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Homosexuals are revolting: A history of gay and lesbian activism in the Republic of Ireland, 1973-1993

Patrick James McDonagh

Thesis submitted for assessment with a view to
obtaining the degree of Doctor of History and Civilization
of the European University Institute

Florence, 17 December 2018

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ABSTRACT

This project explores the history of gay and lesbian activism in the Republic of Ireland from 1973 to 1993. Using primary archival material and oral interviews it challenges the current historical narrative which presupposes that gay and lesbian activism in Ireland was confined to a legal battle to decriminalise sexual activity between males and confined to the activities of one man, David Norris. The project broadens the campaign for gay rights in Ireland to include other individuals, organisations, concerns, aims, strategies, and activities outside Dublin. In particular, the thesis demonstrates the extent to which there were numerous gay and lesbian organisations throughout Ireland which utilised the media, the trade union movement, student movement and support from international gay/lesbian organisations to mount an effective campaign to improve both the legal and social climate for Ireland's gay and lesbian citizens.

While politicians in recent years have claimed credit for the dramatic changes in attitudes to homosexuality in Ireland, this project demonstrates the extent to which these dramatic changes were pioneered, not by politicians, but rather by gay and lesbian activists throughout Ireland, in both urban and provincial regions, since the 1970s. The project considered the emergence of a visible gay community in Ireland and its impact on changing perceptions of homosexuals; the important role played by lesbian women; the role of provincial gay/lesbian activists; the extent to which HIV/AIDS impacted the gay rights campaign in Ireland; and how efforts to interact with the Roman Catholic Church, political parties, and other important stakeholders shaped the strategies of gay/lesbian organisations.

Homosexuals are revolting: A history of gay and lesbian activism in the Republic of Ireland, 1973-1993, reveals the extent to which gay and lesbian activists were important agents of social and political change in Ireland, particularly in terms of Irish sexual mores and gender norms. This project helps to contextualise the dramatic changes in relation to homosexuality that have taken place in recent years in Ireland and encourages scholars to further explore the contribution of Ireland's queer citizens to the transformation of Ireland in the twentieth- and twenty-first century.

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ABBREVIATIONS

CHE	Campaign for Homosexual Equality
CGC	Cork Gay Collective
CLC	Cork Lesbian Collective
Cork IGRM	Cork Irish Gay Rights Movement
ECHR	European Court of Human Rights
EEA	Employment Equality Authority
EEC	European Economic Community
Galway IRGM	Galway Irish Gay Rights Movement
GGC	Galway Gay Collective
GHA	Gay Health Action
ICCL	Irish Council for Civil Liberties
ICTU	Irish Congress of Trade Unions
IGRM	Irish Gay Rights Movement
LIL	Liberation for Irish Lesbians
NGF	National Gay Federation
NUI	National University of Ireland
NYCI	National Youth Council of Ireland
RTÉ	Radó Telifís Éireann
SLM	Sexual Liberation Movement
SMG	Scottish Minorities Group
TAF	Tel-A-Friend
UCC	University College Cork

UCG

University College Galway

USI

Union of Students Ireland

INTRODUCTION

In the privacy of the ballot box, the people made a public statement. With today's vote we have disclosed who we are. We are a generous, compassionate, bold and joyful people who say yes to inclusion, yes to generosity, yes to love, yes to gay marriage. Enda Kenny, Prime Minister of the Republic of Ireland, 23 May 2015.¹

It's a social revolution that's been going on – perhaps in the church people have not been as clear in understanding what that involved. It's clear that, if the referendum is an affirmation of the views of young people, the church has a huge task in front of it. Archbishop of Dublin, Diarmuid Martin, 23 May 2015.²

On 22 May 2015, in what has been described as a 'social revolution' within Irish society, Ireland became the first country in the world to legalise same-sex marriage by popular vote. 41 of Ireland's 42 constituencies, representing 1,202, 198 people (62.01% of electorate), overwhelmingly endorsed the following amendment to *Bunreacht NA hÉireann* (Irish Constitution): 'Marriage may be contracted in accordance with law by two persons without distinction as to their sex.'³ Internationally, Ireland received widespread praise and admiration as a beacon for LGBT civil rights. The United Nations Secretary-General, Ban Ki-moon, remarked that 'the result sends an important message to the world: All people are entitled to enjoy their human rights no matter who they are or whom they love.'⁴ The widespread backing for same sex marriage in Ireland was supported by many sections of Irish society, in both rural and urban areas. In a rare sign of political agreement all the major political parties: Fianna Fáil, Fine Gael, Sinn Féin, and the Labour Party, along with the Irish Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children, the Union of Students in Ireland, Barnardos, Children's Rights Alliance, and the Adoption Alliance campaigned for marriage equality.⁵

¹ <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/may/23/gay-marriage-ireland-yes-vote>, Henry McDonald, 'Ireland becomes first country to legalise gay marriage by popular vote', *The Guardian*, 23 May 2015. Accessed on 25 May 2015.

² McDonald, 'Ireland becomes first country', *The Guardian*.

³ Lise Hand, 'Troubles melt like lemondrops on a day of sunshine, happiness and rainbows', *Irish Independent*, 25 May 2015. <http://www.rte.ie/news/2015/0121/674602-marriage-equality/> RTE News, 'Wording of same-sex marriage referendum published', 21 January 2015. Accessed on 25 May 2015.

⁴ <http://www.irishexaminer.com/breakingnews/ireland/ban-ki-moon-praises-ireland-on-marriage-equality-vote-678570.html> *Irish Examiner*, 'Ban Ki-moon praises Ireland on marriage equality vote', 24 May 2015. Accessed on 25 May 2015.

⁵ <https://www.irishtimes.com/news/social-affairs/children-s-charities-call-for-yes-in-same-sex-marriage-vote-1.2193759> Kitty Holland, 'Children's charities call for Yes in same-sex marriage vote', *Irish Times*, 29 April 2015. Accessed on 1 February 2018.

How is that Ireland, a state where sexual acts between males had been treated as criminal activity and homosexuals as deviant, perverted, sick, and sinful since its foundation in 1922 suddenly became a beacon for the LGBT community throughout the world? Moreover, how was it possible for the leaders of the main political parties, most notably social conservative Prime Minister Enda Kenny of Fine Gael, to express support for marriage equality without suffering any political fallout? One answer is the gradual acceptance in the last 40 years within Irish society that homosexuals are not deviant or perverted and should not be treated as unequal or second-class citizens. When asked in 2013 what life is like for him today in Ireland, Tonie Walsh, a long-time gay rights activist, remarked that:

If I could go and visit myself back at the age of nineteen, I'm not so sure that at the age of nineteen I could even imagine where I would be today. I think the transformation in Irish society has been extraordinary. It's been rapid. It's happened within a generation. It's been extraordinary, and we've gone much further than I think anything – any of us could have imagined, say, thirty or forty years ago.⁶

In the aftermath of Ireland's historic decision to legalise same-sex marriage commentators struggled to explain this dramatic transformation in a country once renowned for its strict adherence to Catholic social teaching. Eamon Gilmore, in the *Irish Independent*, argued that Ireland's positive endorsement for marriage equality, 'and the liberalisation of its social laws, owes much to education, and to the women's movement. [...] Women gave the lead. They were no longer willing to have their lives and their childbearing determined by elderly celibate and often unsympathetic, male clerics. By persisting to oppose and condemn artificial contraception, the Catholic Church lost its hold on Ireland's social laws.'⁷ Others argued that this particular transformation resulted directly from the efforts of one individual, Senator David Norris. Speaking in Seanad Éireann, (Upper House of the Irish parliament), Senators congratulated Norris on getting 'the ball rolling many decades ago when it was neither popular nor profitable.'⁸ Fianna Fáil's Denis O'Donovan, who entered Seanad Éireann in 1989, argued that 'at that stage Senator Norris was ploughing a lone furrow, not alone in this House, but in this country and he was often scoffed at by members of my party and other parties.'⁹ Similarly,

⁶ Edmund Lynch interview with Tonie Walsh, 6 April 2013, *Edmund Lynch, Irish LGBT History Project*.

⁷ Eamon Gilmore, 'A Republic of Equals', *Irish Independent*, 25 May 2015.

⁸ <http://www.irishtimes.com/news/politics/oireachtas/miriam-lord-some-puffing-out-of-the-norrisonian-chest-1.2227038> Miriam Lord, 'Some puffing out of the Norrisonian chest', *Irish Times*, 27 May 2015. Accessed on 27 May 2015.

⁹ Lord, 'Some puffing out of the Norrisonian chest', *Irish Times*, 27 May 2015.

Senator Eamonn Coghlan took the opportunity ‘to acknowledge Senator David Norris as the pathfinder on this human rights issue and for his role in leading us to a more modern Ireland.’¹⁰

Prior to the referendum, politicians, such as Albert Reynolds and Maire Geoghegan, had also been credited with helping this transformation. Astonishingly, at his death in 2014, the Gay and Lesbian Equality Network stated that former Prime Minister Albert Reynolds had helped start ‘the great transformation in the status of lesbian and gay people in Ireland.’¹¹ Although Reynolds was indeed Prime Minister when sexual activity between males was decriminalised, he had never been a proponent of decriminalisation.¹² Similarly, in a 2004 article in the *Irish Independent*, former Minister for Justice Maire Geoghegan-Quinn was listed as one of only 5 individuals who helped change ‘gay Ireland.’¹³ While she was justifiably lauded for introducing the Criminal Law (Sexual Offences) Act, 1993, it must be acknowledged that for many years Geoghegan-Quinn, along with Fianna Fáil, Fine Gael and the Labour Party, had studiously avoided introducing legislation to decriminalise sexual activity between males. This narrative, however, is hardly surprising considering the current state of the historiography on the history of gay and lesbian activism in Ireland.

Literature Review

Despite the dramatic change in attitudes towards homosexuality in the Republic of Ireland, the efforts of numerous gay and lesbian organisations throughout Ireland has received negligible attention in the historiography of modern Ireland. The current Irish historiography and narrative on the history of gay and lesbian activism has focused exclusively on the legal status of sexual activity between males and its subsequent legalisation in 1993. Focusing on decriminalisation led most historians and observers to conclude that, in comparison to its international counterparts, the campaign for gay liberation in Ireland only had one aim. This has also led many to treat the movement as if it had been comprised of one man, David Norris, who from 1973 until 1993 was allegedly the only activist committed to the liberation of Irish gay and lesbian citizens.¹⁴ Secondly, the overwhelming majority of the discussion has been restricted to organisations and events associated with David Norris in Dublin. Organisations in

¹⁰ Lord, ‘Some puffing out of the Norrisonian chest’, *Irish Times*, 27 May 2015.

¹¹ <http://www.thejournal.ie/albert-reynolds-gay-rights-1631517-Aug2014/>, Darragh Brophy, ‘How Albert Reynolds made Ireland a fairer place for gay people’, *thejournal.ie*, 22 August 2014. Accessed on 10 March 2015.

¹² *Dáil Eireann Debate*, Vol. 420 No. 6, ‘Legislation on Homosexuality’ 3 June 1992.

¹³ <http://www.independent.ie/opinion/analysis/five-people-who-changed-gay-ireland-25912487.html> Accessed on 29 May 2015.

¹⁴ Chrystel Hug, *The Politics of Sexual Morality in Ireland* (London, Macmillan Press, 1999).
Diarmaid Ferriter, *Transformation of Ireland 1900-2000*, (London, Profile Books, 2004).

Galway, Limerick and Cork, if ever mentioned, have only been mentioned in passing, although, they played a vital role in challenging negative views of homosexuality in areas considerably more culturally conservative than Dublin.

In particular, very little is known about the activities of Ireland's lesbian community during this early period. Although lesbians constituted a minority within the Irish gay liberation campaign, they nevertheless played a significant role in challenging Ireland's restrictive gender stereotypes by making lesbianism visible in Irish society. Finally, with the exception of New York's Stonewall Riots, the diverse transnational influences on the emergence and development of gay and lesbian organisations in Ireland have also tended to be overlooked. Just as James Green in the case of Brazil and Stephen Brown on Argentina have shown, the emergence and development of gay movements there resulted from changing interaction between local conditions and transnational influences, be that through migration, tourism, gay periodicals, or formal organisations such as the International Lesbian and Gay Association. Any account of the history of gay and lesbian activism in Ireland must consider the interaction of both internal and external events. To do otherwise would hinder one's understanding of the sources of development of Irish gay and lesbian organisations.

Although, historians and sociologists have in recent years recognised the existence of Irish gay and lesbian organisations, their approach has nevertheless taken a very narrow focus. In her 1999 sociological and legal monograph, *The Politics of Sexual Morality in Ireland*, Chrystal Hug bizarrely remarked that 'the developments of the gay movement, including the Irish one, have been well discussed elsewhere so suffice it to draw a link between the creation of homosexual groups in various countries and calls for the liberalisation of anti-homosexual legislations on one side, and the fact that the Catholic Church reiterated its condemnation of homosexual activity on the other.'¹⁵ Simplistic on several levels, Hug's assertion in 1999 that the gay movement in Ireland had already been well discussed is hard to fathom. Researching this topic since 2014, I struggled to find any comprehensive account on the history of gay and lesbian activism in Ireland, particularly one that does not limit its focus to the issue of decriminalisation, to David Norris, or to the organisations with which he was involved in Dublin. Since lesbianism was never criminalised, are we to believe that it was an accepted sexuality in Ireland during this period? Moreover, if there was a movement, did it (or did it not) cater to the differing demands of its urban and rural constituents? How influential were foreign organisations in the development of specific Irish gay and lesbian strategies? What impact did Ireland's decision to join the European Economic Community (EEC) have on the

¹⁵ Hug, *The Politics of Sexual Morality*, 204.

campaign for gay rights in Ireland? These are just some of the many questions that remain unaddressed. It would be disingenuous to suggest that the liberation of Irish gay and lesbian citizens, along with the transformation of social and cultural attitudes, was somehow the result of external forces alone, rather than the work of gay and lesbian citizens in Ireland.

Hug's analysis rests on a series of contradictory assumptions common to other observers as well. Whereas, in the above quotation Hug seems to suggest that homosexual emancipation essentially came to Ireland from the outside, the bulk of her text dealing with homosexuality nevertheless argues that it was the campaign fought by David Norris to decriminalise sexual activity between males that ultimately liberated Irish homosexuals. In her concluding remarks, she writes, David Norris took 'his own liberalisation campaign to its rightful conclusion thanks to the fantastic expert work of his lawyer and friend, now President of Ireland had put into it [...] The legislation of homosexual acts was hailed as one of the historic events of the decade, a satisfying conclusion to nearly two decades of commitment and involvement in the gay rights movement on the part of David Norris.'¹⁶ Hug's extensive reliance on governmental reports such as the *Law Reform Commission*, the *Report on the Committee on the Criminal Law Amendment Acts (1880-1885)* and parliamentary debates helps to explain her narrow focus on David Norris' role in decriminalisation to the exclusion of a broader movement.

Hug is not alone in her narrow focus on decriminalisation. In her contribution to the 1997 volume *Gender and Sexuality in Modern Ireland*, Elizabeth Butler Cullingford argues that the more overt representations of gay men in drama and film of the 1990s coincided 'historically with the reform of Irish anti-homosexual legislation that was initiated by Senator David Norris' 1988 victory in the European Court of Human Rights, and completed in 1993.'¹⁷ Cullingford's reliance on Kieran Rose's, *Diverse Communities: The Evolution of Lesbian and Gay Politics in Ireland*, helps to explain her narrow understanding. Rose's personal account is focused primarily on the five-year period from 1988-1993, highlighting the role of the Gay Lesbian Equality Network (GLEN), an organisation he founded, and which was concerned primarily with enforcing the 1988 European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) judgement.¹⁸ I argue, however, that the political campaign for decriminalisation was only one of many factors that made gay themes more culturally acceptable to Irish audiences. The successful staging of

¹⁶ Hug, *The Politics of Sexual Morality*, 228.

¹⁷ Elizabeth Butler Cullingford, 'Gender, Sexuality, and Englishness in Modern Irish Drama and Film', in *Gender and Sexuality in Modern Ireland*, (ed.) Anthony Bradley and Maryann Gialanella Valiulis, (Massachusetts, University of Massachusetts Press, 1997), 176.

¹⁸ Kieran Rose, *Diverse Communities: The Evolution of Lesbian and Gay Politics in Ireland*, (Cork, Cork University Press, 1994).

Mister X and *Any Woman Can*, by the London Gay Sweatshop, in the Projects Art Centre in Dublin, in 1976, for example, was a key moment in bringing homosexuality to an Irish theatre audience.

Even when a sociologist like Paul Ryan explored issues of ‘being gay’ in Ireland and the early years of the gay movement in, *Asking Angela MacNamara: An Intimate History of Irish Lives* 2011 and ‘Coming out of the dark: a decade of gay mobilisation in Ireland’, in Connolly and Hourigan, *Social Movements and Ireland*, 2006, respectively, his account was nevertheless hampered by a lack of historical context. Ryan concludes his analysis in 1980, at which point the movement was a mere six years old. Moreover, Ryan concluded that the Women’s Movement had been central to the emergence of a gay movement in Ireland. While it was indeed a key factor, Ryan’s omission of events in Northern Ireland or transnational influences, particularly interaction with British and Scottish Gay Rights organisations weakens his argument that the Irish women’s movement alone ‘provided a blueprint to subsequent groups in the art of promoting their message through the media, while persuading decision makers of the merits of their arguments through different forms of social protest.’¹⁹ In fact, it would seem that the Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association and the Scottish Minorities Group were equally important sources of information, providing advice on tactics to gay activists in 1973, before the Irish Gay Rights Movement (IGRM) was founded.²⁰

Ryan also used oral interviews with David Norris, Edmund Lynch and Bernard Keogh to help understand the development of the gay movement in Ireland, which emphasises the personal stories of these three individuals. However, the selection of Norris, Lynch, and Keogh, whose shared primary concern was also decriminalisation, produces a similar narrative to that of Rose’s. In a 2013 interview, Edmund Lynch, discussing the IGRM, stated that:

At that first meeting, as I said, there was over a hundred people there. It was never expected. And the following day, when they decided to have a meeting to organise committees and everything else, it’s amazing all the committees you came across. Even the Gay Switchboard, which was known as Tel-A-Friend, where in Northern Ireland it was known as Cara, and I think it’s now called the Dublin Switchboard. But things like that were established, you know. But I was more interested in the legal situation, of changing the law, and also making contacts with the media because, at that stage, the media was changing.²¹

¹⁹ Paul Ryan, ‘Coming Out of the Dark: A decade of Gay Mobilisation in Ireland 1970-1980’, in *Social Movements and Ireland*, ed. by Linda Connolly and Niamh Hourigan (Manchester, Manchester University Press, 2006), 88.

²⁰ National Library of Ireland (NLI), Irish Queer Archive (IQA), MS 45, 948/2 – ‘Report of Coleraine Conference on Sexual Freedom.’

²¹ Edmund Lynch interview, 31 August 2013, *Edmund Lynch, Irish LGBT History Project*.

Ryan's narrative highlights only one aspect of the IGRM, but it is clear from Lynch's interview that there were many committees established. Somehow, they have been forgotten in this more legally focused account. The extent to which changing the law was the primary concern for many Irish homosexuals, particularly lesbian women, is debatable. I believe, there is a strong argument to be made that the main concern for lesbian women and gay men was not legal reform, but simply the challenge of meeting other individuals similar to them, in a non-judgemental environment. Ryan, like Hug, seems to believe that the movement depended on Norris and could not have emerged without him, noting that 'Norris possessed the necessary cultural capital, both in its objectified and embodied forms to not merely launch the movement but to put the establishment and legislation on trial by defending men brought before the courts on charges of gross indecency.'²² There is no question that Norris was indeed a key figure in the movement, but obviously he could not have founded the IGRM alone. He too depended on the support of many individuals who played important roles away from the media spotlight and often outside of Dublin.

Diarmaid Ferriter, professor of history, has provided a more balanced account of the efforts of gay and lesbian activists, both north and south of the border, in *Occasions of Sin: Sex and Society in Modern Ireland*, 2009.²³ While devoting much attention to Norris' campaign to decriminalise sexual activity between males in the Republic, Ferriter at least attempts to draw some attention to wider aspects of the movement, particularly in terms of AIDS activism, the establishment of the Hirschfeld Centre, and the conflict within the gay movement, particularly within the IGRM. Ferriter's account, however, does not consider the wider implications of the establishment of the Hirschfeld Centre²⁴, particularly its role in the gradual emergence of a commercial gay scene in Dublin in the 1980s. Furthermore, the extent to which the gay community's activism around AIDS played a significant role in changing perceptions of homosexuals, particularly in presenting them as responsible upstanding Irish citizens, is overlooked. Ferriter's account of gay Ireland is a particularly urban one. He excludes any analysis of the movement outside Dublin, particularly in Cork and Galway, or any discussion of the aims of those in provincial regions. Finally, Ferriter's approach is decidedly focused on

²²Paul Ryan, 'Local Structures and the Coming Out of the Gay Movement in Ireland 1970-1979', Paper presented at the annual meeting of the *American Sociological Association*, 12 August 2005.

²³ Diarmaid Ferriter, *Occasions of Sin: Sex and Society in Modern Ireland*, (London, Profile Books, 2009).

²⁴ The Hirschfeld Centre was a gay community centre founded by the National Gay Federation in 1979. Between 1979 and 1987 it was the centre of Dublin's gay social scene, housing a disco, cinema, telephone support service and youth group.

the nation state. Although he draws attention to the ILGA, it is not clear what impact he believes this organisation had on the development of strategies within the respective Irish gay and lesbian organisations.

In his 2012 autobiography, *A Kick Against the Pricks* David Norris provides a valuable insight into how he became Ireland's most prominent gay activist and one of the founding members of the gay movement in Ireland.²⁵ This book offers Norris' account of the foundation of the IGRM in 1974, highlighting for example the impact of British newspapers on his own awareness of a gay movement outside of Ireland, events in Northern Ireland and his participation in the Southern Ireland Civil Rights Association. Norris' primary focus, unsurprisingly, is a discussion of the campaign to decriminalise sexual activity between males. While acknowledging the work of other individuals, such as Sean Connolly and Edmund Lynch, he does not detail their roles in the broader movement. Moreover, Norris avoids any discussion of the lesbian movement, only mentioning that lesbianism was not criminalised in Ireland.

In the Name of Love: The Movement for Marriage Equality in Ireland, 2014, Una Mullally used Oral History to document the emergence of marriage equality as a key issue for the current gay and lesbian movement in Ireland.²⁶ Mullally interviewed gay and lesbian activists from the early movement 1973-1993 to provide an insight into growing up in Ireland pre-1993. Her account provides insights into some of the motivating factors that led people to become involved in the gay movement in Ireland during the 1970s. Nevertheless, one learns little new about the movement itself. Mullally is more concerned with the activities post 1994, as she sees the period since then as the moment when marriage equality became a gay rights issue in Ireland. Recently, Orla Egan, in *Queer Republic of Cork*, has provided a wonderful insight into the activities of gay and lesbian activists in Cork from the 1970s to 1990s. While, Egan's publication is particularly welcomed for moving the discussion outside Dublin and the legal campaign, its own narrow focus on Cork does not give us a broader understanding of the role Cork played in the national campaign for gay and lesbian liberation in Ireland.²⁷

Internationally historians have tended to acknowledge in greater detail the impact of gay and lesbian organisations on their respective societies.²⁸ However, a common characteristic

²⁵ David Norris, *A Kick Against the Pricks*, (London, Penguin Books, 2012).

²⁶ Una Mullally, *In the Name of Love: The Movement for Marriage Equality in Ireland: An Oral History*, (Dublin, The History Press, 2014).

²⁷ Orla Egan, *Queer Republic of Cork*, (Cork, Onstreams Publications, 2016).

²⁸ Barry D. Adam, *The Rise of a Gay and Lesbian Movement* (Boston, Twayne Publishers, 1987), Stephen Brown, 'Con discriminación y repression no hay democracia: The Lesbian and Gay Movement in Argentina', in *Latin American Perspectives*, Vol. 29, No. 2, Gender,

of this historiography is its tendency to see the USA as the prime instigator of international gay and lesbian liberation, particularly when one considers the global dominance of the Stonewall myth. According to Barry D. Adam, 'within two years from the Stonewall Rebellion, gay liberation groups emerged in every major city and campus in the United States, Canada, Australia and Western Europe.'²⁹ Today Stonewall is synonymous with gay liberation. Even if we accept the significance of the Stonewall riots in the history of the international gay and lesbian movement, one unfortunate consequence of this discourse is the over-Americanisation of the movement. One could be forgiven for thinking that in 1969 New York City alone pioneered the gay rights movement, which other parts of the USA and the rest of the world then tried to emulate. This tendency, in turn, has led historians to concentrate solely on the diffusion of United States' influence in other societies, as opposed to broadening their approach to incorporate events and movements in other societies as well as the interaction between local and transnational events.

To understand the dramatic changes that have characterised attitudes towards homosexuality in Ireland in recent years, I contend that we must recognise that gay and lesbian organisations throughout Ireland, not a small number of politicians, were the central agents in transforming Irish society to point where it became the first country in the world to legalise same-sex marriage by popular vote. By challenging Ireland's attitudes towards homosexuality, by presenting a different image of and rhetoric on homosexuality, and by forging effective alliances with other social groups, both inside and outside Ireland, Irish gay and lesbian organisations successfully renegotiated Irish perceptions of homosexuality, and sexual mores during this period. It did so by challenging the specific (often unspoken) meanings of what constituted 'Irishness', by coming out publicly discussing their homosexuality, by engaging with Irish society through day-to-day interactions, in the media, talks, lobbying, protests, by creating a space for gay and lesbian individuals, and crucially by confronting those who continued to portray homosexuals as sinful, deviant, perverted and a threat to society. Irish gay and lesbian activists were unafraid to speak publicly and to articulate their cause, unafraid to confront their opponents and unwilling to succumb to any setback, despite their limited resources.

Sexuality, and Same-Sex Desire in Latin America, March 2002. John D'Emilio, *Sexual Politics, Sexual Communities: The Making of a Homosexual Minority in the United States, 1940-1970*, (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1983). Linda Hirshman, *Victory: The Triumphant Gay Revolution*, (New York, Harper Perennial, 2012). Julian Jackson, *Living in Arcadia: Homosexuality, Politics, and Morality in France from the Liberation to AIDS*, (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 2009). Jeffrey Weeks, *Coming Out: Homosexual Politics in Britain, from the Nineteenth Century to the Present*, (London, Quartet Books, 1977).
²⁹ Adam, *The Rise of a Gay and Lesbian Movement*, 82.

Gay and lesbian activism was present in many corners of Irish society, in a myriad of different guises and played its role in forging a social movement and spirit of a gay community in Ireland. The impact and role of provincial activists in the campaign for gay liberation in Ireland must be explored, for otherwise, understanding the developments and events which emerged in Ireland in the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s cannot be explained. The role of lesbian women must also factor into this discussion. Lesbian women were neither passive agents or absent agents in the campaign for gay liberation in Ireland. Although they formed a minority in this campaign, they nevertheless played a significant role in bringing greater visibility, awareness and understanding of lesbianism to an Irish public. The willingness of many lesbian women to involve themselves actively in the gay liberation campaign ensured that lesbian women in Ireland had a voice in the movement, a voice in Irish society, and a voice fighting for the issues that directly affected them. Lesbian activists ensured that spaces for lesbian women also emerged throughout Ireland, and with it a spirit of a lesbian community.

To write the history of gay and lesbian liberation in Ireland, I maintain, that we need to also broaden our understanding of what we understand gay liberation to be. We need to recognise that institutional reform alone was not the sole concern of Irish gay and lesbian citizens and institutional reform alone cannot be seen as gay liberation. Institutional reform is an important part of gay liberation but, as this dissertation will demonstrate, it was only one aspect of gay liberation in Ireland. For many gay and lesbian individuals, the primary concern was not legal reform, but rather gaining the opportunity to meet others, to end their social isolation, to understand their sexuality and to have spaces where they could safely express their sexuality. Only by recognising this can we understand the importance gays and lesbians attached to the creation of spaces for socialising, to the development of social services, such as befriending services, counselling services, and outreach activities, all of which aimed to help foster a sense of a gay community in Ireland, and all of which had a wider impact on the campaign for gay liberation in Ireland. These attempts to create socialising spaces provided the basis for many Irish gay and lesbians to understand and become confident in their sexuality. Such spaces and events, often characterised as merely 'social', were an integral part of a resistance campaign in Ireland, which in turn facilitated a wider recognition of the existence of gay and lesbian individuals in Ireland and a cultural transformation. It is also my contention that by exploring the impact of these social events we can further challenge the false distinction between social and political action.

To understand the introduction of progressive legislation in 1989 and 1993, we must explore the alliances forged by the different gay and lesbian organisations with other groups both inside and outside Ireland. In particular, the Irish Congress of Trade Unions, Union of

Students in Ireland, Irish Council for Civil Liberties, Employment Equality Authority, and International Gay and Lesbian Association. These efforts ensured that gay rights were heard in trade unions, on student campuses, in boardrooms and at conferences throughout Ireland. The inclusion of sexual orientation in the Unfair Dismissal's Act, 1993, and the introduction of an equal age of consent for homosexual and heterosexual activity in 1993 was not the direct result of a decision at the European Court of Human Rights in 1988, but rather the direct result of the efforts of gay and lesbian activists who lobbied influential groups in Ireland to support gay law reform, who in turn helped gay activists lobby the political class.

Finally, I contend that a transnational approach to the history of gay and lesbian activism in Ireland allows us to challenge the accepted consensus around the key role of USA diffusion in the rise of gay liberation groups. While activists in Ireland were well aware of events taking place in the USA, the emergence of gay and lesbian organisations in Ireland in the mid-1970s was the direct result of events closer to home, most notably the outbreak of violence in Northern Ireland, engagement with groups in Great Britain and, in particular, the impact of Ireland's decision to join the European Economic Community (EEC) in 1973. 1970s Ireland was not as isolated as it had been in previous decades, as the 1973 decision to join the EEC demonstrated. To date, however, Europe's role in the quest for gay liberation in Ireland has centred only on the importance of the European Court of Human Rights. In particular, Article 8 of the European Convention on Human Rights has been seen as the main (if not the only) argument put forward by gay activists in the campaign for gay liberation in Ireland during this period. In turn, the courtroom has been viewed as the main avenue and location for the promotion and propagation of gay rights in Ireland. However, the courtroom was only one of many sites of strategies adopted by gay and lesbian activists in Ireland. In fact, Ireland's place in Europe was central to the campaign for gay and lesbian liberation in Ireland. Irish gay and lesbian activists strategically utilised Ireland's decision to join the EEC to argue for a greater alignment of Ireland's laws on homosexuality with those in continental Europe. A transnational analysis of gay and lesbian activism in Ireland will also add to the emerging transnational literature on the Gay and Lesbian Movement and challenge the USA-centric approach of previous scholars.

The dramatic change in Irish attitudes to homosexuality was the direct result of 40 years' work on the part of gay and lesbian individuals involved in a movement, not the sudden result of 'pioneering' politicians. By empowering Ireland's gay and lesbian citizens to proudly 'come out' and to no longer feel ashamed or isolated, Irish gay and lesbian organisations convinced Irish society and its policymakers to re-think their attitudes towards homosexuality. In doing so, they successfully presented themselves as 'ordinary respectable Irish citizens' who

should not be viewed as deviant, sick or a threat, and their demands as neither extravagant or unique, but rather as basic human rights. In 1970s Ireland the issue of human rights was gaining considerable traction, unlike at any other period previously in Irish history. Irish gay and lesbian activists were highly cognisant of this development and adopted this rhetoric in their engagements with Irish society. It was a rhetoric which many Irish citizens were willing to accept.

The pathway to 'equality' for Irish gay and lesbian citizens began long before Maire Geoghegan-Quinn decriminalised sexual activity between males and long before David Norris won his case at the European Court of Human Rights. To truly understand this dramatic transformation, we have to acknowledge the hard work accomplished by numerous gay and lesbian organisations throughout Ireland in legitimatising homosexuality in Irish society. In focussing on this hard work, this dissertation demonstrates the extent to which institutional and cultural change was a direct result of gay and lesbian activists throughout Ireland and that Irish society was not as resistant to change during this period, as some would have us believe.

Description of Project

This dissertation creates a local, regional, and transnational analysis of the history of gay and lesbian activism in Ireland between 1973 and 1993. The dates for this project cover the beginning of the movement up to the introduction of legislation sympathetic to homosexuals, most notably the decriminalisation of sexual activity between males and the amending of the Unfair Dismissals Act in 1993. This period forms the first phase of gay and lesbian activism in Ireland. I have divided the thesis into two parts. The first part focuses primarily on the emergence, development and spread of gay and lesbian organisations in Ireland. The second part focuses on attempts to move outside these gay and lesbian organisations and generate a greater understanding and awareness of homosexuality, through the use of the media, by forging alliances both domestically and internationally, and by lobbying the political class.

Part 1 concentrates firstly on the emergence and dynamics of the different gay and lesbian organisations in Ireland, with reference both to international events and to particular Irish issues (events in Northern Ireland, the emergence of the Irish women's movement and Ireland's decision to join the EEC). I examine these organisations' membership profiles, aims, development of strategies, rhetoric and identities and how these related to the creation of a 'gay community', something that had previously not existed in Irish society. How did they locate and engage with the differing desires of its provincial and urban constituents? What role did provincial activists play in the campaign for gay rights in Ireland? How did activists publicise the existence of a gay and lesbian organisations in Ireland? How did these organisations expand

outside Dublin into a truly national grassroots movement? What obstacles did they encounter? To what extent did it enjoy success in forging a gay community and spaces for gay and lesbian individuals? What conflicts emerged within and between the different gay and lesbian organisations? How were these conflicts negotiated?

Part 1 also examines the tensions that developed between gay and lesbian members of the respective groups, particularly issues surrounding women-only spaces, sexism, motherhood, etc. Lesbian women may not have suffered legal prosecution, but thanks to their sexual orientation they suffered discrimination in other areas of their lives. What aims, and objectives did Irish lesbian women have? How did they go about achieving these aims? To what extent were lesbian women and gay men able to work together? Did tensions arise, and if so, over what issues? Were lesbian women able to generate greater visibility and awareness of their existence in Irish society? If so, how? What role did lesbian women play in the overall campaign for gay liberation in Ireland? These are just some of the questions and issues that will be discussed in Part 1.

Part 2 examines the efforts of gay and lesbian organisations to engage with other activist groups and institutions in Irish society and abroad. Particularly important is the relationship with key stakeholders such as: Irish governments, the political parties, the various churches, Union of Students in Ireland (USI), the Irish Congress of Trade Unions (ICTU), and the various media. It will also be crucial to explore interactions with the international gay movement. These efforts formed a crucial part of the attempts to penetrate Irish society and promote gay liberation in all areas of Ireland. How did Irish gay and lesbian organisations forge alliances, negotiate obstructions, and engage in dialogue about homosexuality and discrimination? Where did the tensions arise in this process? What arguments and strategies were adopted in lobbying such groups? How effective were these efforts?

Part 2 also includes an analysis of gay and lesbian activists' response to AIDS in Ireland in the 1980s. The Irish AIDS experience provides a unique contrast to other countries experiences with AIDS. Unlike, in the USA, Great Britain or France, Ireland's gay community did not become the scapegoat for AIDS in Ireland. This was a direct result of the work of the gay and lesbian activists, who, when the State ignored AIDS, took the lead in providing a public educational campaign on AIDS, at a considerable financial and personal cost. These efforts led many in Irish society to view gay community as the best informed in how to deal with AIDS. This resulted in considerable praise for the gay community, protecting them from the vitriol their international counterparts encountered. The response of gay and lesbian activists to AIDS was an integral and overlooked part of changing perceptions of gay and lesbian individuals and therefore an integral part of the campaign for gay liberation in Ireland.

Finally, I will reflect on the degree to which the Irish gay and lesbian activists penetrated the public sphere. By examining print media, speeches and various periodicals and journals, I will offer an assessment of the degree to which the gay and lesbian activists reshaped public discourse and broader understandings of homosexuality in Ireland. By analysing their actions this project will situate the history of Irish homosexuality within the wider framework of Irish sexuality by considering the ways in which gay and lesbian activists contributed to the challenging, reconceptualising and re-framing of public discourse on homosexuality, sexual mores and gender identity. This will help us to see how gay and lesbian activists in Ireland served as crucial agents in the renegotiation of sexual mores in Irish society during the twentieth century.

Methodology

Primary archival research formed the backbone of this history project. The Irish Queer Archive (IQA) in the National Library of Ireland was the main archive consulted. The IQA contains numerous documents relevant to the establishment, evolution and dynamics of the different gay and lesbian organisations in Ireland, and copies of correspondence with the hierarchy of the Irish Roman Catholic Church, Church of Ireland, and politicians from the main political parties, along with correspondences with organisations outside Ireland. Irish gay periodicals such as *In Touch*, *Identity*, *Out* and *GCN* were also consulted to ascertain the main issues for those within the different gay and lesbian organisations during this period.

Members of the different gay and lesbian organisations created this archive and certain folders have been marked ‘not for consultation until 2039.’ This posed some problems, particularly in terms of the materials which remain restricted. I was aware that these restrictions may directly influence my research and possible conclusions. Having considered that possibility, I deemed it essential for me to consult other archives that hold material related to my project, as a means of branching out of the IQA. In particular, the archive of the Northern Ireland Gay Rights Association in the Public Record Office of Northern Ireland, the Attic Press Archive at University College Cork, the National Archives of Ireland and the Gale Archives of Sexuality and Gender, were also consulted and proved beneficial in analysing the history of gay and lesbian activism in Ireland. Moreover, I was granted access to the personal papers David Norris, Kieran Rose, Sean J. Connolly and Cathal Kerrigan. The online Cork LGBT Archive was also consulted to explore gay and lesbian activism outside of Dublin.

The papers of the hierarchy of the Catholic Church remain closed from 1970 onwards. Therefore, I had to examine the public religious discussions on the issue via the main religious periodicals, for example, *Christus Rex*, *The Catholic Standard*, *The Furrow*, and *The Church*

of Ireland Gazette. Dr. Noel Browne's papers were also consulted. Dr. Browne was a medic, politician and Dáil representative, and his collection contains information regarding his political campaigning on gay rights. Additionally, Irish student publications and trade union journals were consulted to ascertain the extent to which the student movement and trade union movement was engaged with the gay liberation movement. The Union of Students in Ireland archive was not accessible during the course of this project, however the Irish Queer Archive had files of correspondences between the different gay organisations and the USI, and along with the student publications, offered an insight into the level of interaction between the student movement and the gay movement. The relationship with the state was examined through the files of the Department of Justice, Labour, Foreign Affairs, and Taoiseach, at the National Archives. However, due to the 30-year rule files relevant to the latter years of this project were not accessible. Nonetheless, Dáil and Seanad Éireann debates were readily available online, along with the archives of the Labour Party, and Fianna Fáil. I also consulted the Historical Archives of the European Union at the European University Institute in Florence for statements made in the European Parliament on homosexuality and specifically issues directly related to Ireland and gay rights. The Irish newspaper archive and *Irish Times* archive at the NLI provided access to regional and national newspapers during this period, helping to trace the evolution of public discourse on homosexuality in Ireland.

Edmund Lynch, founding member of the Irish Gay Rights Movement, has granted me access to 188 oral interviews he conducted with gay and lesbian citizens who grew up in Ireland before decriminalisation of sexual activity between males. These interviews provided insights into the experience of growing up in Ireland as well as provided an insight into the gay subculture in Ireland before the emergence of the IGRM and the impact of the gay liberation campaign on the lives of Irish gay and lesbian citizens. I also carried out my own oral interviews with members involved with gay and lesbian organisations in Dublin, Galway and Cork. They included, Marese Walsh, Helen Slattery, Deirdre Walsh, Sean Connolly, Clement Clancy, Kieran Rose, Cathal Kerrigan and David Norris. These oral history interviews helped to compensate for certain archival gaps and were particularly important in documenting what influenced these individuals to establish gay and lesbian organisations in Ireland, the emergence of numerous divisions, and development of certain strategies. They also provided a crucial insight into the priorities of some lesbian activists during this period. Oral History remains a controversial method of research. Nevertheless, I believe, by balancing my own interviews with primary archival research and Edmund Lynch's interviews it was possible to provide, as humanly possible, an objective account of the history of gay and lesbian activism in Ireland from 1973 and 1993.

CHAPTER 1 - Smashing the wall of silence: Irish Gay Rights Movement

‘You see the only sin in Ireland was getting caught. Ireland was actually doing whatever it wanted to do provided it was behind closed doors.’³⁰

Gay and lesbian individuals did not suddenly appear in Irish society in 1993 with the decriminalisation of sexual activity between males. Since the 1960s, a gay subculture had been developing in certain neighbourhoods throughout the country. The Ireland of the 1960s, while still relatively conservative and dominated by the social teachings of the Roman Catholic Church was, nevertheless, slowly loosening its grip on the way Irish people lived their lives, thereby facilitating, unknowingly, the rise of a gay subculture and subsequently a gay and lesbian movement. In 1974, *Gay News* described Dublin as ‘the gay mecca of the province, attracting people from around the country, in much the same way as London attracts gays from all over the British Isles.’³¹ While mecca might be an exaggeration, a gay subculture did exist in Dublin, and, to some extent, in Cork and Galway in the 1960s. In another *Gay News* article, Paddy wrote that ‘in common with a number of Irish gays, I have been surprised at the scarcity of articles on the gay scene in Ireland. Surprised, because there is quite an advanced and organised gay scene here – even if it is still ostensibly an underground one.’³²

In many respects Paddy was correct, an underground or hidden gay scene did exist. In Dublin pubs such as: Bartley Dunne’s, Rice’s, and The Bailey were seen, but not publicly advertised, as the main hubs for gay, and to a lesser extent, lesbian individuals in the 1960s and 1970s. Bartley Dunne’s, located on Stephen’s Street Lower, and Rice’s on the corner of St. Stephen’s Green, were within walking distance of each other and were the most popular locations for Dublin’s gay clientele. Gerard Lawlor quipped that:

You walked up and down in case there was somebody better looking – if you were in Bartley Dunne’s, you thought maybe there was somebody better looking in Rice’s, or if you were in Rice’s, you thought somebody better in Bartley Dunne’s, but when you left and went to the other, you saw all the people you had already seen in the other bar anyway, because everybody was walking up and down.³³

³⁰ Edmund Lynch interview with Brian Merriman, 27 April 2013, *Edmund Lynch, Irish LGBT History Project*.

³¹ Public Records Office Northern Ireland (PRONI), D3762/1/10/1, ‘Eire: A long, hard struggle ahead’ in *Gay News*, 1974.

³² PRONI, D3762/1/10/1 ‘News from Ireland’ in *Gay News*, 1973.

³³ Edmund Lynch interview with Gerard Lawlor, 23 February 2013, *Edmund Lynch, Irish LGBT History Project*.

Sam McGrath argued that homosexuals frequented these pubs because ‘they were in close proximity to the Gaiety Theatre and St. Stephen’s Green, which at the time were popular gay cruising areas.’³⁴

Although not exclusively gay, these pubs nevertheless provided a meeting point for gay and lesbian individuals and helped begin the creation of a greater collective consciousness, albeit a relatively hidden one. While both lesbians and gay men frequented Bartley Dunne’s and Rice’s, the clientele were overwhelmingly gay males. According to Theresa Blanche, only a small group of ten lesbian women regularly visited the establishment, while the men numbered in the hundreds.³⁵ It was, in fact, through contacts made at Bartley Dunne’s and Rice’s that Blanche later became a central figure in the Irish Gay Rights Movement.

For many it was a daunting experience entering Bartley Dunne’s or Rice’s. Even though Bartley Dunne’s did not promote itself as a gay bar, it had developed a reputation as a place that such individuals frequented. In 1980, for example, *Vortex* acknowledged this reputation, noting that ‘the patronage is so overwhelmingly gay that sight of anyone entering is enough to label that person as ‘queer’, ‘dyke’ etc.’³⁶ Pat O’Byrne, born in 1948 in Dublin, recalled the anxiety he felt upon entering Bartley Dunne’s:

I found myself one Sunday afternoon, (believe it or not, it must have been late in the afternoon because the bars didn’t open till 6 then) going into Bartley Dunne’s, and I was the only customer for about an hour. And that was my first – it took quite an effort, and I was absolutely terrified. I was convinced that everyone knew, and my entire family would be sitting in the bar waiting for me, which was ridiculous, but that’s what was going through my mind. Or that somebody would see me going in or coming out.³⁷

O’Byrne’s recollection is one of many which highlight the turmoil gay and lesbian individuals had to contend with when looking to meet others at that time. It was clear from O’Byrne’s comments, and those of *Vortex*, that there was a considerable stigma attached to be seen as homosexual.

Outside of Dublin in Cork, Galway and Limerick a gay subculture also existed. In Cork the Persian Bar in the Imperial Hotel, Morgan’s Hotel on St. Oliver Plunkett Street, and La

³⁴ <http://comeheretome.com/2013/10/06/rices-bartley-dunnes-dublins-first-gay-friendly-bars/>, ‘Rice’s and Bartley Dunne’s: Dublin’s first gay-friendly bars’, in *Come here to me* blog, 6 October 2013. Accessed on 27 May 2015.

³⁵ Edmund Lynch interview with Terri Blanche, 17 June 2013, *Edmund Lynch, Irish LGBT History Project 2014*.

³⁶ NLI, IQA, MS 45, 963/5 – *Vortex*, February 1980. *Vortex* was a student magazine produced at Trinity College Dublin.

³⁷ Edmund Lynch interview with Pat O’Byrne, 15 November 2013, *Edmund Lynch, Irish LGBT History Project*.

Chateau on St. Patrick's Street were frequented by gay and lesbian individuals.³⁸ While in Galway, the Tavern Bar on Eyre Square and in Limerick, Gleeson's Bar on Patrick Street and Captain Hogg's on Cecil Street, also proved popular locations.³⁹ Describing the Cork gay scene before the establishment of the Cork IGRM in 1976, Cathal Kerrigan remembered that:

The scene then in Cork was very layered and structured. Most people didn't leave home in Cork at that stage, unless they married, or they were leaving Cork. So, everybody was living at home. The structure of the scene was almost freemasonry and was class and hierarchically structured. So, what happened was, you had the people who only engaged in the street. Then there were people who went to the public loos and then went to the hotels and then there were the people who had apartments, who were largely older, middle-aged, they had a career and money. They were the ones who had a place to go, or a room, a living room, a dry place. The system worked as such, in those days, that if you were young, a new guy on the scene you often would be taken under the wing by these older men. It was almost like a patronage sort of thing. It was just taken for granted that that was the way it was.⁴⁰

Kerrigan's description of the scene demonstrates the extent to which the scene was hidden and closed off, particularly to those who were unwilling to follow the unwritten etiquette, or unaware of where the scene actually was. Moreover, while Kerrigan does not imply in his comments that the younger individuals were exploited by their older counterparts, it does appear that this was, to some degree, likely due to their inexperience, vulnerability and reliance on older individuals. One does not get the sense from Kerrigan's comments that any sense of a *community* spirit existed or could exist due to the secretive hierarchical nature of the scene at that time. There is a sense from Kerrigan's comments that people were simply using each-other for their own satisfaction and benefit.

