

## **Discourse and power in Ireland's Repeal the 8<sup>th</sup> movement**

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### **Abstract**

*Understanding the success of social movements in terms of their situatedness in the social and historical context is a necessary direction for social movement research. In Ireland, much of the research on reproductive rights activism since the 2018 referendum that legalised abortion has examined distinct aspects of the movement that might be improved going forward. The present study endeavoured to examine the discursive strategies used by the Repeal campaign. Qualitative data, collected from 23 activists from the 'Repeal the 8<sup>th</sup> Campaign' at a critical moment in time - ten months before the referendum - were subjected to critical discourse analysis. Situating the Repeal movement within a theoretical framework, we propose that initial pro-choice activism since 1983 maintained the abeyant movement until the receptive environment re-opened. From 2012 to 2018 pro-choice activists capitalised on the newly receptive environment to remove Article 40.3.3 from the Constitution of Ireland successfully. Findings demonstrate how activists created social change by mainstreaming discursive categories that were not previously culturally dominant, drawing on discourses of feminism, modernity versus traditionalism and approaches of strategic consciousness-raising.*

**Keywords:** Feminism, Pro-choice Activism, Repeal the 8<sup>th</sup>, Intersectionality, Social Movement Lifecycle, Critical Discourse Analysis.

### **Introduction**

In 1983, the Irish public voted to enact the Eighth Amendment to the Irish Constitution (Article 40.3.3). The Eighth amendment was deemed by Irish law to make abortion illegal in all cases – except where there was a 'real and substantial risk to the life of the mother' (Attorney General v. X, 1992; Irish Statute Book, 2013). It is estimated that between 1980 and 2016 at least 168,705 women travelled from the Republic of Ireland to the United Kingdom to obtain an abortion, and at least 1,547 travelled to the Netherlands for the same reason. These figures only account for women who provided an Irish address and so likely underestimated the correct figure (Bardon, 2018). In May 2018 another referendum was held in which 66.4% of voters in Ireland chose to repeal Article 40.3.3. The referendum result changed the Irish law on women's healthcare by permitting abortion on request for up to 12 gestational weeks and beyond this point in limited circumstances.

Discussion in Ireland since the 2018 referendum has focused on asking what caused this shift. The current study aimed to contribute to our knowledge of the pro-choice movement in Ireland – and social justice movements more generally. It does this by analysing the accounts of activists that were collected at a crucial point in time (10 months before the referendum). Further, the study will take a theoretical approach to explore the Repeal movement in line with the lifecycle theory of social movements (Christiansen, 2009). We aim to use Critical Discourse Analysis (Van Dijk, 2001) to illuminate how activists within the Repeal movement used language, action and visual displays, to strategically navigate the discursive environment and to win the referendum.

The current study offers a unique contribution to the literature on social movements by evaluating the 'Repeal' campaign as a social movement rooted in wider social and cultural change in Ireland. Critically, the study will account for the historical and social situatedness of a predominantly female-led social movement, whose primary goal is campaigning for bodily autonomy in a historically unreceptive environment.

## Literature

Since the popular vote to repeal *Article 40.3.3* from the Irish Constitution, several studies offered a hindsight view of the strategies employed by the Repeal campaign. Findings from these studies emphasized successful aspects of the campaign and also the areas where the campaign may have been improved.

## Hard cases and healthcare

Since the May 2018 referendum, hindsight evaluations of the Repeal campaign shed light on some of the strategic choices made by activists to drive the movement towards success. In a cross-cultural study, Cullen and Korolczuk (2019) compared how pro-choice activists in Ireland and Poland endeavoured to change social narratives on abortion. They noted that in both countries pro-choice activism has tended to focus on creating a discursive frame that attempts to destigmatise abortion by positioning it in line with narratives of tragedy, and by prioritising accounts of fatal foetal abnormality in campaign rhetoric. The authors suggest that both movements employed this rhetorical strategy as a way to navigate a gendered and socially conservative environment. The choice to focus on hard cases has been a topic of interest in several studies since late 2018. It was found that movement organisations tended to focus their rhetoric on so called 'hard-cases' because these cases were deemed as being easier for wider society to understand (de Londras, 2019; Carnegie and Roth, 2019).

Another successful strategy employed by the campaign was related to the discursive framing of abortion as a healthcare issue. The campaign sought to situate support for abortion in the context of women's health care, referring to it as "abortion care" and deliberately emphasising themes of care and compassion. The canvassing strategy avoided language that could be seen as absolutist,

favouring the terms “personal decision”, “doctor’s care” and “regulated”, and avoiding the language of “choice”, “on demand” “right to choose” or “bodily autonomy”. Further, the campaign gathered and disseminated personal stories to illustrate the need for change (Griffin et al, 2019, p.140). This, along with the fact that the campaign gained widespread support from the medical community and the media, was shown to be an important factor for challenging stigmatising attitudes towards abortion (Taylor, Spillane and Arulkumaran, 2020). Findings have shown that, in the time after the death of Savita Halappanavar, the Irish media widely adopted the discursive frame of abortion as a healthcare issue and pivoted away from the previous discussion of foetal ethics (McDonnell and Murphy, 2019). This is said to have contributed to refocusing the topic of abortion as an urgent healthcare matter in mainstream discourse.

Other findings suggest that the Irish media choosing to frame the topic of abortion within rational and easy to understand terms (e.g. healthcare) was an important factor in recruiting new campaign supporters. Murphy and colleagues (2019) conducted a psychological experiment examining cognitive and social bias in people’s understanding of the news as it related to the Repeal campaign and the opposing ‘No’ campaign. The researchers found that ‘No’ voters were more likely to believe false news stories framing the Repeal campaign as unreasonable and the same was true for ‘Yes’ voters who were more likely to accept fake news stories about the ‘No’ campaign. Both sides were significantly less likely to believe false stories concerning their side of the debate which were not in line with their own previously held viewpoints. This suggests that the decision to ground campaign discourse in terms of rationality was important. Art had a similar effect. For example, Chan (2019), Calkin (2019) and Enright (2020) offered perspectives on how art played an essential role in the Repeal campaign; particularly where it pertained to changing prevalent discourse surrounding the topic of abortion in Ireland.

### **Intersectionality and the 12-week access window**

Intersectionality is an important issue in feminist activism and it has been a common theme within recent Repeal campaign research. Intersectional feminism emphasises the multiple identities individuals may have that when combined, can lead to novel types of discrimination (Crenshaw, 1990; Shields, 2008). It has been suggested that the decision to focus campaign rhetoric on hard-cases and women’s healthcare, resulted in legislation that is perhaps inconsiderate to diverse identities. It was recommended that intersectionality should have played a more central role in the campaign (Cullen and Korolczuk, 2019; de Londras, 2019; Rivetti, 2019).

