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DYNAMICS OF IDENTITY NEGOTIATION: A CASE STUDY ON A FACEBOOK POST PERTAINING TO ABORTION RIGHTS

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ABSTRACT. ***Dynamics of Identity Negotiation: A Case Study on a Facebook Post Pertaining to Abortion Rights*.** With the advent of computer mediated communication, Internet users have formed routines and rituals that mirror the articulation, the negotiation and the formation of online identities. This extremely subtle yet complex process has stimulated researchers' interest in the particularities of the socio-cultural acts performed in the on-line environment. The present study focuses on the negotiation of self- and group identity and on techniques of self-definition and self-representation, through an analysis of the reactions to a Facebook post regarding abortion rights.

Keywords: *Facebook, abortion, self-presentation, interpersonal goals, identity negotiation*

REZUMAT. ***Dinamica negocierii identităţii: studiu de caz asupra unei postări Facebook privind dreptul la avort*.** Comunicarea asistată de computer a permis internauţilor să dezvolte ritualuri care reflectă tehnicile de exprimare, negociere şi formare a identităţii online. Acest proces subtil dar complex a stimulat interesul cercetătorilor pentru studiul manifestării actelor socio-culturale în spaţiul virtual. Acest articol examinează comentariile utilizatorilor Facebook la o postare referitoare la avort pentru a evidenţia tehnicile de auto-definire şi auto-prezentare aferente negocierii identităţilor individuale şi de grup în mediul online.

Cuvinte-cheie: *Facebook, avort, auto-prezentare, scopuri interpersonale, negocierea identităţii*

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Motto: "Identity is produced and reproduced both in discourse – narrative, rhetoric and representation – and in the practical, often very material, consequences of identification"
(Jenkins 2008, 201)

Introduction

Depending on the interactional context, people shape their discourse in light of the specific layers of identity brought to the forefront by the particular factors underlying the respective act of communication. According to the ethnomethodological view pioneered by Harold Garfinkel, any person's identity can be regarded as their "display of, or ascription to, membership of some feature-rich category" (Antaki and Widdicombe 2008, 2). Identity, therefore, is profoundly social in nature, so it is neither simply passive nor merely latent, being a work-in-progress and, thus, never perfectly crystallised or permanently fixed: "Membership of a category is ascribed (and rejected), avowed (and disavowed), displayed (and ignored) in local places and at certain times, and it does these things as part of the interactional work that constitutes people's lives" (Antaki and Widdicombe 2008, 2). This qualitative research study relies on a conversation analytic process of scrutinising the dynamics of identity construction and negotiation as revealed by a three-day-long heated dispute occasioned by a Facebook post of 7 May 2022 pertaining to abortion rights.

The Dynamics of Online Identity Negotiation

With the advent of the Internet, the traditional distinction between mass communication and interpersonal communication has become increasingly blurred. On the one hand, mass communication was regarded as a one-way channel used to impart information to a rather large – either outright-anonymous or highly-undifferentiated – audience, yet some newspapers and magazines have also provided readers with the opportunity to respond via specially designed themed discussion forums. Interpersonal communication, on the other hand, was viewed as an exchange of ideas between (usually) two individuals whose discourse strategies are determined by their instrumental and relational goals and by their knowledge regarding "one another's idiosyncratic preferences" (Walther et al. 2011, 19). Nevertheless, the e-mail, albeit a form of interpersonal media, has also been used to simultaneously reach large groups of recipients.

The emergence of new interactive media has accelerated these convergent practices, especially with the rise of social networking sites, of which the most popular in 2022 are Instagram, YouTube, Facebook, Twitter, TikTok, Pinterest and Snapchat (Robinson 2022). Both mass communication and interpersonal communication contribute to the process of forming opinions on socio-political issues and their recent convergence, brought forth by computer-mediated communication, which favours the public sharing of personal information, has modified not only the information-processing patterns, but also the "social influence dynamics" (Walther et al. 2011, 17) and the subsequent "effects of information consumption", all these being shaped by "the interplay of motives that drive particular interactions" (18).

For instance, one can react to an item of political news with a Facebook post that, in turn, will fuel a debate by attracting the interest of one's Facebook friends, who may contribute with their individual reactions both to the original post and to other comments it might have generated. Thus, Facebook posts are perfect candidates for an analysis meant to illustrate what Patrick O'Sullivan, in 2005, termed "masspersonal communication", and later, in 2018, together with Caleb Carr, expanded into a communication-centred research model. Whereas the move away from the previously employed medium-centred approaches was promptly applauded by researchers such as Megan French and Natalya Bazarova, they felt the need to refine the mass-personal communication model "by incorporating anticipated interaction into its framework", given that, "to be truly communication-centered, the model has to link the sender and receiver, instead of considering their experiences separately or focusing on static message characteristics" (French and Bazarova 2017, 303). Thus, since social media is highly participatory in nature, this refined mass-personal communication model adroitly includes not only the sender's relatively subjective initial assessment of audience size and the receivers' perceived personalisation of the message, but also the sender's "expectations for audience involvement in a communication exchange" (304).

Through profile settings, Facebook users can either keep the level of self-identification to a minimum, or disclose from just a few to a great many details about themselves (by displaying a profile picture, e-mail addresses, websites and social links, their telephone number, date of birth, their own gender and the one of those they might be interested in having relationships with). They may choose to add a short bio, in no more than 101 characters, and offer information regarding their educational background, workplace, current city, hometown, relationship status, life events, hobbies, favourite quotes, languages spoken, religious and political views. Similarly, for any one of their posts, users may select the desired audience: "Only me", "Specific friends", "Friends except …", "Friends" or "Public". As different from other social networking sites,

such as the video-sharing system called YouTube, for example, populated by "relatively anonymous peers", Facebook allows users to build their own social network of "friends" (Walther et al. 2011, 26). It is, nevertheless, true that on Facebook the term "friend" is used with an extremely wide scope, to refer to any individual who enjoys the privilege of not only viewing but also contributing to a person's Facebook posts. Still, one can actually choose to "befriend", even here, only close affiliates, like real-life friends and acquaintances, but such exclusivity does seem to be uncommon. Hence the relative – yet not absolute – subjectivity of an original poster with regard to the size of any post's audience and to its degree of personalisation in the viewers' minds, once the "Friends" or the "Public" confidentiality option is selected.