Although these premises were frequented primarily by homosexuals, this did not necessarily mean they were welcomed. Describing his time attending the Imperial Hotel in the early 1970s, Kieran Rose, who grew up in Cork City in the 1950s, recalled that 'it was all kind of subterfuge, you know a nod and a wink and basically it was just a hotel bar, but you could go in there and you might meet gay people by accident, but it wasn't a very pleasant feeling, because you were there on sufferance.'⁴¹ This is a view supported by Cathal Kerrigan, who remembered that in 1975 La Chateau barred suspected homosexuals after word reached the owner that his pub was advertised in *Gay News* as a gay friendly pub in Cork. Kerrigan stated that the owners 'were horrified and convinced we had betrayed them. I mean this is 1975 they

³⁸ PRONI, D3762/1/10/1 'News from Ireland' in *Gay News*, 1973

³⁹ NLI, IQA, MS 45, 967/5.

⁴⁰ Cathal Kerrigan interview with author, 14 January 2016.

⁴¹ Kieran Rose interview with author, 12 January 2016.

did not want to be a gay bar.⁴² According to the *Sunday Independent*, a similar reaction was expressed by pub owners in Dublin after their premises were advertised in *Gay News* in 1975. The owner informed the *Sunday Independent* that he would be seeking legal advice on a possible action against *Gay News*.⁴³

Outside of the bar scene, house parties proved to be a popular feature for Irish homosexual's sociability and constituted an alternative means to meet other homosexuals. However, this was extremely limited to those only in the know or with connections. According to Orla Egan, the Cork scene in the early 1970s consisted of 'informal social networks, (mostly) centring around parties and gatherings, particularly in the homes of some of the wealthier gay men. These parties were open only to those 'in the know' and in the 'in-crowd.'⁴⁴ In Dublin, one individual's house which was popular with gay and lesbians was Marie Seligman's. Seligman opened her home to gay and lesbian individuals to facilitate their socialisation. In the words of Gerard Lawlor, Seligman was 'a wonderful friend to the gay community before we had anybody else and I think she was a star to us.'⁴⁵ The National Gay Federation later awarded Seligman the Magnus Hirschfeld Award for her services to the gay community.⁴⁶ Tonie Walsh, writing on Seligman, noted that 'she gave gay people support as a friend, and as a counsellor, and even earned herself the title of the Fairy Godmother.'⁴⁷ Seligman later described those days as 'the happiest of her life.'⁴⁸

For many homosexuals due to their location or personal situation attending pubs or house parties was not an option. Like in many other countries, cottaging therefore was not an uncommon feature of Ireland's predominantly gay male subculture.⁴⁹ In Dublin, Cork and Galway, many areas throughout these cities were well-known locations for cottaging. In Dublin, St. Stephens Green, the Forty Foot's gents bathing area in Dun Laoghaire, East Pier Gardens, and numerous public toilets along O'Connell Street were common cottaging areas.⁵⁰ In Cork, the public conveniences on South Mall Grand Parade and Pope's Quay near Patrick's

⁴² Cathal Kerrigan interview with author, 14 January 2016.

⁴³ *Sunday Independent*, 'Dublin pubs listed as 'gay bars'', 11 May 1975.

⁴⁴ <http://corklgbthistory.com/2014/07/30/cork-early-mid-1970s/>, Orla Egan, 'Cork Early-Mid 1970's' on Cork LGBT History blog, posted on 30 July 2014. Accessed on 6 January 2016.

⁴⁵ Edmund Lynch interview with Gerard Lawlor, 23 February 2013, *Edmund Lynch, Irish LGBT History Project*.

⁴⁶ NLI, ILB 305 G 2, *Gay Community News*, Issue 2, March/April 1988, 'Magnus Hirschfeld Awards Honours Supporters of Gay Community.'

⁴⁷ NLI, ILB 305 G 2, *Gay Community News*, Issue 2.

⁴⁸ NLI, ILB 305 G 2, *Gay Community News*, Issue 2.

⁴⁹ Cottaging is a slang term for cruising for sex, most commonly in public toilets.

⁵⁰ NLI, IQA, MS 45, 967/5.

Bridge, and in Galway, Eyre Square and Salthill promenade were also frequented.⁵¹ Cottaging was an extremely risky and dangerous practice and often resulted in attacks, but for many homosexuals it offered the only opportunity to find a sexual encounter with a member of the same sex. Even in the 1980s, when gay venues were much more common, cottaging continued to be a lifeline for many individuals. Following Cork City councillors' decision to close the public toilets on Pope's Quay in 1985, *Out*, an Irish gay magazine reported that 'there must be a lot of people in Cork who regret the closure of Pope's Quay and all the other loos.'⁵²

Despite the fact that the aforementioned bars were not exclusively gay bars, they nevertheless did facilitate the gradual development of a collective consciousness and personal contacts that eventually facilitated the creation of gay organisations in Dublin, Cork, Galway and Limerick in the 1970s and early 1980s. As John D'Emilio has argued:

the spread of the gay bar contained the greatest potential for reshaping the consciousness of homosexuals and lesbians. Alone among the expressions of gay life, the bar fostered an identity that was both public and collective. [...] But the bars offered an all-gay environment where patrons dropped the pretension of heterosexuality, socialising with friends as well as searching for a sexual partner. When trouble struck, as it often did in the form of a police raid, the crowd suffered as a group, enduring the penalties together. The bars were seedbeds for a collective consciousness that might one day flower politically.⁵³

While it would be a step too far to state that those who visited these bars were able to drop the pretension of heterosexuality fully, the bars were nevertheless important in building up connections. Through encounters in Bartley Dunne's, Rice's, La Chateau, and the Tavern Bar, gay and lesbian individuals gradually got to know more and more gay and lesbian individuals, who would later form the backbone of a gay movement and community. Des Fitzgerald, for example, has spoken of meeting homosexuals for first time by going to Bartley Dunne's:

I did it through walking in the door of Bartley Dunne's and hanging around, looking very lonely and feeling, I don't know anybody here and they all seem to know each other. And then, after a while, a few people talked to me, and I met one or two people that I actually recognised. One was in college with me, and they, in a sense, took me under their wing, and through them, I made friends and started circulating and, I suppose, having a social life here in Dublin.⁵⁴

⁵¹ NLI, IQA, MS 45, 967/5.

⁵² NLI, IR 369 0 7, *Out*, Vol. 1, No. 4, June/July 1985, 'Loos Corked.'

⁵³ D'Emilio, *Sexual Politics, Sexual Communities*, 33.

⁵⁴ Edmund Lynch interview with Des Fitzgerald, 18 July 2013, *Edmund Lynch, Irish LGBT History Project*.

The rise of a gay subculture in Ireland in the 1960s provided the necessary groundwork for the rise of gay and lesbian organisations in the 1970s in the Republic of Ireland. It instilled a shared sense of oppression and a desire to fight for their civil rights. Most importantly, the gay subculture allowed gay and lesbian individuals to meet others, who would later become involved in the founding and running of the Irish Gay Rights Movement. However, while these events provided an important avenue for these individuals to express their sexuality, they nevertheless were underground and hidden, and did not facilitate a more public affirmation of confidence in one's sexuality, or an attempt to challenge Ireland's restrictive sexual mores. In many respects, after attending these events individuals would continue their everyday lives denying or hiding their sexuality, until returning to the parties, where once again they could be their 'gay' selves for the few hours they were there. A more public and visible affirmation of one's sexuality was not realised through this underground scene.

***'Tracing the origins of the gay movement in Dublin could cause any outsider quite a headache, for the beginnings, if not actually shrouded in mystery – are confused to say the least.'*⁵⁵**

The Irish Gay Rights Movement was publicly launched in the South County Hotel in Dublin in July 1974.⁵⁶ Although no official record exists of those in attendance, David Norris, writing in 1980, stated that 30 people had turned up to this meeting.⁵⁷ That 30 included Sean Connolly, Clement Clancy, Martin Barnes, Edmund Lynch and David Norris. At that time, David Norris was a lecturer in Trinity College Dublin, while Sean Connolly was a civil engineer, Edmund Lynch worked for the national broadcaster, *Raidió Telefís Éireann* and Clement Clancy worked in the supermarket industry. Born in the 1940's, they spent the majority of their adult life living and working in Dublin prior to meeting and establishing the IGRM. While none of these individuals were arrested under the 1861 Offences Against the Persons Act and the 1885 Criminal Law Amendment Act, which criminalised sexual activity between males, they nevertheless felt aggrieved by these laws and the treatment of homosexuals in Irish society, particularly the negative image of homosexuals as deviant, perverted or child molesters. In his

⁵⁵ PRONI, D/3762/1/10/1, 'Gay rights – history and emergence of IGRM', *Gay News*, 15 August 1974.

⁵⁶ NLI, Personal Papers of David Norris, ACC 6672, Box 21, Edmund Lynch to David Norris, 19 April 1975.

⁵⁷ NLI, IR 369 I 23, *In Touch: Journal of National Gay Federation*, Vol. 2, No. 7, August/September 1980, David Norris, 'Homosexuals are Revolting: A history of the gay movement in Ireland.'

2012 autobiography, Norris spoke about the impact these attitudes had on his own health and the subsequent advice he received from his doctor:

I was suffering great stress at the time, as I was still in mourning for my mother and the man I loved had just got engaged, but the anxiety attack was blamed on the fact that I was homosexual. I was sent to a psychiatrist, Dr. McCracken, whose advice was that for the preservation of my health and to forestall a possible nervous collapse, I should leave Ireland and go to live in the south of France, where these matters were better understood under the Code Napoléon.⁵⁸

Whereas, the Stonewall Riots have been credited with providing the necessary impetus for the emergence of gay liberation in: North America, Brazil, Argentina, Australia, Great Britain, and many more regions, the emergence of the Irish Gay Rights Movement in 1974 was influenced more by organisations and events in Great Britain and Northern Ireland, than the direct consequence of the Stonewall Riots. While the outbreak of violence in Northern Ireland divided Ireland's hard-line Catholic and Protestant communities, the emergence of gay organisations, north and south, was the direct result of co-operation and mutual support amongst, catholic, protestant, unionist and republican homosexuals on the island of Ireland. Brian Lacey, who was involved in the Northern Ireland Gay Rights Association, has stated that 'the oddity of course was that that was against the background of the Troubles, and it's one of the greatest joys of my life, and I look back at it with great, great pleasure, that throughout the whole of the, you know, the 20 years or more that I was there, there was virtually no sectarianism within the gay community.'⁵⁹ It is hardly surprising, therefore, that the constitution of the IGRM clearly stated that it was a 'non-party political, non-sectarian homophile grouping.'⁶⁰

The climate generated by events in Northern Ireland created a greater awareness of an individual's rights as a citizen, particularly minorities. The 1970s heralded a time of dramatic upheaval in Ireland with widespread demonstrations taking place over a range of different issues. In the three-year period preceding the emergence of the IGRM, anti-apartheid demonstrations took place in Dublin, the Catholic Church's ban on Catholics attending Trinity College Dublin was lifted, a Commission on the Status of Women in Ireland was established and was followed by the infamous contraception train, when Irish women travelled from Belfast to Dublin with contraceptives, which were illegal. Moreover, January 1972 witnessed the Bloody Sunday massacre and one year later Ireland joined the European Economic

⁵⁸ Norris, *A Kick Against the Pricks*, 113.

⁵⁹ Edmund Lynch interview with Brian Lacey, 9 February 2013, *Edmund Lynch, Irish LGBT History Project*.

⁶⁰ NLI, IQA, MS 45, 951/2 – 'Constitution of the Irish Gay Rights Movement.'

Community.⁶¹ This was a period when the status quo in Ireland was beginning to be challenged, particularly by the Women's Movement and Civil Rights activists in Northern Ireland.

In the midst of all this, the Sexual Reform Movement at the New University of Ulster, Coleraine, organised a conference on human sexuality in October 1973. According to the conference report 'it was in acknowledgement of their common problems that the first ever gay rights conference in Ireland was organised by the Sexual Reform Movement on an all-Ireland basis.'⁶² Out of 50 people who attended, 4 were from the Republic of Ireland, along with representations from the Scottish Minorities Group, the Exeter Gay Liberation Society and Al Stewart of the National Union of Students. One of the four to attend this conference from the Republic of Ireland was Edmund Lynch.

From the very beginning, gay and lesbian individuals in Ireland were exposed to the thoughts and activities of gay and non-gay organisations from across the Irish sea. Fred Broughton of the Scottish Minorities Group (SMG) updated members on the activities of SMG, revealing that the SMG had published a draft bill to amend the Scottish laws on homosexuality.⁶³ Terry Bruton, (Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association) offered advice on tactics based on his own political experience telling delegates to 'look for short term gains first, rather than the moon. He ended by saying that [Irish] gays should come out boldly in the open and seek acceptance.'⁶⁴ At the conclusion of the conference, delegates agreed on a resolution which committed them to:

work in the future for the establishment of human rights for the sexually oppressed in society, noting that problems exist in all areas of civil liberties, these liberties being continuously ignored and rejected by the authorities at present controlling our society. We resolve to elect a steering committee of 6 to (a) keep activists aware of developments in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland, (b) organise future meetings and (c) establish firm links with other groups active in gay rights and civil liberties (NICRA, CHE, GLF, NUS, SMG, etc.).⁶⁵

The immediate impact of this conference was the establishment of the Sexual Liberation Movement, in Trinity College Dublin, the first such organisation to emerge in the Republic of Ireland. Although the SLM was born in Trinity College Dublin, its membership was overwhelming comprised of non-students.⁶⁶ The SLM was an organisation not restricted to one

⁶¹ Diarmaid Ferriter, *Ambiguous Republic: Ireland in the 1970s*, (London, Profile Books, 2012), pgs. XIV – XXI.

⁶² PRONI, D/3762/1/10/1, 'Irish Gay Beginnings: Full Report on First Ever Irish Gay Conference', October 1973.

⁶³ PRONI, D/3762/1/10/1, 'Irish Gay Beginnings.'

⁶⁴ NLI, IQA, MS 45, 948/2, 'Report on Coleraine Conference on Sexual Reform.'

⁶⁵ NLI, IQA, MS 45, 948/2, 'Report on Coleraine.'

⁶⁶ PRONI, D/3762/1/10/1, 'Gay rights – history and emergence of IGRM', *Gay News*, 15 August 1974.

particular issue, rather it focused on issues such as contraception, divorce, abortion and homosexuality.

Encouraged by the success of the 1973 Coleraine conference, the SLM organised a two-day symposium on homosexuality, in February 1974, at Trinity College Dublin. Jeffrey Dudgeon, a Northern Irish gay activist, described the excitement and significance of the event, proclaiming, 'Fuck it, this was to be the big coming out event in Irish sexual history. The delegates gathered from all corners of the isle. Anticipation of fresh talent swept through Bartley Dunne's and Rice's – the city's gay bars – and the bar queens put on their *Bord Fáilte* smiles.'⁶⁷ In a sign of the strong enthusiasm evident at that time, over 300 attended the event, a considerable increase on the turnout at the conference in Coleraine in October 1973. In the words of Christina Murphy, those in attendance 'were a pretty widely assorted group, comprising young students, clerics, middle-age respectable looking men, very attractive looking girls, country, posh and working-class accents and a contingent from Northern Ireland. They didn't look in the least queer, freaky or weird [...].'⁶⁸ Murphy's comments provide insight into what many in Irish society perceived homosexuals to be at that time, freaky, queer, and weird.

The SLM had arranged for Dr. Noel Browne an Irish politician, Rose Robertson of Parents Enquiry in England, Babs Todd of Campaign for Homosexual Equality (CHE) and Ian Dunn of Scottish Minorities Group to speak. Surprisingly for 1970s Ireland, Fr. Enda MacDonagh also agreed to speak urging 'the churches to understand the character and the dignity of the homosexual.'⁶⁹ Ian Dunn, of the Scottish Minorities Group, offered practical advice to Irish homosexuals on organising and running a gay rights organisation. In particular, Dunn focused on two specific issues: Is the movement to be run by homosexuals? And what is the simplest structure? Dunn advised that a homosexual group should be run by homosexual women and men and that an executive committee, was the most effective way to run the group.⁷⁰ Babs Todd reassured Irish homosexuals that the good days were ahead and soon they would no longer have to deny their homosexuality. Echoing Terry Bruton's call in Coleraine, Todd urged Irish homosexuals to come out in the open and be honest about themselves.⁷¹ In

⁶⁷ PRONI, D3762/1/10/1, 'Plus ca change', Jeffrey Dudgeon, 1974.

⁶⁸ Christina Murphy, 'Homosexuals Set Up Organisation: Conference in T.C.D', *The Irish Times*, 18 February 1974.

⁶⁹ Murphy, 'Homosexuals Set Up Organisation', *The Irish Times*, 1974.

⁷⁰ NLI, Personal Papers of David Norris, ACC 6672, Box 16 – Scottish Minorities Group: The Scottish Experience by Ian Dunn at the Gay Rights Symposium at TCD, 16 February 1974.

⁷¹ Christina Murphy, 'Homosexuals Set Up Organisation: Conference in T.C.D', *The Irish Times*, 18 February 1974.

his report, Jeff Dudgeon complimented Babs Todd for speaking as if to a gay audience, as opposed to persons interested in the homosexual problem, insisting that ‘the applause and cheering was colossal; at last the audience spoke and it spoke loud. Had Babs continued there could have been an outbreak of straight bashing in Dublin that night.’⁷²

The novelty of this symposium caught the attention of some within the media. Prior to the symposium, Hugo McManus and Margaret McWilliams became the first openly gay individuals interviewed on Irish radio, while Rose Robertson appeared on *Late Late Show* to discuss homosexuality. David Norris jokily remarked that ‘the event occasioned some surprise among reporters that homosexual men and women looked just like you or I and were issued with a standard regulation set of equipment – 2 eyes, 2 arms, 2 legs etc.’⁷³ Although, Norris’ comments were taken as a joke, there was some truth to them. For many, as we have seen with Christina Murphy’s previous comments, the realisation that homosexuals were not alien, and in fact were much the same as heterosexuals was a surprise. Murphy herself seemed to have changed her perception of homosexuals following the symposium, writing:

As I walked up the steps to the Junior Common Room in Trinity College, Dublin, on Saturday, I met a young Dublin businessman whom I know coming down. And I thought, full of embarrassment, Oh, my God, he’s one of them, too. By the time I left, three hours later, having listened to over 200 gay people talk about their problems, I was almost feeling guilty that I wasn’t one myself.⁷⁴

Murphy’s attendance at the symposium was particularly important because she devoted two sympathetic articles to the symposium and homosexuality, one of which dismissed the assertion that homosexuality was unnatural, while the other drew attention to the oppressive treatment of homosexuals in Ireland.⁷⁵

The importance of the symposium cannot be underestimated. David Norris remarked that ‘the injection of confidence provided by these events confirmed a number of us in the view that it was necessary to emerge from under the comparatively bland umbrella of general

⁷² PRONI, D3762/1/10/1, ‘Plus ca change’, Jeffrey Dudgeon, 1974.

⁷³ NLI, IR 369 I 23, *In Touch: Journal of National Gay Federation*, Vol. 2, No. 7, August/September 1980, David Norris, ‘Homosexuals are Revolting: A history of the gay movement in Ireland.’

⁷⁴ Murphy, ‘Homosexuals Set Up Organisation’, *The Irish Times*, 1974. Christina Murphy, ‘Homosexuals – An Oppressed Minority’ in *The Irish Times*, 16 February 1974.

⁷⁵ Murphy, ‘Homosexuals Set Up Organisation’, *The Irish Times*, 1974. Christina Murphy, ‘Homosexuals – An Oppressed Minority’ in *The Irish Times*, 16 February 1974.

liberation and specify an interest in gay liberation as such.⁷⁶ While Mary Dorcey, speaking in 2003, described it as ‘an extraordinary day and it was the start of all the changes that have since happened in Ireland and it was the first time publicly in the South that questions of sexual orientation had ever been addressed. We came out of a society that was as repressed as Stalinist Russia.’⁷⁷

By June 1974 some individuals within the SLM were actively advocating for the establishment of a specifically gay rights orientated organisation.⁷⁸ At a meeting, on 23 June 1974 in Dundalk, often referred to by those who attended as the gunfight at the K.Y. Corral, the differences within the SLM became evident.⁷⁹ For Edmund Lynch and David Norris, it was now time for Irish homosexuals to band together and unite under a gay rights organisation. In an interview with *Gay News*, Norris stated that ‘he thought it idiotic that gays within SLM were fighting the contraception issue. First, we must define our own aims, then we can lend our support to other things.’⁸⁰ Lynch, Norris and others, had three stated objectives at that point:

1. The protective mask of woolly liberal reform should be discarded, and our position publicly announced by the formation of an openly gay movement.
2. That this movement should move to a permanent home outside the easy custody of Trinity’s walls, thereby demonstrating our maturity independence and accessibility as a group to those who might to be too intimidated to penetrate what I called the ‘Front Gate Barrier.’
3. That we should establish in this new location an organisation with 2 inter-relating functions – A) the provision of positive social outlets, i.e. discos etc. in which gay people could explore their newfound sense of social and sexual identity in a civilised manner, the profits from this going in turn to fund B) the more actively liberationist but uneconomic areas such as counselling, consciousness raising and political lobbying.⁸¹

On 27 June 1974, in what was further confirmation of the necessity in establishing a gay rights organisation in Ireland, Kim Friele, general secretary of the Norwegian gay organisation, Det Norske Forbundet, dedicated Gay Liberation Day to the people of Ireland in their struggle against Church and State. Demonstrating outside the British Embassy in Oslo, they carried

⁷⁶ NLI, IR 369 I 23, *In Touch: Journal of National Gay Federation*, Vol. 2, No. 7, August/September 1980, David Norris, ‘Homosexuals are Revolting: A history of the gay movement in Ireland.’

⁷⁷ Edmund Lynch, *Did they notice us? Gay Visibility in the Irish Media 1973 – 1993*. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ik19fvu6dP0> . Accessed on 23 April 2015.

⁷⁸ Union for Sexual Freedom in Ireland was formed following the symposium in Trinity College, to co-ordinate between the different groups fighting for sexual liberation in Ireland.

⁷⁹ NLI, IR 369 I 23, *In Touch: Journal of National Gay Federation*, Vol. 2, No. 7.

⁸⁰ PRONI, D3762/1/10/1, ‘David Norris: gay lecturer’, in *Gay News*, 1974.

⁸¹ NLI, IR 369 I 23, *In Touch: Journal of National Gay Federation*, Vol. 2, No. 7.

placards with slogans, such as ‘Stop the oppression of Irish homosexuals’ and ‘No to discrimination on the grounds of being different.’⁸² Encouraged by their Norwegian counterparts, twelve individuals picketed the Department of Justice in Dublin on the same day carrying placards saying, ‘Gay is Good’ and ‘Homosexuals are revolting.’⁸³ On 7 July 1974, the Irish Gay Rights Movement, the first gay rights organisation in Ireland, was launched.⁸⁴ The IGRM came about in a time when Irish society was undergoing a cultural transformation and transnational influences were filtering through, thereby creating a space for minority groups to emerge and fight for their rights, as citizens of a republic.

‘The Irish Gay Rights Movement was founded in 1974 in a blaze of energy and optimism, when radical change seemed possible, necessary and immediate.’⁸⁵

The constitution of the IGRM was formally adopted at its annual general meeting on 28 September 1975. In 42 separate articles the rules governing membership, voting rights, and the general aims of the IGRM were carefully constituted, rendering strict control of the organisation to the 9 members of the elected committee, of which the founding members held most of the positions, most notably, David Norris as Chairperson, Sean Connolly as General Secretary and Clem Clancy as financial controller. The specific aims of the IGRM may, in comparison with other gay organisations outside Ireland, appear conservative considering what they demanded was already in existence in the vast majority of European countries. However, in the context of 1970s Ireland, there can be no doubt that the demands of the IGRM were radical. Their six primary objectives as laid out in the constitution were:

- ◇ The improvement in the lifestyle of homosexual men and women.
- ◇ The achievement of equality under the law with heterosexual congress.
- ◇ The promotion of better understanding of homosexuality by the community at large, by education and example.
- ◇ The provision of social amenities and events for members, befriending.
- ◇ The provision of religious, legal and medical information relating to homosexuality.
- ◇ The acquisition of premises for official and social activities.⁸⁶

⁸² PRONI, D3762/1/3/8, ‘Norway takes up Irish cause’, *Gay News*, 1974.

⁸³ *Irish Times*, 28 June 1974.

⁸⁴ NLI, Personal Papers of David Norris – ACC 6672, Box 21 – Edmund Lynch to David Norris, 19 April 1975.

⁸⁵ Rose, *Diverse Communities*, 11.

⁸⁶ NLI, IQA, MS 45, 951/2 – ‘Constitution of the Irish Gay Rights Movement.’

The IGRM acquired a temporary premise at 23 Lower Lesson St., Dublin 2. Clem Clancy recalled how their respectable image had worked in their favour:

The owners knew we were a social group. They may not have understood what we were totally about, other than we were a social group, who were prepared to pay the rent. We had respectable jobs, respectable backgrounds and at the end of the day once the lease was signed, we paid the money and no issues arose.⁸⁷

The annual membership fee was set at £3.50.⁸⁸ This entitled individuals to attend the AGM, to elect candidates to the executive committee, to seek office themselves and most importantly a reduced entrance fee to events organised by the IGRM. As a new and small organisation, the social activities within the IGRM were limited. A typical month for the IGRM in 1974 and 1975 would have seen Thursdays and Saturdays open for general enquiries, coffee reception and awareness discussion group. On the first Sunday of each month the IGRM also hosted a cheese and wine reception, which was often used as a means of welcoming new individuals who had made contact through the telephone befriending service, Tel-A-Friend.

The discos organised at the Good Karma on Sunday's, however, proved most popular. Discos were particularly important for the IGRM in terms of generating revenue to sustain the organisation. In the *Sunday Press*, Hugh Lambert estimated that roughly 1000 individuals took part in the events organised by the IGRM.⁸⁹ In light of this success, the IGRM was in a position to move from its Lesson Street premises to a bigger venue at 46 Parnell Square, Dublin 1, in late 1975. David Norris described the new location as being in a 'very fashionable part of the city – centrally located at the top of O'Connell Street.'⁹⁰ The Parnell Street venue allowed the IGRM to host discos on Friday and Saturday nights, along with other occasional social activities. The new disco venue held 150 people, but *Gay News* reported that the new discos were so popular that over 180 people attended every Friday and Saturday.⁹¹

While lesbian members of the IGRM were strongly outnumbered by their male counterparts, the new premises facilitated the introduction of a trial series of women-only discos on Thursday nights, beginning on 18 December 1975. Lesbians also had use of their own room, known as the Lavender Room, to host discussion groups and informal meetings.⁹²

⁸⁷ Author interview with Clem Clancy, 15 April 2016.

⁸⁸ D3762/1/8/1, 'Sean Connolly to NIGRA, February 1975.

⁸⁹ Hugh Lambert, 'Gay Rights: the good news and the bad', in *Sunday Press*, 10 August 1975.

⁹⁰ PRONI, D3762/1/10/1, 'Eire', *Gay News*, 1975.

⁹¹ PRONI, D3762/1/10/1, Dublin Toast, *Gay News*.

⁹² Theresa Blanche, 'Irish Action', *Sappho*, n.d.: 25. Archives of Human Sexuality and Identity. Accessed on 8 March 2016.

In comparison with the mixed disco nights on Friday, the women-only disco attracted small numbers. Theresa Blanche estimated that the women's disco, which only took place once a month, attracted around 30 lesbian women each night.⁹³ According to Clem Clancy, the women-only disco was 'probably the only night we never paid all the bills to run that club.'⁹⁴ It is perhaps no surprise then that the women-only disco was restricted to one Thursday a month.

Although, many people did enjoy and take advantage of the discos, the IGRM did come in for some criticism, particularly from younger and less affluent individuals. Rory Campbell wrote to *Gay News* complaining that the IGRM entry fees were too expensive for young homosexuals. Campbell remarked that 'I wonder what English readers think of the scandalous prices the IGRM charge for three hours dancing (members, 75p, guests £1). I speak for many young gays here in Dublin.'⁹⁵ John Scott shared this view, deciding instead to frequent Bartley Dunne's because he 'was a penniless student. I couldn't afford taxis and going through all of that, so I never went to this club in Parnell Square.'⁹⁶

Despite this criticism, the IGRM's popularity substantially increased in just three years, even with an increase in the annual membership fee to £5 in 1976.⁹⁷ By February 1977, the IGRM was able to report that over 3000 individuals had benefited from the organisation.⁹⁸ The IGRM's ability to provide a space for gay and lesbian individuals made it a popular venue for those who could afford it. One individual, who spoke to Mary Maher of the *Irish Times*, stated that 'it's a great thing for gays in rural Ireland to be able to come to a place like this. You can have the freedom to dance, to be yourself for a little while, even if it's within the confines of these walls.'⁹⁹ The discos and Phoenix Club venue allowed homosexuals to leave the harsh realities of gay life in Ireland and imagine what a positive gay life could be like, if even for just one night.

Attending discos or bars did not necessarily appeal to every gay or lesbian individual. In seeking to facilitate these individuals, even on a limited scale, the IGRM initiated alternative activities on an occasional basis. One such activity was the fortnightly Wednesday Forum, hosted by James Malone. The Wednesday Forum involved either a lecture by an invited guest,

⁹³ Theresa Blanche, 'Irish Action', *Sappho*, n.d.: 25.

⁹⁴ Edmund Lynch interview with Clem Clancy, 23 February 2013, *Edmund Lynch, Irish LGBT History Project*.

⁹⁵ PRONI, D3762/1/10/1, Disco Prices, *Gay News*, 18 December 1975.

⁹⁶ Edmund Lynch interview with John Scott, 31 August 2013, *Edmund Lynch, Irish LGBT History Project*.

⁹⁷ NLI, IQA, MS 45, 951/3, Bernard Keogh to Raymond Comerford, 30 April 1977.

⁹⁸ Mary Maher, 'An end to the isolation', *The Irish Times*, 21 February 1977.

⁹⁹ Mary Maher, 'An end to the isolation', *The Irish Times*, 21 February 1977.

or a debate. Guests included Dr. Noel Browne and Brian Reynolds of RTÉ, who gave a talk on ‘Radio Producing and the Media.’¹⁰⁰ This talk was preceded in February 1976 by a talk on the ‘Human Sexual Response’ and a discussion involving Fr. Michael Cleary on the topic of homosexuality in March 1976.¹⁰¹ The IGRM also set up a library in the Parnell venue. IGRM members helped by donating books and equipment to get the library up and running. The success of this commitment resulted in an array of different genres from Biography, Arts, Gay Liberation and Fiction. Books on homosexuality included, *Society and the Healthy Homosexual*, *Time for Consent*, *Woman Plus Woman*, and *Homosexual: Oppression and Liberation*.¹⁰² While the IGRM library may seem like a mundane initiative, it must be understood that at this time in Ireland finding books on homosexuality was particularly difficult. It was this reality which led the IGRM to write to librarians throughout the country requesting that they consider adding books on homosexuality.¹⁰³ Even if one did find a book on homosexuality, developing the courage to actually buy it required considerable bravery. Theresa Blanche, for example, remembered the shame and embarrassment she felt when trying to purchase *The Well of Loneliness* at a bookstore in Dublin:

I think I went in on a Saturday and I stood outside and I walked up and down and then I went in and then I came out. I couldn’t. Then, the next Saturday, I went back in and I said you have to go in and I went up to this woman. I said, okay, just, just do it, you know, just ask. And very sternly she said to me, ‘We don’t sell those type of books’, and I felt like, oh, and like, very ashamed. It was very shaming because I had asked for something that was, you know, not to be asked for.¹⁰⁴

The IGRM library allowed individuals to further their limited understanding of homosexuality, while also avoiding the awkward and embarrassing situation of having to try purchase the book themselves in an Irish bookstore.

On occasion the IGRM’s attempts to provide cultural events for Ireland’s gay and lesbian community caused considerable controversy. This was the case following the IGRM’s invitation to the London based theatre group, Gay Sweatshop, to perform in Dublin. In November 1976, the IGRM and the Project Arts Centre co-sponsored Gay Sweatshops’

¹⁰⁰ *In Touch*, April 1977, Vol. 1, Issue No. 1. Archives of Human Sexuality and Identity, accessed on 8 March 2016.

¹⁰¹ NLI, IQA, MS 45, 951/4 – *IGRM Newsletter*, February 1976.

¹⁰² Personal Papers of Sean J. Connolly, *Phoenix Review: Magazine of the Irish Gay Rights Movement*, Issue 1, April 1977, ‘IGRM Library.’

¹⁰³ *Irish Times*, ‘Gay Movement Request’, 11 February 1975.

¹⁰⁴ Edmund Lynch interview with Theresa Blanche, 17 June 2013, *Edmund Lynch, Irish LGBT History Project*.

productions of *Any Woman Can* and *Mister X*. Gay Sweatshop was established in 1974 to expose the media mis-representation of the homosexual and to increase general awareness of the oppression of sexuality both gay and straight.¹⁰⁵ *Any Woman Can* followed the life of a young lesbian, describing her awareness of her non-conformity, her guilt complex, her frustrations and her eventual release when she finds solace in the company of another woman, while *Mister X* presented one cliché after another about homosexuality and exposed them to the ruthless scrutiny which knocks them for the Aunt Sallies that they are. [...] It is an angry work, attacking those gays who accept the view that straight society holds of them.¹⁰⁶ Prior to the opening of the Gay Sweatshop in Dublin, *Scene Magazine* mused that ‘it’ll be interesting to see whether or not traditional guardians of the moral fibre of the nation like the Irish Family League and the *Irish Independent* will step out for the occasion. It’s unlikely that a more controversial exploration of the whole question of sexual roles and attitudes has ever been staged in this country before, so there’s meat for their kind of politics here.’¹⁰⁷ This was a very accurate account of the events that followed Gay Sweatshop’s appearance in Dublin.

While the *Sunday Independent* noted that Gay Sweatshop played to a crowded house, the Project Arts Centre nevertheless received heavy criticism from some sectors for showing the production.¹⁰⁸ The controversy centred on whether or not Dublin City Council should continue to award the Project Arts Centre its grant for the upcoming year, in light of it facilitating Gay Sweatshop. Councillor Ned Brennan, a member of the Dublin City Council Corporation Culture Committee, fumed that ‘Ratepayers did not elect me to subsidise that kind of filth. I will oppose any further grants to this theatre unless they give an assurance that the quality of their productions will not be obscene. Certain standards of morality must be observed, and theatre people are no different than anybody else.’¹⁰⁹ A fellow committee member, Sean D. Loftus, supported Mr. Brennan arguing that a Christian society like Ireland should not be subjected to ‘this sort of stuff.’¹¹⁰ Other individuals and organisations were equally critical. Kenneth McQuillan of the Knights of St. Columbanus, in a letter to the chairman of the Cultural Committee, expressed his organisations objections to the production. Mr. McQuillan argued that ‘The message of the plays was that to be Gay was normal, in fact more normal than to be straight. We do appreciate that at the time of the performances, i.e. 11pm it is unlikely that children will be present, but we are very worried at the effect such a

¹⁰⁵ NLI, IQA, MS 45, 951/5, Press Release, Project Arts Centre, 10 November 1976.

¹⁰⁶ NLI, IQA, MS 45, 951/5, Press Release, Project Arts Centre, 1976.

¹⁰⁷ NLI, IQA, MS 45, 951/5, *Scene Magazine*, November 1976.

¹⁰⁸ NLI, IQA, MS 45, 951/5, Gus Smith, *Sunday Independent*, 21 November 1976.

¹⁰⁹ NLI, IQA, MS 45, 951/5, Jim Farrelly, *Irish Independent*, 17 November 1976.

¹¹⁰ NLI, IQA, MS 45, 951/5, Jim Farrelly, *Irish Independent*, 17 November 1976.

show would have on an immature teenager or impressionable young adult.¹¹¹ Although he did agree that the Project Arts Centre had in the past produced high quality productions, Mr McQuillan asserted that it had now spoiled its reputation by ‘promoting homosexuality.’¹¹² Reviewing the production in the *Irish Independent*, Desmond Rushe dismissed them as ‘grotesquely obscene’, insisting the group ‘is pitiable in its failure to achieve its aims. Its efforts are more geared to repulsing the heterosexual and making the homosexual with a tittle of sensitivity cringe with shame.’¹¹³

Despite this criticism, there was some cause for encouragement, as reporters from the *Cork Examiner*, *Evening Herald*, *The Irish Times*, *Hibernia* and the *Irish Press* all praised the production. In *Hibernia*, Deirdre Younge took exception to Desmond Rushe’s review, insisting that ‘the tenor of the review is one that finds homosexuality inherently disgusting, a point of view which one is entitled to hold. The review itself might have been less distorted if that fact was made clear from the beginning as a criterion on which the play was judged.’¹¹⁴

Whereas, before 1974 such a production would not have appeared in Ireland and such negative opinions concerning a production on homosexuality would have gone unchallenged, the existence of the IGRM allowed them to vigorously challenge these damaging assertions, both for the sake of the Project Arts Centre and Ireland’s homosexual community. In an attempt to persuade certain councillors who condemned the production without viewing it, the IGRM reserved 15 seats for them at the Project Arts Centre.¹¹⁵ One such councillor was Mrs. Carmencia Hederman who, prior to seeing the production stated that the ‘Gardai should go in and see if the players could be prosecuted for violating the obscenity laws. [...] If it is shown that they are abusing the grant then we must make it a precondition in future that no money be given out without an agreement that only responsible productions be shown.’¹¹⁶ However, when asked for her opinions after seeing the production, Mrs Hederman replied that: ‘Personally, I didn’t like the performance but I saw no reason why it should not go on.’¹¹⁷ Another councillor, Sean Loftus, also appeared to have changed his opinion. Loftus told

¹¹¹ Personal Papers of Noel Browne, Trinity College Dublin, 11067/6/2/1-8.

¹¹² Personal Papers of Noel Browne, 11067/6/2/1-8.

¹¹³ NLI, IQA, MS 45, 951/5, Desmond Rushe, ‘Gay groups propaganda offensive’, in *Irish Independent*, 16 November 1976.

¹¹⁴ NLI, IQA, MS 45, 951/5, Deirdre Younge, ‘Gay Rights’, *Hibernia*, 3 December 1976.

¹¹⁵ NLI, IQA, MS 45, 951/5, Rushe, ‘Gay groups propaganda offensive’, in *Irish Independent*, 1976.

¹¹⁶ NLI, IQA, MS 45, 951/5, Jim Farrelly, ‘Gay show may end theatre grant’, *Irish Independent*, 17 November 1976.

¹¹⁷ NLI, IQA, MS 45, 951/5, ‘Homosexual Plays did not offend’, *Evening Herald* 20 November 1976.

reporters that: ‘The acting was very good. It was as good as I have seen everywhere. They were presenting a problem which is in human society and which is not very well understood. They put a point of view across. The second play was certainly rather crude in parts. People can be emotional about a thing like this because we have been a closed society for so long.’¹¹⁸ Both comments were a remarkable turnaround in perceptions of the production and, in fact, Loftus’ comment suggests that the productions made him reconsider the position of homosexuals in society and the lack of understanding of homosexuality.

Despite the many positive reviews of the production and a petition signed by over 170 individuals, one of whom wrote that they ‘agree[d] with this production and would hope to see more public acceptance for the group and for IGRM’, Dublin city councillors voted against awarding a future grant to the Project Arts Centre on the basis that the centre did not have security of tenure.¹¹⁹ This was something the Project Arts Centre’s managers insisted was only an excuse and the real reason they maintained was because ‘councillors had set themselves up as censors and had more objections to the kind of shows being put on at the centre, particularly those by Gay Sweatshop.’¹²⁰

While the IGRM was not directly attacked, homosexuality clearly was at the centre of the controversy. In a strong show of defiance, Gay Sweatshop returned to Dublin in January 1977 to perform both productions again at the Eblana Theatre as part of a fundraising effort for the Project Arts Centre. According to the *Irish Times*, both shows were completely sold out, resulting in the Sweatshop raising over £700 for the Centre.¹²¹ Even more remarkable were the thousands who expressed their support for the centre through petitions, donations and gifts, which according to Peter Sheridan amounted to £1,500. In a letter thanking people, Sheridan maintained that it was the Project Arts Centre’s duty to ‘raise issues of social importance, whether it be housing or homosexual. This is a duty we shall continue to discharge and we are confident that the people of this city will keep us open to do this for another ten years.’¹²²

Although the council refused to give a grant to the Project Arts Centre following Gay Sweatshop’s production, the IGRM’s ability to court support from prominent newspapers and members of the public helped promote a better understanding of the reasons the IGRM was established. Attempts to censor such productions had in fact resulted in a much greater discussion on homosexuality than would have likely occurred had the council and opponents

¹¹⁸ NLI, IQA, MS 45, 951/5, ‘Gay Lib show defended’, *Irish Press*, 20 November 1976.

¹¹⁹ NLI, IQA, MS 45, 951/5, ‘I support the work of Gay Sweatshop and the policies of Project Arts Centre.’

¹²⁰ *Irish Times*, ‘Gay Sweatshop to return to Dublin’, 24 January 1977.

¹²¹ *Irish Times*, ‘Full houses for Gay Sweatshop’, 31 January 1977.

¹²² *Irish Times*, ‘Project Theatre’, 5 February 1977.

simply said nothing. Peter Martin of *The Irish Press* wrote that ‘what the Gay Sweatshop Company succeeds in doing is initiating self-questioning among the onlookers. We the audience are part of the oppressive conspiracy. We too must change if the gay population are to find their rightful place in our society.’¹²³ What started out as a simple invitation to perform at the Project Arts Centre resulted in a broader debate around homosexuality and its place in Irish theatre and Irish society more broadly.

‘It was very interesting for me because quite a lot of people were ringing from rural areas, from country areas. And they were really very isolated. They really didn’t have any place to go or any place to meet people, and very often you were the first person they talked to.’¹²⁴

In Hugh Lambert’s aforementioned article on the IGRM in the *Sunday Press*, he noted that ‘there are 200 fully paid up regulars, most of them surprisingly living in rural Ireland. This is not so surprising, however, when one considers the much more furtive atmosphere which must cloak a homosexual’s life in small towns.’¹²⁵ Although discos were important to the gay and lesbian individuals who attended, they were off limits to the majority of gay and lesbian individuals who lived out outside Dublin. In an attempt to support these individuals, many of whom were suffering in isolation, the IGRM established a confidential telephone befriending service, Tel-A-Friend (TAF), in 1974. TAF, a voluntary service run by IGRM members, was one of the most important services established by a gay rights organisation in the Republic of Ireland. TAF was modelled on the London Gay Switchboard and, whereas, its equivalent in Northern Ireland (CARA) received an annual grant of £750 from the Department of Health and Social Services, TAF received nothing from the Irish state. Its funding came entirely from the social events organised by the IGRM.¹²⁶ In the beginning TAF operated every Thursday and Friday from 7:30 p.m. – 9:30 p.m. and Saturdays from 3 p.m. - 6 p.m. By the early 1980s, however, the service had become so popular a second line was opened and the service operated 7 days a week.¹²⁷

Despite the importance of this service to Irish gay and lesbian citizens the mainstream media refused to carry advertisements for TAF. To circumvent this, TAF reached out to other

¹²³ NLI, IQA, MS 45, 951/5, Peter Martin, ‘Project’s rare double bill’, *The Irish Press*, 16 November 1976.

¹²⁴ Edmund Lynch interview Des Fitzgerald, 18 July 2013, *Edmund Lynch, Irish LGBT History Project*.

¹²⁵ NLI, IQA, MS 45, 951/1, Hugh Lambert, ‘Gay Rights: the good news and the bad’, in *Sunday Press*, 10 August 1975.

¹²⁶ D3762/1/8/10, 1974 Committee, Northern Ireland Gay Rights Association to Trevor Phillips, University of London Union, 28 April 1976.

¹²⁷ NLI, IQA, MS 45, 949/3, TAF Secretary’s Report 1984-1985.

less mainstream publications and organisations. One such organisation was the Samaritans, a telephone service aimed at helping anyone in distress.¹²⁸ The IGRM requested that the Samaritans provide the number for TAF to anyone who contacted it about homosexuality, insisting that TAF would be better suited to deal with that caller. As a well-known nationwide support service, support from the Samaritans insured that individuals both inside and outside of Dublin, who might not necessarily have heard of TAF, but would know of Samaritans and contact them, could therefore be introduced to the TAF service. The Samaritans Annual Reports demonstrated that a percentage of their calls were on the topic of homosexuality. In the 1978, for example, over 180 calls were received from homosexuals, with 20% stating they were suicidal.¹²⁹

Publications such as *In Dublin*, a popular fortnightly event journal, *Hot Press* a fortnightly music and politics magazine and the National Social Services Council Directory also assisted in promoting TAF.¹³⁰ Both *In Dublin* and *Hot Press* were particularly popular with lesbian and gay individuals who placed personal ads looking to meet other gay and lesbian individuals. Crucially, based on the addresses of those who placed ads in both magazines their distribution reached areas well outside the capital city. Advertisement's for the IGRM and TAF were a common feature of *In Dublin* and *Hot Press* throughout the 1970s and 1980s. In 1985, *In Dublin* even facilitated TAF advertising the need for new volunteers, which resulted in the recruitment of 5 new volunteers.¹³¹

Joni Crone, who volunteered with TAF, remembered another advertising method adopted by TAF:

TAF Volunteers subverted the printed media's refusal to carry gay advertising by printing their own stickers. These were small cards giving the telephone number and in the tiniest of small print 'befriending service for homosexual men and women. [...] We would then place stickers on toilet doors in bars around the town. Since every small town in Ireland has about ten bars, this ladylike networking proved quite effective and for several years it was the only means of advertising our existence outside Dublin.¹³²

¹²⁸ NLI, IQA, MS 45, 949/3, Letter to Minister for Health and Social Welfare, 11 November 1980.

¹²⁹ NLI, IQA, MS, 45 948/5, 1978 Dublin Samaritans Report.

¹³⁰ In 1982/1983 *In Dublin* had an average of 73,800 readers each fortnight. NLI, IR 94133 I 2 – *In Dublin*, 26 January – 9 February 1984.

¹³¹ NLI, IQA, MS 45, 949/3, TAF Report 1985/1986.

