

# **Pregnancy termination for fetal abnormality: Ambivalence at the heart of women's experience**

## **Abstract**

The aim of this article is to demonstrate the centrality of ambivalence in women's experience of pregnancy termination for fetal abnormality (TFA). Data were collected from two qualitative studies conducted in England and France with women who had undergone TFA (n = 44). The findings point to eight manifestations of ambivalence throughout the process of TFA: hope and despair, a choice but no choice, standing still and rushing, bonding and detaching, trauma and peace, disclosure and secrecy, bridging past and future, and individual and societal experience. Women's ambivalence illustrates their internal struggle to reconcile the act of termination with their desire to become mothers. It also reflects societal tensions regarding abortion and disability. We argue that the absence of normative responses, social desirability bias and the potentially confusing coexistence of the fields of prenatal diagnosis and social integration of people with disability account for the ambivalence women feel as they go through TFA. As women's ambivalence may impact upon the way they adjust to TFA, it is important to remain cognisant of the complexity of TFA to support women appropriately.

**Keywords:** termination of pregnancy, fetal abnormality, qualitative, ambivalence,

## **Introduction**

The present article is based on a series of studies which aimed to investigate women's experience of pregnancy termination for fetal abnormality (TFA). Our research endeavour started with the completion of a doctoral thesis in psychology conducted in England, and was later complemented by research carried out as part of a large programme on prenatal diagnosis in France which involved a multidisciplinary team of researchers. Our aim in this article is to

26 illustrate the ambivalence expressed by women who undergo TFA, as well as the processes that  
27 underpin it. Our focus on ambivalence is based upon the fact that it is one of the most prevalent  
28 phenomena observed in our studies, and that it may represent a significant challenge to  
29 women's adjustment to TFA and/or their help-seeking behaviour.

30

### 31 **Termination of pregnancy for fetal abnormality in context**

32 In Europe, termination of pregnancy for fetal abnormality (TFA) concerns on average 4.6 per  
33 1.000 births. TFA is three times more common than stillbirths and infant deaths combined  
34 (Boyle et al., 2018). The prevalence of TFA varies widely between countries, which reflects  
35 differences in professional and legal frameworks as well as attitudes and beliefs towards TFA  
36 (Zeitlin et al., 2013). In England<sup>1</sup>, TFA represents 2% of all terminations (3,158 in 2017;  
37 Department of Health [DH], 2018). In France this percentage rises to 4% (7,084 in 2015; Agence  
38 de la Biomédecine, 2016).

39 In England as in France, there is currently no time limit for pregnancy termination if  
40 there is a serious risk that if the baby was born, he would be severely handicapped (Ground E of  
41 Abortion Act, 1967; Ministère de la santé, 1975). In contrast to the French law, the English law  
42 had initially fixed a term of 28 weeks of gestation for all terminations, including those for fetal  
43 abnormalities. In 1992, the threshold was reduced to 24 weeks, but with no time limit in case of  
44 fetal anomalies. This difference is reflected in practice with TFAs conducted at a later gestational  
45 age in France compared to England<sup>2</sup>. However, the professional practices surrounding the  
46 process of termination show a high level of similarity between the two countries. These include

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<sup>1</sup> England and Wales form an entity separate from the rest of the UK in terms of health, whilst the Abortion Act covers England, Wales and Scotland. For simplicity purposes, we will refer to England throughout the article.

<sup>2</sup> In France, 36.9% of TFAs occur after 22 weeks of gestation, whereas in England only 7.8% of all TFAs are conducted after 24 weeks (Agence de la Biomédecine, 2016; Department of Health, 2018).

47 the protocols that frame TFA (e.g. methods of termination) as well as the practices surrounding  
48 bereavement care (e.g. use of photos, hand and foot prints).

49

### 50 **TFA as a specific type of pregnancy loss**

51 TFA shares many characteristics with other pregnancy losses such as miscarriages and  
52 stillbirths, but it also differs from them in very significant ways. In all cases, parents lose a child  
53 before birth, at a time when they would normally rejoice. Evidence also suggests that parental  
54 grief reactions following TFA are similar to those following other types of pregnancy losses  
55 (Keefe-Cooperman, 2005). However, TFA differs from miscarriage and stillbirth in that parents  
56 elect to terminate their pregnancy, and from abortion for non-medical reasons in that the  
57 pregnancy is, in most cases, wanted and the decision is based upon characteristics of the fetus.

58 Furthermore, the loss following TFA is generally not recognised by society in the same  
59 way other bereavements are. In many cases, the baby<sup>3</sup> remains ‘invisible’ to the outside world  
60 and many parents feel that their grief is disenfranchised (Doka, 1989). Parents may find it  
61 difficult to disclose that they have chosen to end the pregnancy and publicly mourn their loss  
62 (Leichtentritt, 2011; Maguire, Light, Kuppermann, Dalton, Steinauer, & Kerns, 2015), as they  
63 have to contend with the incongruence (either experienced by themselves and/or by others)  
64 between the decision to terminate the pregnancy and the feeling of loss.

65 TFA also bears a unique moral component. Being a form of abortion, TFA is intrinsically  
66 linked to the polarised debate about abortion and the opposing views regarding the rights of the  
67 women versus those of the fetus (Sharp & Earle, 2002). The dichotomy between these two  
68 positions has been described as one between those who have rights and those who have  
69 morality (Ludlow, 2008). The fact that the decision to terminate the pregnancy is based upon

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<sup>3</sup> Throughout the article, the term baby has been used to render the perspective of the women who participated in our studies and used this terminology.

70 disability-related considerations adds to the moral dimension of TFA as it raises ethical  
71 questions such as ‘whose right it is to make a decision’ or ‘what kind of life is worth living’.  
72 Although both advocates of women’s rights and the rights of people living with a disability agree  
73 that the abortion law should not differentiate between reasons for terminating the pregnancy  
74 (medical versus non-medical) they are still at odds on whether TFA represents a basic human  
75 right exercised by the woman, or a eugenic practice (Sharp & Earle, 2002).

76 Finally, unlike other pregnancy losses, TFA is a relatively new phenomenon, which results  
77 from policies of mass screening developed in the 1970’s and the legalisation of abortion (in 1967  
78 in England and 1975 in France). Therefore, the experiential knowledge of how to deal with it is  
79 limited as women cannot turn to older generation for advice. This also means that there are, as  
80 yet, no normative responses to this type of loss or no social scripts on how to deal with it  
81 (McCoyd, 2009).

82

### 83 **Psychosocial consequences of TFA**

84 Several studies suggest that TFA has a significant impact upon women on three levels. First, at  
85 the individual or intra-personal level, TFA is generally experienced as a traumatic event, akin to  
86 an existential crisis (Sandelowsky & Barroso, 2005; Lafarge, Mitchell & Fox, 2014), which can  
87 have long-term, negative psychological consequences for women. These consequences have  
88 been well documented and include symptoms of depression, posttraumatic stress (Kersting et  
89 al., 2009; Korenromp et al., 2007) and complicated grief (Kersting et al., 2007; Nazaré, Fonseca,  
90 & Canavarro, 2013). Feelings of guilt relating to the decision are also prominent among women  
91 (Nazaré, Fonseca, & Canavarro, 2014). A systematic review of the qualitative evidence on  
92 women’s experiences of TFA (Lafarge et al., 2014) indicates that many women feel unprepared  
93 for the severity and duration of the emotional pain following TFA. Many feel powerless over  
94 their situation and isolated in their experience, particularly when support is seldom available.