Social identification empowers users of social networking sites to exert an increasingly strong influence on peers, especially on those that display what Rogers and Shoemaker (1971) called "optimal heterophily", namely on peers who are similar to us with respect to their interests and outlook on life. Thus, whilst political and religious posts are likely to spark fierce debates, the OP may expect full or partial support from such peers, but others' reactions will likely flesh out a number of issues and set in motion conflictual exchanges. Matters are further complicated by the fact that one rarely succeeds in classifying fellow human beings in a neutral, disinterested and internally consistent way, as there are layers of identity that cannot be accommodated by a one-dimensional classificatory model. Classification relies on much more than mere evaluation and tends to be hierarchical, not only cognitively, but also interactionally and socially. Thus, "A and B may be different from each other at one level, but both are members of the meta-category C" yet a certain individual might have to be identified as a C in one particular context and as an A in another context (Jenkins 2008, 6). Moreover, since identification is a process that simply "makes no sense outside relationships", it is closely connected to "motives for behaviour" and, thus, accounts for our treatment of others: there are hierarchies "of preference, of ambivalence, of hostility, of competition, of partnership and co-operation, and so on" (Jenkins 2008, 6). Additionally, categorical imperatives cannot be relied on: "Hierarchies of collective identification may conflict with hierarchies of individual identification", and there often are "emotional charges" attached to identification (Jenkins 2008, 6).

The "Emotions as Social Information theory (EASI)", developed by Gerben van Kleef, is an interpersonal approach to emotion.[2] The result of

[2] The theory rests on the fundamental assumption that, because of the ambiguity of social life, people often "turn to others' emotions to inform their understanding of the situation and the people involved in it" with the purpose of clearly determining "a fitting course of action"; disambiguation can, however, occur if and only if people have the ability to "express the emotions that they experience (encoding) and accurately perceive the emotional expressions of others (decoding)" (Kleef 2016, 198).

evolutionary adaptation, emotional expressions are seen as communicative tools, as cues to social predispositions, which elicit inferential processes in observers, trigger their affective reactions and produce social effects, both in close relationships and in larger groups, playing an essential role in conflict and negotiation: "EASI theory posits that emotional expressions are more likely to trigger inferential processes to the degree that they are perceived as appropriate. Conversely, emotional expressions are more likely to elicit (negative) affective reactions to the degree that they are perceived as inappropriate" (Kleef 2016, 199).

Thus, interpersonal-communication competence is essential whether the interaction is face-to-face or online. Interpersonal goals shape people's behaviour during interaction: self-presentation goals refer to people's tendency to adjust their contributions during the communication process so as to ensure that they are perceived in the desired way; relational goals motivate people to accept compromises even when these require a certain degree of self-sacrifice, if that means keeping in with the other(s); instrumental goals include obtaining information, eliciting support or gaining compliance. Naturally, at different moments during the interaction, one goal or another may gain priority over the rest. In order to keep the exchange civil, just like there are explicit rules and norms in face-to-face interactions and relationships, so there are clearly communicated guidelines and regulations on social networking sites, meant to ensure that users do not fail to conform to normative positions in group discussions. All Facebook users, for instance, must follow the Community Standards and any user may report a post that does not, for it to be removed. The OPs or commentators in question cannot find out who reported them, but they are allowed to require a review of Facebook's decision and have the posts returned to their walls if it is proven that, in fact, no rules were broken. Repeat non-compliance results in restrictions (from temporary suspensions to lengthier bans) and might even lead to the respective account being deleted.

In light of the information outlined above, and given that Facebook is mainly used for status seeking, forming and maintaining as well as for relational initiation, development and maintenance, a case study such as the one presented in this article may provide insights into the evolution of communication strategies, into the dynamics of online identity formation and negotiation or into the new-fangled ways of conceptualising communication in the online environment.

The Socio-Political and Cultural Background of the Present Case Study

In the wake of the Supreme Court's vote of 5 May 2022 to strike down the landmark *Roe v. Wade* ruling, following Justice Samuel Alito's initial draft majority opinion, which repudiated the 1973 decision guaranteeing federal constitutional protections of abortion rights, a seismic socio-political wave of

conflicting reactions was generated. This affected the world at large, not merely the United States, due to the serious nature of human rights infringement that such a ruling engenders wherever it may be made.

In Europe, for instance, Poland's abortion ban is very strict, as it now only allows the procedure if the pregnancy constitutes a health-risk for the mother or if it resulted from either rape or incest. A third exception – which had accounted for 98% of abortions in Poland, also used to apply but, in October 2020, the country's Constitutional Court declared the termination of pregnancies on account of foetal abnormalities unconstitutional, equating them with "eugenic practices" (Vandoorne and Bell 2022). Conservative anti-abortion pressure groups, not content with the harshness of the legislation, are lobbying to tighten it even further, so as to completely eliminate the right to safe and legal abortion in this heavily Catholic country, following in the footsteps of predominately Catholic Malta. Maltese law is the strictest, enforcing a complete ban on abortion but, on 30 June this year, the government announced their intention to review the legislation in order to ensure that the law does not "prevent doctors from saving lives" (Moneta 2022). This occurred in the aftermath of a terrifying experience that Andrea Prudente, a 38-year-old US citizen from Seattle, was forced to undergo. She and her partner, Jay Weeldreyer, 45, were on their babymoon in the Mediterranean archipelago, when her water tragically broke and she suffered an incomplete miscarriage. Although in the absence of amniotic fluid the foetus had no chance of survival, the 16-week pregnant woman was denied the life-saving procedure, as the doctors were required by law to wait until the foetal heartbeat stopped or until the mother developed sepsis, before intervening to save her life. After spending one tormenting week in extreme fear for her life, despite the "significant danger that she'd bleed out during the two-hour flight", Andrea decided to require an emergency medical evacuation to Spain, where she was given proper medical care, coincidentally on the very day when *Roe v. Wade* was overturned in the United States (Campoamor 2022).

Obviously, since bodily autonomy should be one of the human rights enjoyed by all citizens of a country and of the world, irrespective of their biological sex, the persistent attempts throughout history to limit this right to males only has always given rise to protests all over the world. *Roe v. Wade* stipulated that states were not allowed to outlaw abortion during the first 24 weeks of pregnancy, or even afterwards, if pregnancy turned out to threaten the mother's life or health. When, on 24 June 2022, the Supreme Court officially overturned *Roe v. Wade*, many people took to the streets. However, the pro-choice peaceful protesters were violently attacked in various places by self-entitled "pro-life" vigilantes. In Cedar Rapids, Iowa, for example, a man in a black truck careered into the group of women who were just leaving the site where the meeting had taken place, crushing one's ankle and causing another to fall and hit her head. Local journalist Lyz Lenz tweeted about the attack:

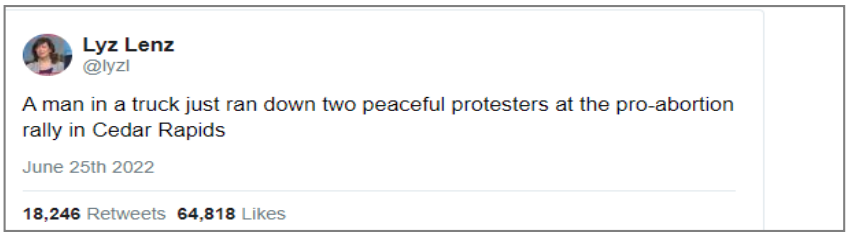


Figure 1. Lyz Lenz, Embedded Twitter PrintScreen.
Source: *Substack*. https://lyz.substack.com/p/this-is-how-we-fight?utm_source. Published: 25 June 2022, 13:16.

