

Dr Elizabeth Lubinga

Department of Strategic
Communication,
University of Johannesburg,
South Africa
Email: elizabethl@uj.ac.za
(corresponding author)
ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1811-7421>

Karabo Sitto

Department of Strategic
Communication, University
of Johannesburg,
South Africa
Email: ksitto@uj.ac.za
ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5146-9189>

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DISSONANCE OF RIGHTS: DIGITAL SPACE, AN ENABLER OF CONVERSATIONS ABOUT ABORTION AMONGST SOME SOUTH AFRICANS

ABSTRACT

Discussions about abortion evoke strong, complex sentiments. In many societies, and religious and civil society organisations, using moral grandstanding drives polarised sentiments about abortion in the public sphere. These discussions frequently adopt a stance on the health of women versus the foetus that transcends health-related aspects to include the rights of women versus others in society. Yet the complexity and polarisation as reflected in public narratives has been underexplored. This article examines Twitter conversations on the topic. Through a social representation approach, the article analyses the representations made regarding termination of pregnancy, arising social representations, and the communication consequences. The social ecological model studies people in their environments and the influences they hold on each other. Netnography was used to analyse online conversations, which ultimately filtered into traditional media enabling convergence. This study contributes to communication scholarship by highlighting the growing role of social media to enable expression of various dissenting perspectives, from a “safe space” to a subject that would ordinarily be inaccessible through discordance.

Keywords: health communication; social media; online communication; social representation; social representation theory; abortion; human rights; dissenting perspectives; pro-life; pro-choice

INTRODUCTION

Discussions about abortion and related rights are often complex and reflect the dissonance of personal views about decision-making. Sentiments about abortion, as expressed in the public sphere, are usually polarised, with such polarisation often routed along moral grandstanding, mostly by religious groups and civil society pro-choice and pro-life/anti-abortion groups. Conversations reflecting societal “shaming” and shunning of women with regards to the

decisions they make about whether not to abort are mostly driven by two prominent basic human values – the principle of reciprocity and the right to life. The principle of reciprocity expounds the argument that humans act to preserve their own lives; therefore, it is wrong to take the life of another. Contextualised to abortion, reciprocity implies that a woman, not having been aborted herself, should then respect the sacrosanctity of the foetus. In terms of right to life, proponents argue that the wrong of abortion lies in denying the foetus its future life despite its cognitive abilities at the time of abortion (Loi & Nobile 2016).

In South Africa, these debates take place in places of worship, public platforms, and public and private health spaces, and often filter into traditional media (Dr Eve 2018; Kammies 2019) as well as social media. On public platforms, such as social media, there appears to be censorship in terms of what is allowed to be debated and who is allowed to lead or guide the direction of the conversation. Traditionally, social media in South Africa have not commonly been used as spaces for citizens to engage about termination of pregnancy due to access and affordability challenges, especially for rural citizens (McLeod 2017). However, social media have the potential to create a forum for open engagement about a sensitive and stigmatised subject among citizens, as well as enabling access help online (Israelsen-Hartley 2018).

In terms of South Africa law, abortion is legal based on the Choice on Termination of Pregnancy Act (Act 92 of 1996, amended in 2008). The original version of the Act obliged the government to provide reproductive health services to all women, including safe conditions under which the right of choice can be exercised without fear or harm. Following the amendment, in recognition of the fact that health professionals hold personal views that may not necessarily be pro-choice, they were provided with an option of referring women to a facility where they could access services if the health professional concerned was not inclined to provide these services for whatever reason. Conversations in the media indicate that, despite an abortion law in South Africa that has been termed as progressive, there are discrepancies between the law and the lived experiences of women (Dr Eve 2018; Kammies 2019).

BACKGROUND: ABORTION, STIGMA AND SHAME

Some of the recurring discussions about the subject centre on stigma and shame about termination of pregnancy, as reflected in revelations in the media by women in narratives about their lived experiences. Shame and stigma around abortion are rife in Ghana (Oduro & Otsin 2014) and in Nigeria (Koster 2003) where women fear ridicule and the cultural taboos associated with it. Nigeria's abortion laws in some of its states make it a criminal offence, unless it is performed to save a woman's life, punishable by imprisonment, fines or both (Iyioha & Nwabueze 2015). Such stiff laws automatically translate into women engaging in "backyard" abortions, possibly leading to the very maternal deaths that governments try to prevent. Conversely, even if such laws allow for saving the life of the pregnant woman, pro-life/anti-abortion groups would still argue that the right to life of the foetus is violated.