De Londras (2019) highlighted that exclusively female-centric language tended to be used by the Repeal campaign and subsequently by the Irish state in *the Health Act of 2018*. It was shown that the exclusive use of female pronouns had the unintentional effect of excluding transgender communities, who do not identify as female, yet might still require abortion services. The decision to focus

on hard-cases was criticised as being unnecessary. De Londras (2019) claimed that the focus could have been on narratives of choice for all people who can become pregnant and that this would have led to a more inclusive type of abortion care. Attention has also been drawn to the fact that there was, and still is, a lack of awareness regarding the experiences of migrants and asylum seekers who require access to abortion services in Ireland. According to de Londras (2019), to obtain an abortion in Ireland, people have to travel to a dedicated healthcare provider at least twice within a 12-week window, and this is often inter-county travel. For people living in direct provision, who are not legally permitted to gain paid employment; and who live on an allowance of only 155 euro per month – this is frequently impossible. The study also noted that the 'My Options' helpline set up by the Irish government to provide information about abortion, is available only in English and Irish languages. It was argued that, had campaign rhetoric been more inclusive, then perhaps the experiences of marginalised people would have been more sensitively considered at the stage of legislation.

Similarly, Carnegie and Roth (2019) also suggested that the 12-week access window permitted by the new abortion legislation is too restrictive; and they reiterated claims made by others (e.g. de Londras, 2019; Rivetti, 2019) that this has the most severe impact on marginalised groups. In other words, a lack of intersectionality may have led to legislation that serves most but not all. Other findings show that the restrictive 12-week access window may be unsuitable for some people living in remote or rural locations. Kasstan (2018) emphasised that medical professionals can legally object to provide abortion care on the grounds of a conscience clause within the new legislation. If an individual is living in a remote part of Ireland, they may have access to only one local GP. Should the only local healthcare provider choose not to engage with the patient regarding abortion care, then the patient will find themselves in a position whereby they need to travel elsewhere. This leaves one of the most significant problems with *Article 40.3.3*. unchanged for some people, as they will still need to find the time, money and the emotional capacity to travel somewhere unfamiliar to them, to obtain an abortion within a 12-week timeframe.

### **The lifecycle of a social movement**

It has been theorised that the lifecycle of a social movement can be divided into four main phases. This concept is based on early research by Blumer (1951), who suggested that most social movements share a typical temporal structure. Since Blumer's original work, contemporary research (e.g. Tilly, 2004; Tarrow, 2011; Christiansen, 2009) named these temporal stages: "Emergence, Coalescence, Bureaucratization, and Decline" (Christiansen, 2009, p 16).

The first stage, 'emergence', occurs early in a social movement. A social or political problem brings about feelings of injustice among a given population. This stage is not strategic, and there is typically no common discourse framing it as a movement. People affected by the issue might be unaware that others

experience the same issue. Alternatively, it may be an overt problem within a specific community, meaning those affected are aware of others experiencing the problem, but they feel disempowered by dominant discourses that frame the phenomenon as a social norm. The second stage, 'coalescence', occurs when some of the affected population start to network and collectively establish shared discourses to communicate their perceived injustices. During this phase, movements may operate underground or be considered a 'grassroots' group. The members of the movement negotiate the movement's goals. They also attempt to raise awareness of the issue through small-scale acts of collective activism. At this stage, movements tend to be small and might face opposition from any outgroups who are exposed to the movement discourse.

The third stage 'bureaucratisation' occurs when the movement takes on a clear structure. According to Christiansen (2009), movements will have achieved some degree of success by this stage. Many movements decline before they make it to bureaucratisation. However, for movements that are advancing towards success, this stage marks a turning point whereby formal organisations within the movement must share a streamlined strategy. Fragmentation, at this point, can send the movement into decline. Presentations of movement discourse in the mainstream must be clear and consistent. Continued progress typically involves hiring paid staff who specialise in the topic of the movement and who can establish communication with more powerful institutions. Typically, ordinary people cannot sustain the level of involvement that is required for large scale social change. So while they are still of vital importance, a movement at this stage cannot solely rely on unpaid activists. The fourth and final stage 'decline' signals the end of a movement. Movements can decline because they achieved their goal, leaving no more requirement for a movement. However, movements can also fail. They may deteriorate in authoritarian or non-receptive environments where their activism is hindered by way of law or violence. Movements can also fail due to encapsulation, whereby activists start to overly identify with the movement. Over-identification of its members can lead to the movement becoming insular and unapproachable for new supporters (for a detailed outline of movement failure see Christiansen, 2009).

According to Taylor (1989), another structural trait of social movements is that they can gain a degree of success for a time, but then due to contextual changes in society, the social environment can become unreceptive. Taylor (1989) suggested that rather than movements failing at this stage, they can take the form of an abeyance structure. An 'abeyance' structure refers to a temporal point in a movement when wider society is highly unlikely or unable to respond favourably to the movement's goals. From the mainstream perspective, it can appear that the movement has declined or disappeared. Nevertheless, this is not the case. Abeyant movements are characterised by smaller factions of highly dedicated principal members of the original movement, who continue the discourse of the movement at an in-group level. This continuity and maintenance of structure can hold the movement's place in society. This structure of abeyance means the ideals and shared rhetoric of the movement remain intact; leaving them prepared for the social environment to become

receptive again. When the social or political environment re-opens, movement activity then refocuses its attention back to out-group and mainstream targeted activism.

The present study proposes that the lifecycle theory can be used as a framework to understand how the Irish feminist and pro-choice movements in the 1980s onwards, navigated the discursive norms of the pre-Repeal era, and how they, along with newer Repeal activists, used pre-existing movement discourses within the newly 'discursively receptive' Repeal era to accomplish the goals of the movement.

## **Tracing the lifecycle of the Repeal movement in Ireland**

### **The emergence phase**

The 1861 Offences Against the Person Act stated that any woman who “procures a miscarriage” or any persons who help a woman “procure a miscarriage” will be punished with a lifetime of imprisonment. The 1861 act formed the basis for women’s lack of reproductive autonomy in Irish law for 157 years.

After Ireland gained independence, there was a clear enduring trend towards conservatism in Irish social policy, particularly where it pertained to ‘moral’ issues. The trend of conservatism is said to be a reflection of the influence of the Catholic Church on the State (Elkink, Farrell, Reidy, & Suiter, 2017). Fischer (2016) noted that the application of Catholic ideals, such as sexual purity, immediately problematised women’s bodies. For example, Crowley and Kitchin (2008) noted 24 reports and government acts from between 1922-1937 that sought to reduce women’s autonomy and regulate discourses surrounding sexual conduct in Ireland. The authors articulated that this was an attempt by the Irish state to produce “decent girls” who would represent the Catholic ideal of Ireland – at a critical time when Ireland was negotiating the type of country it wanted to be on the world stage.

Irish historical discourse rhetorically framed women as being people whose elemental function in society was to act primarily as wives and mothers. This notion was juxtaposed against the contrasting discursive category of so-called ‘fallen women’ who were severely marginalised and frequently institutionalised in brutally oppressive organisations, run by the catholic church and endorsed by the state (Luddy, 1997; Luddy, 2011). Notably, several feminist organisations started to become active in Ireland during the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries (Valiulis, 1995). The establishment of these groups was the beginning of trackable feminist organising in Ireland. However, in a period when women’s movements were fighting for fundamental rights such as being allowed to participate in democracy equally – abortion rights likely appeared unattainable. Nevertheless, the unjust treatment of women in normative discourse at the time, paired with a clear drive towards feminist activism by small numbers of

people, indicates an emergent movement that decades later would evolve into the pro-choice movement.