¹³² Joni Crone, 'Lesbian Feminism in Ireland', in *Women's Studies International Forum*, Vol. 11, No. 4, 1988, 345.

Volunteers with TAF quite often had no formal experience or professional training in dealing with the situations they faced. While they received advice from the Samaritans, CARA and London Gay Switchboard, the majority of TAF volunteers simply learned on the job. Despite the constant demand for new volunteers, not everyone, however, was suitable to be a TAF volunteer. To be eligible one had to be homosexual, but more importantly had to be ‘totally at ease with their own gayness.’¹³³ They had to follow strict guidelines which were aimed at easing the pressure on those who made contact, but also protecting them from being exploited. From the moment a volunteer answered a call, they had to adhere to 6 main points: ‘Find out fairly quickly where the person is phoning from. If they are ringing from a call-box ask if they have enough money for a long chat, and if warranted get their number and ring them back – but watch the time. Ask fairly soon Are you homosexual? And mention that you are also. Some callers may assume that we’re a group of helpful hets [heterosexuals]! If the caller is not of your own sex, ask ‘would you prefer to speak to a man (or a woman)?’¹³⁴

Des Fitzgerald, who volunteered with TAF, remembers the isolation and nervousness expressed by those who called:

It was very interesting for me because quite a lot of people were ringing from rural areas, from country areas. And they were really very isolated. They really didn’t have any place to go or any place to meet people, and very often you were the first person they talked to. So, we always operated on the principle that for the first 10 minutes they probably don’t hear a word you’re saying because they’re so wound up and nervous. So, the first part would be really calming people down and then just getting to talk to them.¹³⁵

Don Donnelly recounted how the most popular question asked by callers was ‘How would I know if I’m gay?’¹³⁶ According to Don, volunteers asked the callers three questions to ascertain whether they were or were not: ‘Firstly what are their fantasies predominantly about, secondly in the street or on buses do they generally find themselves attracted to people of the same sex and lastly we ask them about previous experience, if they have ever had a gay sexual experience and how do they see the rest of their lives?’¹³⁷ When it came to arranging meetings with callers for the first-time volunteers had to take extreme caution for a number of reasons. Firstly, to protect their own safety, and secondly to protect the wellbeing of the caller. Guidelines

¹³³ ‘The Silent Majority’, in *Out for Ourselves: The Lives of Irish Lesbians and Gay Men*, (Dublin, Women’s Community Press, 1986), 118

¹³⁴ NLI, IQA, MS 45, 949/4, Tel-A-Friend Guidelines for Telephone Befriending.

¹³⁵ Edmund Lynch interview with Des Fitzgerald, 18 July 2013, *Edmund Lynch, Irish LGBT History Project*.

¹³⁶ Caroline Walsh, ‘Gay people don’t have two heads’, *Irish Times*, 28 September 1984.

¹³⁷ Walsh, ‘Gay people don’t have two heads’, *Irish Times*, 1984.

stipulated that ‘if a meeting is to be arranged specify that it is for a chat and that you and another or others will be there. Mention that there can be no sexual contact between the caller and their befriender.’¹³⁸ Helen Slattery, who volunteered with the Cork Lesbian Line in the 1980s, explained the reasoning behind this was that ‘you couldn’t sleep with the person you were befriending. You couldn’t because you were talking to someone who was very vulnerable. So, you were a little step better along the way because you were out for a little bit longer. So, you would always meet in twos, because a lot of the time the person could end up having a crush on the first lesbian they met, which also happened.’¹³⁹

TAF also operated what they called a ‘Country Liaison Group’, which travelled throughout the country organising opportunities for gay and lesbian individuals to meet others. The Country Liaison Group was a lifeline for many gay and lesbian individuals in isolated regions of Ireland who did not have the opportunity to meet others or travel to Dublin to attend the Phoenix Club. In many respects, the group was a bridge between Dublin and more isolated regions.¹⁴⁰ Prior to these meetings, the IGRM would inform anyone who contacted TAF from provincial regions that they would be in this location on this particular date. In an attempt to disguise the true basis for these meetings, organisers booked the venues, mainly in hotels, under ‘the Phoenix Club’, thereby allowing un-come out homosexuals to attend these meetings without arousing any suspicion. Theresa Blanche recalled the anxiety evident in those attending for the first time:

They would come in and they would be absolutely petrified mainly because their main thing was who else was there. Because, you know, sometimes there was maybe two guys from the same town who didn’t know about each other. And it was initially for them very difficult to discuss it, you know. They were outed without wanting to be outed. But then, if they were able to, they would form a contact or friendship with each other.¹⁴¹

By venturing outside Dublin, to areas such as: Roscommon, Kilkenny, Galway, Sligo, Dundalk, Cork and Limerick, those involved in the country liaison provided provincial homosexuals with the opportunity to meet and talk with other homosexuals, something that was not immediately available in their own localities. In 1970s Ireland, contacting TAF was for many the first step in coming to terms with their sexuality, first opportunity to learn where to meet other gay and lesbian individuals and, quite often, their entrance into gay and lesbian activism. One such individual was Kieran Rose. Rose first contacted TAF in 1975 and from

¹³⁸ NLI, IQA, MS 45, 949/4, Tel-A-Friend Guidelines for Telephone Befriending.

¹³⁹ Helen Slattery, Interview with the author, 9 March 2016.

¹⁴⁰ PRONI, D3762/1/3/2, *IGRM Newsletter*, March 1977.

¹⁴¹ Edmund Lynch interview with Terri Blanche, 17 June 2013, *Edmund Lynch, Irish LGBT History Project*.

that moment on became a leading figure in the gay rights campaign in Ireland. He recalled that moment in a 2013 interview, noting that:

I remember arriving up into Dublin, getting my bedsit out in Ratgar, and got on to the Honda 50, went to a telephone box, which we had in those days and phoned gay switchboard (TAF), and then they told me about the IGRM in Parnell Square and that they had a cheese and wine on a Sunday, and that's where I went and met gay people for the first time.¹⁴²

TAF provided the means for many gay and lesbian individuals to learn about an Irish gay community and become part of it. Over the years those contacting TAF increased substantially. Whereas, in period from 1975 to 1976, TAF received 136 calls, this figure had increased to 1,024 in 1980, broken down into 432 callers wishing to talk about their fears, anxieties and sexuality, 411 requesting information, 150 requesting to visit TAF at the Hirschfeld Centre and 31 requesting TAF counsellors to meet the caller at another venue. Of these, 175 were from callers outside the Dublin area.¹⁴³ Over the next 6 years, calls to TAF went from 1,953 in 1982, to 3,088 in 1985 and just over 3,700 by 1986.¹⁴⁴ The increased demand for TAF's services throughout the 1980s caught the attention of the media. The *Irish Times*, for example, reported the high levels of calls TAF received, particularly amongst the 19-30 age group.¹⁴⁵

TAF provided a crucial link between those who were confident in their sexuality and those who were struggling to come to terms with their sexuality. Whereas, a large city like Dublin provided for greater freedom, most towns in Ireland did not have this luxury. Without TAF, many homosexuals would have remained isolated, alone, confused, and perhaps never developed the confidence to come out, or the opportunity to meet other homosexuals for much longer than they did. One such individual who benefitted from TAF was Pauline O'Donnell, who stills remembers the positive impact TAF had on our life:

I phoned anyway, and a guy answered, and I was nearly about to put down the phone, but he was actually very nice and very sympathetic. And, he said to me, 'Would you like to speak to one of the women here?' I think there's somebody here. And I said, yes I would actually. So, he went off, and who came back to the phone, only Terri Blanche, and arranged to meet me. First of all, she said, well, we could meet you, say, at the weekend or something. I think this was maybe a Wednesday night. And I said, 'Is there any chance I could meet you tonight?' because, having plucked up the courage to ring, I didn't want to wait any longer, you know. I desperately needed to get my story out and to talk to someone of like mind. So, she said yes. So, Terri and the guy, some guy, came

¹⁴² Edmund Lynch interview with Kieran Rose, 6 April 2013, *Edmund Lynch, Irish LGBT History Project*.

¹⁴³ NLI, IQA, MS 45, 949/4, Report of the operation of TAF for the period April 1979 to April 1980.

¹⁴⁴ NLI, IQA, MS 45, 949/3.

¹⁴⁵ *Irish Times*, 'Calls to centre increase', 28 May 1984.

along with her and we met in the Royal Dublin and had a great old chat, and the relief was just unbelievable, to be able to speak honestly about how I felt. So, that was the beginning of a new life, I suppose for me really.¹⁴⁶

‘The first thing on the agenda of an Irish organisation is the split.’¹⁴⁷

Externally the IGRM may have appeared to be developing into a well-organised, well-resourced, united gay rights organisation. Internally, however, the picture was much different. Although, the IGRM had provided an important outlet for Ireland’s gay and lesbian citizens, particularly those residing in Dublin, tensions between those running the organisation began to emerge and distract from the successful operation of the organisation. At the centre of this tension was personal animosities, rather than ideological differences. On 7 January 1977, IGRM chairman David Norris sent a letter to the IGRM national executive. In his letter, Norris derided what he described as the ‘very severe difficulties I encounter in attempting to fulfil my role as Chairman given the present attitude of the general secretary Sean Connolly.’¹⁴⁸ According to Norris, he had been subjected to personal affronts from Connolly and therefore ‘valuable energies were being wasted at all levels of the organisation in fighting off personality based attacks and futile point scoring exercises.’¹⁴⁹ In particular, Norris signalled out 7 issues: ‘personality cult’, ‘illegal meetings’, ‘usurping of authority by insult and innuendo’, ‘refusal to act as secretary’ and ‘general abusiveness to members of the Movement.’¹⁵⁰ What followed was a devastating division between those who supported Norris and those who supported Sean Connolly.

This division became evident following Sean Connolly’s resignation letter in March 1977.¹⁵¹ While Connolly had stipulated his intention to resign as general secretary effective from 4 April 1977, Bernard Keogh proposed at a special committee meeting on 13 March 1977 that Connolly’s resignation should be taken as effective from the date the letter was written. Keogh’s proposal was seconded by Phil Carson, and subsequently approved by 6 votes to 4.

¹⁴⁶ Edmund Lynch interview Pauline O’Donnell, 17 May 2013, *Edmund Lynch, Irish LGBT History Project*.

¹⁴⁷ <http://www.irishtimes.com/opinion/an-irishman-s-diary-1.1058945>, ‘Irishman’s Diary’, *Irish Times*, 30 May 2002. Accessed on 14 April 2017.

¹⁴⁸ NLI, Personal Papers of David Norris, ACC 6672 Box 21 – Letter from David Norris to National Executive of IGRM, 7 January 1977.

¹⁴⁹ NLI, Personal Papers of David Norris, ACC 6672 Box 21.

¹⁵⁰ NLI, Personal Papers of David Norris, ACC 6672 Box 21 – Letter from David Norris to National Executive of IGRM, 7 January 1977.

¹⁵¹ NLI, Personal Papers of David Norris, ACC 6672 Box 21 – Report of Letter of Resignation of Sean Connolly as General Secretary, 10 March 1977.

Those in favour included, Keogh, Carson, David Norris, Michael Bergin, Theresa Blanche and Martin Barnes. Those against were Clem Clancy, James Malone, Noel Clarke and Sean Connolly. In response, Noel Clarke proposed that a vote of no confidence be taken in David Norris chairing the meeting, which was seconded by Clem Clancy.¹⁵² Another proposal was also put by James Malone who argued that if they ‘were serious about removing Sean, a new General Secretary should be elected immediately.’¹⁵³ This was defeated by the same group who supported Keogh’s earlier motion and supported by the same group who opposed Keogh’s motion.

It was evident from the March meeting that cliques of a sort had developed behind Norris and Connolly. Those supporting Connolly sent a notice to IGRM members of their intention to hold an extraordinary general meeting on 6 April 1977. According to the announcement approximately 80 members had given their support to an EGM, to deal with what was described then as a ‘crisis’ within the IGRM.¹⁵⁴ Speaking at the EGM Norris appealed to members ‘not to make a situation so bad and so distressing on what appears to be issues of personality rather than issues of real substance [...]’¹⁵⁵

While initially the tension had been confined to within the IGRM national executive, by April 1977 it had filtered out to the general membership. For many, a complete overhaul of personalities was now needed to rescue the IGRM. In manifestos for the May 1977 election to the new national executive of the IGRM, the discontent of many with the present IGRM executive was evident. Numerous candidates’ manifestos spoke of a lack of momentum, lack of enthusiasm, lack of proper leadership, the desire for an end to the present divisiveness and the desire for the creation of a united committee.¹⁵⁶ One such individual, Tony O’Connell, noted in his election manifesto that he felt ‘of late the committee has lost much of its original momentum and it will require a radical change of personnel to bring the movement back on course.’¹⁵⁷ Similarly, Thomas McGettigan, putting forward his candidature, claimed that ‘a lot of the drive and enthusiasm which the committee had, has faded and therefore some changes

¹⁵² NLI, Personal Papers of David Norris, ACC 6672 Box 21 – Special IGRM committee meeting 13 March 1977.

¹⁵³ NLI, Personal Papers of David Norris, ACC 6672 Box 21 – Special IGRM committee.

¹⁵⁴ NLI, Personal Papers of David Norris, ACC 6672 Box 21 – Notice of Extraordinary General Meeting, 6 April 1977.

¹⁵⁵ NLI, Personal Papers of David Norris, ACC 6672 Box 21 – Norris speech at EGM.

¹⁵⁶ PRONI, NIGRA, D/3762/1/1/6 – Profile of Candidates seeking election to the National Executive of IGRM on 28 Saturday May 1977.

¹⁵⁷ PRONI, NIGRA, D/3762/1/1/6 – Profile of Candidates.

would be for the better of all the members and the club [...] The most important thing is that a united committee fights for the necessary changes in legislation regarding homosexuality.’¹⁵⁸

According to *Gay News*, following the May 1977 AGM, ‘Tony O’Connell took over from David Norris as Chairman of the IGRM in a palace coup.’¹⁵⁹ In an interview with Norris in 2017, he similarly described events following the AGM as a coup d’état.¹⁶⁰ Unfortunately for the IGRM membership, however, O’Connell only lasted eight months in this position, before resigning, along with two other members of the executive, John Ryan and Desmond Duffy. This followed complaints of inactivity on the part of the IGRM national executive committee.¹⁶¹ Rather than improving, the situation had worsened following the May 1977 AGM. The result of this infighting led to the exodus of many of the founding members, and with it much of the manpower which had helped sustain and run the organisation since 1974. The split left a trail of bitterness and antagonism between the different personalities involved, which lingered long after the demise of the IGRM. The IGRM slowly disintegrated to the point, whereby, in 1978 the IGRM had lost its lease at Parnell Square. Without a premise, the IGRM was no longer able to organise events. This, in turn, led to the shutting down of TAF. From 1978 to March 1979 Dublin was without a gay premise for the first time since 1974. The enthusiasm and optimism which greeted the establishment of the IGRM in 1974 appeared to have disappeared within the space of just 4 years, with little hope in 1978 of an alternative emerging. The blaze of energy and sense of community which greeted the movements establishment in 1974 had withered in 1977 and all but extinguished by 1978. The positive, however, was that the silence surrounding homosexuality in Ireland had certainly been broken and a greater number of individuals were committed to challenging Ireland’s oppressive treatment of its gay and lesbian citizens.

¹⁵⁸ PRONI, NIGRA, D/3762/1/1/6 – Profile of Candidates.

¹⁵⁹ NLI, Personal Papers of David Norris, ACC 6672 Box 17 – *Gay News* No. 137, 23 February – 18 March 1978 – ‘Normal Service will be resumed as soon as possible.’

¹⁶⁰ Telephone interview with David Norris with the author, 16 March 2017.

¹⁶¹ NLI, Personal Papers of David Norris, ACC 6672 Box 17 – *Gay News* No. 137.

Chapter 2 - Gay and lesbian visibility in 1980s Dublin: social activities as an act of resistance.

*'We concentrate on the social aspect because we feel it's not true that all a gay organisation has to do is to be politically active. The vast majority of our members lack a political awareness; they need a place to meet first, and maybe the political awareness will develop later.'*¹⁶²

In a 1979 interview with *Gay News* on the re-opening of the IGRM, Clem Clancy remarked that 'he did not see IGRM as a directly political force. Banner waving is inappropriate in Ireland. The whole thing is to talk to people, to put gay people in touch with each other for friendship, understanding and companionship.'¹⁶³ For Clancy, it would appear that banner waving was political, but putting gay people in touch with other gay people in a society which stigmatised such actions and individuals was not political. In a similar vein, *In Touch* (newsletter of the NGF), discussing the opening of the NGF's new centre, the Hirschfeld Centre, described it as a social centre facilitating social events (discos etc.), which would generate the finance for counselling and political action. This political action was considered education of public opinion and reform of social, legal and religious attitudes towards homosexuality. These social events, however, contributed to this *only* by generating the finances, nothing more.¹⁶⁴

Social events, therefore, are presented primarily as revolving around discos, tea and coffee parties, cinema, and befriending groups, events which were considered hidden and behind closed doors within these social centres. In other words, these were covert activities and had little consequences outside the centres. On the other hand, the political was narrowly defined as lobbying, legal action and demonstrations, events which were considered more overt and carried out by those within the leadership of the different gay organisations. Those who engaged in such actions were considered political, while those who engaged in social events were apolitical. This was often used by leaders of their respective gay and lesbian organisations to characterise Irish gay and lesbian individuals as not interested in anything political. Steve Quillinan, for example, in a letter to David Norris requesting that a meeting be moved from Cork to Dublin, argued that 'There can be little doubt that given the stunning apathy of our local gays towards anything which even remotely smacks of politics the chances of getting a

¹⁶² Elgy Gillespie, *Irish Times*, 'Gay Groups celebrate respective birthdays', 2 June 1980.

¹⁶³ Archives of Human Sexuality and Identity, 'New Group Set to Open Old Wounds in Ireland', in *Gay News*, 23 August – 5 September 1979.

¹⁶⁴ NLI, IR 369 I 23, *In Touch*, Vol. 1, No. 1, September 1979.

respectable attendance are increased twofold by holding it in Dublin.’¹⁶⁵ This is not to say that Dublin gay and lesbian individuals were sufficiently more ‘politicised’ than those in Cork, rather it reflected the reality that a greater number of gay and lesbian individuals were living in Dublin.

Maintaining such a clear distinction between the social and the political, as adopted by gay activist leaders and reinforced in the historiography, is problematic to understanding the history of gay liberation in Ireland and elsewhere.¹⁶⁶ This narrow distinction has facilitated the disregarding of thousands of gay and lesbian individuals who crossed the threshold of these ‘social centres’ and who were not involved in overt political action. Their ‘social’ actions have been ignored as important elements in the undermining of the status quo in Ireland during this period. Moreover, the centres themselves have been ignored as important sites of gay liberation and particularly as *centres of resistance*, not merely social centres. Their very existence and the determination of many to enter them, I argue, constitute a form of what James Scott has characterised as *Everyday Resistance*.¹⁶⁷

According to Stellan Vinthagen and Anna Johansson in ‘Everyday Resistance: Exploration of a Concept and its Theories’, *Everyday Resistance* can be understood as ‘how people act in their everyday lives in ways that might undermine power.’¹⁶⁸ If one applies this definition to the actions of gay and lesbian individuals who entered these social centres or any other centre or event which accommodated gay and lesbian individuals during this period then, I maintain, such actions can be considered a challenge to the status quo, and thereby political. I see everyday resistance by gay and lesbian individuals as actions which individuals engaged in, in an attempt to live out a homosexual lifestyle in Ireland, such as telephoning a gay switchboard, attending a gay disco, participating in a gay youth group, watching homosexual themed movies, or participating in discussion groups on homosexuality. These were activities which were not generally tolerated, promoted, or welcomed in mainstream Irish society. Yet,

¹⁶⁵ NLI, IQA, MS 45, 951/7 – Steve Quillinan to David Norris September 1982.

¹⁶⁶ Take for example Izzy Kamikaze’s contribution to *Lesbian and Gay Visions of Ireland: Towards the Twenty-first century*. In a scathing attack on the NGF, Kamikaze stated that: ‘The kindest thing to say about the NGF would be that it was irrelevant. Not only would it be possible to write a history of Irish lesbian and gay politics without mentioning it at all – it has already been done. They avoided political action like poison. But everything is political, so they were political too. Let’s put a name on their politics. They were conservative.’ Kamikaze has fallen into the trap of seeing a clear distinction between the social and the political, even though she denies this in the text. There was nothing conservative about opening a gay centre in Dublin in 1979 and extensively advertising it as such.

¹⁶⁷ James C. Scott, ‘Everyday Forms of Resistance’, *Copenhagen Papers*, No. 4, 33-62.

¹⁶⁸ Stellan Vinthagen and Anna Johansson, ‘Everyday Resistance: Exploration of a Concept and its Theories’, in *Resistance Studies Magazine*, 2013, No. 1.

as we shall see, these actions were central to the evolution of a gay community and gay consumer revolution in Dublin by the late 1980s. Moreover, by meeting, talking and socialising with other gay and lesbian individuals in these centres, many finally came to accept their sexuality as something normal, rather than abnormal. This was crucial for, as Nancy Duncan has noted in *Body Space: Destabilising geographies of gender and sexuality*:

Bell Hooks offers another destabilising perspective on the idea of the traditional home as a place of immanence rather than transcendence. She says that because public space can be very hostile to African Americans (men as well as women), the home can be an important site of resistance. She sees the home place as having a radical political dimension. It's a place where, as she says, we could restore to ourselves the dignity denied to us on the outside in the public world.¹⁶⁹

If one applies this analysis to gay and lesbian centres and gay and lesbian individuals, then the significance of these locations and actions becomes evident. For many Irish gay and lesbian individuals home was not a place where one could restore dignity to themselves. However, within centres like the Hirschfeld Centre and the Phoenix Club homosexuals could do exactly that. In this regard, these centres in Ireland could be considered to have had a radical political dimension, particularly in fostering a sense of a gay community. As Carol Hanisch rightly noted, the *personal is political*.¹⁷⁰ To accept and act on one's sexuality, despite growing up in a society which considered it a perversion, was political, was radical, and was central to gay liberation.

These centres and the activities carried out within them are important for another reason. In a 2014 interview with the *Irish Marxist Review*, Ailbhe Smyth, a long time feminist and LGBT activist, speaking on LGBT and feminist activism in the 1980s remarked that 'the 1980s were such bad times in Ireland that a lot of the movement activity – whether it was the women's movement or whether it was lesbian or gay or whether it was socialist – tended to be very much in abeyance and very much less visible. I remember from my own involvement in movements that they tended to be off the public agenda. It was just so difficult to be overtly involved in social movement politics or to be involved in direct action.'¹⁷¹ Smyth is correct that it was difficult to be overtly involved, but her account is very much one sided, very much

¹⁶⁹ Nancy Duncan, 'Renegotiating Gender and Sexuality in Public and Private Spaces', in *Destabilizing geographies of gender and sexuality*, ed. Nancy Duncan, (London, Routledge, 1996), 136.

¹⁷⁰ Carol Hanisch, *The Personal is Political*, February 1969:

<http://www.carolhanisch.org/CHwritings/PIP.html> Accessed on 15 March 2017.

¹⁷¹ <http://irishmarxistreview.net/index.php/imr/article/viewFile/136/138>, 'The Struggle for LGBT rights in Ireland: Interview with Ailbhe Smyth', in *Irish Marxist Review*, Vol. 3, No. 11, 2004. Accessed on 15 March 2017.

shaped by what many have come to characterise as the success of the moral majority in 1980s Ireland, specifically, the 8th Amendment, the Divorce Referendum, and Norris' defeat in the High Court and Supreme Court. In comparison with the 2000s, the 1980s were much worse. However, by sustaining this narrative, one overlooks the considerable achievements that were made in this period, achievements, which again, have been viewed as politically insignificant. If one compares the 1980s with the 1960s/1970s the picture is considerably different. The 1980s, in contrast, was a period in which a gay scene was more vibrant and more public, a time when there were numerous organisations throughout the country advocating for gay rights, a greater public discussion on gay rights, organisations coming out in support of gay rights and businesses seeking to cater to Ireland's gay and lesbian community. In particular, it was a time when lesbian women became more confident and active in their attempts to generate a sense of a lesbian community and greater awareness of lesbianism in Ireland.

The 1980s had its setbacks for progressive groups in Ireland and successes for conservative forces, but it was also a time when gay and lesbian individuals challenged Irish social norms in a myriad of different ways. If we focus solely on the overtly political actions, at the expense of the covert efforts taking place, then we fail to recognise the important developments that took place in forging a gay and lesbian community in Ireland. If Smyth believed the overt political action was less visible and in abeyance, (which I do not necessarily agree with), then the covert resistance certainly was not in abeyance. In fact, covert attempts to undermine power were in the ascendancy. As James Scott has rightly noted 'Everyday forms of resistance rarely make headlines. But just as millions of anthozoan polyps create willy-nilly a coral reef, thousands upon thousands of petty acts of insubordination and evasion create a political and economic barrier reef of their own.'¹⁷² Within these centres there can be no doubt that acts of insubordination were taking place. Irish gay and lesbian individuals were evading heteronormativity and embracing homosexuality. These actions, in turn, formed a crucial part in forging a cultural change in Ireland and cannot be overlooked. However, as Mary Bernstein rightly argues 'the bulk of research on movement consequences focuses on explaining 'political' outcomes and continues to give short shrift to understanding the cultural effects of social movements.'¹⁷³ This chapter seeks to re-dress this approach by exploring the efforts of those within the Dublin based National Gay Federation (NGF), and Liberation for Irish

¹⁷² James C. Scott, 'Everyday Forms of Resistance', *Copenhagen Papers*, No. 4, 33-62.

¹⁷³ Mary Bernstein, 'Nothing Ventured, nothing gained? Conceptualising Social Movement 'Success' in the Lesbian and Gay Movement', in *Sociological Perspectives*, Vol. 46, No. 3, (Autumn 2003), 353-379.

Lesbians who worked to foster a sense of community amongst gay and lesbian individuals in the 1980s. I maintain that such attempts, which have been labelled social, did in fact undermine the status quo in Ireland and therefore cannot simply be dismissed as social per se. These actions had a considerable cultural impact not only on Irish gay and lesbian individuals, but also on the wider Irish society.

This chapter is divided into three sections. The first section will explore the more male dominated NGF, with occasional reference to the IGRM, due to the paucity of sources. The IGRM's existence was nevertheless important as it represented evidence of a growing gay scene in 1980s Dublin. The second section will then explore the efforts of LIL, which sought to create a space for lesbian women to come together. What were the aims of LIL? How did they go about achieving these aims? To what extent were lesbian women and gay men able to work together? These are just some of the issues addressed in this section. Lesbian women were active, rather than passive agents in the campaign for gay/lesbian liberation in Ireland. Their independent existence was a central feature in bringing about a greater debate on issues of gender and sexism within the gay movement in Ireland. While they did not garner the same attention as gay males, the 1980s nevertheless marked a turning point for greater lesbian visibility in Ireland. The final section will reflect on the impact of the above organisations, activities and centres, particularly, in generating greater awareness of a gay and lesbian community, fostering a spirit of a gay community and beginning a gay consumer revolution in Ireland. These activities were a form of everyday resistance and must be part of the history of gay and lesbian liberation in Ireland.

***'I certainly am aware of people talking about the recession and stuff in the 80's. I honestly just partied the whole time and the gay scene was extraordinarily vibrant'*¹⁷⁴**

If the first years of the gay movement in Dublin (1974-1978) represented a time of growth on a modest scale, then 1979 represented a time of greater excitement, opportunity, and considerable expansion for gay and lesbian individuals in Dublin. With this expansion came greater awareness of a gay scene in Dublin. 1979 heralded not only the re-emergence of the IGRM, but also the foundation of a second gay rights organisation, the National Gay Federation as well as the foundation of Ireland's first lesbian organisation, Liberation for Irish Lesbians.¹⁷⁵

¹⁷⁴ Edmund Lynch interview with Ciaran McKinney, 9 February 2013, *Edmund Lynch, Irish LGBT History Project*.

¹⁷⁵ Archives of Human Sexuality and Identity, 'New Group Set to Open Old Wounds in Ireland', in *Gay News*, 23 August – 5 September 1979.

Although the IGRM adopted a new constitution in 1980, its aims were effectively the same as those from 1974, despite Clancy and Ryan placing greater emphasis on social events.¹⁷⁶ The IGRM opened its new premises, the Phoenix Club, on 15 March 1980 at 18 North Lotts, Bachelor's Walk, Dublin 1.¹⁷⁷ Across the River Liffey on the South side of Dublin, those who had broken away from the IGRM in 1977, most notably David Norris, Edmund Lynch and Bernard Keogh, came together to establish the NGF in 1979. The NGF's structure and aims were practically identical to that of the IGRM, including for example a commitment: 'To achieve for gay men and women full equal rights with their heterosexual counterparts; to provide social events and amenities for members of NGF; to encourage the growth of a spirit of community among gay women and men in all parts of Ireland.'¹⁷⁸ On 17 March 1979, after some £40,000 was spent on renovations, the NGF opened the Hirschfeld Centre, which became the home of the NGF, and in many respects a home for many Irish gay and lesbian individuals throughout the 1980s.¹⁷⁹ Rhona McSweeney, writing *In Dublin*, described the Hirschfeld Centre as 'a warm and welcoming building and everyone in there is very friendly and quick to welcome a strange face. It functions both as a social centre and as a welfare centre.'¹⁸⁰ The centre was named after Magnus Hirschfeld, the pioneering German sexologist and founder of the Scientific Humanitarian Committee in 1896.

Both the Phoenix Club and the Hirschfeld Centre were open seven days a week. Between both centres, members could avail of: discos, a cinema in the Hirschfeld Centre, a theatre group in the Phoenix Club, befriending groups, Parents Enquiry (a support group for parents of homosexuals), youth groups, discussion groups, outdoor activities, and an alternatives group for more 'senior' members. The Phoenix Club had a billiard table and coffee room, while the Hirschfeld Centre even housed a café. Crucially, both organisations re-established a telephone befriending service. Whereas, TAF had been aligned with the IGRM

¹⁷⁶ Personal papers of Sean Connolly, IGRM constitution 1980.

¹⁷⁷ NLI, IR 94133 I 2, *In Dublin*, 7-20 March 1980.

¹⁷⁸ NLI, IQA, MS, 45, 936/3 – Constitution of the National Gay Federation adopted at the first Annual General Meeting held on Saturday 31 May 1980, in the Gresham Hotel, Dublin. Other objectives included: To promote, by education and example, greater understanding of homosexuality by society in general, and by medical, legal and religious institutions in particular. To work for the establishment of NGF groups in provincial centres. To work for the elimination of sexism in the gay community and in society in general. To campaign for the removal of all discriminatory sanctions against homosexual behaviour.

¹⁷⁹ NLI, IQA, MS 45, 940/8 – Leaflet on the Hirschfeld Centre produced by the National Gay Federation. NLI, IR 369 I 23, *In Touch: Journal of the National Gay Federation*, Vol. 1, No. 1, September 1979, 'Finance.'

¹⁸⁰ NLI, Ir 94133 I 2, *In Dublin*, July/August 1985, 'The Gay Generation.'

until 1978, in 1979 it transferred to the NGF, resulting in the IGRM (1979) establishing a new switchboard in September 1979, known as Irish Gay Switchboard.¹⁸¹

‘Dublin’s Gay Population, formerly invisible, have now begun to reflect the times that are in it and adopt a higher profile in the life of the city.’¹⁸²

From the very beginning both centres enjoyed high profiles for gay centres. Rhona McSweeney was not the only journalist to have visited the Hirschfeld Centre. In 1980, her colleague Lynn Geldof wrote a favourable review of the Hirschfeld Centre and its disco, Flickers.¹⁸³ Encouraging her readers to ‘check it [Hirschfeld Centre] out’, Geldof described it as ‘a most worthy, comprehensive and essential service for gay people. [...] Taking into account the voluntary nature of the organisation and the financial burdens under which it operates, the facilities are remarkable [...]’¹⁸⁴ *Hot Press* also featured an article on the Hirschfeld Centre in 1980, describing it as a solidarity centre and a ‘concrete sign of this demand for gay rights’ in Ireland.¹⁸⁵ Similarly, Elgy Gillespie, writing in the *Irish Times* on the birthday celebrations of the NGF and IGRM, noted the opening of the IGRM’s new premises on North Lotts, while Colm Toibin in *In Dublin* drew attention to the IGRM’s gay disco at the Phoenix Club, writing that ‘the air was charged with a sort of sexual tension. Anything might happen. Love stories could begin. If you’re gay, it could be a good idea to join.’¹⁸⁶ Even the fact that Elgy Gillespie was aware of the NGF and IGRM’s birthdays is representative of the high profiles these organisations and their centres enjoyed, even at that early stage. In fact, the opening of the Hirschfeld Centre was deemed so newsworthy that both the *Irish Times* and *Irish Press* sent journalists to visit and report on the centre.¹⁸⁷ The *Irish Press* described the Hirschfeld Centre as ‘A Centre for counsel and for friendship.’¹⁸⁸ This headline, rather than sensationalising the centre as a hotbed for homosexual activity, instead presented an image of an unthreatening centre simply seeking to offer a space for gay and lesbian individuals.

¹⁸¹ NLI, IQA, MS 45 951/8 – IGRM Press Release, 9 September 1979.

¹⁸² NLI, IR 94122 I 2, *In Dublin*, 25 July 1985.

¹⁸³ NLI, Ir 94133 I 2, *In Dublin*, December 1980, ‘Review of Flickers’ by Lynn Geldof. Flickers was the Dutch word for faggot and again was representative of the NGF’s interaction with their European counterparts.

¹⁸⁴ NLI, Ir 94133 I 2, *In Dublin*, December 1980, ‘Review of Flickers’ by Lynn Geldof.

¹⁸⁵ NLI, ILB 780, *Hot Press*, Vol. 4, No. 12, 7 – 12 November 1980, ‘Solidarity Centre.’

¹⁸⁶ NLI, IR 94133 I 2, *In Dublin*, 1980, 103, ‘Slow dancing’, by Colm Toibin. Elgy Gillespie, *Irish Times*, ‘Gay Groups celebrate respective birthdays’, 2 June 1980.

¹⁸⁷ *Irish Times*, ‘Gay group opens new headquarters in Dublin’, 25 April 1979. *Irish Press*, 1 May 1979, ‘A Centre for friendship and counsel.’

¹⁸⁸ *Irish Press*, 1 May 1979, ‘A Centre for friendship and counsel.’

The IGRM and NGF did not shy away from publicly advertising these centres as centres which catered to gay and lesbian individuals. This was clearly reflected in the advertisements they placed with publications such as *In Dublin* and *Hot Press*. In one example of many which appeared in *In Dublin* and *Hot Press*, the confidence of the IGRM in promoting the Phoenix Club was clearly evident.¹⁸⁹ As figure 1 illustrates, these were not small advertisements hid away at the bottom corner out of site, but rather quite large and visible. It is interesting to note that these advertisements were also positioned alongside more ‘socially acceptable’ establishments, such as Captain America’s Cookhouse, or Solomon Grundy’s, helping to normalise the Phoenix Club, and the Hirschfeld Centre within these publications. There was no ambiguity about who these centres wanted to appeal to. The bold capital letters of ‘**BEST GAY DISCO IN TOWN**’, was a courageous declaration of how unashamed and unafraid they were in stating it was a gay disco. In other words, these were not hidden gay centres, but very much public ones.

These venues were a clear progression from the more hidden venues gay and lesbians had previously frequented, to a more publicly recognised gay space in the north and south of Dublin city. This was a view shared by RTE’s Brian Black in November 1981. As the Hirschfeld Centre’s stature increased Brian Black visited it as part of RTE’s *Ireland’s Eye* programme.¹⁹⁰ Black gave Irish viewers an insight into the going on’s inside the Hirschfeld Centre, including footage of disco goers (almost exclusively male) at Flikkers.¹⁹¹ Recognising the greater awareness of gay people in Ireland, Black asked an NGF member ‘why is it the image of gay people seems to have taken on a profile?’¹⁹² Responding the NGF member contended that:

Basically because of places like this. The centre has established itself, because the NGF has made its profile public, has come out in many ways to the public, made itself known to the media, made itself known to other people, has established a social centre, a community centre here in Dublin. So, it’s possible for gay people to come in and relate to themselves, discover their own personalities, discover their own sexuality and then go back out to the world that bit more confident and that bit more aware of what they are

¹⁸⁹ NLI, IR 94133 I 2, *In Dublin*, 7-20 March 1980. NLI, ILB 780, *Hot Press*, Vol. 4, No. 12, 7 – 12 November 1980.

¹⁹⁰ <http://www.rte.ie/archives/2016/1123/833947-hirschfeld-centre-national-gay-federation/> RTE online archive, ‘Hirschfeld Centre home of Gay Liberation’, on *Ireland’s Eye*, 24 November 1981. Accessed on 20 March 2017.

¹⁹¹ ‘Hirschfeld Centre home of Gay Liberation’, on *Ireland’s Eye*, 24 November 1981.

¹⁹² ‘Hirschfeld Centre home of Gay Liberation’, on *Ireland’s Eye*, 24 November 1981.

and consequently communicate to other people that they are gay. This raises their own profile and encourages other people to do likewise.¹⁹³


¹⁹³ <http://www.rte.ie/archives/2016/1123/833947-hirschfeld-centre-national-gay-federation/>
RTÉ online archive, 'Hirschfeld Centre home of Gay Liberation', on Ireland's Eye, 24
November 1981. Accessed on 20 March 2017.

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Figure 1. Advertisement of Irish Gay Rights Movement from In Dublin, 7-20 March 1980.¹⁹⁴

¹⁹⁴ NLI, IR 94133 I 2, In Dublin, 7-20 March 1980.

It is in this context then, the greater publicity and awareness of these centres, that we can begin to recognise these centres, and those brave enough to enter them, as being part of a resistance campaign. By choosing to enter such publicly recognised gay venues, thousands of gay and lesbian individuals made a conscious decision to embrace their homosexuality and reject heteronormativity. Entering such publicly recognised gay venues was not an easy decision to make. In a 2013 interview, Mick Quinlan recalled the courage it took to enter the Hirschfeld Centre:

I called Tel-A-Friend and I jumped on the 78 [bus] and this guy said, ‘Come on down, it doesn’t mean you’re gay.’ I was convinced that everyone on the bus knew where I was going. Quite terrifying. Got off at Fleet Street. And I walked up to the Hirschfeld, and I was about to ring the bell and two guards walked around the corner, and then I said, ‘Ah shite.’ And I walked around the block a few times. I eventually rang the bell, and this guy came down and I can remember his name – Martin, so he said come on in. [...] And so that’s how I started the process of coming out or dealing with my sexuality.¹⁹⁵

The extent to which gay and lesbian individuals were willing to do as Mick Quinlan did, is evidenced not only in the numbers who signed up to both the IGRM and the NGF as members, (which in the early 1980s was apparently a combined total of over 5000), but also in the fact that both centres were a hive of activity throughout the week, such was the demand.¹⁹⁶ From her visit to Flikkers in December 1980, Lynn Geldof estimated that roughly 150 people attended Flikkers on a nightly basis.¹⁹⁷ One year later, in the space of just one week, 1361 individuals attended Flikkers nightclub, making it the busiest week for that year.¹⁹⁸ Later in 1985, on one Saturday alone, Flikkers nightclub made almost £850 (roughly 251 individuals).¹⁹⁹

The popularity of the Hirschfeld Centre was no doubt helped by the fact live bands such as: Last Hoorah, Tokyo Olympics, Kissed Air and Moujik Strip all performed there.²⁰⁰ Maurice Haugh, writing in *the Irish Times*, described Flikkers as one of ‘the liveliest and musically up-to-date in town.’²⁰¹ Haugh also touched upon another unique feature of the Hirschfeld Centre which helped its popularity; the fact the NGF was able to import records directly from London and play them months before they hit the radio charts in Ireland.²⁰² This might also help explain why, on *Ireland’s Eye*, one member of the NGF revealed that ‘straights’ were now coming into

¹⁹⁵ Edmund Lynch interview with Mick Quinlan, 1 October 2013, *Edmund Lynch, Irish LGBT History Project*.

¹⁹⁶ Elgy Gillespie, *Irish Times*, ‘Gay Groups celebrate respective birthdays’, 2 June 1980. *Irish Independent*, 26 June 1980.

¹⁹⁷ NLI, IR 94133 I 2, *In Dublin*, December 1980, ‘Review of Flikkers’ by Lynn Geldof.

¹⁹⁸ NLI, IQA, MS 45, 946/1 – 1981 Weekly Disco attendances.

¹⁹⁹ NLI, IQA, MS 45, 946/1 – Flikker’s Disco Report, 9/3/1985.

²⁰⁰ NLI, IR 94133 I 2, *In Dublin*, 18 December – 7 January 1981.

²⁰¹ *Irish Times*, 30 July 1984, ‘life revives in a dying part of Dublin’.

²⁰² *Irish Times*, ‘life revives in a dying part of Dublin’.

Flikkers, when previously they did not even want to mix with gay and lesbian individuals.²⁰³ In many respects, this might have contributed to de-radicalising how some individuals perceived the gay scene, homosexuals, and how they socialised.

Looking at *Identity* magazine, which provided a list of events for gay and lesbian individuals in the early 1980s, the contrast and expansion of gay orientated activities between 1977 and 1982 is quite remarkable. Whereas, in April 1977, there was just the original Phoenix Club offering 15 disco nights a month, of which only one of the 15 was exclusively for women, by April 1982, between the new Phoenix Club and the Hirschfeld Centre there was, on average, a total of 36 disco nights, with a weekly women-only disco at the Phoenix Club on Wednesdays. Coupled with this were the new activities on offer, such as the Phoenix players theatre group, gay befriending group, youth group, talk shops, parents' group and the very popular Hirschfeld Biograph.

The Hirschfeld Biograph, a 55-seater cinema housed in the Hirschfeld Centre, was one of the most successful and enduring initiatives of the NGF. The Biograph screened a range of different movie genres every second Monday, many of which would not have been accessible to gay and lesbian individuals without the Hirschfeld Biograph. In the course of its 6-and-a-half-year history the Hirschfeld Biograph screened 137 films, of which included, the Irish premiere of *The Times of Harvey Milk*, *Sunday Bloody Sunday*, *We Were One Man*, *Victor Victoria* and *The Best Way to Walk*.²⁰⁴ The Biograph was very much a transnational endeavour, which brought Irish homosexuals into contact with international gay films.

The Hirschfeld Biograph proved extremely popular particularly because it provided an opportunity for younger and older members to socialise outside the disco setting. Its success and endurance, however, owes much to the efforts of Johnny McEvoy who managed the Hirschfeld Biograph from 1979 to its closure in 1986. McEvoy described the Biograph as something which 'all gay persons, regardless of age, could attend without having the feeling of being left out of things or being in a cruisy atmosphere they felt uncomfortable with.'²⁰⁵

Although, initially established to provide an alternative social activity for gay and lesbian individuals in Dublin, the Hirschfeld Biograph was highly instrumental in bringing gay themed films into wider circulation and knowledge in Ireland throughout the 1980s. The success in acquiring such a high number of films was helped by McEvoy's connections outside

²⁰³ <http://www.rte.ie/archives/2016/1123/833947-hirschfeld-centre-national-gay-federation/> RTÉ online archive, 'Hirschfeld Centre home of Gay Liberation', on Ireland's Eye, 24 November 1981. Accessed on 20 March 2017.

²⁰⁴ NLI, IQA, MS 45, 998/6 – The Hirschfeld Biograph.

²⁰⁵ NLI, IR 369 07, *Out*, NGF NEWS, December 1984/January 1985 'Hirschfeld Biograph.'

the gay community. In 1980, at a meeting in Tralee of delegates representing 33 film societies in Ireland, who were attending the annual viewing session of the Federation of Irish Film Societies, McEvoy gave a speech about the Hirschfeld Biograph. Following this, McEvoy, despite his connection with Ireland's only gay cinema, was invited to take over responsibility for the presentation of films at the Federation's annual viewing session.²⁰⁶ McEvoy described this as a great turning point for the Biograph.²⁰⁷

There are a few reasons for this being the case. Firstly, by agreeing to take on this responsibility, McEvoy ensured that the Hirschfeld Biograph became an honorary member of the Federation of Irish Film Societies, a considerable achievement for a gay cinema. This not only granted official recognition to the Hirschfeld Biograph, but also legitimised it as a respected outlet for films in Ireland. In turn, this allowed the Biograph to avail itself of films coming in from abroad, helping to reduce the costs of acquiring international films.²⁰⁸ More crucially, however, by selecting gay themed films for the Biograph, McEvoy was responsible for these films being shown by other members of the Irish Film Societies throughout the country.²⁰⁹

McEvoy's connections were not limited to Irish organisations or individuals. During the 1980 Gay Pride Week, McEvoy succeeded in bringing Vito Russo over from London to speak about his book, *Celluloid Closet*. A few years later in October 1984, thanks to the support of the British Film Institute, Terence Davies came to speak at the Hirschfeld Biograph on his acclaimed trilogy of films, *Children, Madonna and Child, Death and Transfiguration*.²¹⁰ Davies' trilogy explored the emotional and spiritual problems of growing up both Catholic and gay in Liverpool. Of all the films which appeared at the Hirschfeld Centre, Davies' generated the most positive reviews and attention outside the gay community. Writing in the *Irish Times*, Ray Comiskey gave considerable attention to Davies' trilogy, noting that 'Hirschfeld Biograph club members will have an opportunity to see a marvellous piece of film [...]'.²¹¹ Donald Houram, in *In Dublin*, was even more praiseworthy of the film, arguing that:

Most films, quite frankly, are shit. A few are merely mediocre. But occasionally there comes along something to justify all those hours spent sitting unhappily in the dark wishing that the cultural division of some illegal organisation would bazooka the projection booth. Terence Davies' trilogy of films constitutes quite the most extraordinary and affecting cinematic experience of recent years.²¹²

²⁰⁶ NLI, IR 369 07, *Out, NGF NEWS*, December 1984/January 1985, 'Hirschfeld Biograph.'

²⁰⁷ NLI, ILB 305 G 2, *Gay Community News*, January 1990, Hirschfeld Biograph.

²⁰⁸ NLI, IQA, MS 45, 998/6 – The Hirschfeld Biograph.

²⁰⁹ NLI, ILB 305 G 2, *Gay Community News*, January 1990, Hirschfeld Biograph.

²¹⁰ NLI, IR 369 07, *Out, NGF NEWS*, December 1984/January 1985 'Hirschfeld Biograph.'

²¹¹ *Irish Times*, Hirschfeld Biograph, 1 October 1984.

²¹² NLI, IR 94133 I 2, *In Dublin*, Review, October 1984.