According to Molly Monk, one of the witnesses, "the pro-life movement is a complete lie if, in order to be against people who are protesting for abortion rights, you try to murder them in my street" (Campbell and Vagianos 2022).

The dire consequences of the decision to roll back access to abortion did not take long to surface. On 2 July 2022, Doctor Caitlin Bernard, an Indianapolis obstetrician-gynaecologist, reported to the Indiana Department of Health and to the Department of Child Services that on 30 June she had provided abortion services to a 10-year-old rape victim from Ohio. The little girl had been forced to travel to Indiana, where for the first 22 weeks of pregnancy it is legal to have an abortion, because in Ohio the procedure can only be performed up to 6 weeks of pregnancy, with no exceptions for cases involving rape or incest, and she was 6 weeks and 3 days pregnant. Nevertheless, Indiana Attorney General Todd Rokita, a member of the Republican Party, decided to investigate the physician's actions, alleging that she is an abortion activist whose medical license should be suspended. On a similar note, Indiana lawyer Jim Bopp, author of the model legislation drafted in advance of the Supreme Court's decision to overturn *Roe v. Wade*, claimed that the girl, who had been raped by a 27-year-old man, should not have sought abortion but, instead, should have understood "the reason and ultimately the benefit of having the child" (Messerly and Wren 2022). Naturally, due to Republicans' refusal to acknowledge the cruel reality of their inflexible abortion stance, any such case is bound to spark not only national but often international polemics.

Given the widespread use of social media platforms, the anti-choice versus pro-choice wrangle immediately found its way to various social networking sites, even before the Supreme Court handed down the final decision in that case, namely immediately after their initial vote on 5 May 2022. Among these, there was the Facebook post of 7 May which constitutes the focus of this study.

Methodology

The study focuses on the analysis of the picture below (Fig.2), which the author of this article, hereinafter referred to as the OP (i.e. original poster) shared on her Facebook wall in early May 2022. The OP has a total of 1,392 Facebook friends – mostly former or current colleagues and students, family members or actual real-life friends and uses no other social networking platform. Her preference for Facebook is mainly motivated by its accessibility on the PC and by the generous character number limit of 63,206. In terms of anticipated audience size and interaction, her average of three memes per day may receive about thirty reactions and a couple of comments, if any. Only extremely rarely does a post generate a greater number of comments and/or reactions. Her online contributions, however, are often a topic of conversation in real life, whenever she socialises with friends, colleagues or students, many of whom do not leave any reactions to the respective posts, as they prefer to keep a low profile on social media. The posts themselves are mostly humorous or parodical, yet the ones more serious in nature normally concern current national or international events, especially those related to human rights issues.

Figure 2. Original Post, Embedded Facebook PrintScreen.
Source: Alina Preda, Published: 7 May 2022.

Since the author of this article is also the OP, only the commentators' names and profile pictures have been blurred. The male contributors will be referred to as M1, M2 and M3, whilst the female ones will be identified as F1, F2, F3, etc. because, in light of the hierarchies of collective and individual identification, gender is, in this case, a layer of identity as relevant to the analysis as is the contributors' degree of religiosity, unlike the educational level, which does not constitute a differentiating factor. M2 is not a believer in supernatural powers, whilst M1 belongs to one of the largest Protestant denominations of Christianity and M3 is an Eastern Orthodox. The commentators' demographics are known to the author, as they are her friends and acquaintances in real life, not only on social media.

Highly regarded by James Powell, President of the International Bible Society (Barnard 1989, 18), *The New International Version of the Bible*, arguably "the most popular modern Bible translation in the world" (Lewendon 2020), has been chosen by the author, for the quotes featuring in this article, on the grounds that it has succeeded in preserving the original meaning of the text while making it easily-understandable especially at "gatherings where a wide-demographic of people are in attendance" (Lewendon 2020).

The Facebook post itself and the OP's contributions are in English, the others' as well, at first, since they have all been studying English. However, M1's use of Romanian, a language he seems to prefer when engaging in apologetic work, determines some of his interlocutors to also shift to Romanian, especially if it is their mother tongue, or to structure their discourse combining both languages, sometimes even within one and the same post. M3 joins in English, a language he feels very comfortable using but, if addressed in Romanian, he does his interlocutors the courtesy of mirroring their choice of language in his comebacks. This practice is known as translanguaging, one of the "many anticanonical variations of multilingualism" generated by superdiversity, "a linguacultural phenomenon stemming from the crossing of identity and speech repertoires of individuals in communities" (Cotrău, Cotoc, and Papuc 2021, 32). Since the English comments feature in the article, they will be discussed rather than quoted, whereas the Romanian ones will either be translated or paraphrased throughout the analysis.

Data Analysis

The picture under consideration here, created and distributed by the 4-million-member foundation NARAL Pro-Choice America, briefly yet cleverly outlines, in the form of a mockingly patronising tree-chart, the principle of bodily autonomy: the decision whether to have a baby or not belongs to the

respective pregnant woman and no other entity, male or female, priest or state, should have a final say in the matter. Between 7 May and 10 May, 120 supportive reactions were offered, by males (16) and females (104) alike, in the form of emoticons, either "thumbs up" or "hearts", keenly anticipated by the OP. She had actually used a one-word assertion meant to draw attention to the importance of the message while unequivocally expressing her stance on the issue: the word "This!" appears in the status update field – the box at the top of the Facebook homepage which prompts users, via the 'What's on your mind?' question, to share personal reflections on their own wall. Since the OP's Facebook friends are almost all college graduates, some holding one or more BA degrees, others even MA degrees or PhDs, her expectations, based on the notion of optimal heterophily, were that there would be little or no controversy on the issue, given that, to rational educated people, their right to make decisions regarding what happens to their own body is sacrosanct and they acknowledge the need to also accept the bodily autonomy of others.