### **The coalescence phase**

The second wave of Irish feminism in the 1970s led to the establishment of organisations that advocated for the reproductive rights of women, such as the Irish Women's Liberation Movement (Farren, 2006) and the Irish Family Planning Association (IFPA, 2008). Activism by these groups was instrumental in the legalisation of the sale of contraception to individuals with a medical prescription, which came into force in 1980 (Murphy, 2009). It was at this time that people in Ireland who felt affected by a lack of bodily autonomy started to form official movements that were visible in the public sphere – the coalescence phase.

Seven years earlier in 1973, the U.S. Supreme Court made a landmark ruling in the case of *Roe v. Wade* where it was held that a woman's right to privacy, as outlined in the American Constitution, extends to the right to make her own medical decisions and this includes the right to procure a safe, legal abortion (Bacik, 2013). This ruling reflected a distinct shift in dominant discourses regarding women's bodily autonomy in broader western culture and subsequently created a wave of resistance among conservative groups in Ireland. Conservative groups lobbied for ten years to have the 1861 act reinforced. These groups recommended that policymakers should amend the Irish Constitution to ensure that abortion would not become legal in Ireland without a referendum. Despite the attempts from the opposing 'Anti-Amendment Campaign' which was led by grassroots reproductive rights activists, the Eighth Amendment of the Constitution (Article 40.3.3) was voted into law in 1983 by 66.9% of voters in Ireland. It declared that:

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. - (Bunreacht na hÉireann, 1937, Article 40.3.3)

### **The abeyance phase**

According to Christiansen (2009) and Taylor (1989), social movements do not necessarily move from one stage to the next in a predictable fashion. It may be the case that a movement will lay in an abeyant state for a while before re-emerging at an appropriate time. The Irish abortion rights movement took the form of an abeyance structure following the unsuccessful 'Anti-Amendment Campaign' that preceded the 1983 referendum. Some activists reported that they felt disillusioned with abortion activism after the referendum. They believed that the existing social norms in Ireland at the time meant the country was not a receptive environment for the introduction of pro-choice discourse.

For example, referring to the outcome of the 1983 referendum, one long-term activist claimed:

I was very, very upset at the outcome of that referendum, even though it wasn't a surprise. A couple of years later, we lost a divorce referendum ... I thought, "I can't stand this, we've had two terrible losses; it is a terrible decade, the '80s, there's dreadful economic recession, there's huge repression ... I know, for myself, I really had to keep on going although it was terribly difficult. And everybody I know who was involved at that time. I think we all felt terribly demoralized. - (Smyth, 2002)

Despite their trepidation, a small number of grassroots pro-choice activist groups continued to work towards advancing abortion rights in Ireland in the years after 1983, along with the Irish Family Planning Association, which set up the "Safe and Legal in Ireland" abortion campaign in 2005 (IFPA, 2005). These activists acted as placeholders for the movement in a period when pro-choice rhetoric was not receiving public support. For example, one of the founders of 'Doctors for choice' talked about their involvement with the 'women on the waves' project in 2001, in which a ship was sailed to international waters to let doctors provide abortion care without facing legal repercussions. The doctor claimed that:

We discussed the possibilities of, "Are women going to actually go down to this ship in broad daylight and in front of television cameras and look for an abortion? Is that going to happen? .... And we really felt in Ireland that it wasn't ... We couldn't have been more wrong because hundreds of women phoned looking for an abortion on the ship ... they were so desperate. It was heart-breaking. - (Bressan, 2002)

The Eighth Amendment was periodically called into question on multiple occasions in the decades after its enactment, but it seemed that the cultural climate was still generally unreceptive. Nevertheless, an ongoing series of prominent cases (as outlined in Taylor, 2015) slowly increased interest in abortion rights among the Irish public.

### **The bureaucratisation phase**

Twenty years after the enactment of the Eighth Amendment, policymakers signed the *Protection of Life During Pregnancy Act (2013)* into Irish law. This event signalled the most significant change in Irish abortion law for over a century. The 2013 Act stated that women could access lawful abortion in Ireland in cases where the woman's life is deemed by medical professionals to be at risk.

This came one year after extensive interest in abortion rights broke into the mainstream consciousness following the high-profile death of Savita Halappanavar, who died of septic shock whilst under the care of the Irish Health Service. It was later acknowledged by the clinical director of the national maternity hospital, that it was "highly likely" that Savita Halappanavar would have survived, had her pregnancy been terminated (McCarthy, 2016). Soon after this, new pro-choice lobby groups formed to repeal *Article 40.3.3*. Activists established the Abortion Rights Campaign (ARC) in 2012 as part of the campaign to repeal *Article 40.3.3* (ARC, Accessed 2017). ARC hosted highly attended protest marches annually, which became a central feature of the campaign until 2018 (D'Arcy and Pope, 2012; McGreevy and D'Arcy, 2017). While advocates applauded the *Protection of Life During Pregnancy Act (2013)* to some extent, it still stood that many feminists, medical professionals and other pro-choice advocates considered the new law to be an oversimplification of a much larger problem. Therefore, pro-choice activism continued.

Another high-profile case emerged in 2014, two years after the tragic death of Savita Halappanavar. The 'Ms. Y case' (Holland, 2014) involved a young woman who was seeking asylum in Ireland. During this time, she found out she was eight weeks pregnant as a result of being raped. The woman was informed that her status as an asylum seeker would complicate her ability to travel to another country to obtain an abortion. The woman was subjected to a lengthy process of waiting for the paperwork for several months that would allow her to travel. During this time, mental health professionals who were allocated to support the woman made attempts to persuade her to consider adoption; a suggestion the woman refused as she expressed that experiencing the pregnancy was emotionally traumatising. Eventually, the woman declared that she was suicidal – a condition that according to the *Protection of Life During Pregnancy Act (2013)* would mean abortion would be lawful in limited cases. Despite this, it was determined that the woman would be forced to carry the pregnancy to term. Eventually, 'Ms. Y' went on a hunger strike which led to her receiving a caesarean section 25 weeks into the pregnancy. The 'Ms. Y' case sparked protests in Dublin, Cork and Galway; and further reinforced public interest in Irish abortion law (McGuire, 2014).

Adding weight to these events, some years later it emerged the United Nations Human Rights Committee found that Irish abortion laws were in direct violation of two women's human rights in the cases of *Mellet v Ireland (2016)* and *Whelan v Ireland, (2017)*. By 2017, seven different UN committees called for legal reform in Irish abortion law (de Londras, 2017). This UN criticism, along with the growing number of high profile cases, put pressure on the Irish government to fully engage with the topic of the Eighth Amendment. By November 2016 a Citizens' Assembly was established by the Irish government to evaluate the role of *Article 40.3.3* in Irish law (Taylor, Spillane and Arulkumaran, 2020).

