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**Campaigning for Choice:
Canvassing as Feminist Pedagogy in Dublin Bay North
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‘The whole group were incredibly supportive and encouraging, especially with beginners. All my fears about talking to strangers on their doorsteps were allayed with one short evening shadowing a more senior member. There was a wonderful sense of unity and egalitarianism, and any ideas that I had were listened to and encouraged...’ -- DBN member survey response, June 2018

The dramatic and resounding vote for abortion rights in Ireland was won by committed women sharing their personal stories. While some of these stories were circulated in the mass media, many more were shared with family and friends in the privacy of kitchen or living room. Still more were retailed on doorsteps to complete strangers face-to-face when activists canvassed. This aspect of the Repeal campaign was prepared for and supported by groups who organised locally in their constituencies. This chapter comes from our membership and activism in Dublin Bay North Together For Yes (DBN Repeal) group, a grassroots, women-led group set up to remove the Eighth Amendment (8th) from the Irish constitution. In this chapter, we draw upon a survey of June 2018 conducted by and of 125 activists from DBN Repeal to describe how this vote was won and the particular place of the canvass in the campaign.² After providing an overview of our constituency, group, and campaign, we argue that our approach to canvassing may properly be understood as a form of feminist activist pedagogy.

Dublin Bay North

Dublin Bay North (DBN) is the capital’s largest constituency, with an electorate of 108,209 at the time of the referendum (Elections Ireland, 2018). It had the largest voter turnout in Dublin – 71.6% compared to the Dublin average of 65.7% and a national average of 64.1% – and with its margin for Repeal of 38,181 votes, it contributed the largest net ‘Yes’ vote to the national total of any constituency.³ These are striking statistics when considering that DBN is a rather mixed constituency, and in terms of class rather close to the Dublin average.⁴ On the one hand, DBN has a noticeably higher proportion of households living in houses or bungalows (82.2%) than the Dublin average (73.1%), which range from the grand villas on Griffith Avenue at the north-west abutting the early planned suburb of Marino, extending to the stately terraces of Clontarf in the south, which march eastwards towards the architectural jewels of Howth. Between and around these are bedsits and apartments in Kilmore, modest cottages in Raheny, and areas of social housing in Darndale, Edenmore and Kilbarrack, the latter of which, when taken together, are slightly below the city average for local authority housing (7.2% compared to 9.3% in Dublin). Unemployment is below the city average (5.9%; Dublin 6.5%; RoI: 7.1%) and health is only a little below the average with 89.1% being reported as in good or very good

health (Dublin: 90.5%; RoI: 90.0%). It has a relatively lower share of non-Irish born (14.2%), when compared Dublin (21.8%) and the Republic (17.3%).

On the other hand, DBN also recorded Dublin's highest share of the electorate voting No (18.1%, compared to the Dublin average of 16.1%, and the national average of 21.5%). The one age-group that exit polls found to have voted in majority against Repeal was over-64 (McShane 2018: 10), and the percentage of DBN voters in this age range is relatively high, 21.6% compared to 15.8% for Dublin and 17.9% for the Republic. It also has a relatively high proportion of retired persons (18.2%; Dublin: 13.4%; RoI: 14.5%). The share of the population that is elderly may explain the high proportion whose education was finished by the age of 18 (38.6%; Dublin 31.7%; RoI: 35.9%). It may also explain the relatively high proportion of the people reporting themselves as Catholic (75.9%; Dublin: 68.9%; RoI: 78.3%), since nationally the share of the population that is Catholic is 75.0% for the age-group 20-64, but 88.1% for those older than 64.⁵ These figures indicate the local challenge that existed for the Repeal campaign, as also its success.

If we consider the campaign historically, in the 1983 referendum which established the 8th Amendment, only 5 of 11 Dublin constituencies voted against it.⁶ The area now covered by DBN was then in two constituencies, one of which voted narrowly in favour of the amendment to establish a 'right to life of the unborn', and one narrowly did not. Only 59.7% of the constituency voted in 1983 turnout for the area now designated DBN, which was significantly below 2018 numbers. In 1983, the proportion of the electorate voting *for* abortion rights (27.6%) was about *half the proportion in 2018* (53.4%).⁷ Moreover, the share of the electorate voting *against* the right to abortion in 1983 was *far higher* (31.9%) than the recent poll (18.1%).

