britain legalized abortion in 1967 and remains a link to Irish women seeking an abortion today.¹² In 1973 alone, 1,193 Irish addresses were reportedly given at abortion clinics throughout Britain. By 1983, that number jumped up to 3,677 addresses, or approximately 10 women traveling to Britain to access abortion services each day that year.¹³ Across the Atlantic in the United States, the Supreme Court made a decision on the landmark case *Roe v. Wade* in 1973. This case ruled in favor of women's right to an abortion, effectively legalizing abortion services with limitations in all states. As Lisa Smyth states in her book on abortion and the nation, the influence of these international cases "threatened to undermine the hegemony of conservative and patriarchal discourse through which Irish legal, political, and social decisions and policies had been produced."¹⁴ It was at this time that two distinct organizations formed to fight on opposite sides of the abortion debate. The Pro-Life Amendment Campaign (PLAC) was founded in 1981 with the goal of enshrining a constitutional right to life of the unborn to ensure that legal abortion was not introduced in Ireland. The PLAC played a significant role in the campaign for the Eighth Amendment to the Constitution. On the other side, the Women's Right to Choose Group formed in Dublin in 1979 in order to advocate for

¹¹ Dewan, "The Practice of Politics", 177.

¹² Smyth, *Abortion and Nation*, 9.

¹³ Schweppe, *The Unborn Child*, 18.

¹⁴ Smyth, *Abortion and Nation*, 9.

decriminalizing abortion, the provision of pregnancy-counseling services, and, ultimately, for preventing the Eighth Amendment. This group formed the Irish Pregnancy Counseling Centre in 1980, which later became Open Door Counseling, which provided unbiased counseling services and abortion referrals to British clinics.¹⁵

The Irish abortion referendum took place in 1983 during a time of anxiety about changing national identity and the promotion of conservative values by a still powerful Catholic Church. After a harsh and divisive campaign, the referendum passed by 66.90% or 841,233 votes for and 416,136 votes against.¹⁶ The Eighth Amendment of the Constitution, or Article 40.3.3, reads, “The State acknowledges the right to life of the unborn and, with due regard to the equal right to life of the mother, guarantees in its laws to respect, and, as far as practicable, by its laws to defend and vindicate that right.”¹⁷ The language of the amendment essentially made the right to life of the unborn equal to that of the mother and caused controversy and confusion for years to come.

Following the referendum in the 1980s and early 1990s, several cases removed the right to access information and non-directive counseling services. Two particular services, Open Line Counseling and the Dublin Well Woman Centre were targeted and shut down for providing support and assistance to Irish women in crisis pregnancies who may have been seeking an abortion. There was a mass censorship of books, brochures, phone books, and magazines to remove all mention of abortion or abortion service information.^{18,19} Despite these actions, the number of women traveling to Britain for abortions did not decrease. Irish women were often linked to these services through an ‘underground abortion trail’ where London-based Irish

¹⁵ Dewan, “The Practice of Politics”, 193.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 191.

¹⁷ “Abortion in Ireland: Legal.”

¹⁸ Smyth, *Abortion and Nation*, 10-11.

¹⁹ Schweppe, *The Unborn Child*, 29.

activists provided support, accommodation, and assistance through organizations such as the Irish Women's Abortion Support Group (IWASG) and the Irish Abortion Solidarity Campaign (Iasc).²⁰ The culture of secrecy surrounding abortion increased significantly during this time and activist work was rooted in confidentiality. It wasn't until the *X* case and the subsequent three referendums in 1992 that abortion was thrown into the political discourse once again.

In February of 1992, a fourteen-year-old girl, who had become pregnant as a result of rape, was prevented by the State from traveling to Britain to procure an abortion. Legally known as the *X* case, details of the situation were brought forth through the media and discussed widely among campaigners, politicians, and citizens. For the first time, there was a national awareness of the way the Eighth Amendment could cruelly impact real and vulnerable women and girls, as it became known that the young girl in the *X* case was raped and suicidal. This case also made it clear that article 40.3.3 was incredibly vague and allowed for controversial interpretations of the law. Abortion activists argued that the case valued the right to life of the fetus over a young girl's right to bodily integrity and restricted Irish citizens' freedom of movement. The media reports described the girl as part of a law-abiding, middle class family.²¹ In other words, she was presented as an innocent victim who could have been anyone's daughter, niece, or friend and who was suffering the effects of an inhumane law. As a result, there was public outrage that the State could force a girl to carry a pregnancy that resulted from rape and prevent her from obtaining care outside of Ireland when she was suicidal. Arguably, one of the most important results of the *X* case was a growing awareness and acceptance of a need, however limited, for some kind of abortion services in Ireland.²²

²⁰ Ann Rossiter, *Ireland's Hidden Diaspora: The 'Abortion Trail' and the Making of a London-Irish Underground, 1980-2000* (London: IASC Publishing, 2009), 12-19.

²¹ Smyth, *Abortion and Nation*, 1-6.

²² Dewan, "The Practice of Politics", 211.