Taking all of this into account, it appears that from 2012 onwards there was a distinct reopening of the receptive environment. The abeyant abortion rights

movement had pivoted into the crucial 'bureaucratisation' phase. This was illustrated in numerous ways. The Coalition to Repeal the Eighth Amendment was formed in 2013, initially with 12 organisations but eventually growing to over 100. By 2015 the annual March for Choice in Dublin had doubled in size from the previous year, with an estimated attendance of 10,000 people. A political lobbying campaign was rolled out in advance of the upcoming general election and an advertising agency was engaged to research and help develop the Repeal strategy, significant fundraising was achieved and paid staff were employed. Ultimately, a "Together for Yes" umbrella group of 70 organisations was formed to campaign in favour of the referendum (Griffin et al, 2019).

The Repeal campaign was also highly visual. For instance, black sweaters with the word 'Repeal' written in a bold white typeface became synonymous with the campaign and a mural painted by a political street artist known as 'Maser' became the unofficial iconography of the campaign. Photographs of people posing with the mural or wearing black Repeal clothing proliferated social media as a visual way to discursively align oneself with the campaign. Visual displays, clothing and art contributed greatly to mainstreaming pro-choice rhetoric and the purchase of 'Repeal' jumpers also contributed financial funding for the campaign. Therefore, art and clothing were utilised to build on discursive and financial power. The internet played a significant role in the visibility of the campaign. online discussions were on the increase. The popular #RepealThe8th Twitter hashtag is a useful marker for measuring the timing of movement activity. The hashtag first appeared on an individual's Twitter account on 25<sup>th</sup> November 2012, 11 days after the news of Savita Halappanavar's death broke publicly. By the time the Irish government held the referendum on 25<sup>th</sup> May 2018, the ARC social media accounts had amassed 23,149 followers on Twitter; 27,695 on Facebook and 9,423 on Instagram. In addition to this, several of the original activists who previously held the movement in place during the abeyant phase, and who founded the ARC, became household names through their involvement in the campaign (Duffy, 2019).

### **The decline phase**

Following the explosion of new mobilisation in the pro-choice movement, the Irish government finally announced that they would hold a referendum on the 25<sup>th</sup> of May 2018. The referendum asked the Irish public whether they want to repeal or retain the *Eighth Amendment to the Constitution* (Article 40.3.3). The Irish public voted 66.4% in favour of repealing *Article 40.3.3*, making abortion legal in the Republic of Ireland for up to 12 gestational weeks; or in rare and exceptional circumstances beyond 12 weeks where there is a severe risk to the life of the woman or foetus. As noted previously, social movements can decline due to failure or due to success. The Repeal movement can be said to have declined due to successfully achieving its primary goals. However, Christiansen (2009) notes that movements do not necessarily entirely dissolve upon achieving their goals. Some movements re-orient to a new set of goals. The

emerging research findings since late 2018 (Carnegie and Roth, 2019; Cullen and Korolczuk, 2019; de Londras, 2019; Rivetti, 2019; Kasstan, 2018) suggest that the Repeal movement might be pivoting to focus on refining the legislation surrounding abortion care in Ireland; especially where it pertains to increasing intersectionality and inclusivity.

## **Methodology**

The current study sought to understand the social underpinnings of the successful Repeal campaign. The primary objective was to provide a holistic view of the discursive environment associated with the campaign in the years between 1983 and 2018. The study set out to answer the following research questions:

1. How can modern pro-choice discourse explain the social and historical background of pro-choice support in Ireland?
2. What discursive strategies do participants employ to justify their pro-choice subject positions?

Qualitative data was collected from twenty-three participants who provided detailed personal accounts of their engagement as pro-choice activists in the Repeal campaign. All data was collected using internet-mediated qualitative survey methodology. Unlike the quantitative survey, which aims to investigate populations as units; the qualitative survey aims to gather data that illuminate the experiences of individuals who exist within a population that is under investigation (Jansen, 2010).

Data was collected throughout August 2017, which was ten months prior to the 2018 referendum. Prospective participants were initially contacted through publicly available email addresses for pro-choice organisations that were sourced from the websites of official movement organisations, regional feminist groups, popular Repeal affiliated social media accounts and Repeal affiliated blogs. Overall 50 prospective participants were invited to participate in the study. The fifty prospective participants were also encouraged to share the survey with other activists in their network. According to Coleman (1958; as cited in Bryman, 2015), snowball sampling is especially useful for studies in which networks of people are the main focus of enquiry. Diani (2013) described social movements as connected networks of people and organisations that are committed to a mutual cause. Therefore, it was reasoned that snowball sampling would be a useful addition to the initial convenience sampling technique since it permitted greater access to the Repeal campaign activist community in Ireland. Finally, twenty-three participants completed the full qualitative survey.

The Repeal campaign, like other pro-choice movements internationally, is primarily female-led (Griffin et al, 2019). Therefore, the majority of accessible activists tended to identify themselves as female. In addition to this, the research questions were not gender-specific. For these reasons, the gender imbalance in the current sample is not seen as being exceptionally problematic.

Table 3 - Participant Profiles

		N = (23)
Education		
	Junior Cert	2
	Leaving Cert	1
	Apprenticeship	1
	PLC Course	1
	Diploma	1
	Bachelor's Degree	13
	Master's Degree	1
	PhD	3
Sex		
	Male	2
	Female	21
Age Bracket		
	18-25	4
	26-36	13
	37-50	6
Location		
	Dublin	6
	Cork	1
	Galway	1
	Limerick	1
	Waterford	1
	Donegal	2
	Meath	1
	Kilkenny	1
	Kerry	2
	Tipperary	2
	Wicklow	1
	Rural Ireland (Not Otherwise Disclosed)	1
	Small Village (Not Otherwise Disclosed)	1
	Working Class Area (Not Otherwise Disclosed)	1

	Northern European City	1
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Two quantitative demographic questions preceded the survey. Following this, the main body of the survey was comprised of one qualitative demographic question and a further ten qualitative activism related questions. Finally, a general comment box was included at the end of the survey, whereby participants were encouraged to offer further insights into their pro-choice activism. Several participants used this box to elaborate on topics they mentioned earlier in the survey. The survey was intentionally designed to ask only the ten most important questions for addressing the overall research question. DeVaus (2013) emphasised the importance of keeping online surveys succinct since drawn-out surveys encourage non-participation. Also, as participants become more fatigued, they are less likely to provide high-quality responses. Therefore, it is considered good practice to keep internet-mediated surveys to between 10 and 15 questions overall (DeVaus, 2013). Collectively, the 23 participants spent 9 hours and 20 minutes answering the open-ended questions. Specifically, participants spent an average of 24 minutes completing the survey.

The final dataset was initially subjected to thematic analysis and then refined further through discourse analysis. Findings were understood using the critical discursive analysis (CDA) theoretical approach (Van Dijk, 2001).