Within about one generation, in DBN, as in Dublin generally, a narrow majority against abortion rights has been transformed into a decisive 3:1 margin in favour – far ahead of the national shift, where a 2:1 margin against abortion rights has reversed to a 2:1 margin in favour. This remarkable change in attitudes had many causes but among these must be counted the activism of local grassroots campaigns. Below we describe the history and campaign of DBN Repeal, with a focus on canvassing, which we believe resulted in such a high voter turnout in our constituency.

The campaign in Dublin Bay North

All my fears about talking to strangers on their doorsteps were allayed with one short evening shadowing a more senior member. There was a wonderful sense of unity egalitarianism and any idea I had were listened to and encouraged. -- DBN member survey response, June 2018

DBN Repeal was a consensus-based and largely female-run grassroots group that included Pro-Choice groups and activists in our constituency. It was established in August 2017, beginning with 20 members from various background of activism, political traditions and members new to campaigning. In its first months, the focus was mobilizing to the March for Choice; developing our logo, social media, and messaging; offering canvassing training; fundraising activities; and lobbying local politicians. The group created its campaign foundations in anticipation of the

referendum. In January 2018, officers were elected, a group constitution written, bank accounts opened and canvassing began. After the national Together for Yes (T4Y) campaign was launched in March 2018, DBN had a long discussion about whether to dissolve into the national campaign or not, and decided to affiliate while maintaining its autonomy for strategic decision-making and organisational independence.⁸

DBN Repeal had two levels of organisation: officers led monthly (and later biweekly) meetings open to all members, while ‘on the ground’ team leaders coordinated specific projects. For monthly group meetings, three elected officers (chair, secretary, treasurer) solicited action items and volunteers to coordinate activities decided upon by the larger group; a closed member Facebook (FB) and an ‘opt in’ email listserv was the primary means of communicating amongst members. Geographically-located team leaders coordinated canvassing, leafletting, and stalls in their own neighbourhoods and they organised open public meetings, posterage, and other activities. Other project-leaders were responsible for larger fund raising events and the rally. Team leaders used social media (WhatsApp) and email to organise local members, often at short notice. While some members of DBN were also members of political parties, the group did not want its campaign to be a platform for any party or elected official, and rejected top-down organising.

This long and intensive local campaign mobilised between 400 and 500 volunteers; our survey of 125 respondents suggests that about 80% of these were women.⁹ Beyond concerns with abortion rights, our members described a variety of causes that impelled their joining. About one-quarter said they joined out of solidarity with women affected by the lack of abortion rights in Ireland. A fear that the referendum might fail motivated about one-sixth of those joining in March and April 2018, and in the final month 22% joined due to their anger at ‘No’ campaign tactics. A sense of the urgency of the issue is also reflected in the intensive commitment of members in the final month: 61% of the 18 respondents who joined in May reported working on a daily basis of the campaign, with 28% early joiners (before March 2018), 19% of those joining in March, and 23% of those joining in April also sustaining a daily engagement.

Almost half (43%) of the survey respondents reported that this campaign was their first experience of political activism; this was particularly true of women joining during the last three months of the campaign (59%). 15 of our 125 respondents came to DBN Repeal from pre-existing Repeal organisations. Work in political parties was a common background for 27% of male and 11% female respondents. Other issue-based campaigns and movements, including Housing and Water Charges, were supported by 7% of members replying to the survey. The largest cohort among those whose activism antedated the Repeal campaign were the 14 women and 7 men (17% of survey) who had worked to secure passage of the Referendum mandating Marriage Equality.

The central experience of the campaign was canvassing, which, alongside leafletting (89%), was the main form of participation in the group (90%). Door-to-door canvassing, known as ‘ground campaign’, has long been employed in Irish politics for local and general elections to promote a platform, increase a politician’s visibility, and gauge the support for different issues in local areas. DBN’s goals in canvassing were to gauge the level of support for a ‘Yes’ vote and to reach undecided voters.