The conclusion of the *X* case established the right of Irish women to access abortion under article 40.3.3 if there is ‘a real and substantial risk’ to her life, including the risk of suicide. In response, three new constitutional amendments were put to the public in November 1992: one on the freedom to travel, one on the right to information on abortion services, and one to further limit abortion rights by removing the possibility that suicide could be used as grounds for accessing abortion in Ireland. The former two amendments passed, while the latter amendment failed. However, no legislation followed and interpretation of the law did not allow for consideration in cases of risk to the health of the mother.²³ For reproductive activists, this single step forward in the legal and social battle for abortion access in Ireland preceded two steps backwards. The Regulation of Information Act of 1995 restricted the amendment allowing the right to information to only within the context of non-directive counseling services.²⁴ Under this act, doctors are not allowed to make appointments for or refer women to clinics abroad. Another case highlighting issues of rape, suicide, youth, and abortion emerged in November 1997 with the *C* case. A thirteen-year-old girl in the custody of the State was raped and became pregnant. She was permitted to travel to England to obtain an abortion on the grounds of risk of suicide by virtue of the judgment in the *X* case. By 1999, a Green Paper on Abortion was published by a Cabinet Committee to outline issues surrounding abortion and discussion points.^{25,26} An important point to note is the absence of stories anywhere in this report of women who had actually experienced a crisis pregnancy or received an abortion.

The early 2000s marked the beginning of a decade of continued division over whether to continue to restrict or relax abortion law and increased international interest and activism. In

²³ Schweppe, *The Unborn Child*, 34-35.

²⁴ Dewan, “The Practice of Politics”, 363.

²⁵ Schweppe, *The Unborn Child*, 35-36.

²⁶ “Abortion in Ireland: Legal.”

2001, the Dutch organization Women on Waves sailed a floating medical facility to Dublin and Cork. They provided contraceptives, information, workshops, and abortion services in international waters outside of the jurisdiction of local laws. Due to significant controversy, no abortions were performed on the ship while docked in Ireland; however, hundreds of people visited the boat and received counseling and service information. A 24-hour emergency line was temporarily set up to provide British clinic information and some funds were provided for financially strapped women to be able to travel abroad to obtain an abortion.²⁷ Following this event, a referendum to approve or reject the Protection of Human Life in Pregnancy Bill was proposed. The bill removed suicide as grounds for an abortion, clarified the permissibility of abortion to save the life, but not the health, of a pregnant woman, and criminalized anyone who attempted or helped another attempt abortion with a prison sentence of up to twelve years. Activists pointed to the hypocrisy of this provision in that 6,391 women traveled to Britain for an abortion in 2000, yet the State wished to continue criminalizing Irish women who had an abortion in Ireland.²⁸ Irish voters rejected the bill with a ‘no’ vote of 50.42%.²⁹ The close margin of the 2002 referendum demonstrated continuing significant division amongst the voters.

Irish abortion rights activists have also looked to international human rights bodies, such as the UN’s Committee on the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), to highlight aspects of Ireland’s abortion laws that violate human rights law. Amnesty International Ireland’s She Is Not A Criminal campaign arose in direct response to concerns over Ireland’s restrictive abortion law, as cited by several human rights bodies, including CEDAW, Human Rights Committee, Committee Against Torture, and the

²⁷ Rossiter, *Ireland’s Hidden Diaspora*, 168-170.

²⁸ Schweppe, *The Unborn Child*, 37-38.

²⁹ “Abortion in Ireland: Legal.”

Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights.³⁰ In 2010, the A, B and C v Ireland case made its way to the European Court of Human Rights. These three individuals claimed that Ireland had breached their human rights under several acts of the European Convention on Human Rights. The court ruled that Ireland was failing to implement the existing constitutional right to an abortion when a women's life is at risk by having no medical framework available to them to legally access abortion services within Ireland. This led to the introduction of the Protection of Life During Pregnancy Act in 2013, which permits abortion only in the case of risk to life of pregnant women and puts into place restrictive regulations in these cases. For example, the Act states that at least two doctors must confirm when there is a threat to a woman's life before a decision on abortion can take place.³¹

Public Attitudes and Abortion Stigma

Although the repeal of the Eighth Amendment remains a key demand, abortion rights activists have increasingly turned their attention to destigmatizing the abortion experience itself. Despite the social transformations that have taken place in Irish society, the Catholic Church still has some degree of influence and Irish values are tied up in ideas of women as non-sexual, procreative beings. Abortion is one of the most common gynecological experiences, yet abortion stigma creates an additional barrier to acceptance of abortion care services abroad and within Ireland.³² Anuradha Kumar, Leila Hessini, and Ellen Mitchell define abortion stigma as “a negative attribute ascribed to women who seek to terminate a pregnancy that marks them,

³⁰ Amnesty International, "She Is Not a Criminal: The Impact of Ireland's Abortion Law," (London: Amnesty International Ltd, 2015), 13.

³¹ Maeve Taylor, "Women's Right to Health and Ireland's Abortion Laws," *International Journal of Gynecology & Obstetrics* 130, no. 1 (2015): 94.

³² Anuradha Kumar, Leila Hessini, and Ellen M. H. Mitchell, "Conceptualising Abortion Stigma," *Culture, Health & Sexuality* 11, no. 6 (2009): 625.

internally or externally, as inferior to ideals of womanhood.”³³ In Ireland, abortion has been discussed as a political issue, but not within the context of everyday life. The silence surrounding abortion only breaks when a court case hits the headlines or a tragedy strikes, as with the *X* case. The repeal of the Eighth Amendment will require public and political demand for a referendum and a proportionally higher number of citizens voting yes to repeal.