Backyard abortions also occur in South Africa, even though abortion is legal. More than 50% of an estimated 260 000 abortions that take place in South Africa every year are unsafe and illegal pregnancy terminations (SA News 2018). Women have cited abortion stigma as being high in the country, especially among health care professionals, whose attitude acts as a deterrent. The high rate of illegal abortions could be attributable to lack of access, suggesting correlation between supply and demand. A high demand for termination of pregnancy services with insufficient supply due to reluctant health care professionals and few physical facilities are some of the causes (Stevens & Mudarikwa 2018). Less than 7% of South Africa's 3 880 public health facilities have the capacity to perform termination of pregnancy services (Amnesty International 2017).

These factors interface to make the decision to terminate pregnancy more complex for women. This is especially important when considered in context with societal debates about the ultimate decision they have to make – whether to or not to engage in termination. Societal debates on abortion taking place in the public sphere are driven by attitudes and beliefs about numerous rights that vie for priority in terms of decision-making among women. These include the rights of religious groups, faith-based and civil organisations to protect life, the rights of the pregnant woman and the healthcare professional's right to perform a termination versus constitutional prescription, and many other rights, which all compete to influence a single decision. Social media conversations provide insight into sentiments expressed by individuals about sensitive subjects such as abortion and the clash/coexistence of rights.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Abortion is not solely a health problem; hence, traditional behaviour communication theories typically used to study health may be partly applicable, but cannot cover the totality of the topic. Using health behaviour models to guide communication strategies provide an “engineered” and structured way of thinking (Lie 2008). While emphasising the argument that abortion is a conglomeration of rights, it should be noted that it is more of a social issue.

Social representation theory (SRT) provides tools for the identification of social problems as people move through different systems of relation (Bratu 2014), observed through interpersonal communication, and face-to-face, online, symbolic and other communication forms. The abortion conversation is one that is often hidden, and a conversation that is dominated in society by moral language. The actual decision is influenced by an intrapersonal conversation that a woman has with and within herself. The same may apply to a healthcare practitioner who makes a decision about assisting a woman to terminate a pregnancy.

SRT suggests three types of social representations, namely hegemonic, emancipated and polemic (Moscovici & Hewstone 1983; Jaspal *et al.* 2014). Hegemonic representations are coercive and uniform, jointly shared by members of a group. Emancipated social representations are “developed by subgroups within a larger social collective... [and] constitute minor amendments of the overarching hegemonic representation” (Jaspal *et al.* 2014: 112). Polemic representations, on the other hand,

are generated “in the course of social conflict, and characterised by antagonistic relations between groups” (*ibid.*). Abortion and the related decision-making process is a contested representation that polarises families, churches, communities and sexual partners. Darwin and Norton (2014) sketch these polemic social representations as arising out of conflict; in this instance, the conflict over whose rights are more important.

Humans can manipulate representations internally by using their minds and even thinking about or reflexively responding to themselves (Stryker 2001). Abortion has evolved over the years, from an unspoken means or a last resort for pregnant women to conceal pregnancy, to open conversations about health risks involved in obstetrics, to the empowerment of women to make choices regarding their bodies and pregnancy. The development of symbols is based on interpersonal communication taking place between people as social representations provide a code for social exchange (Serrano & Hermida 2015). These symbols may involve humanising the woman carrying the foetus, using medical terms to explain processes beyond simply “life”, and the use of metaphors or images as representations of abortion. These symbols, or social representations, develop through people’s interactions and communicative behaviour (Stryker 2001), and eventually become social norms. According to Hogg and Reid (2006: 10), “Norms are shared cognitive representations” and social representations are norms that can be intentionally communicated verbally and/or non-verbally. Social representations through communication are constantly transmitted and shared until they are widely accepted (Serrano & Hermida 2015). The primary modes of communication of social representations of abortion are through traditional media, churches, civil society organisations, as well as activists.

Groups and individuals on polarised ends of the debate on abortion fight to preserve their social representations on abortion, be it pro-life or pro-choice. “Representations [are] rooted in language and culture because they are the work of collectivity, [and thus] cannot be entirely conscious,” writes Moscovici (1993: 40). The social representations people hold about abortion often are connected to their family upbringing, as well as the societal norms of the social groups to which they belong. These may be cultural, religious, civil or even national representations.

