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Reproductive rights or duties? The rhetoric of division in social media debates on abortion law in Poland

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ABSTRACT
This study explores the argumentative schemas used in claim-making and the rhetorical resources for stance-taking in the online abortion law debate in Poland in late 2016. It shows how these discursive devices were used to divide and discredit the opponent in the social media by two social movements: the Stop Abortion coalition of conservative and religious organizations that sponsored the legislative proposal to considerably restrict abortion, and the Save Women committee that stood behind the ‘black’ protests opposing the project. The textual material is drawn from social media profiles of the two movements following a week of intense street protests and publicity activities (19–26 October 2016). It is subjected to contrastive argument analysis and critical discourse analysis of rhetorical resources. The analysis involves comparing (1) the discrepant premises underpinning arguments in the process of claim-making; (2) the reverse distribution of legitimization techniques deployed; and (3) the choices of name-calling devices aimed at discrediting antagonists.

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Pro-life; pro-choice; argument; stance; protest; discourse analysis; rhetoric

Since 1993 the Polish law regulating abortion has been relatively restrictive, allowing the termination of pregnancy only in cases of severe risk to women’s health, irreversible damage of the foetus, or for pregnancies that result from criminal acts. This law is supposed to reflect the social ‘compromise’ between deeply ingrained Christian values and the protection of the rights of women. The number of legal abortions amounts to a thousand cases annually, and there have been media reports of women not getting the adequate medical assistance in time, even when they were entitled to legal abortion (Mielczarek, 2013). Reports by NGOs show, however, that illegal abortions are on the rise and can be estimated even at 100,000 cases a year, as the circumstances drive some women either to attempt induced miscarriages or to use abortion clinics in neighbouring countries.¹

Despite that, for the last 20 years, the compromise has been largely upheld as ‘a lesser evil’ in battles to criminalize all kinds of abortion staged by pro-lifers and in preventing pro-choicers from attempting a liberalization of the law. This balance was upset in September 2016, when the Polish Parliament, controlled by the conservative party Law

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and Justice, agreed to attend to a citizen project of an almost total ban on abortion. The public outcry grew more intense with street protests (also known as black protests because demonstrators wore mostly black and carried clothes pegs or umbrellas as solidarity symbols), women’s general strikes and (social) media activities that criticized the ban and called for more recognition of women’s needs and rights in Polish politics, society, and mores. The question of the state’s control over women’s bodies has been a prominent theme of that debate, with activists echoing the rhetoric of American lawyers justifying Roe v. Wade: ‘It is difficult to imagine a greater invasion of individual’s control of their own bodies than compelling a woman to keep a foetus in her womb against her will’ (Chemerinsky, 1982, p. 134). In Poland women’s reproductive rights used to be taken up by a variety of lesser party-based organizations, but mostly by women’s civic organizations. These national and regional feminist groups have also campaigned on a wide range of issues (such as gender parity/quota system in the 2000s), but have no strong organizational base in the political parties, although they have a potential for cooperation or competition with political groups.

This comparative study explores the argumentative schemas used in claim-making and the rhetorical resources in stance-taking, particularly legitimization tools and expressive labels that were used to divide and discredit the opponents in the abortion law debate, as performed by two antagonists: the Stop Abortion coalition that initiated the ban project, and the Save Women committee that stood behind the protests. It is an empirical ‘bottom-up’ attempt at mapping which rhetorical resources were deployed by the two movements to persuade and mobilize a largely disengaged public at a critical moment when the legislators were to decide on reproductive rights. The simmering debate on the issue that continued for over two decades crossed the threshold of media and public visibility.

Textual material drawn from social media profiles of the two social movements following a week of intense street protests and publicity activities of both camps (19 Oct–26 Oct) is subjected to contrastive argument analysis and critical discourse analysis of rhetorical resources. The specific objectives of this study include comparing (1) the premises underpinning arguments in the process of claim-making by the two camps (Fairclough & Fairclough, 2012), (2) the distribution of legitimization techniques deployed as global rhetorical strategies in each case (Van Leeuwen, 2007), and (3) the choices of self- and other-presentation devices (Van Dijk, 1998, 2006). The study is located in the line of work on media representations of abortion debates (Ferree, Gamson, Gerhards, & Rucht, 2002) and in the context of mediatization of social movements (Benford & Snow, 2000; DeLuca, 1999), with social media activism and networking being an increasingly integral element of social movements both in terms of mobilization and representation (Tufekci, 2017).

This study looks both at claim-making and stance-taking, as these two textual processes converge in the mediated contentious politics of social movements (Tilly, 2008 instrumental and expressive performances). Attention is paid to the divisive, yet totalizing, representations of womanhood, as well as to how ideologically biased notions of women’s rights, social needs, and cultural priorities are used to enhance the respective stances. The analysis also traces which rhetorical resources (labels, modifiers, phrases, metaphors, slogans, narratives) are applied in the expressive repertoire that foregrounds polarization in order to epistemically strengthen each movement’s claim
through stance. It would be a truism to say that there is little actual debate beyond rhetoric in the current abortion controversy, yet the two movements use social media to ‘speak at each other’, as well as at a large populace of disengaged Poles, often in order to discredit or demonize the antagonist in the eyes of the public.

**Performative repertoires of social movements and mediatization**

Some sociologists view social movements less as groups or organizations and more as interactive performances or protest events through which actors make claims against powerful elites, state institutions or ideologically adversarial groups (McAdam, Tarrow, & Tilly, 2001; Tilly, 2008). In screening the dynamics of political contention, this literature looks at the forms of performed activities and repertoires of communicative resources used by groups of activists to make collective claims (Tilly, 2008). Tilly (2008) uses the artistic metaphors of ‘performance’ and ‘repertoire’ to highlight both routine and innovative forms of what we call here ‘claim-making’ and ‘stance-taking’ in political contention. It is often stressed that the ‘dominant cultural formations’ of what turned out to be a successful social movement are to be seen as important patterns for future social activism. For example in Poland, the political vestiges of the Solidarity movement that had brought back the national and traditional values, the culturally prominent patterns of patriarchal gender relations, and the moral claims compatible with Catholic doctrines ideologically underpin much of public discourse on both abortion restriction and its liberalization (Kamasa, 2013).