However, attitudes are changing, though slowly. Margaret Fine-Davis, current Director of the Social Attitude and Policy Research Group, conducted a survey on abortion attitudes in 1986 and found that 37.9% of Irish citizens felt abortion was not permissible under any circumstances, while 58.4% believed it was permissible under some circumstances. Interestingly enough, 67.1% of those who said it should be allowed under some circumstances, particularly for risk to life and health of mother and in the cases of rape or incest, had voted yes in the 1983 referendum that made it constitutionally illegal under all circumstances.³⁴ This is evidence of the high degree of confusion and lack of knowledge during the 1983 referendum. In 2013, two surveys by Millward Brown and Ipsos/MRB used nationwide representative samples of the Irish adult population and questions closely related to the 1986 survey. While 57% of people supported abortion in the case of risk of life to mother in 1986, this had risen to 84% in the Ipsos/MRBI survey. Support for abortion in the case of rape and incest rose from 50% and 51% to an agreement of 78% in a joint question proposed by the Ipsos/MRBI survey. Finally, only 10% of people agreed with abortion for socio-economic factors in 1986, while 30% believed in 2013 that abortion is permissible “where the mother decides to have an abortion for other reasons.”³⁵ This data demonstrates a shift in public attitudes towards greater acceptance of abortion in specific circumstances and

³³ *Ibid.*, 628.

³⁴ Margaret Fine-Davis, *Gender Roles in Ireland: Three Decades of Attitude Change* (New York: Routledge, 2015), 153.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 168-169.

growing support for women's right to choose abortion. These views are also generational and the shifts are even more prominent among younger Irish people.

Savita Halappanavar's death on October 28, 2012 may have been partly responsible for this change in attitudes. It humanized the abortion issue in the public eye and ushered in a new wave of reproductive activism. Savita, who was pregnant, was admitted to University Hospital Galway with complaints of back pain. She was told that a miscarriage was inevitable and there was nothing that could be done to save the baby. With this heartbreaking news, she requested, and was denied, a termination of pregnancy due to the presence of a fetal heartbeat. Because of the confusion surrounding abortion law, which equates the life of the mother and fetus, doctors were unclear if they were able to terminate the pregnancy. Savita delivered a stillborn girl three days later. However, by this point, her health had deteriorated considerably and she was diagnosed with severe sepsis from an infection due to the delayed miscarriage.³⁶ Savita's death put a life and face to the suffering of many women in Ireland. There was widespread public outrage that Savita's well-being and health were ignored while she suffered an inevitable miscarriage.³⁷

Aoife Murphy, whose name has been changed for this paper, used to work on the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission. In an interview conducted for this project, she told me that the death of Savita spurred her, like many others, to get involved in activism on abortion rights. She recalled being shocked that a woman's life was less valued than that of a fetus. The media's reporting on the case captured the public imagination, as the stories and photos of Savita and the heartbreak her husband, family, and friends experienced were described in the media. Many Irish people felt shame that they harbored Savita as a migrant, gave her a home, and then

³⁶ "Timeline: Savita Halappanavar's Treatment," RTÉ, April 19, 2013, <https://www.rte.ie/news/special-reports/2013/0418/382308-timeline-savita-halappanavar/>.

³⁷ Fine-Davis, *Gender Roles in Ireland*, 174.

let her die in a health care system that made those kinds of choices.³⁸ What happened to Savita caused a national and international outcry and demonstrated that the abortion debate straddles the personal and public spheres. It is discussed in public politics, but it is a very private and personal decision with profound impacts on the lives of individual women and their families who have to make the complex decision to end unintended or impossible pregnancies.³⁹ As Aoife Murphy explained to me, opposition to abortion reflects a distrust of women and their ability to be able to make the best choice of whether or not to have a child.⁴⁰ She also pointed out that the individual stories of women who have had an abortion are vital to grounding the abortion debate in reality.

Highlighting Women's Voices

The new generation of reproductive activists in Ireland is using strategies that focus on women and share their experience and the reality of the abortion law. By sharing their stories, activists are drawing attention to the fact that it's mothers, daughters, sisters, and friends who need or want access to abortion services. Women's voices help the public understand the wide variety of circumstances that lead to an abortion.⁴¹ Contemporary activists are utilizing several strategies to fight abortion stigma. Women themselves are taking to Twitter and Facebook to share their experiences of abortion. The Repeal Project promotes women's stories on their website. The use of social media to highlight women's voices and stories helps to normalize abortion and reduce the stigma.

³⁸ Aoife Murphy, interview by Kelsey O'Donnell, March 22, 2017.

³⁹ Anne Quesney, "Speaking Up! Speaking Out! Abortion in Ireland, exploring women's voices and contemporary abortion rights activism," in *Abortion Papers Ireland*, edited by Aileen Quilty, Sinead Kennedy, and Catherine Conlon (Cork: Cork University Press, 2016), 154-160.

⁴⁰ Aoife Murphy, interview by Kelsey O'Donnell, March 22, 2017.

⁴¹ Quesney, "Speaking Up! Speaking Out!", 160-162.