According to Joffe (2003: 60), “[Social] representation is concerned with symbols, social reality and social knowledge”. While many South Africans know that abortion is legal, means to exercise this right have been curtailed by the amendment to the legislation that hands more decision-making power to healthcare professionals. As mentioned before, healthcare professionals may invoke personal conscience to deny providing services to women seeking termination services, despite their obligation to refer these women to other professionals. There is perhaps a “misguided” social representation, depending on which side one takes, that the rights of the foetus supersede the rights of the individual in whose body the foetus is developing.

Social representations can be both products and processes. As products, they are shared beliefs, such as the irrevocable representation of the right to life of the foetus, from different sectors of society, stemming from religious beliefs of termination being seen as the taking of a life, or murder. The social representation amongst professionals

becomes a product of the shared belief of doing no harm, with respect to not harming the foetus. These products of shared beliefs appear not to place value on the life of the woman carrying the foetus. She is merely represented as a vessel to bring forth life, regardless of any personal health risk involved in the process of pregnancy.

As processes, social representation encompasses a range of activities, such as communication, exchange and argumentation, which groups as well as individuals engage with. In terms of abortion, these processes take the form of preaching in churches, advertising campaigns, public consultations with individuals in clinics, forced counselling, community naming and shaming, and counting of the number of abortions sought by individual women.

According to Wagner *et al.* (1999: 95), "A social representation is the ensemble of thoughts and feelings being expressed in verbal and overt behaviour of actors which constitutes an object for a social group". An individual enters an interaction holding specific social representations and draws on these during the interaction, and changes them in some way through representing them (Howarth 2014).

Theoretically, the social ecological model by Dahlberg and Krug (2002) allows for a study of people in an environment and the associated influences that they have on each other. The model shows an interface of influences on people at the individual, relationship, community and societal levels. In relation to this study, the complexity of abortion is reflected in influences at all these levels through social, cultural, religious, moral, legal and other dimensions. Conversations in the media also play a role in influencing decisions and behaviour at the various levels. The model proposes that at the individual level, characteristics such as knowledge, attitude and beliefs play a part in influencing decisions. At a relationship level, the importance of relationships with family, intimate partners, peers, as well as the role of the immediate social circle of an individual and their influence plays a part in decisions. At a community level, decisions are influenced by the setting in which social relationships occur, such as in schools or the workplace. At a societal level, decisions are influenced by broad societal factors that either create or inhibit an individual from taking certain actions or decisions, such as social norms, public policies, and religious and cultural beliefs (Dahlberg & Krug 2002).

All four levels of the model affect abortion decisions. At each of the levels, there are rights that are enshrined that are often in polarity. At an individual level, the right of the woman to engage in termination of pregnancy (for whatever reason) clashes with, for example, religious beliefs that discourage abortion. At a relationship level, some intimate (sexual) partners force women to terminate. An American study of almost 1 000 women found that almost 74% were pressured into terminating their pregnancies because they experienced subtle forms of pressure, such as partners threatening to leave them (Abbamonte 2018). Communities also exert their influence. For example, in South Africa health professionals in public hospitals mistreat women who seek out their services (Qukula 2016). At a societal level, policies are made that promote or clash with individual rights, like the amendment to the 1996 Choice on Termination of Pregnancy Act, referred to above.

METHODOLOGY

The article employed netnography (ethnography on the internet) – a rigorous methodology suited for studying the uniqueness of online communities (Kozinets 2002: 62). Netnography as a qualitative data collection method, which helps illuminate cultural realities, is less complicated and time consuming, less obtrusive, less costly to obtain information, and more naturalistic (Kozinets 2002; 2006). People form relationships online because they are inclined to spend time online connecting, working and conducting other transactions, including seeking entertainment (Xun & Reynolds 2010). Kozinets (2002) developed five steps to help researchers using netnography with methodological rigour, and expanded these steps to 12 methodological steps (Kozinets 2015). Kozinets' (2015: 98) 12 steps are “non-exclusive and often-interacting process levels” of netnography.