Canvassing also helped with visibility, demonstrating that the Repeal campaign was active in our constituency. In general, while canvassing, our members focused on the importance of the right to choose, whilst being prepared to address specific questions on legislation. We also shared and listened to personal stories with strangers while canvassing, an approach that, until the 2015 Marriage Equality Referendum, was not at all common (Healy et al.: 2016). Those involved with the ‘Yes Equality’ civil campaign were asked to share their personal reasons for supporting marriage equality when canvassing. Similarly, our survey establishes that canvassing for Repeal provided opportunities for both new and experienced members to engage in conversations with strangers about the emotive and highly personal issue of abortion in Ireland.

Canvassing was organised at three levels, through: a buddy system, team-leaders, and social media. We began in mid-January 2018, after a training day in November 2017 attended by 15-20 people, when we decided to use a simple ‘buddy system’: a new canvasser is paired with a more experienced member (typically female/male or female/female) until the new member gained experience and felt confident to go alone; with experience, the new member soon becomes the trainer. The group continued to canvass each week thereafter, and member numbers steadily grew as the weeks passed. A second training day was held in March 2018, organised in response to new members joining after the referendum had been officially called. About 30 people attended, many new joiners, and this training was led by an Abortion Rights Campaign (ARC) trainer. This juncture was a crucial time for the campaign as messages about the legislation were becoming solidified. Nonetheless, in our survey, members indicated that canvassing, rather than the workshops, helped them feel confident about the facts.

Eventually the campaign was able to divide the constituency into local canvassing groups, each with at least one team leader, all of whom were women and the majority of whom had their first canvass in January. For most of these neighbourhood-based team leaders, this was their first campaign. These women learned by doing; they became confident through the knowledge gained from more experienced members and were empowered to organise and lead their own local groups. Team leaders briefed canvassers before each night’s canvass about our main message/s for that outing, and debriefed them at the end of the evening, offering further opportunities for group discussion on issues that arose. A DBN member commented in the survey that the ‘debrief on how to address challenging questions, discuss strategies and share emotions’ was especially important. Canvassers were given the opportunity to ask questions about specific material or raise concerns. Alongside briefs and debriefs by canvass-leaders, our DBN FB and local canvassing groups WhatsApps fielded questions and posted the latest developments in the campaign and the press.

Initially, canvass leaders worked alongside others, and provided her group with: white high-visibility vests, clipboards, pens, canvassing sheets, up-to-date leaflets and DBN window posters. The buddy system facilitated new members learning how to canvass with a more experienced member until they were confident to go alone and then train new people themselves. This was a constant process of sharing knowledge and support. The buddy system offered new members the space and time to grow in confidence without feeling pressured to canvass alone at any point. The buddy system also helped integrate new members into the group and build relationships with longer

term members, which also encouraged new people to return. This snowballing process enabled us to reach large sections of the constituency in the final weeks of the campaign, with team leaders directing ‘buddies’ to doors and streets. As the campaign intensified, large numbers of people would show up to canvasses, as illustrated in Figure 1, which was DBN Repeal’s first monster canvass in Coolock in April 2018. For the last four weekends of the campaign, these ‘monster canvasses’ were organised, whereby 80-100 people would show up and work 2-3 hours. Thanks to the buddy system DBN Repeal could train such large numbers of new people at each monster canvass.

[Figure 1 about here]

Figure 1. DBN Repeal First ‘Monster’ canvass, 21 April 2018, Coolock, North Dublin. Photo © Karl Leonard.]

Canvassers recorded the date of the canvass, street name, house numbers and if the door was opened or the voter was not in. Initially, they rated residents’ support for repeal from 1 to 5 (lowest to highest) and included a comments section (to direct return visits). By late April, DBN Repeal adopted the T4Y canvass sheet, and recorded a ‘Yes’, ‘Maybe’, or ‘No’, with space for comments, feeding results back to the national campaign with canvass leaders uploading data after each canvass. At the door, enthusiastic ‘Yes’ voters were given details of our public FB page and invited to join the group. These voters reinvigorated canvassers because they reaffirmed the commitment to seeing this change made in Irish society.

Meeting undecided voters at the door gave the greatest opportunity for dialogue about the impact of the 8th on the everyday lives of women and reasons to support its removal. Responses from these voters as to why they were undecided ran a broad spectrum; people hadn’t thought about how they would vote; some felt the well-publicised cases (A, B, C, X and Y) were wrong, possibly indicating that the ‘No’ campaign created uncertainty for them; whereas others wanted to know about the proposed legislation. If voters had specific requests for more information, canvass leaders had additional supplementary materials to hand, including: Trade Union newspapers on the 8th Amendment, Doctors for Choice leaflets, and Termination for Medical Reasons leaflets.