95 The review also indicates that some women question their identity, between that of a bereaved  
96 mother versus that of a woman who has lost a pregnancy, with at its core the concept of  
97 personhood attributed (or not) to the fetus (Parsons, 2010). Some women also question their  
98 body for producing an imperfect pregnancy.

99 The impact of TFA upon women can also be felt at an inter-personal level, as women  
100 reassess their relationships with others. Research suggests that women's partners also  
101 experience difficulties following TFA, and that they tend to grieve differently for the loss of the  
102 baby after TFA, with women experiencing more intense grief than their partners (Nazaré et al.,  
103 2013, 2014). Although in some cases, the TFA experience brings partners closer together, at  
104 least initially, these differences can contribute to increasing women's feelings of isolation  
105 (Nazaré et al., 2013, 2014). TFA also impacts upon women's relationships with their friends,  
106 family and colleagues, which is usually contingent on the level of support women feel they  
107 receive. A perception of limited support or lack of understanding can significantly alienate  
108 women.

109 Finally, TFA also has an impact upon women's perception and engagement with the  
110 world. Some women have described the experience of TFA as a loss of innocence (Rillstone &  
111 Hutchinson, 2001). In line with Janoff-Bullman's shattered assumptions theory (1992), women's  
112 visions of the world are irremediably altered by their TFA experience (Lafarge et al., 2014;  
113 McCoyd, 2007). Women engage in a process of rebuilding their world views whilst  
114 accommodating their TFA experience. The fact that TFA is linked to the abortion and eugenics  
115 debate can also make the experience stigma-bearing (Hanschmidt, Trembl, Klingner, Stepan, &  
116 Kersting, 2018; Maguire et al., 2015), which adds another level of complexity and further  
117 alienates women.

118

119 **Ambivalence at the heart of the TFA experience**

120 In England and France, the experience of TFA follows a sequential series of events or  
121 experiences which include the diagnosis, the decision-making process, the procedure, the  
122 immediate aftermath and the long-term adjustment. Each point brings its own set of challenges  
123 including: waiting for the diagnosis, reaching a decision about the pregnancy, making decisions  
124 about the procedure, whether to see the baby or not, what to do with the baby's remains, what  
125 to disclose to others, how to grieve for the pregnancy and/or the baby, how to deal with a new  
126 pregnancy and how to adjust long-term (Hunt, France, Ziebland, Field, & Wyke, 2009; Rapp,  
127 2000). Each point is characterised by conflicting feelings and emotions, or even uncertainty  
128 about how to feel about the experience. It is this ambivalence and the tensions it generates  
129 which is the focus of this article. The aim of this article is, therefore, to demonstrate the  
130 relevance of ambivalence to the experience of TFA. Data from two qualitative studies conducted  
131 with women who had undergone TFA, one in England, the other in France, have been used to  
132 convey and illustrate the ambivalence that characterises the TFA experience.

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134

### **Research methodology**

135 This article is based on two datasets gathered as part of the first author's doctoral thesis  
136 conducted in England and, of a wider research programme on the practice and experience of  
137 prenatal diagnosis in France. The larger project was led by the third author and involved all  
138 three authors alongside a multidisciplinary team of French academics. The article's stance, the  
139 theories and the majority of the literature cited in this article are rooted in the discipline of  
140 psychology. However, where relevant, we have also borrowed concepts and literature from  
141 sociology and the feminist paradigm.

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### **Study 1**

146 The first study was carried out in England and consisted of an online qualitative questionnaire  
147 conducted amongst women who had undertaken TFA. The study methodology has been

148 reported in detail elsewhere (Anonymised for peer review), therefore only the key  
149 methodological points are mentioned in this paper. Women were recruited from a UK-based  
150 organisation that provides support to parents when an anomaly in their babies is identified in-  
151 utero. A message advertising the study was posted on the online forum of the support  
152 organisation and disseminated through the email network. To be eligible to the study women  
153 had to be over 18 years old and had undergone TFA. No time limit was put on when the  
154 termination had occurred. Altogether, twenty seven women took part in the study between  
155 2010 and 2011. The topic guide included 12 open-ended questions exploring what the  
156 termination meant for women, what coping strategies they used at the time of the termination  
157 and afterwards, how their experience was influenced by time, and what their plans and hopes  
158 for the future were.

## 159 160 **Study 2**

161 The second study was a qualitative study conducted in France as part of a larger research  
162 programme about women's experience of prenatal diagnosis (Funding details anonymised for  
163 peer review). The project used a mixed methods approach and comprised an online quantitative  
164 questionnaire to which over 1,500 women responded, followed up by in-depth interviews with  
165 women who had agreed to be re-contacted. Using purposive sampling, 107 women were invited  
166 for an interview to explore their experience further. Of those, 69 were interviewed. It is as part  
167 of this qualitative phase that 17 women were interviewed about their experience of TFA. Data  
168 were collected between May 2015 and May 2017 through face-to-face and telephone  
169 interviews. Participants were invited to provide a narrative of their experience, and questions  
170 were used to elicit feedback on: the way the diagnosis and prognosis were presented; the  
171 information provided (e.g. about the condition and how it may translate after birth); the  
172 interactions with practitioners; the role of the entourage and the media; and the process that

173 led to the decision to terminate the pregnancy. Interviews were recorded and transcribed  
174 verbatim.

175  
176 The studies used different methods of data collection. The data collected through online  
177 narratives (Study 1) generated reflective accounts and provided insights into the meaning  
178 women attributed to their experience. Nevertheless, the data did not offer the same level of  
179 detail as the data collected through in-depth interviews (Study 2). By contrast, although  
180 interviewing participants enabled the researchers to collect more granular data (through  
181 probing), the topic guide was broader and less focused on the meaning of women's experience.  
182 However, both studies generated rich data and both achieved data saturation.

#### 183 184 **Data analysis**

185 For the purpose of this article, data were analysed using thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke,  
186 2006). Thematic analysis (TA) was selected as a method of analysis because of its flexibility. TA  
187 can be used inductively (bottom up) and deductively (top down) as well as across data sets. As  
188 the aim of the present analysis was to explore the manifestation of ambivalence, conflicts and  
189 uncertainty during the TFA experience across both datasets, TA was deemed the most  
190 appropriate method. The analytical process closely followed the guidelines recommended by  
191 Braun and Clarke (2006). Both sets of transcripts were read several times, initial codes and  
192 themes were generated, themes were defined and labelled (and later relabelled when deemed  
193 necessary) and quotations were selected to illustrate the themes. The results of the analysis  
194 were also considered within the literature on TFA and abortion more generally. Where relevant,  
195 evidence from the literature was incorporated to support the article's narrative. To protect the  
196 participants' identity, names have been changed to pseudonyms and any identifiable  
197 information has been removed. All references to babies have been made using the masculine



198 pronoun. The analysis identified that most themes were present in both datasets, therefore,  
199 quotes from both studies have been used to illustrate these.

200           Given the similarity of the professional practices surrounding TFA between the two  
201 countries, our approach in this article is not comparative. Our aim is to illustrate the  
202 manifestations of ambivalence observed in both datasets, rather than seeking to link these  
203 manifestations to the modes of regulation and organisation of care in each country.