In fact, *In Dublin* was so impressed with the production, that they selected it as their recommended event for readers that week.²¹³ Despite these positive reviews, Terence Davies' scheduled appearance on RTÉ's *Day by Day*, to talk about his trilogy, was cancelled at the last minute. According to the *Irish Times*, one producer read Davies' book, *Hallelujah Now* and backed off the notion of putting Mr. Davies before the Plain People of Ireland. Even an impressive pedigree of critical acclaim for Mr. Davies' films in the *Observer*, *Times*, *Guardian* and a number of Irish papers failed to save the day.²¹⁴ Although not every film shown at the Hirschfeld Biograph generated as much praise, it was nevertheless important that the Biograph was actually acknowledged in mainstream publications. The nonchalant references to the Biograph gives the impression that these journalists simply viewed the Biograph as a cinema, not a gay cinema to be feared or avoided, but rather one which screened high quality films.

Writing on the closure of the Hirschfeld Biograph in 1986, McEvoy stated that he hoped the Biograph would be remembered as being 'part of a positive evolving gay scene, cherished and let go, but not forgotten. It is time to advance and it is the turn of the next generation.'²¹⁵ McEvoy was overly modest in this statement. I would argue, that it was not only a part of an evolving gay space, but also part of an evolving awareness of gay themed films within Irish society. While the intention may have been to simply provide gay and lesbian individuals with an opportunity to view such films, the quality of the Biograph and the films on show appealed to more than just gay and lesbian individuals, as the above reviews highlighted. The positive impact of the Hirschfeld Biograph on the lives of many gay and lesbian individuals was also expressed in comments made by Ciaran Coleman and John Kilcullen in interviews in 2013. Coleman fondly remembered going to see:

The Times of Harvey Milk, which, to me, was like amazing, to see this film about this openly gay politician who unfortunately was shot, but the documentary was just of a high quality. [...] But, for me, the Hirschfeld Biograph was one of the wonderful things about the Hirschfeld Centre, you know, to see movies and documentaries about, you know, at the time, we had no internet, you know, so it was, like, seeing things about places far away, about the gay community, and really, I suppose, you know, San Francisco and the whole Harvey Milk thing really informed the gay community, on, you know, about rights and what we should do et cetera.²¹⁶

²¹³ NLI, IR 94133 I 2, *In Dublin*, Review, October 1984.

²¹⁴ *Irish Times*, 'Backdrop', 13 October 1984.

²¹⁵ NLI, IQA, MS 45, 998/6 – The Hirschfeld Biograph.

²¹⁶ Edmund Lynch interview with Ciaran Coleman, 8 November 2013, *Edmund Lynch, Irish LGBT History Project*.

Coleman's reflection gives another insight into the benefit of the Biograph. The majority of these films were not Irish. They gave Irish gay and lesbian individuals an insight into areas outside Ireland, which had progressed more in terms of gay rights, offering considerable hope and encouragement to the likes of Coleman. In many respects, these films were a window into a brighter future, when perhaps Ireland could elect an openly gay politician like San Francisco had.²¹⁷ Similarly, John Kilcullen has credited the Hirschfeld Biograph with helping him make new gay friends, noting, 'I used to go to the Hirschfeld Biograph, which was a cinema, and again I found another guy from work who was gay, met him there, so through him I met other people and gradually my circle of friends increased.'²¹⁸

***'I remember we stopped the traffic, and the police were there, and the police were on tenterhooks about how to deal with us because it was the first time there had ever been a big public pride event.'*²¹⁹**

It was within the Hirschfeld Centre that gay pride week celebrations were officially marked for the first time in Ireland. Although many associate gay pride events exclusively with parades and demonstrations, this would not be the case in Ireland until 1983. However, although a public parade did not take place until 1983, it was also not the case that gay pride went uncelebrated in Ireland. Within the Hirschfeld Centre, this week-long celebration of gay pride was celebrated with numerous events, thereby ensuring that Irish gay and lesbian individuals could be part of the international gay pride celebrations. From 1979 to 1982, these gay pride events were extremely varied, ranging from a Gala Night, an outing to Glendalough, an art exhibition, jumble sale, numerous poetry readings, films, folk music sessions, fundraiser for David Norris' legal battle, and pink balloon release from St. Stephens Green, amongst others.²²⁰ The one reoccurring event, however, was a public picnic in Merrion Square.²²¹ These picnics, in many respects, were a pre-cursor to the gay pride parades in Ireland. Writing about the 1980 gay pride picnic in *In Touch*, Tonie Walsh remarked that 'If one could only visualise

²¹⁷ In June 2017 Leo Varadkar, an openly gay member of the Irish parliament, was elected Prime Minister of Ireland. <https://www.irishtimes.com/news/politics/leo-varadkar-becomes-youngest-ever-taoiseach-1.3119285>, Michael O'Regan and Marie O'Halloran, 'Leo Varadkar becomes younger ever Taoiseach', *Irish Times*, 14 June 2017. Accessed on 2 January 2018.

²¹⁸ Edmund Lynch interview with John Kilcullen, 28 September 2013, *Edmund Lynch, Irish LGBT History Project*.

²¹⁹ Edmund Lynch interview with Tonie Walsh, 6 April 2013, *Edmund Lynch, Irish LGBT History Project*.

²²⁰ NLI, IQA, MS 45, 955/2 – 'Gay Pride Week 1981.' March planned as part of Gay Pride Week', *Irish Times*, 22 June 1981.

²²¹ NLI, IQA, MS 45, 940/8 – Gay Pride Week 1982.

seventy faggots and dykes all bedecked with pink carnations and triangles squatting on the grass in the middle of a public park! The sun shone down in all its glory on beaming happy faces and everyone, I think, enjoyed themselves immensely.²²²

From as early as June 1979, the *Irish Times*, *Evening Herald*, *Irish Independent*, *In Dublin* and *Hot Press* all drew some level of attention to the celebration of gay pride in Dublin. In fact, in 1979, the *Irish Times* included the gay pride week celebrations in their 'What's On' section.²²³ Writing in the *Irish Independent*, Michael Riordan used the end of gay pride in 1980 to explore the existing situation of homosexuals in Ireland, noting that there could be up to '231,000 homosexuals in the 26 counties.'²²⁴ Such media attention brought the very concept of gay pride and the efforts of gay and lesbian individuals to resist their oppression to a much wider Irish audience, before the more public parades ever began. Although these gay pride week celebrations were primarily 'social events' confined to the Hirschfeld Centre, they nevertheless were important stepping stones to a more public expression of gay pride for many Irish homosexuals in later years.

The primary impetus, however, for a more public declaration of protest and pride followed the killing of Declan Flynn on 9 September 1982. Flynn was attacked and killed by five youths, who defended their actions on the basis that they were simply trying to clean the park of homosexuals.²²⁵ Although found guilty of the lesser charge of manslaughter, despite one of the youths stating that they 'were all part of a team to get rid of queers from Fairview Park', Justice Gannon ruled that this could never have been a case of murder and handed down a suspended five-year sentence.²²⁶ The suspended sentence generated considerable controversy and anger amongst Ireland's gay and lesbian community. In the *Sunday Independent*, Hugh Leonard wrote that:

Only today, as I write, five teenagers were found guilty of beating and kicking a 31-year old man to death in a Dublin park. They were, they told the court, conducting a campaign of 'queer-bashing', which may or may not have been a mitigating factor. At any rate, they walked from the court, free. I find this heartening. It is nice to know that while you may be bludgeoned and booted to a bloody end in a Fairview Park on a fine Spring

²²² NLI, IR 369 I 23, *In Touch: Journal of National Gay Federation*, Vol. 2, No. 7, August/September 1980.

²²³ *Irish Times*, 26-27 June 1979.

²²⁴ Michael Riordan, 'A question of rights for a different minority', *Irish Independent*, 26 June 1980.

²²⁵ Hugh Leonard, 'I'll not be moved from Mr. Dukes' Ireland', *Sunday Independent* 13 March 1983.

²²⁶ *Irish Independent*, 'Suspended sentences for killing man in park', 9 March 1983.

evening, at least a homosexual is unlikely to wink at you. Let us, by all means, get our values right.²²⁷

While it would seem that it was the suspended sentence, rather than the killing of an individual because of his presumed homosexuality, was the main cause of the public outcry, there can be no doubt that the reaction and actions of the gay and lesbian community to the verdict ensured that the public outcry was not restricted solely to the issue of mandatory sentences, but rather heavily focused on the treatment of homosexuals within Irish society. Rather than taking shelter, gay and lesbian activists instead sought to confront their marginalisation and victimisation with a public demonstration demanding their right to exist as gay and lesbian Irish citizens. Their decision to do so generated considerable media attention and allowed them to highlight that violence against gay and lesbian individuals was not simply illusory, but rather a frequent occurrence in Irish society.

On 19 March 1983, gay and lesbian individuals, with the support of the Union of Students in Ireland, People's Democracy, Socialist Worker's Movement, Sinn Féin, the Irish Republican Socialist Party, Democratic Socialists and the Rape Crisis Centre, marched with members from the Dublin Gay Collective, NGF, Cork Gay Collective and LIL from Liberty Hall to Fairview Park with banners declaring: 'Gays are Human', 'Gays have the right to Life' and 'Stop Violence against Gays and Women.'²²⁸ The number of individuals who took part was reported by the media to have been 400, while the organisers claimed close to 1000 marched. Even, if the 400 figure is to be accepted, this still represents a significant turn-out for the first mass demonstration on gay rights, particularly one organised only a few short days after the sentence was delivered. This was reflected in the considerable coverage the demonstration received in the *Sunday World*, *Evening Herald*, *Sunday Independent*, *Sunday Press* and *Irish Times*.²²⁹

The Fairview Park Protest March was a symbolic moment for Irish gay and lesbian individuals, who demonstrated their willingness to stand up against their oppression and mistreatment by society. The march was a strong declaration that they were not going to go away or succumb to the hostility they were facing. To some extent, the public outcry and participation of many from outside the gay community suggests that their attempts to highlight that homosexuals were human and should not be treated differently, was getting through to some. The public outcry demonstrates the extent to which a vast majority of Irish citizens

²²⁷ Hugh Leonard, 'I'll not be moved from Mr. Dukes' Ireland', *Sunday Independent* 13 March 1983.

²²⁸ *Evening Herald*, 'Demo over attacks on 'gays'', 19 March 1983.

²²⁹ NLI, IR 369 I 25, *Identity*, Issue No. 5, April-June 1983, 'Fairview Park.'

opposed the actions of the 5 youths, who had defended themselves by arguing that they were seeking to clean the park of homosexuals. In 1983 this excuse met with little support outside the court room.

The killing of Declan Flynn and the Fairview Park Protest March were highly significant in the organisation of the first gay pride parade in Ireland on 25 June 1983. In an announcement in the *Irish Times* preceding the parade, Noel Walsh, a member of the parade's steering committee, explained that the march was being organised to 'celebrate this pride in our identity, but also to protest at the lack of humanity and equality shown to lesbians and gay men.'²³⁰ Tonie Walsh has recalled the significance of this gay pride protest march, stating that:

I will never ever forget, to the day I die, that feeling, 200-off of us, walking down through newly pedestrianised Grafton Street from the Fusiliers Arch through Grafton Street and then that wonderful moment when you're walking Westmoreland Street, and the vista opens up, and you get that great expanse of the river, and then you're into O'Connell Street, and there was this just – I mean, even now when I think about, I just get a lump in my throat and I just – there's this great sense of fierce acclamation and that you've arrived somehow as you are walking into Dublin's main elegant thoroughfare. And there we were, this raggle-taggle bunch from Belfast, Cork and Dublin, only a few months after the horror of the Declan Flynn murder and the protest march [...] We came across a stand that had been set up for the National Children's Day parade that was going to be held the next day. And, of course, everybody, being opportunistic lesbians and gay men, decided to take over the stand outside the GPO. We put up some banners and everything else and then we made our speeches. [...] I remember we stopped the traffic, and the police were there, and the police were on tenterhooks about how to deal with us because it was the first time there had ever been a big public pride event.²³¹

It is evident from Walsh's comments, that even after 30 years, the emotion and sense of pride he felt marching with 200 other gay and lesbian individuals still remains. It is also clear, just how significant Walsh viewed this event, an event that signified that gay and lesbian individuals had 'arrived somehow' and were claiming their space on the major streets of Dublin's city centre.

The Declan Flynn case, while highly significant was not the only catalyst for the 25 June gay pride march. Just as the Stonewall Riots were a culmination of a series of events and moments, which spilled over into violent riots in June 1969, so too was the 25 June 1983 gay pride march in Dublin. The marking of gay pride since 1979 and the sense of a gay community spirit built up in the Hirschfeld Centre and Phoenix Club contributed significantly to the holding of a gay pride march in 1983. Without the existence of either the Hirschfeld Centre or

²³⁰ *Irish Times*, 'Gay Rights Protest March', 24 June 1983.

²³¹ Edmund Lynch interview with Tonie Walsh, 6 April 2013, *Edmund Lynch, Irish LGBT History Project*.

Phoenix Club, and the willingness of many to socialise there, who in turn built up bonds of community, it is hard to imagine the organisation of a gay pride march. In other words, had a similar incident to that which happened to Declan Flynn occurred 10 years previously (no doubt many such killings or attacks did occur), I do not believe such a demonstration would have taken place, nor such an outcry occurred. Why? Simply, because there was no sense of gay community spirit or organised gay movement to respond, like there was in 1982/1983.

‘The gay adolescent is living proof in the public’s eye that gay people are out to recruit the young and that they succeed in doing so.’²³²

While the above activities were extremely popular, they nevertheless were restricted to individuals aged 18 and over. Trying to facilitate individuals 18 and under caused some headache for the NGF. Without being able to avail of the activities and services at the Hirschfeld Centre, young homosexuals were pretty much expected to find their own way of meeting other homosexuals, which, when pubs and discos were also excluded, only left the more dangerous public lavatories, or the personal column pages of certain publications or agony aunt columns. Quite often these agony aunt columns were as psychologically dangerous as the public lavatories. The *Irish Times*, for example, reported on how one youth who contacted an agony aunt columnist was told to wait until he was 28 and then go to a doctor for a diagnosis. Another columnist told a girl to simply wait until she got to like boys.²³³ Within the NGF there were those, led by Bernard Keogh, who believed that the NGF had a moral obligation to help younger homosexuals. Others, however, felt that should the NGF be seen to be encouraging young individuals to become part of a gay organisation, the NGF could come in for heavy criticism from conservative forces. They feared that those opposed to homosexuality would use it to argue that the NGF were out to corrupt the youth of Ireland and convert them to homosexuality.²³⁴

Despite the pitfalls that a Youth Group might have presented for the NGF, Keogh, nevertheless, sought to demonstrate the extent to which a gay youth group was necessary and, in doing so, provide some reassurance to the NGF of its merits. With the support of Chris Heaume of the London Gay Teenage Group, testimonies from young gay people, and professionals from various scientific disciplines, Keogh produced a detailed discussion report

²³² NLI, IR 369 I 23, *In Touch: Journal of National Gay Federation*, Vol. 1, No. 3, November/December 1979, ‘NGF Youth Group.’

²³³ *Irish Times*, ‘The Gay with parents’, 5 September 1980.

²³⁴ NLI, IR 369 I 23, *In Touch*, ‘NGF Youth Group.’

on the merits of setting up a youth group.²³⁵ The report included topics such as: ‘adolescent breakdown’, ‘it’s only a phase, isn’t it?’, ‘the claim of recruitment’, and ‘a youth group for gay adolescents.’²³⁶ Keogh emphasised that the demand for a youth group came in fact from gay youths, and were the NGF to establish one, they would merely be reflecting that desire.²³⁷ In many respects Keogh’s report was as much a blueprint for how the NGF could respond to criticism from opponents, as it was a case for the establishment of such a gay youth group.

Drawing on the existence of gay youth groups internationally, such as the London Gay Teenage Group and Gay and Young in New York, Keogh maintained that a ‘youth group would provide the young person with a validation not usually available to him in the wider society. It would provide an environment where these young people could relate to each other in a relaxed supportive atmosphere [...]’.²³⁸ This was particularly important, Keogh argued, at a time when reports from the Samaritans showed a dramatic increase in calls from gay youths. According to figures for 1978, there were 45 calls to the Samaritans from gay youths aged 19 and under. This represented a 114% increase on 1977 figures. While Keogh noted that some might consider the number small, he contended that it only ‘represented the tip of what is most likely a very considerable iceberg.’²³⁹

Keogh’s report succeeded in convincing the majority of the NGF administrative council of the necessity in establishing a gay youth group.²⁴⁰ However, the NGF implemented strict safeguards to protect youths attending the Hirschfeld Centre. For example, during the gay youth groups’ meetings every Sunday from 3p.m. - 6p.m. in the Hirschfeld Centre, access was restricted to those only under 21, including the administrative council of the NGF.²⁴¹ The only exception to this rule was Bernard Keogh, who was liaison officer for the youth group, and the parents of youths.²⁴² These rules were also an attempt to shield the NGF from claims of exploiting and corrupting youths.

The NGF Youth Group’s main objective was ‘to foster a spirit of mutual validation and support among its members while providing facilities for young gay women and men to meet

²³⁵ NLI, Personal Papers of David Norris, ACC 6672, Box 36 – NGF Gay Youth Group Report, September 1979.

²³⁶ NLI, Personal Papers of David Norris, ACC 6672, Box 36 – NGF Gay Youth Group.

²³⁷ NLI, Personal Papers of David Norris, ACC 6672, Box 36 – NGF Gay Youth Group .

²³⁸ NLI, Personal Papers of David Norris, ACC 6672, Box 36 – NGF Gay Youth Group.

²³⁹ NLI, Personal Papers of David Norris, ACC 6672, Box 36 – NGF Gay Youth Group.

²⁴⁰ NLI, IR 369 I 23, *In Touch*, ‘NGF Youth Group.’

²⁴¹ NLI, IQA, MS, 45, 956/1 - Bernard Keogh, NGF General Secretary to Anne Keogh, Student Counsellor, Trinity College, 4 March 1980.

²⁴² NLI, IQA, MS 45, 949/4 -Bernard Keogh NGF General Secretary to Willie McConkey, TAF Director, 18 December 1979.

socially in a peer group environment.’²⁴³ Parents were encouraged to take an active role in the youth group and were invited monthly to review the progress and workings of the group. In cooperation with Parents Enquiry, the youth group was able to allow parents attending with their son or daughter for the first time, to talk to members of Parents Enquiry on issues such as: how to come to terms with their child’s sexuality and how best to cope with it. One of the key features of the youth group were its open days held on the last Sunday of every month. The open days, which were generally promoted through newspapers, such as the *Irish Times*, offered young adolescents the opportunity to bring family members and friends to the Hirschfeld Centre and introduce them to the youth group, the NGF, and issues relevant to gay youths.²⁴⁴ At one such open day the discussion revolved around ‘counselling’, with representatives of the Samaritans, Hope, Contact, TAF and the National Youth Council of Ireland invited to participate.²⁴⁵ This, in turn, allowed outside organisations, who might not have had an opportunity to learn about homosexuality, to speak to gay and lesbian individuals and become more aware of the problems and challenges they faced in Irish society. Derek Moloney remembers another session which involved a discussion on what it takes to be a parent, remarking that ‘we had this fantastic session on what does it take to be a parent because if some parents were wonderful about it and some parents weren’t so wonderful about it, you’d tend to have judgements, and we had to go through a thought process of how a parent learns being a parent, and a person learns their sexuality.’²⁴⁶

The NGF Youth Group was keen to foster connections with other youth groups both inside and outside Ireland.²⁴⁷ In 1981, the youth group successfully affiliated to Comhairle Le Leas Óige, (Dublin Youth Service). One year later, in September 1982, the benefits of affiliation became evident when Comhairle Le Leas Óige awarded the NGF Youth Group a £200 grant to help with advertisement costs.²⁴⁸ In May 1983, the National Youth Council of Ireland also assisted the NGF Youth Group by forwarding details of a seminar on working

²⁴³ NLI, IR 369 I 23, *In Touch: Journal of National Gay Federation*, Vol. 1, No. 3, November/December 1979, ‘NGF Youth Group.’

²⁴⁴ *Irish Times*, ‘What’s on this weekend’, 11 May 1985.

²⁴⁵ NLI, IQA, MS, 45, 956/1 - Bernard Keogh, NGF General Secretary to Anne Keogh, Student Counsellor, Trinity College, 4 March 1980.

²⁴⁶ Derek Moloney, 31 August 2013, *Edmund Lynch, Irish LGBT History Project*.

²⁴⁷ NLI, IQA, MS 45, 956/3 - Bernard Keogh, NGF General Secretary to David Medcalf, Executive Officer of National Youth Council of Ireland, 30 June 1981.

²⁴⁸ NLI, IQA, MS 45, 943/3 - Maurice Devlin, Liaison Officer with Comhairle Le Leas Óige, to Pat McGrath of NGF Youth Group, 28 September 1982.

camp activities for young gays and lesbians, taking place in the Netherlands in July/August of that year.²⁴⁹

While the NGF Youth Group welcomed the £200 grant, some in Irish society did not. For some, its recognition represented an undermining of Irish social norms, particularly ideals of masculinity, but also the legitimisation of a gay organisation in Ireland. The *Irish Independent* reported that Tom Holt, a member of the Dublin Vocational Education Committee (VEC), of which Comhairle Le Leas Óige was a sub-committee, condemned the decision, insisting that:

The money should be used properly and especially for children taking part in manly games. Mr. Holt warned that by approving grants to these types of groups, the VEC was failing in its big responsibility in the forming of the character of young people. By giving financial support to groups like this we are not helping to form characters but to deform them.²⁵⁰

Mr. Holt was supported in his views by Dublin T.D. Larry McMahon, who argued that homosexuals were ‘misguided and sick people and the money should be spent putting them back on the right road.’²⁵¹ Some, however, defended the awarding of the grant. Michael McGee, then director of Comhairle Le Leas Óige, insisted that the NGF Youth Group appeared to be ‘a well organised youth club and ran a programme similar to other youth bodies. They had been given a grant on application the same as any other group, and the club had received the money.’²⁵² While McGee defended the decision based on the basis that the NGF Youth Group met the criteria, the issue for those opposed was not that they met the criteria, but rather the fact that a gay group was being treated just like any other youth group. It would appear from Holt and McMahon’s perspective the NGF Youth Group’s failure to adhere to Ireland’s strict gender and sexual norms was reason enough to refuse the grant, irrespective of the fact that the group fulfilled the official requirements.

Although the controversy did not immediately impact the NGF Youth Group’s relationship with other organisations, by the mid 1980s the youth group was beginning to become ostracised inside Ireland. In 1985, the NGF Youth Group’s attempt to become an associate member of the National Youth Council was unsuccessful.²⁵³ According to *Out*, delegates from the Irish Democratic Youth Movement, Connolly Youth Movement and an

²⁴⁹ NLI, IQA, MS 45, 956/3 - Nuala O’Donovan, International Officer of National Youth Council of Ireland to National Gay Federation, 11 May 1983.

²⁵⁰ *Irish Independent*, ‘Row over gay group’s grant’, 14 October 1982.

²⁵¹ *Irish Times*, ‘Grant to gay group attacked’ – 14 October 1982.

²⁵² *Irish Press*, ‘Gay Club grant defended’, 14 October 1982.

²⁵³ NLI, IQA, MS, 45, 956/3 - David Meredith, Director of National Youth Council of Ireland to Tonie Walsh, General Secretary of NGF, 24 October 1985.

officer of the National Youth Council of Ireland all supported the NGF Youth Groups application.²⁵⁴ However, in a rather unusual move, the NGF Youth Group's application was defeated, not by groups voting against them, but rather by the fact that the other groups abstained from voting, thereby, denying the NGF Youth Group the necessary 2/3 majority for affiliation.²⁵⁵

More surprising, however, was the decision in 1986 by Comhairle Le Leas Óige to not register the NGF Youth Group, as it had done for the last five years, thereby denying them any future funding. It is not known why Comhairle Le Leas Óige suddenly refused to affiliate the NGF Youth Group, despite the group continuing to fulfil the necessary requirements for affiliation. Writing in *Out*, the NGF Youth Group claimed that a number of factors had influenced this decision. Firstly, they stated that 'some members of the Comhairle apparently felt that teenagers would not be sufficiently clear about their sexual identity to be able to decide whether or not they were gay.'²⁵⁶ Secondly, the NGF Youth Group believed that the legal position regarding homosexual activity was used as justification.²⁵⁷ Finally, and perhaps most crucially, this decision, they maintained, was aided by the loss of the previous chair, Kevin Byrne, who the NGF argued was strongly in favour of supporting the NGF Youth Group.²⁵⁸

Despite the unwillingness of the Irish National Youth Council to support the NGF Youth Group, its European counterpart, the European Youth Foundation was willing to assist Irish gay and lesbian youths. In what was described by Tonie Walsh as 'one of the most memorable events in the six-year history of the Hirschfeld Centre', the NGF Youth Group hosted the 2nd International Gay Youth Congress in July 1985.²⁵⁹ The ability of the NGF to host this event was a major achievement, especially as Comhairle Le Leas Óige declined to give any funding insisting that 'It is our policy at present not to support international events because of general financial constraints.'²⁶⁰

The 2nd International Gay Youth Congress, which took place from 7 July to 12 July 1985 at the Hirschfeld Centre, had as its theme, 'Building a Future: A Task for Gay Youth Groups.'²⁶¹ The congress, attended by 52 delegates from countries such as the Netherlands,

²⁵⁴ NLI, IR 369 07, *Out*, December 1985/January 1986, 'Youth Organisation say Yes to Gay Rights, No to NGF Youth Group.'

²⁵⁵ *Irish Independent*, 'Youth Projects in cities to get £600,000 boost', 14 October 1985.

²⁵⁶ NLI, IR 369 07, *Out*, March/April 1986, 'Ignorance and prejudice.'

²⁵⁷ NLI, IR 369 07, *Out*, March/April 1986, 'Ignorance and prejudice.'

²⁵⁸ NLI, IR 369 07, *Out*, March/April 1986, 'Youth Service Rejects Gay Group.'

²⁵⁹ NLI, IR 369 07, *Out*, August/September 1985, '2nd International Gay Youth Congress.'

²⁶⁰ NLI, IQA, MS 45, 956/1 - Michael A. McGee Director of Comhairle Le Leas Óige, to Martin Jones, NGF, 14 September 1984.

²⁶¹ NLI, IQA, MS 45, 957/2 - Press Release, 23 June 1985.'

Denmark, Norway, Great Britain, and the USA, which included a range of different recreational activities and workshops, brought young Irish homosexuals into contact with their international counterparts. On the opening day of the event, in an attempt to attract as much media and political attention as possible, invitations to a reception at the Hirschfeld Centre were sent to 150 individuals, which included representatives of youth organisations, religious and political groups, the media, and the government. Only 20 replies were received, all apologising for not being able to attend. The NGF Youth Group also attempted to hold a civic reception, but again their efforts were unsuccessful. George Birmingham, Youth Minister at the Department of Labour, explained his reasons for declining such a reception on the basis that:

First of all, there are financial difficulties in that the budget available to the State for official entertainment is pre-committed sometimes several years in advance. [...] In those circumstances hosting a reception at relatively short notice would present difficulties. However, there is a second and perhaps more fundamental difficulties. At the moment as you are well aware Irish law imposes restrictions on homosexual conduct. While I accept that there are very cogent arguments for changing that law, I feel that at least as long as it remains in the statute books, it will not be appropriate for me to host a reception of the sort suggested.²⁶²

The use of the law as justification for declining to participate is particularly interesting. It was not illegal for homosexuals to congregate or socialise, yet Birmingham still felt it unacceptable to facilitate their request. It would, in his opinion, have been illegal. His outright refusal represented governmental anxieties regarding engaging with the gay cultural sphere, particularly an event that was being organised by gay and lesbian youths.

The build-up to the conference did, however, succeed in generating national and international coverage. The *Irish Times* printed an article on the congress quoting Garry Ashton, of the NGF Youth Group, who stated that: ‘we’re hoping that the congress and the publicity it receives will both encourage gays to face up to their homosexuality and will show the general public that we are not the limp wristed stereotype, but young people who happen to be homosexual.’²⁶³ RTÉ Radio 1 also interviewed two delegates for a midweek youth magazine programme, while Magic 103FM, the largest pirate radio station in Ireland, featured a segment with three congress delegates.²⁶⁴

²⁶² NLI, IQA, MS 45, 957/1 – George Birmingham, Minister of State to Tonie Walsh, President of NGF, 15 May 1985.

²⁶³ *Irish Times*, ‘Gay Congress Opens in Dublin’, 8 July 1985.

²⁶⁴ NLI, IQA, MS 45, 956/4 - Report of the 2nd International Gay Youth Congress held in Dublin, Ireland, 7-12 July 1985.

The Congress offered an array of different topics for discussion such as; the ‘Purpose of Gay Youth Groups’, ‘Problems of Gay Youth Groups’, ‘Leadership and Structure’, ‘Sex and Sexuality’, ‘AIDS and Gay Health’, and ‘Gay Youth Internationally.’²⁶⁵ If the workshops offered delegates a means to debate motions and devise strategies to improve the lives of gay and lesbian youths, then the social events offered an opportunity for delegates to relax, get to know each-other, and foster new friendships. Rather than restricting the social events to one night, the organisers planned an expansive array of events throughout the county for each evening or morning of the congress. According to the report of the Congress, delegates took part in a walking tour of Dublin, a visit to the Viking settlements, Oscar Wilde’s birthplace, a trip to an early Christian settlement in Glendalough, a bus tour to the Russborough stately home and screening of ‘The Rocky Horror Picture Show’ at the Classic Cinema.²⁶⁶

According to Tonie Walsh the ‘congress and its string of social events [...] were an unqualified success [...]’.²⁶⁷ For the likes of Rob from the Netherlands, he felt the need to compliment the NGF on their organisation, stating that ‘they even organised social events in the evening. All this helps communications. It’s hard to do a lot of work in one week and also look after the social side. I think they’ve done very well.’²⁶⁸ Similarly, Dwyne from the USA remarked that ‘it was generally good, especially the social side. It was fun in Dublin to go out and check out the reactions. I think we were accepted a lot better than most of us expected.’²⁶⁹ For Daniel from Kerry, the congress was ‘very informative. It dealt with subjects I had never even thought of before, issues of lesbians, for instance, or bisexuality.’²⁷⁰ One comment by Steven from the UK summed up the importance of holding such congresses. Whereas, Daniel from Kerry found the congress very informative, Steven on the other hand found that the issues discussed were ‘a bit basic for some countries.’²⁷¹ This comment demonstrates a key benefit of such a congress taking place, particularly for Irish homosexuals and others, who were still in the early stages of campaigning for gay rights. They were a crucial means in facilitating the transformation of ideas and knowledge from more experienced activists outside the narrow confines of the nation state, to those within newer less experienced groups, like the NGF Youth Group.

²⁶⁵ NLI, IR 369 07, *Out*, June/July 1985, ‘2nd International Gay Youth Congress.’

²⁶⁶ NLI, IQA, MS 45, 956/4 -Report of the 2nd International Gay Youth Congress held in Dublin, Ireland, 7-12 July 1985.

²⁶⁷ NLI, IR 369 07, *Out*, August/September 1985, ‘2nd International Gay Youth Congress.’

²⁶⁸ NLI, IR 369 07, *Out*, August/September 1985, ‘2nd International Gay Youth Congress’

²⁶⁹ NLI, IR 369 07, *Out*, August/September 1985, ‘2nd International Gay Youth Congress’

²⁷⁰ NLI, IR 369 07, *Out*, August/September 1985, ‘2nd International Gay Youth Congress’

²⁷¹ NLI, IR 369 07, *Out*, August/September 1985, ‘2nd International Gay Youth Congress.’

What started out in 1980 initially as a group to facilitate youths to socialise together, in fact turned out to be much more. Its very existence was a threat to what many considered acceptable social norms, of which the NGF Youth Group did not admittedly meet. Its existence was a clear sign that gay youths existed in Ireland and were willing to resist the views expressed by the likes of Mr. Holt. The creation of a youth group was not, as we have seen, a straightforward decision. In fact, it could well be argued that it was one of the most radical ‘social’ initiatives of the gay movement in Ireland. As Bernard Keogh acknowledged, its creation could well have played into the hands of those opposed to homosexuals/homosexuality. In terms of gay and lesbian liberation in Ireland, the NGF Youth Group demonstrates the extent to which gay and lesbian youths were also present and active agents in promoting gay liberation in Ireland. Many no doubt went on to become more publicly active in the campaign for gay liberation in Ireland.

‘For a woman who is gay, being lesbian means placing women above men in a male dominated society. That in itself is a political as well as a sexual statement.’²⁷²

Just as gay youths were active in the campaign for gay rights in Ireland, so too, were lesbian women. One of the most significant moments in the history of lesbian activism in Ireland was the foundation of Liberation for Irish Lesbians (LIL), the first lesbian liberation group to emerge in the Republic of Ireland. While the male dominated IGRM crumbled due to infighting, some lesbian women came together, seeking a means of furthering a greater awareness and understanding of lesbianism in Ireland. The foundation of LIL followed a women’s conference on lesbianism at Trinity College Dublin in 1978.²⁷³ *GPU News* quoted Joni Sheerin, LIL founding member, as saying that ‘Liberation for Irish lesbians is a political sounding name and it represents our highest aspiration. It sounds as if we’d be out on the streets tomorrow. We’re not quite ready for that yet – but the day will come. Now we have something to build from and co-operation with men for the first time ever. That’s a great step forward.’²⁷⁴ The optimism of LIL was evident in Sheerin’s comment, but so too, however, was the pragmatism. LIL were all too aware of the difficulties lesbian women had to overcome in a society who did not even acknowledge lesbian women existing.

²⁷² NLI, IQA, MS 45, 938/2 – National Gay Federation leaflet on ‘Lesbian Women.’

²⁷³ NLI, IQA, MS 45, 964/7 - *NGF News*, 1984 ‘LIL News – Tribute to Ireland’s Only Lesbian.’

²⁷⁴ *GPU News*, ‘Irish Lesbians.’ July 1979, Archives of Human Sexuality and Identity. Accessed on 8 March 2016. Joni Sheerin and Joni Crone refer to the same individual. I am not sure which name is her pseudonym and which is her actual name. I used both interchangeably, depending on how Joni she is referred to in the material.

The foundation of a specific lesbian group was important for two reasons. Firstly, as Sheerin's comments highlight, it represented the first true opportunity to build and co-operate on a more equal footing with gay males in Ireland. Rather than relying on gay males, LIL was able to prioritise the demands of its own membership and seek a way of providing for them, whether that be in cooperation with the NGF, or groups outside of the gay movement. Secondly, as invisibility was one of the key obstacles for lesbian women in Ireland, the foundation of a group, which included the word 'lesbian' was particularly important in beginning a process of bringing greater awareness to lesbianism in Ireland, particularly as the word 'homosexual' and 'gay' were primarily associated with males.²⁷⁵ By naming the new group Liberation for Irish Lesbians, Joni and others, were drawing attention to the fact that Irish women had a sexuality that did not revolve around men. LIL's main objectives consisted of providing a 'forum for discussion of women's issues and lesbians' gay political ideas, [while also seeking to offer a] social environment where lesbians can meet and simply be themselves.'²⁷⁶ Working along similar lines as gay male activists, LIL sought to reach out to lonely and isolated lesbian women, while also seeking to provide a space for them to socialise in and develop friendships, relationships etc.

In 1979, LIL took the decision to affiliate to the newly established NGF.²⁷⁷ This, in many respects, was a pragmatic decision. By affiliating with the NGF, LIL, could remain an independent organisation, but could still avail themselves of the services within the Hirschfeld Centre, particularly meeting spaces and TAF. Moreover, this affiliation permitted LIL to nominate members to the administrative council of the NGF.²⁷⁸ This, it was hoped, would have given LIL greater autonomy, influence and a voice for lesbian women within the NGF and the Hirschfeld Centre. LIL's main task, therefore, was to try to create a space within the male dominated Hirschfeld Centre for lesbian women, in an attempt to encourage more lesbian women to become involved. The task LIL set themselves was a formidable one. Of the 1027 members of the NGF in 1980, 983 were male, and only 44 were lesbian women.²⁷⁹ In fact, no lesbian woman was a member of the NGF outside of Dublin.

LIL's first success was obtaining the use of the Hirschfeld Centre for women-only every Wednesday from 8p.m. – 10p.m. Those who attended were treated to informal group

²⁷⁵ NLI, IQA, MS 45, 938/2 – National Gay Federation leaflet on 'Lesbian Women.'

²⁷⁶ NLI, IQA, MS 45, 938/2 – National Gay Federation leaflet on 'Lesbian Women.'

²⁷⁷ NLI, IR 369 I 23, *In Touch: Journal of National Gay Federation*, Vol. 1, No. 1, September 1979, 'Liberation for Irish Lesbians.'

²⁷⁸ NLI, IQA, MS 45, 936/10 – Manifestos of the candidates for election to the 5th administrative council of the NGF.

²⁷⁹ NLI, IQA, MS 45, 936/4 – Breakdown of Membership of the National Gay Federation 17 March 1979 to 31 March 1980.

chats, discussions, readings of gay literature, and the other amenities such as the coffee bar and table tennis.²⁸⁰ The main aim of the Wednesday night social was to allow lesbian women to meet in an informal setting to discuss issues related to their sexuality.²⁸¹ Along with the weekly women's discussion night, LIL also ran a women-only disco on the first Wednesday of every month at the Hirschfeld Centre. Within one year, however, as a result of LIL's resilience and success in encouraging more women to visit the Hirschfeld Centre, the women-only disco became a weekly event and continued to be so until 1985.²⁸²

The increased lesbian activity within the Hirschfeld Centre in the early 1980s was helped by LIL's involvement with TAF. Every Thursday lesbian women operated the TAF service only for women, later renaming the service Lesbian Line.²⁸³ This was the main means by which lesbian women reached out to isolated lesbian women, both inside and outside Dublin. Having even just one night a week where lesbian women could contact the service knowing that they could talk to another woman was a lifeline to many who were particularly uncomfortable talking to gay males about their sexuality. As we have seen in Chapter 1, the option of speaking to another woman was extremely important to Pauline O'Donnell who, otherwise, would have hung up had Terri Blanche not been available to speak to her.²⁸⁴

Lesbian Line volunteers described the types of calls they received as varied, with some talking about 'the women they love, of rejection, and fear of rejection, isolation and secrecy. [...] They talk of depression and suicide attempts. They talk about parents, husbands, children and work. They want to know about being lesbian – are we happy? Is it possible? Is there anyone else like them?'²⁸⁵ While, the number of lesbian women contacting TAF was considerably smaller than males, with only 26 females contacting the service from 1981 to 1982, compared to 293 males for the same period, women only had the service once a week for 2 hours.²⁸⁶ However, according to the *Irish Times*, this number had increased to an average of 15 calls a night by 1984.²⁸⁷

²⁸⁰ NLI, IR 369 I 23, *In Touch: Journal of National Gay Federation*, Vol. 1, No. 1, September 1979, 'Liberation for Irish Lesbians.'

²⁸¹ NLI, IQA, MS 45, 938/2 – National Gay Federation leaflet on 'Lesbian Women.'

²⁸² NLI, Ir 94133 I 2, *In Dublin*, December 1980, 'Discos.'

²⁸³ NLI, Ir 94133 I 2, *In Dublin*, 6 October – 20 October 1983.

²⁸⁴ Edmund Lynch interview with Pauline O'Donnell, 13 May 2013, *Edmund Lynch, Irish LGBT History Project*.

²⁸⁵ *Out for Ourselves: The Lives of Irish Lesbians and Gay Men*, 'The Silent Majority', (1986), 126.

²⁸⁶ NLI, IQA, MS 45, 949/4 – Tel-A-Friend.

²⁸⁷ *Irish Times*, 'Women who love women', 12 October 1984.

Lesbian Line became one of the most important services run by lesbian women in Ireland. So important was the Lesbian Line service, that even though LIL disbanded in 1985, the Lesbian Line successfully continued, even to this day. In fact, in the preceding years, it developed a reputation as the go-to service for women looking to come out or adjust to the realisation they were lesbian. Orla Howard, speaking in 2013 about coming to terms with her sexuality, explained that, ‘I did, I suppose, what a lot of people did in the kind of late 80’s early 90’s: I phoned Lesbian Line. I thought it would be a good thing to go and get some counselling, as lesbians do, which I did, and it was really useful.’²⁸⁸

‘It seems to be impossible to establish a large gay women’s group within this or any gay men’s organisation, hence the necessity for Sita’s club.’²⁸⁹

While LIL utilised the Hirschfeld Centre, it seemed to enjoy more success in arranging events for lesbian women outside of the male dominated gay scene. The choices available to lesbian women may not have been extensive, but even organising one weekly social for lesbian women, independent of gay males was welcomed and proved popular. LIL were conscious of the fact that the Hirschfeld Centre did not appeal to many lesbian women who felt it was too male dominated. Grainne Healy, for example, speaking about the Hirschfeld Centre, stated that ‘I never really felt that it [Hirschfeld Centre] was a place that really welcomed - I felt it was more a man’s place and never really felt it was a kind of a woman’s space to hang out in [...]’.²⁹⁰

Lesbian women had been organising socials independent of the male dominated scene since 1977. For example, ‘gay women’s discos’ were organised at Pembroke Inn on Pembroke Street.²⁹¹ When these finished in 1980, LIL succeeded in organising a new social at the Parliament Inn, on Parliament Street, that same year.²⁹² The first women’s disco at the Parliament Inn began on International Women’s Day, 8 March 1980. This became a popular venue, every Friday and Saturday, for Dublin’s lesbian community.²⁹³ Within just a few months, 40 members were registered with LIL for the women’s disco at Parliament Inn. By

²⁸⁸ Edmund Lynch interview with Orla Howard, 31 August 2013, *Edmund Lynch, Irish LGBT History Project*.

²⁸⁹ NLI, IR 369 I 23, *In Touch: Journal of National Gay Federation*, Vol. 2, No. 3, March 1980, ‘Comment.’

²⁹⁰ Edmund Lynch interview with Grainne Healy, 15 November 2013, *Edmund Lynch, Irish LGBT History Project*.

²⁹¹ NLI, Ir 94133 I 2, *In Dublin*, No. 90, 23 November – 6 December 1979.

²⁹² NLI, IR 369 I 23, *In Touch: Journal of National Gay Federation*, Vol. 2, No. 6, June/July 1980, ‘SITA-LIL Affiliation.’

²⁹³ NLI, IR 369 I 23, *In Touch*, ‘SITA-LIL Affiliation.’

August 1980, confidence appeared high and expectations were that this number would reach 70.²⁹⁴ The opening of a new women's only disco offered lesbian women the opportunity to have a social life at the weekend, something denied to them in the past, as other venues such as Bartley Dunne's, Rice's, the Phoenix Club and the Hirschfeld Centre, were overwhelmingly male. Rather than having only a mid-week social to attend, women now had the choice of 4 specific women-only socials, including a night at the Hirschfeld Centre and a disco at the IGRM's Phoenix Club.²⁹⁵

In 1981, the women's disco at the Parliament Inn moved to J.J. Smyth's on Aungier Street, which became the popular 'home' for the lesbian social scene in 1980s Dublin, overshadowing the women-only night at the Hirschfeld Centre.²⁹⁶ In comparison with her experience at the Hirschfeld Centre, Grainne Healy stated that 'she loved it [J.J. Smyth's]. It was great fun, it was a place that you could be yourself.'²⁹⁷ According to Pauline O'Donnell, there was a great feeling of belonging to a community at these discos:

Because we were a small group of lesbians really you could nearly, you know could nearly count them. At the beginning, you could definitely count them on two hands. But even over the first few years, like, you would say, fifty sixty, a hundred max, so everybody knew each other. First names only. You rarely knew someone's surname and didn't really ask, you know, there was still a sort of a respect for anonymity and that. But what was really wonderful at those discos on a Saturday night in J.J.'s, women coming together, we'd all join a big circle, and the most popular song, I suppose at the time in the early years was Cris Williamson's, 'Song of the Soul.' [...] So, there was a great feeling of belonging to a community²⁹⁸

Healy and O'Donnell's comments reveal the importance of LIL securing venues outside the Hirschfeld Centre and Phoenix Club for lesbian women to socialise. As O'Donnell noted, these efforts helped to foster a sense of a community spirit amongst lesbian women. O'Donnell's comments also highlight the peculiarity of the situation many Irish lesbians found themselves in. While trying to become part of a community and express their sexuality, many were still too fearful to divulge their full name.

²⁹⁴ NLI, IR 369 I 23, *In Touch*, 'SITA-LIL Affiliation.'

²⁹⁵ NLI, Ir 94133 I 2, *In Dublin*, No. 144, 8-21 January 1982.

²⁹⁶ NLI, IR 369 I 25, *Identity*, Issue 1, December 1981.

²⁹⁷ Edmund Lynch interview with Grainne Healy, 15 November 2013, *Edmund Lynch, Irish LGBT History Project*.

²⁹⁸ Edmund Lynch interview with Pauline O'Donnell, 13 May 2013, *Edmund Lynch, Irish LGBT History Project*.

*'Lesbians, Ireland's sexual exiles.'*²⁹⁹

LIL was keen to further a greater understanding of lesbianism within the wider gay rights movement and wider society. During gay pride week in June 1980 LIL organised Ireland's first lesbian conference in Trinity College Dublin. While this was not the first conference to discuss lesbianism, it was, however, the first time a conference was actually advertised as a lesbian conference in Ireland. The previous TCD conference in 1978 was advertised as a 'Women's conference on lesbianism.'³⁰⁰ Joni Sheerin explained the reason behind that decision: 'We realised that if we called the event a 'lesbian conference' most of the organising collective would be unable to attend because walking through the door would be a public statement. [...] Our compromise solution was to call the weekend a Women's Conference on Lesbianism. This meant that women of every sexual persuasion were free to attend.'³⁰¹ The organisation and promotion of the 1980 conference as a lesbian conference demonstrated the greater confidence of lesbian activists at that time. Rather than hiding behind a more concealed title as they did in 1978, they instead challenged those who sought to ensure they remained invisible.³⁰²

The conference discussed topics ranging from, 'coming out', 'isolation', 'sexuality', 'relationships' and 'lesbian mothers.'³⁰³ The issue of lesbian mothers was later highlighted at the first International Lesbian conference in Amsterdam as one of two key issues which was of considerable concern to Irish lesbians.³⁰⁴ In her report on the conference, Mary (LIL) revealed that in England and Ireland there had been:

a number of cases over the past few years where divorced women have wanted to retain custody of their own children. Usually, in these countries women are awarded custody of their children, because women usually have responsibility for children. But if a woman is a lesbian, the usual procedure is suddenly reversed. Then it is considered better for the children if the father is given custody.³⁰⁵

²⁹⁹ *Sunday World*, 'Lesbians: Ireland's Sexual Exiles', 7 November 1982.