Taylor, Kimport, Van Dyke, and Andersen (2009) note that, in the context of activism related to current gender issues, the forms of claim-making are not only instrumental (to achieve political advantage, or support for legislative demands), but mostly expressive (to confirm identification and alignment). Movements are internally oriented towards breeding cohesion, often, as will be shown in this study, at the expense of the adversarial group(s). The rhetorical projections of ‘us’ versus ‘them’ inspire in-group solidarity but, at the same time, entrench oppositional consciousness that stifles deliberation (McGee, 1980). We see it as a dialectical relation in which conflicts of interests/ideologies are reproduced in public discourses, where, over time, confrontation prevails over deliberation, which, in turn, may feed into further social polarization or fragmentation. This relates to the purpose of the present study, in which discursive characteristics of two oppositional women-related social movements perform identity politics basing on self-expression, self-legitimizing argument construction and rhetorical division, often making claims to be representing the larger society’s norms and values (Taylor, 1999). After all, the rhetorical effectiveness of the mobilizing appeal is largely a matter of finding the appropriate ways to tap a vast audience for their support (Aristotle, 2007).

Since social movement repertoires are ‘culturally encoded ways in which people interact in contentious politics’ (McAdam et al., 2001, p. 16), they might be closer to real-life practices of claim-making and stance-taking than to formal politics (Walton, 1990), especially if looked at from the perspective of how they are performed through social networking platforms. Both in live street protests and in their documentation online, activists demand recognition, signal their numerical strength, and articulate group interests and goals (Tilly, 2008). To achieve visibility, activists display unity
through common attributes (similar watchwords, situated chanting, symbolic colours, objects or gestures), which may be shared, appreciated and reposted in social media. While street demonstrations tend to exploit leadership charisma and indicate high degrees of tenacity, online manifestos offer novel textual, graphic, or interactive rhetorical affordances.

To enhance the visibility of a movement’s arguments, various online resources can be exploited for mainstream media to take up and remediate (DeLuca, 1999). According to communication specialists, in the mediatized and fragmented public sphere, it matters more and more how the movement is visualized for the public to consume and how the public is exposed to its argumentation (Cammaerts, 2015). Ślősarski (2017) offers a pilot analysis on how websites and social media were used to rhetorically enhance identifications, arguments and visibility in the Polish gender-related contention. He notes how different semiotic attributes (the colour black, the clothes peg, the umbrella) were used as a coherent ‘aesthetic’ of Save Women activists to draw attention and to achieve ideological and material visibility. Kielbiewska (2018) traces the rhetorical patterns of ‘black protesters’ self- and other-labelling using a corpus of watchwords displayed in the streets. She illustrates how contention was managed not only through the expression of anger and resilience, but also through satire, hyperbole, and wit. However, the visibility of the 2016 black protests was also elevated through strategic positive self-presentation maneuvers via posts on official websites and user commentary in social media. Predictably, such presentation was subsequently challenged in an intense online campaign to discredit the black protesters that was organized by prolifers (Stop Abortion).

**Public debating: claim-making and stance-taking**

Although the title of this article suggests that the subject of the analysis is a public debate, it must be noted that the dynamics of social media interactions hinder dialogue (Berlin & Fetzer, 2012). Instead, the term debate is used here to refer to a large pool of communications involving claim-making and stance-taking related to abortion law, where some arguments receive more prominence and become ideologically reproduced, often through remediation of performances of activism. As put by Zienkowski:

Some debates have a rather repetitive or even circular character and are characterized by entrenched positions and repetitive arguments rather than by a process of critical self-examination and rational persuasion. Such debates testify to the ritual and performative functions of debate rather than to the rational and persuasive dimension of public stance-taking. We can think of so-called ‘ethical’ debates in which – frequently underspecified – national norms and values are debated. For instance, in debates about euthanasia or welfare, it is highly predictable what actors will come up with what arguments (2017, p. 229)

Such ‘debating’ is mainly oriented to successfully distinguishing one’s stance from the opponent’s and articulating one’s claims in such a way as to make them seem more acceptable to the (voting) audience, which is often presented as a silent majority whose implied stance is purportedly best articulated by ‘us’. In practice, making one’s claims epistemically stronger and more accessible involves taking strategic advantage of various mechanisms of cognitive processing (selective processes, confirmatory bias),
emotional overstimulation, and saliency of information that is favourable to one’s stance (Oswald, 2014, p. 103–107). It can also involve manipulating social cognition and memory processes through discursive moves to induce compliance (Van Dijk, 2006, p. 373). In this study, the focus is on the rhetorical resources recruited to project divisions between ‘us’ and ‘them’ and, specifically, to discredit the antagonist.

A useful framework for analysing claim-making by social activists may be derived from works on practical reasoning and audience-oriented persuasion (Fairclough & Fairclough, 2010, 2012; Perelman & Olbrechts-Tyteca, 1969; Walton, 1990). According to Fairclough and Fairclough, in political deliberation ‘arguments are based on different but often reasonable values and value hierarchies (normative priorities), which often turn out to be hard or impossible to reconcile’ (2012, p. 21). However, debating rarely proceeds smoothly, as social groups may resort to incompatible means to take a stance and make a claim for or against a legal solution. Ideally, new regulations tend to be implemented if there are practical reasons for them that outweigh counterarguments articulated during the debate (Walton, 1990). In this perspective, a claim for a regulation (e.g. a ban on abortion) to be drafted requires rational and moral premises which can be subjected to evaluation procedures. A claim against a regulation also requires sufficient premises, which may additionally include counterarguments that take the validity and persuasiveness away from the opposite claim.

