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## **Exploring Online Testimonies of Abortion in Mexico through a Feminist Lens:**

A Reflexive Thematic Analysis Across Temporal Contexts

submitted by

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## **Abstract**

The topic of abortion in Mexico has been contested in political and social spheres since the 1870s, handled by state penal codes which criminalized abortion based on geographic location. Feminist demands for decriminalization experienced major success in 2007, when a set of reforms legalized abortion in Mexico City, making it a pioneer in reproductive rights legislation. From then, a 12-year pause in legislative efforts followed, guided by an anti-abortion sentiment campaign led by the Catholic elite, which held power over traditional media and public opinion. The resurgence of abortion in mainstream spaces came along in 2018 with the movement *Marea Verde*, boosting feminist pro-choice sentiment in the streets and in digital media. Displaying that across time, the State, the Catholic Church, the Mexican feminist movement, and the media have been pivotal agents in abortion discourse in Mexico.

## **Aim**

Mexican women have experienced abortion very differently since the 2007 reforms, as the country has witnessed many social and legislative transformations on the matter. Throughout it all, abortions have kept happening – legally, clandestinely, safely, and unsafely - attached to a wide range of legal and social consequences. Moreover, online feminist networks and digital platforms have become increasingly vital to procure safe access and information about abortive healthcare. Internationally, the field of abortion storytelling has studied abortion narratives as an initiative associated with transformations in policy and public perception. In Mexico, only in 2025 has there been an interest in monitoring mediatic abortion discourse through time. This research introduces the abortion storytelling field to Mexican discourse by analyzing online abortion testimonies. The aim is to examine the role and evolution of digital media in women's abortion stories and to explore whether major socio-political events and actors in the reproductive justice field since 2007 have impacted the narratives analyzed.

## **Methodology and Theoretical Framework**

This research employs Reflexive Thematic Analysis (RTA) following Braun and Clarke's (2006, 2019, 2021a, 2021b, 2022, 2025) methodology. The dataset consists of 90 abortion testimonies published to the Mexican online platform FOCOS (focos.org.mx). The stories are categorized according to the year the abortion occurred and grouped across three time periods: 2007-2011, 2012-2016, and 2017-2021. The items were coded in Spanish using the OpenQDA (openqda.org) software, following ethical considerations by erasing any personal

identifiers. A feminist intersectional lens with a reproductive justice perspective guides the interpretation of the data.

### **Key Findings**

Through Braun and Clarke's six-step iterative methodology, three main themes stemming from the dataset are identified, all exhibiting the embeddedness of institutions, structures, and society across all years studied: *Theme 1. The Cycle of Institutional and Infrastructural Violence: Women Facing God, the State and Other Actors to Access Healthcare*, focuses on the negative impact of outlined actors by exhibiting violent and discriminatory practices affecting women's physical and mental health when seeking an abortion. *Theme 2. Towards Better Abortions: All-encompassing Support, Accompaniment in Institutional, Structural and Social Spheres*, focuses on the positive impact of said actors in women's stories and overviews constructive narratives to understand what all-encompassing support means for Mexican women who undergo abortions. Lastly, *Theme 3. From Silence to Advocacy: Abortion as a Catalyst for Overcoming, Reclaiming and Rethinking Womanhood in Mexico*, focuses on how the systemic silencing of Mexican women's abortion stories is transformed by them into tools of resistance whether online or in real life to speak up and advocate for others. Further findings suggest that the testimonies analysed are impacted by the main historical events in the reproductive rights field happening during the time period when the abortion procedure occurred. In the digital media front, the narratives over time evolve from being the only spaces for women to share their abortion stories to specialized hubs of information where women share highly detailed, educational information, feeling a responsibility for contributing trustworthy advice to others.

### **Conclusions and Implications**

This work emphasizes the need for trustworthy online spaces in Mexico to access reliable up-to-date information about abortion on a state-by-state basis and advocates for the preservation and support of archival platforms such as FOCOS. This study calls for further research into online abortion testimonies of Mexican women from a feminist intersectional lens as a novel tool to monitor systematic changes in discourse and policy. Lastly, this thesis supports the *Grupo de Información en Reproducción Elegida's* (GIRE) demands for the total decriminalization of abortion in the country as paramount in changing the legal and social perception of abortion.

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## 1. Introduction

The battle for the decriminalization of abortion in Mexico is approaching a century (Austria Mejía, 2022, p. 26). This battle has been framed in history and academia by three main actors: the changing powers of state, a deeply Catholic society, and the feminist movement (Baleón and Vargas, 2024, pp. 115-116; Lamas, 2012b, p. 43). Acclaimed Mexican feminist scholar Marta Lamas (2009, p. 156) argues that the right for women to decide over their own bodies has been one of the most basic and oldest demands of the feminist movement in the country. Mexico City became a pioneer for reproductive rights in Latin America in 2007, when a set of reforms decriminalized abortion in the first 12.6 weeks of pregnancy on a voluntary basis (GIRE, 2021, p.31; Lamas, 2012a, p.57). This achievement was met by a reign of twelve years of stigma, censorship, and fear-driven legislative silence led by the conservative religious sector (Austria Mejía, 2022, p. 21; Lamas, 2012a, p. 56). In 2018 pro-choice sentiment was reactivated by the *Marea Verde*, or *Green Wave*, since then 24 out of the 32 entities in Mexico have decriminalized pregnancy interruption (Alín, 2025) at the time of writing. As seen in this brief overview, in the last decades, abortion in Mexico has been subject to a plethora of legislative and social transformations.

Around the world, people have used social media forums to seek support, advice and find others that have faced similar experiences as them, by reading and sharing their personal stories with pregnancy interruption (Wilson-Lowe et al., 2024, p. 173). In Mexico, the massive reactivation of the pro-choice movement introduced digital platforms as spaces where feminist activism could occur (GIRE, 2025, p. 162). The radical legal and social changes that the country has witnessed in the matter of abortion call for an investigation into the experiences that the decriminalization of pregnancy termination since 2007 has implied for Mexican women (Robles and Hernández, 2024, p. 4). This is emphasized by the fact that within institutional and academic spaces, only the 2025 report *Maternidad o Castigo. Hacia la despenalización del aborto en México* by GIRE has drawn attention to this issue.

At the international level, a growing body of qualitative research has examined the framing of online abortion experiences, focusing almost exclusively on English-speaking countries of the Global North (Berny, 2024, p.136), observing that digital platforms can be used as tools to “disseminate feminist ideas, shape new discourses, and allow new creative forms of protest and activism” (Locke et al., 2018, p. 4). Given this context, a gap has been identified in

analysing online abortion testimonies in different socio-political environments, such as Mexico.

This work addresses this gap by analyzing online abortion testimonies of Mexican women through a feminist intersectional and reproductive justice lens, using Reflexive Thematic Analysis (RTA) as outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006) following a Big Q orientation (Braun and Clarke, 2025, p. 400). This six-step iterative methodological approach emphasises subjectivity, theoretical and methodological flexibility, and the generation of knowledge based on the researcher's own academic and lived context, making it suitable for feminist research (Braun and Clarke, 2019, p. 591). This thesis examines the 90 manually collected online testimonies of abortion shared to the digital forum FOCOS ([focos.org.mx](http://focos.org.mx)) across three distinct time periods: 2007-2011, 2012-2016, and 2017-2021. Testimonies were coded and analyzed in Spanish using the OpenQDA ([openqda.org](http://openqda.org)) software. The process took into account factors such as; ethical concerns, reflexivity through all RTA phases, and selecting diverse and rich narratives.

This work finds its focus in the guiding research question: What recurring themes and narratives emerge from Mexican women's online abortion testimonies, and how have they evolved across temporal contexts? Furthermore, to address more concrete aspects pointed out by the literature review as well as following quality practice of RTA (Braun and Clarke, 2021a, p.345), specific research objectives fall under two main spheres: Analyzing the role and presence of digital media in the women's stories through time, and whether social and political events in the reproductive rights sector have impacted the narratives. Therefore, further research objectives are framed as follows:

RQ1: How has the content of the testimonies evolved over the different time periods outlined? What socio-political or cultural factors might account for these changes?

RQ2: What does the analysis reveal about Mexican women's use of online resources in relation to abortion? Does it display a change over time?

RQ3: What does a feminist analysis reveal about the framing and themes embedded in online abortion storytelling in Mexico?

The work presented is grounded in an intersectional, feminist, theoretical framework informed by literature on Latin American feminist movements. Prioritizing the Mexican

reproductive justice perspective that critically examines how gender, socio-economic status, location, and institutional powers shape women's access to healthcare (GIRE, 2018, p.45). These Latin American theoretical ties aid in comprehending that women's experiences of abortion must be analysed considering discrimination and privilege as portrayed in the testimonies, as well as considering the feminist movement in Mexico as dynamic and evolving according to the socio-political context that surrounds it (Lau Jaiven, 1998, pp. 185-187). Moreover, concepts such as Collins' (1990) *matrix of domination* as well as Rashida Manjoo's (2012) *continuum of violence* are drawn as complementary tools to analyze the systemic nature of oppression and violence surrounding abortion experiences. The other set of theoretical lenses building this framework focuses on the international field of feminist digital activism, stressing the contributions of the abortion storytelling field, which argues that digital participation fosters real social and legislative change (Mendes et al., 2019b, pp. 185-187). This research adds a novel perspective to the global discourse on the framing of abortion storytelling (Berny, 2024, p. 136) by examining the role of online platforms as spaces for sharing lived experiences, fostering feminist activism, and socio-political change. Moreover, this study contributes to existing scholarship on Latin American feminist movements and the intersectional reproductive justice field in Mexico.

This thesis is divided into six chapters, which are structured as follows. Chapter 1, Literature Review, provides a rich historical and sociopolitical overview of abortion in Mexico, exploring latent issues such as the consequences of long-standing criminalization as well as the role of traditional and digital media in shaping abortion practice and discourse, and reviewing academic literature outside of Mexico on feminist digital activism and abortion storytelling. Chapter 2, Methodology, details my approach and explicit positioning, following detailed descriptions of the research design, sampling strategy and data generation, ethical considerations, and the iterative use of RTA. Chapter 3, Analysis, presents the three themes found across the dataset unified by central organizing concepts (Braun and Clarke, 2021b, p. 80) and identifies shifting narrative patterns. Chapter 4, Discussion, interprets the themes under the underlined theoretical framework as well as examining the temporal findings and their relation to socio-political events in Mexico and the evolution of digital media. Chapter 5, Conclusions, summarizes the key contributions, discusses limitations, and suggests feminist media approaches for the major issues at hand, as well as providing avenues for future research.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1 Historical Foundations of the Fight for Abortion Legislation in Mexico

Lamas (2012a, p. 55) states that self-induced abortion has always been possible, practiced by women in all cultures and time periods to free themselves from an unwanted destiny. Classified as a common event that can take place in the reproductive life of women and people able to get pregnant (GIRE, 2025, p. 165) and labeled in 2022 by the World Health Organization (WHO) as a safe, sanitary and uncomplicated practice fundamental for women's rights to healthcare as well as an essential healthcare service (2022, p. 2). However, abortion in Mexico has only become thinkable in recent history; it happened in the 1870s, when the penal code *Código Juárez* was published, classifying abortion as separate from homicide, typifying it as a crime in Mexican legislation (GIRE, 2025, p. 152; Lamas, 2012a, p. 56; Ortiz Millán, 2020, p. 98). This was a part of a calculated strategy to push for the separation of the State and the Catholic Church (Lamas, 2012a, p.55), showcasing that in Mexican history, abortions, the Church and the government have always been intrinsically tied to one another.

From there, sixty years later in 1931, abortion was a topic once more, considered non-punishable in the context of sexual assault (GIRE, 2025, p.152). In 1936, there was the first organized demand for the decriminalization of abortion by activists (Lamas, 2012a, p.60). Having said that, Mexican feminists at the time needed to heavily focus on the suffragist movement and held on until the 1970s to see the resurgence of the topic of abortion in public and political spaces. The feminist movement of the seventies, supported by public figures, academics, scientists, and intellectuals, remained active in their demands for the decriminalization, reaching its culmination on the 26th of April 2007, when, alongside factors such as the recent liberal sentiment in the capital and Mexico's involvement in international treaties protecting women's rights, a set of reforms to the Penal Code and the Local Health Law decriminalized abortion in the first 12.6 weeks of gestation on a voluntary basis in Mexico City (GIRE, 2021, p.31; Lamas, 2012a, p.57). This reform was historical, the first of its kind in Latin America, setting a precedent for sexual and reproductive rights (Austria Mejía, 2022, p.1; GIRE, 2025, p.153).

Abortion is a common procedure worldwide; the WHO (2022, p.1) estimates that 6 in 10 unplanned pregnancies and 3 out of 10 pregnancies result in self-provoked abortion. In 2008, the *Programa para la Interrupción Legal del Embarazo (Program of Legal Interruption of*

*Pregnancy*), better known as ILE, was implemented in Mexico City to ensure access to legal, safe, and free abortion services to its residents and beyond (GIRE, 2021, p.31). From April 2007 until the 31st of March 2021, dates relevant to this investigation, the Local Health Department reported having provided attention to a total of 234,513 users (GIRE, 2021, p.31), highlighting the demand and importance of this legislation. The decriminalization of pregnancy interruption in the Mexican capital sets a stark divide in the contemporary feminist fight for reproductive rights in Mexico as well as marking the beginning of the time period of interest for the research at hand.

## **2.2 The Social, Legal and Religious Implications Surrounding the 2007 Reforms**

The 2007 reforms in Mexico City were celebrated by many within feminist and liberal spaces. Having an undeniable impact on Mexican society's collective imagination by witnessing firsthand how, with the right political alliances and the organized demands of citizens, decriminalizing abortion was possible in other states (GIRE, 2025, p.153; Lamas, 2012a, p. 58). The most powerful conservative sectors in Mexico, the political and religious, recognized the threat of wider decriminalization and were quick to act, placing an unconstitutionality lawsuit against the reforms in 2008 led by the *Federal Public Prosecutors Office* (FPPO) as well as the *National Commission of Human Rights*. They claimed to *protect life from the moment of conception* (GIRE, 2025, p.153; Lamas 2012a, p.58; Ortíz Millán, 2020 p.10) heavily based in religious ideology stemming from the 1989 *in favor of life* media campaign led by Pope Wojtyla (Lamas 2012b, p.46). The motions were ultimately dismissed (Lamas 2012a, p.58; Ortíz Millán, 2020 p.10; GIRE, 2025, p.153) but it caused 20 states to reform their local constitutions under the resurgent protection of life discourse, seemingly legally blinding themselves against the luring decriminalization of abortion (GIRE, 2018, p.25; GIRE, 2021, p.25; Lamas, 2012a, p.58; Lamas, 2012b, p.61).

This was possible because in Mexico, legislation regarding abortion is regulated on a state-by-state basis, under criminal codes that define the circumstances under which abortion can be performed, meaning that in the country, the bodies of women are controlled to a different degree, circumstance, and manner based on their geographic location (Belfrage, 2022, p.8; GIRE, 2021, p.17). Even though the local constitutions that *Protect Life* continue to not pose a legal obstacle to past, current, or future actions towards the decriminalization of pregnancy interruption, they still contribute towards generating a climate of legal uncertainty

and confusion, which directly affects health care and law enforcement personnel as well as women themselves (GIRE, 2018, p.26).

This legal alteration was not the only destabilizing factor pushing a conservative agenda. There were growing threats from Catholic institutions which Lamas classified as the biggest direct or indirect obstacles historically towards the decriminalization of abortion in Mexico (2012b, p.59). Catholic religious groups took to the streets to protest against the 2007 reforms and imposed a complicit silence in the media by threatening to remove advertising paid by Catholic businessmen if they broached the topic (Lamas, 2012b, p.58). This displayed a coordinated effort to promote an extremely well-financed anti-abortion legislation sentiment (Austria Mejía, 2022, p.21) via censorship, ideological terrorism and stigmatization (Lamas, 2012a, p.56) that would begin a reign of twelve years of legislative silence.

### **2.3 When the Green Wave Hit Mexican Shores, a Legislative Awakening**

From 2007 on, no federal entity would prioritize reproductive justice over stereotypes and conservative ideology (GIRE, 2021, p.34) until the summer of 2018, when the Argentinian Feminist movement *Marea Verde*, started gaining considerable visibility for their efforts in the decriminalization of abortion in their country (Austria Mejía, 2022, p.19; GIRE, 2021, p.35). *Marea Verde* acted as a blueprint; Argentinian women had taken to the streets with their signature green handkerchiefs as a symbol, forging alliances between existing feminist, social, political, and academic organizations to work as a collective in sensitizing society to the matter of abortion and building a collective imaginary that could influence lawmakers (GIRE, 2025, p. 42). This campaign proved successful when, in December 2020, abortion was decriminalized in Argentina until 14.6 weeks (GIRE 2025, p. 154).

In Mexico, *Marea Verde* took hold of social spheres and repositioned abortion in the political debate, showcasing a drastic increase of efforts towards decriminalization in the country (GIRE, 2021, p.35). Furthermore, it evidenced its influence in the historic changes of ideology in the judicial branch, highlighting how the FPPO, which had labeled abortion as unconstitutional in 2007, was the leading institution taking to the Supreme Court ten years later to resolve how not allowing abortion in the first weeks of gestation went against human rights (GIRE, 2025, p.154). In October 2019, one year after the popularization of *Marea Verde*, the coordinated effort of allies, organizations, and activists in Mexico saw the approval of the reforms to Oaxaca State's Congress. These implied decriminalizing abortion in the first

twelve weeks of gestation, making it the second federal entity in the country to do so after the 2007 reforms in Mexico City, exhibiting once more how social mobilizations led by feminist movements could impact legislative processes (GIRE, 2021, pp. 32-34).

In 2021, the year that marks the end of data collection for this study, five more entities namely, Hidalgo, Veracruz, Coahuila, Baja California, and Coahuila decriminalized voluntary abortion until the twelfth week through legislative and judicial branches (GIRE, 2025, p.62). Since then, the efforts to decriminalize abortion have continued to gain relevance and to make strides in every corner of the country. Only in the first six months of 2025, three states removed the codes that criminalize abortion out of their penal codes and at the time of writing this text, 24 out of the 32 entities in Mexico have decriminalized and legalized abortion on a voluntary basis (Alín, 2025). This is in great part due to the fact that, in 2023, the Supreme Court of Justice declared the criminalization of abortion as unconstitutional, making it so that no woman, pregnant person, or health personnel can be punished for having or procuring an abortion (GIRE, 2025, p.155). This ruling is attributed to local feminist and allied organizations such as GIRE, which led a national judicial strategy in which a series of injunctions were presented to eliminate the crime of self-provoked and consensual abortion in Penal Codes throughout the country, including the Federal Congress (GIRE, 2023).

#### **2.4 The Effects of Criminalizing Abortion in Mexico**

As seen by this historical overview, the legal fight for the rights of women to choose their own reproductive future in Mexico is nothing new. Even though, from 2019 on, the legislative changes happening display a positive trend in the topic of abortion (GIRE, 2025, p.155), there is still a lot to work for in the fight for reproductive rights in Mexico. In the matter of decriminalization, even though the Supreme Court has ruled in favor of decriminalizing this health procedure, some local governments still reject this constitutional criteria and continue to criminalize those who interrupt a pregnancy as well as those who aid in this process (Alín, 2025). Feminist organizations in Mexico are working towards the total decriminalization of abortion (GIRE, 2025, p.107; WHO, 2022, p.2). This in practice entails removing abortion from criminal jurisdiction altogether to be regulated strictly from the healthcare front (GIRE, 20205, p.107) as every other medical procedure in Mexico currently is.

The consequences of abortion being regulated by the legal system are vast. For starters, it perpetuates stigma by reproducing the idea that maternity is an obligatory function of women; this perception has long permeated culture and state institutions (GIRE, 2018, p. 11; GIRE, 2021, p. 13). The subjugation of women's biological functions is entirely political, economical, and social, deeply rooted in patriarchal and religious traditions with the end of perpetuating women's role as subordinates to men (Belfrage, 2022, p. 7). To this end, it is important to understand that prohibiting women from autonomous decision-making, punishing and impeding their access to health interventions that only they need is not only discriminatory, it is a calculated, territorial, capitalistic, systemic, and political means to maintain the status quo (Belfrage, 2021, p. 7; GIRE, 2018, pp. 31, 40).