Social media has allowed more women to feel comfortable sharing their stories as a way of speaking out against the abortion law. Many, but not all, women choose to do this anonymously because of the intense backlash from some Pro-Life activists or fear of criminalization. Emily Bullen, a member of the Abortion Rights Campaign in Ireland whose name has been changed here, spoke to me in an interview about media and abortion activism. She said that breaking the media silence on abortion in Ireland in the late 2010s encouraged people to be more open and talk about it.⁴² Many women started to realize that by sharing their stories, they could do something to help make a change. She gave the example of Janet O’Sullivan who in February of 2014 took a turn on the @Ireland Twitter account which rotates between guest speakers who share different experiences and perspectives from Ireland. While curating the Twitter account, O’Sullivan shared her personal story of traveling to England for an abortion in 1992, when she was eighteen years old. She explained that her only regret at the time was that she had to travel. It was already a very difficult decision and a stressful time, but there was relief when it was over. She argued that her stress levels would have greatly decreased if she hadn’t had to overcome the difficulties of accessing information, gathering funds, booking a flight, and the currency exchange.⁴³ O’Sullivan is certainly not alone. It is estimated that at least 165,438 women and girls were forced to travel from Ireland to the UK for an abortion between 1980 and 2015.⁴⁴ This number does not include the number of women who have traveled in the past two years or those who traveled to another country such as the Netherlands to access services.

⁴² Emily Bullen, interview by Kelsey O’Donnell, April 6, 2017.

⁴³ Bradley Campbell and Siobhan Wornell, "How tweeting a story of a secret abortion shocked Ireland," *Public Radio International*, February 21, 2014, <https://www.pri.org/stories/2014-02-21/how-tweeting-story-secret-abortion-shocked-ireland>.

⁴⁴ "Abortion in Ireland: Statistics," *Irish Family Planning Association*, accessed April 29, 2017, <https://www.ifpa.ie/Hot-Topics/Abortion/Statistics>.

While O’Sullivan did not go into details about her journey, her tweets focused on how the shame and stigma made everything more difficult. She tweeted, “There are many of us who have had an abortion, but the shame and stigma have kept us silent for too long. More shaming, more stigma, more lies. Having an abortion did not tear my life apart, I felt that having an abortion saved my life.”⁴⁵ Many Irish women feel intense shame or guilt after accessing abortion services. This is not because they believe what they did was wrong, but from the overwhelming silence on the issue, which leads them to believe they are the only one who has gone through the experience. They may also feel shame as a result of scrutiny and criticism from Pro-Life activists, religious organizations, or the government. By sharing her story, O’Sullivan wanted to show women who have had an abortion or wish to seek one that they are not alone. She was also describing how the abortion stigma impacts women. O’Sullivan admitted that she felt able to share her identity because she works in her home and did not have to worry about negative reactions from her employer.⁴⁶ Other women may not have this luxury.

Irish news outlets largely ignored O’Sullivan’s story, but international media reported it. In our interview, Emily Bullen told me that she was working with the Abortion Rights Campaign when the tweets started. They were monitoring the response and counting the number of news outlets that were reporting about it. Overall, the international community and other activists responded sympathetically, while the Irish media was silent.⁴⁷ The account had 20,000 followers at the time, and many followers responded positively, but a few subjected O’Sullivan to backlash and bullying.⁴⁸ Because of the possibility of negative reactions, Bullen pointed out that it is important for abortion rights activists to support women who desire to share such a private,

⁴⁵ Janet ní Shuilleabháin, "My Story," in *Abortion Papers Ireland*, edited by Aideen Quilty, Sinead Kennedy, and Catherine Conlon, (Cork: Cork University Press, 2016).

⁴⁶ Campbell and Wornell, "How Tweeting a Story".

⁴⁷ Emily Bullen, interview by Kelsey O’Donnell, April 6, 2017.

⁴⁸ Campbell and Wornell, "How Tweeting a Story."

personal experience. As an activist herself, O’Sullivan also used her tweets to share resources and explain where to get information on the procedure and clinics and how to get funding to travel.⁴⁹ Her story was a way to normalize abortion for Irish people reading her tweets. It presented abortion as a normal medical procedure that has been stigmatized but that women have every day. This Twitter story set a precedent for others to come forward.

According to Anne Quesney, former director of the Abortion Rights Campaign, the criminalization and stigma of abortion in Ireland “enables politicians and the anti-choice movement to pretend abortion is not happening in Ireland and ignore the humanity of the women behind the statistics. ‘Silence is almost necessary in Irish society so it can keep a good opinion of itself.’”⁵⁰ Essentially, silence is necessary to create a “pure” image of the nation. However, two Irish women recently challenged this image and brought the issue of abortion to the political and public forefront by tweeting about their trip to England. The @TwoWomenTravel Twitter account was created in August 2016. Over the course of nineteen tweets it details the journey of a woman to Britain to obtain an abortion with the support of her friend. The description on the Twitter page says “Two Women, one procedure, 48 hours away from home.”⁵¹ The women took a political stand by directing each tweet @EdnaKennyTD, who is the leader of the political party Fine Gael and current Taoiseach, or prime minister, of Ireland.⁵² Each tweet- about the flight there, the train, the waiting room, the hotel, the bloodstained sheets, and the journey home- is aimed at the Irish government. They are a way of saying that this wouldn’t be happening if not for the law and if not for the unwillingness of the government to take a stand and hold a referendum to repeal the Eighth Amendment. The two women take a more radical approach than

⁴⁹ ní Shuilleabháin, "My Story."

⁵⁰ Quesney, “Speaking Up! Speaking Out!”, 159-160.

⁵¹ Two Women Travel, Twitter post, August 20, 2016, <https://Twitter.com/twowomentravel?lang=en>.

⁵² Ibid.

other women who have used social media by speaking directly to the head representative of the government and blaming him for exiling them from their own country, leaving them isolated and away from home during this procedure.