Interestingly enough, there were no direct comments to the post itself, except for the first quip, namely "What about God's opinion?" – which promptly unleashed a flood of comebacks in the feed, as did one other male-authored intervention, thus subsequently fuelling the debate. Since Romania is one of the most religious countries in Europe and a predominantly Christian state,[3] some female participants to the debate are Christian as well, yet gender identity and endorsement of rationality coupled with a belief in the importance of upholding universal human rights take precedence over religious identity in this particular instance. The opposite is true in the case of the two female members of M1's congregation, one of them being his wife, who supported, via likes, some of M1's statements Fig. 4, 5, 6, 8, 15). Since collective identification "places the emphasis on similarity" (Jenkins 2008, 118), their belonging to the same congregation brings to the forefront the religious identity which outranks gender identity, especially as the Christian belief system exclusively sanctions male authority, as stated in 1 Timothy 2:11-12: "A woman should learn in quietness and full submission. I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man; she must be silent" (*The Bible*). Within such an inegalitarian framework, males dictating to females what they should do, including with their own bodies, is the norm, as women are expected to be submissive, especially a wife to her husband (Ephesians 5:22-24, Colossians 3:18, 1 Peter 3:1-6; Titus 2:5, 1 Corinthians 11:3,

[3] Statista Research Department published on 21 June 2022 an article entitled "Religious commitment in Europe 2018, by country", which shows that Romania ranks first among 34 European countries in having the most religious citizens. This confirms data found on Wikipedia, showing that Romania has 1% non-believers and Malta 2%, these two countries thus being the most religious in the European Union (Wikipedia 2019).

etc.), whilst pregnancy and birth are to be accepted by women as manifestations of God's will and punishment: "To the woman he said, 'I will make your pains in childbearing very severe; with painful labor you will give birth to children. Your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you'" (Genesis 3:16). This situation illustrates Jenkins's claim that "the 'irrational' dimensions of everyday life", such as "religious or other ideologies", are extremely significant, "within organisations no less than in other walks of everyday life" (Jenkins 2008, 203).

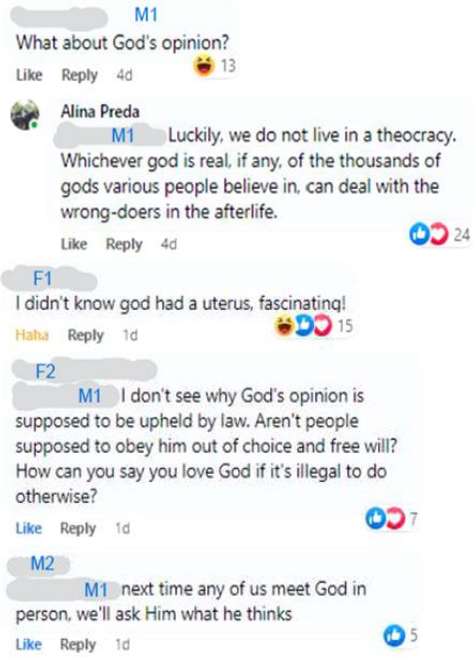


Figure 3.

Figure 4.

Comments to the Original Post, Embedded Facebook PrintScreen.
Source: Alina Preda, Published: 7 May 2022.

By introducing a supernatural being into the equation, M1 dismisses the relevance of the original post, showing his disagreement with its content and, consequently, attempting to persuade others that his deity of choice should be the ultimate judge in the matter of abortion, as opposed to any merely-human entity. His goal is instrumental in nature and in line with the evangelical drive instilled in cult members, who manifest utter disregard towards others' beliefs (or lack thereof) in one or more of the many supernatural beings whose existence has been postulated throughout the ages. Just like all those who proclaim deeply held beliefs, M1 is certain that the god he worships is the only

true one, the other conceptualisations of deities being merely figments of misguided people's imagination. Thus, he spells the word "god" with capital "G" and dismisses the OP's reply with no other argument than his strong belief which accounts for the 100% degree of certainty that his god is the one true God and all people should acknowledge Him (Fig. 1, 4). Moreover, M1 declares to be saddened by F1's sarcastic retort because, on the one hand, it implies that God could be a woman – a blasphemy in his view – and, on the other hand, it represents an attempt to bring the dispute back to the natural realm, leaving the supernatural aside (Fig. 5). As different from the OP's and from F1's lower-case spelling of the word "god", M2, although a non-believer, employs M1's capitalised spelling in his comment (Fig. 3), yet he promptly receives a patronising lecture, as illustrated by the diminutive *târzior:* "Don't you worry, next time we see Him it will be *a tiny bit too late* to ask anything", which reflects M1's growing frustration at witnessing resistance to his inflexible religious position on the matter (Fig. 4). M1 seems to resent the fact that others refuse to believe him when he tells them what God wants, as, although he is a simple human being, who has not yet died to go to Heaven, meet God in person and come back to bring us the news, he feels entitled to lecture others on the ways of God.

Numerous controversial claims punctuate M1's comments. For instance, following F2's statement that God's opinion is not "supposed to be upheld by law" (Fig. 3), M1 argues that it is on divine laws that the civil ones are based (Fig. 6) and, in reply to F3's declaration as to there being no reason why God should be brought up in this conversation, he states that anything seems permissible to us unless we acknowledge man's connection to God, adding that there is more to the issue than "My body-my choice", namely "my eternity", because we have a soul and there is also another's body involved, albeit a very tiny one (Fig. 7).

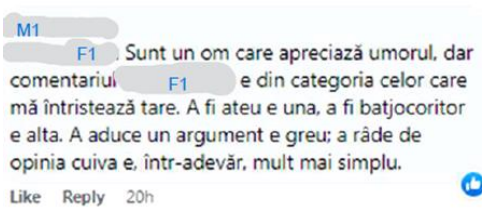


Figure 5.

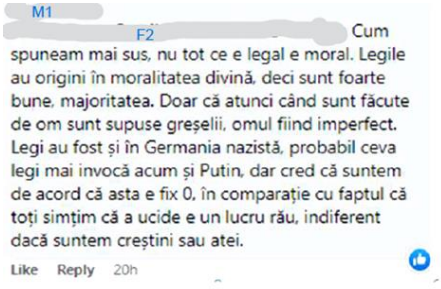


Figure 6.

Comments to the Original Post, Embedded Facebook PrintScreen.
Source: Alina Preda, Published: 7 May 2022.

Figure 7.

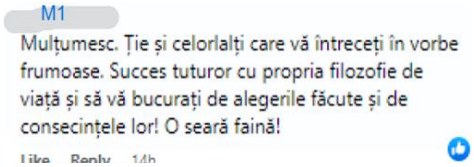


Figure 8.

Comments to the Original Post, Embedded Facebook PrintScreen.
Source: Alina Preda, Published: 7 May 2022.

M1's discourse becomes increasingly passive-aggressive, as he sarcastically thanks all those who expressed their anger in response to his comments, wishing them good luck in reaping the fruits of their life choices (Fig. 8). On reading F4's statements that "the only mention of abortion in the Bible is a straight-up how-to guide" so ¯_(ツ)_/¯" and that, according to the Bible, only at birth does the soul enter the body, M1 insists that he be offered the respective Bible quotes (Fig. 9, 15). F4 could obviously have quoted the ordeal of the bitter water from Numbers 5:11-31 and, respectively, Genesis 2:7 coupled with Ezekiel 37: 9-14, but she decided not to deliver, perfectly understanding F1's sarcastic "encouragement" to transform the debate into a rap battle by providing these Bible verses, which M1 would then counter with his own cherry-picked quotes or self-serving interpretations (Fig. 10). Although a very emotional response, F1's inferred refusal to accept, as a moral guide, the Iron Age book written by scientifically illiterate men was perceived as appropriate by F4 who, in the spirit of cooperation, complied with the implied request, instead of negatively responding to the sarcasm therein.