204

205

## **Results and discussion**

### **Participant's profile**

206           The profiles of participants of both studies are displayed in Table 1 and Table 2.

207           In both studies, women participants tended to be well-educated, with 17 out of 27 and 12 out of  
208 17 educated at degree level and beyond in the English and French study respectively. On  
209 average, pregnancies were terminated at an earlier gestational age in the English study  
210 compared to the French one: 19 weeks of gestation (range 12-30) versus 26 weeks (range 12-  
211 36). Reasons for terminating the pregnancies varied. In the French sample, most of the  
212 pregnancies were terminated because of genetic/chromosomal anomalies (13 out of 17), with  
213 the other pregnancies terminated because of structural abnormalities. In the British sample,  
214 reasons for terminating the pregnancy were more even; seven pregnancies were terminated for  
215 genetic/chromosomal anomalies, seven for structural anomalies and four for other reasons (e.g.  
216 hormone imbalance, mixed reasons).

217

218

### **Analysis**

219           The data analysis identified eight significant points at which women experience ambivalence,  
220 from the moment a severe abnormality is suspected to sometimes long after the termination.

221           These manifestations of ambivalence, tension and conflicts can be depicted as: hope and  
222

223 despair, a choice but no choice, standing still and rushing, bonding and detaching, trauma and  
224 peace, disclosure and secrecy, bridging past and future, and individual and societal experience.

225

### 226 ***Hope and despair***

227 Across both datasets, the discovery of a severe anomaly represents the first tension and source  
228 of ambivalence in women's experience of TFA. Women usually start their pregnancy hopeful  
229 that everything will be fine and in the belief that taking good care of themselves will guarantee  
230 a positive pregnancy outcome (McCoyd, 2007). They have started to plan their future and  
231 formed an image of their baby in their mind. The suspicion or the discovery of an anomaly,  
232 therefore, comes as a shock. It shakes women's sense of security and destroys their hopes and  
233 plans for the future: "*We had hopes for our future as a family and saw ourselves as parents from*  
234 *when I was pregnant*" (Lucy, UK).

235 From that point, women embark on a journey of uncertainty, over which they feel they have no  
236 control:

237 *"There is this feeling of having put your finger in a sort of thing that will sweep you away*  
238 *and which, in any cases, is called a tragedy. So I, I try to believe in it a little and have a*  
239 *little bit of hope, but deep down I don't"* (Lara, FR).

240

241 This state of shock is usually compounded by the fact that many women are unaware that  
242 ultrasounds examinations are an integral part of the screening process: "*The second trimester*  
243 *ultrasound, I had no idea that it was a screening test*" (Florence, FR). This also includes the third  
244 (and usually last) ultrasound in France conducted at around 33 weeks of gestation. At this point,  
245 women tend to feel 'safe' in their pregnancy and allow themselves to look forward to the  
246 future: "*At the last ultrasound, honestly you don't ask yourself any more questions. The last*  
247 *ultrasound, for me, is just to control [that all is well], and the pleasure to see your baby*" (Clara,  
248 FR).

249  
250 Until a diagnosis is given, women harbour concurrent feelings of hope and despair. They are still  
251 hopeful for a positive outcome but worried about the potential decisions to come. This is  
252 Laura's case (UK) who, when hearing about of her baby's anomalies, starts planning for logistic  
253 and material adjustments whilst still hopeful the outcome may be manageable. However, as  
254 further tests demonstrate the gravity of the situation, her hope gradually turns into despair:

255 *"She said that our baby had [major structural anomalies]. (...) First I thought we could*  
256 *work around this. (...) I had thoughts about having a stair lift in the future, ramps,*  
257 *teaching the child how to use these. (...) I thought that [other child] would be a loving*  
258 *sibling and really helpful but then had to question how he would deal with having a*  
259 *sibling who needed so much, and the affect this may have on him. (...) The decision was*  
260 *agonising."*

261  
262 In some cases, the coexistence of hope and despair resemble a roller coaster, a term that has  
263 been used to characterise women's experience in the TFA literature (Bryar, 1997):

264 *"The day of the CVS, the measure of the nuchal translucency had decreased a little bit. So*  
265 *the nurse said to me 'there is some positive [news].' So, hope came bouncing back. The*  
266 *Saturday, two days later, someone called to tell me that it was Down's syndrome. A*  
267 *catastrophe" (Marie, FR).*

268  
269 In many cases, the first suspicion that all may not be well signals the end of innocence (Rillstone  
270 & Hutchinson, 2001) with women facing an uncertain future and difficult decisions to make, not  
271 least, about the management of the pregnancy. As the pregnancy's outcome no longer matches  
272 their initial expectations, women are left wondering which other areas of their life they may  
273 harbour a false sense of security for.

274

275 The discovery of the anomaly represents the starting point in the TFA journey, and is  
276 characterised by uncertainty and the coexistence of mixed emotions. For women, it is often a  
277 brutal reminder that reproduction is not a process with a guaranteed positive outcome.

278

279 ***A choice but no choice***

280 Ambivalence is also manifest in the decision to terminate the pregnancy as it involves conflicting  
281 feelings between doing the right thing, whilst wishing one never had to make that decision: "*I*  
282 *ended the life of my baby and I wanted him so much*" (Gemma, UK). The decision-making  
283 process following the discovery of a fetal anomaly has been described in the literature as "a  
284 Sophie's choice", a "travesty of choosing", "chosen loss and lost choices" (Sandelowski &  
285 Barroso, 2005). In both studies, women also describe the decision-making process as a no-  
286 choice since it offers no positive outcome: "*You are damned whatever you do*" (Wendy, UK).  
287 For many, the decision is about choosing the least awful scenario, or between "terrible and  
288 horrible" (Rillstone & Hutchinson, 2001).

289

290 To reach a decision, women have to balance a number of considerations that are often in  
291 contradiction with each other, such as their desire to have a healthy baby with their desire to  
292 spare their child a life of suffering: "*I had too much information that told me that it could be very*  
293 *hard, very painful for him and that his life could be just one of suffering. I could not take that risk*  
294 *for him. It was too much*" (Marie, FR). Women also have to balance their own projections of  
295 what a life with a disabled child may be like with what they know of their own coping processes  
296 and resources, and those around them: "*I was concerned that I may become depressed. I do not*  
297 *follow a faith, and feel that I would not have that strong faith to offer our baby to help him come*  
298 *through tough times*" (Laura, UK).

299

300 For many, the decision-making process is a struggle between heart and mind: *"It was hard to*  
301 *separate heart and head when making the decision"* Zoe (UK). In some cases, the option to  
302 terminate directly conflicts with what they had previously expected they would do in that  
303 situation: *"I had always thought that termination, in whatever circumstances, was completely*  
304 *wrong. Now I had to face the fact that I'd had one"* (Justine, UK). The decision to terminate can  
305 also conflict with personal beliefs *"I also have conflicts with my Christian faith and this is*  
306 *probably a cause of my current conflict"* (Gemma, UK). It can also divide partners. For example,  
307 Marie (FR) and her partner disagreed on which decision to make. Whilst her partner considered  
308 terminating the pregnancy as *"a selfish act driven by a desire not create problems for oneself"*  
309 Marie believed the opposite: *"If I had been really selfish, I would have kept him. (...) I had too*  
310 *much information telling me that it could be very hard. (...) I couldn't take that risk for him."*  
311  
312 As women struggle to reconcile those conflicting considerations, some opt to frame their  
313 decision as an *"act of love"* (Ingrid, FR) towards the baby: *"I don't want him to suffer, I don't*  
314 *want him to be in pain"* (Inès, FR). Yet, they also know that this is a decision that, in some cases,  
315 denies life and opportunities: *"Yes he would have been in a very bad state, but he was viable*  
316 *and it's like I did not give him any chance"* (Céline, FR). Thus, some women compare their act to  
317 compassionate euthanasia, which illustrates the tension they experience:

318 *"There comes a point, I suppose (not that I have ever had this experience), where there is*  
319 *no hope of recovery, no hope of anything approaching a normal life, no hope of progress.*  
320 *Then it is probably the kindest thing to turn off the machine. That's what I did for my*  
321 *baby, in a way – I turned off the life support that was the pregnancy"* (Sally, UK).