Even though the two women have remained anonymous, they wanted to show the realities of the Irish women traveling every day for an abortion. They stated, “We stand in solidarity with all women exiled by @EdnaKennyTD, his predecessors, his apologists.”⁵³ Irish news outlets immediately picked up the story demonstrating how stories of abortion had become more acceptable in the few years since O’Sullivan had described her experience. As Emily Bullen explained to me in our interview, people were shocked about the lengths to which these two women had to go traveling to a whole other country.⁵⁴ The blunt reality of the difficulties of their journey made it impossible to pretend that abortion was not happening to Irish women. The story emphasized their feelings of fear and stigma, by the expense involved, and by a lack of support and sense of isolation.⁵⁵ Their concluding tweet explains, “We wanted to share the very ordinariness of the situation- we wanted to show it for what it is; a series of waiting rooms, moments in transit, a sequence of tediums protracted by stigma. No filters, no monologues, just the facts”⁵⁶

While Two Women Travel shares a story to represent the experience of Irish women traveling to obtain an abortion, the X-ile Project is putting a face to those that have been exiled. Their website showcases a gallery of photos of women who have traveled, mainly to Britain, for an abortion. Four current members organize the project: Julie Morrissy, Ruth Morrissy, Laura Lovejoy, and Paula Cullen. The project was launched with the first eleven photographs in

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Emily Bullen, interview by Kelsey O’Donnell, April 6, 2017.

⁵⁵ “Abortion in Ireland: Statistics.”

⁵⁶ Two Women Travel, Twitter post, August 21, 2016, 2:15 p.m., <https://Twitter.com/twowomentravel?lang=en>.

December 2015, followed by a second group of photos in February 2016 and a third group in June 2016.⁵⁷ The main page of the website showcases a stream of photographs of women who have had an abortion; the stories of these women are embedded in the project itself. Their faces are bright, happy, and in the forefront of the webpage.⁵⁸ Many women have come forward in recent years to share their stories. This project wants to build upon this by exhibiting these women as members of a cohesive and now visible group in the Irish community. The website normalizes their experiences showing that these are ordinary Irish women who have had to make a responsible, yet tough decision. One of the photographers of the project, Emma Campbell, said in an interview to Ciara Gillan of Public Radio International that the X-ile Project “shows people that abortion is a common and normal experience. It shows us that real women sometimes have abortions and then continue with their lives.”⁵⁹ This helps to normalize the experience in the public view and it shows that this is not a kind of trauma.

In addition, the X-ile Project encapsulates the belief that the individual women affected should lead abortion conversations, not politicians. This adds a political element to the project by insisting that the Irish public and government see and hear the women who have felt exiled from the country. This brings a more human element to an issue that has been highly politicized in the past. As Ciara Gillan from Public Radio International pointed out, one of the most distressing factors for Irish women is that they have to travel abroad in secret and at great financial cost to have an abortion.⁶⁰ Many women find this more difficult than the decision to have one in the first

⁵⁷ "Our Mission," *X-ile Project*, accessed April 29, 2017, <http://www.x-ileproject.com/new-page/>.

⁵⁸ "Our Mission."

⁵⁹ Ciara Gillan, "These activists are putting a face to a taboo work in Ireland: abortion," *Public Radio International*, February 24, 2016, <https://www.pri.org/stories/2016-02-24/putting-face-taboo-word-ireland-abortion>.

⁶⁰ Gillan, "These activists are putting a face."

place. The X-ile Project is further evidence of an attempt by activists to normalize the realities of abortion in Ireland.

Another method used by activists to support women and normalize abortion is to start conversations among the public to shift views of abortion that do not fit into the realities women face in Ireland. This particular method comes directly from campaigning for the Marriage Equality Campaign. The 34th amendment, or Marriage Equality Act, was added to the Constitution of Ireland following a public referendum held on May 22, 2015 that passed with a 62.07% yes vote. The amendment allows for marriage contracts without distinction as to the sex of either party.⁶¹ Public attitude changes towards L.G.B.T. people in Ireland were driven by people talking about their own identities and shifting the discourse from ‘them’ to ‘us’. In other words, they used the deep values of family and community in Ireland to demonstrate that L.G.B.T. people are important members of the community and that they are sisters, brothers, mothers, fathers, friends, and neighbors. This discourse was particularly important for children coming out to their parents, who mostly just want their children to experience love and happiness.⁶² As Charlie Bird, a well-known Irish journalist, wrote in an article for the Huffington Post, “The ‘Yes’ campaign was not about shaming others who disagreed with us... it was about making a case for our shared humanity.”⁶³ The Abortion Rights Campaign has pulled this strategy directly from the Marriage Equality Campaign. Many activists are focusing on the middle ground and winning over the public through civil discourse and personal engagements, rather than using more radical or potentially controversial forms of protest. By making politics

⁶¹ Fintan O'Toole, "Ireland's Marriage Equality Moment," *The New York Times*, May 18, 2015, https://www.nytimes.com/2015/05/18/opinion/irelands-marriage-equality-moment.html?_r=0.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Charlie Bird, "One Year Later: What I Learned From Ireland's Historic Campaign for Marriage Equality, and What the World Could Learn Too," *HuffPost: The Blog*, The Huffington Post, May 26, 2016, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/charlie-bird/one-year-later-what-i-lea_b_10142396.html.

personal and telling stories about the realities of abortion for Irish women, they are changing the conversation surrounding abortion.