³⁰⁰ Joni Crone, 'Lesbians: The Lavender Women of Ireland', in *Lesbian and Gay Visions of Ireland*, edited by Íde O'Carroll and Eoin Collins, (London, 1995), 62.

³⁰¹ Crone, 'Lesbians: The Lavender Women of Ireland', 62.

³⁰² NLI, Ir 94133 I 2, *In Dublin*, 27 June – 10 July 1980, 'Lesbian Conference.'

³⁰³ NLI, IQA, MS 45, 955/2 – Extra Event – Lesbian Conference.

³⁰⁴ NLI, IR 369 I 23, *In Touch: Journal of National Gay Federation*, Vol. 3, No. 2, March/April 1981 – 'Report from the International Lesbian Conference, 27-30 December 1980.' Lesbian women from Denmark, France, Germany, Sweden, Italy, England, Spain and Ireland attended the conference in Amsterdam.

³⁰⁵ NLI, IR 369 I 23, *In Touch: Journal of National Gay Federation*, Vol. 3, No. 2, March/April 1981 – 'Report from the International Lesbian Conference, 27-30 December 1980.'

These injustices were later revealed by some Irish lesbian mothers in *Out for Ourselves: the lives of Irish lesbians and gay men*. Máire Ní Bheagliach, for example, remarked that she ‘couldn’t apply for custody of the children because of the homophobia of the legal profession when it suits it. Having tried the law and failed the only thing for me to do now is to brazen it out and expose them as much as possible.’³⁰⁶ To assist these women, Action for Lesbian Mothers was established in 1982. Announcing its establishment Mary Kinnane stated that: ‘We are a women’s group who see the area of lesbians with children as sadly neglected.’³⁰⁷ Beginning on 2 June 1982, Action for Lesbian Mothers met every Tuesday from 8p.m. – 10p.m. at the Dublin’s Women’s Centre on Dame Street. Action for Lesbian Mothers had two specific aims: ‘To enable lesbian mothers to get together to talk and to act as a pressure group for change in custody procedures and to support individual women, if they wish.’³⁰⁸ The creation of Action for Lesbian Mothers constituted a considerable challenge to the status quo, by publicly stating the existence of women who were lesbian, but also mothers in Ireland.

The Second Irish Lesbian Conference held in October 1982 brought even greater numbers of lesbian women together.³⁰⁹ This time, 82 Irish lesbians registered to attend workshops on ‘Lesbian Mothers’, ‘Alliances with other movements’, ‘Women and the National Question’, ‘What unites us and what divides us?’ and ‘Women and Science.’³¹⁰ This higher attendance figure was, no doubt, helped by the opening of the Dublin Women’s Centre on 8 March 1982.³¹¹ LIL described this as a ‘major step forward for the lesbian movement.’³¹² Lesbian women, in fact, had played their own part in the establishment of the women’s centre. Since 1980 LIL had organised fundraising events in co-operation with the Women’s Centre Campaign.³¹³ This represented the strong desire amongst lesbian women in Dublin to work more closely with women’s liberation groups, even though the Hirschfeld Centre and Phoenix Club were available to them. Rather than hosting the second Irish Lesbian Conference in the Hirschfeld Centre, for example, the organisers instead choose to host it at the Women’s Centre. Until its closure in 1985, the Dublin Women’s Centre facilitated lesbian discussion meetings,

³⁰⁶ *Out for Ourselves: The Lives of Lesbian and Gay Men*, (Dublin, 1986), 82.

³⁰⁷ NLI, IQA, MS 45, 964/3 – *NGF Newsletter*, No. 4, July 1982, ‘Lesbian Mothers.’

³⁰⁸ NLI, IQA, MS 45, 964/3 – *NGF Newsletter*, ‘Lesbian Mothers.’

³⁰⁹ *Irish Times*, ‘Lesbian seminar’, 30 October 1982.

³¹⁰ NLI, IQA, MS 45, 964/5 – *NGF Newsletter*, Christmas Edition 1982, ‘Irish Lesbian Conference.’

³¹¹ NLI, IQA, MS 45, 964/5 – Lesbian AGM Report.

³¹² NLI, IQA, MS 45, 964/5 – Lesbian AGM Report.

³¹³ NLI, IR 369 I 23, *In Touch: Journal of National Gay Federation*, Vol. 2, No. 3, March 1980, ‘Comment.’

lesbian yoga classes, a bookshop with lesbian magazines and books, including a mail order catalogue service and most significantly, Action for Lesbian Mothers.

The Second Irish Lesbian Conference was a key social and media event for lesbian women. While 82 registered for the workshops, over 140 women attended a late-night disco in Newman's House.³¹⁴ This was followed on Saturday by the continuous showing of women's videos and films throughout the day. Although these conferences were organised by lesbians in Dublin, they nevertheless attracted lesbian women from throughout Ireland, including Galway, Cork and Northern Ireland. In interviews with Helen Slattery, Deirdre Walsh and Marese Walsh, the Dublin conferences were fondly remembered. Deirdre Walsh maintained that 'there was huge politics and very serious stuff going on', while Helen Slattery remembered there was a 'very feminist and political bent towards a lot of the conferences in Dublin, which was great.'³¹⁵

The Second Irish Lesbian conference was also significant in generating media attention. One of the organisers, Anne Dillon, was interviewed for RTÉ's *Women Today*, and for an hour-long Radio Leinster segment on 'lesbianism and gay politics.'³¹⁶ The *Sunday World* also featured a wide-ranging article on lesbians, giving an insight into the situation of lesbian women, or as they described them, 'Ireland's sexual exiles.'³¹⁷ The article included an interview with three Irish lesbians, who only revealed their first names, Liz, Mary and Claire. All three highlighted the fear amongst many lesbian women in Ireland about losing their jobs should their sexuality be found out, particularly those working in the teaching, nursing or other careering professions.³¹⁸ In a poignant conclusion to the article all three explained that all they were asking for was 'acceptance and the right to choose our own lifestyle in society. The three of us are from rural areas and our parents don't know that we are lesbian. We hope that in years to come lesbians will be able to come out totally and say that they are lesbian without fear of losing parental respect and endangering their jobs.'³¹⁹

'NGF's constitution aims to encourage the growth of a spirit of community among gay women and men in all parts of Ireland. Are you now going to decide for women just how

³¹⁴ NLI, IQA, MS 45, 964/5 – *NGF Newsletter*, Christmas Edition 1982, 'Irish Lesbian Conference.'

³¹⁵ Author interview with Deirdre Walsh and Helen Slattery, 9 March 2016. Author interview with Marese Walsh, 9 April 2016.

³¹⁶ NLI, IQA, MS 45, 936/10 – Manifestos of the Candidates for election to the 5th Administrative Council of NGF.

³¹⁷ *Sunday World*, 'Lesbians: Ireland's Sexual Exiles', 7 November 1982.

³¹⁸ *Sunday World*, 'Lesbians', 7 November 1982.

³¹⁹ *Sunday World*, 'Lesbians', 7 November 1982.

*that spirit of community is to be fostered or are you prepared to listen to gay women's voices to our clearly stated needs.*³²⁰

LIL's achievements are all the more remarkable considering some of the struggles lesbian women experienced within the male dominated organisations. Often members of the NGF and IGRM adopted a laissez faire attitude to lesbian women's basic requests for a women-only space, or issues more generally important to lesbian women. As early as September 1979, LIL was expected to justify why they should have a women-only night at the Hirschfeld Centre. According to the minutes of an NGF administrative council meeting on 14 September 1979, Bernard Keogh was to send a letter to Joni seeking reasons as to 'why the women should hold on to Wednesday nights?', and to inform them that on special occasions, such as Halloween, national holidays, etc., the Wednesday night will become flexible.³²¹ This appeared to be an attitude shared by some NGF members. For example, in letter to the NGF, one member complained that, 'Monday: no money to be made so it may open. Tuesday: as above, but generally open. Wednesday: Gold Television disco night. Thursday: Ladies night. Try getting in, if your NGF male member.'³²² The NGF seemed more concerned with profiting from these busier nights (national holidays, Halloween etc.) than respecting the one night assigned exclusively for women's use. Instead, this night should and would be 'flexible.' It is perhaps no surprise, therefore, that Majella Breen, in an interview with *Gay News* in 1980, described the Hirschfeld Centre as 'a male commercial club.'³²³ This was a comment which caused considerable consternation amongst some members of the NGF administrative council.³²⁴

LIL, however, were not afraid to confront their male counterparts, who, in their opinion either undermined or disregarded issues important to lesbian women. Following three occasions in 1981 when the women's Thursday night meetings had been cancelled due to the organisation of male attended events at the Hirschfeld Centre, LIL sent a strongly worded letter to the NGF administrative council setting out their grievances. LIL claimed that these incidents had undermined the credibility of the Women's Group in the eyes of both new and old members.³²⁵ To rectify this, LIL called for certain safeguards to be implemented, which

³²⁰ NLI, IQA, MS 45, 966/5 – Joni Crone letter to *NGF News*, May 1983.

³²¹ NLI, Personal Papers of David Norris, ACC 6672 Box 36 – NGF administrative council meeting, 14 September 1979.

³²² NLI, IQA, MS 45, 966/17 – Letter from 'some members' to NGF Council, 27 August 1980. The women's only night had moved to Thursday night in 1980.

³²³ NLI, Personal Papers of David Norris, ACC 6672 Box 46 – NGF Minutes 5 December 1980.

³²⁴ NLI, Personal Papers of David Norris, ACC 6672 Box 46 – NGF Minutes.

³²⁵ NLI, Personal Papers of David Norris, ACC 6672 Box 46 – NGF minutes 27 November 1981 – letter from Women's Group.

included that the ‘administrative council does not sanction alternative activities on Women’s Night without prior consultation with, and agreement from the representatives of the Women’s Group.’³²⁶ The merits of LIL’s complaints were acknowledged by the NGF’s general secretary, who stated that it was ‘regrettable that any NGF group had been placed in the position of having to defend an allocation of time and use of the centre that had been long established.’³²⁷ This was a view shared by a majority of the administrative council who accepted LIL’s safeguards and agreed that at ‘least one month’s notice be given in writing to the Women’s Group of any proposed alternative event on Women’s night.’³²⁸

In an article in *Hermes* magazine, in January 1979, Joni had argued that ‘gay women have much more in common with other women than with gay men. Judging by past experience I think the lesbian community in Dublin will continue to grow, but if we’re to make any further progress I feel it will be arm in arm with the women’s movement.’³²⁹ It was this sentiment which led Joni and Majella Breen to propose that the NGF affiliate to the Women’s Right to Choose Campaign (WRTCC) in July 1982.³³⁰ Breen argued that the ‘campaign concerned itself with the basic right of the individual to control over [their] own body, the campaign was quite directly associated to gay liberation in that many lesbians were mothers of children and the issue affected them dearly.’³³¹ Although, the NGF council supported the proposal, it started in motion a heated and fractious debate within the wider NGF culminating, one year later, in the reversal of this decision, much to the resentment of LIL.

Whereas, LIL argued that women’s sexuality ‘was closely linked to gay sexuality. It was all one issue’, many NGF members did not agree.³³² The main objections came from individuals who were completely against abortion, those who felt affiliating to the campaign would result in the NGF losing credibility and those who felt that the NGF was a one issue organisation (gay rights) and affiliating to the WRTCC was not respecting this mandate. In one letter to the NGF, in October 1982, an NGF member requested that someone from the Society for the Protection of the Unborn Child (SPUC) be allocated speaking time at the upcoming

³²⁶ NLI, Personal Papers of David Norris, ACC 6672 Box 46 – letter from Women’s Group.

³²⁷ NLI, Personal Papers of David Norris, ACC 6672 Box 46 – letter from Women’s Group.

³²⁸ NLI, Personal Papers of David Norris, ACC 6672 Box 46 – letter from Women’s Group.

³²⁹ NLI, IR 369 H 6, *Hermes*, January/February 1979, Vol. 1, No. 2, ‘Life for a lesbian in Dublin.’ *Hermes* was a short-lived gay magazine published in Dublin.

³³⁰ The Women’s Right to Choose Campaign, campaigned for the legalisation of abortion in Ireland. For more information on the Women’s Right to Choose Campaign, see Linda Connolly, *The Irish Women’s Movement: From Revolution to Devolution*, (Dublin, 2003).

³³¹ NLI, Personal Papers of David Norris, ACC 6672 Box 46 – NGF Minutes 9 July 1982.

³³² NLI, Personal Papers of David Norris, ACC 6672 Box 45 – NGF Minutes 17 September 1982.

AGM.³³³ He informed the NGF that should this request be denied, he would request a vote at the AGM to allow a SPUC representative to speak, insisting that he felt ‘very strongly about this and hope[d] that you see fit to allow this person to speak. The person shall not be speaking about the amendment, but about anti-abortion.’³³⁴ Similarly, Anthony Redmond expressed his objections to the NGF being used as a ‘recruiting centre for the Women’s Right to Choose Campaign and putting out propaganda for abortion.’³³⁵ Redmond argued that by giving its support to the campaign the NGF was giving the ‘clear impression that all gay people in this country are in favour of abortion and in fact, this is the greatest obstacle to the acceptance of homosexuality in this country.’³³⁶ Redmond clearly believed this was a greater obstacle to acceptance of homosexuality than the teachings of the Catholic Church. Some, such as Joseph Donnelly, even threatened to withdraw their membership if the NGF affiliated, insisting that he ‘would be very bitter if I were forced to consider leaving NGF because a group within it had, by pressing for affiliation brought about a conflict which need not have arisen.’³³⁷

The greatest criticism, however, came from Bernard Keogh, a member of the administrative council. In a September 1982 council meeting Keogh had sought to overturn the previous decision to support affiliation, by proposing that the July 1982 proposal did not have the support of the administrative council. Keogh’s proposal was seconded by Willie McConkey, but was defeated.³³⁸ Keogh later argued in a letter to the *NGF News* that ‘some people have been led to believe that since women can become pregnant, and that abortion is therefore an issue they may well have to come to terms with, and that some women are lesbian, then abortion is a gay issue. Such reasoning is absurd and the same logic if applied to almost any other issue would show how stupid it is [...]’³³⁹ Keogh maintained that:

I too have campaigned publicly over many years through the media, meetings, debates, etc. to refute allegations of the Mary Kennedys in Irish society about abortion, contraception, divorce and homosexuality represented a conspiracy to advance immorality and that these issues were inextricably linked. I would greatly fear that if NGF does affiliate to WRTCC the repercussions would be enormously damaging both for NGF and for gay rights, that we should never again enjoy the same credibility within the media as commentators on gay affairs that the public’s willingness to give a fair hearing to the gay rights cause will be dismissed – in short – that we will have thrown

³³³ NLI, IQA, MS 45, 943/1 – Jim McCarthy to Tonie Walsh, 15 October 1982.

³³⁴ NLI, IQA, MS 45, 943/1 – Jim McCarthy to Tonie Walsh, 15 October 1982.

³³⁵ NLI, IQA, MS 45, 964/5 – Anthony Redmond letter to *NGF News* 1982.

³³⁶ NLI, IQA, MS 45, 964/5 – Redmond letter.

³³⁷ NLI, IQA, MS 45, 966/5 – Joseph Donnelly letter to *NGF News*, May 1983.

³³⁸ NLI, Personal papers of David Norris – NGF minutes 17 September 1982.

³³⁹ NLI, Personal Papers of David Norris, ACC 6672 Box 22 – *NGF News* March/April 1983 – Letter by Bernard Keogh.

away advantages in these areas that we have earned only through long years of hard, patient work.³⁴⁰

For Keogh and Redmond, the issue primarily seemed to be that the NGF needed to maintain an image of ‘respectability’, which they had evidently built up since 1979. Were the NGF to affiliate to the WRTCC they would jeopardise their respectable image and their position as commentators on gay issues. Maintaining this image was more pressing than supporting the WRTCC and with it, LIL’s wishes.

In a strong rebuke of Keogh’s assertions, Crone asserted that:

Bernard also suggests that this affiliation will not help to achieve equal rights for gay people. Which gay people are you talking about Bernard? That allegation implies that you only think in terms of gay men. Lesbian members of NGF have been raped, have had unwanted pregnancies, have had abortions and continue to need and demand Women’s Right to choose. [...] NGF’s constitution aims to encourage the growth of a spirit of community among gay women and men in all parts of Ireland. Are you now going to decide for women just how that spirit of community is to be fostered or are you prepared to listen to gay women’s voices to our clearly stated needs. Are you open to change in this regard or is it a matter of deciding in a patriarchal fashion that you know what our women members needs are and what’s best for us?³⁴¹

For Crone and supporters of affiliation this was unequivocally a gay rights issue. Supporting affiliation to the WRTCC, Sean McGowran argued that ‘to the extent that the gay movement and presumably Mr. Redmond himself demand the right of gay women and men to so dispose of their bodies then it and he are morally obliged to support in general the movement to give all women the same right.’³⁴²

The issue of affiliation caused considerable headache for the NGF, particularly the administrative council, who did not know how to respond. While the council had supported affiliation in July 1982, the complaints did have an impact. Before they would fully commit to the WRTCC, the NGF decided to ballot members on the issue. To help members decide, they organised a workshop in January 1983.³⁴³ Of the 400 ballot papers sent out, 110 were returned,

³⁴⁰ NLI, Personal Papers of David Norris, ACC 6672 Box 22 – *NGF News* March/April 1983 – Letter by Bernard Keogh.

³⁴¹ NLI, IQA, MS 45, 966/5 – Joni Crone letter to *NGF News*, May 1983.

³⁴² NLI, Personal Papers of David Norris, ACC 6672 Box 25 – Sean McGowran letter to *NGF News*, June 1983.

³⁴³ NLI, Personal Papers of David Norris, ACC 6672 Box 22 – *NGF News*, January/February 1983.

with 58 voting in favour and 52 voting against.³⁴⁴ Despite, a slim majority in favour, the NGF administrative council opted to decline to affiliate to the WRTCC.³⁴⁵

In refusing to affiliate to the WRTCC, Crone claimed that ‘this betrayal of lesbian and heterosexual women who had campaigned previously for gay male law reform resulted in lesbians leaving the NGF. And it was the last time that many of us chose to work in any official capacity in solidarity with gay men.’³⁴⁶ This was not helped by events soon after. During an NGF administrative council meeting in August 1983, Brian Ward queried the use of TAF on Thursday for women and calling it Lesbian Line.³⁴⁷ At that same meeting Willie McConkey also accused LIL of using the line to promote the WRTCC.³⁴⁸ Later, LIL expressed their outrage at posters displayed at the Hirschfeld Centre promoting David Norris’ Senate campaign. They labelled them offensive, sexist and a ‘slap in the face of all of us who work within the NGF [...]’³⁴⁹

These events contributed significantly to the gradual exodus of women from the Hirschfeld Centre and LIL. According to *Out*, 1984 was not a good year for LIL, noting that ‘no major developments of a positive nature can be reported. [...] The collective which was shrinking at that stage has been further depleted, those who still remain are finding it increasingly difficult to even run the regular Thursday night disco at the Hirschfeld.’³⁵⁰ Within a year LIL ceased to exist. Its demise was the result of fatigue on the part of those who had invested so much energy in the organisation, but also its relationship with the NGF and failure to attract younger lesbian women into the organisation. In an interview with *In Dublin* in 1985, Siobhan, a young lesbian, argued that the majority of women in the established lesbian groups belonged to her mother’s generation.³⁵¹ In summing up her attitude to the lesbian movement, she stated that ‘If you’re a gay woman under twenty-one, then God love you’³⁵²

³⁴⁴ NLI, Personal Papers of David Norris, ACC 6672 Box 25 – *NGF News*, June 1983.

³⁴⁵ NLI, IQA, MS 45, 966/5

³⁴⁶ Joni Crone, ‘Lesbians: The Lavender Women of Ireland’, *Lesbian and Gay Visions of Ireland: Towards the Twenty First Century*, edited by Íde O’Carroll and Eoin Collins, (London, 1995), 68.

³⁴⁷ NLI, Personal Papers of David Norris, ACC 6672 Box 45 – Minutes of NGF Administrative Council, 26 August 1983.

³⁴⁸ NLI, Personal Papers of David Norris, ACC 6672 Box 45 – Minutes of NGF Administrative Council.

³⁴⁹ NLI, Personal Papers of David Norris, ACC 6672 Box 33 – LIL to David Norris, 21 May 1984.

³⁵⁰ NLI, IR 369 07, *Out*, Vol. 1, No. 3, April/May 1985 – LIL Report.

³⁵¹ NLI, Ir 94133 I 2, *In Dublin*, July/August 1985, ‘The Gay Generation.’

³⁵² NLI, Ir 94133 I 2, *In Dublin*, ‘The Gay Generation.’

*'It was alarming that gay men should have learnt so little about men's oppression of women and should still be alienating women from the gay movement.'*³⁵³

The issue of sexism was not limited to within the NGF, but rather was an issue for the wider gay rights movement in Ireland. This was particularly evident at the national gay and lesbian conferences held between 1981 and 1983. These conferences became an avenue for lesbian women to speak out and confront the sexism within the wider gay movement. In particular, there was considerable debate on how lesbians and gay men could better work together on an equal, non-hierarchical basis. For lesbian women, this involved gay men taking responsibility and acknowledging their role in oppressing women within the movement.³⁵⁴

At the first National Gay Conference in Cork, in May 1981, women were greatly outnumbered by their male counterparts, with roughly 50 women attending, out of a total of 200.³⁵⁵ While the conference did hold women-only workshops, reflecting what Sharon described as 'the different nature of the oppression suffered by gay women and by gay men, and the fact that many gay men are extremely sexist and in some cases more discriminatory against women than some straight men', no serious discussion on the topic of sexism, or how gay men and lesbian women could better work together, appear to have featured.³⁵⁶ In fact, of the 40 or so motions passed only two related exclusively to women.³⁵⁷

If the issue of lesbian women and gay men working better together had been side-lined at the 1981 conference, it featured prominently at a February 1982 meeting tasked with planning a second national gay conference. According to the minutes of this meeting, some women became angry by what they regarded as the 'patronising attitude coming from some of the men towards those who they saw as having less political experience than they.'³⁵⁸ The

³⁵³ Personal Papers of Kieran Rose – Report on National Gay Conference and discussions for 1982.

³⁵⁴ Personal Papers of Kieran Rose – Report on National Gay Conference.

³⁵⁵ NLI, IR 363 g 28, *Gay Star: Belfast Bulletin of the Northern Ireland Gay Rights Association*, No. 4, Summer 1981, 'National Lesbian Network.' – The National Gay Conference was organised by gay and lesbian activists in Cork, who wanted to bring the different gay and lesbian groups in Ireland together, to discuss how to bring about gay rights and unity within the gay movement in the 1980s. The different groups present included, NGF, IGRM, LIL, Cork Gay Collective, Cork IGRM, Galway Gay Collective, Galway IGRM and other gay and non-gay international organisations. This will be discussed further in Chapter 3.

³⁵⁶ NLI, IR 363 g 28, *Gay Star: Belfast Bulletin of the Northern Ireland Gay Rights Association*, No. 4, Summer 1981, 'National Lesbian Network.'

³⁵⁷ NLI, IQA, MS 45, 940/9 – Report on National Gay Conference 1981 15-17 May, Connolly Hall, Cork.

³⁵⁸ Personal Papers of Kieran Rose – Minutes of Interim National Gay Conference 13 February 1982.

report noted that the women were alarmed ‘that gay men should have learnt so little about men’s oppression of women and should still be alienating women from the gay movement.’³⁵⁹ Two examples cited included what was described as the ‘male aggression expression in the interim conference poster’ and the use of the term ‘chairman.’³⁶⁰

Following this exchange, the meeting agreed that a ‘radically different structure from the Cork conference’ was needed.³⁶¹ In particular, it was agreed that because of the small number of lesbians at the Cork conference there should be positive discrimination in favour of women.³⁶² It was also agreed, that while women had a right to their own workshops, there was a need for ‘joint workshops between women and men to come to a greater understanding of the nature of sexism.’³⁶³ This marked a shift in attitude from the organisation of the first conference where, according to a document within the personal papers of Kieran Rose, there was ‘continuous hassles over such things as women only workshops.’³⁶⁴ The conference report noted that in their choice of workshops, films, videos, and advertising they ‘tried to draw in as many women as possible, emphasising the links between lesbians and gay men in our struggle for gay liberation, but also pointing out to gay men the fact of women’s oppression in society generally.’³⁶⁵ The workshop topics also sought to be more inclusive, including issues such as Coming Out/Personal Liberation/Fear of Politics, Gays in a Patriarchal Society, Gays at Work/Trade Unions, Structures for Development/A United Gay Movement.³⁶⁶

While the second conference did attract a greater number of women, 80 out of 200, the overall objective of bringing about greater unity amongst lesbian women and gay men did not materialise.³⁶⁷ The women’s conference report was highly critical of the attitude of some men, claiming that ‘it might have been presumed that most of the men there would have some basic

³⁵⁹ Personal Papers of Kieran Rose – Minutes of Interim National Gay Conference 13 February 1982.

³⁶⁰ Personal Papers of Kieran Rose – Minutes of Interim National Gay Conference 13 February.

³⁶¹ NLI, IQA, MS 46, 005/3 – Report of the Second National Gay Conference held in Dublin between 18-20 June 1982.

³⁶² Personal Papers of Kieran Rose – Minutes of Interim National Gay Conference 13 February 1982.

³⁶³ Personal Papers of Kieran Rose – Minutes of Interim National Gay Conference 13 February 1982.

³⁶⁴ Personal Papers of Kieran Rose – Development of the Cork Gay Collective.

³⁶⁵ NLI, IQA, MS 45, 940/10 – Steering Collective Report on Second National Gay Conference, Trinity College Dublin, 1982.

³⁶⁶ NLI, IQA, MS 45, 940/10 – Steering Collective Report on Second National Gay Conference.

³⁶⁷ NLI, IQA, MS 45, 940/10 – Steering Collective Report on Second National Gay Conference, Trinity College Dublin, 1982 – Women’s Report.

grasp of sexual politics – this proved wrong.³⁶⁸ The women’s report argued that ‘apart from a minority of gay men who had made some effort to tackle their own sexism, the bulk were either aggressively defensive, or blissfully unaware of their own oppressive role in a patriarchal society.’³⁶⁹ A men’s report on this workshop does not exist, but writing a few months after the conference, Bill Foley acknowledged that ‘it became perfectly obvious that the gay men present [at the workshop] had little or no appreciation of the levels of discrimination operating on the basis of gender.’³⁷⁰ The result was the splitting up of the remaining workshops into women-only and men-only groups.³⁷¹ The women’s report ended with the statement that ‘the 1983 conference organisers will have an uphill struggle to persuade many of the women to attend another mixed conference.’³⁷²

Despite the obvious disappointments, the conference did lead to some positive developments for lesbian women. Firstly, the conference passed a motion in support of the Women’s Right to Choose Campaign and voted to affiliate to the Anti-Amendment Campaign. It also agreed to give a £100 donation to support a lesbian conference in October 1982. The conference also adopted a motion calling for the Northern Ireland Gay Rights Association to recognise the right of women to use their premises autonomously every Friday or Saturday with sole control over the funds raised on that night.³⁷³ Later, in 1982, LIL, reflecting on the 1982 conference once more, commended the fact that a workshop on patriarchy had actually taken place, stating that:

the workshop which took place at the National Gay Conference on gays in a patriarchal society was a milestone for the gay movement. For the first time, issues like sexism, the double oppression of lesbian women and the different priorities and attitudes between lesbians and gay men were confronted. The idea of men taking responsibility for their own sexism was given a good airing.³⁷⁴

³⁶⁸ NLI, IQA, MS 45, 940/10 – Steering Collective Report on Second National Gay Conference, Trinity College Dublin, 1982 – Women’s Report.

³⁶⁹ NLI, IQA, MS 45, 940/10 – Report on Second National Gay Conference, Women’s Report.

³⁷⁰ NLI, IQA, MS 45, 964/5 – Men Against Sexism.

³⁷¹ NLI, IQA, MS 45, 940/10 – Report on Second National Gay Conference, Women’s Report.

³⁷² NLI, IQA, MS 45, 940/10 – Report on Second National Gay Conference, Women’s Report.

³⁷³ NLI, IQA, MS 45, 940/10 – Steering Collective Report on Second National Gay Conference, Trinity College Dublin, 1982 – Press Release – National Gay Conference 1982.

³⁷⁴ NLI, IQA, MS 45, 964/5 – Lesbian AGM Report.

The workshop on patriarchy also had a lingering effect on some gay males. This was reflected in the establishment of a Men Against Sexism group soon after the conference.³⁷⁵ Writing in the *NGF News*, encouraging the establishment of a similar group within the NGF, Bill Foley lambasted the ignorance of many gay males around the issue of sexism, stating that ‘There is a tendency, when sexism is mentioned, to think that it’s just women sounding off again. It seems a lot of men think that now women have the vote there is no more to be done. Sexism is not an ‘old hat’ syndrome but very much a reality that is alive and well and living in our heads.’³⁷⁶ The issue of sexism was returned to once more at the third national gay conference in Belfast, in 1983, but according to Páraic O’Flaithimh, a similar narrative to that of 1982 developed. O’Flaithimh noted that many women concluded that ‘working with, and educating men was draining their energies.’³⁷⁷ One notable difference, however, was that this conference was renamed the ‘All-Ireland Gay and Lesbian Conference.’³⁷⁸ While many women might have felt the same as the women with whom O’Flaithimh spoke, they nevertheless did succeed in bringing greater awareness and debate around the issue of sexism. There can be no doubt that they did, as Bill Foley’s comments highlight, start a process of challenging attitudes around sexism and lesbian women more generally within the gay movement. The changing of the conference title to include the ‘lesbian’ was only one small part of that process.

‘With a scattering of pink triangles on lapels, Irish gays celebrated their sixth birthday as a civil rights movement this weekend in the time hallowed and traditional manner - with a split.’³⁷⁹

Tension was not confined between lesbian women and gay men. While the Hirschfeld Centre and Phoenix Club were important in fostering a spirit of community amongst those who visited them, the fact that both existed caused considerable tension between the leaders of the NGF and IGRM. Although legacy issues certainly played a role (Chapter 1), the main issue appears to have been that the NGF and IGRM did not welcome the competition the other’s existence presented. From as early as October 1979, *Gay News* reported that the NGF ‘blamed a rival gay group (IGRM) for continual harassment and attempted sabotage of the work of the capital’s

³⁷⁵ NLI, IQA, MS 45, 964/5 – Men Against Sexism.

³⁷⁶ NLI, IQA, MS 45, 964/5 – Men Against Sexism.

³⁷⁷ NLI, IQA, MS 45, 999/4 – *Outrage for lesbians and gay men*, Issue No. 1, July/August 1983 – All-Ireland Conference.

³⁷⁸ NLI, IQA, MS 45, 938/2 – Leaflet on All-Ireland Lesbian and Gay Conference in Belfast, June 1983.

³⁷⁹ Elgy Gillespie, ‘Gay groups celebrate respective birthdays’, *Irish Times*, 2 June 1980.

six-month old gay centre.³⁸⁰ The IGRM strongly denied this accusation and claimed that the NGF was behind repeated raids of their discos by Dublin's drug squad.³⁸¹ In January 1980, the NGF revealed that the IGRM were stirring up 'civil war in the gay community' by launching legal actions at the NGF.³⁸² The IGRM had, in fact, initiated legal proceedings over what they claimed was the NGF's unlawful position of property belonging to the IGRM.³⁸³ Incredibly, Tom McClean, of the NGF, even contacted the Minister for Telegraphs, Albert Reynolds, over concerns of IGRM wiretapping. In a December 1980 letter, McClean requested to know if the Minister for Telegraphs or Minister for Justice had received 'any information from an organisation calling itself the Irish Gay Rights Movement regarding possible illegal interference with the telephone lines serving the Hirschfeld Centre.'³⁸⁴

From the language both organisations used, it was clear that they did not welcome each other's existence. Despite having almost identical aims, they nevertheless referred to each other as 'rival organisations', not allies, and took every opportunity to belittle the other. For example, in an interview with the *Irish Times*, (which, remarkably, was aware of the tension between the NGF and IGRM), David Norris was quoted as saying that 'Irish gays have a straight choice between teeny parties with the Provisionals [IGRM] or gay liberation with the NGF.'³⁸⁵ In other example from *In Touch*, the NGF described the IGRM as a 'small group of malcontents [who] have chosen to react to our efforts in a negative manner.'³⁸⁶ The IGRM similarly responded with their own attacks on the NGF. Ironically, these often centred on trying to present the NGF as a 'commercial disco', only interested in profiteering off the gay community. In April 1981, the IGRM made an appeal for a spirit of reconciliation and unity, calling on those concerned (notably the NGF) to 'put the needs of the gay community before selfish commercial and mercenary considerations, and to unite with the Irish Gay Rights Movement [...]'.³⁸⁷ Later in 1981, the IGRM repeated this statement, maintaining that they had 'behaved with remarkable restraint and dignity in the face of the virulent attacks both verbal

³⁸⁰ NLI, Personal Papers of David Norris, Acc. 6672 Box 19 – *Gay News* No. 176, October 4 – 17 1979.

³⁸¹ NLI, Personal Papers of David Norris, Acc. 6672 Box 19 – *Gay News* No. 176.

³⁸² NLI, IR 369 I 23, *In Touch: Journal of National Gay Federation*, Vol. 2, No. 1, January 1980.

³⁸³ NLI, IQA, MS 45, 951/8 – Gallagher, Shatter and Co. to David Norris, 23 January 1980.

³⁸⁴ NLI, IQA, MS 45, 963/1 – Tom McClean to Albert Reynolds, 10 December 1980.

³⁸⁵ Elgy Gillespie, 'Gay groups celebrate respective birthdays', *Irish Times*, 2 June 1980.

³⁸⁶ NLI, IR 369 I 23, *In Touch: Journal of National Gay Federation*, Vol. 2, No. 1, January 1980.

³⁸⁷ *In Touch: Newsletter of the Irish Gay Rights* – April 1981 in Archives of Human Sexuality and Identity, Accessed on 8 March 2016.

and written launched against IGRM by certain former members who are now associated with a commercial disco in Dublin.³⁸⁸ The NGF had also used the ‘commercial insult’ in its attempts to undermine the IGRM. In a letter to the International Gay Association, in March 1981, seeking to prevent the IGRM becoming members of the IGA, the NGF claimed that the IGRM ‘were largely interested in exploiting the resources of the gay community in a way that is preponderantly commercial.’³⁸⁹ Commercial was evidently viewed by the NGF and IGRM as unpleasant, unpopular, and unbecoming of a gay rights organisation in Dublin, yet both organisations depended on the commercial success of their respective centres for survival. It is hardly surprising, therefore, that they did not appreciate competition.

It is noteworthy that in the above examples and in correspondence with the NGF, the IGRM were loath to actually mention the National Gay Federation directly, deciding inside to use ‘former members’ or simply ‘your group’ when speaking about the NGF.³⁹⁰ The NGF, adopted a similar approach, often labelling the IGRM as the ‘Provisionals’ or ‘79ers.’³⁹¹ At the same time, both also tried to present themselves as the so-called true ‘national organisation’, who put the interests of the gay community above everything else. For example, Bernard Keogh, in a speech where he referred to the IGRM as ‘a rival organisation’, claimed that the IGRM was ‘attempting to secure for themselves a foothold in the world of gay politics which would provide them with their *raison d’être*. Why else would calls for unity in the gay community go unheeded? Why else are energies wasted in attempts to duplicate the services and facilities provided already by the national organisation [NGF]?’³⁹² In a similar vein, John Ryan (IGRM), in a letter to David Norris, expressed his regret at the negative response to arrangements for a meeting between ‘your group [NGF] and representatives of the National Organisation [IGRM].’³⁹³

The Cork Gay Collective condemned the actions of the Dublin based groups, which it maintained, were more ‘intent on keeping power than in building the movement. In fact, it is in the interests of those whose objective is personal power that there should not be a large body of gay activists who would challenge them.’³⁹⁴ This was a view also expressed in the report of the Second National Gay Conference, which claimed that IGRM and NGF had ‘greatly over

³⁸⁸ Elgy Gillespie, ‘Gay groups celebrate respective birthdays’, *Irish Times*, 2 June 1980.

³⁸⁹ NLI, IQA, MS 45, 951/7 – Letter by Tonie Walsh and Bernard Keogh, 31 March 1981.

³⁹⁰ NLI, IQA, MS 45, 951/8 – John Ryan to David Norris, 22 November 1980.

³⁹¹ Gillespie, *Irish Times*, 2 June 1980.

³⁹² NLI, IR 369 I 23, *In Touch: Journal of National Gay Federation*, Vol. 2, No. 6, June/July 1980 – General Secretary’s report.

³⁹³ NLI, IQA, MS 45, 951/8 – John Ryan to David Norris, 22 November 1980.

³⁹⁴ NLI, IQA, MS 45,940/9 – Report on National Gay Conference 1981.

focused their energies on property acquisition and embellishment.³⁹⁵ The animosity between the IGRM and NGF, incidentally, seemed most problematic for members and groups outside of Dublin. According to the letter announcing a meeting in Glencree, in November 1980, to discuss the disunity in the gay movement in Ireland, it was felt that turning to the NGF or IGRM in Dublin for support:

means acknowledging and encouraging a split in the gay movement which we feel has been a destructive influence on the energy of people inside and outside of those movements. A great deal is being done within both organisations, but if we are to effectively face the challenges of the future we must develop a stronger sense of unity, we must at the very least talk to each other.³⁹⁶

In late 1980, early 1981, the NGF and IGRM ‘tried’ to overcome their differences.³⁹⁷ However, the correspondences reveal that unity was not the main priority. In fact, it was the case that both organisations wanted to be seen publicly to want unity, but internally, this was not the case. This was made clear at an early stage, as both organisations even clashed over agreeing a date to actually meet.³⁹⁸ After only two meetings, the discussions to bring about ‘unity’, unsurprisingly ended without agreement. It would appear that issues of property and archival material were more pressing to the IGRM, while the NGF seemed intent on undermining the IGRM throughout the process. The IGRM explained its reason for ending discussions on the basis that they were not ‘empowered to enter further discussions with your group [NGF] until property and archive material is treated unconditionally to this movement.’³⁹⁹ That same month, Bernard Keogh wrote to David Norris insisting that ‘the letter to Lotts Lane [IGRM address] should be prepared as soon as possible in my opinion, I have some ideas that I believe will wrong-foot the ‘79ers [IGRM]. Tom agrees with these ideas and I would like to hear both your own and David Twohig’s comments very early in the week.’⁴⁰⁰ Despite their public announcements of wanting unity, neither the IGRM, nor the NGF were

³⁹⁵ NLI, IQA, MS 45, 940/10 – Steering Collective Report on Second National Gay Conference, Trinity College Dublin, 1982.

³⁹⁶ NLI, IQA, MS 45, 949/6 – Letter announcing Glencree meeting, 11 November 1980.

³⁹⁷ NLI, IQA, MS 45, 951/8 – This folder contains the numerous correspondences between NGF and IGRM about resolving the tension between both groups.

³⁹⁸ NLI, IQA, MS 45, 951/8 – David Norris to John Ryan, 19 November 1980. John Ryan to David Norris, 22 November 1980.

³⁹⁹ NLI, IQA, MS 45, 951/7 – Sean Connolly to NGF President, 23 January 1981.

⁴⁰⁰ NLI, Personal Papers of David Norris, ACC. 6672 Box 21 - Bernard Keogh to David Norris, 11 January 1981.

able to come to any form of agreement and tensions persisted until the IGRM disbanded in 1983.

‘While products, shops, or businesses geared exclusively to the gay market may be a bit thin on the ground in Ireland at the moment there is no doubt that the influence and spending power of the gay community has had considerable reverberations throughout society.’⁴⁰¹

Despite the obvious tension between those running the Hirschfeld Centre and Phoenix Club, the centres’ existence had a considerable impact on the development of a consumer culture targeting gay and lesbian individuals in Ireland. Both centres contributed to the development of a more active gay scene in Dublin, than had been witnessed before in Irish society. Recognising the growing number of gay orientated events, *In Dublin* introduced a ‘Gay’ section in 1983 which gave readers a much easier guide to the events and services catering to gay and lesbian individuals in Dublin.⁴⁰² Two years later, *In Dublin* devoted a special edition to the ‘Gay Generation’, in which Rhona McSweeney noted that ‘Dublin’s Gay population, formerly invisible, have now begun to reflect the times that are in it and adopt a higher profile in the life of the city.’⁴⁰³ In fact, Maurice Haugh cited the success of the Hirschfeld Centre as one reason for explaining the revival of the Temple Bar area during this period. In his article, ‘Life revives in a dying part of Dublin’, Haugh noted the contribution of the Hirschfeld Centre, which, he added, made that part of temple bar the ‘Gay Paree’ of Dublin.⁴⁰⁴ That a journalist with one of the most popular newspapers in Ireland would acknowledge a ‘Gay Paree’ emerging in Dublin, and see it as a positive development, was testament to the everyday efforts of gay and lesbian individuals who bravely crossed the threshold of the Hirschfeld Centre. That Dublin could even have a ‘Gay Paree’ may well have come as a surprise to many who read Haugh’s comment.

In one of Ireland’s leading business magazines, *Success*, Niall O’Dowd even discussed the possible emergence of the pink pound in Dublin in the 1980s. While O’Dowd noted that, in comparison with the United States of America, the pink economy in Dublin was relatively ignored and the gay scene small, he nevertheless noted the extent to which greater visibility and greater choice for gay individuals now existed. Dublin, he insisted had become the focus of ‘social activity for an increasing number of well-heeled homosexuals. And on a sunny morning or afternoon it is not uncommon to see gay men and their queens strolling along

⁴⁰¹ NLI, IR 650 S 1 – *Success*, ‘Chasing the Pink Pound’, November 1984.

⁴⁰² NLI, IR 94133 I 2, *In Dublin*, October 1983.

⁴⁰³ NLI, Ir 94133 I 2, *In Dublin*, July/August 1985, ‘The Gay Generation.’

⁴⁰⁴ *Irish Times*, 30 July 1984 – ‘Life revives in a dying part of Dublin.’

Grafton Street.⁴⁰⁵ The fact that O'Dowd even mentioned the 'pink pound' in *Success* in 1984 was remarkable.⁴⁰⁶ O'Dowd went so far as to argue that 'while products, shops, or businesses geared exclusively to the gay market may be a bit thin on the ground in Ireland at the moment there is no doubt that the influence and spending power of the gay community has had considerable reverberations throughout society.'⁴⁰⁷

O'Dowd's comments were rather prophetic. Within only two years of his article the 'pink economy' was evident in Dublin. One such endeavour, which demonstrated this, was Side One disco, located at 26 Dame Lane, Dublin 2, which opened in 1986. Speaking about its opening to *Out* magazine, John Nolan, who was behind Side One, explained that 'It was felt that there was a gap which needed to be filled, an opening for an international gay club. In a way, SIDES is a positive demonstration that the gay scene has come of age.'⁴⁰⁸ This was very much a reflection of the greater confidence and desire of Irish homosexuals to be part of an international gay scene, but also to have an international gay club in Ireland. The extent to which Nolan was justified in asserting the gay scene had come of age, was evidenced one year later, in 1987, when Hooray Henry's in the Powerscourt Townhouse in Dublin joined SIDES as another gay venue. According to *GCN*, Hooray Henry's became the first fully gay seven night a week licensed night club in Ireland.⁴⁰⁹ One other notable venue which emerged to cater to gay individuals was the George Bar. In 2015, the George Bar celebrated its 30th anniversary, a considerable achievement for any gay bar, particularly one that began in 1980s recession Ireland.⁴¹⁰

By 1988 the choice of venues catering to gay and lesbian individuals was quite remarkable. Not only was the NGF successful in acquiring the Irish Film Institute in Temple Bar to organise events throughout the year, such as the Halloween Ball, gay pride parties and New Year's Eve Balls, but the numbers of people who attended these events seemed considerably higher than they had been in the early 1980s. Such was the demand for these events, that because over 460 people attended the 1987 Halloween Ball at the IFI, the NGF encouraged those wishing to attend the 1988 ball to buy their tickets early.⁴¹¹ In a sign of the

⁴⁰⁵ NLI, IR 650 S 1 – *Success*, 'Chasing the Pink Pound', November 1984.

⁴⁰⁶ NLI, IR 650 S 1 – *Success*, 'Chasing the Pink Pound', November 1984.

⁴⁰⁷ NLI, IR 650 S 1 – *Success*, 'Chasing the Pink Pound', November 1984.

⁴⁰⁸ NLI, IR 369 07, *Out*, March/April 1986.

⁴⁰⁹ NLI, ILB 305 G 2, *Gay Community News* Issue 9, November 1988, 'Hooray Henries.'

⁴¹⁰ http://thegeorge.ie/events/1722/our_30th_birthday Accessed on 20 March 2017.

⁴¹¹ NLI, ILB 305 G 2, *Gay Community News*, Issue 8, September 1988.

changing times, tickets for this gay event were purchasable in non-gay venues, such as Abbey Discs and Beat Records.⁴¹²

While the NGF organised the main party at the IFI, establishments such as the Parliament Inn, Hooray Henries, and J.J. Smyths, all planned fancy dress parties for gay and lesbian individuals on the Saturday preceding the NGF Halloween Ball.⁴¹³ On Sunday, both the Loft Bar on Dame Street and the George Bar on St. George's street hosted pre-IFI Halloween ball receptions.⁴¹⁴ In the listing pages of *GCN*, these locations were continually advertised as venues for gay and lesbian individuals. It marked a major increase from the late 1970s when the only options had been either Bartley Dunne's, or Rice's; neither of which had been a gay bar. (See Figures 2 and 3 for a comparison in activities and locations for gay and lesbian individuals in Ireland from *Identity* in 1983 and *GCN* in April 1990). Lesbian women also had their own weekly socials at J.J. Smyth's, where they could socialise in a relaxed, non-judgemental manner. According to *GCN*, a new social event for lesbian women on Friday's began at *The Castle Inn* in 1988.⁴¹⁵ A new lesbian support group had also emerged in 1986 to replace LIL, meeting every Saturday at the Gingerbread, on Wicklow Street, providing a basis for the continuation of supporting lesbian women.⁴¹⁶

This was very much a consumer revolution, and one that was not restricted to the emergence of gay and lesbian venues and activities. Coupled with the greater number of venues to socialise in were the number of bookstores which were now stocking material related to homosexuality, or gay issues more generally. In Dublin, by the beginning of 1990, such bookstores included, Book Upstairs on College Green, Well Read Books on Crow Street, Waterstones on Dawson Street and one of Ireland's biggest bookstores, Eason's, on O'Connell Street.⁴¹⁷ Moreover, advertisements within *GCN* also demonstrated the extent to which businesses now were recognising the existence of a gay community and seeking to attract gay clientele. Whereas, in the early 1980s, the NGF and IGRM had to reach out to magazines, such as *In Dublin* and *Hot Press*, to promote their existence, by the late 1980s businesses, such as 'PA Sectorial Service', 'The Market Winery', 'The Shirt Shop', 'Frankie's Bed and Breakfast', and *In Dublin*, were now reaching out to *GCN* requesting advertisement space. This was a considerable turn of events, in the space of only a few years.

