



Bryan White <zebrafactcheck@gmail.com>

Clarification request: "Are abortions never medically necessary?"

3 messages

Bryan White <zebrafactcheck@gmail.com>
To: factcheck@thip.in

Sat, Jul 23, 2022 at 9:41 PM

Dear THIP editors,

Your fact check seeking to answer the question of whether abortions are ever medically necessary fails to adequately account for varying definitions of "abortion." To be fair, the Facebook post by Live Action suffers the same weakness by apparently using a different definition in the post text than in the meme image. But Facebook's solution, blurring the image, doesn't really address that problem at all. The troublesome text remains.

Of course, Facebook's failure does not fall squarely on THIP. The problem at THIP stems from the equivocal use of the term "abortion."

How do you fix the equivocation problem?

Inform readers that abortion has a wide range of meaning. In your fact check, you define abortion as "a process in which a pregnancy is ended so that it doesn't result in the birth of a child." That definition itself counts as ambiguous, for it will ring true to the opponent of elective abortion in that it may appear to emphasize the reason for the procedure (no live childbirth). And it will ring true for others as a basic description of the procedure, even though as stated it could apply to a c-section where an attempt to save the child's life failed ("it doesn't result in the birth of a child").

To illustrate how these ambiguous definitions cloud the picture, consider the fact that groups receiving the label "anti-abortion" nearly always oppose *elective* abortion selectively. Elective abortion has the explicit purpose of ending the life of the embryo/fetus. Thus, a procedure ending a pregnancy to save the life of the mother would not count as an elective abortion even if no live birth resulted. And we contrast that in parallel language to an elective abortion which is a procedure ending a pregnancy so that no living baby results. Do note the similarity of the latter to the definition appearing in your fact check.

Why do opponents of elective abortion receive the "anti-abortion" label in the popular press, even though it could be said they favor "abortion" procedures to save the life of the mother? The term "abortion" in "anti-abortion" does not fit the group it is intended to describe unless understood as "anti-*elective*-abortion."

So, the meme Facebook blocked is not false using the applicable understanding of "abortion." But it's ambiguous because the truth value flips depending on what understanding of "abortion" the reader employs in its interpretation. And the post text accompanying the supposedly false meme clearly contributes to the confusion, because the doctor's advice implies the doctor isn't referring to elective abortion.

Instead of helping readers understand the complexity of the moral debate and the wide range of meaning for the term "abortion," your fact check uses an equivocal definition to misleadingly rule the meme language flatly false. It's not false. It's ambiguous: true in the context of the "anti-abortion" position and otherwise false.

Same meme, different fact check:

[Is abortion ever medically necessary? Second-guessing AP Fact Check](#)

Thanks for your attention to this matter.

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Sincerely,

Bryan W. White
editor
zebrafactcheck.com

Sudipta Sengupta <sudipta@thip.in>
To: Bryan White <zebrafactcheck@gmail.com>

Sun, Jul 24, 2022 at 4:02 AM

Hi Bryan,

It's a very interesting view point for sure. And, I must thank you for raising it to us via this mail.

Honestly, at THIP Media, we do not try to associate a piece of information source to a particular group/lobby - one of the reason we have very few 'journalists' in the team. We try to look at a topic purely from a medical perspective. But I agree, there can be times like these where we can still face an argument on the 'definition' or 'perspective'. We are a startup and the team is young. They are qualified, efficient and dedicated but that doesn't make them beyond human errors (in this case - missing a perspective)

Your question about "why don't we consider live birth via cesarean section or induced labor abortion procedures" is worth considering. I am not sure if the same is medically feasible in every situation. I am also not sure whether this "procedure of ending pregnancy via birth" can be called an "abortion" but then I am neither a doctor, nor a lawyer. As we say within our team in THIP Media - "The answers should never come from us; it should come from the available medical research, documents and experts say".

So, I will go back, discuss this with my team and pose a new set of questions to our experts. We will surely add this new angle. As you rightly said, it is our duty to educate the readers on every aspect.

I am not sure if that will call for a rating change though because the user posted it with "abortions are never required" with an emphasis on never. Had it been "abortions are mostly not required" OR "abortions can be sometimes not required" OR "there can be alternatives to abortions" etc., then probably in the new light of your argument the consideration would have been different. "NEVER" is like deleting ALL chances giving a very strong and wrong perspective. This is from the standpoint of language and not medicine. Hope you will agree. That said, we will discuss this too internally from an editorial perspective.

I hope you also understand how facebook decide to show the alert of 'False' and 'Mostly False' is also not in our control.

Once again, I thank you for your mail. This adds to our learning. This helps us to learn to think differently and honestly, this makes us happy knowing that there are readers who will correct us when we make mistakes. That's a lot of moral encouragement. Thanks a ton.

Regards,



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Bryan White <zebrafactcheck@gmail.com>
To: Sudipta Sengupta <sudipta@thip.in>

Sun, Jul 24, 2022 at 11:41 AM

Dear Sudipta Sengupta,

Thanks very much for your gracious reply.

I most pointedly understand that you and your organization have no direct control over Facebook's particular methods for sanctioning. 😊

There's one point to which I must reply:

I am not sure if that will call for a rating change though because the user posted it with "abortions are never required" with an emphasis on never. Had it been "abortions are mostly not required" OR "abortions can be sometimes not required" OR "there can be alternatives to abortions" etc., then probably in the new light of your argument the consideration would have been different. "NEVER" is like deleting ALL chances giving a very strong and wrong perspective. This is from the standpoint of language and not medicine. Hope you will agree.

No, I can't agree to that, for my original disagreement is precisely from the standpoint of language.

One may certainly fact check whether "abortion" is ever medically necessary using any sense at all of the word "abortion," but when one checks a particular claim from a particular source ***it is language that must compel us to take "abortion" in the sense it is used in the original claim***. If we fail to do that, it results in the fallacy of equivocation I pointed out. When a person opines that a scary situation "turned my knees to water" we can either dismiss it as a medical impossibility or else appreciate it as a figure of speech communicating that the person doubted his legs would hold up in that situation. Understanding increases the most if a fact checker explains the possibilities of both interpretations to the reader. And certainly we should not sanction the claim "turned my knees to water" as a social media falsehood.

To emphasize further, I'll return to the term "anti-abortion." As I noted, "anti-abortion" groups oppose elective abortion, not all procedures described medically as "abortion." Should Facebook flag the innumerable media accounts using "anti-abortion" and sanction those for promoting the false view that these so-called "anti-abortion" groups don't oppose abortions other than elective ones? Sic fact-checkers on them and downthrottle their Facebook reach? Putting a medical lens on normal human speech doesn't result in a scientific outcome. Accurate fact-checking relies, as you noted, on our handling of language. Logic must guide the handling of language, including the requirement that we guard against fallacies of ambiguity.

Again, I much appreciate you taking the time to reply to my message. I look forward to seeing how your team of editors decides to handle this case.

Cheers.

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