We will return to a discussion of our members’ experiences of canvassing, but note here that our movement was impelled by solidarity with women who wanted a right to an abortion, and it mobilised very many women and some men. Many of these people were new to political activism and, specifically, to the canvassing which was the principal vehicle of the campaign. People sustained a very significant level of commitment and in this respect it is perhaps important that a majority felt that they influenced group decisions ‘very much so’ (14%) or at least ‘pretty much’ or ‘sort of’ (44%). The 42% who said that they influenced decisions ‘not really’ or ‘not at all’ were drawn mainly from the late-joiners. Even here there was a good degree of satisfaction with decision-making and the majority of those offering any explanation for their lack of involvement in decision-making said it was because they joined late, were happy to take instructions, chose not to be involved in decisions, or could not attend meetings. Of the 51 saying they were ‘not really’ or ‘not at all’ included in decision-making only 3 had any negative comments at all about the decision-making

process while many more of this group commended the organisational structure or its inclusiveness.

The referendum and our campaign did not happen in a vacuum: it was the accumulation of decades of activism when abortion rights was a very hostile topic in Irish society. As bell hooks (1994, 2010) urges, it is critical to pay attention to previous ways that feminists organised around rights and support for women, and consciousness-raising work, and how they advanced feminist pedagogical practice. Before describing our members' experiences, we first acknowledge the hard and thankless work of many women and people who paved the way for groups like DBN to emerge in the next section. We then argue that DBN Repeal practised a feminist activist pedagogy through canvassing that was both empowering and effective. We describe how our members gained the confidence to speak and tell their own stories, to listen and interact with strangers on difficult issues, all the while feeling supported by other members.

The Irish Women's Movement and Feminist Pedagogy

The movement unleashed mass active involvement of people completely new to campaigning. Open activists' meetings, extensive and creative use of social media and a plethora of WhatsApp message groups for people to arrange canvassing and fundraising and suggest ideas, allowed people to step forward quickly into organising roles. In the Dublin Bay North group, for example, a 17-year-old school student, coming up to exams (and who was not even old enough to vote) threw herself into public speaking and had no qualms about doing so in front of large crowds. (Holborow, 2018, np).

The Repeal movement drew upon decades of feminist organising in Ireland.¹⁰ We identify three broad strands of feminist activism critical to the Repeal campaign: calls for women's and reproductive rights, detailed by Connolly in this volume, consciousness raising about violence against women in Irish society, and feminist pedagogies. Democratic female-led organising is central to all three.

Firstly, while organisations working both inside and outside established institutions adopted varying strategies to achieve aims, grassroots activism was always of paramount importance to the movement for reproductive rights in Ireland. Radical 'women's liberation' and female-led organisations like Irishwomen United focused on participatory democracy, consciousness-raising activities and political campaigns, calling for amongst other things: free, legal contraception, including state-financed birth control clinics; the right to a free, legal and safe abortion; and the right to self-determined sexuality (Connolly and O'Toole 2005). This highlighted the intersections of socialist, lesbian, and class-based activism, which were critical to Irish feminists at this time. In advocating for women to control their own fertility, Contraception Action Plan (CAP) organized a national petition and large public meetings to opposed the 1979 Family Planning Bill (Galligan 1998), later provided information on contraception and women's sexual health and selling non-medical contraception (Irish Times 1981). The Dublin-based Women's Right to Choose Group, the first abortion rights group in Ireland, supported the Irish Pregnancy Counselling Centre and supplied educational material and speakers to women's groups. Grassroots feminist

activism continued to underpin the movement for reproductive rights in Ireland, focused energies on providing support and information to women who needed abortions, and advocated for abortion access. Some DBN activists brought their experiences to the group having worked previously in earlier campaigns for women's health and reproductive rights, including CAP, Anti-Amendment Campaign (1983), Dublin Abortion Information Campaign (1985), and Defend the Clinics (1988).¹¹