⁴¹² NLI, ILB 305 G 2, *Gay Community News*, Issue 9, November 1988.

⁴¹³ NLI, ILB 305 G 2, *Gay Community News*, Issue 9, November 1988.

⁴¹⁴ NLI, ILB 305 G 2, *Gay Community News*, Issue 9, November 1988.

⁴¹⁵ NLI, ILB 305 G 2, *Gay Community News*, Issue 2 1988, 'Listings.'

⁴¹⁶ NLI, IQA, MS 46,002/4 – Lesbian Support Group to Working Committee Lesbian/Gay Community Centre, 13/3/1986.

⁴¹⁷ NLI, ILB 305 G 2, *Gay Community News*, Issue 15, February 1990.

LISTINGS

<p><u>National Gay Federation</u> Hirschfeld Centre, 10 Fownes Street Upper, Dublin 2. Tel: (01) 710939.</p> <p><u>Services</u> Tel-A-Friend (Founded 1974). An information and befriending service for homosexual men and women telephone (01) 710608. The service operates for men on Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Friday and Sunday from 8.00 p.m. to 10.00 p.m. and Saturday from 3.30 p.m. to 6.00 p.m. The service operates for women on Thursday from 8.00 p.m. to 10.00 p.m.</p> <p>Gay Befriending Group: Meets Hirschfeld Centre on Saturday from 4.00 p.m. to 6.00 p.m.</p> <p>Parents Inquiry: A group for the parents of gay women and men. For information phone Tel-A-Friend (01) 710608.</p> <p>Women's Group (Liberation for Irish Lesbians): Meets Hirschfeld Centre Thursday from 8.00 p.m.</p> <p>NGF Youth Group: Meets Hirschfeld Centre Sunday 3.00 p.m. to 6.30 p.m. <i>Under 21s only.</i></p> <p>NGF Publications Group: Meets Hirschfeld Centre Tuesdays from 8.30 p.m.</p> <p>Flickers Gay Disco: Hirschfeld Centre Wednesday 11.00 p.m. to 1.30 a.m., Friday 11.00 p.m. to 2.00 a.m., Saturday 11.00 p.m. to 2.30 a.m., Sunday 9.30 p.m. to 1.00 a.m. Membership and admission reserved.</p> <p>Hirschfeld Biograph: NGF members' cinema club. The cinema operates every alternate Monday. NGF members only are admitted except for visitors from abroad for whom special arrangements are made. For further information phone 710939.</p> <p>Trinity College Dublin Gay Soc. Meets every Friday at 1.00 p.m. in Room 5052 Arts Building during term time. Staff and students, gay and non gay welcome.</p> <p>University College Dublin Gay Soc. Coffee afternoon every Friday at 1.00 p.m. in Room D108, Arts Commerce Block, Belfield during term time.</p> <p>Dublin Gay Collective For information contact P.O. Box 1076 enclosing S.A.E.</p>	<p><u>Cork</u> Munster Region IGRM 4 McCurtain Street, Cork. Telephone Cork (021) 505304.</p> <p><u>Services</u> Switchboard Cork (021) 505394. Monday to Friday 7.30 p.m. - 9.00 p.m., Saturday 3.00 p.m. - 6.00 p.m. Disco Friday and Saturday 11.00 p.m. - 2.00 a.m., Sunday 10.00 p.m. - 1.00 a.m. Youth Group Monday 8.00 p.m. - 9.00 p.m.</p> <p>Cork Gay Collective For information write to P.O. Box 39 Cork enclosing s.a.e.</p> <p>University College Cork Gay Soc. For information contact Students' Union, 4 Carrigside, College Road, Cork.</p> <p>Quay Co-op Sullivan's Quay, Cork. Telephone (021) 967660 Restaurant and bookshop.</p> <p><u>Derry</u> Cara-Friend Telephone Derry 63120 Thursday 7.30 p.m. - 10.00 p.m. Information and befriending service.</p> <p>Bookworm Community Bookshop 12 Orchard Street, Derry.</p> <p><u>Galway</u> Galway Gay Collective Political and social group: For information on activities write to P.O. Box 45, Eglinton Street, Galway, enclosing s.a.e.</p> <p><u>Waterford</u> Waterford Gay Society For information write to P.O. Box 36, Waterford enclosing s.a.e.</p> <p><u>London</u> Irish Gays In London A non sectarian group for Irish gay women and men living in London. For information contact the General Secretary, Irish Gays In London, 274 Upper Street, London N1.</p>	<p>London Gay Switchboard If you need to talk to someone at a time when the local phone services are not operating the London Gay Switchboard operates 24 hours of the day, 7 days a week. The telephone number is 031 - 8377324. (The prefix is 01 if phoning from N. Ireland).</p> <p><u>Dublin</u> Women's Centre 53 Dame Street, (above Nico's Restaurant).</p> <p>Women's Disco At J. J., Smyth's Bar, Aungier Street, Dublin 2. Saturday 9.00 p.m. to 11.00 p.m.</p> <p>Books Upstairs Market Arcade, Off South Great George's Street. Bookshop stocks a range of gay literature.</p> <p><u>Belfast</u> Northern Irish Gay Rights Association P.O. Box 44, Belfast BT1 1SH.</p> <p>Cara-Friend Telephone Belfast 2222023, Monday to Wednesday 7.30 p.m. - 10.00 p.m. Lesbian Line Thursday 7.30 p.m. - 10.00 p.m. Information and befriending service.</p> <p>Belfast Lesbian Feminist Group Meets at 4 University Street, Belfast, Tuesdays at 8.00 p.m.</p> <p>Queen's University Gay Lib. Soc. Meets at 4 University Street, Belfast, Thursdays at 8.15 p.m.</p> <p>Gay Christian Fellowship Write to P.O. Box 44, Belfast BT1 1SH for information.</p> <p>Carpenter Club Long Lane off Lower North Street. Disco Friday and Saturday 9.00 p.m. - 2 a.m.</p> <p>Just Books Collective Bookshop, Winetavern Street, Belfast.</p> <p><u>Coleraine</u> Cara-Friend Telephone Coleraine 51904, Tuesday 7.00 p.m. - 10.00 p.m. Information and befriending service.</p>
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Figure 2. Identity March 1983 Listings

Listings

DUBLIN/NATIONAL/GENERAL

ORGANISATIONS/GROUPS

NATIONAL GAY FEDERATION
The Hirschfeld Centre
10 Fowles St
Dublin 2
(01) 710639

GAY AND LESBIAN EQUALITY NETWORK
c/o 10 Fowles St. Upper
Dublin 2
(01) 710639

REACH
Gay and Christian ?
Meets monthly on Sat.
Contact: P.O. Box 1790, Dublin 6
Thurs 7.30-9.00
(01) 961843

METROPOLITAN COMMUNITY CHURCH
Services in Dublin city centre -
Sat 7.00
Group meeting Wed. 7.30
Contact Pastor Mick Foley
(01) 857403

SEMA
For married bisexuals, gays and
their partners
Contact Gay Switchboard Dublin

LESBIAN & GAY YOUTH GROUP
Meets first and third Sunday every
month at 4.00pm
For details contact National Gay
Federation or Gay Switchboard
Dublin

ICEBREAKERS
First Saturday every month at 7.30
in a Dublin City Centre hotel
Contact Gay Switchboard Dublin

IRSCHFELD OUTDOORS GROUP
Meets last Sunday every month at
12.00 at the Hirschfeld Centre
(See box on facing page for year's
programme)

PARENTS ENQUIRY
Contact Gay Switchboard Dublin

MF MONTHLY SOCIAL
(inc. video showing)
First Monday every month at 8.00
in Kralay House, Lord Edward
St. Dublin 2

DUBLIN LESBIAN DISCUSSION GROUP
Sat 7.30-9.00
Contact Lesbian Line

WOMENS FILM CLUB
Wed 8.15
Contact Lesbian Line

JULIAN FELLOWSHIP
Support and Prayer Group for
Christian gay women. Meets
monthly.
Contact Julian Fellowship
P.O. Box 1871
Churchtown, Dublin 14

GAY & LESBIAN SOCIETY LTD
Meets Wednesday 5.30
Rivers G109, Arts Block, Belfield

WAYNOUTH GAY SOCIETY
Meets Mondays.
Contact Waynouth Students Union

BATHMINES COLLEGE OF COMMERCE LESBIAN & GAY SOC.
Meets Tuesdays 6.00-7.00
Contact Barry Quirk - Students
Union

TED LESBIAN AND GAY SOC.
Thurs 6.00 - Room 6.26

HELP AND HEALTH

GAY SWITCHBOARD DUBLIN
(TEL-A-FRIEND)
Mon-Fri 8.00-10.00
Sat 3.30-6.00
Sun 7.00-9.00
(01) 721055

AIDS HELPLINE
Mon 7.00-9.00
Wed 7.00-9.00
Sat 3.00-6.00
(01) 307888

LESBIAN LINE
Thurs 7.00-9.00
(01) 613777

NATIONAL TRANSEXISTE LINE
Thurs 8.00-10.00
(01) 710939

GAY HEALTH ACTION
Carmichael House
North Brunswick St
Dublin 7
(01) 721466

BODY POSITIVE
c/o Cairde
Support group for people affected
by HIV, ARC or AIDS

IRISH FRONTLINERS LTD
c/o Aids Action Alliance
Carmichael House
North Brunswick St., Dublin 7
Self help group for people
affected by HIV, ARC or AIDS
Mon-Sat 11.00-6.00
(01) 721466

CAIRDE
36/37 Lower Ormond Quay
Dublin 1
Voluntary group providing emo-
tional and practical support to people
who are HIV+ or have AIDS
Daily 10.00-1.00
(01) 733799/730877

AIDS ACTION ALLIANCE
Carmichael House
North Brunswick St
Dublin 7.
(01) 721466

STD CLINIC AT ST. JAMES' HOSPITAL
Hospital 5 (Rialto Entrance)
Mon 9.00-12.00 Thurs 1.00-4.00
Tues 1.30-4.00 Fri 9.00-12.00

HIV CLINIC
Wed 9.00-12.00 (HIV+ only)
(01) 537941 Ext 2161
(01) 535245 (direct line)

NIGHTCLUBS

THE GROVITO AT SIDES
Dance St, Dublin 2
Dance Club - Free Admission
Sun 11.30-3.30

HOORAY HENRY'S
Powerscourt Townhouse Centre
South William Street, Dublin 2
Nightclub and Winebar every
night
(Admission Free)

MINSKY'S
22 Ely Place
Dublin 2
Nightclub and Winebar every
night
(Admission Free)

RISKS
Annes Lane (Off South Anne St.)
Dublin 2
Thurs 11.00
(01) 774330

ACCOMMODATION

MALLARD GUEST HOUSE
76 Tyroneed Road
Inchicore
Dublin 8
(01) 535040

FRANKIES
8 Camden Place
Dublin 2
(01) 783087

BOOKSHOPS

BOOKS UPSTAIRS
36 College Green
Dublin 2
(01) 796687

WILL READ BOOKS
Dublin Resource Centre
6 Crow St
Dublin 2
(01) 771974

WATERSTONE'S
7 Dawson St
Dublin 2

EASON'S
40 Lr. O'Connell St
Dublin 1

EATS

FRANKIES RESTAURANT DINER
8 Camden Place, Dublin 2
Daily 10.00-6.00
(01) 783087

WELL FED RESTAURANT
Dublin Resource Centre
6 Crow St, Dublin 2
Vegetarian Food - cheap
11.00-5.00

MARKS BROS
7 South Great Georges St
Dublin 2
Young - trendy - cheap
Mixed gay/straight coffee shop
Mon-Sat 10.00-5.30

CORK

PUBS

LOAFERS
Douglas St.
Mixed - especially Tues and Sat

SIR HENRY'S
South Main St.
Small regular crowd from Loafers

EATS

QUAY CO-OP
24 Sullivan's Quay
(021) 317660

HELP AND HEALTH

GAY INFORMATION CORK
Wed 7.00-9.00
(021) 317026

WOMEN'S LINE
Thurs 7.30-9.30
(021) 317026

GAY HEALTH ACTION (CORK)
Tues 8.00-10.00
(021) 317026

LIMERICK

ORGANISATIONS/GROUPS

WOMEN'S MEETING
Thurs nights
Contact Limerick Lesbian Line

HELP AND HEALTH

LIMERICK GAY SWITCHBOARD
Mon 7.00-8.30
(061) 310101

LIMERICK LESBIAN LINE
Thurs 7.00-8.30
(061) 310101

BELFAST

ORGANISATIONS/GROUPS

NORTHERN IRELAND GAY RIGHTS ASSOCIATION
P.O. Box 44
Belfast BT1 1SH
Thurs - meetings 8.30
(084) 664111

NORTHERN IRELAND GAY CHRISTIAN FELLOWSHIP
P.O. Box 44
Belfast BT1 1SH
Meets fourth Sunday of month in
Corrymeela House
Upper Crosscut
Belfast

QUEEN'S UNIVERSITY LESBIAN AND GAY SOCIETY
Meets every Tues during term
time at 7.00 in Welfare Office
Room 514
Open to all

CARA-FRIEND DROP-IN
Cathedral Buildings
Lr. Donegal St.
(next to Spice of Life café)
Sat 1.30-5.00
Ring bell marked CF

PUBS

CROW'S NEST BAR
Skipper St. (off High St.)

THE QUEEN'S BAR
Queen's Arcade
Welcomes gay customers Thurs.
Fri. and Sat. nights

NIGHTCLUBS

THE LIMELIGHT
Ormeau Ave.
Mon 8.30-1.30

DELANEY'S
Corner of Rosemary and Lothian
St
Gay disco every Sat night

SEVENTH HEAVEN
(Off Victoria St.)

HELP AND HEALTH

BELFAST CARA-FRIEND
Mon, Tues and Wed 7.30-
10.00pm
(084) 322023

LESBIAN LINE BELFAST
Thurs 7.30-10.00
(084) 238668

LEGAL LINE
24 hours with call forwarding
(084) 438796

NORTHERN IRELAND AIDS HELPLINE
Mon, Wed and Fri 7.30-10.00
Sat 2.00-5.00
(084) 326117

HELP AND HEALTH
Queens University Night-line
Students Advice Line
Seven Nights 3pm-8am
(084) 231117

BOOKSHOPS

JUST BOOKS
7 Winesaver St
(084) 225426

CORK AIDS ALLIANCE/CAIRDE

22 McCurtain St
(021) 507237

LESBIAN & GAY SUPPORT GROUP
Students Union Office
(021) 276871 Ext 2367

BOOKSHOPS

QUAY CO-OP
24 Sullivan's Quay
(021) 317660

CLONMEL

CLONMEL GAY GROUP
P.O. Box 57
Clonmel

GALWAY

PUBS

NEAIGHTAINS BAR
Crest St.
Mainly men

CLOGS
Dominick St.
For women

MICK TAYLOR'S
Dominick St.
For women

HELP AND HEALTH

GALWAY LESBIAN AND GAY LINE
P.O. Box 45
Eglishan St
Galway
Contact also for details of
occasional social events
Wed. 8.00-10.00
(091) 24810

AIDS HELPLINE/CAIRDE
Thurs 8.00-10.00
(091) 66266

BOOKSHOPS

SHEELA-NA-GIG
The Galway Bookshop
Carnegie Mall
Middle St.
(091) 66849

DONEGAL

SAUNA AND B&B
Market Square
Milford
Co. Donegal
(074) 53175

DERRY

PUBS

QUEEN VIC
Every Second Tues.

ANCHOR BAR
Gays "tolerated"

ORGANISATIONS/GROUPS

DROP-IN CENTRE
At Women's Centre
London St
2.30-4.30 Sat

MAGEE COLLEGE GAYSOC
Contact Cara-Friend

NIGHTCLUBS

MAGEE COLLEGE
Disco every second Fri. during
term

HELP AND HEALTH

CARA-FRIEND
Thurs 7.30-10.00
(085054) 263120

BOOKSHOPS

BOOKWORM
16 Bishop St.
Derry(085054) 261616

Figure 3. Gay Community News April 1990 Listings.

*'Today it is We, Not I.'*⁴²⁰

By 1987, both the Phoenix Club and Hirschfeld Centre had closed. The IGRM had lost its lease at North Lott's in 1982 and brought an end to the Phoenix Club. With the loss of the Phoenix Club, the IGRM had lost its main source of income and was forced to disband.⁴²¹ The Hirschfeld Centre, on the other hand, which had dominated Dublin's gay scene for the majority of the 1980s, had been forced to close following a disastrous fire in 1987.⁴²² While part of the Hirschfeld Centre re-opened in March 1989, from this point on the NGF and Hirschfeld Centre were effectively a changed organisation and centre. In a letter sent to members updating them on the situation within the NGF, the managing committee stated that it would be dropping its role of trying to run a gay community centre and with it, discos. Rather, the organisation would concentrate its attention on the publication of *GCN*, updating of the Gay/Lesbian Archive and helping other gay organisations, such as the Gay Lesbian Equality Network to introduce legal reforms.⁴²³ The managing committee called on members to support its recommendations of changing the constitution of the NGF to 'reflect the limited aims we have set ourselves.'⁴²⁴

While many will see the decline of these organisations and centres as signs that the 1980s were a difficult time for the gay social scene and community, such a view is overly negative. Rather, the demise of the Hirschfeld Centre, in particular, merely reflected other changes that had taken place in Dublin by the late 1980s. By this time there were a greater number of venues which now catered to homosexuals. This allowed the NGF to walk away from its focus on discos. There were now other options for gay and lesbian individuals to avail themselves of. These, however, were not run by gay organisations, but by commercial interests. These commercial interests, no doubt, had been influenced by both the Hirschfeld Centre and Phoenix Club, who's very existence demonstrated the demand by Irish homosexuals for a space to socialise in.

Moreover, although they had closed, they had played a significant role in the fostering of a gay community spirit. As early as 1981, Chris Kirk noted this in *Gay News*, remarking that:

⁴²⁰ NLI, IR 369 I 23, *In Touch: Journal of the National Gay Federation*, Vol. 2, No. 8, October/November 1980, Gerard Hickey, 'Postbag.'

⁴²¹ NLI, Personal Papers of David Norris, *IGRM Newsletter*, 8 December 1982.

⁴²² NLI, IR 369 07, *Out*, February/March 1988, 'Hirschfeld Centre fire.'

⁴²³ NLI, IQA, MS 45, 936/17 – National Gay Federation letter sent to members, 31 August 1989.

⁴²⁴ NLI, IQA, MS 45, 936/17 – National Gay Federation letter sent to members.

it is encouraging to see the great amount of warmth and solidarity that the Dubliners feel within their own centres. And pride. It's that kind of gay pride which you don't get in a commercial club and it's the kind of pride that CHE must build on. [...] I was impressed enough by the Phoenix Club and the Hirschfeld to feel that CHE could do far worse than model their communities on them.⁴²⁵

Both the Phoenix Club and Hirschfeld Centre were important sites in helping to generate a greater awareness of a gay and lesbian community, but also a sense of community spirit between those who visited. They allowed individuals to live out a gay or lesbian lifestyle at a time when few such options existed. They engendered greater confidence, acceptance, and fostered friendships between those who took part in the different activities there. This everyday resistance by many gay and lesbian individuals brought a hitherto invisible gay and lesbian community very much into the open throughout the 1980s. Had they not carried out this resistance, whether intentional or not, it is hard to image the likes of an *Irish Times* journalist ascribing Temple Bar the 'Gay Paree' of Dublin, or a gay youth group obtaining official recognition through the awarding of a grant, or businesses seeking to cater to the demands of gay and lesbian individuals. Gay liberation does not take place over night. It is a gradual process that required changing public perceptions. The centres helped not only gay and lesbian individuals change their own perceptions of their homosexuality, but also a wider society who encountered them either through RTÉ, journals, newspapers, or even by visiting themselves to attend one of Flikker's live band performances or a movie at the Biograph. In many respects, it helped to de-mystify homosexuals, their activities and dispel notions of their deviancy. All of these were crucial steps in the emergence of a commercial revolution for gay and lesbian individuals in the late 1980s and into the 1990s.

Many interviewees who frequented the Hirschfeld Centre in the 1980s have noted its impact in fostering a broad sense of community. Speaking in 2013, Gerard Lawlor, for example, remembered that:

When I was 30, which was around 1979, the Hirschfeld Centre was opened and it was, I think, the best thing that happened in Ireland to the gay scene because suddenly we had a place to go to that was organised for us and where you could attend – you could go to discos, you could go in during the week and have coffee. It was a great place. What most of us of course enjoyed was the discos on the Friday and Saturday nights, at the weekends. They were excellent. And there was just a wonderful friendly atmosphere and a great place for gay people to go to.⁴²⁶

⁴²⁵ NLI, Personal Papers of David Norris, ACC 6672 Box 40 – *Gay News*, August 20 – 2 September 1981.

⁴²⁶ Edmund Lynch interview with Gerard Lawlor, 23 February 2013, *Edmund Lynch, Irish LGBT History Project*.

Lawlor's continued reference to us, rather than I, suggests a greater awareness of being part of something collective during that time. Similarly, George Robothem remembers it was through the Hirschfeld Centre that he developed a sense of community, revealing that, 'I remember going to the Hirschfeld Centre for the first time in 1986 and had a few visits there and then unfortunately it burnt down in 1987, but it was extraordinary energy there and lots of activity and that gave me an awareness of a community [...]'⁴²⁷

Going into the 1990s the growing gay and lesbian community was in a much better position than it had been at the end of the 1970s. Not alone did gay and lesbian people have places to socialise in, but the variety of services that existed for homosexuals was noteworthy. These ranged from the Gay Switchboard/Lesbian Line, to SIGMA, a group for married bisexuals or gay/lesbians, the Julian Fellowship a support group for Christian gay women, Icebreakers a social group geared to introducing gay or lesbian individuals to other gay and lesbian individuals and a commercially successful gay magazine, *GCN*. Larry Knopp, in 'Queer Diffusions', remarked that 'survival in the face of overwhelming oppression is arguably one of the most radical acts of all.'⁴²⁸ LIL, IGRM, NGF, and their respective centres and events helped many Irish gay and lesbian individuals to survive and thrive at a time when conservative forces were enjoying considerable success in Ireland. These actions were a form of everyday resistance which were crucial in resisting Irish sexual norms, and therefore central to the history of gay liberation in Ireland.

⁴²⁷ Edmund Lynch interview with George Robothem, 14 November 2014, *Edmund Lynch, Irish LGBT History Project*.

⁴²⁸ Larry Knopp, 'Queer Diffusions', in *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, Vol. 21, 2003, 409-424.

Chapter 3 - Decentring the metropolis: gay and lesbian activism in Cork, forging their own path?

‘For a gay man Cork is something of a twilight zone. In one way it is still a provincial Irish city; impervious to change. In others it seems an open, adventurous place in some ways more advanced than Dublin.’⁴²⁹

In the lead-up to Ireland’s marriage equality referendum in May 2015, two articles, in the *Irish Times* and *The Journal*, presented events that occurred only in Dublin as crucial in the campaign for gay rights in Ireland. These events included the founding of the IGRM, the NGF, 1983 Fairview Park Protest March and David Norris’ legal case.⁴³⁰ All of these were important, however, missing from this narrative were the events which took place outside Dublin, such as the foundation of the Cork Gay Collective, or the staging of the first National Gay Conference in Ireland in 1981, or even Ireland’s first Women’s Fun Weekend in 1984. As these events did not take place in the metropolis of Dublin, but rather in Cork, they are not considered to have been important or significant milestones in the campaign for gay rights in Ireland. The problem with the two articles is that the aforementioned events in Cork were actually very important.

This is not all that surprising, however, considering internationally the historiography of gay liberation is primarily focused on major metropolises, most notably, New York, San Francisco, London, Paris and Berlin, etc.⁴³¹ Evidently, it is only in these metropole regions that important events occur, movements emerge, and ideas and strategies devised and diffused to non-metropole areas. However, in recent years attempts have been made to challenge this simple notion of diffusion being a one-way system.⁴³² These attempts have sought to challenge

⁴²⁹ NLI, Ir 369 0 7, *Out*, June/July 1985, Donal Sheehan, ‘Cork 800 Years.’

⁴³⁰ <http://www.thejournal.ie/gay-rights-ireland-history-varadkar-history-1890129-Jan2015/>, Michael Sheils McNamee, ‘Timeline: A history of gay rights in Ireland’, *thejournal.ie*, 19 January 2015. - <http://www.irishtimes.com/news/social-affairs/10-milestones-in-irish-gay-rights-1.2214151>, Eibhear Walsh, ‘10 milestones in Irish gay rights’, *Irish Times*, 16 May 2015. Accessed on 11 April 2017.

⁴³¹ Examples I am referring to include: Matt Houlbrook, *Queer London: Perils and Pleasures in the Sexual Metropolis, 1918-1957* (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 2005). John D’Emilio, *Sexual Politics, Sexual Communities: The Making of a Homosexual Minority in the United States, 1940-1970*, (Chicago, University of Chicago, 1983). Barry D. Adam, *The Rise of a Gay and Lesbian Movement*, (Boston, Twayne Publishers, 1987), Marc Stein, *Rethinking the Gay and Lesbian Movement*, (New York, Routledge, 2012). Julian Jackson, *Living in Arcadia: Homosexuality, Politics, and Morality in France from the Liberation to AIDS*, (Chicago, University of Chicago, 2009). Robert Beachy, *Gay Berlin: Birthplace of a modern identity*, (New York, Vintage, 2014).

⁴³² Richard Phillips, Diane Watt, and David Shuttleton, *De-Centring Sexualities: Politics and Representations Beyond the Metropolis*, (London, Routledge, 2000).

the previously accepted belief that non-metropole areas were 'backward' and depended on metropole areas to guide them towards gay liberation. Notwithstanding the importance of large urban areas in the campaign for gay liberation, their primacy has, to some degree, hindered our broader understanding of the development and success of the gay and lesbian liberation movement. This is especially the case in Ireland, for, as the recent marriage equality referendum demonstrated, the support for marriage equality was present in both urban and provincial Ireland.

In 'Queer diffusions', Larry Knopp and Michael Brown rightly argue that:

it appears that resistance happens everywhere, and that the tight-knit and intimate personal networks that characterise smaller communities and, incidentally, closets – can create, at a times, opportunities for, rather than constraints on, fairly radical forms of resistance, whereas in large metropolitan environments (and other spaces where 'outness' is common) such goals can as easily be compromised as enhanced by the presence and pursuit of (relatively) abundant material resources and status.⁴³³

Gay and lesbian activism in Cork offers a strong defence of Knopp and Brown's argument. In many respects, Cork could be described as a mix between Galway and Dublin, provincial yet cosmopolitan, and to the fore in what may be characterised as radical (gay) politics in Ireland. Whereas, we shall see in Chapter 4 how activists in Galway, due to many constraints, concentrated their efforts on providing a space for gay and lesbian individuals to meet, often in secret, activists in Cork sought a much more public and unapologetic approach to gay liberation and gay identity. In particular, activists within the Cork Gay Collective (CGC) sought a different approach to gay liberation, in what may be compared to the kind of politics espoused by the Gay Liberation Front in New York in the early 1970s.

While working with and supporting the efforts of the Dublin based groups, activists in Cork were also unafraid to challenge them and their methods. Cork activists sought to be active players in the development of a gay community and strategies themselves. In Cork, alternative ways of forming a gay and lesbian community and gay politics were successfully explored. These efforts had wider implications outside of Cork and were important in the campaign for gay and lesbian liberation in Ireland. By analysing Cork this chapter hopes to de-centre the movement from Dublin and challenge the assumption that the important moments in gay

⁴³³ Larry Knopp and Michael Brown. 'Queer diffusions' in *Environment and Planning D* 21, no. 4 (2003): 409-424.

liberation in Ireland were a Dublin phenomenon only.⁴³⁴ This chapter will add to the growing international literature on queer activism outside the major urban areas and challenge the assumption that it is only from these large urban areas that ideas and strategies have an impact on the wider campaign for gay and lesbian liberation nationally.

The first part of this chapter is focused on the efforts of Cork IGRM which was the first organised attempt to forge a gay community in Cork. This will provide context to understanding the development of the Cork Gay Collective in 1981. The remainder of the chapter will focus on the efforts of the Cork Gay Collective and the Cork Lesbian Collective. Interestingly, while there existed three distinct gay and lesbian groups in Cork, their willingness to work together marked a welcome change to the dis-unity which existed in Dublin between the IGRM and NGF. Through their combined efforts Cork activists were important agents in challenging the hostility and discrimination faced by Irish gay and lesbian individuals, in developing new strategies, and in creating a more visible gay and lesbian presence outside Dublin.

‘In Cork as in Dublin, it’s the gay politicians who provide the main social scene.’⁴³⁵

Cork, nicknamed the rebel county for its loyalty to Perkin Warbeck (Richard, Duke of York) in the fifteenth-century, borders Tipperary, Kerry, Waterford and Limerick, and was a popular destination for gay and lesbian individuals within the Munster province throughout the 1980s.⁴³⁶ Situated in the south of Ireland, along the Celtic Sea, Cork is the largest county in terms of land area and, with a population of 402,465 in 1981, was the second most populated county in the Republic of Ireland.⁴³⁷

⁴³⁴ <http://www.thejournal.ie/gay-rights-ireland-history-varadkar-history-1890129-Jan2015/> Michael Sheils McNamee, ‘Timeline: A history of gay rights in Ireland’, *The Journal.ie*, published on 19 January 2015 Accessed on 11 April 2017.

<http://www.irishtimes.com/news/social-affairs/10-milestones-in-irish-gay-rights-1.2214151> – Eibhear Walsh, ‘10 milestones in Irish Gay Rights’, *Irish Times*, published on 16 May 2015. Accessed on 11 April 2017.

⁴³⁵ Personal Papers of Kieran Rose, Eric Presland, *Capital Gay*, December 2nd 1983.

⁴³⁶ <http://www.independent.ie/lifestyle/if-not-for-collins-why-is-it-called-the-rebel-county-29469436.html>, Joe O’Shea, ‘If not for Collins, why is it called the rebel county?’, *Irish Independent*. Accessed on 6 January 2016.

⁴³⁷ <http://www.cso.ie/en/census/censusvolumes1926to1991/historicalreports/census1981report/s/census1981volume1-population/>, ‘Census 1981’, www.cso.ie Accessed on 6 January 2016.

Only two years after its foundation in Dublin, a Cork branch of the IGRM (Cork IGRM) was established in 1976.⁴³⁸ Those responsible for establishing the Cork IGRM were Cathal Kerrigan, Bert Meany, Pat O'Mahony-Rysh and Oliver Cogan.⁴³⁹ As a branch of the IGRM, the Cork IGRM signed up to support the IGRM's aims and constitution.⁴⁴⁰ The acquisition of premises on 4 MacCurtain Street in 1977, known as the Phoenix Club, was one of the greatest achievements of the Cork IGRM.⁴⁴¹ Cathal Kerrigan maintains that the only reason the Cork IGRM were able to obtain this building was because of the buildings poor condition:

It was a firetrap. It was filthy. So, we had to go in with gloves and masks and clean the dirt. But it was good, it was community building, because everybody came on board, so some people were carpenters, some were in the drinks trades etc. So, we set up a little [coffee] bar and that's how it began. There is no better way than creating something like that, to create a sense of community and sense of ownership.⁴⁴²

The Cork Phoenix Club was the first gay centre outside Dublin and a central hub for gay men and, to a lesser extent, lesbian women throughout Cork and the Munster Region. Kerrigan has credited the Phoenix Club with beginning the 'transformation of gay life in Cork.'⁴⁴³ Eric Presland of *Capital Gay*, a London based gay weekly newspaper, visited the Phoenix Club in 1983 and described it as:

being on a more modest scale than Dublin's Hirschfeld Centre. An anonymous door next to a garage in MacCurtain Street leads up a steep staircase to a first floor disco with room for 40 or so dancers; there's a candle lit alcove off the disco floor with sofas to sit and chat, plus the coffee bar [...] [It has] a caring friendly concern, which is a positive quality of small town gay life which many larger more anonymous places lose.⁴⁴⁴

Interestingly, the Phoenix Club appears to have been known to and tolerated by the local police, who Kerrigan remembers inviting to the club to reinforce that 'there were no drugs or

⁴³⁸ Orla Egan, 'Searching for Space: Cork Lesbian Community 1975-2000', in *Women's Studies Review: Women's Activism and Voluntary Activity*, Vol. 9, 2004.

⁴³⁹ <http://corklgbthistory.com/2014/07/27/cork-irish-gay-rights-movement/>, Orla Egan, 'Cork Irish Gay Rights Movement', 27 July 2014, posted on Cork LGBT History Blog. <https://corklgbthistory.com> Accessed on 6 January 2016.

⁴⁴⁰ <http://corklgbthistory.com/2014/07/27/cork-irish-gay-rights-movement/>, Orla Egan, 'Cork Irish Gay Rights Movement', 27 July 2014, posted on Cork LGBT History Blog. <https://corklgbthistory.com> Accessed on 6 January 2016.

⁴⁴¹ <http://corklgbthistory.com/2014/07/27/cork-irish-gay-rights-movement/>, Orla Egan, 'Cork Irish Gay Rights Movement', 27 July 2014, posted on Cork LGBT History Blog. <https://corklgbthistory.com> Accessed on 6 January 2016.

⁴⁴² Cathal Kerrigan interview with author, 14 January 2016.

⁴⁴³ NLI, IQA, MS 49,655/1 – Cathal Kerrigan, 'Growing up gay in Cork 1971-1981.'

⁴⁴⁴ Personal Papers of Kieran Rose, Eric Presland, *Capital Gay*, 2 December 1983.

fornication on the premises.⁴⁴⁵ This veneer of respectability was clearly beneficial to the Cork IGRM's efforts to establish a gay social centre in Cork. By securing their own location, free from police harassment, the Cork IGRM were able to generate the revenue it required to survive. This in turn allowed it to become more independent and less reliant on the Dublin IGRM.

From the beginning the Cork IGRM sought to promote its existence publicly. In January 1978, Bert Meany, Oliver Cogan, and Anne Philpott appeared on the radio programme, *Cork About*, to promote the Cork IGRM. The segment titled 'Homosexuals in Cork' discussed the legal, religious and social aspects of gay life in Cork.⁴⁴⁶ Writing after his appearance on the programme, Oliver Cogan stated that 'from the very start of the programme the phones in RTÉ were literally hopping. Listeners comments ranged from take that rubbish off the air, to complete support for the contributors and the organisation. Whatever the general consensus of opinion, the programme certainly stimulated discussion.'⁴⁴⁷ Advertisements were also placed in journals and on the radio. For example, *Suirside Radio* in Waterford, and *Gay News*, were used to extensively advertise the Cork IGRM.⁴⁴⁸ Later, in 1981, over seventy ads appeared on *Radio City Cork*, along with a six-month advertising contract with the *Cork Review*.⁴⁴⁹ Events at the Cork IGRM were also featured in the 'What's on' section of the *Cork Review*.⁴⁵⁰

The advertising campaign does appear to have been successful. According to a report in the 1981 February edition of *In Touch*, the Cork IGRM 'were delighted to welcome gays from all over the country and overseas to the club over Christmas and New Year period and of course especially our friends in the Munster counties to whom we intend to expand greatly our service in the coming year (1981).'⁴⁵¹ In fact, the success of the Cork IGRM appears to have taken its leaders by surprise. Speaking at the 1981 IGRM AGM, the first of its kind to take place outside of Dublin, Pat Rysh remarked that:

⁴⁴⁵ NLI, IQA, MS 49,655/1 – Cathal Kerrigan, 'Growing up gay in Cork 1971-1981.

⁴⁴⁶ Oliver Cogan, *Sapphire* (Journal published by Cork IGRM), <http://corklgbthistory.com/2014/07/26/homosexuals-in-cork-1978-radio-programme/>, Orla Egan, 'Homosexuals in Cork 1978 Radio Programme', 26 July 2014, posted on Cork LGBT History Blog. Accessed on 6 January 2016.

⁴⁴⁷ Oliver Cogan, *Sapphire* (Journal published by Cork IGRM), <http://corklgbthistory.com/2014/07/26/homosexuals-in-cork-1978-radio-programme/>, Orla Egan, 'Homosexuals in Cork 1978 Radio Programme', 26 July 2014, posted on Cork LGBT History Blog. Accessed on 6 January 2016.

⁴⁴⁸ NLI, IQA, MS 46, 051/2-4 - Report of the Convenor of the Munster Regional Council of the Irish Gay Rights Movement, 1981

⁴⁴⁹ NLI, Ir 705 c 10, *The Cork Review*, April – June 1981.

⁴⁵⁰ NLI, Ir 705 c 10, *The Cork Review*, April – June 1981.

⁴⁵¹ NLI, 1K 2139, Cork Report, *In Touch*, Vol. 3, No. 10, February 1981.

our membership in Munster, not only in Cork, but also in Limerick, Waterford and the adjoining counties has grown at a steady rate. Who could have thought 16 months ago that Cork alone would have achieved a membership of 198 persons, that Limerick would have such a fast-growing group with its own post office box and that Waterford would have broadcast six radio interviews, a regular advertising campaign and their own post office box.⁴⁵²

This statement offers an interesting insight into the contrast between the movements in Cork and Dublin. Although Cork was the second most populated county after Dublin, the numbers and size of the scene were considerably different. While 198 members was considered significant for the Cork IGRM, in Dublin this represented an average night at Flikkers.



Figure 4. One advertisement of Cork IGRM Gay Switchboard in Cork Review in June 1981, and another of Cork IGRM in May 1981, with location of Phoenix Club mentioned.⁴⁵³

The Phoenix Club provided a welcome space for meetings, a youth group, discos, the IGA headquarters for religious affairs, the publication of its own (short-lived) newsletter, *Sapphire*, video nights and the Munster Gay Switchboard.⁴⁵⁴ The Phoenix Club also played host to a theatre group, the Cork Phoenix Players. The Cork Phoenix Players met every Tuesday under the direction of Pat Lynch, and performed productions such as *Sinderella*, and *Aladdin and his Wonder Wick*. A 1981 edition of *In Touch* reported that the highlight of the Christmas

⁴⁵² NLI, IQA, MS 46, 051/2-4, Report of the Convenor of the Munster Regional Council of the Irish Gay Rights Movement, 1981.
⁴⁵³ NLI, Ir 705 c 10, *The Cork Review*, April – June 1981.
⁴⁵⁴ NLI, IQA, MS 46, 051/2-4 - Report of the Convenor of the Munster Regional Council.

season was in fact the production of ‘*Aladdin and his Wonder Wick*’, which played to a capacity audience who were treated to a ‘glittering extravaganza the like of which it is true to say has not been seen in this cultured city before.’⁴⁵⁵ The plot of the play, with its array of innuendos, was as follows:

Wankey, a widow was experiencing some difficulties with trade, and her son/daughter, or whatever, Aladdin was having difficulties due to the slump in local cottage industry and the unwelcome attentions of two very butch ‘queer-bashers.’ All, however, appears to be saved by the aptly named Prince John of Trans-Sexualvania, who was deliciously attired in a most becoming Pink Tutu. From there on in, things get increasingly more confusing (and smutty).⁴⁵⁶

For those, however, who were not yet brave enough or in a position to attend the Phoenix Club, the Cork IGRM established its own befriending service, the Munster Gay Switchboard, in 1981. Tony Galvin and Dominick Daly explained that with the Munster Gay Switchboard they hoped ‘to provide an information and counselling service for all gay men and women, while also providing information on medical issues, particularly how to avoid various ailments, how to recognise their symptoms and where to go if necessary.’⁴⁵⁷ Initially, contact with Munster Gay Switchboard was made through the postal service, before a telephone line was installed in April 1981. This immediately led to an increased demand for the service. Whereas, in early 1981 the service only operated once a week, by July 1981 it operated four nights a week.⁴⁵⁸

The Munster Gay Switchboard, however, was not without its difficulties. For example, such was the delay in obtaining a telephone line the Cork IGRM had to contact the Minister for Post and Telegraphs, Albert Reynolds, to speed up the process.⁴⁵⁹ Bizarrely, however, within a year, the Cork IGRM reported that the Department of Posts and Telegraphs had severed their telephone line for no known reason.⁴⁶⁰ The line was only reinstated in September 1982. According *Out Front*, Colorado’s premier gay magazine, (the Cork IGRM had contacted international groups to lobby Ireland’s ambassadors on the matter), the line was only re-instated after the local police informed the Ministry of Telegraphs and Posts that the helpline might

⁴⁵⁵ NLI, IQA, MS 46, 003/3 – *In Touch: Newsletter of the Irish Gay Rights Movement*, Vol. 3, No. 10, February 1981, ‘Cork Report.’

⁴⁵⁶ NLI, IQA, MS 46, 003/3 – *In Touch*, ‘Cork Report.’

⁴⁵⁷ NLI, IQA, MS 46, 051/2-4 - Cork Gay Switchboard, Report for the Annual General Meeting of the Munster Regional Council of the Irish Gay Rights Movement, 1981.

⁴⁵⁸ NLI, IQA, MS 45, 951/7.

⁴⁵⁹ NLI, IQA, MS 46, 051/2-4 - Report of the Secretary of the Munster Regional Council, Irish Gay Rights Movement, 1980/1981.

⁴⁶⁰ *Out Front: Colorado’s Premier Gay Magazine*, ‘A Call for Help from Irish Gays’, 10 December 1982, in Archives of Human Sexuality and Identity, accessed on 8 March 2016.

help to solve a gay related murder in the area.⁴⁶¹ Following this request, the necessary repairs were made within five hours.⁴⁶²

‘The fundamental task of any gay activist is to politicise others. Competing with one another, the established gay groups have not effectively worked at politicising gays in Ireland. We must reject defeatist attitudes and look for more accessible ways for greater political involvement. Why not a march, and a dance in the Mansion House in Gay Pride Week? [...]’⁴⁶³

While the Cork IGRM had enjoyed considerable success in establishing a gay social centre in Cork within a short period of time, not everyone, however welcomed their efforts. Some, in particular were aggrieved at the Cork IGRM’s efforts to raise the visibility of gay and lesbian spaces in Cork, particularly those who would have preferred to remain hidden underground. Cathal Kerrigan remembers one such individual who confronted him at a house party shouting:

You fucking shit, you stupid young fool, you don’t know what you are doing, you don’t realise, you and your fucking put up posters, lets advertise, let’s go on the radio, lets protest, lets tell them we are here, lets tell them where to find us. You don’t realise how much they fucking well hate us. They hate us, they know nothing about us, they don’t know where to find us, and that makes us safe, and now you are going to tell them where to find us, going to tell them all about us, you going to tell them, give them the information and they hate us, and what do you think they are going to do, they are going to find us and kill us.⁴⁶⁴

One might surmise from Kerrigan’s account that this individual was from an older generation, who did not welcome a younger generation bringing greater attention to the activities of Cork’s gay and lesbian individuals. By attempting to bring awareness and visibility, the Cork IGRM were destroying the traditional conventions of many Irish homosexuals, who, over the years had cultivated a hidden homosexual lifestyle, while still remaining part of Irish society. This in turn led many individuals to fear persecution or ostracising from society, due to a heightened awareness of their existence. The sense was that this younger generation was ‘rocking the boat’ and were unaware of the consequences of their actions.

These fears did have merit. As we have seen in Chapter 2 Declan Flynn was killed because of his presumed homosexuality. Moreover, in Eric Presland’s article in *Capital Gay* he noted the cautiousness with which Pat Rysh opened the door of the Phoenix Club. Rysh explained his actions on the basis that the Cork IGRM ‘had half a dozen trouble makers tonight.

⁴⁶¹ *Out Front: Colorado’s Premier Gay Magazine*, ‘A Call for Help from Irish Gays’, 10 December 1982, in Archives of Human Sexuality and Identity, accessed on 8 March 2016.

⁴⁶² *Out Front: Colorado’s Premier Gay Magazine*, ‘A Call for Help from Irish Gays’.

⁴⁶³ NLI, IQA, MS 45, 940/9 – Report on National Gay Conference May 1981.

⁴⁶⁴ Cathal Kerrigan interview with author, 14 January 2016.

The *Sunday World*, (an Irish gutter paper) ran a gay story today and we had a few weirdos around. It always happens.’⁴⁶⁵ In 1986, the Hirschfeld Centre had to be evacuated because of a bomb scare, while one year later it had to close because of a fire, which some believed was started deliberately.⁴⁶⁶ While activists involved in the gay movement often complained about the lack of visibility of homosexuality in the media, the downside of greater visibility was the increased possibility and likelihood of hostile incidents.

The other criticism levelled at the Cork IGRM, and the two Dublin based groups (IGRM and NGF) was that they had failed to encourage homosexuals to become more actively involved in the campaign for gay rights in Ireland. They had failed, as their critics saw it, to ‘politicise’ Irish homosexuals.⁴⁶⁷ These critics, included Kieran Rose, Arthur Leahy, Laurie Steele and former IGRM member Cathal Kerrigan, who together established the Cork Gay Collective (CGC), in January 1981.⁴⁶⁸ What it actually meant ‘to be political’ was never clearly defined by the Cork Gay Collective, but from the above sub-heading it appears to have involved marches or discos, but not discos in gay centres, but rather discos in public buildings, such as the Mansion House. Comments, in 2016, by Kieran Rose give a further insight into what ‘political’ might have meant to those in this group:

You have to be open as a gay person, cause if you are not, you are very restricted, you can’t go on radio, can’t go out on the street, you can’t go to a trade union meeting and say things. [...] people are afraid of neighbours and families and stuff. There was a limited number of people who were openly gay, openly publicly gay in those days.⁴⁶⁹

To be political or to be an activist seemed, firstly, to mean being ‘out’ with one’s sexuality, and, secondly, using that ‘outness’ to speak out publicly against not only homosexual oppression, but all forms of oppression. It also appears to have meant not confining or living out one’s sexuality solely in the ‘gay ghetto.’ The social events provided by the Cork IGRM, NGF and IGRM were not, therefore, political because they were not seen to be speaking out directly against the injustices in society or moving outside the ‘gay ghetto.’

For Rose, Kerrigan, Leahy and Steele, the so-called weakened position of the movement was the direct result of both the NGF and IRGM, who they believed had primarily concentrated their efforts on providing social activities for Dublin’s gay and lesbian

⁴⁶⁵ Personal Papers of Kieran Rose, Eric Presland, *Capital Gay*, 2 December 1983.