Two noteworthy conversations that took place in South Africa on the topic of abortion and rights of women were selected for analysis. They were selected for their volume of engagement and the high number of participants in these conversations, as well as for the convergence between mass media and Twitter. The first conversation was a radio conversation during sexual reproduction health month on a private talk radio station about stigma, which remained an obstacle to abortion rights in South Africa (Qukula 2018). This conversation was converged with a conversation on Twitter, led by the host of the show. The second conversation resulted from a tweet by a young woman emphatically reminding women that abortion is their right and they need not feel ashamed to access a safe abortion, which sparked debate from different quarters of society and even drew the attention of people outside of South Africa with its reach. These conversations were analysed to compare the arising themes and positioning of rights with respect to the termination of pregnancy. Sandlin (2007: 289) states, “Netnography is naturalistic enquiry... [because it] captures individuals and groups in their natural settings, conducting their everyday life practices”. These conversations were captured in settings where people naturally engage, both on air and on Twitter.

The following steps were used in a non-linear fashion for purposes of engaging in netnography on the topic of abortion:

- ◆ Introspection – reflection on the role of research in approaching how the data would help achieve the research aims and objectives of the study. This included the purposive selection of conversations.
- ◆ Investigation – the search for conversations on abortion and rights in South Africa centred on collecting data for the purposes of analysis of public conversations.
- ◆ Information – ethical considerations involved accessing only publicly available conversations, including building anonymity in the interpretation of the data collected.
- ◆ Interview – the choice of the site inspected was Twitter, and only these high volume conversations were included for analysis.
- ◆ Inspection – this only linked to the abortion conversations mentioned with thorough analysis and data collection of each thread of the conversation.

- ◆ Interaction – the entrée strategy was through a public search on Twitter, which allowed for these conversations to be identified using the terms “abortion” and “abortion in South Africa”, and narrowing it down to the conversations with high reach. This was done using an understanding of how Twitter works and being a member of the Twitter community.
- ◆ Immersion – the authors had to immerse themselves in the conversations, including listening to a podcast of the radio segment, analysing each picture and video, as well as collecting the tweets and replies.
- ◆ Indexing – this phase involved weighting of the data; selecting more high quality and meaningful data from each conversation.
- ◆ Interpretation – interpretive analysis was done using SRT to attempt to understand the social representations on abortion without distorting them through interpretation.
- ◆ Iteration – there were phases within these phases for this netnographic analysis.
- ◆ Instatiation – for this article, the analysis approach that was most appropriate was humanist, given the sensitivity of the topic and the nature of the conversations.
- ◆ Integration – the authors then integrated the data with the research objectives to develop some insights from the netnography, forming part of the overall findings and interpretation discussion of this research

The research for this article did not focus on fora, but rather on two specific conversations on abortion rights in sexual reproductive health. One of the benefits of netnography is the near-automatic transcription of the contents downloaded, and the ease with which the data is obtained (Kozinets 2002). Netnography helps to provide insight into individuals’ experiences (Xun & Reynolds 2010); in this instance, the varying perspectives on rights in the execution of abortion and how these are communicated. Netnography as a method “provides a window into the cultural realities” (Kozinets 2006: 282) of abortion in South Africa, the social conversations and the arising themes.

Capturing the conversations involved a number of steps. The first was to search for conversations on Twitter on abortion and abortion rights in South Africa and evaluating these conversations based on the volume of engagement. This search was important to conduct in order to identify the conversations that included voices from different people on the discussion of abortion and sexual reproductive health rights to reduce bias in perspectives.

All the user names and handles were excluded in the data analysis in order to avoid detracting from the substance of the tweets. Mentions of individuals in responses that formed part of the ongoing conversations in the thread of tweets were also excluded. People frequently take part in important discussions in their online communities to inform and influence each other using “relevant symbol systems” (Kozinets 2002: 61); that is, using social representations. Only publicly accessible tweets were used, and

21	abortion	6	give
16	child	5	murder
15	life	5	babies
13	want	5	abort
12	women	5	don't
11	right	5	know
10	just	5	It's
10	men	5	live
10	one	5	true
8	people	5	say
8	woman	5	sex
8	said	5	use
7	can	4	pregnancy
6	love	4	adoption
6	kill		

FIGURE 4: WORDLIST OF TWITTER CONVERSATION

The conversations about abortion took place eight months apart, one taking place on radio and Twitter simultaneously in South Africa, and the other on Twitter with contributions from people outside of South Africa. In both instances, the conversations were sparked by considering the human rights involved in the issue of abortion. The tweets analysed could broadly be categorised under the following themes:

- ◆ Reciprocity of life – your mother had you, why would you choose otherwise?
- ◆ Sacrosanctity of the foetus – governed by representations of religion and morality.
- ◆ Partner rights and responsibilities – with respect to the termination decision or the maintenance of a child, should a woman choose to keep a child.
- ◆ Abortion stigma – seen as a “dirty” choice, based purely on women being selfish; in another conversation, the perpetuation of abortion stigma by medical professionals in public hospitals.