Secondly, activist consciousness-raising in practice drew connections between personal lives and political processes by calling attention to violence against women in the home and promoting women's bodily autonomy. Ailbhe Smyth (1995: 38) noted: 'When the state failed to provide vital services in the area of violence against women, women established services themselves and have succeeded in forcing the state to recognize and (at least partly) fund them'. The founding of voluntary organisations like Women's Aid (1976) and Dublin Rape Crisis Centre (1977) were important steps in making visible sexual and domestic violence. In the 1980s and 1990s, feminists mobilised on a number of core issues including divorce, contraception and abortion as well as the provision of services around violence, counselling and health centres. Important to DBN's informational campaign was raising awareness about these issues, through speakers at our regular and public meetings, including Midwives for Choice and Lawyers for Choice, and our leaflets. Furthermore, it was evident when canvassing that some voters understood issues of abortion access, bodily autonomy and violence against women as intimately connected.

Thirdly, alongside the Irish women's movement, community-based voluntary education groups developed feminist pedagogies as a necessary tool for examining and articulating women's experiences of oppression. The course content and scheduling of community groups were organised to accommodate women whose primary responsibilities were tied to the home (Inglis 1994). At the same time, the political and educational goals of women's studies projects and feminist education within academia were closely aligned to the women's movement (Connolly and O'Toole, 2005). Trinity College Dublin Women's Studies Programme (1983) and the collective-run Women's Studies Forum (1987, later became the Women's Education, Research, and Resource Centre (WERRC), 1990), were instrumental in establishing Women's Studies in third level education (Connolly and O'Toole, 2005).¹² UCD's Women's Studies Outreach programme (1990), an innovative University-Community partnership with a Certificate in Women's Studies, offered working class women pathways to university education previously out of reach (Moane and Quilty 2012). Some DBN members were educated through WERRC and other gender and women's studies programmes.

Feminist pedagogy in these programmes placed women's experience as the centre of inquiry to realise individual and collective empowerment through participatory learning. Owing to its activist roots, knowledge in the feminist classroom is generated through dialogue, with teachers and learners open to each other's viewpoints and is validated by or with experiences that are collectively recognised (Chow et al. 2003: 263). Transformative learning environments were created that were collaborative, non-hierarchical and 'safe' spaces, whereby instructors 'facilitate' and attempt to democratise the creation and sharing of knowledge, while students voice opinions and ask questions (Pileggi et al. 2015: 30). Experiential, 'hands-on' learning incorporates

critical consciousness that enables one to generate new knowledge. Students thus gain confidence by developing critical thinking skills, and political and social understandings of activism (Stake and Hoffman 2001). Emotion is an important tool in feminist transformative learning experiences, particularly when it causes discomfort, because these intense teaching moments generate different types of knowledge, requiring patience, collective inquiry and improvising (Pileggi et al. 2015: 31). Unpredictable teaching moments, born of intense responses to the social, political and affective relationships between learners, facilitators and content result in personal experiences of meaning-making (ibid: 31). Moreover, acknowledging one's vulnerability is key to fostering a sense of mutual empathy in feminist experiential learning (ibid: 40). Dialogic, participatory and experiential learning in unpredictable moments was critical to the sharing of knowledge through canvassing in DBN, as we discuss below.

Canvassing for Repeal as an Empowering Feminist Pedagogy

‘I definitely became way more confident in the facts through canvassing and reading up. Listening to team mates really helped me also’. -- DBN member survey response, June 2018

The Repeal campaign echoed these legacies and lessons of previous feminist practice. In particular, we found that the experience of canvassing was a transformative and empowering process for our members. The group's survey of open ended questions confirmed what we were witnessing during the campaign. Strangers, mainly women, came together for a common goal, supported each other, trained each other, built relationships, and shared stories while fundamentally changing Ireland forever. Through our canvassing buddy system, we drew upon strands of dialogic, participatory and experiential feminist pedagogy that generated new forms of knowledge for the canvasser and citizen at the door. Our members raised their consciousness and knowledge, and gained the confidence to share and listening to stories.

It is striking that 98% of our surveyed members described their experience of the campaign in positive terms, when considering that two-thirds of the same members had never canvassed before; further, two-thirds female and one-third male of first-time canvassers also had no previous experience with political activism. While almost half the early joiners (before March 2018) received some specific training, virtually none did who joined later. Instead, they were learning through experience. Certainly a few mentioned anxieties about canvassing. Asked if there were any factors inhibiting their engagement with the campaign, 27 of the 125 respondents raised a number of issues, but mainly about lack of time to do all that they would have liked. Only 5 mentioned a lack of confidence relating to canvassing, which is quite impressive given the general lack of experience among the group.