The topic of access to healthcare is directly breached by the way in which local law decides over women's bodies, from 2007 until 2019, the only legal and free way to access abortive healthcare was in Mexico City. This practice is considered by GIRE (2018, pp.13, 319) and Belfrage (2021, p.9) as discriminatory, turning safe pregnancy interruption into a privilege of the rich, where those who can afford legal and private care are the ones most likely to access it. This makes it so that criminalization and stigma directly affect most women in impoverished, remote sectors of the country, coming from violent contexts and lacking access to information on reproduction, who have to turn to high-risk health providers and practices (GIRE, 2018, p.13,31; GIRE, 2021, p.13). Denying access to safe abortion makes women choose between forced maternity or enduring alternative methods to interrupt a pregnancy, which puts their emotional and physical wellbeing as well as their freedom at risk.

The WHO (2022, p.1) urges governments to implement an integral model of attention to abortion procedures, which they call the *continuum of care* and considers the elimination of dangerous abortions as a priority mandate. However, in Mexico there is a considerable gap between the rights established on paper and the actual services that women and pregnant persons have access to, which is enhanced by the fact that there is a great lack of knowledge on behalf of authorities, especially in the healthcare front, about their obligations (GIRE, 2018, p.106). Particularly the health sector has fostered a culture where healthcare staff double as vigilantes, as most legal complaints stemming from the practice of an abortion come directly from the healthcare providers, who either report or threaten to do so when a woman comes to a healthcare institution with a self-inflicted or spontaneous abortion (GIRE, 2018, pp.22, 245). This reflects the criminalization environment fostered for decades in the

country, enhancing stigma, secrecy and exhibiting how health practitioners place higher importance on disclaiming themselves from legal repercussions rather than to safeguard a woman who is in an obstetric emergency (Robles and Hernandez, 2024, p.17). All of this amounts to the fact that even though abortion might be decriminalized in some states, it often does not hold the state and other institutions accountable for safe, timely access to free, legal, and safe pregnancy interruption (GIRE, 2021, p.34). In other words, partial decriminalization does not guarantee access, does not equal institutional accountability and does not take into account infrastructural planning and availability.

Eradicating abortion regulations from Criminal Law in Mexico would act as an indicator of a social transformation, removing it from the narrative that this practice is something to be punished for, a false logic that has long perpetuated stigma and stereotypes in women, health personnel, and accompanying persons or members (GIRE, 2021, p.11; GIRE, 2025, p.164, p.107). Following Belfrage (2021, p.9) as long as abortion is still regulated by criminal law, there is no real liberation to practice pregnancy interruption, only a new additional exception, temporality, which enhances economic disparity and discrimination towards those in unfavorable economic or geographical conditions.

## **2.5 Digital and Traditional Media's Role in Shaping Abortion in Mexico**

It is undeniable that the media landscape on the topic of abortion has drastically changed since 2007; until then, the topic was simply not a priority in the media and communications space (GIRE, 2025, p.158). As mentioned previously, this was, on one hand, by design, private and public media were dominated by the Catholic religious monopoly with full administrative power over what Mexican audiences consumed (Blancarte, 1999, p.191). When the 2007 reforms came around, for a moment discourse on abortion was everywhere, the polarizing legislation was covered from the front page of newspapers to the newly found internet space (GIRE, 2025, p. 159). However, it remained an obscure and risky topic to discuss in the collective imagination, and the main message spread was that of *protecting life from the moment of conception* (GIRE, 2025, pp.158-159). At the time, as registered by Lamas (2012b, p.58) the written press was the only traditional media outlet where the Catholic elite could not completely impose their censorship and therefore the only medium for critical debate and coverage on the topic of abortion. Showcasing that honest discussions about abortion in Mexico have always found safety in the written media.

As reflected by the historical overview, the topic of abortion would not break into the media agenda in any meaningful way until 2018 with the emergence of *Marea Verde* (GIRE, 2025, pp. 158-160). Before that the only way a story would break into the mainstream media was through revictimization as media exposure was used as a threat by health and legal institutions for women to confess a self-provoked abortion (GIRE, 2025, p.145). During this decade of media silence, clandestine and unsafe abortions were actively taking place with a varying range of physical, mental, and legal consequences. It is important to exhibit the difference between clandestine and unsafe abortions. According to GIRE (2021) clandestine refers to an abortion outside of what the law allows (p.64). On the other hand, according to the WHO (1993) an unsafe abortion is “characterized by the lack or inadequacy of skills of the provider, hazardous techniques and unsanitary facilities” (p.3). Both texts underscore that the legality of an abortion is not the defining factor for its safety, as a medically induced abortion can be performed both clandestinely and safely with the proper counsel.

Born out of this climate of secrecy, religious fearmongering and social stigma, feminist organizations like *Las Libres (The Free Ones)* since the early 2000s and *Fondo María (María Fund)* since 2009 have been working to support women in their decision not to continue their pregnancies by forming organized accompanying networks, which collaborated to help women to not turn to unsafe abortion practices by providing the abortive medication regimen, which consists of offering information, emotional, logistic and material support through pregnancy interruption (Austria Mejía, 2022, p.40; Robles and Hernández, 2024, p.4). The approved practice in Mexico and by the WHO for at-home abortive care consist of a combined regime of the mifepristone and misoprostol medication which is proven to be the most effective although abortions can also be achieved only by taking misoprostol (CONAVIM, 2021, p.58; WHO, 2022, pp.10-17).

With the notorious media coverage brought by *Marea Verde* starting in 2018 and the impact of Covid-19 came a transformation in the communications field, where digital media started generating a positive and wide-ranging impact on the narrative of abortion in Mexico (GIRE, 2025, p.162). Austria Mejía (2023, p.41) describes how the more widespread use of the internet for feminist activism worldwide saw a drastic increase in the presence of feminist networks in Mexico operating mainly through social media, using the internet to its full potential by providing online-based support and accompaniment through pregnancy interruption to great success. As reported by GIRE (2025, pp.163-164) religious and

conservative *anti-choice* groups did not play a protagonic part this time around, and since then abortion has not left the media agenda.

Given this information, it is disturbing that the first institution in the country to provide an overview of the narratives surrounding abortion in traditional and digital media similar to the aims of this research is from 2025. GIRE's 2025 Report (pp.152-165) dedicates its last chapter, *Towards a New Narrative*, to their findings in the systemic monitoring of traditional and digital media content from 2007 to 2023 and justifies the research at hand. It does so by establishing that in the time period studied, the changes seen in the narratives of the media about abortions in Mexico have positively impacted the way in which people understand and perceive this procedure, effectively molding societies attitudes and opinions on the topic while also eliminating stigma. Based on their data, they claim that public opinion on abortion is not fixed and immovable but rather depends on factors such as the prejudices that surround it, the way the topic is handled in the media, and the level of access to trustworthy information and to health services to legally perform abortions (GIRE, 2025, p.164).

Lastly, the report highlights how stories centered on personal experiences in the media have been seminal for audiences to understand the various reasons that lead women to choose to terminate a pregnancy (GIRE, 2025, p.164). The chapter *Towards a New Narrative* (GIRE, 2025) acknowledges for the first time in Mexican feminist studies on abortions that, for women, access to rights regarding healthcare is a crucial part of the communications and media agenda. This is particularly evident in digital feminist activism of media campaigns like *Ni Una Menos* and *Me Too*, underscoring that it is vital to monitor traditional and social media narratives of abortion to generate strategies to influence in the building of a media environment that follows human rights and reproductive justice frameworks (GIRE, 2025, p.156). The shift in the media landscape surrounding abortion in Mexico since 2007 reinforces the need to explore online abortion testimonies as central to the normalization and demand for reproductive justice.

## **2.6 The Field of Abortion Storytelling as Feminist Digital Activism**

International academic research supports the claims that digital platforms have the potential of disseminating feminist ideas that shape new discourses and connect diverse individuals in new forms of protest and activism (Locke et al., 2018, p.4; Mendes et al., 2019a, p.2). At the same time, scholarship on the impact of online health information access has long established

that the internet impacts people's everyday lives and that includes the experiences of health and illness, and that the practice of sharing health-related experiences online is well known to stimulate advocacy and campaigns (Ziebland and Wyke, 2012, p.220).

The online health discourse and digital feminist interventions disciplines meet when talking about abortion experiences online, which has become a popular form of digital feminist activism evident in culture via media and political campaigns, even amidst the normalized stigma against them (Allen, 2015, pp. 44-45), social movement scholarship exhibiting how these stories can raise awareness for social causes. The field for researching abortion storytelling on the internet is relatively new (Allen, 2015, p.45). However, it has become an important part of reproductive justice activism, with online and offline projects that contest restrictive abortion regimes breaking into the mainstream in the last few years (Berny, 2024, p.100), namely, *Shout Your Abortion* in the US or *In Her Shoes* in Ireland and Poland, to name a few. Moreover, there is growing interest in the way abortion discourse online and socio-political movements are associated with changes in abortion policy (Wilson-Lowe, 2023, p.16).

## **2.7 Moving Past Stigma, the Personal and Social Impact of Sharing Online**

Evidence suggests that women tend to go to online platforms to share, as they provide safe spaces to explore feminism and have the potential to speak up on misogynistic practices or stigmatizing situations they have experienced (Locke et al., 2018, pp.6-7). Moreover, research shows that several women consider online spaces as pivotal in preparing them for their own procedure through others' knowledge as well as rejecting stigma through pro-abortion discourse (Berny, 2024, p.102; Wilson-Lowe, 2023, p.16).

Historically abortion stigma has been conceptualized as negotiable upon concealment or by producing an immediate fall from grace upon disclosure (Wilson-Lowe, 2023, p.22); these conceptions make it so that women report rarely discussing their procedures, "guarding their stories for fear of negative sexual moral and social understandings" (Allen, 2015, p.44). Wilson-Lowe (2023, p.15) pinpoints some of the reasons some women decide to talk about their abortion despite the risk of stigmatizing interactions, like seeking social support or information, the hope of finding other stories to relate to, and increasing the visibility of this experience. According to Wilson-Lowe (2023, p.32) stigma regarding abortion can be managed by information control, which means that individuals can feel empowered by deciding to share certain aspects of their experience under their specific conditions. Selective

sharing can take the form of only choosing to self-disclose to one or a few individuals in a person's life, or it could look like posting your story on an online forum that allows for a user to personalize their level of anonymity (Wilson-Lowe, 2023, pp. 33, 35).

Both in abortion storytelling and in the broader online health discourse spaces, there is an emphasis on learning and creating specialized language, as reading how others describe their experiences aids in the personal ability of relaying an individual's own account (Berny, 2024, p.106; Ziebland and Wyke, 2012, p.236). On this topic Berny (2024, p.102) finds that abortion storytelling projects aim to dismantle shame associated with abortion and reset narratives to position this gynecological event as ordinary by engaging in a process of "speakability", a term the researcher uses to illustrate how by reproducing and repeating discourses relating to experiences of the body, they become more sayable and knowable.

Mendes et al. (2019b, p. 175) display that there is a growing trend in digital feminist activism, where the public is willing to engage with resistant and challenging practices of female oppression since the feminist uptake of digital spaces. This is echoed in the abortion storytelling field, where "vocalising abortion is seen as an act of resistance, solidarity and defiance" (Berny, 2024, p.102). Attributed to the fact that users often engage with feminist social media campaigns as a political action to align themselves with a social movement (Locke et al., 2018, p.7) and in abortion storytelling. Allen (2015, p.43) concludes that the accounts of women that contribute their stories tend to align their writing with the movement's norms, actively shaping the stories to come.

Locke et al. (2018, p.8) calls for further research on feminist social media activism under an analytical and intersectional lens to really understand the social action potential in digital platforms. In spite of the popularization and growth of the feminist movement in Latin America the past decade, as well as the pivotal use of online platforms by Mexican women and feminist organizations to access, share, and inform themselves and others on pregnancy interruption (Austria Mejía, 2022, pp. 40-41), qualitative research on online abortion testimonies has not yet been explored. The existing body of research focuses on "english-speaking countries of the Global North" (Berny, 2024, p.103). One of the major institutions in the fight for reproductive justice in the country, GIRE (2025, p. 158) only recently acknowledged and began monitoring the evolving media narratives around the topic of abortion, as well as their ability to influence legislative changes and transform negative socio-cultural perceptions of abortion like guilt, shame, and stigma.

## 2.8 Review Summary

This literature review serves the purpose of positioning the topic of abortion in Mexico as a deeply personal and political issue, shaped by a long-standing history of intersecting religious, legal, social, feminist, and media narratives. The historical overview exhibits how the criminalization of abortion rooted in a constitution from 1870s has been consistently reinforced by conservative thinking led by the Catholic Elite producing structural, geographical, institutional, and cultural damage that, to this day, continues to harm women in the form of social and legal criminalization and discrimination that most affects marginalized populations. Although, since the 2007 reforms, legislative progress has been made, the total decriminalization of abortion remains a pending goal in the agenda of feminist activists and organizations. This change would bring the country closer to a comprehensive healthcare model that supports safe, legal, and stigma-free access to abortion in the whole nation.

This chapter places great importance on the role of media as a powerful actor shaping public discourse. Exhibiting how early media coverage was largely driven by conservative as well as religious discourse and progressively, with the rise of feminist movements like; *Marea Verde* and global campaigns like *Ni Una Menos* and *Me Too*, abortion has been restructured in the social and media fields as a human rights issue and a normal event in the reproductive life of women and people able to get pregnant. In addition, the last sections are dedicated to the broader field worried about the intersection of feminism, media and abortion. The abortion storytelling field demonstrates the transformative potential of digital platforms in doing feminist advocacy by enabling women to share their experiences, access knowledge, and resist stigma under their own conditions, often aligning their testimonies with broader political movements. This part of the text is the last remaining to fully address the gap that exists in academic literature on abortion storytelling in Latin America, particularly in non-English-speaking countries like Mexico. This literature review serves to highlight the validity and importance of online abortion testimonies, as narratives that have the potential to change perceptions of abortion and alter legislation, and as items that show resistance to strict abortion regimes. This thesis contributes to an underdeveloped field of study that examines Mexican abortion storytelling narratives in contrast to their socio-political and media context.

### **3. Conceptual Theoretical Framework**

This chapter introduces the theoretical and conceptual foundations supporting this research. These concepts acted as lenses through which the analysis and results of this work have been interpreted and presented. To answer the research question and further objectives in this thesis, I draw upon feminist theory focused on scholarship on feminist movements in Latin America as well as digital feminist activism and take on an intersectional and reproductive justice perspective. Furthermore, core concepts such as the *matrix of domination* (Collins, 1990) as well as the *continuum of violence* (Manjoo, 2012) are explained as complementary conceptual tools that help analyse the institutional, structural and systemic nature of oppression and violence surrounding abortion experiences in Mexico.

#### **3.1 Feminist Theory and Latin American Feminist Movements Scholarship**

Feminist research is not composed out of one singular approach; rather, a feminist framework usually entails the combination of a set of perspectives that advance women's interests, health, and safety while acknowledging the differences among them (DeVault and Gross, 2012, p. 3). This research aligns with Lau Jaiven's (1998, pp. 185-187) view of feminist movements as dynamic, multifaceted, ethical, politically evolving, and transformative. Central to this view is the idea that feminist movements seek that women as a collective become aware of the oppression and domination they are structurally subjected to by calling them to question the beliefs, values, and norms designated to constrain them, with the end goal of modifying these realities that subordinate them (Lau Jaiven, 1998, pp. 185-187).

In addition, feminist movements are understood to be intrinsically tied to different actors, groups, and organizations with whom they interact with, act upon, and react to in a discursive field (Alvarez, 1998, p. 265). These movements are not limited to self-reflective and active protesting practices, as they exist within academia, civil society organizations, political parties, the media, and communications structures (Austria Mejía, 2022, p. 61). According to Alvarez (2019, p. 75) one of the defining features of these movements is their dynamism; this feature should be analyzed as movements move and reconfigure constantly, prompted by change, tension, and internal contradictions, as well as the broader context they are situated in. Given the pivotal role feminist movements have played in shaping reproductive rights in Mexico, this scholarship provides a lens for understanding the evolution of abortion testimonies over time and how they are shaped by broader structural and institutional forces.

### **3.2 The Field of Feminist Digital Activism**

As previously stated, feminism is a broad field; the last decade has been characterized by renewed expressions of this movement and new repertoires of actions, such as the digital media campaigns worldwide, such as *#MeToo* and in Latin America, *#NiUnaMenos* and the *Marea Verde* (Austria Mejía, 2022, p. 61). The field of digital feminist activism stems from these instances of digital participation that, together with offline activities of protest and resistance, have fostered real social and legislative change. Digital feminist initiatives as described by Mendes et al. (2019b, pp. 185-187) engage in the process of “making visible issues of inequality, access, power, abuse and patriarchy” (p. 185) contributing to public consciousness and narrative change. Furthermore, digital feminism challenges cultural norms and practices that have historically produced inequality and oppression and understanding women’s or victims’ needs within and outside legal frameworks (p. 186). Pivotal to this investigation, is the notion that digital feminist activism is aware of the real people behind the screen whose sharing of their lived experiences online carries legal, social, political, and cultural implications (p.185). In the context of this study, digital feminist activism informs how online testimonies are understood as an activity that challenges dominant discourses, reclaiming narrative agency and fostering community through resistance (Locke et al. 2018, p. 3). In this sense, digital feminist activism situates online platforms as spaces for reproductive advocacy and knowledge sharing, where marginalized voices reclaim their power through text, resisting stigma and producing political meaning around abortion.

### **3.3 Practices of Intersectionality**

Intersectionality emerges within feminism as a tool that examines discourse surrounding different forms of inequality and discrimination. Coined by Kimberly Crenshaw (1989) to describe the experiences of discrimination of Black women and critique the idea that all women would experience inequality in the same way (Gows, 2017, p. 20). Since then, intersectional feminist analysis has been adopted in various contexts, including Latin America, where it has been instrumental in examining sexual and reproductive practices (Zaremborg and Rezende de Almeida, 2022, p. 7). In Mexico, the GIRE organization (2018, p. 45) considers an intersectional perspective as one that acknowledges the specific and diverse obstacles in relation to women and access to justice, in which factors such as gender stereotypes and discriminatory policies can result in more or less detrimental depending on the intersectional factors women are subject to, such as race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status,

and physical impairment. This approach underscores the importance of recognizing that women's experiences of abortion are not uniform and must be analyzed considering the different degrees of discrimination and privilege revealed in the stories.

### **3.4 The Reproductive Justice Perspective**

Intersectionality is used as a tool within feminism to analyse how intersecting systems of oppression create discriminatory situations for women or other marginalized groups (Gows, 2017, p.20). On the other hand, reproductive justice is a cross-disciplinary, feminist framework that uses an intersectional lens and applies it to a human rights and reproductive health field (Morison, 2021, p. 2). Reproductive justice is both a *political movement* and *activism framework* that recognizes sexual and reproductive issues as deeply socio-political and tied to the oppression of women and socially marginalized groups (GIRE, 2025, p. 30; Morison, 2021, p. 2). As an analytical practice, it aims to transform and question the domain of sexuality and reproduction under a social justice perspective. Following Morison (2021), in this research reproductive justice is a tool used to generate a “nuanced, complex, complete, and critical view necessary for understanding and responding to reproductive issues and the pernicious social inequities and power relations underpinning them” (p.2).

### **3.5 Conceptual Approaches: The *Continuum of Violence* and the *Matrix of Domination***

To analyze the topic of abortions in Mexico from a feminist perspective, I decided to combine takes from two intersectional feminist frameworks and apply them to the reproductive justice field. The first is the human rights holistic approach established by Rashida Manjoo (2012) in the *Report of the Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences*, which situates violence against women “on a continuum that spans interpersonal and structural violence” (p. 7). The continuum displays how “violence results from a complex interplay of individual, family, community, and social factors” (p. 8) to different degrees depending on women's social location and attributes. This model helps to understand “the ways institutional and structural inequalities exacerbate violence through intersecting forms of discrimination” (p. 16). For this research, it frames how systemic interpersonal and structural violence affects those undergoing abortion in Mexico over time.