The most dominant words in the two conversations, after the topic “abortion”, were “marriage” and “child”. This emphasises the reciprocity of life, with concern for the foetus being labelled a person, whilst medically the definition is different. Marriage as a term invokes morality with respect to women waiting for marriage to have sex for procreation, as well as the misguided comparison of abortion with gay marriage rights. Life was a top term that appeared in both conversations, and it was used mostly with respect to the argument for right to life of the foetus, regardless of any potential risk to

the woman carrying the foetus. Abortion was labelled as murder, with conversations casting aspersions on the female's sexual behaviour, loose morals, selfishness and lack of love or regard for the child they would be "killing". The social representations of vilification of the women weighed heavily in the words used to describe those that choose to terminate, as murderous, uncaring human beings. Leaders use religious scripts, such as The Bible, to justify their words and actions in rejecting the rights of women to choose, focusing instead on the loss of potential new life. This despite the Choice on Termination of Pregnancy Act (1996), which clearly states that it "promotes reproductive rights and extends freedom of choice by affording every **woman** [emphasised] the right to choose whether to have an early, safe and legal termination of pregnancy according to her individual beliefs".

A number of themes emerged from the two Twitter conversations on abortion and related rights. The themes included discussions with respect to partner rights and responsibilities. Reciprocity of life was raised in these discussions, questioning the rights of the child (foetus) superseding those of the woman in making the decision of which right to life matters more. This was closely linked to representations of the sanctity of life of the unborn child, as well as religious moral views on the representation of abortion as the murder of innocent life. Tweets referring to the sexual behaviour of women and their rights being compromised by them for not taking precaution to become pregnant squarely place the responsibility on women, socially representing those who are pro-choice as selfish. The stigmatisation of women linked their behaviour, the right to an abortion, the humiliation suffered at the hands of medical professionals, and the policing of women's bodies. The admonition in these tweets was that women should feel empowered to seek abortions without feeling shame, and in a safe environment. The tweets relating to these themes are discussed in more detail below.

Partner rights and responsibilities

A number of tweets and retweets came from people who identified as male and who clearly argued for the rights of partners in decision-making about abortion by women. They pointed to the fact that their feelings about abortion should be considered too.

Partner rights

While the physical impact of the consequences of an unwanted pregnancy are carried by females, the conversations challenged the rights of partners. Many men raised the neglect of their rights in making the abortion decision, feeling victim to their partners not considering their emotions. Females, on this right, retorted that men typically do not take responsibility for children, leaving women to fend for themselves. The following conversation is an example:

Problem is we together smashing but we it comes to abortion guys are not consulted
i believe we have the right to be consulted

Do Girls Consider How We Men Feel When They Abort?

Most of y'all deny the baby

But Then Not All Of Us To Do That Hey.

Do You Know How It Hurts To Be Robbed The Chance Of Being A Father♥

🙄 no I don't, are you a victim?

Yes♥♥

Kodwa Kuzo Lunga Yaz [meaning yes my heart has been broken twice (emojis), but it will get better in Isizulu]

Yho askies 🙄🙄 [Oh sorry]

Partner responsibilities

The participants also tweeted about the responsibilities that result from pro-life decisions, yet partner responsibilities do not seem to be taken into consideration in making pro-choice decisions. The sentiments expressed by the partners were that they were only conveniently allowed into children's lives to maintain and support them, yet when decisions about abortion were made, they were not invited to participate:

When you want to have the [sic] and she doesn't she goes ahead and abort, "she's within her rights" When she wants the and you're not ready she can go ahead and have the child, you have to maintain and support the child whether you financially ready or not...😏

The decision to abort must taken by both parties angithi simenze sobabili [meaning we made this child together in Isizulu]. If one says yes and the other one says no, the one who said yes keeps child... the one who said no can't claim him/her.😏

This gets forgotten very quickly, some turn into prophets and say ubabakhe [the father] will run away or reject the child without even telling u that they pregnant.