Fairclough and Fairclough (2012, p. 28) structural method for argumentation analysis, which will be applied in this study, evaluates the argument through a description of salient patterns of representation of the claim, namely its premises related to goal, means to a goal, value, and circumstance. This constitutes a working framework in which claims can be broken down and represented to enable further detailed argument reconstruction. This is graphically represented in Figure 1. According to this framework, each movement (Save Women and Stop Abortion) is a ‘Speaker’ that makes certain claims about what the ‘Agent’ (the Polish Parliament) ought to do regarding allowing/restricting abortion. Given the strategically represented circumstances and selected moral values to underpin the goal, each ‘Speaker’ will construct their argument for or against abortion in such a way as to maximize the public acceptance of the claim.

However, scholars representing discourse studies, particularly its critical branch, recognize the fundamental role of strategic mustering of discourse to legitimize an articulated claim (Galasiński, 2000; Van Dijk, 1998). For example, Van Leeuwen (2007) suggests attending to four distinct discursive strategies aimed at legitimation: (1) authorization, which is ‘legitimation by reference to the authority of tradition, custom and law, and of persons in whom institutional authority is vested’; (2) moral evaluation, described as any reference to discourses of value; (3) rationalization, consisting in references to ‘goals and uses of institutionalized social action, and to the social knowledges that endow them with cognitive validity’; and (4) mythopoesis, which involves constructed narratives whose ‘outcomes reward legitimate actions and punish non-legitimate actions’ (2007, p. 91). As these legitimization strategies are persuasive rather than argumentative in nature, they can be treated as useful categories for tracing the distribution of global rhetorical strategies in the case of each antagonist and will be applied in this study.

Apart from making claims and legitimizing them effectively with discursive resources, online media ought to be studied as venues for stance-taking. The rhetoric of stance-
taking in online public discussions is a prominent strand of studies (Chovanec & Molek-Kozakowska, 2017; Englebretson, 2007; Zappavigna, 2012), of which many confirm what Myers (2010) has found about online commentary as not being channelled to argumentative deliberation but to ‘rhetorical efforts to place oneself in the field’ in relation to other voices. Online realizations of stance-taking tend to be functionally oriented towards expressing one’s (unique) view, attitude, or alignment and undermining the others’ stance with the aid of irony and other rhetorical resources. For Myers, online public discussions are about ‘getting other people to pay attention’ to the Speaker, and significantly differ from the model of Habermasian public sphere, because ‘argument gives way to […] social networking’ (Habermas, 1989; Myers, 2010, p. 272).

Another critical approach to public discourse draws attention to devices for strategic self-/other-presentation (KhosraviNik, 2010; Van Dijk, 1998, 2006), which functions as a local rhetorical strategy to give salience to favourable information about ‘us’ and to discrediting information about ‘them’. According to Van Dijk (2006, p. 373), in manipulative discourse, detailed and rhetorically enhanced negative other-presentation will be foregrounded. Meanwhile, information that is critical to challenge the Speaker’s representations will be made less accessible: neither positive information about the antagonist nor negative details about the self will be made readily available. Discursive devices that account for such polarization include other-reference through

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**Figure 1.** Claim-making, adapted from Fairclough and Fairclough (2010, n.p). Reproduced with permission from Isabela Fairclough & Norman Fairclough.
labelling (name-calling), and the use of pejorative evaluative markers (modifiers, attributions, predicates), as well as collocations that may invoke negative ‘semantic prosody.’ These minute, but pervasive, linguistic choices are instrumental to tracing divisive rhetoric, as studied here.

**Design of the study**

The material sampled for this study was to be automatically garnered from websites and social media profiles related to Stop Abortion and Save Women, but it soon turned out that in the period of intense media activity by both social movements, the same piece of information (claim or stance) could be remediated many times across networks or services, which could significantly skew the sample. In the end, only the movements’ Facebook profiles were manually sourced for data (ensuring through initial reading of the posts that no doubled information was included). This sampling decision was also motivated with Facebook’s affordances that enable giving some insight into audience’s responses to presented arguments/stances (i.e. reaction/reposting regarded as public’s authorization of argument and magnification of stance).

The samples comprise all available Facebook posts publicized between 19 and 26 October 2016, which was the week of the second wave of major protests and general strikes. The period was marked with intense publicity activities by both Stop Abortion and Save Women movements intended not only to document the level of social support ‘on their side’, but also to reinterpret the political events (the Parliament’s decision to table the abortion ban) for the followers. At this time, many mainstream media outlets and blogs have taken up the issue, so it was possible to explore whose arguments and stances were referred to, commented, shared and remediated. The textual material that was coded includes (1) all the above-the-line texts, (2) all the users’ comments found under texts in case there were up to 30 comments, and (3) 10% of users’ comments if there were more than 30 comments (as of 28 October 2016). The samples were analysed with WordSmith Tools 4.0 (Scott, 2007) and GraphCall 1.0.0; however, the frequency and concordance analysis was treated only as a guide to coding to enhance the systematicity of claim-making and stance-taking analysis.

The pro-life sample consists of 11,227 tokens, 4,242 types, with the following frequency for the keywords: kobieta (woman) n = 23, kobiety (women) n = 37, aborcja (abortion in subject position) n = 21, aborcj* (abortion in object position) n = 78, protest n = 7. The sample includes material from two related profiles: Stop Abortion and a much more often updated fan page of Pro-Life Foundation (Fundacja prawo do życia), which includes 47 texts: fifteen articles, eleven videos, seven infographics, six invitations, two links, two shared posts, two petitions, one blogpost and one report. As commentary is an integral part of Facebook posting, users’ comments were collected (in the order of appearance), yielding 160 comments (the overall number of comments is relatively high ranging from 10 to 285 per post).