The Repeal Project was created by Anna Cosgrave, a twenty-six year old activist and Irish citizen, who was motivated by her anger and frustration following Savita Halappanavar's death in 2012. Cosgrave noticed that many people were posting their political views on social media and discussing abortion online, but that these discussions were very much in the political sphere. She saw a lack of everyday, real-life conversations that discuss women's experiences with abortion.⁶⁴ The Repeal Project website explains that the "Repeal Project seeks to vindicate the rights of Irish women by reflecting, respecting and representing the need and want for free safe and legal access to abortion in Ireland. Making it seen that this issue needs to be heard." It sells black sweatshirts with the word REPEAL written across the front in white lettering, and it also actively uses their Facebook page as a space for women to share their stories. Dozens of women have posted their stories to date, each of which is accompanied by the woman's name and image wearing the REPEAL sweatshirt. While the stories are unique, they all share in common the fact that they could not obtain an abortion in Ireland.

One example is Maeve-Anne Kenny, who wrote that she was on a drug called warfarin following a diagnosis of congenital heart disease when she found out that she was pregnant after her birth control failed. Warfarin can cause fetal damage, but the hospital told her they could do nothing to help the damage that may already have been done and could only give her a different course of treatment for the heart disease. After five weeks of being off the drug meant to save her and making all the arrangements to obtain an abortion in Liverpool, she was finally able to obtain the procedure that she felt was best for both her and the fetus. She returned home two

⁶⁴ Carey Dunne, "How a pro-choice movement in Ireland is changing the way women campaign for their reproductive rights," *Quartz Media*, September 7, 2016, <https://qz.com/776130/how-repeal-irelands-pro-choice-abortion-movement-is-changing-the-way-women-campaign-for-their-reproductive-rights/>.

days later and moved on with her life. In regard to the Eighth Amendment, she wrote, “Those who are opposing changes to the constitution may have sisters, mothers, nieces, daughters that have made the journey in silence. The conversation on abortion needs to change because it’s happening every single day and people are too afraid to speak out for fear of being stigmatized.”⁶⁵ Her story on the Repeal Project’s website serves to humanize abortion by pointing out that it is quite likely that everyone in Ireland knows a woman who has had an abortion. These women are friends and family members and their stories show the complexity of the decision to have an abortion.

REPEAL sweatshirts also serve as a talking point to begin these kinds of conversations. Cosgrave’s hope in beginning the Repeal Project was that the sweatshirts would spark personal and public discussion on the abortion issue. This appears to be working. The REPEAL sweatshirts debuted in July and sold out within an hour. Thousands of sweatshirts have since been purchased and all proceeds go to the Abortion Rights Campaign.⁶⁶ In an interview with Quartz Media, one activist, Fia Kavanagh, explains how she wore her sweatshirt while visiting the small village of Howth. Initially, she was nervous to wear it in a rural area, but when she went into a middle-age fisherman’s shop, he saw her sweatshirt and proceeded to show her photos of his own daughter wearing one.⁶⁷ This is just one example of how the sweatshirt is generating conversation across Ireland. The ultimate goal is to generate enough discussion to sway public opinion. The speckle of black sweatshirts with the word REPEAL across the front in white lettering also helps create a more comfortable environment for those that have had an

⁶⁵ Repeal Project's Facebook Page, accessed April 29, 2017, <https://www.facebook.com/repealproject/photos/a.1619861121657224.1073741828.1618950718414931/1664815230495146/?type=3&theater>.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

abortion. It is a visible symbol of support for women who have abortions. This visibility is important to break the silence and challenge abortion stigma.

These campaigns appear to have been having an effect. Fabiana Mizzoni, a contributor to the Repeal Project's Facebook page describes the impact of the X-ile and Repeal Project on her life. Mizzoni traveled in secret to Liverpool with her mother while a teenager to get an abortion. She discovered she was pregnant when she was only seventeen years old and she felt in no way financially or socially prepared to have a child. She explains that she was completely confident with her decision, but still felt a deep shame caused by having to travel in secrecy and being unable to access health care at home. After becoming involved in the pro-choice movement, she began to realize that she had made the best decision for herself in a difficult situation.⁶⁸ On the impact of activist projects Fabiana writes,

I lent my face to the X-ile Project a couple of months back. Looking through the online gallery of other women who've had abortions is beyond comforting for me. Normal women, just like me. Seeing women and men wearing Repeal Project jumpers, wearing badges and Maser t-shirt... you have no idea how much it means to me. When I cycle to work and I see another person supporting me, saying 'I stand by you, you're a human whose experience matters, you deserve better' it makes my heart flutter.⁶⁹

In other words, not only are the projects these activists have developed normalizing abortion in the public, but they are also normalizing it on a personal level for women who have had abortions. Projects like X-ile and Repeal bring a sense of solidarity and show women that they are a part of a large, cohesive group of women who have had an abortion. For these Irish women and those that support them, the personal is the political. They are using their personal experiences to fight the politics of the abortion law.