I have NEVER heard or seen guys against abortion, usually they pay for it coz most guys aren't very keen on fatherhood... I'm impressed with this thread

Yet the man has no choice in forking over cash for 18 years. Liberal society is messed up.

Reciprocity of life

The idea that a pregnant woman was given a chance to life and should therefore treat others, in this case a foetus, in the same way was a recurring theme in Twitter conversations:

sometimes matter of morals [sic] and been responsible [sic]...why your mom didn't abort you?

i don't like idiots girls in my life...why at first place you admitted that sex with no protection...Condoms are not 100% safe you know. Please don't involve my mom in this conversation. It's not that hard to understand that ripping a child apart piece by piece and vacuuming its brains out is "wrong"

Dissonance of rights: digital space, an enabler of conversations about abortion...

I totally disagree...Thats a life already you getting rid off. why cant you just give that kid its right to live just like your mama did for you

Imagine if your mom had aborted you

Sacrosanctity of foetal life

The sanctity of the foetal life manifests through tweets comparing abortion to murder, with the foetus referred to as an angel, and promising punishment by the devil for terminating a pregnancy. This conversation between two people evokes guilt on the part of the woman, equating her to a murderer and killer with "blood on her hands":

Abortion is murder!!! That little angel you have in your womb has right to life, killing him/her is d greatest injustice against nature! He neva asked u to have sex witout protection, y kill him/her? U r heartless!!

What about if you are raped? 🙄 I'm supposed to live with that?

If u r raped, it is still not the child's fault. He or she has d right to live. Give birth to the Child and him/her to the orphanage or the Social services. Murder is murder!

Could never be me. Call me heartless, I don't care.

D devil will care... Close your damn legs and stop committing murder! Gosh!

Leave me alone, abortion is legal.

Kip aborting, good luck in losing ur womb and having blood on your hands! I wonder hw u sleep at nyt

And the innocent life?

When does life begin?

The minute the baby takes its first breathe according to the South African law of persons

Religious prejudice

The response to morality from those adopting a religious view is that of abortion being considered murder. The main contestation and challenge to those viewing abortion as a sin is that Christians commit all manner of sins, and yet are selective in their outrage, specifically against abortion:

To selective Christians: I know the Bible says abortion is a sin

But what about those other sins y'all are committing? Don't get all holy holy on me because of what I said.

People are going to say what they think is right. You are entitled to your perspective. Don't let these folks drag you down. Nobody has time for these all of a sudden part-

time Christians. These, morally correct for this topic of conversation type of thing. I got you.

The Bible Is Pro-Child Killing

I've pointed out before that the Bible nor the God it portrays is "pro-life," but the BEattitude has compiled some more verses about the Bible's stance on killing

patheos.com

Abortion is not given enough platform it deserves in societal discourses. Abortion is clouded by religious prejudices hence opinions like "it is ok for rape". There are other dynamics that are reasons enough for abortion.

Female sexual behaviour and rights

Women are often shunned by communities on the basis of the moral, cultural and religious views held by societies (Oduro & Otsin 2014). The social representation of these views is that the life of an unborn child, who is innocent, does not deserve to be terminated. Linked to this representation is the implied judgement that a female who chooses to abort was irresponsible by becoming pregnant in the first place and did not take the necessary precautions. This places the responsibility for the consequences of sexual intercourse squarely on the shoulders of females, absolving men from the responsibility of pregnancy. Women who choose to abort are socially represented as selfish, lacking in maternal instincts and callous with the "gift of life":

Neither does that kid deserve to suffer when he/she is born. It's a catch22. So best to give women prerogative to decide without her being subjected to prejudice.

There's no point of argument here...it's people who refuse to be responsible for their actions because i believe anyone can hersal [sic] and provide for that baby...there's always a way out unless you just don't want to...

Its not about beliefs...you get pregnant, you not like raped or something that will make sense to abort, and you can find a job even though you gonna hersal [sic]... Don't say you'll get rid of it just because you choose whatever you want with your body and just because its 22.

Hle...it's a taboo...people need to understand that as much as it's a sin examples like divorce os [sic] also a sin. but you'd hear people saying "if you're not happy get out of that unhappy marriage"...but they want people to be unhappy mothers.