The second conceptual approach is the *matrix of domination*, first emerging as a form of intersectional analysis crafted by African American feminist scholar Patricia Collins (Gows, 2017, pp.20, 25) in her book *Black Feminist Thought* (1990) which, through black feminism,

argued that placing diverse women's experiences "at the center of analysis offers fresh insights on the prevailing concepts, paradigms and epistemologies" (p.541) fostering creative acts of resistance and creating new possibilities for empowering feminist knowledge. She conceptualized a theoretical understanding of "how race, gender and class oppression are part of a single, historically created system (p.543)" supported by economic, political, and ideological conditions. For this study, Collins concept aids in reasoning how intersecting *domains of power* shape women's access to abortive healthcare in Mexico by understanding how social relations function at the structural, disciplinary, hegemonic, and interpersonal levels. In combination, these conceptual approaches support the research objectives by focusing on the systematic and interlocking oppression of women by addressing the culture, society and institutions that surround them.

### **3.6 Feminist Perspective on Institutional Actors**

In Latin America, the last decades have been framed by an apparent receptiveness by States towards certain issues that Latin feminist movements have demanded for decades (Anzorena, 2018, p. 213). In Mexico, this trend is exemplified by the 2023 Supreme Court Ruling that decriminalized abortion at a national level (GIRE, 2023). I choose to take on a dual-perspective approach that situates women's experiences within the institutional and infrastructural realities of Mexico. Following Austria Mejía, (2022, p.72) the state is examined both as an actor of positive change and as a mechanism of systemic surveillance that controls women's reproductive autonomy. At the same time, the author points out that the relationships between the feminist movement and the state are not exclusive (Austria Mejía, 2022, p.80) and are not isolated from other actors that might have ideological agendas surrounding feminist objectives. These actors historically have taken the form of being conservative entities and are reactionaries in essence (Silva and Pereira, 2020, p. 35). In line with the work of Lamas (2012b, p. 59), in Mexico the Catholic religious movement has been the main conservative antagonist in the fight for reproductive rights in the country. However, Lamas (2012b, p.63) argues that the church learns inopportune, but it learns meaning that, even though the Church finds it hard to accept societal transformations, they are forced to adjust to reality. Having a flexible position and an understanding of feminist perspectives towards the main actors in this study is vital to analyse them from a place of informed experience and avoid prejudicial bias, a topic that is further explored in the Methodological section (see *Explicit positioning, owning my perspective*).

### **3.7 Review Summary**

This thesis looks at Mexican women talking about their abortion experiences through an intersectional feminist lens grounded in a reproductive justice perspective and informed by literature on Latin American feminist movements as well as digital feminist activism. Following Austria Mejía (2022, p. 94), through these theoretical concepts there is an understanding that the abortion movement in Mexico is a dynamic phenomena characterized by the presence of the feminist movement and its different relations to private and state institutions and structures throughout time. This complexity requires considering the different relationships and actors the women at the center of this work have interacted with and how they have influenced their testimonies and lived experience. The actors at the center of this research are thus; the State as a law-making and upholding entity, The health sector as the department most responsible for ensuring or denying safe access to abortion, the Catholic Church as a hierarchical power leading and orchestrating public opinion through traditional and digital media as well as withholding power in the private sector (Lamas, 2012a, p.56; Lamas, 2012b, p.59), the feminist institutions and organizations as a constant advocate, critic and information repository of the movement for reproductive rights in the country and lastly, the internet as a new discursive and activist field where women go to make visible their experiences of abortion and challenge traditional paradigms and stigmatizing practices.

The feminist movements as dynamic and intersectional make us analyze them as they move and reconfigure themselves (Alvarez, 2019, p. 75), acknowledging the diverse experiences of women as well as the different types of inequalities in the forms of oppression and dominance they are subject to. Austria Mejía (2022, p. 96) claims that, sorority and advocacy, are the way towards new, better and different realities. The work presented here views Mexican women's experiences with abortion as pivotal to current practices and dominant discourses in the country. To fully understand their accounts, I considered them from an intersectional perspective, with the aim of forming unifying themes among them, engaging in a feminist process of knowledge co-creation that fosters community and resistance.

## **4. Methodology**

To answer the research questions outlined in this thesis, a Big Q, non-positivist, constructionist, critical, majoritarily inductive and both semantic and latent approach (Braun and Clarke, 2022, p. 6) to RTA informed by intersectional feminist theory and reproductive justice is employed. The data set analyzed consists of 90 abortion testimonies of Mexican women shared in the digital repository FOCOS ([focos.org.mx](https://focos.org.mx)), divided by specific time periods 2007-2011, 2012-2016, and 2017-2021; for each year, 6 testimonies were selected. The Data was coded in the OpenQDA ([openqda.org](https://openqda.org)) qualitative analysis Software and Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-stage approach for conducting RTA was undertaken for the analysis and report structure of the data. This chapter contains my constant input as the researcher in the matters of reflexivity, theoretical knowledge and transparency (Braun and Clarke, 2019, p. 592) and describes the reasoning for the research design, data generation, formal aspects of the dataset, ethical and inclusion considerations, detailing how the six-step process for RTA was carried out and the measures taken to ensure quality practice by framing my theoretical underpinnings. All materials referred to, such as Google Documents and Excel Spreadsheets, developed in this stage, can be found in the Appendix of this thesis.

### **4.1 Explicit Positioning, Owning my Perspective**

“Explicit positioning” as Braun and Clarke (2025, p. 401) remark, is pivotal for qualitative research reporting and involves the researcher’s ownership of their own perspective. Furthermore, Big Qualitative, or Big Q, research is a non-positivist type of research with qualitative values, paradigms, data, and reporting practices, this type of research is directly affected by the researcher's background (Braun and Clarke, 2025, pp. 400-402). I position myself as a cisgender woman who was born and socialized in Mexico and whose socio-political orientation as a feminist provides insider knowledge to my approach to this thesis topic and informs my execution of the RTA methodology and feminist theory. I am a candidate for a master’s degree in Digital Media and Society and in my academic career, my research focus tends to explore the intersection of feminism and digital media. Even though I am working within a familiar field, it is important to mention that I was raised in a privileged middle-class, conservative, Catholic context and had access to education and means that are not the norm in Mexico. These factors, as well as my pursuit of education in Europe, could reflect Westernized knowledge frameworks. The results of this investigation are entirely my

personal interpretation of the data generated, not an objective truth, and it is inevitably influenced by personal experiences, opinions, knowledge, and background.

## **4.2 Research Design**

This master thesis examines online testimonies of abortion of Mexican women from 2007 until 2021. The dataset consists of 90 online testimonies extracted from the FOCOS ([www.focos.org.mx](http://www.focos.org.mx)) repository, ranging from 2007 until 2021; for each year, 6 testimonies were selected. Moreover, 3 sets of RTA were performed, to be able to make comparisons over time. This was achieved by grouping years together, making the datasets go from 2007-2011, 2012-2016, and 2017-2021, respectively. Using pre-existing data sources such as online forum posts is common practice in the convergence of feminist research and TA or RTA (e.g., Mowat et al., 2020; Vandenburg and Braun, 2017) and even in the niche field of exploring abortion testimonies online and TA (Richards et al., 2021). I decided on this type of source, as, from my experience as a woman in Mexican feminist circles, most discussions and information on abortion experiences by women happen online, in these sorts of spaces.

## **4.3 Sampling Strategy and Data Generation**

The individual textual items were retrieved from the FOCOS website, which is a digital platform that belongs primarily to the Feminist Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) *Equidad*, with the objective of shedding light on abortion in Mexico and encouraging its users to share their own testimony (FOCOS, 2016). The platform protects user privacy by encouraging anonymity and recommending the use of aliases. Moreover, FOCOS allows for the user to specify the year they had their abortion in as a criterion to filter and search through the different stories. The website's affordances were unique and in line with the research objectives. Moreover, the backing of the project by credible, well-known NGOs in Mexico made it a trustworthy, credible source of information. Finally, ethical clearance is granted in the website's Terms of Service, stating that the information shared on the website may be used for research purposes (FOCOS, 2016). All these factors were considered for choosing to build the dataset from this source. As mentioned, the project provided social identification cues resonating with the pro-choice movement. This element could affect the types of stories on the platform, leaning towards a more leftist, liberal ideology, even though it was a priority from my end to include a wide range of varying experiences when reviewing the textual data.

The number of testimonies were determined because of a range of factors. As stated before, the starting point was 2007, the FOCOS website had a total of 8 testimonies available in this time period, so 8 testimonies per year were collected in the beginning stage. Accounts that recounted their experiences in full, in more detail and explaining their emotional state or rational thought were prioritized. Furthermore, having a variety of social and economic circumstances were guiding criteria through this process. An important note: from all statements read, there were no posts by individuals identifying as non-binary, intersex, or transgender men, which is why this dataset does not account for their perspective in language or analysis. Data collection was done manually, by copying each textual item and saving it as a .txt file with the year and title of the story as document name. The software chosen for the coding process was OpenQDA, a free, open-source, qualitative data analysis software that I had previous experience with. Three different projects were created for each time-period specified. The items were uploaded in Spanish and read through one-by-one as I was uploading them into the OpenQDA platform.

The decision to divide the dataset into 3 sets of year clusters comes from a historical standpoint. Choosing to start in 2007, as the year marking the legalization of abortion in Mexico City (GIRE, 2021, p. 31; Lamas, 2012a, p. 57). As stated in the literature review, there have been constant legislative and sociocultural changes regarding the topic of abortion in Mexico since the 2007 reforms, so I wanted to understand how or if these contextual events were reflected in women's narratives. The specific split in years was done out of practicality, as then all time periods include the same amount of testimonies within them, making comparison of changes over time clearer and more balanced. Moreover, the decision to stop data gathering in 2021 is because starting in 2022, the input by users in the FOCOS repository significantly slowed, so there was not as much variety or enough testimonies to choose from. To this last point, it is meaningful to add that in Big Q orientation, reporting on older data is not frowned upon; in this model new knowledge does not displace old, so it can be equally as valuable and relevant to research (Braun and Clarke, 2025, p. 423).

#### **4.4 Formal Categories of the Dataset**

As this dataset was built-on preexisting data, there could not be a formal set of information required from the authors. However, from the information they freely-provided; we know that this dataset is made up of 90 testimonies of women who underwent an abortion from 2007 to 2021. At the time of the pregnancy interruption, more than half wrote about being university

students, a total of 40, 16 described being in the workforce, 8 of them identified themselves as minors, and 8 of them were mothers. Regarding the abortion procedure, 8 of them described dealing with complications from the procedure due to illegality or malpractice, 4 of them disclosed previously having had an abortion, and 4 commented on having to undergo an abortion twice in order for one pregnancy to be successfully interrupted. Most got access to abortive healthcare in the form of a curettage intervention, a total of 21. Furthermore, 18 mention getting clandestine abortion medication from an unknown source, 13 were given abortion medication by a legal clinical institution, 11 got abortive medication through a feminist collective, and 6 mention getting medication online. Moreover, 20 out of the 90 women mention traveling to Mexico City to get an abortion, as it was illegal or inaccessible in their state. Almost a quarter of the women commented on their use of the internet as a source to get medical information, 15 considered the internet as an important platform for abortion storytelling, and 8 of them used it as a resource for reading other women's stories. Lastly, on the topic of accompaniment, 48 women describe having someone from their social circle accompany them through the abortion, while 19 write about going through the process alone, and 13 mention the accompaniment by a feminist collective.

#### **4.5 Rationale and Process in Doing Reflexive Thematic Analysis**

Reflexive Thematic Analysis as a method was first developed by Braun and Clarke in 2006 as a “theoretically flexible approach to analysing qualitative data” (p.77). The most current understanding of the method “emphasises the importance of the research subjectivity as analytic resource, and their reflexive engagement with theory, data and interpretation” (Braun and Clarke, 2021a, p. 330). It follows a six-step process that goes through data engagement, coding, and theme development in an iterative way (Braun and Clarke, 2021a, p. 331). I proceed to describe my use of RTA, clarifying that even though I describe the phases as linear, I went back and forth in the six-steps listed to ensure a quality result.

In Phase One, data familiarization, I kept a Google Docs document to make notes and write my impressions of the data as I was first reading it. In this stage (see Appendix 2, Section 2.6), I manually deleted personal identifiers within the stories to further the anonymity of the storytellers, information such as places, states, names, and institutions were erased, all but the mentions of Mexico City, which became a part of the analysis. In Phase 1, I also decided to go from 8 stories per year to 6, totaling 30 stories per dataset and 90 overall, making my workload more manageable. I related to Berny (2024), finding that abortion storytelling

shares many patterns in narratives and “particular framings of abortion come up again and again” (p. 104). In my criteria, I had reached “theoretical sufficiency” (Braun and Clarke, 2022, p. 17) having enough depth of understanding and meaningfulness even when reducing the initial amount of items.

For Phase Two, generating initial codes, three rounds of initial coding were necessary. The third time, after rereading the items as well as my notes from Phase One, I realized I was making sense of the stories by the actors and structures surrounding them. This felt significant, so I reorganized my coding around this actor logic. I was able to reproduce this system in all 3 datasets, adding new codes when necessary. In the end I had 10 main categories of actors, institutions, and structures that permeated women’s stories, and a total of 81 codes within them, this initial iteration of codes can be found in the Excel Spreadsheet *2007-2021-Initial-Codes* (see Appendix 2, Section 2.1). In addition, I created another spreadsheet, for annotating the formal categories of the dataset called *Formal-Categories-Spanish* (see Appendix 2, Section 2.2), as well as being able to make notes on individual stories’ aspects.

Phase Three, generating initial themes, focused on “the interpretation of aggregated meaning and meaningfulness across the data” (Byrne, 2021, p. 1403). I achieved this by expanding my Excel document. I created the spreadsheet *Actor-Based-Code-Overview* (see Appendix 2, Section 2.3), where I noted all codes within their tentative actor-institution-infrastructure categories and reviewed the coded content in OpenQDA. Writing down in the spreadsheet the main information representative for each code in the specific time period and having a notes section. After cleaning up my data based on this tentative analysis, I was left with 50 codes expanding over 8 different actor-institution-infrastructure categories. I printed this spreadsheet and cut it up so I could move every code with its over time summaries freely. This helped in beginning to recognize bigger patterns and overarching concepts across all codes and datasets away from the actor-institution-infrastructure groupings. I used different color highlighters to underline similar topics through the data and Post-it notes to write down the unifying concepts in different code clusters. This resulted in three main initial themes, all with four or more sub-themes each. I made a digital copy of the *Actor-Based-Code-Overview* spreadsheet in Excel, reorganized it to mirror the physical printed version, and added the tentative themes and sub-themes, I called it *Initial-Themes-Code-Matrix* (see Appendix 2, Section 2.4).

For Phase Four, reviewing potential themes, I found it crucial to analyze them in relation to my research objectives. Afterwards, I focused on having a *central organizing concept* (Braun et al., 2022, p. 27) for each theme. I did this by what Braun and Clarke (2012, p. 65) call defining a theme's boundaries. For me, this process was carried out by creating the ***Theme-Sub-Theme-Abstracts*** (see Abstract 2, Section 2.5) Excel spreadsheet which was supported by the ***Initial-Themes-Code-Matrix*** spreadsheet. I wrote an abstract for each sub-theme, here I realized some more codes could be erased and some sub-themes merged together. Finally, I wrote an abstract for each theme, which became my *central organizing concepts*.

In Phase Five, defining and naming themes, I made sure there were enough meaningful data to support the themes (Byrne, 2021, p. 1404) and to better grasp the over time evolution. So I went back to OpenQDA, where I selected the codes making up my sub-themes and chose text passages that best reflected my findings and over time progression. At this point I also named all Themes and sub-themes, even though they were refined up until the writing stage, and began drafting my results in mocking up their different sections.

The final Phase, producing the report, involves the writing up of findings. This process is very interwoven with the later phases (Byrne, 2021, p. 1409). My main focus through it was to make sure my themes showed sufficient meaningfulness and to carefully translate the extracts I was going to use. This was achieved by a mix of using the free DeepL ([deepl.com](https://www.deepl.com)) translation tool and my own knowledge of the language to keep the meaning of the authors as close to the original as possible. Here, I decided how to identify the data extracts. I name them in this report, by the year where the author had their abortion in and furthermore, by keeping their original story title in Spanish, honoring their contribution to this work.

#### **4.6 Quality Practice Measures and Theoretical Underpinnings**

Braun and Clarke (2019, p. 592; 2021a, p. 332; 2022, pp. 25-27) identify as a quality practice measure a set of theoretical assumptions one should address when practicing RTA. With the purpose of theoretically conceptualizing “how the researcher understands their data and the way in which the reader should interpret findings” (Byrne, 2021, p. 1395). I proceed to list the theoretical underpinnings guiding this research and myself as a researcher. I adopt a constructionist perspective for this work, which sees language as the “social production and reproduction of meaning and experience” (Byrne, 2021, p. 1395). A constructionist perspective fits to study complex subjects where individuals tend to perceive a topic based on

their direct or indirect experience with it (Rieger and Sigurvinsdottir, 2016, p. 37). By aiming to understand what shapes Mexican women's online testimonies of abortion in Mexico, I examine their individual experiences and how these are shaped by external actors and structures over time. A critical orientation to understanding data was prioritized with the aim to "examine the constitution of a social reality" (Byrne, 2021 p. 1396). This aspect became more evident during the coding stages, as through all the years reviewed, the way in which I was making sense of the data in the most meaningful way to answer my research questions was by coding the texts in their relation to external actors and structures that held positive and negative influence in women's stories. This reflects critical theories' consideration of knowledge as a "constructed resource within social, historic, political, and economical structures" (Langhout et al., 2016, p. 81). These structures mentioned, constitute the way themes were constructed and therefore permeate the analysis and their evolution through time.

The literature review supports the fact that there is a gap in researching Mexican women's online abortion storytelling, which this thesis aims to address. Even though Mexican scholars (e.g., Austria Mejía, 2022; Belfrage, 2022; Lamas, 2012; Robles and Hernández, 2024) research abortion in Mexico from a sociological and feminist perspective, there are few overlaps with the media research field. Therefore, I felt like my role as a Mexican researcher was not to impose a theory-driven approach onto a dataset that would reveal more if not informed by Western constructs. In turn, this research takes a mostly inductive approach. However, as analysis "rarely falls cleanly into one approach" (Byrne, 2021, p.1397) deductive aspects can be seen in how literature and pre-existing theory is included minimally in the results and predominantly in the discussion and conclusion sections. A last clarification as to my theoretical underpinnings is the orientation of coding. In this work, both latent and semantic orientations are present. My results make up three different themes, the ones exploring institutional and infrastructural violent practices against women, often required to stay very near the surface level of accounts, and taking authors' experience as fact (Byrne, 2021, p. 1397) exhibiting a semantic orientation. For other themes, there was an interest in pursuing meanings that were not explicitly stated (Braun et al., 2022, p. 26), especially in the over time analysis and the reflections of women relating to society, culture, and womanhood. This reflected the latent aspect of the investigation.

#### **4.7 A Rationale for the Analysis**

The following chapters contain the three themes generated as a result of Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-stage approach to RTA stemming from 90 online testimonies of abortion from Mexican women extracted from the platform FOCOS from 2007 to 2021. Each theme is unified by a central organizing concept (Braun and Clarke, 2021b, p. 80) briefly explained in the respective introductions and sub-themes, which exhibit the wide range of topics and aspects a single theme can cover. The analytical claims made are supported by presenting several data extracts illustrative of the findings throughout the text (Braun et al., 2022, p.33). All three themes are a result of the overarching research question; What recurring themes and narratives emerge from Mexican women's online abortion testimonies, and how have they evolved across temporal contexts? Furthermore, this analysis procures RQ1 by including a time-centered presentation of each sub-theme which highlights the evolution between the different datasets as well as aspects that remain consistent in all three time periods specified and their relation to different actors and institutions. Finally, the themes presented advance the RQ2 by describing the impact and transition from digital media to social media in the results when relevant to the sub-theme.