⁶⁸ Repeal Project's Facebook Page, accessed April 29, 2017, <https://www.facebook.com/repealproject/posts/1746665645643437>.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

The Irish Family Planning Organization (IFPA) is one of the most important organizations providing sexual and reproductive health information, as well as affordable health services for women since 1969. They have also been highly active in the fight for reproductive activism, including breaking down the abortion stigma. According to their website, the “IFPA aims to facilitate open and honest dialogue on abortion and to dispel myths that stigmatize women who seek abortion services.”⁷⁰ The IFPA also offers a clear case study for understanding how contemporary abortion activism has pulled abortion out of the political domain and used personal stories as a means of normalizing abortion. In 2000, the IFPA released a publication called *The Irish Journey*, which was the first book to detail the personal stories of Irish women who have had an abortion.⁷¹ The publication includes a diverse range of stories and frames abortion rights as a family and community issue. It points out that women who get abortions are sisters, mothers, wives, girlfriends, and neighbors, as well as teachers, students, homemakers, doctors, farmers, artists, civil servants, and so on.

Within the media and political spheres in Ireland, the abortion discourse constantly reinforces stigma with its word choice and negative connotations. This discourse has allowed policy makers to put women who have had an abortion in a separate category of immoral or traumatized women that discounts most women’s experiences.⁷² During our interview, Emily Bullen confirmed that the discourse was stuck in politics and the media. She argued that the broadcasting media in Ireland controls the abortion discussion because they are required to balance the abortion debate. If there is anything on the radio or television about the pro-choice

⁷⁰ “Abortion Stigma,” *Irish Family Planning Association*, accessed April 29, 2017, <https://www.ifpa.ie/Hot-Topics/Abortion/Women-Have-Abortions-Every-Day-Its-Just-One-Choice>.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*

⁷² *Ibid.*

movement and their beliefs, there always has to be a voice from the pro-life side.⁷³ The problem with this, in her opinion, is that a woman's personal experience with abortion is not a debate. This is why it has become so important to activists in Ireland to balance the personal and the political. While it is vital that there are legal activists working on changing abortion law, it is just as important to make politics personal in order to shift public opinion. Another problem with abortion coverage in the media is the dominant narrative of the innocent woman.⁷⁴ The media in Ireland highlights exceptional cases. This reinforces a stereotype of innocent, brave, or tragic victims that have fallen before the abortion law, but stigmatizes women who do not fall within this set of circumstances, be it rape, incest, fatal fetal abnormalities, or risk to the women's life. The IFPA attempts to de-stigmatize myths and misconceptions on abortion by advocating for legal reform for equitable access to abortion, taking into account the significantly varied circumstances for women choosing abortion, and promoting positive, non-judgmental language use surrounding abortion choice.⁷⁵

One last way activists normalize abortion is through contextualizing it as just one part of women's lives. On September 27, 2013, the Irish Family Planning Association published a video called *Women Have Abortions Every Day: It's Just One Choice* on YouTube and their personal website. The video was produced by Katie Gillum and won the award for the Abortion Care Network's Abortion Stigma Busting Video Competition. The video, which has been viewed over 75,900 times, describes the individual lives of four women who have had an abortion.⁷⁶ While many women have had abortions, the video seeks to show that this is just a small part of their life. The music narrates a little march with a timeline of significant events in each woman's life

⁷³ Emily Bullen, interview by Kelsey O'Donnell, April 6, 2017.

⁷⁴ "Abortion Stigma."

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ "Women Have Abortions Every Day: It's Just One Choice," YouTube video, 2:09, posted by "irishfamilyplanning," September 27, 2013, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R4SSHkgD73E>.

appearing around her as she stands in front of a solid colored backdrop and having an abortion is just one of these events. The events are unique to each woman, but include having their first period, starting contraception, a first job, finishing college, getting married, getting divorced, emigrating, starting a business, giving birth to a son or daughter, or getting involved in the women's rights movement. The video presents abortion as a choice, rather than an exceptional case. There is no explanation of why the women decided to have an abortion. The goal is to show that, despite the law, many Irish women have abortions and they are happy and normal individuals.⁷⁷ The words on the screen at the end of the video sum it up: "The debates about abortion have gone round and round in circles. But the reality is straightforward: Women have abortions every day. Abortion is just one personal decision women make. It's time to see the whole picture."⁷⁸ The women who appear in the video have all shared their abortion story in the past, yet, through this video, they reintegrated all the other parts of their lives and showed that they cannot be defined by their decision to have an abortion.⁷⁹

In an interview with Katie Gillum published on the *Ansirh Blog*, Gillum explained that she wanted to make sure the film was not made for a political campaign, but was strictly on busting stigma through women's personal stories. Gillum's idea was to talk about abortion as it truly is, just one aspect of a woman's life. The stigma surrounding abortion is what makes it stand out as a unique event, but it does not have to be this way. Without the stigma, abortion is as important as individuals believe it is within their own lives. Gillum asked each woman in the video to pick the things within their lives that were important to them and that they wanted to

⁷⁷ Steph Herold, "Using Video to De-Stigmatize Abortion: An interview with Katie Gillum," *Ansirh Blog*, October 25, 2013, <http://blog.ansirh.org/2013/10/using-video-to-destigmatize-abortion/>.

⁷⁸ "Women Have Abortions Every Day."

⁷⁹ Emily Bullen, interview by Kelsey O'Donnell, April 6, 2017.

share in the video.⁸⁰ The video shows the whole story and doesn't reduce them to women who have had an abortion, while positioning the women in the center of the screen so that they are not cut out of the picture. This is in direct contrast to the abortion debate where women's bodies are literally cut out of the conversation with a historical focus on the fetus. Most importantly, the video is timeless. Regardless of changing politics, the stories of women's lives are not going to change. Their experiences are the reality of abortion in Ireland. Gillum said, "We don't have to make people bare the extremes of their emotions for abortion to be normalized. Instead of playing on people's heart strings, I wanted to play on people's normal strings."⁸¹ The IFPA video accomplishes exactly this by not playing into the politicized discourse that is so prevalent in the media and focusing instead on presenting abortion as just one part of women's rich and complicated lives.