Maybe they just don't want to have a kid with that specific man.

Well birth control like any other contraceptive isn't 100% fool proof.

And what happens in cases of rape? Must we as society force an unwanted child on a woman suffering from trauma? Or in cases where in cases where the pregnancy could kill the woman before she even gives birth?

She can give it up for adoption

Saying "give it up for adoption" is not always realistic in SA, as of 2017 the rate of adoption has decreased by roughly 50%, and that number wasn't great to begin with. According to the children's institute at uct only 1186 children were adopted between apr 2017 n mar 2018

I personally don't Entertain bullshit...its sad these Abortion thing i once experienced "its funny these girl she still young don't know what she sayin..she will grow and understand...unless she will die stubborn.

Abortion stigma

The discussions mostly emanated from medical professionals speaking out against the stigma that surrounds women who choose to engage in termination of pregnancy and discouraging women from having unsafe abortions. On the other hand, some women pointed out the medical practitioners were the perpetrators of the stigma surrounding abortion:

Don't be ashamed to have an abortion It is legal to have it and you're acting within your rights. Don't let the stigma around abortion force you to go and have back door abortion because you might end up dead and you don't owe anyone any explanation. it's your body and your right

One of the biggest obstacles for women getting abortions is abortion stigma. It's the core of what's inhibiting more abortions being offered to women.

It's unacceptable that women should be humiliated for having this experience.

The treatment by the nurses in the hospital towards the women seeking abortions was just disgusting.

I'm 28. I've had three abortions and I have one son... In my first abortion, I was 19 and I was raped in first year... I was four weeks and told to come back at 20 weeks. That really depressed me. I speak out about my story. I speak out about the stigma because I don't think it's fair.

I'm pro choice and I find it interesting that it's men who want to tell women what to do with their bodies. I'm a medical professional in the public sector. The environment is very difficult for women who are seeking abortions. It's humiliating for the one's that do come. The circumstances are inhumane for what women are going through.

Healthcare workers are the biggest culprits of obstructing access. As a med student wanting to be trained in performing TOPs, senior professionals will alienate you for even asking.

CONCLUSION

Whilst there is recognition in South Africa that freedom of choice to terminate is legal, there is an argument against it being morally “right”. In arguing for the moral position, pro-life proponents argue that, from being conceived, a foetus is a living human whose life should not be in the hands of its mother. However, the burden of care is also placed on women as those meant to raise children, by virtue of their own mothers having chosen to birth them. In this way, rights are ranked by perceived order of social importance, and the rights of the foetus take precedence. These are followed by the rights of the woman’s partner, the societal rights in occupying the moral high ground, as well as the rights of healthcare professionals to refuse to help women exercise their right to terminate. These rights are represented as altruistic, and that of the woman wanting to terminate as selfish or uncaring. This also deprioritises women as people, as their right to terminate is enshrined in the Constitution.

Throughout the different social representations that present all other human rights as the main factors in the abortion arguments, women’s bodies are represented as governable entities policed by society. No matter the reason behind the choice to terminate the pregnancy, be it a personal health risk or socio-economic factors, in the conversations analysed as part of this study the women are presented as being selfish and evil. The conversations argue against the sole choice of a woman to choose termination by putting forward these other rights. Through hegemonic and gendered social representations carried in communication, the women are blamed for getting themselves pregnant through irresponsible behaviour. Their behaviour is seen as testing or violating the behaviour of others; for example, partners and healthcare practitioners. The partners are sympathised with for having to pay for these unwanted terminations, or for keeping the baby when the partner who would have to pay maintenance refused.

The abortion conversation in South Africa needs to be given the space and room to evolve, given all the existing rights and obligations of those involved in such circumstances. However, it is uncertain but perhaps in line with the controversy of the subject as who is to steer the conversation in order to give all rights adequate and equal regard in making the final decision for termination. The Constitution, through an amendment, does not appear to have successfully brought about societal acceptance of a woman’s right to termination. However, opening up spaces for conversation will ensure that different, polarised and contentious views on the subject are given a safe platform to be heard.

The authors acknowledge that a limitation of the study is that Twitter is a privileged space that does not represent the views of the many who do not have access or a voice. For further study, consideration should be given to narratives in traditional media and how these are shaped by the media in which they take place and by the dominant voices who drive the conversations.

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