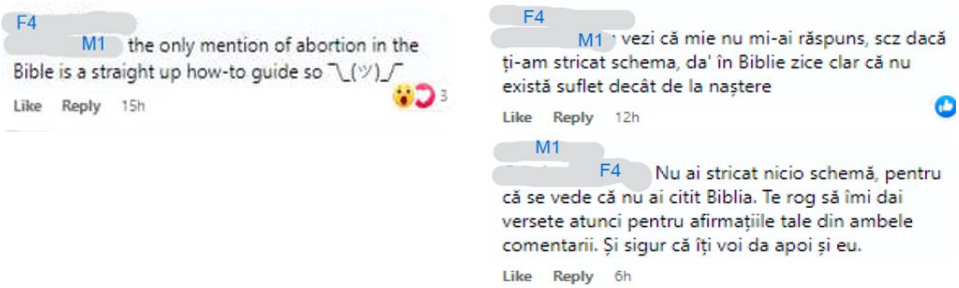


Figure 9.

Comments to the Original Post, Embedded Facebook PrintScreen.
Source: Alina Preda, Published: 7 May 2022.

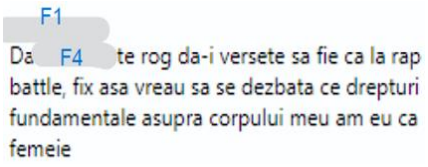


Figure 10.

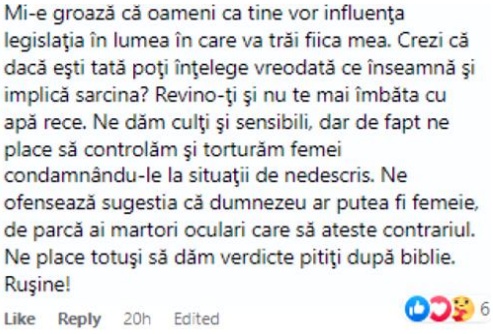


Figure 11.

Comments to the Original Post, Embedded Facebook PrintScreen.
Source: Alina Preda, Published: 7 May 2022

The conversation takes a somewhat different turn when F1 accuses M1 of misogyny and expresses her fear that the daughter she is carrying might have to live in a world whose laws are shaped by men like M1 (Fig. 11). Her angst is not unjustified, given that the recent overturning of *Roe v. Wade* is the noxious work of far-right religious fundamentalists. Romania has its own Christian fundamentalist groups, one of the strongest being Pro Vita, an organisation whose members insist that abortion is never justified, even if the pregnancy is the result of incest or rape; moreover, since pregnancy is God's gift, not a disease, and abortion is not a cure, danger to the mother's health cannot be used to justify the procedure[4].

[4] "Fiecare ființă omenească, indiferent de modalitatea venirii ei pe lume, își datorează existența unei voințe exprese și unei lucrări specifice a lui Dumnezeu în ceea ce o privește"./"Every human being, irrespective of how it came into this world, owes its existence to the express

Once F1 self-identifies as a pregnant woman, M1 disregards all her other statements and his style turns condescending (Fig. 12), as he expresses his hope that she will see the Creator when looking at her daughter.

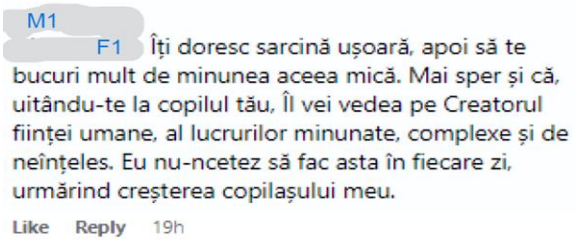


Figure 12.

Comment to the Original Post, Embedded Facebook PrintScreen.
Source: Alina Preda, Published: 7 May 2022.

Later, he reports – as hate speech – her comment, which is deleted by Facebook officials and reinstated only after F1 protests, explaining that her statements are, actually, in compliance with Facebook's Community Standards (Fig. 13). M1's ensuing explanations of his action (Fig. 15) reflect an utter lack of empathy and an arresting inability to understand why comments such as his, especially when coming from individuals who will never know the trials of pregnancy and birth, are offensive to women, who justifiably object to men's use of supernatural entities in an attempt to infringe upon their body's autonomy. F1's reaction is to post the short YouTube video entitled "your body is mine", to show precisely what M1's comments sound like: "Hi, I am M1. I will never experience pregnancy, let alone an unwanted one, but I have theological opinions regarding what a woman can do when in need of surgical intervention" (Fig. 14).

wish of God and to the specific work of God in what the respective being is concerned." (CartaPRO-VITA). "Medicina autentică trebuie să respingă ideologizarea sa prin echivalarea sarcinii cu o stare de boală și să condamne modificarea lipsită de temei, în sensul permiterii practicării avortului"/"Authentic medicine must reject the ideology that pregnancy is illness and condemn the unwarranted idea that it can harm one's health, idea which would allow doctors to practise abortions." (Manifestul PRO VITA). (Translation ours.)

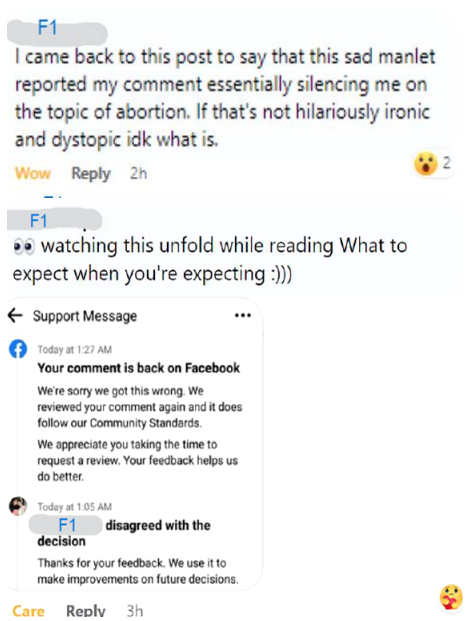


Figure 13.

Figure 14.

Comments to the Original Post, Embedded Facebook PrintScreen.
Source: Alina Preda, Published: 7 May 2022.