Our members, in other words, were empowering themselves and each other while carrying out actions that many thought they were unable to do or would ever do. About three-quarters of those responding to the survey (77%) said that the buddy system we described above was very welcome, giving confidence to 22% of the women and 35% of the men, while 9% of the women and 12% of the men said it was

important in learning the campaign's message. When asked which factors had developed their confidence in the campaign message, 45% referred to their own research, but one-third mentioned the information provided by DBN Repeal (33%), and one-fifth each mentioned their conversations with other members of the group (21%), the experience of canvassing as itself an education (20%), and the questions and replies on DBN WhatsApp (19%). Respondents felt supported and confident thanks to training, a buddying system, and conversations within the group both in person and via social media.

The participatory nature of our approach was well received by our members. In an open-ended survey question, 'What did you think about the buddy system we used?', people commented that it gave them confidence and companionship. A new canvasser stated that the system: 'Was great for giving people confidence and showing you what to say to frequently asked questions'; an experienced canvasser said it was: 'Very good. I found it really encouraged the newbies, and on bad days I needed the company myself'. Not only was the buddy system useful for building confidence, but it provided a safety net for those who might have had concerns about going door to door. One canvasser responded that the buddy system was: 'Excellent. My buddy had been knocking on doors for months, and gave me great advice, and boosted my confidence. It also made me feel safe'. Another commented that not only did it buoy confidence levels but also served to integrate new people into the group. Members commonly referred to the friendships and camaraderie that resulted from the buddy system: 'It is highly relieving to know that you have a friend with you that you know can back you up on the doorsteps and defend your points when the going gets tough'.

We argue that the dialogic exchange of knowledge between new and experienced canvassers through the buddy system was a form of feminist experiential pedagogy. Initially, new canvassers observed how to engage in conversations with voters. When confident to try canvassing, the experienced canvasser offered feedback after leaving the doorstep, or suggested alternative responses if the new canvasser was uncertain how to respond to voter's queries or concerns. Individuals could immediately reflect on each experience based on discussion and feedback with their partner. Learning was also cumulative: new and old canvassers might test out different approaches, sometimes exchanging ideas about what worked with other pairs or asking for advice, which meant that pairs actively adapted and implemented changes to the way they canvassed as they went. For both canvassers, the conversations that happened on the walk between the doors provided a cyclical exchange between members. Indeed, a notable 11% of the women found the buddy system a source of solidarity and friendship. As hooks (1994) notes, creating a safe 'woman space', 'where we can engage in open critical dialogue with one another, where we can debate and discuss without fear of emotional collapse, where we can hear and know one another in the difference and complexities of our experience, is essential' for political solidarity and moving the feminist movement forward (p. 110).

Dialogic and participatory learning in a supportive environment created by relations between paired canvassers also encouraged canvassers to listen to and sometimes disclose personal experiences on the doorstep. As an experiential form of knowledge creation, story-telling resulted in powerful moments of self- and social-transformation. As hooks (2010) describes, 'stories help us engage with the complexities of conflict and paradox . . . Stories also help us heal' (p. 52). All through

the campaign, activism solicited stories as one member remembered: ‘I heard so many personal stories once I held a banner’. One canvasser reported that ‘our arguments were based on compassion and real life experience’. Another said that they were told by their partner on their ‘first day of canvassing that speaking about why I was pro-choice and speaking from the heart would sway people which was something I was nervous about’. Nervous or not, confidence grew. One activist ‘learned from my co-canvassers’, including ‘those with personal experiences of how the 8th amendment affected them (oftentimes this was shared proactively rather than me asking as I felt it was important never to ask anyone why they were canvassing)’.

Engaging in conversations with undecided voters was a significant way to break the silence and denial surrounding abortion in their local communities. It drew citizens into conversations based on the knowledges and experiences of both canvassers and local residents, and became part of the doorstep education. As another canvasser explained:

Personal stories and individual experiences that weren’t readily available on television or even on the web were key to the success of the campaign, and speaking with DBN members on a daily basis would produce different stories about how the 8th amendment has affected them personally. I took these on board when developing arguments and they were highly effective in both educating the other side about the reality of what they were trying to defend, and in manifesting to ordinary and somewhat apolitical individuals just why they should vote yes.