The pro-choice (or more adequately, pro-compromise) sample is inclusive of 15,387 tokens, 5,561 types, with the following frequency of keywords: kobieta (woman) n = 16, kobiety (women) n = 59, aborcja (abortion in subject position) n = 17, aborcj* (abortion in object position) n = 55, protest n = 18. The Facebook sample comprises 42 texts: ten articles, three interviews, six video/graphic posts, seven invitations, four reports from
events, five shared (blog)posts, three links, two alerts and one thank-you letter. Altogether 155 users’ comments were included in the sample.

**Claim-making**

This section identifies and compares the main argumentation strategies in the textual material publicized via the Facebook profiles of the two antagonists in the debate. The procedure of argument extraction involved two coders independently searching for (1) deontic expressions (e.g. Polish equivalents of ‘should/ought to’, ‘need’), (2) subordinate clauses of causally structured sentences (e.g. complements of Polish equivalents of because/as/since/for), (3) strong assertions (non-modalized declaratives) in headings and captions. The findings were classified into content-related groups and subjected to thematic analysis, with themes formulated in the form of clauses that include arguments (originally in Polish and then translated into English following the strategies of literal translation). This coding procedure enabled a move from the ‘etic’ level of linguistic expression to the ‘emic’ level of conceptualization. To present the results, we used the schema of claim-making proposed by Fairclough and Fairclough (2010) (see Figure 1), where each movement is treated as a Speaker that argues why the Agent (Polish authorities) should either restrict abortion (Stop Abortion) or liberalize the law, or at least enable women to freely exercise their right to legal abortions (Save Women).

In the pro-life sample the following arguments have been extracted and grouped according to their leading premises (V – value, C – circumstantial, G – goal, M–G – means to a goal), as interpreted by two coders:

- Each unborn human being’s inalienable right to life should be protected. V
- Child’s right to life is more fundamental than woman’s right to choose even in the case of rape. V
- Abortion is an evil act, a tribute to Satan. V
- Unborn children should not be discriminated against (eliminated) basing on disability. V/C
- The law of the state should protect the most vulnerable individuals (unborn children). V
- *Pro-choicers legitimize abortion to avoid responsibility for permissive lifestyle and to lessen the abortionists’ burden of guilt.* V/C
- *People with low moral standards should not define what is right or wrong and define the circumstances of legal abortion.* V/C
- Abortion, as a violation of one’s inalienable right to life, is a crime, a murder. C
- Many people born with diseases/defects have a good/fulfilling life. C
- Abortion is a grave harm to a woman’s physical and mental health. C
- The president should introduce the ban on abortion as it is in the best interests of the nation. G
- The state should guarantee that diseased children live or die (in perinatal hospices) in dignity (can be baptized before they die). G/M–G
- People who live should devote to campaigning to allow others to live. M–G
Given such formulations of dominant arguments, it can be interpreted that pro-life discourse, as represented by Stop Abortion, relies heavily on value premises to underpin the claim. The values invoked most often involve the inalienable right to live even for a baby conceived in a criminal act or one that is congenitally diseased/disabled. The child’s right to die a peaceful death (preferably after being baptized) in a perinatal hospice is ranked higher than a woman’s choice to abort an unviable foetus. It is clear that the value underpinnings are derived from the social teachings of the Roman Catholic church, but they also hark back on the discursive formations of state’s legal responsibility to protect citizens and persecute crime, i.e. killing of (unborn) people.

The circumstantial premises in pro-life argumentation are also selected strategically. Apart from persistent labelling of embryos/foetuses as unborn children and, in this vein, abortion as murder (which is a typical device in abortion law debates, Condit Railsback, 1984), the posts also represent abortion as a grave human rights abuse: for one it allows discrimination of (unborn) people with disabilities; for another it is socially destructive because it not only harms a woman’s psyche, but also disrupts social order and collective morality, let alone national interests.

In the pro-choice/pro-compromise sample the following premises could be identified:

- Raped women/women whose foetuses are damaged should not be forced to bear the child. V/C
- Raped women/women whose foetuses are damaged should not be additionally punished by being denied the right to terminate pregnancy. V/C
- The state should not treat women as if they were not responsible, capable of making decisions about their fertility. V/C
- Women’s rights are being attacked/taken away by conservative politicians and the clergy. C
- There are interests groups that profit from women’s restricted access to legal and safe abortion. C
- Abortions result from the lack of decent sex education, counselling and access to contraceptives. C
- 90% of women who had abortions feel relieved/happy, and not traumatized. C
- Women usually have a good reason to terminate pregnancy. C
- Women deserve equal treatment, economic stability and respect (which they do not have in Poland viz. domestic violence, discrimination) C/G
- Women should be given the control of their body and reproductive health. G
- Abortion should not be treated as a shameful act, a taboo in public discourse. G

The value premises often invoked by Save Women seem to be attuned to the ideology of the feminist movement and foreground women’s safety, dignity, and the right to control one’s own body, often though associating the current chapter in the legal debate with humanitarian values to strengthen the argument to alleviate women’s suffering. The pro-choice discourse magnifies its appeal by rhetorically laden description of circumstantial premises: it overlexicalizes women’s legal inability to terminate an unwanted pregnancy as ‘oppression’, ‘powerlessness’, ‘enslavement’ and condemns
stigmatization, penalization and ‘hateful’ discrimination of women who ventured to admit to having undergone even a legal abortion, let alone an early termination motivated by grave socio-economic conditions. The argument is also built on the implicit premise that women are responsible, moral and intelligent individuals who should not be patronized and controlled by the state.