Conclusion

In contrast to previous forms of activism, contemporary abortion activism in Ireland has shifted to strategies that focus on the voices, faces, and stories of Irish women. By using various forms of media, such as Twitter, Facebook, websites, and photography, as well as material objects in the form of clothing, activists have spread awareness of women's experience with abortion across Ireland and the world. While previous, but not all, forms of activism focused solely on the political sphere, contemporary organizations and projects are inserting the personal into the political sphere by allowing the women who have had an abortion to make their voices heard. Abortion activists are using these platforms to call on the political establishment in Ireland to address this reality and change the law. Each project is challenging the abortion stigma,

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Herold, "Using Video To De-Stigmatize Abortion."

demanding respect for women who have had an abortion, and promoting access to all forms of reproductive healthcare.

While abortion activists in Ireland are working hard, often for little or no compensation, the majority of the women who have come forward in public to offer their personal stories have been white, Irish women who could afford travel to the United Kingdom to access abortion services, whether through personal funds, borrowing money, or receiving support from an activist organization. These women, whether they choose to reveal their identity or not, are incredibly important to public understanding of abortion in Ireland. Nonetheless, there is an overwhelming absence of groups that are disproportionately affected by abortion laws from the debate. These include women marginalized by disability, racism, poverty, and immigration status, who have a unique set of barriers to reproductive health care and less ability to speak out in the public campaign to repeal the Eighth Amendment. It is equally important to research and address these barriers to support the involvement of all Irish people affected by the law, including Travellers, Roma, people of color, the LGBTQI community, sex workers, and people with disabilities. In addition to some activist groups that particularly focus on supporting these groups, the Abortion Rights Campaign has recognized this problem. It actively promotes inclusivity and has outlined an action plan to accomplish this on their website.⁸²

Two questions remain: How effective have these new strategies been in shifting public opinion and what does the future of the abortion debate in Ireland hold? The most recent poll, published in *The Irish Times* on March 3rd, 2017, confirms increasing support for some kind of reform to abortion laws. The Ipsos/MRBI poll indicates that between 76-77% of Irish citizens support abortion access in cases of rape, incest, fatal fetal abnormalities, or threat to the life of

⁸² “Abortion Rights Campaign Values and Inclusivity Statement,” *Abortion Rights Campaign*, November 21, 2016, <http://www.abortionrightscampaign.ie/2016/11/21/abortion-rights-campaign-values-and-inclusivity-statement/>.

the mother. This has risen from the 67% indicated in the July 2016 poll.⁸³ This data shows that while there may not be large support for abortion choice in Ireland, there is an overwhelming majority in favor of allowing access to abortion in specific circumstances. The nearly 10% rise in support in the last nine months may indicate that new activist strategies have been effective in shifting public opinion in favor of limited abortion access.

The future of abortion in Ireland is uncertain. Activists have been working for decades to repeal the Eighth Amendment that bans and criminalizes abortion in Ireland. Some activists believe that the government is nowhere near holding a new abortion referendum due to their silence and unwillingness to move motions or bills relating to abortion forward. Other activists believe that another abortion referendum is inevitable in the near future. The most recent news in Ireland has brought hope to abortion rights activists. A Citizen's Assembly of 99 people chosen at random and set up by the Irish Government met on April 22, 2017 to discuss the abortion issue and to make recommendations about a possible referendum. The assembly voted 87% in favor of not retaining Article 40.3.3, the Eighth Amendment, in full.⁸⁴ Their recommendations must go through the Dáil, the Irish House of Commons, to decide whether to hold a new referendum on abortion.⁸⁵ An assembly, who is supposed to represent the Irish population as a whole, is 87% in favor of changing the current law on abortion. It still remains unclear what this will mean for the Eighth Amendment. While only time will tell, contemporary abortion rights activists will

⁸³ "Significant majority favour replacing the Eighth Amendment to the Constitution- but how?" *The Irish Times*, March 3, 2017, <http://www.irishtimes.com/opinion/editorial/significant-majority-favour-replacing-the-eighth-amendment-to-the-constitution-but-how-1.2995693>.

⁸⁴ Ronan McGreevy, "Assembly votes to mandate Oireachtas to legislate for abortion," *The Irish Times*, April 22, 2017, <http://www.irishtimes.com/news/ireland/irish-news/assembly-votes-to-mandate-oireachtas-to-legislate-for-abortion-1.3057940>.

⁸⁵ Joel Gunter, "Abortion in Ireland: The fight for choice," *BBC News*, March 8, 2017, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-39183423>.

continue to build upon previous activists' work bringing awareness, new perspectives, and most importantly, the voices and stories of women who seek abortions into the public sphere.

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Appendix: List of Research Questions

1. Please tell me more about the history of your organization and the type of work you do.
2. What is being done to accomplish the goals of your organization?
3. Does social media play a prominent role in reaching your organization's goals?
4. What strategies are being implemented by your organization to address the abortion stigma in Ireland?
5. How effective do you think these strategies have been in shifting public opinion on abortion in Ireland?
6. How have women sharing their stories of abortion impacted the abortion debate in Ireland?