322  
323 Ambivalence regarding the decision can remain after the termination: *"Up until this point [the*  
324 *post-mortem results] we were never sure of the extent of the abnormalities and we tortured*

325 ourselves with the “what ifs” (Beatrice, UK). Some women still question their decision long after  
326 the termination:

327 *“It was the right decision for us at the time, but the wrong decision for our child. That*  
328 *hurts so much and I wish it didn't (...) I try not to have regrets, but I do. I know I could*  
329 *have had a baby, even with disability”* (Gemma, UK).

330  
331 Even when they believe that they have made the right decision, women can find it hard to  
332 accept their decision: *“I have played God and unlawfully killed my baby but it was for the correct*  
333 *reasons. It just does not ever seems right”* (Ellie, UK), and remain uncertain about the future: *“I*  
334 *feel like we are in limbo, as in an addition to losing a child, we had plans to move and I was*  
335 *considering giving up work”* (Yvonne, UK).

336  
337 The ambivalence expressed by women about the decision to terminate the pregnancy, even  
338 when the decision appears to be the most appropriate for them, illustrates women’s difficulty in  
339 exercising their right to terminate the pregnancy within a social context that personifies the  
340 fetus increasingly early (through ultrasound examinations), and where popular discourses  
341 around the fetus’ right to life are widespread (Purcell, Hilton, & McDaid, 2014). Women’s  
342 ambivalence is compounded by the fact that most diagnoses only offer an insight into what the  
343 impairment will actually translate into (Whitmarsh, David, Skinner, & Bailey, 2007).

344  
345 ***Standing still versus rushing***

346 Women’s relation to time during the process of TFA represents the third source of ambivalence,  
347 with time appearing either static or hurried, and/or women wishing to speed up or slow down  
348 the process. Women generally describe their experience of getting the diagnosis as their world  
349 coming to a halt:

350 *“The moment I was told my baby had trisomy 21, my world stopped. Everything stopped,*  
351 *there were no birds, nothing in the sky and the trees did not even seem to be moving .... I*

352           *remember looking at the world and thinking how dare the world carry on as if nothing has*  
353           *happened” (Ulrika, UK).*

354

355 This sense of ‘time being suspended’ or being ‘out of time’ is particularly manifest when the  
356 diagnosis is protracted and women’s experience is paced by the sequence of investigations that  
357 have to be carried out to reach a diagnosis; a process Beatrice (UK) describes as “*a waiting game.*”  
358 Laura echoes this sentiment:

359           *“These five weeks, I am in this kind of spatio-temporal tunnel. I do not see at all, I’m not...*  
360           *I am not aware of anything. I do not know what day it is, if it’s the weekend, not the*  
361           *weekend” (Lara, FR).*

362

363 The duality of time standing still versus rushing can, in some cases, be experienced concurrently:

364           *“There is a side that takes a long time and there is the other side: the teams of doctors, one must*  
365           *acts quickly” (Lara, FR). Anne (FR) also describes this temporal process between the discovery that*  
366           *"something was not right" at 22 weeks of gestation and the termination at 32 weeks. Of her 10*  
367           *weeks wait to get a diagnosis she says: "it is urgent to wait: At the same time, one does not have*  
368           *much time to lose and at the same time, one must not go too fast either.”*

369

370 Women’s perceptions of time are often shaped by practical constraints such as the time needed  
371 to conduct further tests to confirm the diagnosis, or the necessity to proceed rapidly if the woman  
372 is to have a surgical termination (usually carried out in the first trimester of pregnancy in both  
373 England and France):

374           *“She [the midwife] told me: ‘In 2 days it’s the aspiration, we’re going to take the tablets*  
375           *now.’ Until then, I was saying ‘I have to turn the page quickly, it has to be quick.’ In fact, I*  
376           *completely froze. It was too fast (...) when they saw that I was completely stuck, they told*  
377           *me: ‘it is not an obligation, you have a choice.’ But they had planned everything. They*

378 *already had the tablets on the desk. Because I was at the limit. I was 14 weeks' pregnant*  
379 *so at the limit for a curettage by aspiration" (Marie, FR).*

380  
381 Women's perceptions of time in the context of TFA often generates tensions, with some women  
382 wanting to accelerate the process. This is the case of Ingrid (FR), who wanted to put an end to her  
383 baby's suffering and avoid getting her hopes up: *"The desire to speed up the termination process*  
384 *was also linked to the idea that one had to put an end to the baby's suffering: one had to stop her*  
385 *suffering and not give me any hope."* By contrast, this suspended temporality can be welcome  
386 and seen as necessary to reach a decision or start coming to terms with the situation: *"The delay*  
387 *[10 day delay] meant that my husband and I had time to come to terms with what was happening.*  
388 *I didn't feel it was rushed and I felt better equipped to cope" Beatrice (UK).*

389  
390 The perception of being rushed can be experienced as painful and bring regrets: *"It would have*  
391 *been better to give me more time to digest, say goodbye to my baby, etc. But it really is down to*  
392 *the individual. Me, I had this guilt (...) I could have accompanied him a little bit more" (Maud, FR).*

393 In some cases, women actively slow down the process of termination. When Marie's (FR) baby is  
394 diagnosed with Down's syndrome at 14 weeks of gestation, she rejects the surgical option in  
395 favour of a medical termination, which enables her to give birth:

396 *"At first, I was not sure, I wanted it to be quick but once I knew [the diagnosis], I didn't*  
397 *want it to be quick in fact. I don't know why. In fact, it became concrete and until then I*  
398 *was hoping, so I was telling myself: any way, it is not possible. When it became concrete I*  
399 *told myself: I want... first I wanted to respect his body. We all have our quirks I think, but I*  
400 *didn't want him to be reduced to a thousand pieces. It was my priority to keep him whole.*  
401 *(...) I didn't want to rush things. I did not want to get rid of him."*

402



403 Women's ambivalence with time is also present after the termination with some women rushing  
404 to get back to their activities, but regretting it later on: *"Going back to work too soon was a major*  
405 *'no-no'. I went back after 4 weeks – I should have taken twice as much time off work"* (Beatrice,  
406 UK).

407  
408 The tensions women experience between standing still and rushing reflect the difficulty in  
409 processing the termination cognitively and emotionally. It is also rooted in social practices that  
410 form the backdrop of women's experience such as the term at which a baby can be registered  
411 and thus be conferred a social identity, and/or in medical practices which are used at different  
412 times during pregnancy (e.g. surgical versus medical termination).