This emotionally charged exchange that eventually led to hostility soon stops with M1's sheepish denial that he wished to engage in conversation on the topic. Apparently, his comment was only meant to urge others to meditate on the thought that God (i.e., his god of choice) is against abortion. But the transparency of behaviour motives in the case of cult members resides in their required evangelical stance, hence the primacy of M1's instrumental goals. One of the behaviour motives driving his interventions surfaces when he quotes from the book of Matthew. Those who read not just the mentioned verse, 5:11, but also the one immediately following it cannot fail to notice that engaging in online battles in the name of the Christian deity supposedly carries huge benefits: "Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you" (Matthew 5:11-12). Conspicuously revealing his interpersonal self-presentation role, M1 situates himself, with smugness, on a moral high ground and, asserting his membership to the feature-rich category of white heterosexual Christian males, he feels entitled to engage in both mansplaining and religiousplaining, whilst feigning not only offense but also humility (Fig. 15).

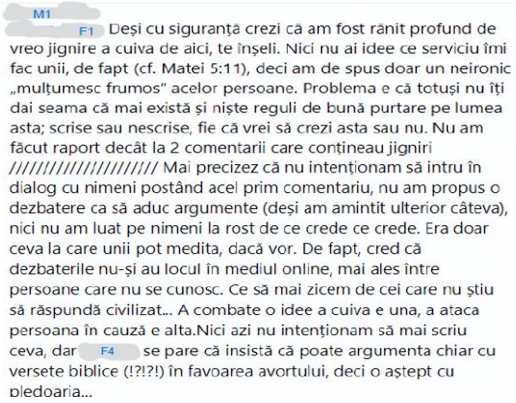

M1
F1 Deși cu siguranță crezi că am fost rănit profund de vreo jignire a cuiva de aici, te înșeli. Nici nu ai idee ce serviciu îmi fac unii, de fapt (cf. Matei 5:11), deci am de spus doar un neironic „mulțumesc frumos" acelor persoane. Problema e că totuși nu îți dai seama că mai există și niște reguli de bună purtare pe lumea asta; scrise sau nescrise, fie că vrei să crezi asta sau nu. Nu am făcut raport decât la 2 comentarii care conțineau jigniri ////////////////////// Mai precizez că nu intenționam să intru în dialog cu nimeni postând acel prim comentariu, nu am propus o dezbatere ca să aduc argumente (deși am amintit ulterior câteva), nici nu am luat pe nimeni la rost de ce crede ce crede. Era doar ceva la care unii pot medita, dacă vor. De fapt, cred că dezbaterile nu-și au locul în mediul online, mai ales între persoane care nu se cunosc. Ce să mai zicem de cei care nu știu să răspundă civilizat... A combate o idee a cuiva e una, a ataca persoana în cauză e alta.Nici azi nu intenționam să mai scriu ceva, dar F4 se pare că insistă că poate argumenta chiar cu versete biblice (!?!?!) în favoarea avortului, deci o aștept cu pledoaria...

Figure 15.

Comment to the Original Post, Embedded Facebook PrintScreen.
Source: Alina Preda, Published: 7 May 2022.

Although a religious man himself, M3, who entered the debate upon the retreat of M1, argues from a position of exclusion, feeling offended by the fact that so many women endorsed the post's message. Self-identifying as a politically correct person who seconds equality, he professes not to be anti-abortion but insists that men must share the burden, as "the entire species' reproduction should not be left to women alone". Of course, his phrasing of the issue fails to take into account the fact that, as F5 pertinently points out, our human species overpopulating the planet is actually in no danger of extinction (Fig. 16).

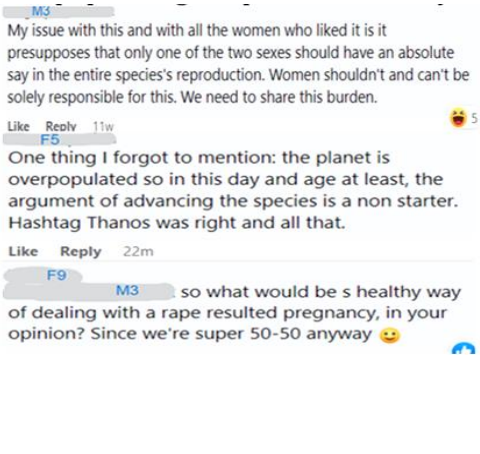

M3
My issue with this and with all the women who liked it is it presupposes that only one of the two sexes should have an absolute say in the entire species's reproduction. Women shouldn't and can't be solely responsible for this. We need to share this burden.
Like Reply 11w 5
F5
One thing I forgot to mention: the planet is overpopulated so in this day and age at least, the argument of advancing the species is a non starter. Hashtag Thanos was right and all that.
Like Reply 22m
F9
M3 so what would be s healthy way of dealing with a rape resulted pregnancy, in your opinion? Since we're super 50-50 anyway

Figure 16.

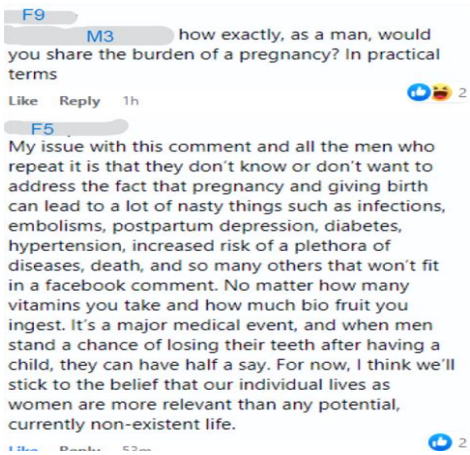

F9
M3 how exactly, as a man, would you share the burden of a pregnancy? In practical terms
Like Reply 1h 2
F5
My issue with this comment and all the men who repeat it is that they don't know or don't want to address the fact that pregnancy and giving birth can lead to a lot of nasty things such as infections, embolisms, postpartum depression, diabetes, hypertension, increased risk of a plethora of diseases, death, and so many others that won't fit in a facebook comment. No matter how many vitamins you take and how much bio fruit you ingest. It's a major medical event, and when men stand a chance of losing their teeth after having a child, they can have half a say. For now, I think we'll stick to the belief that our individual lives as women are more relevant than any potential, currently non-existent life.
2

Figure 17.

Comment to the Original Post, Embedded Facebook PrintScreen.
Source: Alina Preda, Published: 7 May 2022.

Noticeably, since M3 began with the outrageous "My issue with this and with all the women who liked it is …" (Fig. 16), F5 mockingly retorted with "My issue with this comment and all the men who repeat it is …" (Fig. 17). F9 asks M3 how exactly, as a man, he could share the burden of pregnancy and also brings up the case of pregnancies resulting from rape (Fig. 16, 17). In utter disbelief, M3 vows to have been misunderstood (Fig. 18, 19):

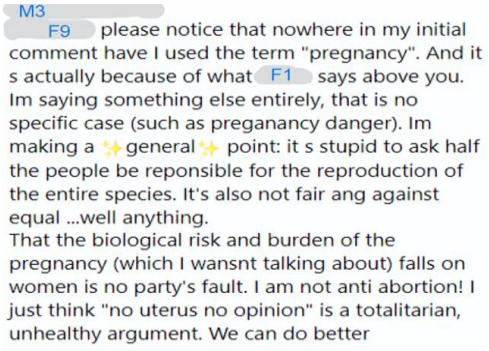


Figure 18.