#### **4.8 Chapter Overview**

In this chapter, I explained the research practices that shaped this investigation, from the methodology, the design, and the approach to the analysis of this work, and how they are impacted by my position as a Mexican, constructionist, critical, intersectional feminist researcher guided by Braun and Clarke's RTA iterative process and quality practice recommendations (2021a) as well as feminist theory. The logic behind certain decisions made to accomplish the research objectives at hand was provided, such as the choice for using existing online data, testimony inclusion criteria and amount, choosing the FOCOS platform and the OpenQDA Software for coding and analysis. Moreover, I provided formal information on the dataset, where relevant to the context of the research results of this investigation. My rationale for applying Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-step process for RTA was detailed, referring to external use of Excel and Google Documents included in the Appendix for reflexive note-taking and journaling. Finally, the theoretical underpinnings considered in this investigation are expanded upon and justified in their use. In subsequent chapters I present the analysis of the online-retrieved textual data in relation to key characteristics presented thus far.

## **5. Theme 1. The Cycle of Institutional and Infrastructural Violence: Women Facing God, the State, and Other Actors to Access Healthcare**

This theme identifies and displays how institutions and infrastructures, namely; religion, the internet, the healthcare system, and the State, enact widespread violence that has shaped Mexican women's experiences with abortion across different temporal contexts. *Theme 1* claims the pervasiveness of these powers begins from the moment women discover an unwanted pregnancy and lasts long after an abortion has taken place. This theme traces how these structures produce and perpetuate harm across four stages and analyzes their change over time.

### **5.1 Stage 1: Cautionary Fear Instilled by Religious Institutions, Media Infrastructures and Reproduced by Society**

The Church as well as traditional and digital media hold power over the information society receives, believes and disseminates (Blancarte, 1999, p. 183). In the case of abortion, a cautionary fear is crafted by these institutions and implanted in the imaginary of Mexican society. One that, from the moment a woman discovers an unwanted or unplanned pregnancy affects free, informed decision-making and instills fear, shame, guilt and misinformation. There is an active labor performed by society on behalf of media and religion that makes individuals act as regulators and surveillance agents towards a woman seeking an abortion. In the three time periods studied, cautionary fear translates directly to misinformation about the abortion procedure and comes predominantly through religion, traditional and digital media, and other individuals in society:

I knew what I had to do, but in my mind there were many doubts, things you hear your whole life about abortion, you know, like afterwards it is very difficult to get pregnant again, that you will always feel super guilty and so on (2018, solo gracias).

This 2018 testimony reflects the role of society as a regulation and surveillance agent for religious and traditionally based beliefs through time. Similarly, religion, namely the Catholic Church as the predominant one in Mexico (Lamas, 2012a, p. 55) and religious ceremonies, are mentioned as agents that emphasize guilt and rekindle doubt regarding decision-making. Illustrated in discourses such as “even though I knew I wanted to terminate the pregnancy, the 24th of December came along, and for a few seconds I considered going through with the pregnancy” (2015, por un segundo). Here, a woman parallels her own situation of an unwanted pregnancy to the biblical account of the Eve before Jesus Christ was born. The

comparison generates feelings of shame and reawakens doubt. The emotional torment is one important consequence of the distorted imaginaries taught by the Church and upheld by Mexican society, as exemplified by this author: “it was a very difficult decision to make, as many times they put this idea in your head that you will go to hell for doing that” (2011, *estuve sola en ese momento*).

The extreme consequences a woman could suffer stemming from an abortion go as far as fearing for the soul’s eternal destiny. However, they range in the dataset to affect areas such as; instilling guilt, fear of the procedure, of the future, and of the individual's mental health. The reinforcement of traditional and religious ideology, acts also on a tangible level. It does so by hindering free and informed decision-making, such as the following account expressing; “we thought that if we had a baby, it would be only out of it being ‘*what is right, religiously speaking*’, we would have a kid who, although financially would lack nothing, would lack love (2019, *decisión responsable*). This author and her partner's choice is wholly impacted by their affiliation to religion. The cautionary fear of doing ‘*what’s right religiously*’ is overcome by the couple however, the mental duress and the added weight in the decision-making remains a part of her story and many others like it. In other words, the damage, to a certain degree, is done.

Through time, a shift can be identified in the way cautionary fear is dealt with and disseminated. The authors in the first dataset, are blunt about the myths and religious beliefs they present the reader with, seeming highly emotionally impacted by the misinformation they were led to believe as reflected here; “it was not the massacre they told me it would be in *Mujer Casos de la Vida Real (Mexican TV show)*, or what people told me when gossiping, or like the urban legends I had heard” (2007 *abortando miedos*). This 2007 testimony mentions that all the mainstream information she had heard about abortion, had misinformed her on what to expect. Mentions of traditional media, specifically TV shows, playing a big part in the false narrative crafted on abortion in this time period. The second dataset serves as a bridge between the one before and after it. With the least amount of input, it echoes the topics already mentioned without displaying particular change in perspective.

The third dataset does show a shift where the attitude towards damaging religious beliefs and institutions becomes angry, defiant, and analytical. In the sense that abortion acted for them as an event that made them reflect and overcome religious and conservative ideas and concepts of right and wrong: “I realized that holding judgement without knowing is a bigger

sin than questioning what we have been told time and again about interrupting a pregnancy” (2020, nudo en la garganta). This 2020 author takes a step back to look at all she has been led to believe about abortion, confronts it with reality, and finally points the finger back to her conservative context. Women's reactions and reflections towards cautionary fear might have changed; however, the institutions have not. This is very well exemplified as media becomes a topic once more: “We looked on the Internet and the scenario was discouraging, saying how I was going to die or be traumatized for the rest of my life” (2019, decisión responsable). Previously in its traditional form, in this dataset, as reflected by the author, the digital version of the same toxic, false beliefs comes back to haunt modern-day women.

This is considered *Stage 1* of the “*Cycle of Institutional Violence*” as these institutions across all three time periods target women for even thinking about having an abortion. Harmful religious ideology, supported by traditional media in the earlier years and digital media in the later ones, is spread through societies word-of-mouth practices, creating a cautionary fear with the aim of dissuading women from pursuing an informed, free decision over their bodies. Change over time happens strictly in the narrator’s relationship to these institutions. Earlier testimonies reflected a more passive way of receiving the messaging and a significant emotional impact from the realization of misinformation, while later narratives showed a critical shift towards reflection, anger, and rejection of institutional control. What remains constant is the emotional and informational effect of institutional messaging as well as the consequences of these institutions in the women’s narratives, even long after the pregnancy termination has taken place. A topic which will be further discussed in *Stage 4* of this Theme.

## **5.2 Stage 2: Vulnerability, Lack of Information and First Violent Encounters with Individual Actors within Institutions and Infrastructures**

As discussed in *Stage 1*. The lack of accurate or easily accessible and trustworthy information when a woman is considering having an abortion puts her in a vulnerable position towards individual actors as well as actors within institutions. *Stage 2* examines the consequences of not speaking on abortion publicly as a society, which results in women finding themselves lacking a clear or realistic image of what to do, where to look for trustworthy information, and most importantly, who to trust their lives with. This sub-theme echoes the concern of this 2019 author: “Where to start, in a state where it is illegal to decide for your body and your own life?” (2019, decisión responsable).

The testimonies ranging from 2007 to 2021 share the anguish in having to fully trust secondhand information from partners, online sources, or healthcare providers. Effectively removing agency over the decisions that need to be made in order to interrupt a pregnancy. The first dataset shows a distinct trend, where in the mid-to-late 2000s it was common practice for conservative institutions against abortion to disguise themselves as clinics or stands that provided information or even the service of abortion, only for women to realize that the goal was to dissuade them from interrupting their pregnancies. One writer states, “I visited several clinics, in several of them they tried to trick me and showed me videos of abortions, took my data, and tried to convince me not to do it” (2007, dos relatos). Exhibiting how it was not uncommon for society to confront women with all kinds of misinformation.:

My partner told me he had an ex-girlfriend who had the same thing happen to her and that they had bought misoprostol on the internet and she had an abortion that way. Even with so little information and unsure of the veracity of it, since we could only find pages that commented on the procedure or sold intravaginal abortion pills, we decided to order them (2013, aborté sin la información correcta).

This statement illustrates the vulnerability and trust on online institutions as well as in individual actors women have been forced to rely on in order to access some form of healthcare. Here, the intervention of the internet served only as a vendor by providing the medication for abortion at a price but not the information. This 2013 statement is a clear example of a concerning disregard by society of what happens to women who seek abortive healthcare and are made to rely on second or third party actors to access it.

From 2017 to 2021, the negative claims and experiences from women seeking information online reach their peak. There is the aforementioned presence of *anti-choice* pages, which serves to illustrate another commonly mentioned problem in this dataset, the excessive amount of information available online. Not knowing where to start or what to look for seems like a common issue in more recent years. However, even women who have enough literacy to find specialized medical information run into issues. A woman who had an abortion in 2020 claimed to have found several clinics that seemed legitimate, only to realize all of them charged an amount of money she did not have. Furthermore, women who were able to join *Facebook groups* of feminist collectives to practice safe abortions were not exempt from running into misinformation:

In researching, I got access to a *Facebook group* for abortions, I did another blood test to find how many weeks pregnant I was, and because I could not

understand the results I asked in the *Facebook group* and was told I was 8 weeks pregnant, and no, I was 5 weeks (2020, el mes más estresante de mi vida).

Here, there is a new type of misinformation as well as a new degree of risk involved. Unveiling a disappointing truth that even communities that support abortion should not be entirely relied on.

It is valid to wonder why women do not always go directly to healthcare professionals as sources of trustworthy information. There seems to be a persistent problem with the care and treatment that a woman might face within the healthcare industry. For starters, from 2007 to 2011 the main issues are a lack of available appointments in the legal timespan for pregnancy interruption as well as women witnessing violence towards other patients from medical staff. Even though the dataset of 2012-2016 does not outline violent encounters with medical personnel, and there is no further mention of the issues from the first dataset, there is an account that highlights, in a very precise way, a systematic mistreatment and disregard for sexually active women:

At the end of last year, it occurred to me to switch to the implant because a gynecologist told me it was the best thing to do. I think something went wrong or I did not understand something, I realized I was pregnant (2015, no quiero mas secretos).

This case paints a clear picture, a woman, who is sexually active and enacts reproductive responsibility, is fully failed by medical specialists in having to deal with a medical condition she actively tried to avoid. The 2017-2021 dataset sees the most radical change in the attitudes of women and their negative experiences with health personnel and the healthcare system. The women in question show anger but also an incisive savviness and an empowering amount of know-how to deal with the situations and individuals presented to them:

The Doctor referred me to another one who ‘agrees’ to do it with a very serious demeanor, he asks for 7,000 pesos to induce the abortion with medication and another 4,000 pesos if I need a curettage, adding that because of my condition it was dangerous to have a curettage, I thanked him, I better go to Mexico City where it is legal, I just said *‘I might as well go there you bastard!’* I was very upset (2018, si vives en -estado- vamos por un café).

Moreover, as seen in this statement, the women reflecting negatively on their interactions with health personnel share an element of descriptiveness that is interpreted as guidance. The authors do this by including specific information for other women to know what to do if they

find themselves in a similar situation. This in itself highlights a shift in the role of the women writing on their experience from the last dataset. Women writing in 2012-2016 share a deep anguish for not having the knowledge they have now. On the other hand, women writing in 2017-2021 actively include this information, acting as that trustworthy source for others.

This sub-theme is considered *Stage 2* of the *Cycle of Institutional Violence*, as it displays the challenges Mexican women face when seeking information about abortion. Across all three time periods, a consistent issue is the absence of clear, trustworthy, and accessible information. *Stage 2* identifies the healthcare industry, the internet, and the individuals operating behind these infrastructures as main actors who often misinform, shame, or mistreat women who seek to inform themselves on abortion, unveiling a systematic neglect of women's healthcare and the treatment of their bodies as a gamble. In the 2007-2011 dataset, misinformation came primarily from anti-abortion centers posing as clinics. Moreover, the problems in the healthcare system were more latent, with women being denied timely care or information and witnessing violence against other patients. From 2012 to 2016, the internet became a more common source, yet it failed to provide localized or comprehensive information. This resulted in women expressing regret over not having the information they have now as well as wishing they knew about feminist support networks and collectives. By 2017-2021, while the internet remained an often confusing space, now riddled with contradictory information on abortion, women displayed greater literacy on what to search for online and where. In the healthcare front, they showed more awareness and assertiveness by confronting exploitative practices of medics and using their testimonies to offer concrete recommendations and advice to other women.

### **5.3 Stage 3: Enduring the System, Legal and Social Protocols, Economy, Location and their Relation to Abortive Healthcare Access**

In *Stage 2*, glimpses of aspects like location, economy, and legality first arise in the narratives examined as negative side effects in women's search for trustworthy information. In this sub-theme, these topics are expanded upon and examined via their relation to access to abortion healthcare. Revisiting the literature review, 2007 is a key year for reproductive rights in Mexico. Mexico City became the first territory in the country to legalize and offer pregnancy termination services until the 12th week of gestation with no external or medical cause for the interruption (Lamas, 2012a, p.57; GIRE, 2021, p.31). In consequence, this dataset exhibits how Mexico City became its own entity in women's storytelling, ever-present

in their narratives. A common denominator between all stories is the looming knowledge from the women's side that Mexico City is, up until the middle of the last time period reviewed, the only legal, relatively safe and possibly free option.

In the first time period analysed, references to Mexico City are featured in two very direct and simple ways. The first one, just as a fact, as the thing to do in the case of an unwanted pregnancy. The second one, relating the city as a safe haven, a net-positive thing, as portrayed by this writer, "us women, we have options, and fortunately in Mexico City we can solve this situation" (2011, buena decisión). This passage reflects an overall sentiment of the time. The recent legalization of abortion introduced an entirely new concept to women in Mexico, the concept of having options, and legal ones at that. Generating a sense that this was something to feel extremely fortunate for.

By the second time period in this analysis, some statements still reflect this wholly positive association to Mexico City. However, various mentions such as "I had to travel to Mexico City" (2013, en medio de la nada) show a growing discontent with the lack of legal options elsewhere in the country. Related to this shift, the economic aspect, planning, and the toll that traveling to Mexico City entails for women outside the area become more commonly mentioned amongst authors. The last time period is characterized by more in-depth statements in relation to the capital. Some descriptions remain positive, while progressively more comment on being forced into completely ruling out the possibility of a legal abortion because of the complications of traveling, most instances pointing to the economic factor as the dealbreaker. Moreover, there is an increasing social and medical protocolary fear:

We went home and started looking for abortion clinics in Mexico City, I am from (...), they gave us prices and information, I was terrified because how would I go without my parents noticing?, under what pretense?, what if the return is delayed?, what if they don't let us come back? (2020, el mes más estresante de mi vida).

As noted by this author, some describe their confusion regarding logistics, secrecy, and appointment-making, aspects that entangle getting an abortion with socially concealing it. Ultimately, it can be said that Mexico City became its own looming entity in women's storytelling, some of the ways in which the authors reference it remaining consistent through time, and some changing completely to reflect a growing irritation with the legal state of abortion and disregard for women everywhere else in Mexico. Furthermore, Mexico City as a topic in women's narratives uncovers two aspects in abortion access: the cost of abortion and

the protocols needed to socially and legally conceal it. *Protocollary know-how*, for this research, refers to the verbal and physical actions Mexican women partake in to avoid receiving legal or social consequences for getting an abortion. Protocols can be learned through experience, through research or through word of mouth. Both the monetary and protocollary aspects become steadily more predominant in mentions over time often converging in narratives.

The 2007-2011 time frame accounts for the fewest mentions of the impact of personal economy and the presence of protocols that women follow to conceal an abortion. The few mentions emphasize how the cost of abortion acts as an added worry to the procedure:

The gynecologist who saw me told me that I needed an instrumental uterine curettage and he could do it for the amount of 6 thousand pesos. Of course, me being a student, I did not have access to that kind of money, so I got referred to the Social Security Clinic (SSC), of which I was a member because I was a student at the University, since in “theory” it was a spontaneous abortion. I went to the SSC with the results of the ultrasound, I never said that I induced the abortion; although I did not know the legal consequences it could entail, I knew it was not convenient to say it, I was afraid of being discovered and of what could happen to me (2008 la mejor decisión).

The woman in question clandestinely induced her abortion and arrived at the hospital due to complications. The complication represents an expense she did not account for and gets referred to a free clinic, where her protocollary knowledge is solely directed by fear and only to the extent of knowing not to disclose she provoked the abortion. This statement touches upon economic and protocollary aspects in a way that very clearly reflects its time period. The lack of protocollary information can be attributed to the social climate at the time, as discussing abortion was more frowned upon. Moreover, there was an insufficient amount of available information on the topic, as evidenced in *Stage 2*. This would be later supplemented by online spaces and feminist collectives, which took on the role of spreading protocollary information for women undergoing clandestine abortions (see Section 6.3).

In the 2012-2016 period, the issue of complications aggravating the cost of pregnancy interruption carries over. On the other hand, the economic aspect is more closely tied to access and translates to the concern of not being able to afford the trip to Mexico City or affording a private or clandestine clinic. Moreover, women who did not have financial support from their partners comment on the fact that it was an added stressor. The protocollary aspect of 2012-2016 introduces the notion of social protocols: “Everything went well, but the

expense was \$10,000. My parents could not find out, so I did my best to cover the expense with my medical insurance” (2016, *afrontando*). The author illustrates a financial worry enmeshed with a socially guided cover-up to avoid disclosing her abortion to her parents.

The years from 2017-2021 portray the lack of money as causing a state of crisis in the writers; there is more desperation in the description of situations as well as an intensification of the emotional state. Protocol-wise it accounts for the most content, exhibiting a growing shrewdness amongst Mexican women:

I thought about what to do if, for whatever crazy reason, some authority found out about my abortion and when I returned to the state I would face jail time. I also considered the possibility of being turned away from the clinic because of a mismatch in the weeks' gestation counts, my clinical status, and even a sudden increase in the stipulated prices to perform it (2017, *sin preguntas obvias*).

This testimony evidences the growing distress in achieving access to healthcare as well as the results of a more informed society on the topic of abortion. The internal monologue of the author indicates the nature of the main concerns being tied to lack of funds and fear of legal repercussions, which is seen as anxiety of performing the correct protocols. At the same time, this author displays profound informative knowledge on abortion's medical and jurisdictional nuances. Across the temporal contexts examined, monetary concerns become a more present issue in women's storytelling, reaching heights of extreme distress. Moreover, protocolary know-how goes from being almost non-existent and based entirely on fear to becoming mainstream knowledge for women in Mexico, and it is deeply informed by the individual's social or legal circumstance.

Once the women get access to a form of healthcare, it is relevant to examine the statements regarding active experiences of abortion. The majority of the women from 2007 to 2011 keep their statements in this regard short and straight to the point. Many mention how they were not informed or prepared on what to expect and expressed shock, fear or surprise when seeing the product. Which ties to the lack of information and false expectations women in this time period were victims to, a topic expanded upon in *Stages 1 and 2*:

I was watching a replay of 'Sábado Gigante' (*Mexican TV game-show*) and suddenly I had one big contraction after another. I wondered how long would it be until dawn?, as if the sunrise would mark the end of my suffering. While Don Francisco (*Show-host*) was giving away a top-of-the-line, brand-new-car, I stood up and felt something coming out of my entrails, I screamed loudly, my boyfriend took care of cleaning the blood trail, we had a lump of clot

bigger than the rest, we looked at each other and he asked me *-what do I do?*  
I didn't know either, nobody told me that (2009, no en ese momento).

As exhibited in the statement, often the authors in this time period mention the physical symptoms they experience and how long the process took, which is the beginning of a trend of advising women on what to expect while on active abortion that is expanded upon over the following years. The testimonies from 2012-2016 build on the trend of informing others on what to expect with their active abortion accounts. There is a general increase in detailed practical information, like the specific brand of pills they took and their aftereffects, how long it took until bleeding fully stopped, or what they did to make sure the interruption was successful after the fact. Interestingly, these seemingly documentary accounts of abortion are mixed with an increased highlighting of the changing emotional states while the interruption was taking place. From 2017 until 2021, the guidance-style of writing reaches its peak; the accounts are extremely descriptive and aim for the educational, some even including time stamps resembling an academic logbook. There is a normalizing tone to pregnancy interruption in the statements of this period:

Immediately after I got the positive result, I went to a pharmacy to buy Misoprostol, I told a girl-friend by message and she comforted me, then I went home, looked for extra information to the one I already had about at home abortion, I got as comfortable as the situation allowed and started the process. It was painful, I didn't have any complications but it hurt a lot (2021, el día después).