413  
414 ***Bonding versus detaching***

415 The fourth source of tension or ambivalence is women's relation to their baby. From the  
416 moment an anomaly is suspected, women are conflicted between the states of continuing  
417 *"giving life while thinking about taking it"* (Leichtentritt, 2011). As they wait for the diagnosis,  
418 women find themselves in a state of limbo, unsure about the way they ought to relate to the  
419 baby. Lara (FR) describes her difficulty in establishing for herself how to care for her baby as the  
420 investigations are ongoing:

421 *"And this baby? And this baby who is alive? This live baby in my tummy? And you don't*  
422 *know what's going to happen... perhaps the worst, probably... but may be also some*  
423 *good? And even if the worse happens, we're in the middle of investigations that are*  
424 *going to last for a while, so I can't completely... the only thing I was able to do to take*  
425 *care, so to speak, of this child, well of this baby was to remain lying down, rest and try to*  
426 *eat well."*

427  
428 As they wait for a diagnosis, women are torn between attachment and detachment towards  
429 their baby and *"fighting love for their baby"* (Bryar, 1997):

430 *"I think that all night I tried to say to myself: that's it, I don't love him anymore, I have to*  
431 *stop loving him, I have to stop loving him. And then I think he never moved more than*  
432 *that night. And then I said to myself: no, it's not possible, I still have 1%, 1% chance that*  
433 *he has nothing"* (Claire, FR).

434  
435 Once the decision to terminate is made, women generally have to wait a few days for the  
436 procedure to take place. This period brings its own set of tensions as women continue to carry  
437 life whilst anticipating death:

438 *"It was a weird sensation. Being happy, being sad, trying to feel all the little joys. I*  
439 *hummed, I listened to music, as if he was going to live, as if I was going to welcome him.*  
440 *It was weird. At the same time, I was crying and explaining to him. I was explaining to*  
441 *him what was going to happen"* (Claire, FR).

442  
443 From the state of pregnancy during which they form a unit with the baby, women have to  
444 separate and learn to 'become one again.' During pregnancy, many women engage in unspoken  
445 dialogues with their baby, who in most cases, they can feel moving. Some describe a symbiotic  
446 relationship in which emotions are shared: *"All I thought about, in my head was, not to be*  
447 *afraid, not to be afraid. Not to be afraid, not to make him sense my fear"* (Claire, FR). In parallel,  
448 women also watch for any signs that the baby may be communicating with them as illustrated  
449 by Claire's quotation above.

450  
451 For terminations after 21 weeks of gestation a feticide is usually recommended, which generally  
452 consists of an injection in the fetal heart, amniotic fluid or umbilical cord to stop the baby's  
453 heart. Whilst the feticide is usually carried out on the day of the delivery in France, it is  
454 conducted two days before in England. Thus, in England, after the feticide, women are sent  
455 home for 48 hours. This period presents some challenges to women who find themselves

456 suspended between two realities, as they continue to carry their dead baby whilst the outside  
457 world remains oblivious to their predicament:

458 *"I just took the tablets and was sent on my way to carry my dead son around in my*  
459 *tummy for two days until I had my termination"* (Megan, UK).

460 *"I was given a tablet to soften my cervix. The midwife spoke to us to prepare us for*  
461 *leaving the hospital saying life will be going on as normal all around you"* (Rose, UK).

462  
463 This duality between life and death is particularly salient when women carry twins and undergo  
464 a feticide on one of the babies. Pregnant with twins, one of which is affected by Down's  
465 syndrome, Alexandra (FR) undergoes a feticide on one of the twins at 32 weeks of gestation,  
466 two days before having a caesarean. In her case, feticide and childbirth are events combining  
467 both life and death:

468 *"I kept life and death in my belly for two days... two long days during which I suffered*  
469 *terribly morally. The weight of a dead baby in a tummy, this is a very strong feeling... It's*  
470 *downright horrible. It is a dead baby, who does not hold himself anymore, who collapses*  
471 *completely [in the stomach]. (...) Then I had an emergency caesarean section two days*  
472 *later... It was the most traumatic period, to keep the dead baby in my tummy for two*  
473 *days."*

474  
475 Ambivalence also characterises women's experience immediately after the procedure, for  
476 example in the decision whether to see the baby or not, which can be experienced as soothing,  
477 yet also distressing:

478 *"Seeing the baby was helpful in some ways as I was able to hold him and say goodbye.*  
479 *(...) But the reality is that he had died two days before and also had been very unwell, and*  
480 *also at a very early stage of development when he wouldn't normally have been born, so*

481            *he did look strange and that frightened me, I was scared to look at him and that made*  
482            *me feel guilty as if I didn't really love him as much as I should"* (Wendy, UK).

483  
484 The ambivalence as to whether to see the baby may be linked to professional practices which  
485 traditionally considered viewing the baby as facilitating the grieving process and actively  
486 promoted it (Sloan, Kirsh, & Mowbray, 2008). Although it is now acknowledged that viewing the  
487 baby or not has to be women's choice, the practice may still be engrained in some practitioners  
488 and some women may perceive it as being expected of them.

489  
490 Ambivalence is also present sometimes long after the termination as women are torn between  
491 their desire to resume a normal life and move on from their experience, and their wish to  
492 remember the baby: *"There are days when we say to ourselves: we have to move on and then*  
493 *there are days when we say to ourselves: we have no right to move on"* (Claire, FR). Ultimately  
494 women have to reconcile the duality of roles between the mother who brings life and the  
495 mother who denies it, with the latter labelled as counter-natural. This is Bonnie's (UK) opinion:  
496 *"Mothers are not supposed to kill their own children";* a view echoed by Isabelle (FR): *"It*  
497 *completely goes against nature. Normally we are supposed to bring life, not death. And we*  
498 *brought death. He did not die naturally, we brought him death."*

499  
500 Women find themselves suspended between two realities: one that empowers them through  
501 exercising their right to terminate the pregnancy, and the other that condemns them for it. The  
502 ambivalence women feel about bonding or not with the baby may also reflect the debates  
503 surrounding the concept of personhood of the fetus, and whether it is possible, or even  
504 desirable, for women to reconcile their right to abort and their wish to bond with the baby  
505 (Ludlow, 2008).

506  
507 ***Trauma and peace***

508 The birth of the baby represents another source of ambivalence for some women who consider  
509 it as a traumatic yet also peaceful experience. Women describe the feticide as the most traumatic  
510 part of their experience: *The pain of that needle going through my tummy and knowing I was*  
511 *stopping my baby's heartbeat was so bad*" (Ellie, UK). The anticipation of the birth can also fill  
512 women with fear, fear of the unknown and/or seeing the baby:

513 *"I was scared like when I was a kid, scared of the unknown. Then, like I said, I never gave*  
514 *birth, so one doesn't know what childbirth is. One is scared, and one's like: 'I'm going to*  
515 *suffer'; and then one thinks: 'We're going to see the baby, he's going to be dead, how's it*  
516 *going to be?'"* (Inès, FR).

517 Yet, Inès also describes the birth as a gentle moment: *"Childbirth for me was a moment of*  
518 *gentleness."* This view is echoed by Laura (UK) who describes giving birth as an unexpected  
519 peaceful moment: *"It was like meeting our lovely baby, almost a wonderful moment in a surreal*  
520 *setting. Almost proud parents but knowing that our baby was at peace now. It was very peaceful*  
521 *and special time."*

522  
523 The birth also contrasts with the rest of the TFA experience as women focus on bodily functions  
524 and sensations. It is a time where the body seems to temporarily take over the mind: *"During*  
525 *labour I just focussed on what I needed to do"* (Valentine, UK). To some women feeling the 'baby  
526 going through' is an opportunity to bond with their baby: *"I needed to be with him throughout*  
527 *and feel him"* (Theresa, UK). Others marvel at what their body has achieved: *"The delivery itself*  
528 *was not as traumatic as I thought it was going to be as I was amazed by body's capabilities"*  
529 (Beatrice, UK). Beatrice adds that the birth was a moment of *"euphoria as I felt that I had*  
530 *weathered the storm and survived"*, signalling the transition to the post-termination phase.