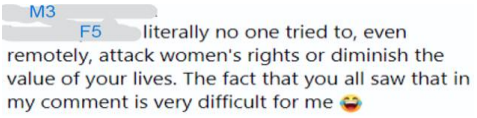


Figure 19.

Comment to the Original Post, Embedded Facebook PrintScreen.
Source: Alina Preda, Published: 7 May 2022.

F1 refuses to accept his stance, reminding him of the tragic deaths and horrendous suffering that the abortion ban abetted during the communist regime (Fig. 21). To M3's "no uterus no opinion" is "a totalitarian, unhealthy argument" (Fig. 18), F1 vehemently replies that only through family planning--which includes abortion and contraception, being thus opposed by religious groups--can both parents fruitfully co-operate and reach a decision as to if or when to have a child (Fig. 20).

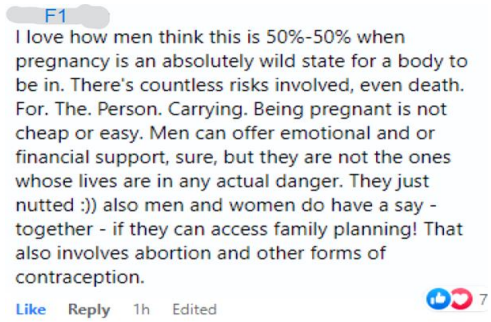


Figure 20.

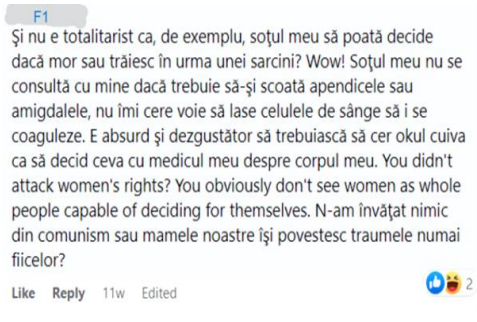


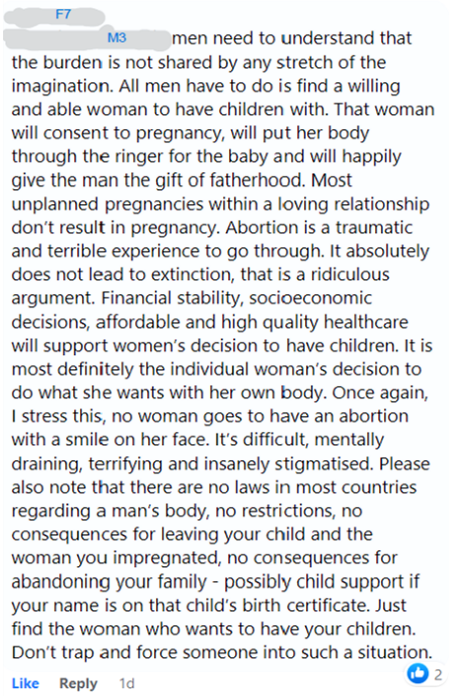
Figure 21.

Comment to the Original Post, Embedded Facebook PrintScreen.
Source: Alina Preda, Published: 7 May 2022.

F6 joins in with a vengeance, her words followed by a smiley, as if to soften the blow. M3 reacts with a sarcastic laugh and unwisely rebuts with a sneering remark preceded by an ill-fitted comparison promptly taxed by the recipient, but again, a smiling emoji is used as hedging to make the intervention seem less aggressive (Fig. 22):

Figure 22.
Comment to the Original Post, Embedded Facebook PrintScreen.
Source: Alina Preda, Published: 7 May 2022.

M3's mansplaining elicits angry reactions and additional explanations from a less ironic F7 (Fig. 23), whilst F8 has admirable patience to further explain the reasons why his comments are perceived as inflammatory (Fig. 24):



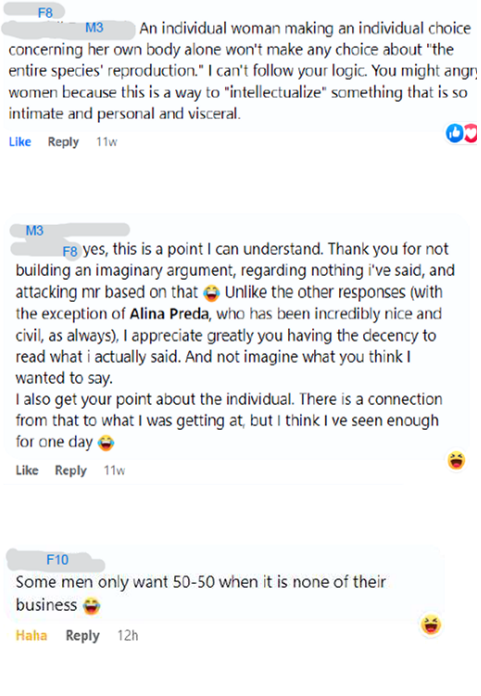


Figure 23. **Figure 24.**

Comment to the Original Post, Embedded Facebook PrintScreen.
Source: Alina Preda, Published: 7 May 2022.

The last contribution in the feed belongs to F10, who points out again that a fair division is impossible when it comes to being pregnant and giving birth, ending her comment with a sarcastic laughing emoji (Fig. 24).

Remarkably, it is only in his interaction with the OP (Fig. 25, 26) that M1's focus slightly shifts towards relational goals, as he attempts to obviate conflict by affirming his respect for her, despite the opposite opinions expressed (Fig. 27). M3 also indicates his appreciation of the civility displayed by the OP throughout the interaction (Fig. 24) yet, despite a few attempts at actual communication, he is not always willing to integrate new information into his views on the topic. In the case of M1, there is an apparently striking lack of concern over what others have to say about the unsupported claims he makes but, to those familiar with Christian apologetics, his extreme lack of interest in an informed perspective on what is being discussed should come as no surprise.

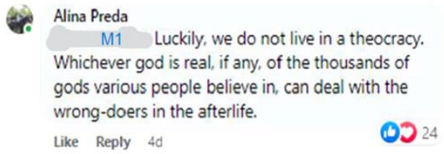


Figure 25.