Additionally (as this study is devoted to divisive rhetoric), the italicized examples in both lists pertain to premises that involve an assumption of inherent divisions and antagonisms. Stop Abortion reproduces the implied division between the moral ‘us’ (pro-lifers) and the immoral ‘them’ (black protesters, pro-choicers), which is used to discredit the antagonist. The pro-lifers deny their opponents the right to deliberate on the abortion dilemma, given their ‘lower moral standards.’ In the Save Women discourse, confrontational premise formulations pertain mostly to defending women as an increasingly disempowered group whose rights are being infringed by authoritarian ‘others’ who resort to technologies of ‘biopower’ (Foucault, 1998).

**Global rhetorical strategies (legitimization techniques)**

Following Van Leeuwen (2007), who identifies four major legitimization techniques (see section 3 above), all the above-the-line texts in the two samples (47 pro-life posts and 42 pro-choice posts) have been coded by three analysts according to the dominant legitimization strategy and quantified in Table 1, basing on the frequency of occurrences. The table reveals a ‘reversed’ order in each movement’s reliance on legitimization techniques.

The Stop Abortion sample abounds in shorter posts which take advantage of narrative-driven, emotion-laden and moralizing legitimization. Mythopoesis (41% in 47 posts) is evident in biographies (and videos) about disabled, yet sweet-looking, children, or testimonials or ‘my stories’ of diseased people that demonstrate that such individuals have been living very fulfilling and productive lives, yet they would have been qualified for abortion according to the ‘compromise of death’ law. There are also captions and quotes from stories of parents who have had/adopted diseased or disabled children. They share the joys and merits of such parenthood by highlighting its deep moral significance. On the other emotion-laden extreme, there is an account by a perinatal hospice worker who describes instances of peaceful and dignified deaths of newborns and the heroism of their parents. These people are subsequently enthusiastically applauded by commenters.

By the same token, legitimization by moral evaluation (29%) transpires in Stop Abortion activists’ explicit references to Christian canonical texts (Thou shalt not kill), or is largely presupposed. For example, in comments there are morally charged expressions of outrage at the black protesters. Meanwhile, specially edited videos are

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<td>Authorization</td>
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<td>Rationalization</td>
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shared that alternate between generally peaceful pro-life activism and the footage of incidents of ‘aggressive’ behaviour and ‘vulgar’ language of black protests, as in Figure 2.

Authorization (19%) of pro-life stance is performed through citations from recent proclamations or sermons by the leading bishops of the Polish Catholic church who condemn ‘eugenic’ abortions. Two posts hark back to the authority of Pope John Paul II and his rejection of the ‘the civilization of death’ (i.e. contraceptives, abortifacients, abortion). Another authorization technique found (two posts) relies on the idea of petitioning President Andrzej Duda – a conservative – through an open letter, and asking him for a ban on abortion since the Parliament has not been able to pass the law. The pro-life arguments are also authorized when opinion pieces from mainstream Catholic media outlets discussing the superiority and social advantage of prohibiting abortion are shared by Stop Abortion. Another strategy includes reporting from pro-life picket lines and counter-demonstrations to the black protest all around Poland to give ‘evidence’ to the overall high support for the ban initiative.

Legitimizing the prohibition of abortion by rationalization (11%) includes a post referring to the medical definition of Down’s syndrome and claiming that this condition should never be a criterion for ‘eugenic abortions’ because it does not qualify as severe congenital disorder. Stop Abortion activists also remind their Facebook followers of abortion statistics and estimates of allegedly ‘murdered’ children in Polish hospitals. One article uses an interview format to solicit information from a psychotherapist who has worked with women who experienced ‘drastic’ symptoms of post-abortion traumas.

Figure 2. A post by Fundacja Pro (24 Oct) showing footage framed as ‘Abortionists’ aggression: Attacking the defenders of life!’ that describes how black-wearing women (abortionists) furiously destroyed the pro-life campaigners’ equipment and assaulted them with umbrellas; concluding with ‘such are the supporters of murdering of innocent children’ and asking for re-posting.
One post recycles a purportedly academic argument by citing research that discredits gender/identity studies as ‘mere ideology’ not a scientific discipline.

By contrast, Save Women’s discourse is predicated on rationalizing the protests and strikes and politicizing the issue. It also uses various kinds of authority appeals to make the arguments epistemically stronger and exemplifications to make the issue more accessible.

With 10 feature articles and three interviews, the pro-choice sample offers various rationalization resources (52%). It deconstructs pro-life argumentation as unreasonable or fallacious; it refers to medical knowledge to discredit the claim that foetuses are fully human beings; it cites statistics and shows images of foetal defects that make them unviable and a burden to the society if born; it presents the advantages of early pharmaceutical abortion; it uses arguments from the extant regulations as well as political manifestos to prove how the conservative government ‘is failing to protect’ women’s rights. One post relates to Poland’s social conditions to emphasize how difficult it is for women in smaller towns to take control of their reproductive rights in the current restrictive atmosphere.

Rationalization is often interlinked with authority appeals, as it relies on expert discourses in law, medicine, human rights and policy. Additionally, authorization (28.5%) is achieved through reference to the sheer number of women (purportedly 1 million) who sympathize with black protests and endorse Save Women. Through the in-depth interviews with well-known women (an accomplished actress, a female politician, and a rock singer who has recently admitted to inducing a miscarriage), certain arguments are legitimized by virtue of the interviewees’ public stance and personal charisma. One article considers in minute detail how the restrictive law would break EU legal standards for human rights.

Moral evaluation (15%) is applied to exposing the arrogance and power-hunger of the current ruling elites and the ‘hypocrisy and self-righteousness’ of the ban supporters. In the comments, the positive evaluation of the protesters’ courage and enthusiasm mingles with the pessimistic tones of helplessness in confronting the ruling conservative elites.