531  
532 Women's ambivalence about the birth exemplifies the coexistence of excitement at meeting the  
533 baby and fear of what the encounter might bring physically and emotionally. It may also reflect  
534

535 society's pervasive depiction of the birth as a joyful, yet risky phenomenon, which is manifest in  
536 the highly medicalised clinical practices surrounding birth (Scamell, 2014).

537

### 538 ***Disclosure and secrecy***

539 Whether to disclose what has happened to them and to whom, represents another source of  
540 ambivalence for women. Without disclosure, women cannot fully process their experience. They  
541 may also be unable to access adequate support. Yet many women are unsure about the  
542 appropriate level of disclosure, as they try to balance the need to be true to their experience  
543 with the risk of being judged. This explains why some women feel uncomfortable when their  
544 experience is labelled a miscarriage, a label they feel does not represent their experience: "*I*  
545 *found people often referred to me having a 'miscarriage' which was so incorrect*" (Olivia, UK).

546 However, at the same time, women are aware that the term termination may bring  
547 condemnation from others: "*I was careful not to tell everyone... I felt insecure about what*  
548 *judgments people would make about what we'd done*" (Bonnie, UK); a view echoed by Olivia  
549 (UK): "*It's also a matter of having to cope with facing people. Termination is a taboo subject, and*  
550 *unless you have found yourself in this situation, people are quite un-aware.*"

551

552 Another challenge women encounter in disclosing their experience is avoiding upsetting or  
553 putting people off: "*I love to talk about him and so that I can, I try to make it a pleasant subject*  
554 *so that people don't mind me talking about him*" (Gemma, UK). Regardless of whether they  
555 choose to disclose their full story or not, most women feel that their loss is not recognised by  
556 others and that their grief is disenfranchised, a concept discussed in the TFA literature (Bryar,  
557 1997; Leichtentritt, 2011; McCoyd, 2007). This societal inability to acknowledge women's grief  
558 following TFA leads women to feel isolated in their grief. It also means that they (and at times  
559 their partners) become the sole guardians of their baby's memory: "*We're the only ones to have*

560 *seen him, no one has any memory of this child and it is important, this memory. So it is difficult*  
561 *to carry a grief like that” (Claire, FR).*

562  
563 Some women start feeling at odds with their environment, particularly when their partner,  
564 friends and family expect them to resume a normal life: *“I feel extremely angry that people*  
565 *expect me to carry on as normal. I feel that no respect is being paid to my baby by this*  
566 *expectation” (Wendy, UK).* This furthers women’s sense of isolation and generates tensions  
567 within relationships that were once thought to be secure:

568 *“The support from my partner was very good during the termination and for about 6*  
569 *weeks afterwards. However, from that point our coping mechanisms have been very*  
570 *different and have put a massive strain on our relationship. He cannot understand why I*  
571 *still need to go for counselling, can’t understand why I have struggled with the arrivals of*  
572 *other babies and pregnancy announcements. This adds to my loneliness as I now cannot*  
573 *voice my sadness” (Christine, UK).*

574  
575 Women’s ambivalence at whether to disclose their story or not is grounded in the belief that  
576 should they choose to disclose it, they risk being misunderstood and/or judged for it. These  
577 experiences are testament to the stigma surrounding TFA, and more generally abortion, which is  
578 still pervasive (McGuinness, 2015). This stigma is reflected in highly emotive and moralising  
579 public discourses about abortion that focus on the risk posed by abortion on women’s wellbeing  
580 and provide a reductionist view about why women terminate their pregnancy (Purcell et al.,  
581 2014).

582  
583 ***Bridging past and future***

584 The TFA experience also generates tensions for women on how to reconcile past and present  
585 experiences with expectations for the future. In some cases, these tensions are present from  
586 the beginning of the pregnancy, even before any suspicion of abnormality is raised. Lara (FR) did

587 not fully invest in her pregnancy because she had had two miscarriages previously. Thus, for her,  
588 the baby was *“neither in the present nor in the future, in fact, he was nowhere.”*

589  
590 As the first suspicions that all may not be well with the pregnancy emerge, women start  
591 projecting themselves in a future without a baby who, in many cases, already carries their hopes  
592 and expectations and whose presence, physical or psychological, is already acutely felt:

593 *“Talking about the future without him whilst, first, we do not want to be without him and*  
594 *he is still there. I didn't yet feel him moving at the time, but hey, there are signs that*  
595 *attest of his presence. It's clear. And we have seen him, even if not that much. We've*  
596 *seen on the ultrasound, it's not a creation of the mind” (Marie, FR).*

597  
598 The aftermath of the termination represents another point of tension as women are conflicted  
599 between their desire to get better, resume a normal life and ‘move on’, and their desire not to  
600 forget their baby. Ellie (UK) is committed to keep her baby’s memory alive, but she also believes  
601 that she owes it to her baby to carry on living:

602 *“[Baby] will be in our lives every day, and I will light his candle and think about him each*  
603 *evening. Our lives need to continue, I cannot dwell on the past...it would probably send*  
604 *me insane. I chose to make the decision to end baby's life to stop him from suffering.”*

605  
606 Bridging past and future is a delicate operation as some women fear being disloyal to their  
607 baby’s memory by moving on: *[Moving on]...“Although I know I probably have, I don't like to*  
608 *think I have because I don't want to move on from my son. I like to think that the future will*  
609 *always have him in it in some way” (Anna, UK). In some cases, women express an intense fear of*  
610 *forgetting their baby: “I have a desperate fear of forgetting him, what he looks like, smells like,*  
611 *how it felt to hold him” (Zoe, UK).*

612



613 One way to reconcile these conflicting drives is for women to integrate their TFA experience and  
614 the feelings it generates, within a new all-encompassing narrative:

615 *I want to acknowledge the experiences, my emotions and feelings and have time to feel*  
616 *sad and remember my baby, but I do not want it to take over my life in a negative way –*  
617 *to become absorbed in grief” (Laura, UK).*

618  
619 The process of creating a new narrative may constitute an important coping strategy for  
620 women. It may also reflect professional practices surrounding perinatal bereavement care in  
621 which women are routinely encouraged to create memories (e.g. photos, hand prints) in order  
622 to promote acceptance (Lafarge, Mitchell and Fox, 2013).

623  
624 A new pregnancy presents another opportunity to bridge past and future. However, it is often  
625 an additional source of ambivalence for women as they feel hope and excitement concurrently  
626 with anxiety, guilt for ‘replacing’ the baby and sometimes disengagement towards the new  
627 pregnancy. This phenomenon has been referred to as ‘re-emergence of anguish’ (McCarthy et  
628 al., 2015; Rillstone & Hutchinson, 2001) in the literature, and is illustrated by Ellie’s quotation:

629 *“Falling pregnant again was a very happy but difficult time for us both. We felt guilty to replace*  
630 *[baby] but happy and also nervous.”* Similarly, when Anna (FR) becomes pregnant again after  
631 two TFAs, she oscillates between investing and not investing the pregnancy. She opts for  
632 disengagement, possibly because she feels this will help her emotionally: *“All these feelings,*  
633 *these questions about I invest, I don't, we tell others or we don't. For me, not investing was clear,*  
634 *except for health professionals, no one knew, it stayed between my husband and me.”*

635  
636 Women’s ambivalence regarding a new pregnancy illustrates their difficulties in projecting  
637 themselves in the future whilst still being firmly anchored in the past. With a new pregnancy,  
638 the termination becomes a liminal event, during which women transition from the state of

639 bereaved mother to that of expectant mother (Reiheld, 2015), resulting in belonging to neither  
640 temporality.