This feeling of solidarity is the essence of the participatory learning in feminist pedagogy: the experienced activist and the newbie each generated insights from shared experiences that can be framed as liberatory knowledge. There can be few more engaged forms of learning than trying to explain your evolving views to strangers who may not fully appreciate your standpoint. It takes creativity and courage, and the support of others.

Conclusion

It was incredibly fulfilling. I think it is one of the best things I ever did. I never canvassed door to door or anything before so really pushed myself. Also the sense of belonging and support was important to me as this was a difficult personal issue close to my heart’. -- DBN member survey response, June 2018

When women speak about abortion in Ireland: ‘There are so many things unsaid. So many stories remain hidden in Ireland, swept under the carpet, nudged into the shadows, silence out of shame and pain’ (Mullally, 2018, p. 5). Canvassing for choice allowed some people to share these hidden stories with strangers. As a feminist pedagogy, it embodied decades of activism and annealed through an intense national debate about women’s rights over their own bodies. Our survey indicated that canvassing offered new insights into the Repeal campaign, developed political strategies and useful arguments, and empowered our members to ‘find their voice’. The DBN paired buddy system in particular built confidence, served to integrate members into the group, resulted in friendships, and created a level of group

camaraderie that might not necessarily have been fostered by our other activities, such as attending meetings or using social media. By creating safe feminist spaces through dialogues while walking on the streets being canvassed, our buddy system allowed women to share and make political use of their personal insights and stories as part of a national campaign. This transformative experience, moreover, created a new cohort of empowered activists. Through experiential and participatory forms of learning, a new group of people were drawn into political participation, many of whom will continue to be active in years to come.

Acknowledgements

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Notes

¹ All authors are members the Dublin Bay North Choice and Equality Network research working group, and were participants in the DBN Repeal/Together for Yes activist group. Callan, Kearns and Till are members of the Department of Geography, Maynooth University. Antosik-Parsons is affiliated with Humanities Institute, University College Dublin.

² Following the vote, with other DBN members, we formed a research group aiming to document and tell the story of our group's history and campaign from the perspective of our members. We are currently organised as the DBN Choice and Equality Network.

³ The eleven taken here as Dublin comprise: Dublin Bay North, Dublin Bay South, Dublin Central, Dublin-Fingal, Dublin Mid-West, Dublin North-West, Dublin-Rathdown, Dublin South-Central, Dublin South-West, Dublin West, and Dún Laoghaire.

⁴ The census data for the Dublin constituencies is part of the Small Area Statistics produced for the Census of 2016: <http://census.cso.ie/sapmap/> (accessed 4 October 2018).

⁵ The breakdown of religion by age is given for the state in Statbank, Profile 8, Table E8078; <https://www.cso.ie/px/pxeirestat/Database/eirestat/Profile 8 - Irish Travellers>

Ethnicity and Religion/Profile 8 - Irish Travellers Ethnicity and Religion_statbank.asp?

⁶ The eleven in 1983 are Dublin Central, Dublin North, Dublin North-Central, Dublin North-East, Dublin North-West, Dublin South, Dublin South-Central, Dublin South-East, Dublin South-West, Dublin West, and Dún Laoghaire. This area is significantly smaller than the unit taken for 2018 as the boundaries of the Dublin region have extended and while Dublin North-Central and Dublin North-East were amalgamated, Dublin-Fingal was added to the north of them.

⁷ The share of electorate voting in favour of abortion rights is the valid vote against the Eighth Amendment in 1983 and in favour of Repeal in 2018. The margin in favour of abortion rights is the share of the valid votes that were for abortion rights minus the share of the valid votes that were against abortion rights.

⁸ While the group did change its official name, it maintained independence from the national-level group. In this chapter, we use the short-hand DBN Repeal.

⁹ Membership estimated from social media. A voluntary online survey of group members was conducted in June 2018 on the nature, engagement and experiences of our members.

¹⁰ For a thorough history of women's rights in Ireland, see: Connolly (2001); Connolly and O'Toole (2005).

¹¹ Some DBN members are involved with other activist groups including ROSA, ARC and IHN.

¹² WERRC was founded by Ailbhe Smyth.