Critical discourse analysis (CDA) is a type of discourse analytical research that primarily studies the way social power abuse, dominance, and inequality are enacted, reproduced, and resisted by text and talk in the social and political context. - (Van Dijk, 2001, p.352)

The dataset was initially coded in an Excel spreadsheet using thematic analysis to organise any statements that were related to the research questions. These sub-codes were reorganised into broader umbrella themes in separate sheets of the same excel workbook. The broad themes were then analysed again, using discourse analysis, to identify the discursive strategies participants used in their talk about each of the thematic categories. In line with CDA, the analysis will be presented in light of social and historical power structures that are negotiated through discourse.

## **Ethics**

This study was approved by the School of Social Work and Social Policy Research Ethics Committee in Trinity College, Dublin. Written informed consent was gained from all participants through an online interactive consent form which explained the terms and then required prospective participants to either click “I agree” or “I disagree”. Only by providing informed consent could participants access the survey. Participants were encouraged to email one of the

researchers with any questions they might have before deciding if they would like to take part.

Participants could withdraw before, during or within one week of participating. Every individual who participated was informed that to withdraw after taking part they would need to email the primary researcher using the same email address they used to access the survey.

The survey did not ask participants their name or contact details, but their responses were associated with specific email addresses. Therefore, contacting the researcher using this email address would make the specific response identifiable to the researcher. The *Ethics Guidelines for Internet-mediated Research* (BPS, 2013) note that partial responses in online research may indicate that the individual withdrew during participation by leaving the website. To account for this, only fully completed responses were accepted by the system. In addition, participants were informed that any data they provided would be anonymised and safely stored in line with the guidelines set by the *Data Protection Act 1988*, as amended in 2003.

Another ethical consideration was based on the potential disclosure of illegal activity. Notably, the study involved people who were campaigning for a medical procedure that, in most cases, was illegal in Ireland. However, at the time of data collection, neither citizens nor professionals were obliged to report cases where an illegal abortion is disclosed. The Clinical guidelines for health professionals on implementing the *Protection of Life during Pregnancy Act 2013* (Department of Health, 2014) did not make any particular recommendation on how health professionals should respond to a woman presenting for treatment after illegally inducing an abortion. Also, both the IFPA and Amnesty International called for it to be made explicit that professionals were not obliged to report to the police, as this would be breaching patient confidentiality (Irish Times, 2016). Therefore, it was concluded that the researchers would not have a legal or ethical responsibility to report if a participant disclosed a previous or planned abortion, whether in Ireland or abroad.

## Findings

During August of 2017, qualitative textual data was collected from twenty-three participants – all of whom identified themselves as activists for the ‘Repeal the 8<sup>th</sup>’ campaign. Ten months later a 66.4% majority chose to repeal *Article 40.3.3* from the Irish constitution. This secured the right to abortion in Ireland within the first 12 gestational weeks. The study captured a moment in time, more than three decades after the introduction of *Article 40.3.3* and just ten months before the 2018 referendum which led to its repeal.

Participants varied in age between 18-50. Some activists had experience spanning over multiple decades for the pro-choice, sexual education and contraceptive rights movements. However, the most common age bracket for participants was in the 26-36 range. Therefore, we can infer that most

participants were not active in the pro-choice campaign that preceded the 1983 referendum due to their age. Perhaps they can be thought of as a second wave of pro-choice activists in Ireland. Nonetheless, the majority of activists in the study did have experience participating in multiple types of activism for a broad range of causes. Most commonly, the LGBTQ marriage equality campaign, in which over half of the current participants were active.

The most commonly occurring word in the dataset was 'people' which was used 98 times. This highlights the extraordinarily social nature of the Repeal movement. In order for the movement to work, activists had to understand how to be persuasive, how to communicate effectively and how to draw upon more acceptable discourses to justify the advent of new ones. In the following pages, we will outline the three most common discursive themes that emerged from the data. These were: 'Feminism', 'Traditionalism Vs. Modernity', and approaches to 'Discursive mainstreaming'.

### **Theme 1: Feminism**

It was common for participants to frame pro-choice discourse within the context of broader feminist discourse. Clodagh talked about how "this time" women will not just go away. Here Clodagh alluded to a belief that something in Ireland has changed for women and that this time it will be different. She draws on discourses of power and strength in light of the previous referendum, or perhaps in light of women's treatment historically.

Making ourselves seen and heard is vital to changing minds and letting those in power know that this time around women in Ireland are not going away. – Clodagh

Holly drew on the same narrative of female empowerment and how "women will not just go away". She emphasised that women are "half of the population" so deserve to be seen and heard. From a CDA perspective, Holly is discursively framing women as a powerful group – she wants to let the reader know that women are not marginal and cannot easily be controlled. She draws on discourses of strength and collective group confidence. She also offers a warning with "we will not go away until it is amended".

We have to be seen and heard regularly and in large numbers because the government needs to know we will not go away until it is amended. – Holly

Nevertheless, it was more common for activists to draw on discourses of female oppression. For example, Jennifer talked about her frustration "that men make decisions about women's bodies" and Sarah talked about how she decided to become a Repeal campaigner because she thinks women in Ireland are treated

“like second class citizens”. She draws strongly on discourses of disempowerment and a need to rise up and fight for women. Sarah immediately follows this statement with the claim that she has two nieces. Here Sarah is alluding to the idea that what women have in the present is not what women should have in the future. She draws on discourses of creating a better future for people in Ireland.

It is such an important topic for women in the country. we are treated like second class citizens. I have two nieces and I want them to have bodily autonomy. – Sarah

Other participants drew strongly on feminist language. For example, Maura constructed a detailed narrative explaining her involvement with pro-choice activism over several decades. She talked about how she did not ‘choose’ to become involved with the Repeal campaign. Instead, she became a pro-choice activist because bodily autonomy is part of a larger feminist belief system that is important for how she understands the world and fundamental to her identity. Throughout her responses, much of her language was firmly rooted in academic feminist discourse. With her use of the term “integral to her social and economic liberation” Maura is drawing directly from feminist scholarship and activist rhetoric (e.g. Norlock, 2019).

It wasn't so much a specific choice to get involved it was more that it was very important and I see a woman's right to control her fertility as being integral to her social and economic liberation. – Maura

Other participants claimed that being exposed to feminist discourse led them to change their opinions about abortion. For example, Fiona talked about how she was “quietly pro-life” when she started college. Yet, upon meeting new feminist friends, she became a dedicated Repeal activist. Noticeably, Fiona used the word “quietly” to describe her previous subject position. Fiona’s discreteness about her former anti-choice subject position indicates that perhaps she believed that her college peers would not see her position as being socially acceptable. This marks a clear change from the social culture in 1983 when the Eighth Amendment was introduced. Throughout Fiona’s talk, it is clear that not only are the young people in Fiona’s college peer group openly feminist but they are also highly politically engaged.