One topical example of mythopoesis (4.5%) is a detailed story of the rock singer who terminated her third pregnancy. The humiliations and stigma connected with this decision taken in the Polish social context led her to writing and releasing a song. The story is taken up by commenters who might partly support or criticize her decision and share other narratives and examples. The story generated a follow-up mainstream media discussion on the implications of more women disclosing their abortions that was re-mediated back by Save Women (Figure 3).

**Diversity and division: self and other presentation**

A more specific local lens on the rhetorical strategies of reproducing division is applied through examining the discourses’ semantic prosody on the basis of the collocations of the keyword *kobiety* (women), according to the procedure outlined in section 3. Having identified all the instances of the keyword with WordSmith Tools, we looked at 10 words on the left and 10 on the right in order to grasp the typical collocations. First we sorted the representations of ‘women’ as either ‘us’ or ‘them’ (self-/other-labelling,
Kielbiewska, 2018) and then, for the sake of order in presentation, we matched the oppositional representations according to one of the five dimensions: ideological, social, public, individual, and moral.

Table 2 shows how the pro-life discourse divides women and polarizes them regarding five different dimensions. The antagonists (‘them’) are stereotyped and mischaracterized to achieve a contrasting effect. At times the antagonist category is contrasted with a non-gendered ‘us’ to achieve stronger discrediting effect. Table 3 presents the corresponding divisions represented lexically and rhetorically in the Save Women material.

In the rhetorical context of stance-taking, one of the main resources to ensure the public acceptance of the Speaker’s position is to demonize the opponent. The negative reference and nomination of the other is realized as a discursive strategy of emphasizing negative attributions of the antagonist (attacking their ethos) without having to address their claims and arguments in the debate (logos). In the studied material, both movements use negative labelling (name-calling), metaphors or wordplay to present ‘them’ as not credible or rational enough to offer arguments in the current debate (Save Women
Table 2. Pro-lifers’ (stop abortion) divisive rhetorical strategies for designation and characterization of ‘women’.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>‘us’</th>
<th>‘them’</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ideological</strong></td>
<td><strong>Maternal women</strong>: live the most fulfilling life; are loving and</td>
<td><strong>Feminist, careerist women</strong>: are self-seeking, materialistic; prefer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>devoted to the family; live in agreement with the body, in</td>
<td>to live in wealth and comfort; sexually liberated, deny the natural</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>satisfactory marital relations; morally superior when choosing to</td>
<td>biological order; resist their natural bodies; have trouble finding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>cope with the challenge of raising a diseased child</td>
<td>partners; choose unethical reproductive techniques (in-vitro, surrogacy)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Social</strong></td>
<td><strong>Pro-life campaigners</strong>: mobilized and determined to act for the</td>
<td><strong>Women in the black protest</strong>: follow crowd logic; are mad and</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>just cause; peaceful, focused on awareness raising; know the truth</td>
<td>aggressive; ignore the facts and deny the truth about killing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>about abortion; victimized by black protesters</td>
<td>through abortion; support murder; brainwashed by militant feminists,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>have no opinion of their own; accept sexual promiscuity as a norm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Public</strong></td>
<td><strong>Average women (by default)</strong>: the silent moral majority with no</td>
<td><strong>Celebrity women</strong> that advertise abortions and female politicians</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>access to media or celebrity</td>
<td>that support pro-choicers: immoral, hypocritical (e.g. concerned more</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>with ecological issues and animal rights than the right of unborn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>children to live); proud of murdering their babies; flaunt their</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>abortions; in need of media attention due to failing careers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Individual</strong></td>
<td><strong>Living (young or adult) diseased individuals</strong>: vulnerable, but</td>
<td><strong>Women who argue they do not want to bear diseased children</strong>: short-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>strong in character; morally superior; experience pain and</td>
<td>sighted, egoistic, mean, self-engrossed, want an easy life with no</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>humiliation, determined to live a good life despite disability;</td>
<td>challenges; worthless people, human shells with no contents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>givers – not takers; hurt by the protesters</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Moral</strong></td>
<td><strong>Mothers of severely diseased children</strong>: decide to give birth in</td>
<td><strong>Women who had an abortion</strong>: murderers, criminals; not very</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>perinatal care to allow children to die in dignity and be</td>
<td>intelligent, as they did not study their sexual education hard enough;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>baptized and buried in a Catholic ritual (rather than being put</td>
<td>experience guilt and try to soothe it by supporting pro-choicers; not</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>in the trash); true heroines</td>
<td>able to be happy; hide dark secrets; are diabolical (in need of</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>exorcism)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

about Stop Abortion), or as too morally inferior or misguided to even offer acceptable claims (Stop Abortion about Save Women). They both resort to overlexicalization of the negative labels for the opponent and the strawman or ironman fallacies. The stereotype of the ‘fighting feminist’ is invoked by Stop Abortion, so is the figure of a hypocritical Catholic and 'the Inquisitor’ in Save Women.

The strategy of linguistically varied negative other-presentation is complemented, through the topos of comparison and contrast (Aristotle, 2007) with positive self-presentation (Van Dijk, 2006). The evaluations are sometimes only implied by collocations and most often relate to the language’s attitude system with affect, judgment and appreciation markers (Martin & White, 2005). Tables 4 and 5 contain the identified self/other presentation labels that are used rhetorically in Stop Abortion and Save Women material, respectively. The aggregation is a result of close reading of both above-the-line texts and the sampled comments, with the subsequent translation into English of the representative examples.