⁴⁶⁶ NLI, IR 369 07, *Out*, February/March 1988, ‘Hirschfeld Centre fire.’ NLI, IQA, MS 45, 969/4 – Media Release, St. Patrick’s Day 1985.

⁴⁶⁷ NLI, IQA, MS 45, 940/9 – Report on National Gay Conference May 1981.

⁴⁶⁸ NLI, IQA, MS 45, 938/2 – Manifesto of Cork Gay Collective.

⁴⁶⁹ Kieran Rose interview with author, 12 January 2016.

individuals.⁴⁷⁰ Both Leahy and Steele, who returned from London at the end of the 1970s, were particularly irked by the unwillingness of both the IGRM and NGF to work together, by their hierarchical structure and by their focus on issues only directly related to gay liberation. They believed that these problems had produced a weakened political movement.⁴⁷¹ In a 2016 interview with Rose, he explained his reason for helping establish the Cork Gay Collective, rather than working within the Cork IGRM:

I suppose, I would have a socialist background, socialist commitment, maybe that's one of the reasons I didn't get involved in the Cork IGRM because they were fairly mainstream, or whatever. It wouldn't have interested me that much. I think they were more interested in discos and stuff. Which is grand. I don't know how, but I met Arthur Leahy and Laurie Steele, who had just come back from London, and they were classic gay left activists, housing co-operatives, squats, etc. So, we kind of met up socially and we started talking [...] We were youngish, leftie.⁴⁷²

According to Kerrigan, the Cork Gay Collective wanted a 'revolution, a revolution for everyone, not just gays.'⁴⁷³ In many respects the Cork Gay Collective shared much the same vision as that of the Gay Liberation Front of the early 1970s, in particular, that a capitalist society had facilitated the oppression, not only of homosexuals, but also of other minority groups and especially of women in society.⁴⁷⁴

The criticism levelled at the IGRM and NGF of being a one issue organisations irked some in these organisations. Speaking to members at the 1982 NGF AGM, David Norris unapologetically defended this position, insisting that:

I am absolutely committed to the continuation of NGF as a one issue organisation, I say this with the wisdom of hindsight. [...] There is to my mind no practical justification for the opening up of a second front on issues other than those directly affecting gay people because they are gay.⁴⁷⁵

Kerrigan later remarked that 'Cork people [Cork IGRM] basically saw us as off the wall, unrealistic, luney lefties. In Dublin, they just saw us as provincial lunatics.'⁴⁷⁶

⁴⁷⁰ NLI, IQA, MS 45, 938/2 – Manifesto of Cork Gay Collective.

⁴⁷¹ NLI, IQA, MS 45, 940/9 – Report on National Gay Conference May 1981.

⁴⁷² Kieran Rose interview with author, 12 January 2016.

⁴⁷³ Kieran Rose interview with author, 12 January 2016.

⁴⁷⁴ NLI, IQA, MS 45, 938/2 – Manifesto of Cork Gay Collective.

⁴⁷⁵ NLI, IQA, MS 45, 936/10 - Report of the Political Co-Ordinator, David Norris to the 3rd Annual General Meeting of NGF, 18 September 1982.

⁴⁷⁶ Cathal Kerrigan interview with author, 14 January 2016.

The CGC adopted a manifesto which they published in January 1981. Kerrigan described the manifesto as being ‘very much from that left, Leninist, kind of thing, you have a manifesto which defines who you are and draws people to you. It was also a self-definition. How you want to see yourself. What we were doing was defining our dream, our vision of what we wanted to live. So that’s what the manifesto was. It was utopian.’⁴⁷⁷ Outside of the personal impact which the manifesto had on those who created it, it was the first time that the politics and strategies of the IGRM and NGF had been challenged. The manifesto marked a watershed moment in starting a process of giving greater voice to provincial activists in the direction of the campaign for gay and lesbian rights in Ireland.

The CGC manifesto declared that those within the CGC demanded an end ‘to job discrimination, equal access to accommodation, for freedom from harassment and for equal right to express (their) feelings.’⁴⁷⁸ While this in itself was not radically different to either the NGF or IGRM, it was their commitment to and belief in the following that separated them from the NGF and IGRM:

This struggle cannot take place in isolation and that gay liberation involves the freeing of all oppressed groups. Therefore, we work, towards forging links with other movements for social progress. In particular, we emphasise our solidarity with the women’s movement, recognising that our shared oppression derives from the abuse of sexuality as a tool of exploitation which necessitated strict gender stereotyping and the denial of sexual fulfilment.⁴⁷⁹

While officially a gay collective, the objective of the CGC was to campaign for the liberation of all oppressed groups from a capitalist society which enforced strict gender roles and sexual norms. This anti-capitalist rhetoric was reflected in the symbol chosen for the CGC, a fist holding a rose, most associated with democratic socialism. Again, this moved away from the more commonly adopted symbols associated with gay liberation, such as the pink triangle, which other gay organisations, including the NGF, adopted. The fist holding a rose signified a wider commitment to issues of oppression affecting not only gay and lesbian individuals, but also other oppressed minorities. At the heart of the CGC’s aim in its formative years was to come out more publicly to challenge the notion of respectability and a certain way of being gay. They wanted the individual’s right to express him/herself freely as they wished to be recognised and not have to submerge it.

⁴⁷⁷ Cathal Kerrigan interview with author, 14 January 2016.

⁴⁷⁸ NLI, IQA, MS 45, 938/2 – Manifesto of Cork Gay Collective.

⁴⁷⁹ NLI, IQA, MS 45, 938/2 – Manifesto of Cork Gay Collective.

The CGC were keen to emphasise the input each individual might have in the decision-making process of the CGC. Their refusal to adopt the hierarchical structures of the NGF and IGRM was an attempt to encourage greater participation of those within the collective, or so they believed.⁴⁸⁰ The roles of president, chairman and sub-committees, they argued, ‘were too restrictive and harmful to the development of a Cork gay political action group. As gays fighting for a pluralistic society, we felt it essential that the structure we create should incorporate this spirit.’⁴⁸¹

‘Surely the time is now at hand when we must consider some new initiatives, some fresh directions.’⁴⁸²

Within only a few months of its establishment the Cork Gay Collective sought to re-direct the course of the gay movement in Ireland and confront the actions of the two Dublin based movements. In seeking to do so, they proposed the organisation of an Irish National Gay Conference. The idea of a National Gay Conference grew out of a meeting organised by members of the Cork Gay Collective at the Glencree Centre for Reconciliation on 30 November 1980.⁴⁸³ CGC explained in a letter to the different gay and lesbian organisations in Ireland that they were organising such a meeting because:

It has been a long time since the Gay Movement in Ireland, initiated a meeting at which all concerned gay groups and individuals, could together assess and evaluate the effectiveness of their efforts in the past and develop new ideas and relationships for the future to bring about political and social changes to better the quality of life for gay people in Irish society. The Cork Wednesday Night Group (became Cork Gay Collective in January 1981) have, after meetings and activities over a long period become more and more frustrated and concerned that not only is there no unified national movement for groups or individuals to turn to for support, but also that to turn to the NGF or IGRM in Dublin for support also means acknowledging and encouraging a split in the Gay Movement, which we feel has been a destructive influence on the energy of people inside and outside of those movements.⁴⁸⁴

For the CGC the tension between the IGRM and NGF was impeding the development of a unified national campaign for gay rights in Ireland, particularly in provincial Ireland. Provincial gay and lesbian individuals could not support a split, nor could they be supported by the continuation of that split, primarily because, resources that could have benefited them, such as

⁴⁸⁰ NLI, IQA, MS 45, 938/2 – Development and Organisation of Cork Gay Collective.

⁴⁸¹ NLI, IQA, MS 45, 938/2 – Development and Organisation of Cork Gay Collective.

⁴⁸² NLI, IQA, MS 45, 940/9 - Report on National Gay Conference 1981

⁴⁸³ NLI, IQA, MS 45, 949/6 – Letter announcing meeting at Glencree Centre for Reconciliation on 30 November 1980.

⁴⁸⁴ NLI, IQA, MS 45, 949/6 - Letter announcing meeting at Glencree Centre for Reconciliation on 30 November 1980.

finance, were being wasted on unnecessary legal fees and hiring of neutral venues to resolve the division between the IGRM and NGF. Rather than co-ordinating strategies amongst the different groups, each organisation carried out its own approach, often resulting in an overlap. Moreover, by contacting one group, and not the other, individuals were automatically seen to have taken sides and therefore ostracised themselves from one of the two groups.

The Glencree meeting passed three motions:

1. That this meeting calls upon all gay activists and organisations to support the convening and organisation of a national conference for gay activists to be initiated by the CGC.
2. That this meeting calls on gay organisations to recognise that towns outside Dublin cannot support a divided gay community and to actively promote unified gay communities in such towns.
3. That negotiations between the national groups should be continued.⁴⁸⁵

The strong commitment of the CGC to follow through on these motions was reflected in the staging of Ireland's first National Gay Conference in May 1981, only five months after the Glencree meeting. The conference titled, 'Gays in the Eighties: Which Way Forward', took place from 15-17 May at Connolly Hall, the headquarters of the trade union movement in Cork. While organising such a conference was in itself a massive achievement, the fact that the CGC succeeded in hosting the conference at Connolly Hall was equally significant. Kieran Rose recalls the symbolism attached to hosting the conference in Connolly Hall, stating that:

It wasn't a conference in a few drafty rooms in a hotel room, or community hall, this was in Connolly Hall, Cork, which is for all sorts of reasons, cause it's a Trade Union hall, and in those days, it was only newly constructed, so it was a fantastic presence in the city and fantastic sense of equality and dignity, that's what we deserved, everything about it was ambitious.⁴⁸⁶

As Rose points out, this was a very public venue, named after James Connolly, an Irish hero of the 1916 Rising, which welcomed hundreds of Irish gay and lesbian individuals to use their venue. Moreover, such efforts to secure a venue like this was consistent with the aims of the CGC to be more public in their sexuality and gay liberation. This was reflected in the *Cork Review* who advertised the Conference in their April/May edition, asking 'Are you a 'gay' man

⁴⁸⁵ NLI, IQA, MS 45, 949/6 – Motions passed at Glencree Centre for Reconciliation on 30 November 1980.

⁴⁸⁶ Kieran Rose interview with author, 12 January 2016.

or woman finding it difficult to cope under an oppressive social and moral climate? Or you may simply know or care about the problems facing ‘gay’ people. This situation is bound to change soon because the first National Gay Conference is being held in Cork.’⁴⁸⁷

Although billed as a national conference, in many respects, it resembled more an international conference. Over 200 (two-thirds of which were male) delegates attended the conference, coming from Dublin, Cork, Galway, Limerick, Northern Ireland, Great Britain and North America. Representatives from Dignity from New York, the Scottish Homosexual Rights Group, London Friend/Gays and Housing U.K. and Gay Teachers and Gay Left Collectives U.K. all took part in the conference, providing information and advice to Irish activists.⁴⁸⁸

The conference involved a mixture of workshops, plenary sessions and social activities. Over 18 different topics were discussed, ranging from ‘gay identity’, ‘gays and religion’, ‘women’s workshops’, ‘structures for development’, gays in the media, and ‘gays in isolation.’ In particular, the conference was important in giving groups, which hitherto had been marginalised, a much stronger voice, most notably provincial groups. John Porter, a founding member of the Galway Gay Collective, maintained that the conference was an important outlet to highlight the difficulties activists were facing in smaller regions of Ireland. At no other point had provincial activists been given this platform within the gay movement in Ireland. In addressing the conference, John Porter emphasised the difficulty of organising in provincial regions, reminding delegates of ‘the lack of facilities and political will in Galway, but hoped that even with their low numbers, an amount of progress would be made.’⁴⁸⁹

Over 50 motions were passed at the conference, with the majority concerned with ‘Gays and the Law.’ The conference, however, did demonstrate the extent to which law reform alone, was not sufficient. This was made clear in a speech by Barry Prothero, the Gay Rights Officer with the National Council for Civil Liberties, U.K., who warned Irish gay and lesbian activists that:

Law Reform, though inevitable and necessary, should be regarded as a very limited development and that much more needed to be done to ensure effective change. He illustrated this with reference to the situation in Britain since the ’67 reforms. Gay people who lost their jobs solely on the grounds of being gay could not seek redress under employment protection legislation because prevailing social prejudice found loopholes in this inadequate legislation.⁴⁹⁰

⁴⁸⁷ NLI, Ir 705 c 10, *The Cork Review*, April /May 1981.

⁴⁸⁸ NLI, IQA, MS 45, 940/9 – Report on National Gay Conference 1981.

⁴⁸⁹ NLI, IQA, MS 45, 940/9 – Report on National Gay Conference 1981

⁴⁹⁰ NLI, IQA, MS 45, 940/9 – Report on National Gay Conference 1981

Reflecting this reality, delegates passed numerous motions on: ‘Gays and Trade Unions’, ‘greater integration of gay and lesbian disabled women within every gay group’, ‘a call for the IMA (Irish Medical Association) /IMU (Irish Medical Union) to declare publicly that a homosexual orientation is not a medical or psychiatric illness/disorder’, and that ‘enquiries be made into whether aversion therapy is taking place in any part of Ireland [...]’.⁴⁹¹ Delegates also called for a law to be introduced in Ireland giving legal recognition to gay relationships.⁴⁹² At a time when sexual activity between males was illegal, this motion either reflects the high ambitions of those who attended the 1981 conference, their lack of realism, or both. The number of motions passed at this conference nevertheless demonstrated the extent to which Irish gay and lesbian activists were focused on more than simply legal reform. This was a movement focused on bringing about a range of different institutional and cultural changes in Ireland.

Along with workshops, the conference was a particularly important ‘social’ occasion for gay and lesbian individuals in this region. Besides discos organised at the Phoenix Club, Connolly Hall also hosted numerous book stalls, exhibitions, and a screening of two American films, ‘Word is Out’ and ‘Comedy in Six Unnatural Acts.’⁴⁹³ According to the conference report, the Gala dance held at Connolly Hall was highly significant because ‘the words gay and straight almost lost their meaning in the light of such genuine community feeling. For us this dance was as politically important as the rest of the Conference and it certainly was a night to remember for anyone who had attended.’⁴⁹⁴

The novelty of the National Gay Conference was reflected in the widespread media attention it generated, both locally and nationally. Newspapers such as the *Cork Examiner*, *Sunday Tribune*, *Irish Press*, *Irish Independent* and *Irish Times* all covered aspects of the conference. In an article on the conference, the *Sunday Times* noted that ‘at least 5% of Irish adults are homosexual making gays the largest minority in a population of 3.5million, [...]’.⁴⁹⁵ The *Irish Times* also reproduced some of the key demands which originated from the conference, such as ‘the enactment of positive civil rights for gay people in the areas of employment and housing, the recognition of the legal rights of partners in a gay relationship and an adequate and balanced treatment by all branches of the media.’⁴⁹⁶ The *Irish Independent*

⁴⁹¹ NLI, IQA, MS 45, 940/9 – Report on National Gay Conference 1981.

⁴⁹² NLI, IQA, MS 45, 940/9 – Report on National Gay Conference 1981.

⁴⁹³ NLI, IQA, MS 45, 940/9 – Report on National Gay Conference 1981.

⁴⁹⁴ NLI, IQA, MS 45, 940/9 – Report on National Gay Conference 1981.

⁴⁹⁵ *Sunday Tribune*, ‘Irish Gays Meet in Cork’, 17 May 1981.

⁴⁹⁶ *Irish Times*, ‘Plea by Gay Rights Body’, 18 May 1981.

focused their attention on the fact that ‘the U.S. Psychiatric Association had rejected homosexuality as a disorder.’⁴⁹⁷

Tom McClean (NGF) summed-up the National Gay Conference with the following words:

The Cork Conference will, I feel, become to the gay rights movement in Ireland what Stonewall is to the gay liberation movement worldwide. It was not so much the discussions at the workshops or the strategy for the future which we talked about, but rather the spirit of unity and the recognition of diversity of view and approach which marks the threshold which we have crossed. The Cork Conference is already the symbol of the unity of the gay movement in Ireland.⁴⁹⁸

This conference has been overlooked as extremely important moment in the campaign for gay rights in Ireland. It provided a welcome opportunity for activists outside Dublin to become active players in the development of strategies, but also an opportunity for smaller groupings like the GGC to drive home the message that the ‘national’ groupings in Dublin were not in fact national, but rather Dublin centred. The success not only in garnering strong support from trade unions later in the decade, but also in the type of law reform that was eventually introduced owes much to the discussions that took place at the National Gay Conference in Cork, particularly discussions with international groups. The National Gay Conference resulted in two more national gay conferences in Dublin in 1982 and Belfast in 1983.

Although the conference failed to heal the division between the Dublin IGRM and NGF, it did succeed in bringing greater unity between activists in Cork. Following the success of the National Gay Conference, the Cork IGRM and Cork Gay Collective jointly organised Cork’s first gay pride week in June 1981.⁴⁹⁹ This was the first-time gay pride was marked outside Dublin. Speaking on behalf of both groups, Kieran Rose stated that ‘we are demanding our civil rights and we feel that this leafletting campaign is a useful way of increasing public awareness and gaining wider support for our just demands.’⁵⁰⁰ Along with leafletting campaigns in Cork and Waterford, activists also took part in two radio broadcasts in Waterford and Cork, and a gay mountain climb of the Comeragh Mountain range in Waterford. At the top a large pink triangle was hoisted on the highest peak.⁵⁰¹ Over the next four years activists in

⁴⁹⁷ *Irish Independent*, ‘Gay Plea on Church Violence’, 18 May 1981.

⁴⁹⁸ NLI, IR 369 I 23, *In Touch, Journal of National Gay Federation*, Vol. 3, No. 3, June/July 1981.

⁴⁹⁹ Personal Papers of Kieran Rose, ‘Cork Gay Pride Week’, 23 June 1981.

⁵⁰⁰ Personal Papers of Kieran Rose, ‘Cork Gay Pride Week’, 23 June 1981.

⁵⁰¹ NLI, IQA, MS 46, 051/2-4 – Report of the Secretary of the Munster regional council of Irish Gay Rights Movement, 1980/1981.

Cork continued to mark gay pride week with similar activities. In 1984, for example, a banner supporting gay and lesbian rights was hung outside the Quay Co-Op in Cork City.⁵⁰²

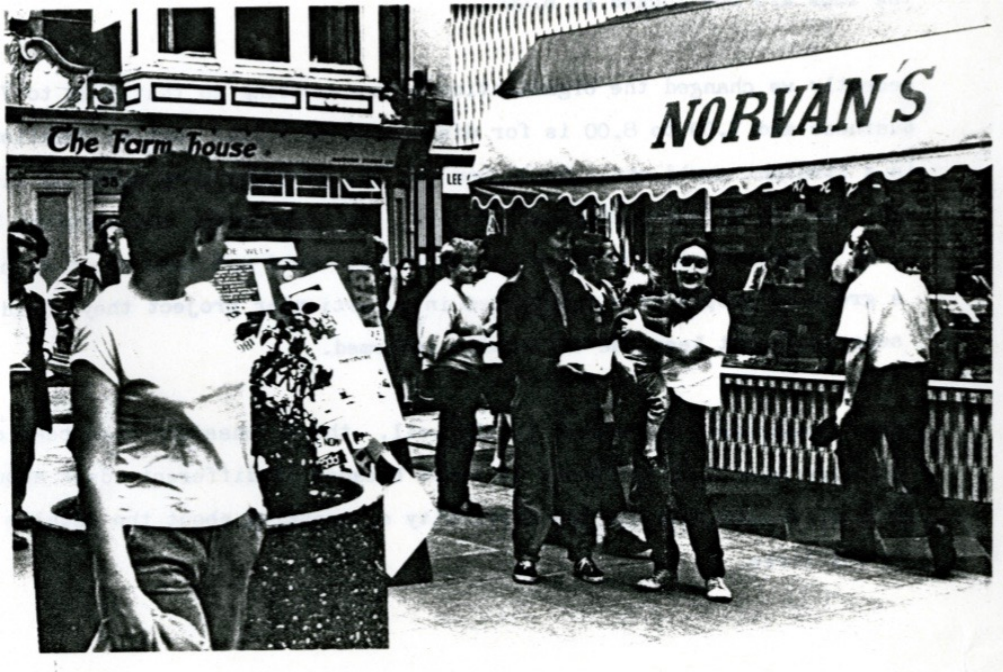


Figure 5. Cork Gay Collective activists handing out leaflets on Prince's Street in Cork City to mark Gay Pride Week 1984.⁵⁰³

⁵⁰² Personal Papers of Kieran Rose, Development of Cork Gay Collective.

⁵⁰³ <http://corklgbtarchive.com/items/show/38>, '1984 Cork Gay Collective Information', Cork LGBT Archive, accessed on 11 February 2016.



Figure 6. Members of the IGRM Munster Council on Comeragh Mountains with a Pink Triangle.⁵⁰⁴

‘In many ways the Co-Op is an exotic presence in the city and many people (not least lesbians and gay men) are simply baffled by it.’⁵⁰⁵

If the 1981 National Gay Conference was important in bringing gay and lesbian activists together, then May 1982 signalled a time when the Cork Gay Collective sought to work with other progressive groups in Cork. A prime example of this was the opening of the Quay Co-Op on Sullivan’s Quay in May 1982, which is still in existence today. Throughout the 1980s the Quay Co-Op ‘provided a local base for the politics of the new social movements of the period – at a time when Irish society, and its economy, seemed to be going backwards rather than forwards.’⁵⁰⁶ The Cork Gay Collective, in particular, Arthur Leahy, who had participated in similar co-operatives in England, played a central role in the development of the Quay Co-Op.⁵⁰⁷ The Co-Op was a pragmatic decision by the different groups involved, who recognised that alone such an endeavour could not have been achieved. Rose explained that one of the reasons the Co-Op was established was because of ‘the realisation that Cork was a very closed city at the time, very dominated by conservative forces, and the little groups around like the collective, women’s groups, generally progressive people had no-where to meet.’⁵⁰⁸ Groups such as Women Against Violence Against Women, Friends of the Earth, Campaign for Nuclear

⁵⁰⁴ *In Touch: Newsletter of the Irish Gay Rights Movement*, Vol. 4, Winter 1981, Issue 14, in Personal Papers of Sean J. Connolly.

⁵⁰⁵ NLI, Ir 369 0 7, *Out*, June/July 1985, Donal Sheehan, ‘Cork 800 Years.’

⁵⁰⁶ <http://www.quaycoop.com/about/> Accessed on 15 January 2016.

⁵⁰⁷ NLI, IQA, MS 46,002/4.

⁵⁰⁸ Kieran Rose interview with author, 12 January 2016.

Disarmament and Alliance for Safety and Health all formed part of the Quay Co-Op with the Cork Gay Collective.

Although, not exclusively a gay/lesbian centre, it nevertheless had a strong gay/lesbian presence through the CGC, and later the Cork Lesbian Collective and Gay Health Action. Its establishment reflected one of CGC's key aims, the desire to work with other groupings fighting for social change. Rather than creating a specifically gay centre, like the Cork IGRM, Dublin IGRM and the NGF, the CGC chose to help create a mixed centre, to avoid the so-called 'ghettoization of homosexuals'. Instead of isolating themselves from wider society, the CGC sought, 'to offer one way out of the gay world and into an alternative, more open grouping that gays are helping to form.'⁵⁰⁹ While the Phoenix Club was available at select times during the week, it was not a venue which was accessible during the day time, therefore the facilities at the Quay Co-Op offered homosexuals an alternative relaxing space to meet, especially for those not wanting to be part of the exclusive gay bar or disco scene.

The Co-Op provided a comprehensive space for a women's centre, café, a nursery, space for exhibitions, general office, a book shop, offering magazines on alternative lifestyles, gay topics, women's issues and other works generally unobtainable in Cork, and employment.⁵¹⁰ Eric Presland described the Quay Co-Op book shop as having a 'far better gay selection than you'll find anywhere in Dublin, and a good second-hand section.'⁵¹¹ Some of these included, *Gay Star*, produced by the Northern Ireland Gay Rights Association, *Identity*, *Gay Scotland*, *Outrage*, *Body Politic*, and *Spare Rib*.⁵¹² In 1984, the bookshop also began a confidential lesbian/gay mail order service.⁵¹³

The structure of the Co-Op reflected the strong anti-capitalist, anti-patriarchal and anti-hierarchical distaste within the CGC and other groupings in the Quay Co-Op. In particular, the Co-Op aimed to 'ensure that women, as the single largest minority grouping in society, continue to have their special needs recognised and catered for within the Co-Operative structure.'⁵¹⁴ To ensure this, the Co-Op Committee was divided equally between 3 males and 3 females. This structure gave women greater influence over the decisions and running of the centre, unlike the situation in both the Phoenix Club and the Hirschfeld Centre.

⁵⁰⁹ NLI, IQA, MS 45,964/2.

⁵¹⁰ NLI, IQA, MS 45,964/2.

⁵¹¹ Personal Papers of Kieran Rose, Eric Presland, *Capital Gay*, 2 December 1983.

⁵¹² Orla Egan, Cork LGBT Archive, <http://corklgbtarchive.com/items/show/79>. Accessed on 21 January 2016.

⁵¹³ Personal Papers of Kieran Rose, 'Development of Cork Gay Collective.'

⁵¹⁴ NLI, IQA, MS 46,002/4.

The creation of the Quay Co-Op was one of the most important steps in facilitating the formation of a visible lesbian presence in Cork. While many might have expected that it was the presence of the Cork Gay Collective in the Quay Co-Op which was the driving force behind the establishment of the Cork Lesbian Collective; it was in fact the presence of a Women's Place at the Quay Co-Op which provided the opportunity for the emergence of a lesbian group. The Woman's Place sought 'to be a base and support for women in Cork. For this it should not be identified with one issue only but offer a broad spectrum of resources and information.'⁵¹⁵ According to the directives of the Cork's Women's Place, lesbian women were encouraged to organise and fight for their liberation, claiming that:

Women in the Co-Op have taken a separate space for ourselves and other women to use and to develop our own identity, to work on women's issues from a feminist perspective, and for those of us who are lesbian, to take space for ourselves to work on lesbian politics, and provide a supportive atmosphere and environment for our sexuality to emerge.⁵¹⁶

The upholding of the Women's Place as a space exclusively for women was uppermost in the minds of those running the Women's Place. In a memo to the Quay Co-Op committee in 1986, the Women's Place objected to the use of the Women's Place library by the male Gay Switchboard without their permission, noting that 'We were not approached at any stage by them asking our permission to use the library. We don't find this situation acceptable but acknowledge that the Gay Switchboard was not responsible. We want the Admin Group or whoever is responsible to note our objection and to ensure that it doesn't happen again. We also want money for the hire of the room.'⁵¹⁷

For many lesbian women attending women's/feminist events offered a pathway to understanding their sexuality and meeting others like them. The Women's Place brought many lesbian women together. The success with which it did so was evident with the foundation of Cork Lesbian Collective in November 1983.⁵¹⁸ Meeting every Thursday at 8:00p.m. the informal and unstructured meetings of the Cork Lesbian Collective offered an opportunity for discussions on sexuality and related topics in a relaxed setting.⁵¹⁹ The significance of this should not be overlooked. While the Cork IGRM and the CGC had existed since 1976 and

⁵¹⁵ Cork Women's Place Support Group Proposal, <http://corklgbtarchive.com/items/show/130> Accessed on 21 February 2016.

⁵¹⁶ Cork Women's Place Definitions and Directives 1982, <http://corklgbtarchive.com/items/show/129> Accessed on 21 February 2016.

⁵¹⁷ Women's Place Admin Group to Quay Co-Op Administration Group, 1986, <http://corklgbtarchive.com/items/show/136>, Accessed on 21 February 2016.

⁵¹⁸ Quay Co-Op Newsletter, 1984, <http://corklgbtarchive.com/items/show/99> Accessed on 21 February 2016.

⁵¹⁹ Quay Co-Op Newsletter c. 1984, <http://corklgbtarchive.com/items/show/99>, Accessed on 21 February 2016.

1981 respectively, no lesbian grouping had evolved from their organisations, yet in the space of just one year, a lesbian collective had materialised in the Quay Co-Op. The structures of the Quay Co-Op and Women's Place were instrumental in this development.

The Cork Lesbian Collective's primary objective was 'getting together to combat isolation and provide support' for lesbian women in Cork and Munster.⁵²⁰ Helen Slattery explained that the collective was set up simply 'to meet like-minded women and to talk about what it was like to come out in the country. To talk to someone else who was out, because the majority weren't. We were the only ones who we knew who were gay. There weren't many lesbians.'⁵²¹ The *Munster Women's Newsletter* revealed that those attending were a mixture of 'those that had known they were lesbians for a long time and those that were attempting the first step of discovering their sexuality. And others still who did not consider themselves lesbian but wished to discuss their sexuality in an open and inhibiting atmosphere.'⁵²² Deirdre Walsh remembers conversations focused on life as a lesbian, recalling that 'a lot of it was about coming out stories, and stuff like that. Just living the lesbian life, some people being more out than others, some being very paranoid about their identity being known to others.'⁵²³ One such individual was Nikki Keeling who remembered, in a 2001 interview, that it was only after attending these meetings in Cork that she eventually accepted the label of lesbian:

I had lovers in Brighton when I was twenty, but I was afraid of the label lesbian, it would've been the early eighties and I used to hang around the women's centre in Brighton – there was a lot of politics but also a lot of socialising and I was there for the craic. These parties were mixed in terms of straight women and lesbians. The lesbian's kind of scared me, they seemed so sure of their identity. I didn't know how I should be as a lesbian. Soon after that I came to Cork and I felt I met other dykes equally and I didn't feel that I had to prove anything. In the first Lesbian Group meeting in the Women's Place in the Quay Co-Op, a group of women turned up and it was the first time just sitting down talking about ourselves and our sexuality and from there really, I took on the label or identity.⁵²⁴

Whereas, we have seen in Dublin tension existed between LIL and the NGF, both the CGC and CLC enjoyed a good working relationship. In fact, the CLC and CGC were equally outspoken in their criticism of misogyny and the wider discrimination faced by women in Irish society. This engendered a much smoother relationship between the CGC and CLC. For example, in an

⁵²⁰ Quay Co-Op Newsletter c. 1984, <http://corklgbtarchive.com/items/show/99>, Accessed on 21 February 2016.

⁵²¹ Helen Slattery, Interview with the author, 9 March 2016.

⁵²² *Munster Women's Newsletter*, c. 1985, 'A lesbian in Cork', <http://corklgbtarchive.com/items/show/81> accessed on 22 February 2016.

⁵²³ Deirdre Walsh, Interview with the author, 9 March 2016.

⁵²⁴ *Linc: Cork's Lesbian Magazine*, Issue 3, November 2001.

interview with Liz Doran of the *Cork Examiner* in 1983, Kieran Rose emphasised the importance of women's liberation to gay liberation.⁵²⁵ Doran, who seemed to recognise the novelty of this, remarked that 'being obvious exceptions to the gay rule Kieran and his collective colleagues do not see the gay movement advancing 'except through women.'⁵²⁶ Rose even compared the laws criminalising male homosexuality to the infringement on the women's right to choose and argued that 'a society which does not accept women's rights will certainly not accept the rights of gays.'⁵²⁷ Rose credits the CGC's involvement with the women led Anti-Amendment Campaign for providing them 'with the opportunity to challenge the conservative hegemony especially in what was a tightly knit town such as Cork [...] it also provided us with considerable skills, experience and confidence.'⁵²⁸

The extent to which the CGC and CLC challenged misogyny within the wider gay movement was evident in their criticism of *Out* following its December 1985/January 1986 issue. In a strongly worded letter, the CGC expressed the view that 'the images of women (and particularly of men dressed as women) in the last issue of 'Out' were awful. We would like to know how you come to choose images like that for the magazine. [...].'⁵²⁹ These views were shared by the CLC who argued that the 'images of women contribute to the on-going misogyny in society. We already experience oppression as lesbians and women from the media in general and so it is even more insulting when a magazine which claims to represent the lesbian and gay population see fit to portray women in this way.'⁵³⁰ According to Donal Sheehan there was a good 'deal of adverse reaction to the images' within the Co-Op and the said issue was only put on sale following a notice in each edition highlighting the Co-Op's objection to the presentation of women in *Out*.⁵³¹ The outcry led to an apology from the board of *Out*, who insisted that it was never their intention to exploit or degrade women.⁵³²

***'It was such an adventure. It actually felt like an adventure.'*⁵³³**

⁵²⁵ *Cork Examiner*, 'Kieran seeks rights for gays', 3 August 1983.

⁵²⁶ *Cork Examiner*, 'Kieran seeks rights for gays', 3 August 1983.

⁵²⁷ *Cork Examiner*, 'Kieran seeks rights for gays', 3 August 1983.

⁵²⁸ Kieran Rose, *Diverse Communities: The Evolution of Lesbian and Gay Politics in Ireland*, (Cork, 1994), 18

⁵²⁹ NLI, IR 369 0 7, *Out*, 'Letters from O'Sullivan's Quay', March/April 1986.

⁵³⁰ NLI, IR 369 0 7, *Out*, 'Letters from O'Sullivan's Quay', March/April 1986.

⁵³¹ NLI, IR 369 0 7, *Out*, 'Letters from O'Sullivan's Quay', March/April 1986.

⁵³² NLI, IR 369 0 7, *Out*, 'Letters from O'Sullivan's Quay', March/April 1986.

⁵³³ Helen Slattery, Interview with the author, 9 March 2016.

One of the most notable achievements of the Cork Lesbian Collective was the organisation of Cork Women's Fun Weekend, which began in April 1984, and still runs today. While this was initially a mixed event, comprising both lesbian and heterosexual women, there was an overwhelmingly strong lesbian influence, not only its organisation, but also in the topics chosen for the weekend celebrations. Over the years, the Women's Fun Weekend has become a staple event, not only for Cork's lesbian community, but also lesbian's outside Cork. According to Deirdre Walsh, 'the original aim of the fun weekend was to provide a forum for women to spend time with other women in the context of having fun and enjoying ourselves as a counterbalance to 'women's' work never being done, i.e. paid work, caring and nurturing of children, housework, etc. as well as meetings and conferences.'⁵³⁴ Helen Slattery remembered that the Fun Weekend was also devised as a fundraiser and a means of offering lesbian women something fun, in comparison to the more serious side of lesbian activism, such as conferences, which she stated 'were quite serious.'⁵³⁵ The Fun Weekend sought to provide a release from conferences and the everyday constraints on the lives of many Irish women and provide something unique, if even for only one weekend.

The first Cork Women's Fun Weekend took place at Quay Co-Op from 13-15 April 1984.⁵³⁶ Organisers arranged for a disco, cabaret performance, women's films, discussions, workshops and card games. Joan McCarthy, who was centrally involved in planning the weekend, even formed a band, 'Standing Ovulation' to perform at the weekend.⁵³⁷ Writing in *Lesbian and Gay Visions of Ireland*, Louise Walsh, who attended the first weekend, remembered how:

It was a huge event for the Cork women to organise, but they pulled it off. Women travelled from all parts of the country. Like a lot of women in Cork I found the idea of going to a cabaret of all women performers, having days of women's films, discussions, workshops and card games totally mind-blowing. I identified as heterosexual at the time, but as I watched all these women dancing together, celebrating and flirting in this wonderful atmosphere I knew something quite important and powerful had happened. A strong open lesbian community had rooted itself in Cork, [...].⁵³⁸

⁵³⁴ *Women's Space Newsletter*, Issue 2, May/June 1988

<http://corklgbtarchive.com/items/show/60> Accessed on 22 February 2016.

⁵³⁵ Helen Slattery, Interview with the author, 9 March 2016.

⁵³⁶ <https://corklgbthistory.com/2014/07/18/cork-womens-fun-weekend/>, Orla Egan, 'Cork Women's Fun Weekend', Cork LGBT History Blog, 18 July 2014, accessed on 22 February 2016.

⁵³⁷ *Linc: Cork's Lesbian Magazine*, Issue 4, April 2002.

⁵³⁸ Louise Walsh, 'Artist-Activist' in *Lesbian and Gay Visions of Ireland: Towards the Twenty First Century*, edited by Íde O'Carroll and Eoin Collins, (London, Cassell, 1995), 172.

Walsh's use of the word 'open' is particularly noteworthy. Julie A. Podmore and Line Chamberland have argued that 'one of the most persistent political struggles for lesbians has been their societal, historical and spatial invisibility.'⁵³⁹ Therefore, the fact that Walsh notes there was a more open and strong lesbian community was central to confronting their invisibility and challenging Irish perceptions of lesbianism. Similarly, Mary Flanagan, who travelled from Galway to the Women's Fun Weekend in 1985, remembers it as an empowering experience:

My first outing where I saw lesbians kissing was in a wild and wonderful weekend down in Cork, it happens every year, and I remember going down there with a straight friend of mine because this other woman encouraged us to go and we went on the Friday night and there was a disco and at the disco they were dancing. My God, I couldn't believe it, it was like being in heaven and the next morning, I remember the Office Bar down in Cork, on the Sunday morning, there was a gathering around half twelve, and that was just tremendous. I can still feel it. You go in and all these lovely women are inside, nothing but women and the craic was great and there was intimacy, you know, and I just remember coming out to my friends at that stage and that's 1985, I think it was, so that was my first kind of lovely feeling [...].⁵⁴⁰

Although Flanagan was speaking 28 years later, it is evident that the 1985 Women's Fun Weekend was still vivid in her mind and the positive impact it had on her, a sense, as she said, of being in 'heaven.'

The popularity of the Cork Women's Weekend was reflected in the expansion of the event outside the Quay Co-Op in later years. By 1989, the event, while still being hosted in the Quay Co-Op, was organising other activities in venues, such as Moore's Hotel and Windsor Hotel. Securing Moore's Hotel appears to have been a huge morale boost for organisers who, in previous years, had struggled to obtain a venue outside the Quay Co-Op. Helen Slattery fondly remembers Moore's Hotel:

Basically what we did was we went to every different hotel in Cork. We could do it for a year, then they would go, oh lesbians, no ye can't have it next year so. Until we landed in Moore's Hotel. That was great. They fucking loved us. They fucking loved us because we drank all-round the place and we had no trouble, we basically leased ourselves. We had our own bouncers, no need for them for paying out for money for anything. We had our own bouncers and basically we were sound bunch of people who spent loads of money at the bar.⁵⁴¹

⁵³⁹ Julie A. Podmore and Line Chamberland, 'Entering the Urban Frame: Early Lesbian Activism and Public Space in Montréal', *Journal of Lesbian Studies*, 19:2, 2015, 192.

⁵⁴⁰ Edmund Lynch interview with Mary Flanagan, 15 June 2015, *Edmund Lynch, Irish LGBT History Project*.

⁵⁴¹ Helen Slattery, Interview with the author, 9 March 2016.

It is interesting to note the financial independence which these lesbian women seemed to enjoy, but also the extent to which Moore's was recognising the value of the 'pink pound.' Just as a gay consumer culture had emerged in Dublin in the late 1980s, so too, it would seem were signs of its emergence in Cork. This was further reflected in the fact that the 1988 Cork Women's Fun Weekend secured sponsorship from Loafer's Pub, (which had become a popular bar for the Cork lesbian and gay community), and from Murphy's Brewery.⁵⁴²

Just as the locations hosting the weekend expanded, so too did the activities and its popularity. Lesbian women, including some who travelled from Great Britain and continental Europe, could take part in meditation classes, tarot reading and rituals, soccer, soft-ball, circle dance, Ceilí (Irish) dancing, writers' workshop, a lesbian exchange workshop and a quiz.⁵⁴³ Loafer's Pub played host to the quiz, which, according to Deirdre Walsh 'was just hilarious. All different teams. We had a golden Barbie painted pink and that was what you would win. Loafers closed-down for it. It was just exclusively us. All squashed into it. It would be a sing-song for the rest of the night then. It was good fun.'⁵⁴⁴

Orla Egan writes that the Fun Weekend 'helped to forge and foster relationships between women from Cork and elsewhere, Belfast, Galway, Dublin, London etc. I remember literally busloads of women travelling down from Belfast to attend the Cork Women's Fun Weekend in the 1980s.'⁵⁴⁵ The success of the Cork Women's Fun Weekend was a remarkable achievement for Cork's lesbian community, something Dublin was not even able to match. It afforded Irish lesbians the opportunity to not only forge new friendships and relationships, but also, as Mary Flanagan and Louise Walsh demonstrated, become more confident in their sexuality.⁵⁴⁶ For Mary Flanagan, the Cork Women's Fun Weekend appears to have given her the confidence to accept her sexuality and come out to friends. It was an event where Irish lesbian women were able to express their sexuality in a relaxed and an enjoyable setting. Moreover, these weekends offered an opportunity for women, but specifically lesbian women, to claim a public space to express their sexuality. This was a space that, by the late 1980s, certain venues were gladly willing to give them. Rather than remaining 'invisible' these events made public that lesbians existed in Cork and Ireland.

⁵⁴² *Women's Place Newsletter*, Issue No. 3, July/August 1988, <http://www.corklgbtarchive.com/items/show/61> Accessed on 9 January 2018.

⁵⁴³ *Women's Place Newsletter*, Issue No. 2, May/June 1988, <http://corklgbtarchive.com/items/show/60>, Accessed on 22 February 2016.

⁵⁴⁴ Deirdre Walsh, Interview with the author, 9 March 2016.

⁵⁴⁵ <https://corklgbthistory.com/2014/07/18/cork-womens-fun-weekend/> Accessed on 22 February 2016.

⁵⁴⁶ *Women's Place Newsletter*, Issue No. 3, July/August 1988, <http://corklgbtarchive.com/items/show/61> Accessed on 22 February 2016.

*'Let's Get Something Going: Where is the support for lesbians and gay men in Cork.'*⁵⁴⁷

In contrast to Dublin, where LIL had disbanded by 1985, in Cork, the Cork Lesbian Collective prospered. The same could not be said, however, for the Cork IGRM and Cork Gay Collective. The popularity of the Cork IGRM and the Phoenix Club began to wane in late 1983. Whereas, previously discos had taken place three times a week, by the end of 1983 discos were reduced to Saturday and Sundays only, but even still, Eric Presland reported that 'Saturday's really the only day worth writing about and painted a gloomy picture of declining attendances.'⁵⁴⁸ Not only were attendance figures down, but so too were figures for those volunteering with the Cork IGRM and Munster Gay Switchboard.⁵⁴⁹ Eric Presland seemed to believe that the cultural climate and emigration played a central role in the demise of the Cork IGRM, claiming that 'unemployment, lack of abortion, lack of gay life, poverty all drive Irish people to leave their country.'⁵⁵⁰ No doubt these were factors, however, it does not explain why the Cork Lesbian Collective did not experience something similar, nor why Loafer's Bar, which opened in 1983, survived for 32 years.⁵⁵¹ It may be the case that Loafer's Bar attracted individuals away from the Phoenix Club, particularly as Loafer's was open more often and served alcohol, which the Phoenix Club could not.

The CGC similarly struggled, but this was a result of exhaustion. The CGC had actively sought to engage itself in the many social and political campaigns in Ireland during this period, most notably, the Anti-Amendment Campaign, protests against the 1983 Criminal Justice Bill, gay law reform, along with running and organising the Quay Co-Op, National Gay Conference, and gay pride events. During this period, the collective had remained a small group, consisting primarily of the original founding members, one of which, Charles Kerrigan had moved to Dublin in 1982. In a 1984 CGC newsletter they revealed that:

There is a general agreement that we should look more to our own needs and that local work should be our priority. We feel that we have tended to ignore the local situation and that if it is not growing strong it is not good for ourselves and also it does not make much sense to be concentrating on national issues. There is also a feeling that we should be more analytical before we take on new work, i.e. questions like 'what do we hope to

⁵⁴⁷ Personal Papers of Kieran Rose, Leaflet produced by Cork Gay Collective, Cork IGRM and Cork Lesbian Collective, as part of the Cork Lesbian and Gay Community Project 1984.

⁵⁴⁸ Personal Papers of Kieran Rose, Eric Presland, *Capital Gay*, 2 December 1983.

⁵⁴⁹ Personal Papers of Kieran Rose, Eric Presland, *Capital Gay*, 2 December 1983.

⁵⁵⁰ Personal Papers of Kieran Rose, Eric Presland, *Capital Gay*, 2 December 1983.

⁵⁵¹ Stephen Rogers, 'Cork says goodbye to Loafers as Ireland's oldest gay bar closes', 5 May 2015 - <http://www.irishexaminer.com/ireland/cork-says-goodbye-to-loafers-as-irelands-oldest-gay-bar-closes-328664.html> Accessed on 9 January 2018.

achieve? Is this feasible given our energies and resources? We tend to be isolated from many of the gay men in the city [...].⁵⁵²

Ironically, their desire not to be a 'one issue' organisation ultimately resulted in isolating them from the local gay community and perhaps might explain why, unlike the Cork Lesbian Collective, they did not enjoy the same success in attracting new members. This was also not helped, they noted, by their concentration on 'national issues', at the expense of more local issues. To what extent national issues are not local, and local issues are not national is questionable. CGC's statement, in many respects, was a vindication of Norris' 1982 defence of the NGF's sole focus on issues only directly affecting the gay community.

The downturn in activism within the Cork IGRM and Cork Gay Collective fed into the formation of the Cork Lesbian and Gay Community Project in April 1984. In the leaflet announcing the first meeting, it asked 'Where is the support for lesbian and gay men in Cork? Where are our: youth group, counselling service, parents group, health group, local newsletters, facilities for unemployed people?'⁵⁵³ In a series of meetings, activists from the Cork IGRM, Cork Gay Collective and Cork Lesbian Collective discussed the importance of initiating a new centre for gay and lesbian individuals, a befriending service for rural homosexuals, new mid-week social nights and new activities, such as self-defence classes, badge making, printing, haircutting and drawing. The latter, however, were seen as 'putting the cart before the horse.'⁵⁵⁴

While the overall aim was to acquire a new bigger premise's exclusively for the gay and lesbian community in Cork this however proved too ambitious. Nevertheless, the project led to some positive outcomes, most notably the establishment of the Cork Lesbian Line, and Gay Information Cork, in January 1985. Operating out of the Quay Co-Op on Wednesday nights for gay men and Thursday nights for lesbian women, both lines sought to provide positive information on lesbian and gay life. Cork Lesbian Line and Gay Information Cork also sought to engage with outside agencies, such as the health service, welfare, libraries and educational groups, to insure they had good information for gay and lesbian people.⁵⁵⁵ The Cork Lesbian Line explained the premise of their existence on the fact that 'being lesbian involves a rethinking of the traditional roles of women as being weak and not in control of our lives. Lesbianism can be a strong challenge to this. In the Lesbian Line, we aim to pass on this

⁵⁵² Personal Papers of Kieran Rose, 'Cork Collective News, 1984.'

⁵⁵³ Personal Papers of Kieran Rose, Leaflet announcing meeting at 4 MacCurtain Street, 11 April 1984.