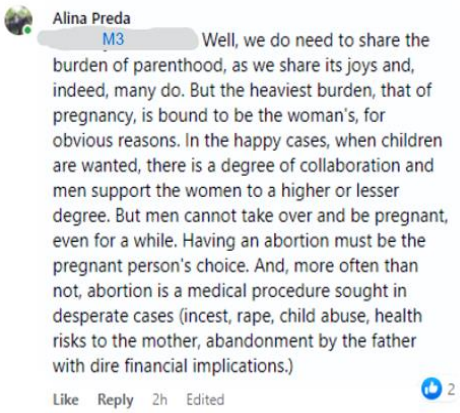


Figure 28.

Comment to the Original Post, Embedded Facebook PrintScreen.
Source: Alina Preda, Published: 7 May 2022.

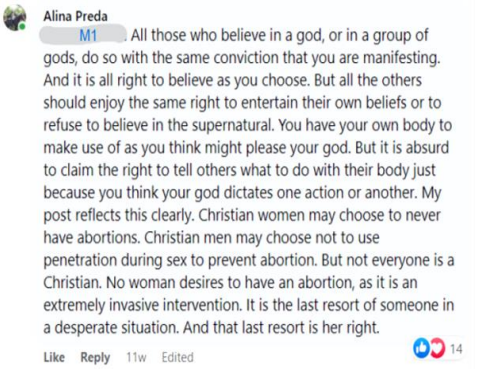


Figure 26.

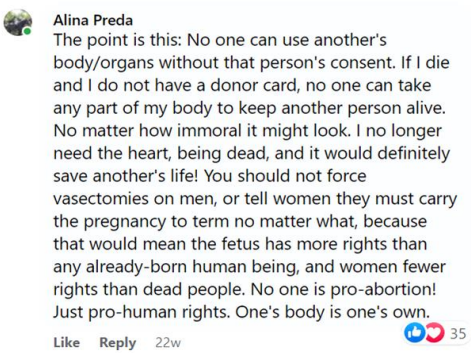


Figure 29.

Comment to the Original Post, Embedded Facebook PrintScreen.
Source: Alina Preda, Published: 7 May 2022.

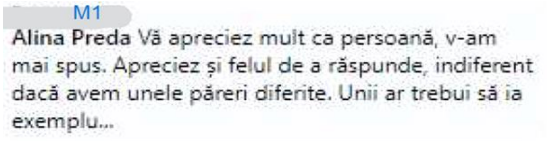


Figure 27.

Comment to the Original Post, Embedded Facebook PrintScreen.
Source: Alina Preda, Published: 7 May 2022.

The OP's more advanced age, professional status, career development and life experience are bound to translate into a social positioning that exacts considerable respect from current and former students, colleagues and friends. In fact, it is expected for this kind of "social identification dynamics" to trigger "more pronounced effects" in the case of computer-mediated communication than in instances of face-to-face interaction (Walther et al. 2011, 25). Nevertheless, in spite of the clearly articulated explanations of the female contributors, among whom the OP features heavily with several sound arguments (Fig. 25, 26, 28, 29), M1 and M3 cannot be swayed toward an understanding of how important abortion rights are for women. If one joins a debate from a position of self-avowed superiority, whether moral or intellectual, the focus being on converting others to your faith or on scoring points to improve one's self-image rather than on having an actual discussion, there cannot be room for any real productive conversation.

Conclusions

One of the reasons why people spend time reading, watching or listening to the news and discussing various news items on social media is that, while elaborating on current affairs in various interactions with their peers, not only do they have the opportunity to elicit reactions from others and to find out more about the subject, but they can also take a stand, express their personal view and attempt to influence those of others. Walther et al.'s reworking of Atkin's conceptualisation of the communicatory utility of social media content in interpersonal exchanges (1972) outlines an extended range of interpersonal goals, from self-presentation and self-representation to conversation starters and ammunition needed in order to reinforce one's views and persuade others to adopt them as well. The primacy of instrumental goals can lead to biased sampling of information provided by mass media or taken from one's "sacred" book of choice in order to support one's own position, whereas a focus on relational goals may influence the wording of one's comments in order to obviate conflict and, thus, maintain amicable relations. Additionally, one's choices might be guided by a drive to "express attitudinal agreement and convey interpersonal similarity" so as to establish, affirm or strengthen one's feeling of belonging to a certain group (Walther et al. 2011, 31); all these are bound to have a considerable impact on the "selection, interpretation, and retention of media information" (32), as well as on the form and content of the comments made on a certain Facebook post, which is "by definition, a public message, bordering on being broadcasted (or, at least, narrowcasted within the social network) for others to see" (33).

Throughout the debate outlined above, there is a clash between two distinct collective identities: masculinism, represented by M1 and M3, versus feminism, this category including the female contributors, as well as M2. On the other hand, there is a dispute between two other collective identities, namely those who are pro-forced-birth, for religious reasons in this case, all of them members of the same congregation, and those who are pro-women's lives. The discourses of the former, whether ambivalent or outright hostile, prioritise self-presentation and instrumental goals. They, thus, mirror the sense of entitlement displayed by privileged individuals who took the post's message personally and felt attacked in their self-assumed superior position as religious men, showing little, if any, concern for women's autonomy. The responses of the latter focus on relational goals and, even when the instrumental ones take precedence, there is no biased sampling of data but rather a generous sharing of personal information and of medically established facts pertaining to the procedure called abortion and to the importance of a right to choose for the physical and mental state of potential mothers.

The analysis of the debate supports Jenkins's claim that our interlocutors do not merely "perceive our identity, they actively constitute it" and this is done not simply "in terms of naming or categorising, but in terms of how they respond to or treat us" (Jenkins 2008, 96). The data show that F1 is justifiably feisty, having participated in both rounds of the debate, yet she consistently stands her ground using strong arguments to support her views. F2, F3 and F5 make pertinent inquiries, trying to have an actual conversation and hoping that, while considering how to answer, M1 and M3 might understand the errors of their ways. F7 and F8 attempt to reach a similar outcome via well-phrased explanations, whereas M2, F4, F6 and F10 mainly resort to sarcastic remarks. Unfortunately, M1 and, on occasion, M3, having informed their perspectives on the issue with falsehoods and stereotypes, instead of trying to understand what the others are saying, seem intent on protecting the perceived superiority of their "tribe". Thus, rather than shaping for himself the desired image of a gracious yet effective ambassador for Christ, M1 unwittingly comes forth as a self-appointed-online-crusader turned missionary-martyr, whose contribution to the debate amounts to nothing more than bible-thumping. M3, on the other hand, although lacking evidentially well-supported contributions, emerges as a slightly better communicator. Their projected self-identity is challenged by the others, who astutely scrutinise M1's and M3's premises and claims, judiciously analyse their interactional competences and sagaciously peer behind the smokescreen, gradually conveying the message that neither the interpersonal self-presentation goals of these two contributors, nor their instrumental goals have been achieved.

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