Even the ones where complications arise are dealt with very straight to the point and prioritize showcasing the medical aspect-of-it-all. Furthermore, the presence of feminist collectives in women's abortions manifests during this time frame, with women mentioning the online monitoring and care happening during the most pivotal hours of the procedure. Over time, testimonies of women narrating their physical procedure of abortion shift from brief accounts, marked by shock and lack of information, to more detailed and emotionally reflective narratives, and finally to highly structured, guidance-oriented testimonies that focus on normalizing the experience.

In order to bring *Stage 3* to a close, it is important to reflect upon the degree of risk women in Mexico are forcibly undertaking as a direct result of lack of information and misinformation, difficulty of access, economic status, and the criminalization of abortion in the country. Unlike every single topic so far, partaking in high-risk practices to achieve pregnancy termination does not display a change over time, the mentions between datasets remaining

high in quantity and increasing only very slightly from the first to the last. The women's overall main concern is not a light one, the threat of impending death is mentioned constantly. As a fear resulting from a complication but also as a release, as an analyzed consequence as exhibited here: "I remember I went to bed and thought that if I died it was okay, at last everything would be over. But I didn't die" (2009, existe una solución). This attitude of ambivalence towards their own survival, goes even further to participating in acts that outright attempt against their lives.

I prayed for a miscarriage, drank and smoked excessively, stopped eating, consumed all the medications I could find at home and hit my belly hard with my fist, hoping that any of these acts would end the gestation of the body that wanted to form inside me (2017, sin preguntas obvias).

Another issue is clandestine abortions, a common practice amongst all years due to the legal status of abortion in the country. The concerns range from having to surrender control to unlicensed doctors to going through an at-home abortion in complete solitude. These are normal topics of anguish in all datasets as displayed here: "Who else will look out for my best interest, but me? I take some pills, I have strong symptoms and an ambulance number nearby, I prayed to God that everything would be fine" (2016, afrontando). In the same branch of clandestinity, legal repercussions are too often mentioned, in the way that women avoid hospitals or clinics for fear of getting into legal trouble. The ones who do attend a health institution due to complications mention an overwhelming fear of being found-out at any moment and facing jail time or worse.

While the first two stages of this theme pay attention to issues Mexican women are faced with when considering and researching about abortions. *Stage 3* examines the actors at play leading up to as well as during active abortion and their participation in the process. There are a number of different tangible aspects that directly affect a woman when seeking to get an abortion in Mexico. The level of access to healthcare varies greatly depending on the women's circumstances, the biggest of which are their physical location, their economic status, and their protocolary know-how. These three aspects are at play at all times in the abortion process of a woman, linked to the possible social and legal consequences a woman could face from having a clandestine abortion, the type of healthcare they can receive, and the complications that might arise from the procedure. All of these represent the different degrees of risk a woman is forced to expose herself to in order to access healthcare, showing a continuous neglect and disregard of women's lives at the institutional and state level.

Across the temporal contexts analyzed in this investigation, testimonies reveal significant changes in access to abortion in Mexico. Mexico City's role evolves from a clear, often praised option to a destination that reflects an increasing discontent towards the legality of abortion in the country and capability of access depending on geographical location. In parallel, monetary and protocolary barriers become increasingly prominent in the narratives. Protocolary know-how becomes more widespread through time, and it is reflected by the rising concerns about the affordability of abortions and the legal risks involved in clandestine procedures. Finally, descriptions of abortion procedures shift from vague and fear-riddled to explicit, informative, normalizing, and educational, showcasing a collective move towards guidance-oriented statements becoming standard in abortion online forums.

#### **5.4 Stage 4: Retroactive Fear and Guilt Instilled by Religious Institutions, Media Infrastructures and Reproduced by Society**

Once women finally get access to abortive healthcare, in spite of the tangible risks discussed in *Stage 3*, such as, affordability, geographical access, legal issues, medical complications, and even the possibility of death. The religious and media industries' socially reproduced, traditional, and stigmatizing beliefs discussed in *Stage 1* return. Having failed in dissuading women from getting an abortion via cautionary fear, they now present in forms of retroactive guilt and shame such as “When it was over I had so many mixed feelings, from the fact that I did what was right to the fact that ‘God’ or someone was going to punish me” (2019, aún no era tiempo). As reflected in this statement, this retroactive role generates an expectation of divine punishment coming for them any day for the rest of their lives and impedes feelings of relief or happiness stemming from having made the right decision for themselves. There is an overwhelming expression in the narratives, of wishing they had been told how abortions truly are, a sense of having been lied to by their beliefs and by society. “The experience was not the horrible thing they said it was, nothing like they told me it would be, and I don't have any traumas for having done it” (2014, la mejor decisión en mi vida). The topic of not having any mental duress after the abortion is also very common amongst writers. Often there is surprise in having survived the procedure and having had a normal life, guilt-free, after it; “and just because you have an abortion doesn't mean you are a bad person or that you will never be able to be a mother” (2011, estuve sola en ese momento).

As exemplified by the statements, *Stage 4* has a silver lining; abortion, in this sense, offers a chance to confront, reflect, and overcome myths, religious teachings, and distorted

imaginaries that live in the subconscious of society and are propagated by religious institutions as well as traditional and digital media outlets. This sub-theme displays no change over time, pointing to a conclusion reached first in *Stage 1*: that change over time happens strictly in the narrator's relationship to these institutions, as the emotional and informational effect of institutional messaging and its consequences in the women's narratives remain consistent and constant, even long after the pregnancy termination has taken place.

## **5.5 Summary of Key Findings**

This theme, through different descriptions of women's abortion experiences in Mexico, exhibits the existence of a cycle of violence carried out by institutions, structures and wider society. *Stage 1*: Examines how religion and media craft a cautionary fear that targets women who consider having an abortion and results in internalized shame and misinformation, which has the capacity to compromise informed decision-making over the woman's own body. Over time, it reveals that institutional messaging holds a consistent emotional and informational effect on women. However, the later years exhibit a shift in reflection, anger, and rejection of learned institutionalized traditional beliefs. *Stage 2*: Focuses on the issues women face due to the lack of accurate, accessible and trustworthy information about pregnancy interruption. It showcases how this problem leads to women finding themselves in vulnerable positions, having to trust their lives on online platforms and negligent healthcare providers, unveiling a systematic neglect of women's healthcare. Over time, conservative abortion discourse adapts to the internet, a space that becomes riddled with misinformation but at the same time one that women prove to dominate by being more literate on the topic of abortion as well as internet usage. *Stage 3*: Reveals the challenges women face leading up to as well as during active abortion. Exhibiting that access to the abortive services is guided by discriminatory factors such as location, economic status and knowledge of protocols to avoid legal or social punishment. Over time testimonies reflect a shift: Mexico City evolves from a symbol of safe access to a reminder of inequality of access; the financial and procedural barriers become bigger sources of stress and anxiety. Moreover, accounts of the abortion procedure move from being vague and fearful to detailed and informative, signaling a shift towards collective knowledge production and efforts to normalize the topic. Lastly, *Stage 4*: Closes the cycle by showing how the ideological messaging introduced in *Stage 1* re-emerges to try and keep women guilt-ridden after the interruption of pregnancy. Abortion in this stage presents an opportunity to confront media and religions' distorted imaginaries by realizing that this medical procedure does not have to be traumatic or prevent women from living a full life.

## **6. Theme 2. Towards Better Abortions: All-encompassing Support, Accompaniment in Institutional, Structural and Social Spheres**

The first theme highlights how institutions, infrastructures, and individuals acting on their behalf have exerted cyclical physical and emotional violence against Mexican women seeking abortion services to varying degrees over time. In this second theme, women's voices and experiences are at the center to paint a picture of what comprehensive support for Mexican women who have abortions could look like, based on their direct imaginaries of better abortions and their positive experiences with their close social networks, as well as with medical, feminist, religious institutions and digital media that permeate their abortion stories.

### **6.1 Imaginaries of a Better Abortion, What Factors and Wishes Constitute a Better Abortion Experience**

This theme stems from contributors in all datasets wishing for other Mexican women to be able to experience better abortions, stating, "I want each woman to have that possibility of feeling better and to live the experience as lovingly as possible" (2008, *resiliencia que acompaña*). How they do so, however, reveals a change across the temporal contexts examined. Narratives from 2007-2011 are characterized by feelings of lamenting in going through this process alone: "I would have liked to have had an abortion accompanied, in conditions of safety, health and justice without fear of anything or anyone, to be able to tell about it without fear of what people will say" (2008, *desesperación*). This abstract communicates the main worries of the time, women wanted to be accompanied by loved ones, not risk their legal or medical safety, openly speak up about their abortion, and feel understood by society. By the 2012-2016 time period, statements reflect the same emotional duress. However, there are two distinct aspects that define this dataset. Echoing findings from *Theme 1 Stage 2*, women wish they knew about feminist networks and collectives:

Even if there are people who, without knowing anything have an opinion, make the right decision for you, no one has the right to make you feel bad, the decision about your life and the possibility of bringing another into the world is yours alone. Only if we exercise our rights and promote their respect and respect for those of others in our environment, things can change and I hope that one day these forums will not be necessary because we can speak openly without anyone judging us (2016, *abortar no es egoísta*).

Representative of other comments of this time, the author talks through the screen and advises the reader as well as commending her hopes for the future to them. There is a shift from women in 2007-2011 wishing they could speak up to women in 2012-2016 wishing they could feel safe doing it beyond the internet. By 2017-2021 the time period is characterized by questioning and chastising the institutions responsible for negative abortion experiences and women feeling responsible for keeping information on abortion trustworthy, accessible, and available to others. Physical accompaniment is either already secured by writers or takes a backseat to more latent worries. The main wish of this dataset, transformed to demand by many: “I wish that abortion would be legal in my whole country and the world, no one deserves to suffer this situation and face something that you really don't want, like motherhood” (2020, el mes más estresante de mi vida). Questioning the Governing body on the status of legal, safe access to abortion in all of Mexico and yes, the world.

After examining women’s imaginaries on what constitutes better abortions, it is also significant to analyze the tangible factors women mention made their experience with abortion more favorable. Common denominators in the whole dataset are, first, the mention of having a partner, family member, or friend to trust, rely on and accompany them, making the experience easier. Second, the importance of professional, non-judgemental, and humane healthcare providers and medical staff as it translates to the patient feeling more assured in the procedure as well as her decision. The third and last common factor is that being informed on abortion and its nuances as a medical procedure, makes for a better abortion experience.

The first dataset reiterates the aspects mentioned, while the second one introduces new reflections. As shown in previous sub-themes, the presence of feminist collectives is a defining characteristic of the 2012-2016 dataset. For this topic, authors underline the paramount role feminist networks played in informing and accompanying their abortions, making them feel safer and supported in their choice. Furthermore, this dataset introduces once again the presence of the internet, with accounts identifying reading other women's online testimonies as a positive factor in their own stories. The 2017-2021 dataset accounts for the most statements where women mention having a safe support system socially and medically, finding the help and information they needed easily, and an overall straightforward experience with abortion, commenting frequently on how it was “way easier than they expected” (2021, todo listo). Moreover, this time period shows an even more sophisticated use of online forums as compared to the previous dataset:

There I took information from Focos, I read what it was and found many women's stories. Since I read that most of them were better when accompanied, I decided to talk to my sister so that she would be with me, even though I knew that she might not agree with me (2019, gracias focos).

This is an example where digital platforms' use goes beyond reading others stories to feel less alone. By this time period, there is a common practice of using forums as hubs for information and advice that is taken and proves to positively affect others experiences.

Mexican women actively talk about better abortions, as an imaginary and by factors they experienced firsthand. The main takeaways of this sub-theme consist of the identification of factors and actors that have the potential of impacting women positively when undergoing an abortion. Through the dataset it can be pinpointed that socially, the accompaniment of friends, partners, and family members is key in making women's experiences with abortion better. While structurally, the healthcare and legal systems, feminist networks and the internet are consistently linked as structures that have the capability of making women feel safer and more secure in their choice. Moreover, differences over how imaginaries and experiences of better abortions have shifted through time are also considered in this analysis. Women in Mexico yearn to feel free to speak up about their experiences; this translates in the first dataset as a general hope, while in the second dataset it shows up as a fed-upness with only being able to tell their stories in online spaces. The presence of the internet also gradually seeps into the narratives as a positive force in stigma reduction, trustworthy information and advice where women go to initially to feel understood and increasingly to take on a role to be informative and provide accompanying sources for others. Finally, the last dataset shows a transformation in women's experiences of abortion, being more secure in the accompaniment and medical aspects, leaving space for them to advocate on other latent issues regarding abortion removed from their personal stories.

## **6.2 What Constitutes Support in the Social Sphere**

*Theme 2 sub-theme 1* (see Section 5.1) identifies that the social sphere can play a key positive role in how a woman experiences the interruption of a pregnancy. This sub-theme aims to review what constitutes positive accompaniment in the social aspect for Mexican women having abortions. The narratives examined recognize three different types of individuals in women's lives who are the most likely to be their main support system during this time; the sentimental partners, female friendships, and female family members. There is a common emphasis on having a non-judgemental, loving, and accompanying support system through an

abortion. The women's partners are the main form of support system mentioned in the testimonies examined. What they do to support women through an abortion displays minimum change over time, with parallels throughout the dataset showcasing how important it is that partners are there before, during, and after the procedure and display loving and caring attitudes:

I have the privilege of having my boyfriend, who prepared everything and was with me. He bought me electrolytes, chamomile tea and a bag of chocolates. Do you need anything else? he asked me. And no, I didn't need anything else (2021, todo listo).

Boyfriends enact an alleviating role, helping with organizational, economic, and logistic aspects of having an abortion, relieving added stress to the woman who undergoes the physical strain of the procedure. The first dataset places a bigger importance on this economic role, however it is consistently mentioned under a positive light. Moreover, all years contain stories where the abortion is performed at the partner's place. Providing physical space for the woman is a contributing factor in her being at ease. The main difference is found in the later two datasets, where women mention this split of responsibilities more casually, as a fact, and in shorter statements, decentralizing the men from their experience.

The part female friendships and female relatives play in women's abortion testimonies is somewhat different. The economic aspect is mostly missing in comparison to the statements referring to romantic partners. The responsibility of these two groups mainly lies in being trustworthy sources of information and unconditionally committed parties in achieving the interruption of pregnancy: "in my state it is not legal, but I told my friend about the situation and her mother knew of a place through a doctor friend where abortions were performed" (2015, por un segundo). The statements talking about the support of other women reflect a more active involvement in illicit actions in states where abortion is illegal and a stronger impact in the unpacking and processing of the lived experience. Moreover, the role of these two groups is often pivotal in reducing feelings of judgement as well as playing a part in the decision-making process, reminding the authors that they have options or even making them confront their misconceptions on the matter to make a free decision. The most representative change can be identified from the second dataset on, showing a gradual but significant increase in the positive involvement of female friends and family members as main sources

of accompaniment, alongside this increase, feminism becomes a more latent topic. Writers felt safer approaching other women when they knew beforehand they were feminists:

I told one of my sisters who was the only one who had talked about abortions at some point. I shared my childhood with her and she had just had a child. I was thinking about my nieces and nephews and she said, '*It's your body, it's your life!*' I don't remember well, but the point was that I decided (2014, mejor afuera que adentro).

This statement reflects the feminist sentiment, as well as the role in decision-making. In the testimonies it is demonstrated how women from 2012 on, have a more widespread knowledge about feminist collectives and networks that aid in pregnancy interruption: "My friends were very important for me to find an organization that helped me get the misoprostol and gave me all the instructions" (2018, sin riesgos). As exhibited in this author's account, from 2017 on, it became a regular practice for female friends and relatives to act as bridges between women seeking abortive healthcare and feminist organizations, some through word of mouth but mostly linking them to specialized online groups, contacts, or sources.

Positive factors, specific individuals and dynamics that were mentioned consistently in women's abortion testimonies are brought forward and examined to include in an overview for all-encompassing support. Findings point out that a strong support system allows women to focus on the medical process and its aftermath, rather than the economic, social, and legal circumstances surrounding it, making the process better altogether. Romantic partners were often discussed in regard to alleviating economic concerns linked to abortion, providing a physical space where the abortion could happen, and emotionally supporting women through caring and loving attitudes. These sentiments persist through time but take less space in women's narratives, pointing at a normalization in the supporting role of partners. For female friendships and relatives, their part shows a more active involvement in the author's decision-making processes as well as their involvement in achieving the interruption of pregnancy in a criminalizing environment. Statements where these groups are the main support system increase drastically over-time. Furthermore, the knowledge and presence of feminism and feminist organizations that aid in pregnancy interruption amongst female friends and family members becomes protagonistic in the narratives.

### **6.3 What Constitutes Support in the Institutional and Structural Sphere**

To understand what all-encompassing support means for Mexican women seeking abortions, it is required to look at the institutions and structures that permeate them. *Sub-theme 1* of

*Theme 2* (see Section 6.1) indicates that there are four main actors that can positively influence a woman's abortion experience: religion, the health system, feminist organizations, and digital media.

Feminist collectives, the internet, and religion show the capacity of being a safety net for women. A safe place they can turn to when they have nowhere else to go: “Since I had no support in my environment, I decided to seek help. I did it with pills at home, helped by a collective, a stranger was there for me the entire time, while everything went down” (2021, me acompañó una desconocida). Here, women seek a space to process the experience, cope, feel less alone, and consider said systems as a direct factor for the survival of the abortion, often expressing thankfulness towards them, sometimes even blurring the boundaries between them, as exhibited by this author: “Blessed be the women who offer accompaniment, and blessed is the meaning of the word, for sometimes you prefer silence” (2007, silencios). This example shows a woman thanking a feminist collective for accompanying her through her abortion by using religious lingo, equating them to the divine as a way to express gratitude.

Furthermore, these actors share a second quality, a level of secrecy. Contrary to the systemic displays of damaging religious beliefs from *Theme 1 Stages 1 and 4*, the positive impact of religion in this case comes through when it is interpreted as faith, a practice to access a higher power: “I like to think that God knew this pregnancy was a mistake for me” (2015, la mejor decisión). This 2015 writer, through her faith, finds comfort in the thought that her God knows her intentions are good. Interestingly, this inner monologue with a spiritual force becomes more common in narratives over time, going against findings in *Theme 1 Stage 1*, where women in the later datasets actively reject and question organized forms of religion.

In the topic of secrecy, digital media is a place to access information that has the affordance of anonymity. With feminist collectives the same is true, as they operate mainly through the internet and hold a strong sense of privacy protection for the safety of the women involved. Given this aspect, it is not surprising that feminist institutions and digital media also play a big role in the clandestine. Though the temporal context examined, providing medication and step-by-step information for performing at-home clandestine abortions became a more normalized role of these two actors over time. Moreover, the 2017-2021 dataset shows the beginning of the practice of monitoring abortion procedures via social media:

On Sunday I took MIFEPRISTONE at 9:30 am and everything was fine until about 5pm when I started to get allergies, I was terrified because I thought I had to go to the hospital, I became very red and I got some rash-like-spots, I consulted with my accompanying member and she told me to take a pill of an allergy medication and I went to sleep, when I woke up the reaction had already gone down (2020, el mes más estresante de mi vida).

As displayed by this 2020 author's account, women in the later years trust remote monitoring by collectives to identify complications and help them navigate through them safely without anyone involved being subject to legal or health consequences. The illicit actions both the internet and feminist collectives partake in prove to be a needed aspect in the time frame analyzed given the legal and social climate of the country at the time of the testimonies.