## **Theme 2: ‘Traditional Ireland’ versus ‘Modern Ireland’**

The second discursive theme related to the dichotomous discourses of ‘Modern Ireland’ versus ‘Traditional Ireland’. Notably, these discursive categories did not refer to the temporal structure of society. Instead, participants talked about

both categories as existing simultaneously. They discursively framed pro-choice individuals as living in a 'Modern Ireland', while they framed anti-choice individuals as living in an 'old' Ireland. The 'Traditional Ireland' category constructs a hypothetical model of a person who is highly conservative and religious. The hypothetical person who lives in Traditional Ireland makes sense of the world by drawing on discourses that were normative in the past.

Notably, the discursive category of 'Modern Ireland' is strongly embedded in broader western culture, while 'Traditional Ireland' is more locally focused. For example, Ciara casually mentioned that one of her parents is American, so she has "always been pro-choice". Here Ciara is drawing on the idea that having reduced Irish influence on her upbringing ensured that she would not be anti-choice. She discursively frames Irish norms as the problem. Furthermore, Ciara used the word "always" - as in "I have always been pro-choice". Here Ciara is constructing a narrative that 'even in the past' she was pro-choice, perhaps before it became a more common subject position in Ireland.

Indeed, the global gaze on Irish culture was a consideration for many of the activists. For example, Jennifer explained her mobilisation in the Repeal campaign as being related to cultural embarrassment. She feared that in the "global setting" people from other cultures might see Irish people as fitting into a discursive category that conflicts with her personal identity as a modern Irish person who is living in a 'Modern Ireland'. There is a subtext that this is embarrassing or undeserved. She is attempting to build new discourses to reject this narrative. In the following excerpts, Jennifer and Caoimhe show that they are not only interested in women's rights - they are also interested in Ireland's position in the world.

Total embarrassment in the global setting that we are seen as the backward religious Irish. – Jennifer

There is this idea that the majority of Irish people are anti-choice, which is arguably not correct at all so [marching] is important for visibility. – Caoimhe

Anti-choice campaigners tended to be discursively framed as being strictly Catholic people, who live in a construction of Ireland that is rooted in the past. For example, Fiona talked about being at a Repeal demonstration where anti-choice campaigners turned up and defiantly "read to the activists from a bible". Caoimhe talked about herself and other female activists being subjected to physical assault and "gendered insults" whilst at demonstrations. Later she draws on the discourse of 'Traditional Ireland' again with her claim that "these things still happen". Here she implies that perhaps it may not have been as unusual for somebody to be extremely religious before - but it is now.

I've mostly had negative experiences from religious people. I have been literally exorcised at protests, have had holy water thrown at me several times. People would think you'd be making that up, but it's true these things still happen – Caoimhe

Another common theme in the activist discourse related to mistrust of the Catholic church. Perhaps in light of the multitude of controversies that have emerged in Ireland and abroad during the last decade. For instance, Aoife talked about the “hypocrisy” of the Irish establishment and the Catholic church. Several participants drew parallels between their choice to become Repeal activists and their feelings of cultural disappointment in the Catholic church in Ireland.

I became pro-choice after my school distributed badges with tiny feet on them, one week after a classmate was expelled for becoming pregnant. This was at the same time that various scandals concerning bishops were being exposed and the hypocrisy of it all became too much to ignore. – Aoife

Another common use of the ‘Traditional Ireland’ narrative related to different regions throughout Ireland. In particular rural areas were constructed as being more traditional, religious and unlikely to be receptive to pro-choice rhetoric. Laura talked about how she runs her rural regional group with a tone of discretion. Roisin talked about people being “openly Repeal”. This draws on implicit power relations within her close-knit community. There is a subtext that some people in the town are indeed pro-choice, but this would not be acceptable within the discursive frame that constitutes the community. Aoife draws on the same discourse but suggests that it may be possible to change these power dynamics.

We're aware that not everyone wants to or can be publicly vocal about being pro-choice (especially in rural Ireland). – Laura

My town is very religious and there are only a few openly Repeal people – I chose to go this route as we know that [name of area] is historically very anti-choice but engagement by local people with local people does have influence in ways that 'outsiders' can never have. – Aoife

### **Theme 3: Mainstreaming approaches**

Social movements use discursive strategies to negotiate power relations (Van Dijk, 2001; Fairclough, 2013). Activists in the present study showed different ways of doing this. One common approach used by participants was sharing the stories of real people. This included activists own stories. Also, re-telling the

stories of people who were impacted by high profile cases. In particular, a large number of participants were disturbed by the death of Savita Halappanavar and made a point of sharing her tragic story as part of their activism. In reference to the death of Savita Halappanavar, followed by the 'Ms. Y' case, Aisling talked about feeling that she "had enough". Conor talked about how high profile cases showed him that "current legislation is unacceptable in modern Ireland". While drawing on discourses of 'Modern Ireland', Conor also draws on the hypothetical model of the listener as being somebody rational and empathic, and who will feel as shocked as he feels. At an implicit level, this is a discursive reasoning strategy whereby Conor highlights the inappropriateness of the Eighth Amendment with the assumption that the ethical listener will agree.

When Savita Halappanavar died I found my voice. When the child was sectioned under the mental health act for asking for an abortion I'd had enough and began to physically get involved. – Aisling

[The] death of Savita Halapanavar was the first public demonstration I attended, like many, because this was an event that made it perfectly clear that the current legislation is unacceptable in modern Ireland. – Conor

Activists who shared their personal stories tended to draw on discourses of anger, injustice and shame. As part of her activism, Roisin re-tells the story of someone close to her who almost lost their life due to complications from a crisis pregnancy. Holly describes multiple shocking experiences her friends and family suffered due to *Article 40.3.3*. Another participant, Caoimhe, decided to tell her personal story in the run-up to the 2018 referendum. She shares her story publicly because she wants to decrease feelings of shame for other women.

I travelled to the UK to access abortion services when I was 18. I didn't have any support from or contact with my family and my relationship had ended. I wanted to get a degree and move past my upbringing as an unwanted child of a single mother living in poverty. When I travelled I felt so ashamed, like a criminal abandoned by my country for making a choice that was about me and my body, my future, my life. I took that anger and hurt and decided to use it to work towards a country that didn't abandon its people like I was. I just didn't want anyone to have to feel the helplessness and shame that I did. – Caoimhe

Another strategy within Repeal discourse was to frame activists as educators. Indeed, the majority of participants drew on discourses of education. They talked about their purpose as activists being to 'inform' undecided voters. Participants rhetoric tended to focus on 'spreading the word' and 'normalising' movement ideals to persuade undecided voters. Holly took this further by talking about the importance of educating people who are already Repeal supporters, in addition to educating undecided voters. Notably, activists did not

frame their educational efforts as being useful for bringing anti-choice campaigners in line with the pro-choice position. Anti-choice campaigners were constructed as unreasonable, inflexible and perhaps even lost causes.