641  
642 ***Individual and societal experience***

643 The last point of tension relevant to the TFA experience is between women's view of TFA as a  
644 deeply personal and intimate experience and the fact that women's experience is largely driven  
645 by societal structures and attitudes. Whilst this tension may not be directly felt by women, it is  
646 nonetheless an important reality that fosters ambivalence. Bonnie expresses a widespread view  
647 that TFA "*is something that will always be with us and feels very personal – something only we*  
648 *can understand.*" As a result of TFA, women's beliefs about the world, their sense of self, and  
649 their relationship to their environment is permanently altered. Yet, this intimate experience is  
650 largely shaped by local laws and policies governing termination of pregnancy, local professional  
651 practices, as well as societal attitudes and beliefs about TFA and, more generally, disability  
652 (Lafarge et al., 2014). These factors contribute in shaping women's expectations for the  
653 pregnancy, underpin their decision to terminate and influence the way they grieve for their loss.  
654  
655 First, local abortion laws define the timeframe and conditions for which a pregnancy can be  
656 terminated. They determine the modalities for accessing termination services, including the  
657 scale of the service provision, the setting (e.g. public hospital vs private provider) and the  
658 financial cost (e.g. whether the state covers it or not). Women's experience is also directly  
659 influenced by local professional practices. For example, speeding up the process of termination  
660 is sometimes necessary to enable women to have a surgical termination. In France and England,  
661 surgical terminations are rarely conducted beyond the first trimester of pregnancy. However,  
662 there is evidence that this method of termination is safe to use in the second trimester of  
663 pregnancy and that the low incidence of surgical termination after 15 weeks of gestation, at  
664 least in England, is due to a lack of health professionals skilled to perform such procedures

665 (Lys, Robson, Parsons, Fisher, & Cameron, 2013). Ingrid (FR), mentioned earlier, was keen to  
666 accelerate the process. By contrast, Marie (FR) wanted to wait 15 weeks so she could give birth  
667 to her baby.

668  
669 Professional practices also include bereavement care surrounding TFA, another important factor  
670 in women's experience. In both England and France, women are given the opportunity to create  
671 memories following the termination, which is considered to be helpful for processing the loss.

672 Clara (FR) illustrates this when describing the care she had received after the birth of her baby:

673 *They offered [to take a picture of the baby] straight away. They put a small cap on him,*  
674 *to hide his slightly deformed head. They brought him back to us. They told us we could*  
675 *keep him for as long as we wanted. After, for a week (...) we could come back as much as*  
676 *we wanted to the maternity to see him (...)* For me, the women who do best are those  
677 *who have an environment that recognises and makes the child exist."*

678  
679 Notably, although professional practices seem to encourage acceptance of TFA and aim to  
680 somehow normalise women's grieving process, wider collective attitudes and beliefs about TFA  
681 result in women feeling disenfranchised and stigmatised about their experience. In turn, the  
682 way women chose to silence their story or part of their story means that TFA continues to be a  
683 taboo subject and prevents women from accessing appropriate support.

684  
685 Finally, women's experience of TFA is also shaped by the way societies regard disability. Céline  
686 (FR) mentions that a key reason for terminating her pregnancy is the marginal place assigned to  
687 individuals living with disabilities in France. She further links her decision to eugenic practices:

688 *"I felt that if we had let our baby come alive, we would have tipped into another world.*  
689 *Perhaps my husband or I would have had to stop working to take care of him. We would*  
690 *have had to fight to get material or financial aid. Disability is really on the margins of*  
691 *society. And I admit that this idea disturbs me in the decision we made because, if we*

692 *push it a little further, it is eugenics when we end pregnancies for medical reasons. It's*  
693 *complicated. On that too, I think that if everybody who faces the question of disability*  
694 *during pregnancy makes the same decision as us, then we will never deal medically with*  
695 *the issue, we will never be able to give them a chance, to make progress. There's a lot of*  
696 *ambivalence around the handicap in my head."*

697  
698 Similarly, Laura (GB) decided to terminate her pregnancy having reached the conclusion that, as  
699 a family, they would not be able to cope financially and logistically, alluding to the lack of social  
700 and economic support for people living with a disability in England:

701 *"My mother asked me whether I would be able to find childcare for the baby if I returned*  
702 *to work and if I couldn't, then could I afford to live without my financial income? I looked*  
703 *into Disabled Living Allowance on the internet and it was not straight forward whether*  
704 *we would be entitled to it."*

705  
706 TFA is a deeply personal and intimate experience for women. However, it is also a socially  
707 constructed phenomenon as women's experiences are shaped by local laws and policies,  
708 professional practices and societal attitudes and beliefs. Thus, women's ambivalence may  
709 reflect societies' own uncertainty and conflict about abortion and disability, which in turn may  
710 be re-enacted by the women. Health professionals caring for women who undergo TFA are not  
711 immune to these tensions. It is likely that their own ethical and moral position would influence  
712 the way they care for women undergoing TFA (Garel, Gosme-Seguret, Kaminski, & Cuttini,  
713 2002), thus directly impacting upon women's experiences.

## 714 **Conclusions**

715 Our findings demonstrate the relevance of ambivalence to women's experience of TFA, as  
716 women face uncertainty as well as conflicting thoughts and emotions. Our findings also indicate  
717 that the TFA experience has to be considered in relation to the social context in which it takes

718 place. Women's ambivalence about TFA may be fuelled by the fact that TFA is a relatively  
719 recent phenomenon and thus, there are, as yet, no normative responses TFA (McCoyd, 2009).  
720 Women are unlikely to have encountered this situation amongst their friends, and they cannot  
721 turn to older generation for understanding and advice. This points to a deficit in experiential  
722 knowledge, which may lead to women feeling pressured to feel or act in ways they think they  
723 ought to and/or are socially acceptable. This phenomenon, coined as 'feeling rules' by  
724 Hochschild (1983), has been evidenced in the context of TFA (McCoyd, 2009).

725         Women's ambivalence may also stem from the gradual transformation of prenatal  
726 diagnosis practices over the past four decades, in which the concept of responsibility has moved  
727 from the public health sphere to that, more private, of the person and informed choice. This  
728 evolution has gradually placed women at the centre of the decision-making process (Löwy,  
729 2017). Yet, if women have become more empowered to make decision about their pregnancy,  
730 they are also expected to make these decisions in the absence of social scripts (McCoyd, 2009).

731         Finally, the ambivalence experienced by women who undergo TFA may also illustrate the  
732 tension generated by the coexistence of prenatal diagnosis, which could be regarded as aiming  
733 to prevent disability, and the drive for social integration of people with disability (Ville, 2011).  
734 Women may find it difficult to reconcile their decision to terminate their pregnancy on the  
735 ground of abnormality when societies promote social participation of disabled individuals and  
736 the adoption of anti-discriminatory legislation. This is complicated by the fact that some  
737 diagnoses do not offer certainty about the level of impairment the baby may experience and  
738 women have to rely on probabilistic calculation to make their decision (Ville & Mirlesse, 2015).