However, feminist institutions and digital media hold a more transformative power. To demystify abortion and the myths and stigma surrounding it: "I called a doctor in Mexico City and she helped me do it. I think it is one of the few times I have felt accompanied and supported by other women" (2010, no era momento). As emphasized in this writer's account, in the 2007-2011 dataset, these spaces were, for some, the first times they felt community and sorority with other women. These two actors become increasingly protagonistic in narratives over time in helping women to heal, resignify, amplify, validate, and empower; this takes the form of sharing or reading abortion testimonies online. In the first dataset women reflect upon the fact that their online statement has been the first time they shared their full story. By the last dataset, forums become pivotal for accessing information, getting advice, knowing what to expect and how to avoid legal or social trouble: "THANK YOU FOCOS. First of all, I am thankful for the existence of this page, reading the stories of other women helped me make several decisions when I had to go through this situation" (2019, gracias focos). Something worth pointing out from this statement is that particularly in Mexico, choosing to get an abortion is by far the only choice a woman will have to make to get access to abortive healthcare. For feminist collectives, health institutions, and digital media, access to trustworthy information and guidance is a recurring factor that helped women feel confident in their decision, safer during the procedure and lessened stigmatizing feelings after the fact:

She took me to the people who finally helped me and I thanked them so much, because it wasn't just that they helped me get it done, but I felt like they cared about me at a time when everything was so ugly and complicated (2021, salí adelante).

As exhibited in this 2021 account, women point out how pivotal individuals within feminist and health institutions are by emphasizing positive interactions with their members. Some

statements go as far as thanking individuals by name; this is a unique instance placing them directly at the center of their stories.

For the case of health institutions, the data is clear. An integral, multidisciplinary accompaniment process from moment one has a significant positive impact on how women experience abortion. This asks one thing from the health sector for a woman to be able to fully rely on them:

The day came, it's a whole process, you get an echography again, you go to a gynecologist to see what type of contraceptive you are going to use moving forward to take care of yourself, I opted for the intrauterine device (IUD), then you go to a social worker and finally to the psychologist, she talks to you so you can unburden yourself and talk about your arrival there and so on (2016, aurora).

Based on the statements reviewed as well as my own personal position, abortion care should be free and begin with a non-judgmental diagnosis within a health institution, followed by an accurate explanation of abortion as a medical procedure and a timely referral to a legal clinic. Women should have access to comprehensive and multidisciplinary support. This includes consultations with psychologists, gynecologists, and social workers, as well as remote monitoring if required. A follow-up appointment to confirm the abortion and discuss contraceptive options. However, such care is almost exclusively reported by women who attended private clinics, with only one exception in the public sector in the 2017-2021 dataset:

I live in (...) and I went to a health center, because I had a bad stomach ache, the doctor sent me for a pregnancy test and when I received the results I felt as if the floor opened from under me, I felt like I was sinking. I went to the social worker to ask her if she knew of a place where I could get an abortion safely and inexpensively. She made a call and told me to go to the (...) clinic in (...), she told me I could go the next day and I did. They treated me very well and gave me pills as well as directions. I was taken care of by my best friend and the social worker wrote to me to ask how everything went. As I said in the title, I needed support and I got it, both from the social worker and my friend (2021, necesitaba apoyo y lo tuve).

## **6.5 Summary of Key Findings**

This theme compiles and reflects what all-encompassing support on the social and institutional side looks like, directly from women's experiences with abortion in Mexico through the years. In this context, all-encompassing support refers to a woman being able to rely on their social circle as well as institutions fully and safely from the moment they realize

they are pregnant to offering support and checkups after the fact. Trustworthiness of information as well as interpersonal trust and humane treatment is highly valued amongst women as a positive factor that gives them a sense of security and ease in decision-making and going forward with exerting their choice. Getting an integral, multidisciplinary accompaniment process at state clinics is regarded highly amongst women but experienced by few. Furthermore, having access to an institution that allows to freely process the experience, such as psychological counseling, internal faith, feminist collectives, and forums or groups on the internet, proves transformative, healing, validating and empowering. Over time, feminist institutions and the internet become more present in different aspects of women's stories as well as enmeshed with one another. Their existence becomes more urgent and relied upon by authors as informative, healthcare-providing, and life-saving sources.

## **7. Theme 3. From Silence to Advocacy: Abortion as a Catalyst for Overcoming, Reclaiming and Rethinking Womanhood in Mexico.**

The past two themes are built and explored in a more arbitrary positive and negative manner, focusing on aspects of women's abortion testimonies as reflected by the actors that permeate them. This theme, however, seeks to thread a through-line, one that examines how the social factors that force Mexican women into silence harbor a transformative tool that has evolved over time. Where women who make the decision to have an abortion in Mexico are radical in their conviction to choose their own reproductive future, even when the possibility of facing emotional, societal, institutional, and physical repercussions lurks at every point in their decision-making. Through time, by going against their conservative stigmatizing contexts, denying forced motherhood and taking back reproductive power, a space is created to reflect upon their role as women in Mexican society in deeper, more impactful ways.

### **7.1 The Role and Consequences of Partners, Family and Female Friendships in Instilling Learned Violence, Stigma and Shame**

As established in *Theme 1, Stage 1* (see Section 5.1), over the years, Mexican society actively disseminates traditional, conservative beliefs taught by religious and media conglomerates that often reflect a negative bias and misinformation regarding abortion. This directly affects Mexican women who carry stigma, shame, secrecy, and false expectations regarding this medical procedure. Furthermore, *Theme 2, sub-theme 2* (see Section 6.2), exhibits that the social sphere plays a pivotal role in how a woman experiences an abortion. This analysis into

the social factors that push women into silence is led by the female friendships, direct family members and sexual/romantic partners. Resulting in two identifiable variables that are stable across the temporal contexts examined; the first one explores the social backlash women experience when disclosing their choice. The second one is secrecy, when a woman chooses not to disclose this information out of fear.

The social backlash women experience when disclosing an abortion ranges all throughout the dataset, from isolation and rejection from social circles, ongoing feelings of devaluation such as shame, irresponsibility, inadequacy and escalates towards physical and mental instances of violence such as coercion, threats, and outright physical assault. An adverse reaction often creates a deep emotional impact, that causes shame and regret that, taking out the social aspect, would otherwise not be linked to the individual's experience of abortion:

No, I have not lived in torment for the rest of my days because of the decision I made. Yes, there was an emotional consequence, but it was not because of the procedure but because of the stigma surrounding my decision. Having to go through the process in secret, not being able to tell anyone what was happening to me, pretending I was just having a painful menstrual period, later the looks of pity from those who found out and saw me as if I was dumb, a whore, evil (2007, *abortando miedos*).

Much like this 2007 author, women in all datasets that recount the emotional torment they lived through are quick to separate it from their personal reassuring feelings about having undergone an abortion. The prospect of disclosure, whether intended or not, generates profound fear in women, the main causes of fear that resonate through all time periods examined are linked to women protecting themselves from social backlash and fear of the impact of their choice on others. Furthermore, there is a consistent mention of a fear of losing agency over their bodies if the wrong people were to find out:

I didn't feel like I trusted anyone enough to tell them, since the first time I tried to have an abortion, a friend told my mother and I was not able to go through with it; this time I preferred to stay silent (2014, *no puedo volver a ser madre*).

This statement reinforces, by the lived experience of the author, the thought that abortion is something to keep quiet, the consequences of disclosing to the wrong person and endangering decision-making over one's own life. Although secrecy might seem like a kinder alternative for women who do not want to risk social backlash or lose agency in all the forms already listed. There is still an important emotional impact tied to this decision, as women in all time periods report increased social isolation and enhanced feelings of loneliness:

Interrupting a pregnancy, especially illegally, automatically becomes a secret that you hide, not out of shame, nor out of regret, nor because it causes irreparable trauma; you hide it not necessarily because you judge yourself, but to avoid the judgment and condemnation of others, of the society, of your context (2007, silencios).

The writer of this testimony explains how secrecy in abortion is not a freely made choice; it is a calculated move that happens automatically when existing in a context where disclosure is not an option. It is interesting to note how women in Mexico know to silence themselves in order to preserve bodily autonomy. This in itself is a type of violence to exert control over women's decisions and bodies imparted by a society where a woman cannot escape social punishment whether she does or does not share her intention to have an abortion. Mexican women know the possibility of becoming social outcasts by proxy:

I had a lot of pressure in my family not to have an abortion, everyone told me that they were going to help me, but not to do it. But I knew that was not so true, they told that to my cousin and in the end they complained to her about everything, until they stopped helping her (2012, aprendí a decidir).

As the author puts it, having a nearby example of a woman who was socially pressured to continue with their pregnancy and witnessing the negative effects from this decision made her choose otherwise. To further illustrate the argument that Mexican society forces women into silence, the authors list having first hand experience of sharing their intentions of terminating a pregnancy and this information being used as leverage to continue with it:

I told him that I did not want to have it, and he refused to agree; he told me that he would tell my mom, my uncle that he would tell my family and follow me to Mexico City, then I let my guard down, I apologized and told him that we would have it, that we would try. I waited 4 weeks or so more and went with my cousin who supported me at all times. This weekend in January was my chance (2020, la vida me esperaba).

This example exhibits the degree to which coercion to continue with an unwanted pregnancy can take place as well as the repercussions of women speaking up in dangerous social contexts. Even still, all women in this dataset, no matter their individual challenges, enact their will to stop a pregnancy, showing how dreadful the alternative of forced motherhood is. The failure of various violent social, physical, and emotional techniques to control women's bodies displays a radical conviction of going against conservative social norms.

There is a strong sense, pointed out by women in their testimonies starting in 2012-2016, that the wider population was not ready or able to recognize this change in women's rights: "After a year I still feel judged by the people around me, not only the religious or *pro-life* groups but

by people close to me, we are still a prejudiced society that does not recognize women's rights” (2016 abortar no es egoísta). This statement alone, accounts for the emotional impact that social backlash caused women through the years not deviating much from one dataset to the next. Institutions, systems, laws can advance in the country. However, this research finds that national and local governments, as they pertain to the management of the healthcare sector and health information, are not doing enough to normalize and demystify abortion in the general population. This research aims to exhibit the negative consequences of it. Even though the sentimental impact described by authors towards social backlash stays consistent through time, the amount of instances it occurs gradually decreases. The only aspect analyzed in this section that dramatically increases are the descriptions of factors that push women into silence, doubling since the first time period examined. Suggesting that women in Mexico have forcibly adopted silence as an instinct to enact their will to terminate their pregnancy.

## **7.2 Online Testimonies of Abortion of Mexican Women: Breaking your Silence as a Radical Act Through Time.**

It is established that Mexican women have historically been shamed and taught to remain silent about their abortion stories. *Theme 3, sub-theme 1*, explores the role of a woman's social sphere in silencing and punishing those who do not comply, with the aim of gaining a profound understanding of the emotional and physical impact of deciding to go against their stigmatizing conservative contexts and remain committed to the decision to terminate a pregnancy. Just like these women knowingly or unknowingly engage in a radical feminist act by keeping agency over their bodies (Belfrage, 2021, p. 7), they further push the societal boundaries by speaking up about their experiences with abortion. This last sub-theme reflects the very nature and existence of the data by analyzing the different ways Mexican women overcome society-induced stigma reflect, resignify, and reevaluate their experience with abortion, break their silence whether online or in real life, and finally, reach a place where they are empowered to advocate, teach, and protest on behalf of themselves and other women. The dataset used in this research exists because Mexican women have felt an urge to speak up about their very personal experiences with abortion, for different reasons, at different points in time, in this particular case dating back to 2007. This sub-theme reflects best the evolution in women's mindsets, outlooks, and reflections through the years. It is also the one that is most directly tied to feminism and the internet as agents to embrace, empower, and create communities where women can share their stories and learn from others.

As examined in *Theme 2 sub-theme 2* (see Section 6.2), it is simple to identify recurring topics in women's emotional state over time. This is also the case when analyzing feelings of empowerment that arise from women going forward with their decision: “Since then I knew that women have every right to decide over our bodies, that our lives matter, and that our health is not only physical, but also psychological and emotional” (2007, *abortando miedos*). As described by this 2007 author, mentions of pride over choosing for their bodies and not letting others make the decision for them go as far back as the first testimony and resonate all throughout. Even though from one dataset to the next, similar emotions and topics are involved in how women relive their abortion procedures. There are certainly differences in how the topics are dealt with and reflected upon across the temporal contexts important to this investigation.

The dataset ranging from 2007 to 2011 is the one most dominated by internal conflict and social fear. In this time period; statements that imply re-evaluation and the overcoming of stigma can be found, although they are few. An unwanted pregnancy leads to reflecting on the importance of chosen motherhood or the role of women in sexual relations, it is all very tied in with the circumstances they were surrounded by. Another example is the common sentiment of how finding support in other women during their abortion made them experience sorority for the first time, a topic touched upon further in *Theme 2 sub-theme 3* (see Section 6.3). Lastly, only one testimony mentions having a change of attitude towards abortion in this time period: “I had always been against abortion, but at this point I couldn't see myself going through with it” (2007 *algo que parece tan lejano*). This account illustrates the main takeaway bluntly; she was against abortion until it happened to her, which denotes a change of attitude but in a very superficial way. This dataset is also the one where most share the reason why they decided to write their testimony, the leading cause being that they never told their full stories before:

To be able to write this story I have come a long way, 10 years to be exact. I have had to rebuild myself after everything I have lived through, not because of the abortion itself, but because of everything that happens around it, the way people look at you, the way they express themselves about those of us who exercise our right to decide (2010, *la mejor decisión*).

As seen here, the women that had abortions between 2007 and 2011 deal with greater trauma in reliving this time in their lives. Writing testimonials in this time period is a way to acknowledge, after years of silence, that they exist, that what they went through was real, valid and that they are okay now.

In the 2012-2016 dataset, the reflections of women are more thoroughly developed, and the critique moves from the immediate surroundings towards a more general societal critique. This dataset is characterized by authors questioning what it means to be a woman and, for many narratives, advocating that women are capable of much more than motherhood:

Even when I had made the decision, many things went through my head: my family saying that I would be a mother, my grandmother saying that I would finally give her a great-grandchild, my friends who always said that I would regret not being a mother because that was the only way I would be fulfilled as a woman. But, was that what I wanted? or was it a given decision that I would be a mother just because I have a uterus? (2013, ser madre por decisión propia o así dicen que debe ser).

This statement prioritizes reflection, and even though it does not give the reader an answer, it opens up a discussion on reproductive rights and types of womanhood. In this dataset there is also the introduction of commentary on Mexican patriarchal society: “I had my abortion, literally in the middle of nowhere, on a ranch where women are worthless and surrounded by men who believe they have the right to dispose of us as they see fit” (2013, en medio de la nada). This powerful testimony reflects over a woman's prolonged life experience that culminates in a reflection on power dynamics and how men treat women as inferior and disposable. Furthermore, there are two statements of women who were previously against abortion, both showcasing increased self-reflection in comparison to the previous dataset: “I ask a friend for help, she advises me to get an abortion, *“that goes against my principles”* I think, but then I reflect a little more on whether it was really *“my principles”* or those of society” (2016, afrontando). At the center of this statement is the questioning of a learned reality, that is overcome by the author with the help of another woman. In the topic of sharing their stories online, women in the years 2012-2016 shared their experience as a way to process, heal, and resignify their experience:

For 5 years I did not talk about this topic with anyone until now that I allowed myself to write about it. I thought that by doing so the memories would fill me with guilt and anguish all over again, but that did not happen. I am at peace and life continues to be kind to me (2014, estoy en paz).

This author still exhibits sentiments from the previous dataset but makes it a point to comment on the healing factor in breaking her silence. This dataset echoes the initial thoughts presented in 2007-2011, evolves them further, and takes issue with patriarchy in Mexican society as seen reflected in attitudes they have experienced in their social contexts. Moreover, there is an increase in overall critical reflection and questioning present in narratives. Lastly,

there is some discontent over having online spaces be the only public place they feel safe to tell their stories, as discussed in *Theme 2, sub-theme 1* (see Section 6.1).

Finally, the 2017 to 2021 dataset is noteworthy for shifting from a private struggle, as showcased in years past, to public agency and empowerment. When speaking of blame and the impact it has on them, they are more detailed about the aspects they describe as being affected in their lives:

I questioned what I wanted to do, things like thinking that this is your punishment for being stupid cross your mind, then I thought, why do I want to punish myself? I mean I made a mistake, but it is not the end of everything (2020, desde la paz).

However, as described by this author, these feelings are increasingly reflected upon as placed onto them by society and separated from their personal experience. When speaking of a change of attitude towards abortion, as in the last dataset, there is reflection on whether they were against it individually or only on a societal level. However, the statements regarding this issue are exponentially expanded upon compared to previous years:

I was accompanied by a very nice woman from the clinic; she helped me a lot to be calm at the time and told me something very true: *nobody gets pregnant to think about having an abortion* and now I confirm it, it is not an event that is sought on a whim, or out of trendiness, but rather out of necessity, for one's well being, for health. I wrote this letter 7 months ago, one day after my abortion. At the beginning I didn't want to know anything about abortions. Now it doesn't hurt anymore, at times it makes me nostalgic because I think I am a very sensitive woman. This September 28th I went to the march for the Global Day of Action for Access to Safe and Legal Abortion with my daughter. We reaffirmed together that women should decide about their bodies regardless of the cause that leads them to have an abortion (2019, indecisión).

This statement is paramount to exemplify the change over time in the way Mexican women experience and write about their stories of abortion. Here, the humane accompaniment of the clinic worker helps the writer by lessening her stigma-riddled feelings and propels a change in perspective where abortion is the catalyst, much like in the 2012-2016 statement. However with further reflection, the author proceeds to reflect on why other women have abortions and comes to the conclusion that it is not a social action; it is wholly out of necessity, healthcare, and personal well-being. On top of that, her position is reaffirmed by actively participating with her daughter in protests to support the legalization of abortion. This exemplifies a holistic change in perspective that is very particular to the 2017-2021 dataset.

In testimonies of this time period, abortion often acts as the seed for entering feminist spaces: “I love reading about feminism, it gave me the courage to tell my mother and far from criticizing me as I thought she would, she supported me” (2017, *pensé en mi presente y en mi futuro*). As stated here, feminism is credited as a source of courage for speaking up and fear is replaced by strength in facing public scrutiny. The increased awareness over societal issues beyond the writer's own has a consequence: the increased worry over other women who might be in the position they were but that cannot access healthcare in the way they could. Moreover, out loud disclosure of having had an abortion is more normalized: “In my case, I have a great relationship with an aunt, who is open-minded and I told her everything. She told me that some years ago she experienced something similar” (2018, *segura siempre*). As illustrated in this account, open dialogue about abortion often results in other women feeling comfortable coming out with their own stories.

The topic of women sharing their experiences online is present in the 2017-2021 dataset. However, impact statements about sharing are notoriously missing. Replaced either by small sentences that thank the reader or by statements that prioritize advice-driven narratives and beg for others to continue speaking up and sharing information on abortion: “Please, it is very important that we continue to provide this information, because the state of things for women and especially young women is very ugly, we need to know what to do and where to go” (2020, *con miedo pero segura*). Following this 2020 author, there is an increased concern over the role women that have abortions play in advocating and informing others. Furthermore, the increased societal awareness brings into the conversation the state of the country regarding the treatment of women and women's rights. Overall, the last dataset is interpreted as women being internally fed up with the conditions under which they and others experience abortion, there is a profound awareness over systems at play beyond the societal structures closest to them and there is a deep want for visibility through on-and-offline advocacy.

Even though, thus far, there is an evident internal evolution in women's attitudes and actions displayed in their narratives, there is one specific aspect that stays unchanged through the 15 years accounted for in this work. The impact, reflections, and reasons why women get involved in the pro-choice and feminist movements after an abortion remain the same:

I joined the Network for Sexual and Reproductive Rights, where through the feminist vocation, I confirmed the idea that my decision to have an abortion was an enormous exercise of autonomy on my part, which has allowed me to

make other life decisions with firmness. To the extent of my possibilities and the spaces I share with other women, I work so that in my state and throughout the country women can have access to legal and safe abortion. To continue with our life projects where an unplanned and unwanted pregnancy has no place and that we never again have to do it clandestinely, risking our health, freedom and life and above all, that we can choose to live voluntary, loving and joyful maternity (2016, aurora).

Displayed by this author, women who give out information on this topic mention finding vocation in accompanying other women in their decision and becoming the person they had or wish they had to give support and information. Furthermore, there are consistent mentions, such as this one, of finding a career path in advocacy and becoming state or NGO-level advocates. Finally, they comment on joining the fight for reproductive rights by protesting and fighting so other women do not have to go through the same as them.