It can be as simple as talking to people in your family or social circle to help normalise something that seems strange to people who have no experience of the issue and no strong opinion either way. – Sophie

Education. Short and straight to the point facts. If you want to get people on side and to stay on side, you need to use actual facts and not scare mongering ... Finally, you have to educate your supporters so that they may hold real life, face to face debates. – Holly

Several activists drew on detailed strategic approaches regarding the type of language that movement members should use in public discussions. For example, Aoife talked about how she handles negative comments from anti-choice family members, by "exposing" them as "unreasonable". This type of essentialist thinking was common among participants. Participants' discourse constructed people with opposing subject positions as being inherently unreasonable. Participants did not frame this 'unreasonable' status as being fluid or changeable. Instead, they framed it as a fixed quality that is integral to that particular individual. For example, Aoife claimed that she does not get angry or react to anti-choice campaigners because she wants to represent pro-choice activists as being calm and rational. Aoife's choice of language frames people with anti-choice subject positions as fanatical or irrational - a discursive frame that wider society would associate with a low level of power.

I handle [anti-choice family] by quietly bringing as many other family members as possible over to the 'vocal pro-choice' position so that their anti-choice position is exposed as unreasonable. – Aoife

I try not to react. As campaigners, we strive to be calm and factual in all dealings with the public. – Aoife

Another emergent theme was related to the concept of mainstreaming through visibility. As mentioned previously, more than half of the studies participants were active in the LGBTQ+ marriage equality campaign. Some participants cited this as their primary reason for getting involved with the Repeal campaign. Sophie talked about how the visibility of the marriage equality campaign inspired her to be more politically engaged in the Repeal campaign. Aoife talked about how the marriage equality campaign helped her to network with Repeal activists.

“I was inspired by the success of the same sex marriage referendum. Having campaigned for that and having seen the referendum passed, I felt like young people in this country can do great things if we are more active in the political process”.

- Sophie

“Once I returned to [Name of Hometown], my involvement ended as the local community was very hostile to the pro-choice movement. Years later, I cared much less about the opinion of others and I got involved with the Marriage Equality campaign. That led me to other pro-choice supporters in my area and we have been campaigning for Repeal ever since”.

- Aoife

With reference to creating a visible Repeal movement, several participants emphasised that it was vital for large numbers of people to attend public demonstrations and for this to be shown in mainstream media. Again this draws on the concept of discursive power – if the movement appears to have a large following on television, it will be considered more normative within Irish culture as a whole. Some participants repeatedly emphasised the term “people power” and another went as far as to refer to the movement as an “advertising campaign”.

Kind of like any advertising campaign, it's repeating the same message in different mediums, posters, flyers, magazines, newspapers, radio. All forms. – Michelle

A movement has to swell and you need every drop of water in an ocean for its tide to rise. Not everyone has to speak or have a sign but they have to turn up. – Jennifer

Activists also emphasised the discursive power of public displays of support through art and clothing as a means of achieving normative status for movement ideals.

Our regional group was quite small, it felt like things would never change. But after the repeal jumpers, the maser mural and some of the horrific cases that have come to light, the movement has been increasing rapidly. Now we have loads of activists in our regional group. – Caoimhe

I think clear leadership is important. Also having different levels of involvement for people, depending on what time they have to give i.e. the time to volunteer going door to door, versus the time to put on a Repeal jumper. – Sarah

Activists were successful in recruiting new supporters not only by sharing serious facts and personal stories of injustice but also by conveying an inclusive and friendly tone online. This may have contributed to building a sense of community and mutual support within the Repeal community. Approachability was particularly valuable for recruiting new supporters who had no previous experience participating in activist communities. Jennifer talked about how social media is “the recruiter” and “the organiser”. Participants regularly referred to how the internet influenced a pivot from passive to active support for many new activists.

The internet has been so important. The Repeal movement has been very active online and on social media, as well as pages like [name of pro-choice website that uses irreverent humour]. – Sophie

Several participants talked about gaining power for the movement by accessing influential platforms. For example, Clodagh suggested that the reason the 1983 campaign was unsuccessful, was because dominant power structures such as mainstream media, did not allow the pro-choice movement's rhetoric to be portrayed accurately. She later goes on to talk about the idea of “false balance”. Clodagh is referring to the national broadcaster in Ireland, RTE who attempt to give equal platforms to both sides of debates. Here Clodagh is drawing on discourses of power in the form of oppression. The underlying action in Clodagh's language illustrates to the reader that the pro-choice movement suffered an injustice by being silenced or misrepresented in the past.

I think the crucial difference between the movement to legalise abortion in Ireland today versus in the past, is that because of things like social media, we are finally hearing from those who have been impacted by the abortion ban in a myriad of horrific ways. We didn't hear much from these people before through traditional media. – Clodagh

Social media and new media amplify voices that would never be heard on traditional Irish media without false balance. – Clodagh

Overall, for most of the participants, it may be reasoned that their use of rhetoric and their discursive strategies for mainstreaming movement ideals, reflected a shift in Irish society for women since 1983. They also tended to make statements that reflected an implicit awareness of the theoretical relationship

between discourse and power which was perhaps crucial to how they orchestrated a successful social movement.

The more people who speak up gives the rest of us courage to speak up and stand up and make our positions known. Now we all know that when we do so, we will be supported in a very real and visible way by thousands of others in Ireland and abroad. This is what has turned the tide. This is why this time, we will achieve our goals to make abortion free, safe and legal in Ireland. - Clodagh

## Discussion

The present study set out to explore the discursive strategies employed by a sample of pro-choice activists in their talk about their involvement with the 'Repeal the 8<sup>th</sup>' campaign in Ireland. Findings were interpreted using the CDA theoretical approach (Van Dijk, 2001). Following this, the lifecycle theory of social movements was used as a framework to retrace the steps of the movement. The main findings showed that movement discourse tended towards themes of feminism, modernity versus traditionalism and approaches to discursive mainstreaming. Since the repeal of Article 40.3.3 in Ireland, journalist Alison O'Connor, along with the three women co-directors of the 'Together for Yes' Campaign – gave an important insider account, in which they told the story of the Repeal campaign from the viewpoint of the campaign leaders (Griffin et al, 2019). The present study adds to the official account of the 'Together for Yes' Campaign, and hence the 'Repeal' campaign, by highlighting the perspectives of the activists on the ground. Further, a CDA perspective, asserts the importance of considering power relations and social context in any social movement and this study, for the first time, situates the Irish pro-choice movement within wider theory on the life cycles of social movements (Blumer, 1951; Tilly, 2004; Tarrow, 2011; Christiansen, 2009).

By situating the Irish pro-choice movement within wider relevant social theory, our study contributes a theoretically informed understanding of the movement's success and develops the understanding of how and why its strategies were effective. In common with other social movements, our examination of the Irish pro-choice movement demonstrates that the dramatic social change that was achieved in 2018, as Christiansen (2009, p.1) puts it, "[did] not just happen". Rather, the social movement's success required many resources, employed through distinct stages of growth (Emergence, Coalescence, Bureaucratization, and Decline) that can be seen to have occurred in the Repeal case.