739         Women's ambivalence about their TFA experience may have important implications on  
740 the way they adjust to it. Research suggests that women find it hard to share their story (Hunt  
741 et al., 2009), many experience guilt (Nazaré et al., 2014), and some develop symptoms of

742 depression and posttraumatic stress or complicated grief (Kersting et al., 2007, 2009;  
743 Korenromp et al., 2007) as a result. It is likely that the stigma surrounding TFA (Hanschmidt et  
744 al., 2018) hinders women's help-seeking behaviour as some women may feel undeserving of  
745 receiving care (Lotto, Armstrong, & Smith, 2016). In this context, it is also important for health  
746 professionals to be aware of their own position on the issue of termination and of the biases  
747 that they may hold as it would influence the way they care for women. This is particularly  
748 important given that women's relationship with health professionals and their experience of  
749 care has been shown to contribute to women's adjustment to TFA (Fisher & Lafarge, 2015; Lotto  
750 et al., 2016).

751           The aim of this article was to demonstrate the centrality of ambivalence in women's  
752 experience of TFA. However, we do not imply that women's experience of TFA is solely one of  
753 ambivalence, nor that women necessarily experience ambivalence at all the stages described in  
754 this article. The experience of TFA is idiosyncratic (Lafarge et al. 2014). As such, our findings  
755 need to be considered as a contribution to the understanding of this complex phenomenon.  
756 Interestingly, there were more commonalities than differences between the two studies. It is  
757 likely due to the fact that the laws and practices surrounding TFA in France and England are  
758 quite similar. The ambivalence surrounding the experience of TFA, whether at the individual or  
759 societal level, as well as its uniqueness in relation to other pregnancy losses, makes TFA an ill-  
760 defined phenomenon that is still misunderstood and stigma-bearing. This raises important  
761 questions about the support provided to women.

762

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Name	Age	Level of education	Gestational age	Abnormality	Pregnancy	Year of TFA
Anna	34	Postgraduate	21 weeks	Spina bifida	1 <sup>st</sup>	2009
Bonnie	36	Postgraduate	22 weeks	Multiple cardiac abnormalities	2 <sup>nd</sup>	2010
Christine	41	Postgraduate	13 weeks	Down's syndrome (Trisomy 21)	2 <sup>nd</sup>	2010
Donna	31	1st degree	20 weeks	Spina bifida	2 <sup>nd</sup>	2009
Ellie	25	1st degree	24 weeks	Brain abnormalities	1 <sup>st</sup>	2009
Frances	31	Postgraduate	23 weeks	Stomach abnormalities	1 <sup>st</sup>	2010
Gemma	44	A levels	17 weeks	Down's syndrome (Trisomy 21)	1 <sup>st</sup>	2008
Holly	36	1st degree	17 weeks	Turner's syndrome	1 <sup>st</sup>	2009
Isobel	35	A levels	12 weeks	Multiple abnormalities	4 <sup>th</sup>	2010
Justine	34	Postgraduate	14 weeks	Structural abnormalities	4 <sup>th</sup>	2009
Kerry	32	Postgraduate	14 weeks	Edwards' syndrome (Trisomy 18)	1 <sup>st</sup>	2009
Lorna	40	1st degree	15 weeks	Structural abnormalities	2 <sup>nd</sup>	2010
Megan	31	GCSE's	18 weeks	Spina bifida	4 <sup>th</sup>	2010
Natalie	33	A levels	13 weeks	Growth deficiency	3 <sup>rd</sup>	2010
Olivia	31	GCSE's	21 weeks	Cardiac abnormality	2 <sup>nd</sup>	2009
Penny	31	1st degree	21 weeks	Lungs abnormalities	1 <sup>st</sup>	2010
Rose	38	Postgraduate	23 weeks	Brain abnormalities	1 <sup>st</sup>	2009
Sally	37	1st degree	24 weeks	Edwards' syndrome (Trisomy 18)	1 <sup>st</sup>	2004
Theresa	N/D	N/D	18 weeks	Mosaic trisomy	4 <sup>th</sup>	2010
Ulrika	36	A levels	16 weeks	Down's syndrome (Trisomy 21)	4 <sup>th</sup>	2011
Valentine	38	A levels	30 weeks	Brain abnormalities	1 <sup>st</sup>	2011
Wendy	38	1st degree	23 weeks	Multiple abnormalities	1 <sup>st</sup>	2011
Xara	34	Postgraduate	20 weeks	Cardiac abnormality	1 <sup>st</sup>	2011
Yvonne	35	1st degree	21 weeks	Spina bifida	2 <sup>nd</sup>	2011
Zoe	33	GCSE's	26 weeks	Brain abnormalities	3 <sup>rd</sup>	2011
Alison	24	GCSE's	14 weeks	Structural abnormalities	2 <sup>nd</sup>	2011
Beatrice	28	1st degree	13 weeks	Multiple abnormalities	1 <sup>st</sup>	2011

**Table 1 – Sample profile from the British study**

Name	Age	Level of education	Gestational age	Abnormality	Pregnancy	Year of TFA
Alexandra	43	1st degree	34 weeks	Down's syndrome (Trisomy 21)	2 <sup>nd</sup>	2012
Fanny	33	Postgraduate	36 weeks	Multiple abnormalities	1 <sup>st</sup>	2012
Céline	30	Postgraduate	30 weeks	Brain abnormalities	1 <sup>st</sup>	2013
Véronique	32	Postgraduate	17 weeks	Down's syndrome (Trisomy 21)	2 <sup>nd</sup>	2014
Ingrid	34	1st degree	26 weeks	Structural anomalies	2 <sup>nd</sup>	2015
Lea	30	1st degree	27 weeks	Genetic deletion	2 <sup>nd</sup>	2014
Anna	35	Postgraduate	12 weeks	Cystic fibrosis	4 <sup>th</sup>	
Marie	36	Postgraduate	16 weeks	Down's syndrome (Trisomy 21)	1 <sup>st</sup>	2015
Patricia	32	1st degree	30 weeks	Cystic fibrosis	1 <sup>st</sup>	2014
Lara	37	Postgraduate	18 weeks	Down's syndrome (Trisomy 21)	3 <sup>rd</sup>	2015
Maud	36	Postgraduate	15 weeks	Turner syndrome & cardiac abnormalities	1 <sup>st</sup>	2010
Florence	38	Postgraduate	28 weeks	Patau's syndrome (Trisomy 13)	1 <sup>st</sup>	2016
Brigitte	38	Postgraduate	22 weeks	Patau's syndrome (Trisomy 13)	2 <sup>nd</sup>	2014
Isabelle	37	Postgraduate	27 weeks	Edwards' syndrome (Trisomy 18)	1 <sup>st</sup>	2014
Claire	34	GCSE	29 weeks	Patau's syndrome (Trisomy 13)	4 <sup>th</sup>	2015
Inès	38	Postgraduate	35 weeks	Brain abnormalities	1 <sup>st</sup>	2014
Clara	29	Postgraduate	35 weeks	Genetic abnormalities	1 <sup>st</sup>	2016

A level + 1 or 2 years of university study has been recoded as 1<sup>st</sup> degree ; A level + 3 or 4 years of university study has been recoded as Postgraduate ; A level + 5 years of university study has been recoded as Postgraduate

**Table 2 – Sample profile from the French study**