### **7.3 Summary of Key Findings**

This theme finds that all three datasets hold very similar information regarding Mexican women's experiences of abortion. In fact, this suggests that the actors, structures, and institutions that permeate these narratives remain consistent over time. Furthermore, it illustrates the external societal, violent, and detrimental actions that succeed in the silence and control of Mexican women. It displays how these very tools meant to silence are transformed by them into reasons to change their attitude towards abortion, break cycles of abuse, find empowerment in reclaiming their bodily autonomy, speak up on their experience, and finally advocate, teach and protest on behalf of themselves and other women. A time analysis on the way women reflect upon their experience and overcome stigma reveals a steady progression where the impact and feelings stemming from their testimonies do not drastically vary through the years. However, the reflection and critique progressively move from the immediate and deeply personal circumstances to the broader societal and structural fractures in the country in the matter of abortion healthcare. This shift can be attributed to the increasing presence and use of online sources as well as the permeation of feminist collectives offering support, information, community and increasingly demanding safe, free, and accessible abortions in the country. One variable that stays the same throughout is the impact, reflections, and reasons why women get involved in the pro-choice and feminist movements after an abortion.

## 8. Discussion

Through the intersectional and reproductive justice feminist lens, supported by approaches such as the *matrix of domination* (Collins, 1990) and the *continuum of violence* (Manjoo, 2012), this discussion of the main findings of the RTA of online abortion testimonies in Mexico situates abortion storytelling and digital feminist activism as tools to map the changing online discourse against the backdrop of evolving reproductive rights policies and social attitudes in the country. Additionally, it proves that digital discourse aids in socio-political transformations intrinsic to the Mexican feminist movement (GIRE, 2025, pp.152-165), expanding advocacy, visibility, and empowerment. Furthermore, a section is included to unpack the evolving content of the narratives, paying close attention to how they relate to the broader cultural, legal, and institutional dynamics that shaped reproductive rights discourse in each time period. Given the analytical depth achieved in the thematic analysis, this discussion draws from those consolidated insights to engage with the study's theoretical as well as historical framework. Following RTA (Braun and Clarke, 2022, pp.19-20), the discussion prioritizes interpretation and conceptual integration over exhaustive repetition of each analytical step. Rather than applying every theoretical concept to each theme, this chapter uses the theoretical tools most relevant to the overarching patterns identified, allowing for a coherent and focused engagement with the research questions.

In order to address the first part of the guiding research question of this work, the analysis of the three temporal datasets allowed me to generate three main themes when exploring online testimonies of Mexican women who had an abortion from the years 2007 to 2021. *Theme 1. The Cycle of Institutional and Infrastructural Violence: Women Facing God, the State and Other Actors to Access Healthcare*, *Theme 2. Towards Better Abortions: All-encompassing Support, Accompaniment in Institutional, Structural and Social Spheres* and *Theme 3. From Silence to Advocacy: Abortion as a Catalyst for Overcoming, Reclaiming and Rethinking Womanhood in Mexico*.

The themes outlined in this research 1) display the embeddedness and impact of institutions, structures, and society in women's online abortion testimonies across all years studied and 2) recognize the specific institutions and structures that most affect women's abortion experiences in Mexico through time, namely, the State, the Church, the public and private healthcare institutions, traditional and digital media, and the feminist organizations, 3) contribute specifically how each of these actors has the capacity for beneficial and

detrimental impact on women's experiences, and finally, 4) showcase how analyzing online testimonies of abortion from a feminist intersectional and reproductive justice perspective is a rich and ignored resource in Mexico, as stated by GIRE 2025 (p.164), to monitor the changes in the narratives parallel to social and legal transformations regarding reproductive rights in the country. Supporting claims such as Austria Mejía's (2022, p.61) that self-reflective and active protesting practices are happening in the feminist movement from the media and communication structures.

### **8.1 Relating Themes to Theory: Reviewing Meaningful Connections**

Regarding the content of the themes, the analysis exhibits how each relates to institutions, infrastructures, and wider society differently. The themes relate to the feminist foundational concepts presented in the theoretical and literature review, such as reproductive justice, intersectionality, digital feminist activism, Collin's *matrix of domination* (1990) and Rashida Manjoo's (2012) *continuum of violence*. By this, clarity is provided towards RQ3: What does a feminist analysis reveal about the framing and themes embedded in online abortion storytelling in Mexico?

*Theme 1* explores the discriminatory practices faced by women in their fight for accessing abortion. This first theme most closely relates to Collin's *matrix of domination* (1990), as through *Theme 1, Stages 1 and 4* (see Sections 5.1 and 5.4), I introduce the concepts of *cautionary* and *retroactive fear* that serve to illustrate the mental distress and misinformation surrounding the topic of pregnancy interruption in Mexico. These fears are crafted by conservative religious groups and are implanted in the culture by traditional and digital media. They result in women feeling guilt from the moment they find out about an unwanted pregnancy and long after the procedure. The stigmatization of abortion is not directly attributed to women, but to society's perceptions, which have been shaped by powerful conservative actors since the 1870s (Austria Mejía, 2022, p.21) via censorship, ideological terrorism and stigmatization (Lamas, 2012a, p.56). To Collins (1990), these are considered *hegemonical* and *interpersonal* domains of power. The *hegemonical* refers to ideological systems perpetuated by social institutions, in this case, mass media and churches, that control the manipulation of ideas and images of specific social groups. On the other hand, the *interpersonal* comments on the social practices that revise how individual beliefs and actions perpetuate the subordination of others (p. 547). As discovered in these stages of *Theme 1*,

while individual women have agency to overcome these stigmatizing practices, they still face labor and damage to their social perception or psyche.

*Theme 1 Stages 2 and 3* reflect Collins' (1990) *structural domain of power*. *Stage 2* by revealing how misinformation within individual actors seeps to institutional operations and *Stage 3* by analysing the discriminatory practices related to access to abortion in Mexico, which are tightly linked to women's physical location, their economic status, and protocolary know-how. These themes also relate to the *disciplinary domain of power* by signaling to criminalization policies of individual states and the practices of private and public healthcare institutions as systems, which, according to Collins (p.544), impart different outcomes depending on an individual women's socio-economic and physical status. This last point is further justified by the leading reproductive justice perspective in Mexico, stating that the discriminatory nature of accessing abortion in the country most affects impoverished women in remote areas who are more prone to resorting to high-risk practices, endangering their life or freedom (Belfrage, 2021, p.9; GIRE, 2018, pp.13, 319), punishing those who are most vulnerable to the systems set in place.

*Theme 1* as a whole falls in line with Rashida Manjoo's holistic approach, whereby addressing "the interdependence and indivisibility of civil, political, economic, social and cultural spheres, it situates the violence against women on a continuum" (p.21), one can demonstrate that interpersonal and structural forms of violence are intrinsically related. Stemming from this analysis, I follow Manjoo's (2012, p.21) conclusion, noting that these forms of violence compromise or even prohibit individual women's ability to enjoy universal human rights.

*Theme 2* focuses on the positive experiences of women with their close social networks as well as institutions and structures to form a picture of what *all-encompassing support* constitutes for them when interrupting a pregnancy. *Theme 2* acts as a direct response to *Theme 1* by exhibiting the constructive experiences of authors with their social circle and the systems that surround them, shedding light on their potential as agents of change and social transformation. From the perspective of Collins (1990, p.546), placing the marginalized women at the center and analyzing their lived experience to generate new knowledge is a way to resist the *matrix of domination*. For Manjoo (2012, p.21), monitoring how policies, laws, and institutions impact discrimination against women is a way to combat violence against them. This theme also considers the importance of introducing abortion storytelling to the

Mexican academic environment as a way to monitor discourses that could advance changes in abortion policy and cultural perception (Wilson-Lowe, 2023, p.16).

Lastly, *Theme 3* confirms that information analysed on actors, structures, and institutions that permeate the narratives stays consistent through time, fostering a conservative society where Mexican women had been historically forced to keep their abortions quiet. This very environment however, is gradually disrupted by the correct use of online resources as well as the permeation of feminist collectives empowering women to speak up and advocate for others. The data displays the failure of various violent social, physical, and emotional techniques to control women's bodies and sexuality. Scholars like Belfrage (2021, p.7) and institutions like GIRE (2018, p.31), talking about abortion in Mexico, place the blame on the state for the violent social, legal and physical attitudes that subjugate women's autonomous decision-making over their own biological functions. Specifically paralleling the fact that abortion has not been entirely decriminalized in all Mexican states, to a subconscious idea in the Mexican population that abortion is something to be punished for. This theme adds to the reproductive justice discourse in the country by framing how women, by committing to the decision of having an abortion in a country of social and legal criminalization, are radical in their conviction to deny forced motherhood and speak up about their experience. This is echoed in the abortion storytelling field, where "vocalising abortion is seen as an act of resistance, solidarity and defiance" (Berny, 2024, p.102).

This theme is most directly tied to feminism and the internet as agents to embrace, empower and create communities where women can share their stories and relate to others. The *matrix of domination* and lessons from non-white feminisms (Collins, 1990, p.542) address that women create and foster alternative communities through daily actions as a response to oppression and not being able to theorize about solutions. The criminalization and stigmatizing climate from the years 2007-2021 made women create environments where they used creative acts of resistance in the form of online communities that constituted potential sanctuaries that rejected the generalized ideology of domination advanced by conservative groups in the country and confronted oppressive social institutions. According to Wilson-Lowe (2023, p.32), stigma regarding abortion can be managed by information control, which means that individuals can feel empowered by deciding to share certain aspects of their experience under their specific conditions. For this research specifically,

FOCOS provided the affordances for women to share and engage with a level of anonymity that would ensure their mental and physical safety.

To comment on the role and progressive involvement of feminist institutions in Mexico, I confirm Austria Mejía's (2022, p.66) conclusions that feminist accompanying networks and organizations are a part of the continuum as well as intersectional in their practices. Through the research presented, I state that feminist organizations' labor in the online, academic, and social fields is pivotal for the access to abortion healthcare. *Theme 3* sees literature on Latin American feminist movements and the mostly English-speaking field of digital feminist activism collide. Feminist movements scholarship tells us that movements reconfigure constantly, prompted by change and tension, tied to the contexts they are situated in (Alvarez, 2019, p.75), and digital feminist activism confirms that digital platforms have the potential of disseminating feminist ideas that shape new discourses and connect diverse individuals in new forms of protest and activism (Locke et al., 2018, p.4; Mendes et al., 2019a, p.2). This convergence highlights how feminist institutions in Mexico have strategically adapted to the digital landscapes, expanding their reach and impact by providing information and access to safe pregnancy interruption and procuring platforms such as FOCOS, where stories foster community, visibility, empowerment, and advocacy.

These findings coincide with my stance on the theoretical front, where I chose to take a dual position within feminist scholarship regarding institutions. Having thoroughly discussed the positive and negative implications of the actors permeating online abortion narratives, it is vital to mention that adopting a polarizing position towards government institutions and structures fails to account for the historically complex and dynamic relationship between feminist struggles and the Mexican State, as outlined in the literature review. Moreover, an entirely negative or positive outlook towards these actors is not reflective of women's experiences with them, displayed across all themes, and following scholar Collins (1990, p. 546), does not recognize the true potential for harm, for good, and for transformation that these institutions possess through their positions of power.

## **8.2 The Temporal Contexts Analysed in Contrast to the Historical Overview**

All three themes are built around a temporal analysis that reveals the transformations happening over time. With the information gained, in this section I will summarize the most distinct characteristics that define each dataset and contextualize them within the historical

overview as well as the theoretical framework. As a primary research objective was to display the evolution of the use of digital media in abortion storytelling, the time-engaged findings are closely tied to the use of online spaces and feminist networks that operate within them, effectively engaging with RQ1 and RQ2.

The 2007-2011 dataset is marked by high emotional distress and social fear, largely shaped by the negative influence of traditional media, which misinformed women about abortion and distorted their expectations of the procedure. Testimonies reveal deep internal conflict when confronting their societal and religious beliefs with the reality of pregnancy interruption. Within this context, clinics in Mexico City emerged as the only legal and safe alternative, highly regarded amongst women's narrative descriptions. Through the historical overview, it's seen that the perception of abortion in Mexico has been dictated by an intrinsic relation between the state and the conservative Catholic Elite (GIRE, 2025, p.153; Lamas 2012a, p.58; Ortíz Millán, 2020 p.10), which had full administrative power over what Mexican audiences consumed (Blancarte, 1999, p.191) and imposed a censorship in regard to abortion narratives. This period of time is marked by misinformation and fear mongering on behalf of conservative groups, justifying the analytical findings.

For many, feminist and online spaces were the first time they encountered sorority and a sense of community amongst women. So, while descriptions of the abortion process were brief, they began to establish a pattern of women sharing what to expect physically and emotionally. In Mexico, even after the 2007 reforms, the topic of abortion remained obscure and risky to discuss (GIRE, 2025, p.158-159). However, decriminalization did see some mediatic discourse even in the newly founded internet (GIRE, 2025, p. 159). Out of this climate, according to Austria Mejía (2022, p.40), the feminist networks *Las Libres* and *Fondo María* began working to support women in interrupting their pregnancies using the early technological tools they had access to.

This earliest dataset is the most dominated by internal conflict and social fear; women in this time deal with greater trauma in relieving this experience, reflecting a generalized focus on writing about their individual, deeply internal struggles with society, structures and institutions. The first years after the change in policy were well received by wider populations and held a hope that the right political alliances would see decriminalization practices begin in other states (GIRE, 2025, p.153; Lamas, 2012a, 58). This was a false hope quickly turned down by the heavily funded and powerful *protection of life* campaign (GIRE,

2025, p.153; Lamas, 2012a, p.58; Ortíz Millán, 2020, p.10), explaining the overwhelmingly positive statements regarding Mexico City as the only decriminalized entity and the prevalence of secrecy and emotional distress from women seeking abortion.

The 2012-2016 period is defined by a reflective and longing tone, where writers express a desire for the medical knowledge and access to feminist support networks they lacked during their abortion experiences. As stated, these networks played a crucial role in this time period, making the women who had access to them feel safer, informed and supported in their choice. This trust in feminist spaces also impacted the social sphere, where users mentioned feeling safer disclosing their abortion to other women they knew beforehand were feminists. As discussed in the literature review, after 2007 there was a 12-year period where no legislative or mediatic discourse on abortion legislation was happening. Clearly displayed in this research and supported by GIRE (2025, p.158-160), is the fact that during this decade of media silence, clandestine and unsafe abortions were actively taking place with a varying range of physical, mental, and legal consequences.

It is in this dataset where the internet begins to act as a resource for seeking information beyond women sharing their stories. It is not surprising then that in these years there is the first account of *Facebook* groups as emerging resources for informing and receiving abortive healthcare. Writers describe reading other testimonies as positively affecting their own experience, using the act of storytelling as a way to process, heal and resignify their own. Statements of abortion become increasingly detailed, including pharmaceutical brand names and possible side effects of abortive medication as well as describing in detail the changing emotional states. On the other hand, women start to point out issues in browsing for information on pregnancy interruption online, mainly a lack of clear, easily accessible sources on how to act in their state.

It is coherent, given the contextual situation of this time period, that women felt a deep want for knowledge they did not know how to access. If we see it in contrast to the historical overview, the strong emphasis on feminist networks comes from the fact that they were the only institutions still talking about abortion in the country during these years (Lamas, 2012a, pp. 59-60). It also accounts for the drastic increase in reflections in regard to the internet as an increasingly accessible platform that presented an opportunity to find information regarding taboo topics. Another complaint of the time regarding online use is that women wished they could speak up beyond the internet. This is incredibly revealing of the historical

moment where the abortions occurred, an added dimension being that in the span of this dataset, according to the GIRE (2025, p. 145), the only way a story would break into the mainstream media was through revictimization; media exposure was used as an impending and effective threat by health and legal institutions.

Testimonies from this dataset reflect growing frustration with the unequal access to abortion across Mexico, particularly criticizing the financial and logistic burden of having to travel to the capital for dignified healthcare, reflecting the legislative pause that provided no solutions, no information, and discriminated against women based on access. The women sharing their stories at this time, wrote about issues beyond their individual, internal experience and process with abortion, questioning social expectations of women and motherhood and reflecting on power dynamics they had witnessed within the Mexican patriarchal structure.

The 2017 to 2021 dataset marks a pivotal shift in tone and perspective among writers, who move from internalized fear and shame to outspoken defiance and critical reflection. The discontent with access inequality comes to the forefront, with writers opting for having clandestine abortions because of the economic aspect that traveling to Mexico City entails. Women in this dataset exhibit greater protocolary know-how and legal awareness; however it is paired with an intensified fear of social, medical, and legal repercussions. Regarding the use of the internet, women have a more systematic and sophisticated use of online forums as hubs of information and advice that is enacted and procured by users. Moreover, it becomes common practice to refer women to specialized online groups, virtual contacts, or sources, as contact to feminist networks is reached with ease, most women know about them themselves or know someone who can get them in touch with them. Accounts on active abortion are extremely descriptive, educational, and normalizing in tone. Furthermore, the presence of feminist networks is reflected in active abortion statements with accompanying members monitoring the procedures remotely through social media platforms. On the other side, the negative claims and experiences from women seeking information online reach their peak, claiming there is an excessive amount of information and being unsure what to look for.

The most recent wave of feminism in the country, as detailed in the literature review (Austría Mejía, 2023, p.41; GIRE, 2025, p.162), was significantly influenced by the appearance of *Marea Verde* in 2018, which fast tracked the adoption of feminist accompanying networks into digital platforms. These networks took on the role of disseminating trustworthy information about abortion as well as facilitating access and supporting women going through

the abortive medical regime. Austría Mejía (2023, p.41) further explains the global rise of internet-based feminist activism that contributed to a notable increase in feminist organizations operating primarily through social media platforms in Mexico to great success. Feminist organizations practically strong-armed the FPPO and local governments into national and local decriminalization through their coordinated efforts, proving how social mobilizations led by feminist movements could impact legislative processes (GIRE, 2021, pp. 32-34). The context provided in this paragraph accounts for the increasingly informed, critical and worried attitude from Mexican women in this time, who saw their fellow friends, sisters and mothers go out to the streets to protest for women's rights, safety, and access to dignified healthcare, as well as witnessing a massive dissemination of feminist information through social media.

Austria Mejía (2022) highlights on the topic of women's rights how "the danger is read on social media and it is felt on the streets" (p.25). The 2017-2021 dataset is characterized by women questioning and chastising the institutional malpractice and inequalities affecting abortion access; women exhibit being painfully aware of the conditions under which they and others experience abortion; there is a profound understanding of the systems at play beyond societal structure and a deep want for visibility through advocacy. This dataset is noteworthy for shifting from a private struggle, as showcased in the first years, to public agency and empowerment. There is increased awareness over societal issues beyond the writer's own and an increased worry over other women facing similar situations under worse circumstances. This awareness of the state of the country carries reflection regarding the treatment of women and women's rights in Mexico.

### **8.3 Addressing Further Research Questions**

To guide the final section of this discussion, in the following each research question is revisited to provide a targeted synthesis of the findings, relating them to the historical overview and feminist perspectives.

RQ1: How has the content of the testimonies evolved over the different time periods outlined? What socio-political or cultural factors might account for these changes?

The testimonies analyzed reveal a clear evolution across the three datasets studied in connection to the socio-political events happening in each time period. Over time, the content of abortion testimonies evolves from the first dataset displaying narratives that were fear

driven, guided by misinformation stemming from a conservative society and with a focus on the internal and individual struggle, to the 2012-2016 dataset reflecting frustration over barriers in accessing abortion and a broader questioning of womanhood and patriarchy. By 2017-2021, testimonies express collective awareness, political agency and reactive against institutional violence and malpractice. Revealing that through destigmatizing practices created by an informed society, women in this time period are able to reflect and be critical over societal issues beyond their own. The changes exhibited, align with shifting socio-political factors through the years mainly; the conservative-religious backlash to the 2007 reforms, the 12 year period of stagnant legislation on abortion and the rise of the feminist reproductive justice activism movement in Latin America with the catalyst of the *Marea Verde* as well as the effort of Mexican feminist accompanying networks in informing and offering their support through social media platforms.

RQ2: What does the analysis reveal about Mexican women's use of online resources in relation to abortion? Does it display a change over time?