This study draws attention to deep roots that supported the success of the Repeal movement, which can be seen in an 'emergence' phase of the movement's lifecycle when women's organisations formed in Ireland during the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries (Valiulis, 1995). Our analysis draws attention to how the Movement transitioned into the 'coalescence' phase when it established itself as a pro-choice movement during the run-up to the 1983 referendum as the 'Anti-Amendment Campaign'. Grassroots feminist organisations were

gaining traction in Ireland and other countries during the preceding decade. Here, implicitly agreed upon movement rhetoric was established, and people started to network in a more significant way. Crucially, the movement also introduced the pro-choice subject position into the mainstream – although the discursive environment was not yet receptive to it. Perhaps this was due to the existing power structures of the era (e.g. Elkink et al, 2017). We argue that the 1983 referendum loss pivoted the movement into an ‘abeyance’ phase (Taylor, 1989). The enduring dedication of a small number of activists and organisations who continued their activism despite the unreceptive environment held the movement in position until the social context became receptive. According to the lifecycle theory (Christiansen, 2009), this was critical for the later success of the Repeal movement. Many movements fail at this stage due to a lack of grassroots activism (Christiansen, 2009).

We proposed that the receptive environment re-opened in 2012, which ushered in the 'bureaucratisation' phase of the movement. The re-opening of the receptive environment would seem to have been supported by several co-occurring events in the local context, including the death of Savita Halappanavar in 2012 and the success of the 2015 Marriage Equality Referendum, and draws attention to the coalescences of external events and civil society responses. Research suggests that many social movements fail to bureaucratize and decline because the energy for continued mobilization is beyond what volunteers can sustain (Christiansen, 2009). On this basis, the Repeal movement's success is likely, in part, attributable to how it managed to formalise its response to the receptive environment through speedy bureaucratization processes in the period from 2012-2018. Notable here, and evident in Griffin and colleagues (2019) account, is how that bureaucratization process created and drew in newly formed activists and leveraged significant new resources, but it also built on the resources and expertise of long-standing individual activists and organisations, such as the Irish Family Planning Association and National Women's Council of Ireland. This bureaucratization process can be seen to have culminated in the ‘Together for Yes’ campaign that successfully leveraged the power of a large and diverse coalition of civil society actors. Griffin and colleagues (2019, p.111) assessment that the successful coalition involved lessons in the “the art of compromise” and putting aside differences for a shared goal, is perhaps an important insight in the context of this successful bureaucratization process.

The study adds further insight to the Repeal movement by examining the discursive strategies employed by a sample of pro-choice activists in their talk about their involvement with the 'Repeal the 8<sup>th</sup>' campaign ten months before the referendum. Other authors have highlighted how the Repeal campaign drew lessons from that of the successful 2015 Marriage Equality referendum (Griffin et al, 2019) and the current study lends support to the idea that the Marriage Equality referendum shaped activists' involvement in Repeal. This is evidenced in that more than half of the current study's participants were active in the LGBTQ+ marriage equality campaign and several claimed that the success of the marriage equality campaign is what inspired them to continue their activism

in the Repeal campaign. Participants' tendency towards discursively aligning these two movements originated during the initial wave of pro-choice activism in the 1980s (e.g. Cork LGBT Archive, 2019). From a CDA perspective, this strategy was mutually beneficial for both movements as it increased movement power through the ability to influence. In another example of this strategy, findings showed that participants commonly drew on discourses of feminism. Aligning pro-choice activism with broader feminism creates discursive power by letting the listener know that the Irish pro-choice movement is part of a bigger and more powerful movement. There is evidence of this approach in the early LGBT movement, which discursively aligned the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender communities.

The most recent manifestation of this approach is illustrated by the drive towards intersectionality evident from recent feminist and pro-choice research in Ireland (de Londras, 2019; Rivetti, 2019; Cullen and Korolczuk, 2019; Carnegie and Roth, 2019). Intersectionality discursively aligns a much larger group of people than historical feminism, which tended to be dominated by the discourses of white, middle class, educated, cisgender women (Carbin and Edenheim, 2013). Therefore, not only is intersectionality a fair and essential direction for pro-choice activism – it is also a means of increasing discursive power for feminist movements globally. Notably, current participants did not use a great deal of intersectional or inclusive language. This finding supports de Londras (2019) and Rivetti (2019) who claimed that mainstream Repeal discourse risked leaving some marginalised people behind. This finding also supports Cullen and Korolczuk (2019), who suggested that the focus on 'hard cases' may have been a rhetorical strategy to navigate the potentially conservative environment. This notion is particularly evident in the finding that participants tended to perceive two coexisting versions of Ireland – a 'Traditional Ireland', which participants framed as being conservative and religious – and a 'Modern Ireland', which participants framed as being liberal and globally focused.

While the formal Repeal canvassing campaign strategically avoided language that could be perceived as dogmatic and absolutistic, including words such as "choice" "right to choose" and "bodily autonomy (Griffin et al, 2019, p. 140), this study demonstrates how such language continued to dominate activists' discursive positioning as they talked about the reasons for their activist involvement ten months prior to the referendum result. Indeed, the findings suggest that some participants were drawn into activism, in part through these constructs, highlighting differing "audiences" in the strategic use of language.

Participants talked about the influence of governmental power structures. Findings showed that some participants were in part impelled towards activism through cultural embarrassment that on two separate occasions, the United Nations Human Rights Committee found that Ireland violated fundamental human rights practices, and its constitution, when it refused abortions to two women (*Mellet v Ireland*, 2016; *Whelan v Ireland*, 2017). In the wake of multiple scandals in the Catholic church, when the country was re-negotiating

its cultural identity – the UN advising that Ireland was torturing women and violating its citizens' human rights, clearly did not align with new discourses of a modern Ireland. These events mobilised several activists to join the Repeal campaign. Furthermore, maintaining diplomacy between Ireland and the UN was likely to be a consideration for the Irish government, as it would conceivably be in their best interest as a nation. Therefore, the movement finally gaining rhetorical support from the Irish government is likely to have caused a significant shift in the opening of the receptive discursive environment in broader Irish culture.

At an international level, several other notable events occurred in 2012 that may have reinforced the newly receptive environment in Ireland. For instance, Twitter gained more users in one year than it gained in the entire five years since its conception (Fiegerman, 2012). The highly shared 'Everyday Sexism' website was established – a project that is said to have started 'fourth wave feminism' (Cochrane, 2013; Abrahams, 2017; Bowles Eagle, 2015). Furthermore in 2017, during the lead up to the 2018 referendum, the #MeToo movement gained considerable prominence online and offline. Notably, almost every participant cited the usefulness of the internet as a tool for activism in the Repeal campaign. Social media platforms gave activists a level of mainstreaming power that was unavailable in the past. Current findings suggested that activists had an implicit understanding of their newfound access to influencing power and used this to drive the movement towards success.

## Conclusion

This study set out to explain how pro-choice activists created social and constitutional change in Ireland by mainstreaming a discursive category that was not previously culturally dominant. Using the CDA theoretical approach (Van Dijk, 2001), in conjunction with a lifecycle model of social movements (Christiansen, 2009), the study emphasised the importance of situating social movement strategy in the social and historical context. It demonstrated the merits of abeyance structures in social movements, and it offered insight into the unique perspectives of the activists who were essential for educating and mobilising enough people to win the referendum to repeal Article 40.3.3 in Ireland.

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