The labels publicized by both movements tend to include terminology associated with negatively evaluated or discredited political and ideological doctrines, with despised animal-like qualities, or with vernacular forms of derogation. What seems to be of interest
in the Save Women corpus is the occasional positive appropriation of negative terms of address (i.e. of Polish equivalents of terms for ‘loose’ women) in the discourse of users’ comments. This strategy seems to be aimed at disarming the opponents by lowering the abusive force of these designations, or by demystifying the hypocrisy of commenters and posters that preach tolerance and kindness, yet resort to hate-filled derogation in their rhetoric. Another pattern in other-presentation, this time as regards Stop Abortion, is that the labels for ‘them’ have mostly feminine endings, which not only presents Save

Table 3. Pro-choicers’ (Save Women) divisive rhetorical strategies for designation and characterization of women.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Save Women</th>
<th>‘us’</th>
<th>‘them’</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ideological dimension</strong></td>
<td><strong>Defenders of women’s rights:</strong> organizations, associations and projects that confront state abuses of the rights of women</td>
<td><strong>Conservative politicians and the clergy:</strong> want to control women’s reproductive rights; some corrupt doctors and interests groups that profit from inaccessibility of legal and safe abortions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Social dimension</strong></td>
<td><strong>Women in the black protest:</strong> brave, enthusiastic, creative and strong individuals; ready to fight for their rights despite mainstream media’s derogation and retaliative actions by the authorities</td>
<td><strong>Pro-life campaigners:</strong> religious fanatics that discriminate against women; Ordo Iuris lawyers who want to introduce barbaric laws and take Poland back to the Middle Ages</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Public dimension</strong></td>
<td><strong>Women leaders, politicians:</strong> embrace progressive platforms and champion women’s rights across party divisions; celebrity women who speak about abortion and women’s disempowerment even if this could tarnish their reputation and induce hate attacks</td>
<td><strong>Spokespeople and activists of Catholic organizations</strong> that propagandize and manipulate; women and men who have been brainwashed by the politicians and bishops to support the restrictive law</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Individual dimension</strong></td>
<td>5 million (?) of Polish women who have had an experience of terminated pregnancy: stigmatized, penalized, oppressed by the state; abandoned by the state in having to resort to self-poisoning or a trip to an abortion clinic abroad; have no representatives in parliament that would care about their rights</td>
<td>Individuals who happen to believe that abortion is evil: should continue to keep this belief, but should not tell others what to do with their bodies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Moral dimension</strong></td>
<td><strong>People who protest against accepting a Catholic doctrine</strong> as superior to other philosophies on birth, fertility, sexuality and parenthood</td>
<td><strong>Hypocritical Catholics who support the ban,</strong> yet would encourage their wives/daughters to have an emergency abortion; attackers of women who admitted to having an abortion with hateful comments and name calling</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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Table 4. Pro-lifers’ labels for ‘us’ and ‘them’ in Polish and their English equivalents.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>‘us’ Stop Abortion</th>
<th>‘them’ Save Women</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Obrońcy życia (defenders of life), proliferzy (pro-lifers), wolontariusze (volunteer campaigners), koleżanki (friends)</strong></td>
<td><strong>Lewczka, liberal, postępowiec (leftie, liberal, progressive), młode feministki, groupies (young feminists, groupies), tak zwany czarny protest (so-called black protest), bydlę (cattle-like mob), agresywne, opętane kobiety (aggressive, mad women), opętane seksem, nieodpowiedzialne kobiety (sex-crazed, irresponsible women), mężczyźni bez obowiązków, bez konsekwencji (immature, reckless men), podobno wykształcone kobiety (supposedly educated women), pacię (pseudo-ladies), głupie historyczki (silly, hysterical women), zwolennicy zabijania/ mordowania nienarodzonych dzieci (supporters of killing/murder of unborn children), zwolennicy eugenicznej aborcji (supporters of eugenic abortion), bojowniczki o aborcję na życzenie (militant fighters for on-whim abortion), czarownice (witches), szmaty, kurwy (whores)</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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Women as a special interest (women only) group, but also allows to tarnish black protesters with such crudely stereotypical female traits as uncontrollable emotionality bordering on aggression, irrationality, or unbridled sexuality.

Conclusions

This three-tier analysis (claim-making, legitimization strategies, self/other presentation) shows that the rhetorical strategies in the two Facebook outlets by antagonistic social movements are often oriented towards breeding distinctions (not debating) and function as contentious communication focused on discrediting or demonizing the antagonist(s). The abusive terms of address and the inscribed negative evaluation of the opponent lead to the entrenching of an oppositional consciousness (Taylor, 1999), and are probably used to integrate the movement’s supporters. Confrontational totalizing categories (designations, labels, stereotypes) for women that belong either to ‘us’ or to ‘them’ can be identified in the ideological, social, public, individual and moral dimensions of representation. These evaluations are not modalized or open to amendment, which is characteristic of rhetorically charged online stance-taking in mediatized debates (Myers, 2010). Such characteristics of ‘debating’ are disturbing, as they not only preclude deliberation on moral and rational grounds, but also perpetuate the oppressive ideologies and mythologies shaping the socio-political and material status of women. As illustrated by Walsh (2009), without addressing the antagonist’s arguments, rhetorics and representations, the women who are actually involved in the abortion controversy cannot productively cope with their experience and eventually become silenced: trapped between black-and-white worlds of personal vs. judicial, feminist vs. patriarchal, amoral vs. religious discourses. Also, with regard to argumentative premises and legitimization strategies, this analysis shows that there is so little common ground in the ways claims are made that deliberation based on mutual argument evaluation and productive consensus-seeking is stifled (Fairclough & Fairclough, 2012).