Over time, Mexican women's use of online platforms to write abortion testimonies has evolved from the first years studied 2007-2011 as an isolated source where a few would go seeking community, validation and sorority, to the 2012-2016 dataset which witnessed the increased presence of feminist networks in social media and the first critiques in browsing for information on pregnancy interruption start to be a part of women's online accounts. Lastly the 2017-2021 displays a digital media landscape where as a result of the criminalisation environment, a sophisticated and systematic use of online forums and platforms as sources of information has been entirely normalized as a first course of action when facing an unwanted pregnancy, having contact with feminist accompanying networks to monitor an abortion remotely is common practice and women who write testimonies do so with increased educational and informative goals.

There is a shift from women in 2007-2011 wishing they could speak up, to women in 2012-2016 wishing they could feel safe doing it beyond the internet. By 2017-2021 women feel a great degree of personal responsibility to keep information on abortion trustworthy, accessible, and available to others. This sense of responsibility is driven by a fear caused by an increased awareness of the delicate situation of women's lives in the country. These findings follow abortion storytelling principles (see Berny, 2024, p.102; Wilson-Lowe, 2023, p.16) that highlight the existence of online platforms where abortion is discussed as pivotal in

preparing women for their procedures as spaces for resistance by rejecting stigma and practicing advocacy through pro-abortion discourse. Finally, through analysis of online narratives, I found that Mexican women's use of online resources in relation to abortion is fundamentally tied to the presence or lack thereof of online feminist networks, which, as Austria Mejía (2022, p.52) argues, have increasingly used social media and messaging apps to provide information and guidance to those considering or seeking pregnancy interruption in Mexico.

RQ3: What does a feminist analysis reveal about the framing and themes embedded in online abortion storytelling in Mexico?

A reflective, thematic analysis from an intersectional feminist perspective reveals that women in Mexico write about their abortion experiences online based on their relationship to the institutions, infrastructures, and society that surround them. This displays how their presence is looming and their effects, whether beneficial or detrimental, are prevalent, actively shaping the abortion experiences and transforming attitudes in the women themselves through time. These actors can exist in the women's lives as sources of anguish and stress, as discriminatory and surveilling, as stigmatizing and shaming, but also as informative, supportive, integral and with the potential for positive impact and transformation in a woman's pregnancy interruption and beyond. This reveals a deeply important channel for researchers to monitor and understand the reflection of legal and social transformations regarding reproductive rights in the country.

#### **8.4 Limitations and Reflexivity**

Before stating the closing statements and implications of this study, it is important to reflect on the limitations and my role as a researcher in shaping the research process, acknowledging once more how both context and positioning influenced the analysis and interpretation of findings. Regarding the dataset, as previously mentioned, all testimonies were extracted from the FOCOS website, which outwardly aligns with liberal, feminist and pro-choice rhetoric. This possibly attracts a specific demographic of women who follow the thinking displayed by the platform, dismissing some more conservative perspectives on pregnancy interruption.

Moreover, the testimonies do not depict a certain part of the women's population in the country, who do not have access to the internet or are not digitally literate enough to contribute their story. Furthermore, as stated in the methodology, I did not encounter in the

FOCOS platform testimonies written by outwardly identified LGBTQ+ individuals, so perspectives from non-binary, transgender men, or other gender dissidents are not portrayed. However, I do personally consider these valid, occupying their own space and research in the feminist and reproductive rights conversations globally. Regarding the temporality aspect, even when stories are categorized by the year of when the abortion took place, they can be written years after the fact, introducing an aspect of retrospective storytelling that might be influenced by hindsight.

To mitigate some of the variables mentioned, I aimed for collecting rich and descriptive testimonies, which were varied in tone and perspectives. Moreover, I placed importance on those narratives reflecting diversity by not following a Big Q orientation (Braun and Clarke, 2025, p.428), where meaningfulness was not reached by repetition within testimonies but by the content of the textual data and its relation to the research objectives. An important thing to state at this point is that, throughout the entirety of the project, I aimed to treat these sensitive narratives with care. I ensured to remove any indicators of a woman's identity and location and treated their testimonies with respect at all times, never undermining any contributions or points of view regardless of my own and personally communicating with the organization responsible for the website Equidad (<https://equidad.org.mx/>), who gave me express permission to use these resources.

Sizing is also an aspect worth mentioning. I was only able to work with 90 testimonies across 15 years. A bigger sample or a comparison between different platforms might result in a different set of conclusions than the ones in this work. I encourage academic, health, state, and non-governmental institutions that have interest in the research field of abortion storytelling and reproductive justice to conduct a larger sample size and to draw comparisons from different repositories with different inclinations (see Allen, 2015; Millar, 2017) and apply them to Latin American and Mexican contexts to different outcomes.

The academic and organizational pillars of this research all have distinct ways of calling phenomena very similar to that found in the analysis section. As previously mentioned, we can look at the intersecting interpersonal and structural factors leading to long-standing discrimination against women in a specific group or sector of society and call it a *matrix of domination* (Collins, 1990) or a *continuum of violence* (Manjoo, 2012). In Theme 1, I name it a *cycle of institutional and infrastructural violence*. In turn, there are concepts to explain the institutional, structural and interpersonal role that women who go through abortions should

have access to and trust in; the WHO calls it the *continuum of care* (2022, p.7); in Theme 2, I call it *all-encompassing support*. Similarly, through the analysis, I present concepts that came from my own understanding of the situation at hand, such as *cautionary* and *retroactive fear* and *protocolary know-how*. I am aware that there might be other names for phenomena similar to what I aimed to explain. However, I engage in a practice of reflexivity as dictated by Braun and Clarke (2006) and also true to the abortion storytelling field, where resetting narratives of abortion emphasizes creating specialized language through reading how others describe their experiences (Berny, 2024, p.106; Ziebland and Wyke, 2012, p. 236). Berny calls this process “speakability” (2024, p.102). I take part in the abortion storytelling field, new to Latin American discourse, by giving phenomena that pertains specifically to Mexican women who have had an abortion, their own names.

It is evident from this last section that as a researcher and as a Mexican woman, with my personal ties to the Mexican feminist movement both in advocacy and belief, I interpreted and analyzed the stories through my own understanding of the world around me, with bias and with preconceived notions but also with theory and thorough information to support the claims made here. I consider this a strength in the work presented through this thesis, as the sensitive topic of abortion requires intersectional perspectives and reveals important insights into the situation of reproductive rights in the country.

## **8.5 Implications**

These main contributions serve to narrow the gap in researching abortion storytelling in Mexico, a field that had not been explored thus far. As exhibited in the literature review, only in 2025 did one of the most important organizations on reproductive rights in Mexico, GIRE, acknowledge the importance of monitoring online narratives of abortion in connection to changes in the social perception of this medical procedure and in advancing legislation on the matter by revising changes over a 16-year period in how journalistic media narrates abortion stories that become part of the media agenda (p.164). The work presented here is unique in gathering the information directly from women themselves and collecting a range of experiences, from those who had the privilege to take the legal route to those who did it clandestinely. Without the internet and the FOCOS platform, obtaining this type of information would have been incredibly challenging. This is supported by evidence in *Theme 3 sub-theme 1* (see Section 7.1) as well as authors such as Allen (2015, p.44) and

Wilson-Lowe (2023, p.22), who write on women not volunteering information out of fear of social and legal repercussions.

This study adds to scholarship on Latin American feminist movements as well as digital feminist activism, specifically in the reproductive justice and abortion storytelling fields. Colliding these two branches under the topic of online testimonies of Mexican women who had abortions, revealing that women in Mexico write about their abortion experiences online based on their relationship to the institutions, structures and society that surround them, displaying how their presence is looming and their effects, whether beneficial or detrimental, are prevalent, actively shaping the abortion experiences and transforming attitudes in the women themselves through time. This study also confirms that statements that digital feminist advocacy can enact social and political transformation and unveils how feminist institutions in Mexico have strategically adapted to the digital landscapes, expanding their reach and impact by providing information and access to safe pregnancy interruption and procuring platforms such as FOCOS, where stories foster community, visibility, empowerment, and advocacy.

The findings of this research point to a significant disconnect between legislative advancements and public perception and institutional practices regarding abortion. Particularly in the later years studied, testimonies reflect a sense that while legal and institutional changes were beginning to take place at governance levels and internally in feminist circles, the broader public was not yet ready to recognize this shift in women's rights. Collins (1990, p.543) suggests that eradicating discrimination means correctly conceptualizing women. In this particular case my findings point out that the total social and legal decriminalization of abortion in Mexico requires institutions and the general public to conceptualize women not only as capable of motherhood but just as capable of abortion. This falls in line with GIRE's 2025 Report (p.165), which constitutes abortion as a normal event in the reproductive life of women and people able to get pregnant.

On the institutional side, this research supports findings that even though abortion might be decriminalized in some states, it often does not hold the state and other institutions accountable for safe, timely access to free, legal, and safe pregnancy interruption (GIRE, 2021, p.34). This research follows GIRE's long-standing assertion (2018, 2012, 2025) that decriminalization does not guarantee access, does not equal institutional accountability and does not take into account infrastructural planning and availability. Furthermore, as

evidenced in *Theme 3 sub-theme 2* (see Section 7.2), national and local governments, as they pertain to the management of the healthcare sector and health information, are not doing enough to normalize and demystify abortion in the general population. Through this work I urge the Mexican State, following WHO (2022) and GIRE (2018, 2021, 2025) at the local and national levels, to place resources towards the goal of normalizing, educating, and shifting detrimental perceptions of pregnancy interruption.

## 9. Conclusions

This study set out to explore online testimonies of abortion of Mexican women through a feminist intersectional and reproductive justice perspective, employing Braun and Clarke's (2006) iterative six-step approach towards RTA. There was an overarching curiosity about discovering whether social and political events related to reproductive rights and the feminist movement had affected or were reflected in the narratives analyzed, as the last two decades in the country have been marked by the evolution or lack thereof in national and local policy as well as conservative cultural discourse led by religious groups and liberal demands headed by organized feminist networks (GIRE, 2018, p.11; Lamas, 2012b, p.45).

Another investigative concern was to examine the role and presence of digital media in these women's stories and their evolution since the late 2000s, as modern iterations of feminist movements contesting strict abortion regimes in Latin America (GIRE, 2021, p.35) and internationally (Berny, 2024, p.100) have been recognized for widespread feminist digital activism media campaigns that break into the mainstream, proving to influence changes in abortion policy (GIRE, 2021, pp. 32-34; Wilson-Lowe, 2023, p.16) and positively impacting societal perceptions of pregnancy interruption (GIRE, 2025, p.164). However, systematic monitoring of changes in online abortion narratives is a topic that had not entered the academic or institutional discourse in Mexico until 2025 (GIRE, 2025, p.156), so it was a paramount objective to add to this context. Considering this information, the present thesis was guided by the central research question: What recurring themes and narratives emerge from Mexican women's online abortion testimonies, and how have they evolved across temporal contexts? This conclusion synthesizes the key findings and theoretical contributions; in RTA terms, they show the ultimate "so what" (Braun and Clarke, 2021b, p.146) of the story told thus far.

### 9.1 Summarizing Main Findings and Reflecting on the Research

Through the exploration of online testimonies of abortion from Mexican women across three temporal datasets (2007-2011, 2012-2016, and 2017-2021) three main themes were generated. They explore concisely the beneficial and detrimental impact of specific institutions and structures, namely the State, the Church, the public and private healthcare institutions, traditional and digital media, and the feminist organizations, as well as society on women's stories with pregnancy interruption and their evolution through time. *Theme 1*

explores violent and discriminatory practices that affect women's physical and mental health when seeking abortive healthcare. It focuses on the negative impact of the outlined actors on women's experiences. *Theme 2* overviews constructive imaginaries and interactions with the social circle, institutions, and structures to understand what *all-encompassing support* means for women who undergo abortions. Focusing on the positive impact of the actors outlined on the women's experiences. *Theme 3* sees how the systemic silencing of women who have abortions in Mexico is transformed by them into tools of resistance to speak-up online or in real life and advocate for others. It focuses on how women deal with the actors outlined, reflect on their context, culture, and condition, and finally are radical in overcoming stigma and deciding their reproductive future.

The historical overview, in contrast to the time analysis exhibited in the data, reveals that each dataset reflects the period of time when the accounts were written in paralleling the biggest historical happenings in relation to the reproductive justice movement in the country with the tone, issues, and frustrations of the women. Specifically, the 2007-2011 dataset exhibits in the narratives the religious conservative backlash against the 2007 reforms (GIRE, 2025, p.153; Lamas, 2012a, p.58; Ortíz Millán, 2020, p.10), forming testimonies that are fear-driven and suffer from misinformation, focusing on the individual woman's experience and struggle. The 2012-2016 period reflects the frustration regarding the legislative and mediatic silence regarding abortion policy (GIRE, 2021, p.34), as the narratives become critical of discriminatory practices relating to healthcare access and women rely on feminist networks as the only institutions talking about abortion, displaying a critique of ideas of womanhood and patriarchy in Mexico as part of narrating their experiences. Lastly, the 2017-2021 dataset feels and reacts to the revival of an active Latin American feminist movement that, as a priority topic, demands safe and legal pregnancy interruption (GIRE, 2021, p. 35). Showcasing a set of more informed women who are critical and reactive towards institutions, structures, and society and therefore are able to be reflexive about their overall experience as it relates to cultural issues and circumstances beyond their own.

The presence of digital media in the testimonies analyzed exhibits that over time, online forums transform from being the only spaces for women to share their abortion stories with a great amount of distress in relieving this time in their lives to specialized hubs of information where women share highly detailed, educational information, feeling a responsibility for contributing trustworthy advice to others. This mirrors the general historical events

mentioned as well as being reminiscent of intersectional Black feminism teachings of overcoming dominance through experience-based knowledge within communities (Collins, 1990, pp. 542,546) and abortion storytelling stemming from feminist digital activism principles, where women's use of digital resources serves to resist stigma and empower through advocacy, whether online or in the streets (see Berny, 2024, p.102; Wilson-Lowe, 2023, p.16). Another conclusion of this study is that as the use of social media platforms as a resource of abortion information increases through the years, so does the presence of feminist networks in the stories themselves and parallel to the historical context, supporting GIRE (2025, p.162) and Austria Mejías (2022, p.52) findings.

These three themes concern Latin American feminist movement literature and the intersectional, feminist reproductive justice perspective by revealing that women in Mexico write about their abortion online in direct relation to their experiences with institutions, structures and society. These testimonies serve to display and understand the legal and social transformations around reproductive rights as well as the public perception to these transformations. The themes generated from the testimonies are significant in joining the Mexican Feminist perspective to the field of abortion storytelling.

Reflexive Thematic Analysis as a method “goes beyond description and summary to ask questions about how particular patterned meanings might relate to wider social contexts and about the significance and implications of patterned meanings” (Braun et al., 2022, p.20). As previously outlined, this was precisely what I set out to do; the method allowed for me as a researcher to interact very closely with the data in a reflexive and iterative way. I was able to draw conclusions based on theory and pre-existing academic work and constructs but from my own particular perspective as a feminist Mexican woman, who understands the topic as an insider. This allowed for a stronger analysis of the context-specific, structural narratives. I recognize that a different researcher can draw different conclusions from the same dataset; however, supported by Big Q and RTA, I am confident in stating that this fact does not undermine or undervalue the work presented here.

## **9.2 Recommendations**

This research highlights the need for trustworthy online spaces in Mexico, to ensure better access to reliable information about abortion, especially in regards to state-by-state legislation, an issue increasingly noted in women’s stories over time. Contrary to existing

literature (see GIRE, 2025, pp.163-164), the findings reveal the persistent influence of Catholic Church institutions in online abortion discourse, exhibiting that, while feminist networks quickly and progressively adapted to digital platforms to support reproductive autonomy, religious groups have also adapted to these spaces to spread their *anti-choice* misinformation. To date, this specific dynamic remains unaddressed in existing research on abortion in Mexico. In line with feminist reproductive justice frameworks, I recommend that the Mexican state actively collaborate with feminist organizations to create a curated network of digital abortion resources. This should include an official online portal that links to trustworthy information personalized by state and established feminist support networks. These resources should be backed by public investment through Search Engine Optimization support to counteract the spread of conservatively motivated misinformation. Furthermore, given the central role of feminist online platforms in facilitating abortion storytelling, such as FOCOS, and access with accompanying institutions, it is essential to invest in and protect these digital spaces. Public institutions, universities, and NGOs should provide technical, financial, and legal support to websites, forums, and networks that advance reproductive autonomy. These measures, coupled with policy mechanisms to hold individuals and institutions responsible for medical misinformation accountable, represent a multifaceted approach to creating informational justice in Mexico's digital abortion landscape.

Moreover, I suggest that public and private healthcare institutions include in their practices, regardless of regulation, guidelines established by WHO's *continuum of care* (2022) and further develop frameworks tending specifically towards circumstances lived by Mexican women, as is the *all-encompassing support* foundational concept of this work, which can be taken as a reference. However, I suggest a more intersectional approach, with professionals and academics in the areas of communications and media, medicine in the gynecological and obstetric field, law in the human and reproductive rights perspective, political sciences, feminist organizations, and NGOs, to collectively develop a more in-depth and diverse *all-encompassing support* framework, that takes into account online abortion narratives, to be presented as a must in states where abortion is decriminalized, incentivizing the healthcare sector to set up infrastructure for pregnancy interruption from a reproductive rights, intersectional perspective. Lastly, following GIRE (2025, p.156) I urge that within institutions and academia, social media narratives of abortion continue to be monitored and analyzed from a feminist lens to generate strategies that influence a media environment that follows human rights and reproductive justice perspectives. Taking into account abortion storytelling

narratives as new forms of feminist resistance and activism (Locke et al., 2018, p.4; Mendes et al., 2019a, p.2) that have the ability of impacting law and policy making in Mexico, removing stigma (Allen, 2015, pp. 44-45; GIRE, 2025, pp. 152-165), as well as positively impacting public opinion (GIRE, 2025, p.162), generating a transformation where institutional, structural, and societal changes go hand in hand.

### **9.3 Final Remarks**

Abortion in Mexico is an ancestral practice (Austria Mejía, 2022, p.163) that has only been recognized as legitimate by the State in the last two decades (Lamas, 2012a, p.56), displaying a historical neglect of women's reproductive healthcare rights and practices. In recent history, many achievements have furthered the cause of decriminalization of abortion in the legal sense; however, this research finds that social stigma lives on as a form of punishment for this medical procedure. Following Collins (1990), placing women from a marginalized group at the center of analysis “not only reveals much-needed information about their experiences” (p.542) but also questions basic social concepts and perspectives on womanhood, religion, and patriarchy. This research displays the historical toll from a society that has regulated abortion under state-driven criminal codes and followed a conservative religious perception of pregnancy interruption, exhibiting a systemic discrimination that places a wide range of women at a disadvantage in accessing healthcare, forcing them into unwanted motherhood or high-risk, non-regulated, abortive practices that threaten their lives and their freedom. It is pivotal to monitor abortion in its practice, its discourse in the media, its regulation, and the institutions that permeate it over time, as not every achievement is permanent and the possibility that setbacks occur is always lurking (GIRE, 2025, p.57), as demonstrated by cases such as the overturning of *Roe v. Wade* (GIRE, 2025, p.54). Finally, this thesis aligns itself with GIRE (2025, p.107) in demanding the total decriminalization of abortion in the country, to be regulated strictly from the healthcare front, sending the message that abortion is a healthcare procedure like any other, removing stigma, fear and rejecting women's biological functions as political and transforming the cultural perception and narratives surrounding it.

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## **11. List of Appendices**

Appendix 1- Dataset of 90 Online Testimonies Retrieved from the [focos.org.mx](http://focos.org.mx) Website (see USB stick)

1.1 - 2007-2011 Items

1.2 - 2012-2016 Items

1.3 - 2017-2021 Items

Appendix 2- Reflexive Thematic Analysis Process (see USB stick)

2.1- 2007-2021 Initial Codes

2.2 - Formal Categories in Spanish

2.3- Actor Based Code Overview

2.4- Initial Themes Code Matrix

2.5- Theme Sub Theme Abstracts (Central Organizing Concepts in RTA)

2.6- Reflexive Journal