The current state of abortion law debate could be described as a social crisis resulting from a communication breakdown. Its signs include: the power imbalance between social movements (of which one is tied to conservative ruling elites), the lack of social motive for reconciliation, the lack of authoritative voice respected by both movements, the lack of a disinterested mediator, and the lack of media spaces to allow ideas to evolve towards a (new) compromise (Condit Railsback, 1984; Ferree et al., 2002). In addition, we can note how the fundamental semantic discrepancies as regards the basic conceptualizations (e.g. embryo/foetus vs. unborn child; abortion vs. murder) in the

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>'us'</th>
<th>'them'</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dzielne, dumne kobiety (brave, proud women), kobiety przyparte do mury (women pushed to the wall), entuzystyczne aktywistki (enthusiastic campaigners), dziwki, szmaty (non-vulgar but offending equivalents to whores)</td>
<td>Barbarzyńcy (barbaric torturers of women), fanatycy (religious fanatics), kult płodu (foetus worshippers), zygotarianie (zygotarians), reakcja (reactionaries), inkwizytory (inquisitors), politycy wypychający kobiety do podziemia aborcyjnego (politicians pushing women into illegality), patriarchat, mizogini, przepelnieni nienawiscią do kobiet (patriarchal misogynists, haters of women, hate-mongers), hipokryci (hypocrites), katolicki beton (Catholic concrete), dziady (frustrated old men)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
debate, and the strikingly divergent ways of claim-making and stance-taking preclude deliberation oriented towards a legislative compromise (Kamasa, 2013; Mielczarek, 2013). Although this study is limited in its capability to grasp the whole course and tone of the current Polish abortion law debate, the analysis of premises that underlie both antagonists’ claims, of legitimization strategies, and self/other presentation manoeuvres might give the larger public a chance to understand the reasons why the debate is not progressing, why divisions are perpetuated and why the open agora of social media is not likely to be conducive to compromise-seeking.

To explain the failures of the complex rhetorics of the social movements’ mediatized performances, one might also return briefly to the current social and political circumstances of deliberation in Poland. One approach to explaining the mechanisms of Polish abortion law debate could be drawn from the discourses of ‘biopower’ (Foucault, 1998), which can be seen as rhetorical but not deliberative. In one sense, the abortion law debate can be understood as both a discursive and material struggle between the institutional (conservative movements, state, church) control of the body and the individual women’s resistance of this attempt (progressive movements, ad hoc protests). While state institutions strive to bring chaotic elements of social reality under control through various controls applied to the self, they mask power under the guise of rhetorics, such as moral or humanitarian discourses of the care for the most vulnerable individuals (humanized embryos, unborn children). In Poland, this resonates with some citizens who are wary of moral permissiveness and generally subscribe to the Christian ethics of bringing human (female) sexuality under control within a regulatory system of prohibitions and injunctions (Mielczarek, 2013).

The institutional power and the conservative religious morality complement each other in the current politics of the ruling Law and Justice party and its supporters from the Catholic organizations.\textsuperscript{15} Abortion discourses in Poland are marked by a rhetoric that abounds in moral self-righteousness (and entitlements to preach), in demonization of (female) sexuality and in crusading (and hate speech) against ‘murderers of children.’ As this rhetoric is morally and emotionally charged, tied with religion and patriotic values, nostalgic and devoid of ambiguity and uncertainty, it seems that the depoliticized public (the silent majority) finds it more comfortable and accepts the ruling party’s biopower discourses by default. In this context, reproductive rights are a toxic theme, abandoned by all leading political parties in Poland, apart from a few women’s organizations. Abortion is a stigmatizing issue that tarnishes political reputations not only with connotations of immorality related to permissive and anti-patriotic mindsets, but also historically with links to Poland’s ruinous communist and (neo)liberal political regimes.

Notes

2. Making abortion available only in cases of direct threat to woman’s life/health, not in cases of fetal defects or criminal acts, and introducing harsh penalties for women and doctors for pregnancy termination.
3. The largest strikes and demonstration activities were organized on 3 Oct and 24 Oct and involved up to 98,000 protesters in over 100 cities, https://wiadomosci.wp.pl/czarny-protest-manifestacje-w-wielu-miastach-w-polsce-ile-osob-wzielo-udzial-w-demonstracjach.
4. #czarnyprotest (black protest) was one of the world’s most popular hashtags in early October 2016, http://politykawsieci.pl/analiza-czarnyprotest-vs-bialyprotest/.

5. This committee represents a coalition of pro-life movements (Polska Federacja Ruchów Obrony Życia) and conservative campaigns (some with church affiliations) that drafted a legislative project for a total ban on abortion and penalty for women and doctors who perform it, and gathered about 500,000 citizens’ signatures under such petition, which was subsequently registered in the Parliament on 5 July 2016.

6. This committee stands for a legislative project advocating unrestricted rights to abortion in the first trimester and more public funding for contraceptives and sex education. It gathered 215,000 citizens’ signatures (on the petition submitted on 4 August 2016). It involves a variety of political (liberal, left-wing) leaders, feminist public figures and representatives of non-governmental women’s groups.

7. Claim-making is seen here as a specific form of framing oriented towards expressing the views about what the world is/should look like, while stance-taking is seen as a specific form of framing oriented towards expressing a speaker’s emotional/attitudinal engagements.

8. Since the material is in Polish, which is an inflectional language, words occur with different affixes and have been lemmatized: a type is the base form of the word and a token is every (inflected) instance of that word in the corpus.

9. The number of comments increased later.

10. Italics relate to premises basing on ‘us’/’them’ polarization and will be discussed below.


12. Italics relates to premises basing on ‘us’/’them’ polarization and will be discussed below.

13. Only cases of full intercoder agreement are included in this discussion.

14. The strawman fallacy consists in misrepresenting an opponent’s words so as to refute them easily; the ironman fallacy is distorting the argument in such a way that it becomes too radical for an audience to accept (Lewiński & Oswald, 2013).

15. A legislative proposal to ban ‘eugenic abortion’ was reintroduced to the Parliament in November 2017.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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