⁵⁵⁴ Personal Papers of Kieran Rose, Minutes of Cork Lesbian and Gay Community Project, 16 April 1984.

⁵⁵⁵ Personal Papers of Kieran Rose, Minutes of Cork Lesbian and Gay Community Project, 16 April 1984.

strength and belief to the women who contact us, to enable them to positively deal with lesbianism in their own lives.’⁵⁵⁶

Not unlike Tel-A-Friend, Gay Information Cork and the Cork Lesbian Line encountered considerable hostility to the advertising of their service. Both local papers, the *Cork Examiner* and *Evening Echo*, refused to promote the service. In a June 1985 letter to the editor of the *Evening Echo*, Kieran Rose (Gay Information Cork) and Paula Keenan (Lesbian Line), noted that initially Gay Information Cork had been advertised for five weeks. However, when they tried to renew this advertisement the *Evening Echo* refused, arguing that ‘the advertisement submitted to us was illegal under the present law in Ireland and as such we can do nothing about the publication of your notice.’⁵⁵⁷ While this explanation might not have taken Gay Information Cork by much surprise, the refusal to advertise Cork Lesbian Line was telling. Neither paper could argue lesbianism was illegal. In fact, the *Cork Examiner* did accept £4.50 from Lesbian Line to advertise the service, but no ad appeared.⁵⁵⁸ When contacted by Lesbian Line, the *Cork Examiner* (who subsequently returned the fee) explained that ‘they objected to the word lesbian and would not print an advertisement with that word in it.’⁵⁵⁹ Unlike the situation with Gay Information Cork, where the legal situation had been raised, not the word ‘gay’, which incidentally would have been tolerated, the word ‘lesbian’, was deemed not tolerable, with or without any laws. Just as TAF had engaged in a sticker campaign to promote its service, so too did the Cork Lesbian Line and Gay Information Cork. One of the stickers included the slogan, ‘Lesbians are Everywhere.’⁵⁶⁰ However, in *Out for Ourselves*, both lines noted that ‘even in the most ‘alternative’ of places they [stickers] are pulled down almost immediately.’⁵⁶¹

While it’s primary goal was to provide a service for lesbian women struggling to come to terms with their sexuality, Lesbian Line also helped foster a greater sense of community amongst those running the different Lesbian Line services throughout Ireland, both north and south of the border. In November 1988, in what has been described as a very special date in the history of the Lesbian Lines in Ireland, an exchange took place between Lesbian Lines from

⁵⁵⁶ *Out for Ourselves: The Lives of Irish Lesbian and Gay Men*, ‘Lesbian Line’, 128.

⁵⁵⁷ T.E. Crosbie to Kieran Rose, 18 June 1985, <http://corklgbtarchive.com/items/show/41>, Accessed on 22 February 2016.

⁵⁵⁸ ‘Lesbians in the Examiner’, <http://corklgbtarchive.com/items/show/98> Accessed on 22 February 2016

⁵⁵⁹ ‘Lesbians in the Examiner’, <http://corklgbtarchive.com/items/show/98> Accessed on 22 February 2016.

⁵⁶⁰ ‘1985 Notes Cork Lesbian Line’, <http://corklgbtarchive.com/items/show/96> Accessed on 22 February 2016.

⁵⁶¹ *Out For Ourselves: The Lives of Irish Lesbians and Gay Men*, 127.

Cork, Galway, Belfast and Derry. This exchange was funded by a grant the CLC received under the Women's Links project of the Co-Operation North Exchange Programme.⁵⁶² This was the first funding to be awarded to a Lesbian Line in the Republic of Ireland. The exchange included workshops on counselling/befriending, difficulty in recruiting new members, how to maintain distance from new befriendeds on the social scene, and the lesbian and alcohol.⁵⁶³ The follow-up exchange took place the following year in Belfast.⁵⁶⁴ The success of the exchange was acknowledged by the Co-Operation North Programme, which awarded Cork Lesbian Line and Belfast Lesbian Line joint first prize in their Women's Link Project '89 awards.⁵⁶⁵ Orla Egan maintains that these exchanges:

wove a very strong network between us all for the continuation of skills, information and fund raising. It is only because the exchange took place that we were enabled to begin to do many of these things. As isolated groups we have neither information, skills or money to get much of the work needed to be done, done. As a larger national network, all things are possible.⁵⁶⁶

By the end of the 1980s there seems to have been a greater sense of confidence amongst Cork lesbians. Whereas, in 1983, the Cork Lesbian Collective's primary objective was to provide a space for lesbian women to meet and talk, by 1989 it was publicly calling for 'strong legislation to protect us (lesbian women) from harassment and loss of work because of our sexuality.'⁵⁶⁷ In health, they focused on improving gynaecological health care, which they argued 'excluded the notion of lesbian sexuality. When we go for smear tests etc. we are treated as heterosexual women so our care is impoverished.'⁵⁶⁸ Furthermore, they called for same-sex relationships and families to be recognised and respected, and to allow same-sex couples easier access to mortgages, just like married heterosexual couples.⁵⁶⁹ At a time when no organised lesbian

⁵⁶² Co-Operation North is a private, non-political organisation dedicated to the development of good neighbourliness between the people of Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. <http://corklgbtarchive.com/items/show/122> Accessed on 22 February 2016. *Women's Space Newsletter*, Issue No. 5 December 1988/January 1989,

<http://corklgbtarchive.com/items/show/63>.

⁵⁶³ *Women's Space Newsletter*, Issue No. 5

⁵⁶⁴ Orla Egan, 'Searching for Space: Cork Lesbian Community 1975-2000', in *Women's Studies Review: Women's Activism and Voluntary Activity*, Vol. 9, 2004.

⁵⁶⁵ <http://corklgbtarchive.com/items/show/124>, 'Constance Short to Geraldine McCarthy, Cork Lesbian Line, 11 January 1990. Accessed on 22 February 2016.

⁵⁶⁶ Orla Egan, 'Searching for Space', in *Women's Studies Review*.

⁵⁶⁷ *Women's Space Newsletter*, Issue No. 5.

⁵⁶⁸ *Women's Space Newsletter*, Issue No. 5.

⁵⁶⁹ *Women's Space Newsletter*, Issue No. 5.

movement existed in Dublin, the CLC provided the strongest voice for lesbian women in Ireland.

By the late 1980s, even with the loss of the Cork IGRM and Phoenix Club (disbanded in 1986) there does appear to have been a variety of more openly gay/lesbian friendly pubs to socialise in. These included bars such as Loafers Bar, Dan Lowry's Bar, Stripes and Slicks.⁵⁷⁰ Just as the organisations in Dublin had encouraged the rise of a gay consumer culture, so too did the organisations in Cork encourage something similar. Moreover, the Quay Co-Op continued to offer an alternative space for homosexuals, providing a base for the Cork Lesbian Line, Gay Information Cork and Gay Health Action. Throughout the 1980s, the Cork IGRM, Cork Gay Collective and Cork Lesbian Collective, succeeded in reaching out to homosexuals in Cork and Munster, helping bring them into contact with other homosexuals and end for many their sense of loneliness and isolation. For individuals like Kieran Rose, Charles Kerrigan, Arthur Leahy and Donal Sheehan it was their time in the CGC, which prepared them for their involvement in areas such as gay law reform, gay workers' rights, the telephone services and particularly the AIDS epidemic, both locally and nationally.

Conclusion

This chapter sought to expand on how gay and lesbian activists outside Dublin sought to lay the foundation for the development of a gay identity and sense of a gay community in Cork. It also sought to demonstrate how Dublin, alone, was not the only centre where ideas and strategies were devised and diffused. I have demonstrated how Cork was a particularly important melting pot for a different kind of gay politics in the 1980s. While the Cork IGRM adopted the same strategy of the Dublin IGRM and NGF, and their efforts should be acknowledged, the Cork Gay Collective and Cork Lesbian Collective adopted different approaches. The Cork Gay Collective marked a turning point in gay liberation and gay community building in Cork and Ireland. The Cork Gay Collective challenged Dublin, to not only recognise that provincial homosexuals had a voice, but that the strategies of the Dublin organisations were alienating many. Instead the Cork Gay Collective took its own path and was influential in the campaign for gay liberation in Ireland. The National Gay Conference and the Quay Co-Op are a vindication of the Cork Gay Collectives' efforts.

The Cork Lesbian Collective, which helped foster a strong open lesbian community in Cork, is evidence that it is not only in major urban areas that such communities can thrive. In

⁵⁷⁰ Orla Egan, '1980s Social Venues', Cork LGBT History blog, 14 July 2014, <http://corklgbthistory.com/2014/07/14/1980s-social-venues/> Accessed on 22 January 2016.

fact, Knopp and Brown have argued that the more close-knit nature of smaller regions can in fact be more susceptible to the creation and maintenance of such efforts. This would certainly appear to have been the case with the Cork Lesbian Collective, who outlived the Dublin based LIL. A large population alone, is not sufficient for the development of a community spirit, nor should big cities be viewed as the epicentre of progress, which provincial areas simply follow afterwards. Quite often, as this chapter has shown, areas outside the metropolis can be instigators themselves for progressive change. Gay and lesbian activists in Cork must be recognised as active agents in the development of not only a gay and lesbian community spirit in Cork and Ireland, but also active agents in the development of strategies in the wider campaign for gay rights in Ireland. Had they not existed it can be said with certainty that Dublin activists would have been unable to achieve what the Cork activists did in Cork, from Dublin.

Chapter 4 - Weapons of the closeted: provincial resistance and activism in Galway

*'To be an eccentric pioneer outside of the Pale has its price.'*⁵⁷¹

On May 31st, 1988, the Galway Gay and Lesbian Collective were the recipients of a Peadar O'Donnell Achievement Award, in recognition of their efforts 'to improve the community we all share in.'⁵⁷² Bridie O'Flaherty, Deputy Mayor of Galway, claimed that the awards 'allowed an opportunity to give people the recognition they deserved.'⁵⁷³ This would appear to be the first prize ever awarded to a gay group in Ireland that recognised their positive contribution to Irish society. This was all the more significant at a time when laws criminalising sexual activity between males still existed and the Irish government steadfastly defended them. Even more significant, perhaps, is the fact that the award was granted in Galway, a much more provincial region than Dublin or Cork.

Despite the significance of this moment, neither the awarding of the prize, nor the existence of a gay group in Galway in the 1980s has factored into the historiography of gay and lesbian activism in Ireland.⁵⁷⁴ Even during the 1980s, the efforts of these groups were overlooked. In 1985, for example, *The Advocate*, declared that 'Ireland's gay movement is unified: it's the NGF. The NGF works too, you don't get that familiar sinking feeling that it's beating its head on its own wall. The NGF decides what to do, and then accomplishes it with flair and poise.'⁵⁷⁵ The NGF was popular and important, but it was primarily a Dublin based organisation, and neither national, nor the emblem for a unified gay movement in Ireland.

The existence of the NGF and IGRM in Dublin does not help to explain why a provincial gay and lesbian group were the recipients of an award recognising their contribution to Galway's community. Rather, to understand this, we need to look past the NGF and IGRM, and explore the activities of the Galway Gay Collective (later renamed Galway Gay and Lesbian Collective) and to a lesser extent the Galway IGRM. The existence of these groups demonstrates that provincial gay and lesbian individuals were not passive agents in the campaign for gay liberation in Ireland. It is not the case that gay and lesbian individuals in Galway, or in other regions, waited for Dublin groups to bring gay liberation to them. Instead,

⁵⁷¹ NLI, IQA, MS 45, 948/6 – Marese Walsh, May 1985.

⁵⁷² *Galway Advertiser*, 'Community Workers Cheered', 2 June 1988.

⁵⁷³ *Galway Advertiser*, 'Community Workers Cheered', 2 June 1988.

⁵⁷⁴ See Introduction – Literature Review.

⁵⁷⁵ NLI, IQA, MS 45, 995/9 - 'Letter from Dublin', in *The Advocate*, 26 November 1985.

they sought to be active agents in this campaign themselves by establishing their own groups, own events, and own support base. This was done in cooperation with other groups in Ireland, rather than being dependent on these groups.

The failure to explore provincial activism has hindered our understanding of developments in recent years in provincial Ireland. In 2013, for example, a small rural town, Lisdoonvarna, in county Clare, hosted an LGBT Outing event as part of the traditional Lisdoonvarna Matching festival. Sara Frackelton, writing in the *North Clare Local*, stated ‘that an event such as the Outing, which saw members of the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) community from all over the nation and beyond, was held in our county is an indication of the positive change in our society that needs to be embraced.’⁵⁷⁶ Irish provincial gay and lesbian activists contributed to this positive change by providing, under much more challenging circumstances, a basis for isolated homosexuals to develop a ‘gay identity’ as part of a ‘gay community.’ This, in turn, led to a more public challenging of Ireland’s sexual mores in these regions in later years.

This chapter provides a case study analysis of Galway, in the 1980s, in an attempt to explore some of the means by which local activists sought to instil greater pride, hope, confidence and acceptance within gay and lesbian individuals in that region. The scale of activism in this region was much more restricted, due to a smaller population, lack of infrastructure, greater fear of being outed due to the lack of anonymity which did not exist in rural regions, to the extent it did in Dublin, and most importantly, due to a more conservative attitude towards issues surrounding sex and sexuality. Yet, despite these challenges, individuals were able to organise and provide a means for provincial gay and lesbian individuals to become part of a ‘gay and lesbian community.’

Where were the sites of provincial activism in Galway? What kind of activism took place in this region? How did activists reach out to isolated homosexual individuals? What impact did this activism have? The activism, I discuss, in this chapter focuses on the activities of those who sought to provide a social outlet for isolated homosexuals. While activism is often seen as something public, carried out in the open, the activism in this chapter is much more secretive in its formative years. It was concerned with bringing a minority together in greater numbers, thereby ending the isolation and loneliness, which many individuals had been accustomed to in the past. However, these efforts contributed to the gradual emergence of a more visible gay and lesbian presence in Galway by the late 1980s and early 1990s. In studying a region more provincial than Dublin and Cork, this chapter will, as Valere J. Korinek argued

⁵⁷⁶ Sara Frackelton, *North Clare Local*, October 2013, 8.

in her analysis of provincial gay activism in Saskatoon Canada, offer ‘a unique [Irish] perspective on questions surrounding the creation of gay identity, gay spaces and gay activism. Put simply, place mattered.’⁵⁷⁷

‘I live in the country and do not get the chance to meet any gay men. Maybe you know someone that might like to write to me as I am very lonely and might like to get to know me.’⁵⁷⁸

Galway is situated on the western coast of Ireland in the province of Connacht. According to the 1981 Census, the total population of Galway was 172,018, with the majority of those, 114,018, residing in small towns and villages. This figure made Galway the third most populated county in the Republic of Ireland, behind Dublin and Cork. However, to put this figure into context; the entire province of Connacht, which has 5 counties (Mayo, Roscommon, Sligo, Leitrim, Galway) had a total population of just 424,410 in 1981, while Dublin alone had a total population of 1,003, 164.⁵⁷⁹ Therefore, while it may well have been the third most populated area in the Republic of Ireland, its overall population paled in comparison with Dublin. Those working in the agricultural sector made up the bulk of the working force in Galway during this period, not unlike the vast majority of counties in Ireland, with the exception of Dublin. What perhaps distinguishes Galway most in terms of culture, even today, is the prominence of the Irish language in this region. Whereas, the *Gaeltacht* (Irish language speaking areas) regions in Meath, Mayo and Cork witnessed a decline in the overall numbers speaking Irish in the ten-year period between 1971 and 1981, Galway’s Irish speakers increased from 17,698 to 19, 819, thereby making it the largest *Gaeltacht* area in the Republic.⁵⁸⁰

Negative attitudes towards sexuality and sex were much more entrenched in areas outside Dublin, particularly in regions where farming was the predominant occupation. The 1984 *Irish Values and Attitudes: The Irish report of the European value systems study*, showed that farmers, when asked whether homosexuality could be justified always (score 10) or never (score 1), on average gave a score of 1.90, compared with 3.77 for non-manual workers, or

⁵⁷⁷ Valere J. Korinek, ‘The most openly gay person for at least a thousand miles’: Doug Wilson and the Politicization of a Province, 1975-1983’, in *Canadian Historical Review*, vol. 84, no. 4, 520.

⁵⁷⁸ NLI, IQA, MS 45, 940/11 – Individual to Tonie Walsh, August 1985.

⁵⁷⁹ <http://www.cso.ie/en/media/csoie/census/census1981results/volume1/C1,1981,V1.pdf>
Accessed on 20 November 2015.

⁵⁸⁰ <http://www.cso.ie/en/media/csoie/census/census1981results/volume6/C,1981,VOL,6.pdf>
Accessed on 20 November 2015.

3.32 for professional/managerial workers.⁵⁸¹ In comparison with Dublin, which only had 0.01% of the labour force employed in the agricultural sector, provincial areas had a much higher percentage of people working or living on farms. For example, in Limerick 20% of the labour force worked in the agricultural sector, while this figure increased to 27% in Galway, 30% in Kilkenny, 31% in Tipperary and 34% in Kerry.⁵⁸² Interestingly, farmers had the highest percentage of weekly church attendance (95%) and confidence in the teachings of the Catholic Church (great deal 52%).⁵⁸³ These findings are supported by an individual who grew up on a Kerry farm in the 1960s/1970s. He revealed that:

Growing up gay is very hard, but more so if you happen to be growing up in rural Ireland. You have a very negative attitude all around you and many people would prefer to lose a gay family member rather than have to face the neighbours. [...] People saw stereotypes and most articles which appeared in the papers helped to reinforce these stereotyped images. Two of these that my family believed were that all gays were either screaming queens or else they were child molesters. These ideas were implanted within me from a very early age. [...] Up to now I have never had a relationship of any length, so I can't really comment on it, but I would think that it would be very hard to sustain a relationship in rural Ireland because of outside interference.⁵⁸⁴

As this individual's comments reveal, conformity and respectability were an important aspect of everyday life in small towns throughout Ireland. Those individuals who did not conform to the expected norms were often isolated or shunned from their families and communities. Lindsey Earner-Byrne, in her analysis of Irish welfare policy between 1922 and 1944, has argued that 'Protection of the family's reputation was perceived as extremely important to the traditional Irish family: the good name of the family was more important than any notion of good citizenship. [...] There was little room for sexual individualism in a society that considered the family guilty by association with very real consequences.'⁵⁸⁵ Despite the emergence of groups in the 1970s challenging notions of what constituted acceptable sexual behaviour in Irish society, this was one aspect that remained relatively static into the 1980s, as unmarried mothers could attest for.⁵⁸⁶

⁵⁸¹ Michael Fogarty, Liam Ryan and Joseph Lee, *Irish Values and Attitudes: The Irish Report of the European Value Systems Study*, (Dublin, 1984), 147.

⁵⁸²

http://www.cso.ie/en/media/csoie/census/census1981results/volume7/C,1981,V7_Entire_vol.pdf Accessed on 5 November 2015.

⁵⁸³ Fogarty, *Irish Values and Attitudes*, 132.

⁵⁸⁴ *Out for Ourselves*, 122

⁵⁸⁵ Lindsey Earner-Byrne, 'Reinforcing the family: The role of gender, morality and sexuality in Irish welfare policy, 1922-1944', in *The History of the Family*, Vol. 13, No. 4, 2008, 363.

⁵⁸⁶ Moira J. Maguire, 'The Changing Face of Catholic Ireland: Conservatism and Liberalism in the Ann Lovett and Kerry Babies Scandals', in *Feminist Studies*, Vol. 27, No. 2 (Summer, 2001), 339.

Irish homosexuals growing up during this period were acutely aware of the shame that their sexuality would bring on their family, particularly those living in small towns or villages. Brian Sheehan, who was born in West Clare in the 1960s, described the torments he suffered coming to terms with his sexuality and the implications of doing so, recalling that:

I made a conscious decision not to accept myself as myself, I would say because I tried not to be gay. Again, there was no pattern how you were gay. What does being gay mean in Ireland? Well, it meant something unpleasant and awful, and you'd lose your family and your friends and your anchoring. Your roots would be gone. Em, and you're dealing and wrestling with that and wrestling being a young teenage man with all the desires that go with that, and all the confusion that goes with that.⁵⁸⁷

One of the greatest problems facing homosexuals in provincial regions was loneliness, isolation and the desire to meet others like them. In a letter to Tonie Walsh, one individual from Wexford expressed his desire for a gay friend, something he felt he could find in Dublin, but not in Wexford, noting that:

I expect that you know the problem in a small country village, you's are okay up in the Hirschfeld Centre it's not so down here. [...] I am hoping to meet a gay that would be a friend as I have no gay friend here, maybe a penfriend for a start. I hope you can give me some advice on how to meet as its very lonely going out at the weekend on your own.⁵⁸⁸

While homosexuals in Dublin and Cork, and those lucky enough to travel there could enjoy the benefits of the Hirschfeld Centre and the Phoenix Clubs, the majority of homosexuals outside these regions could not regularly avail of them. Denis O'Neill highlighted this reality in a scathing attack on the NGF's failure to meet the needs of provincial gays, complaining that:

Gay people who are not out but are fortunate enough to be living in Dublin are in a position to be able to relieve any pressure which they may encounter through trying to live a normal life in a heterosexual society by coming to the Hirschfeld Centre, whether it be a disco or some social event. This is not so in rural areas and it is therefore logical to assume that the pressure which these people are burdened with is far greater.⁵⁸⁹

The struggles of living in provincial Ireland, however, had been made clear to the NGF as early as 1979. In a letter to Bernard Keogh, one isolated individual living in Galway wrote that:

I hope that you can help me. I am an 18-year-old student and I am homosexual. My problem is that I have not yet met a similar student with the same quality. I was glad to read your letter in the Sunday World. Perhaps you could put me in touch with a 'gay' of same age or younger and we could discuss our problem. It would be ideal if I could meet one in Galway or nearer. I am sure you have many contacts. Please write to me as soon

⁵⁸⁷ Edmund Lynch interview with Brian Sheehan, 26 April 2013, *Edmund Lynch, Irish LGBT History Project*.

⁵⁸⁸ NLI, IQA, MS 45, 936/13 – Wexford individual to Tonie Walsh, May 1984.

⁵⁸⁹ NLI, IQA, MS 45, 936/3 - Denis O' Neill to NGF Council Members, February 1982

as possible. My parents or friends are not aware of my problem, so please keep this in the strictest privacy.⁵⁹⁰

The fact that this individual referred to his sexuality as a ‘problem’ gives us another insight into the unfortunate situation he, along with many others, found themselves in, seeing their sexuality in a negative, rather than positive light. However, what was perhaps most disappointing for this individual was the reply he received, which demonstrated the weakness of a Dublin based group to promote a spirit of a gay community without a physical presence in a particular region. Far from having ‘many contacts’, Keogh replied that ‘we do not have any contacts in the West. If you are unlikely to be visiting Dublin in the near future, perhaps you would be interested in meeting a priest counsellor living in Galway who is personally known to me and who I have no hesitation in recommending?’⁵⁹¹ It is not known whether this individual accepted Keogh’s offer, but it must have come as a shock to him that the only option available, outside of travelling to Dublin, was talking to a priest.

This may appear surprising, especially when one considers that an organised gay movement had existed in Dublin since 1974, yet five years later, they still had no established contacts in the West. In fact, this is not all that surprising because provincial homosexuals do not appear to have been a priority for the NGF, despite their constitution making explicit provisions for the establishment of NGF local groups in provincial regions.⁵⁹² A breakdown of the 1980 membership profile of the NGF reveals that only a small minority of members came from outside the Dublin and Leinster region. Those living in Connacht and Ulster only accounted for 1.85% of the NGF’s total membership (19 out of 1027 members).⁵⁹³

The explanation for this situation was revealed in a ‘strictly confidential’ NGF discussion paper on provincial activities in May 1982.⁵⁹⁴ This document revealed that ‘although the NGF constitution makes explicit provision for the establishment of NGF local groups and lays down guidelines as to how these would operate, the NGF Administrative Council has deliberately refrained from embarking upon a deliberate plan of action in this area.’⁵⁹⁵ This decision was not the result of strained resources or strained personnel, but rather shockingly, a direct result of the animosity between the IGRM and NGF. The document explained that the NGF adopted these ‘self-imposed restrictions’ because of a ‘sensitivity to

⁵⁹⁰ NLI, IQA, MS 45, 948/7 – Galway Individual to Bernard Keogh, July 1979.

⁵⁹¹ NLI, IQA, MS 45, 948/7 – Bernard Keogh to Galway individual, August 1979.

⁵⁹² NLI, IQA, MS 45, 936/3 – Constitution of the National Gay Federation.

⁵⁹³ NLI, IQA, MS 45, 936/4 – Breakdown of membership of National Gay Federation, 1980.

⁵⁹⁴ NLI, Personal Papers of David Norris, ACC 6672 Box 36 – NGF Discussion Paper on Provincial Activities – 5 May 1982.

⁵⁹⁵ NLI, Personal Papers of David Norris, ACC 6672 Box 36 – NGF Discussion Paper.

the situation arising from past divisions in the gay community.⁵⁹⁶ In particular, it revealed that the NGF took this decision to avoid placing itself in ‘direct competition with IGRM which had a clear policy of colonialization.’⁵⁹⁷ This reinforced why the Cork Gay Collective considered a resolution between both groups to be paramount in 1981, as those suffering most, were not those in the IGRM or NGF in Dublin, but rather homosexuals outside Dublin, who were being neglected due to the continued animosities. The split between the IGRM and NGF had a direct impact on the policy of reaching out to provincial homosexuals.

This context makes it easier to understand, that while the organisations that will be discussed in this chapter did not attain the heights of Dublin’s gay organisations, their existence was nevertheless an important symbol of hope for provincial gays; firstly that other homosexuals existed in their area, secondly that they could meet them and discuss their individual situations, without having to travel to Dublin, and thirdly that they were a priority for some. This, for many, provided a comforting solace. As Anna from Cavan once remarked in a letter to Theresa Blanche in 1977, ‘In fact it is the most important thing in my life to know I can meet people who feel like I do, and to be able to talk to someone who understands my feelings.’⁵⁹⁸

‘The circumstances peculiar to organising gay people in the West are indeed a quare lot, as I am learning all the time.’⁵⁹⁹

In a 1982 article from *Facade*, a fortnightly Galway review, Michael Diskin commented that ‘Maybe I should have called this article, ‘Gays in Galway!’ There are.’⁶⁰⁰ Not only were there gays in Galway in 1982, but there was also a group of individuals actively committed to improving the lives of provincial homosexuals. Comprising the Galway Gay Collective (GGC) founded in 1980 and a Galway branch of the IGRM, founded in 1981, they worked simultaneously, yet independently of each other, to try to improve the lives of Galway’s homosexuals. The Galway Gay Collective was organised by John Porter and Marese Walsh, while Sean Rabbitte was primarily responsible for the operation of the Galway IGRM. Prior to helping establish the Galway Gay Collective, Marese Walsh had built up connections with individuals from the IGRM (1974-1977), LIL and the NGF, through frequent visits to Dublin

⁵⁹⁶ NLI, Personal Papers of David Norris, ACC 6672 Box 36 – NGF Discussion Paper.

⁵⁹⁷ NLI, Personal Papers of David Norris, ACC 6672 Box 36 – NGF Discussion Paper.

⁵⁹⁸ NLI, IQA, MS 45, 951/9 – Anna from Cavan to Theresa of IGRM, May 1977.

⁵⁹⁹ NLI, IQA, MS 45, 948/7 - Marese Walsh to Bernard Keogh, October 1980.

⁶⁰⁰ NLI, IQA, MS 45, 948/6 - Michael Diskin, ‘Gay Rights’, in *Façade*, March 1982.

in the 1970s.⁶⁰¹ Walsh had also attended the 1978 conference on lesbianism in Trinity College Dublin, describing it as the beginning of lesbian liberation in Ireland.⁶⁰² Porter, similarly, had connections in Dublin, after making contact with members of the Campaign for Homosexual Law Reform in 1978, offering any help he could give.⁶⁰³

Both the Galway IGRM and the GGC sought to reach out to homosexuals who had spent the majority of their lives in the 'closet' and help end their isolation.⁶⁰⁴ Walsh revealed in a 2016 interview that her main reason for getting involved was because 'we were just lonely, we just wanted to meet others.'⁶⁰⁵ Sean Rabbitte explained in his interview with *Façade's* Michael Diskin, in 1982, that one of Galway IGRM's primary objectives was to 'set up a centre for gay social life somewhere in the city and thus perhaps end the need for 'cruising' in public in Eyre Square and in Salthill.'⁶⁰⁶ According to Rabbitte, 'queer bashing' had been an issue in Salthill, which cruising and the lack of a social centre for homosexuals only enabled.⁶⁰⁷

While the Galway IGRM was under the umbrella of the IGRM, both it and the GGC did not have the same hierarchical structure as the Dublin based groups. Whereas, both the IGRM and NGF held annual elections to choose who would run the organisations, both GGC and Galway IGRM relied on the continued commitment of a select few individuals, who, over the years, desperately sought greater involvement from local homosexuals in the running of their respective groups. Even if both groups had wanted similar structures to the NGF or IGRM, the numbers actively involved, simply were not there to do so.

If the structures were dissimilar to Dublin, then the relationship between both groups, at times, often mirrored that of the NGF and IGRM in Dublin. Marese Walsh, for example, explained that the GGC was more aligned with the NGF, while the Galway IGRM was aligned with the IGRM. This, she believed, explained why she was not welcome at Galway IGRM meetings throughout the 1980s.⁶⁰⁸ According to a letter Walsh sent to Bernard Keogh in 1981,

⁶⁰¹ Author interview with Marese Walsh, 4 April 2016.

⁶⁰² Author interview with Marese Walsh, 4 April 2016.

⁶⁰³ NLI, IQA, MS 45, 948/7 – John Porter to Campaign for Homosexual Law Reform, 24 January 1978. – The Campaign for Homosexual Law Reform was set up in 1977 by David Norris and Edmund Lynch. Its priority was in fighting for the repeal of the 1861 and 1885 laws which criminalised sexual activity between males. It was a mixed group comprised of homosexual and heterosexual individuals, including David Norris, Edmund Lynch, Bernard Keogh, Noel Browne, Mary McAleese, Victor Griffin. For more on the Campaign for Homosexual Law Reform see, David Norris, *A Kick Against the Pricks: The Autobiography*.

⁶⁰⁴ NLI, IQA, MS 45, 948/7 - Announcement 1980.

⁶⁰⁵ Author interview with Marese Walsh, 4 April 2016.

⁶⁰⁶ NLI, IQA, MS 45, 948/6 - Michael Diskin, 'Gay Rights', in *Façade*, March 1982.

⁶⁰⁷ NLI, IQA, MS 45, 948/6 - 'Gay Rights', in *Façade*.

⁶⁰⁸ Author interview with Marese Walsh, 4 April 2016.

the Collective was ‘asked to suspend our activities, such as discos and close the box no. to give IGRM ‘a break.’⁶⁰⁹ This, she believed, was an attempt by the ‘Dublin [IGRM] to ‘curb our autonomy.’⁶¹⁰ Unlike Dublin, Galway was undoubtedly too small for two independent groups competing against each-other, and this, certainly hindered the emergence of a stronger gay organisations in Galway in the early 1980s and particularly the failure to establish a venue similar to that of the Hirschfeld Centre or Phoenix Club.

Despite this, however, both groups did succeed in providing an outlet for homosexuals to socialise in Galway.⁶¹¹ The first event organised by the GGC was a cheese/wine party in April 1980 at the Lenaboy Arms Hotel in Salthill. Incidentally, this took place on the same night of the Eurovision Song Contest, which apparently facilitated ‘much merry making and shedding of inhibitions.’⁶¹² Walsh noted that when she booked the venue she informed the owners that they were a social club, rather than a gay collective.⁶¹³ The GGC summed up the success of the first event in *In Touch*, reporting that:

Wine and wit flowed in an atmosphere of warmth and conviviality till about 12:30 when, feeling gayer than usual we all took for a constitutional along the sea-front. Arms around one another and behaving outrageously camp, we marched towards the beach – the ultra-straight nightlife of Salthill got quite a shock. [...] Everybody had great fun and the social was, we feel a very successful venture.⁶¹⁴

In many respects, this was as strong a show of defiance from gay and lesbian individuals ever in Galway or in the West Ireland, to the hostility they had become accustomed to in the previous years. One also gets a sense of community, liberation and pride in their sexuality at this event, even at this early stage. It highlighted the importance of these groups in building up confidence in one’s sexuality, but also in helping resist heteronormativity.

Discos were also organised in Galway and proved to be the most popular activity organised by the GGC and Galway IGRM. This was a clear reflection of the demand for such activities amongst Irish homosexuals, both urban and provincial. The organisation of gay discos was also a testament to the ingenuity and commitment of individuals within the Galway IGRM and GGC. In the first disco organised at the Lenaboy Arms Hotel in October 1981, over

⁶⁰⁹ NLI, IQA, MS 45, 948/6 – Marese Walsh to Bernard Keogh, 15 December 1981

⁶¹⁰ NLI, IQA, MS 45, 948/6 – Walsh to Keogh, 15 December 1981

⁶¹¹ NLI, IQA, MS 45, 948/6 – John Porter to Bernard Keogh, 19 January 1982.

⁶¹² NLI, IR 369 I 23, *In Touch: Journal of National Gay Federation*, May 1980 ‘Galway Gay Group.’

⁶¹³ Author interview with Marese Walsh, 4 April 2016.

⁶¹⁴ NLI, IR 369 I 23, *In Touch: Journal of National Gay Federation*, May 1980 ‘Galway Gay Group.’

30 people turned up, while another disco organised by the Galway IGRM in Rockland's Hotel, also in Salthill, attracted close to 80 people from areas as far away as Cork and Waterford.⁶¹⁵ The success of these discos, which were repeated roughly every three weeks, led Sean Rabbitte to believe that 'change of a type was beginning to happen' in the early 1980s.⁶¹⁶

Between 1980 and October 1982 the Lenaboy Arms Hotel and Rockland's Hotel provided a space for discos for homosexuals. Whether or not these institutions were aware of the fact they were gay events is debatable. I argue that these institutions were aware of the character of the events being held on their premises and they simply tried to keep things as low-key as possible, as evidenced by a letter sent to Bernard Keogh from John Porter. In organising the first gay disco in Galway, John Porter requested the NGF to inform any individuals they know who might be interested in attending, but to be discreet, because 'the manager wishes no publicity or advertising.'⁶¹⁷ Marese Walsh, in fact, claims that the only reason they were successful in hiring these venues was because of the difficult economic climate in 1980s Ireland.⁶¹⁸

Because discos were irregular events, and gay social facilities were non-existent, the GGC also organised occasional dinner evenings, and twice weekly meetings at the Tavern Bar, as a means of keeping up the morale of those who were hoping for a better social alternative.⁶¹⁹ These dinners and meetings were also an alternative for those looking to go somewhere else beside the pub on a Saturday night and organisers were careful to reassure potential participants that the restaurant would suit 'everybody's pocket.'⁶²⁰ These meetings also served another function; to distribute gay magazines and information on gay liberation in Ireland. At such meetings, organisers often distributed leaflets/magazines, such as *Identity*, *Out* and *GCN*, sent by the NGF/IGRM.⁶²¹ One individual in a letter complimenting *Out* stated that 'As an isolated young gay, I would like to congratulate you on the excellent service you provide. Many rural gays, living with families etc. only have an issue of *Out* to rely upon for their communication with the gay community. The rare day trip to Dublin with sole purpose of purchasing an issue of *Out* is all many gays have to live for.'⁶²² The simple fact that the GGC received these magazines and were able to distribute them was an important feature of provincial activism,

⁶¹⁵ NLI, IQA, MS 45, 948/6 – John Porter to Bernard Keogh, 19 January 1982.

⁶¹⁶ NLI, IQA, MS 45, 948/6 – Sean Rabbitte, Galway IGRM.

⁶¹⁷ NLI, IQA, MS 45, 948/6 – John Porter to Bernard Keogh, October 1981.

⁶¹⁸ Author interview with Marese Walsh, 4 April 2016.

⁶¹⁹ Author interview with Marese Walsh, 4 April 2016.

⁶²⁰ NLI, IQA, MS 45, 948/7 – Galway Gay Collective Announcement December.

⁶²¹ NLI, IQA, 45, 948/6 - Tonie Walsh to Galway Gay Collective, October 1981.

⁶²² NLI, IR 369 0 7, *Out*, Nov/Dec 1986 .

particularly in positioning their situation in a broader international campaign, which *Out* was able to do due to the array of different local and international issues it discussed. Furthermore, by attending these meetings, it saved an individual from having to make a trip to Dublin and the difficult task of disguising the magazine from family members.

Speaking about his time attending similar meetings in Clonmel, Tipperary, in the 1980s, James Quinn described the distribution of information at the meetings as the formal part of the meeting. Whereas, on arrival they ‘would hang around in the foyer, chat to each other and whatever, the meeting would actually happen in a room. And that was kind of more formal thing in some ways. Information would be handed out, there’d be copies of *GCN* for this.’⁶²³ James also recalled how, at certain meetings, two individuals would arrive with an enormous cardboard box of merchandise filled with items such as ‘fancy underwear and dildos that they would be trying to flog if people were interested.’⁶²⁴ This was a clear sign that the pink economy was present outside Dublin in the 1980s. The idea that money could be made from provincial gays was not novel. As a greater awareness of the presence of provincial homosexuals started to filter through, individuals saw opportunities to profit from them. As early as 1981, for example, Book Upstairs, a Dublin based bookstore, began a new confidential book delivery service specifically dedicated to delivering books/periodicals on gay related topics to homosexuals outside Dublin.⁶²⁵

‘You must understand, sisters and brothers in the struggle, that a large part of one’s emotional energy is directed into avoiding nervous breakdown – and then simply falling apart anyway!’⁶²⁶

Marese Walsh, however, remembers the difficulty of getting individuals to attend their events, noting that on one occasion she organised a dinner evening, but nobody turned up.⁶²⁷ Encouraging gay/lesbian individuals to become actively involved was a constant battle for local activists, which at times became frustrating. In a letter to Bernard Keogh concerning a visit by the NGF to Galway, John Porter summed up his frustration by stating that ‘with respect to you organising a group to visit here, I think myself because of the enclosed nature of Galway, nothing will bring the gays to their senses. I’ll be doing all I can for the present. It’s not as easy

⁶²³ *GCN*, replaced *Out* magazine in 1988. Edmund Lynch interview with James Quinn, 28 September 2013, *Edmund Lynch, Irish LGBT History Project*.

⁶²⁴ James Quinn, 28 September 2013, *Edmund Lynch, Irish LGBT History Project*.

⁶²⁵ NLI, IQA, 45 943/10 - Book Upstairs to NGF, April 1981.

⁶²⁶ NLI, IQA, MS 45, 948/6 – Marese Walsh, May 1985.

⁶²⁷ Author interview with Marese Walsh, 4 April 2016.

as one might think when individuals think of themselves only.’⁶²⁸ This was a view shared by Marese who, in a letter sent the previous year (1980), had criticised certain individuals who frequented the Tavern Bar. Most of the people who frequented the Tavern, she claimed:

are quite determined not to spread the word round in case it would make a difficult situation more complicated, in other words, they are not prepared to take any risks that would jeopardise the privileges they enjoy as a minority within a minority. They have their friends, are settled in their ways and don’t you dare rock their little boat!⁶²⁹

Walsh also believed that joining a gay group was a step too far for many individuals at that time. Although membership of the GGC was only £2.50 annually⁶³⁰, Walsh claimed that joining for some was ‘too much like a commitment, or too much like saying ‘I am gay’’, something she described as the ‘peculiar circumstances of organising people in the West of Ireland.’⁶³¹

Without strong membership/involvement and with only irregular events to boost their finances, both the Galway IGRM and GGC were unable to acquire a permanent headquarters for their activities. Lack of finances presented a constant problem for the GGC which, on occasion, had to rely on fundraisers organised at the Hirschfeld Centre to provide some financial assistance simply to maintain a post office box.⁶³² The headquarters of the GGC and Galway IGRM were, in fact, the places where those who organised the groups lived. Both Marese Walsh and John Porter, however, tried to keep their involvement with the organisation secret from those with whom they lived. At certain times of the year Marese Walsh lived with her family. In the summer of 1980, for example, she asked Bernard Keogh only to send letters of small things to her home address and large parcels, like copies of *In Touch*, to another address because her ‘sister is incurably nosey.’⁶³³ Walsh, however, revealed that on one occasion her sister went through her letters and found a Galway Gay Collective notice. Rather than confirming her involvement with a gay group, Walsh, instead, explained that she was asked to type-up the notice for work.⁶³⁴ Similarly, in letters sent by John Porter he requested that replies be marked private for fear of people finding out his involvement with such a group.⁶³⁵ This desire for a level of anonymity was something noted by Michael Diskin of

⁶²⁸ NLI, IQA, MS 45, 948/6 – John Porter to Bernard Keogh, May 1981.

⁶²⁹ NLI, IQA, MS 45, 948/7 – Marese Walsh to Bernard, October 1980.

⁶³⁰ NLI, IQA, MS 45, 948/6 – John Porter to Walter, April 1983.

⁶³¹ NLI, IQA, MS 45, 948/7 - Marese Walsh to Bernard Keogh, October 1980.

⁶³² NLI, IQA, MS 45, 948/6 - John Porter to Bernard Keogh, 19 January 1982.

⁶³³ NLI, IQA, MS 45, 948/7 - Marese Walsh to Bernard Keogh, April 1980.

⁶³⁴ Author interview with Marese Walsh, 4 April 2016.

⁶³⁵ NLI, IQA, MS 45, 948/7 – John Porter to Tonie Walsh, September 1980.

Facade in his interview with Sean Rabbitte. He observed in this interview that ‘He [Sean Rabbitte] tells me that he wants to be interviewed as secretary and not as an individual. I say o.k. and watch him straddle the peculiar position of wanting and not wanting publicity.’⁶³⁶

These attempts to remain anonymous and the financial constraints on both groups, restricted the contact they could make with other homosexuals in the region. While they requested those taking part in the events to send a letter confirming their attendance, they were unable to acknowledge receipt of the letters. As a means of engaging in some direct contact with members outside of social events, the GGC provided a contact telephone number. However, contact was restricted to one evening for the purpose of informing them whether or not they could attend. Calling this number outside the pre-arranged time was only in the case of an emergency, provided those who were calling were discreet. Even still, John Porter tried to persuade people to write before using the telephone, so they would have a ‘more firm base to work from.’⁶³⁷ Porter was clearly anxious that this service might result in his unwanted ‘outing.’

The above realities also factored in to the planning and location of events. The GGC and Galway IGRM had to be cognisant of the locations they chose for their events. Quite often the venues chosen were hotels or guesthouses, which allowed for greater privacy through the booking of private rooms under a pseudonym. Moreover, the venues chosen, such as the Lenaboy Hotel, Rocklands Hotel, and later Glendower House, had to be located in areas that were easily accessible, but also not in areas that were very busy, thereby allowing for greater anonymity and participation. Marese Walsh described the Lenaboy Arms Hotel as being favourable to those attending because it was ‘not too big and everybody is relaxed and friendly.’⁶³⁸ However, she expressed her concerns in 1981 over the proposed location of a disco organised by the Galway IGRM, stating that ‘it is quite near a cop shop and we know the boys in blue [police] drink there [...]’⁶³⁹ The threat of police interference in Galway would appear to be in stark contrast with the amicable relationship both the IGRM and NGF enjoyed with the police force in Dublin and Cork.

Code words and symbols became important aspects of events in provincial regions. A look at the way the meetings actually took place reveals that there was considerable secrecy involved, and one could not simply come upon a meeting by chance. In other words, if one turned up to a location of a meeting, they would not necessarily know that it was a gay meeting,

⁶³⁶ NLI, IQA, MS 45, 948/6 - ‘Gay Rights’, in *Façade*, March 1982.

⁶³⁷ NLI, IQA, MS 45, 948/6 – John Porter to Tonie Walsh, November 1981.

⁶³⁸ NLI, IQA, MS 45, 948/6 - Marese Walsh to Bernard Keogh December 1981

⁶³⁹ NLI, IQA, MS 45, 948/6 – Walsh to Keogh December 1981.

unlike those in Dublin or Cork who could go to the Hirschfeld Centre or Phoenix Clubs anytime of the day and know they could meet gay people. In Galway, information such as the particular location within a venue where the group would be was never publicly advertised. Those who contacted would be informed of, for example, in the Tavern Bar the group would be at a particular end of the bar counter from a specific time.⁶⁴⁰ Symbols were also used as a means of recognising members of the GGC. In the case of a GGC outing to Connemara, which involved meeting at the Lyons Tower in Eyre Square, organisers informed those wishing to attend that they would be recognised by a flower in their lapels.⁶⁴¹

Outside of Galway, in other provincial regions, code words also seemed to have been adopted. In Tipperary, just like in Galway and Limerick, these events also took place in a hotel, in this case the Hearn's Hotel and Shannon Arms Hotel, respectively.⁶⁴² James Quinn remembers that the Clonmel meeting 'was called APEX, which was completely anonymous. So, if you arrived into reception, you'd simply say to the people, Oh, I'm here for an APEX meeting, and they would say oh that's the group over there.'⁶⁴³ These symbols and code words allowed for anonymity, but also a much smoother first encounter for those attending these events. Rather than asking for the Galway Gay Collective meeting, individuals wanting to attend were guaranteed that it would remain possible to stay inside the 'closet', while still meeting other homosexuals.

*'We look forward to hearing from you and – with luck – to gay days ahead.'*⁶⁴⁴

Unlike the NGF and IGRM, neither the GGC or Galway had their own magazine or newsletters to advertise their existence or events. As a result, they had to rely on alternative means to advertise. Whereas, the NGF and IGRM publicly stated their location and list of events, neither the GGC or Galway IGRM could do likewise. Instead, they sought to retain some form of anonymity in their advertisements. Besides word of mouth or writing directly to individuals they knew, one means by which the GGC and Galway IGRM advertised was through local publications, most notably, the *Galway Advertiser* and *Mayo News*. In stark contrast to the mainstream nationals, who refused NGF and IGRM advertisements, neither the *Mayo News*, or the *Galway Advertiser* refused such advertisements. The advertisements within these

⁶⁴⁰ NLI, IQA, MS 45, 948/7 – Announcement December 1980.

⁶⁴¹ NLI, IQA, MS 45, 948/6 – Galway Gay Collective to NGF December 1983.

⁶⁴² NLI, IQA, MS 45, 948/6 – John Porter to Denis O'Neill May 1983.

⁶⁴³ Edmund Lynch interview with James Quinn, 28 September 2013, *Edmund Lynch, Irish LGBT History Project*.

⁶⁴⁴ NLI, IQA, MS 45, 948/6 – Galway Gay Collective, 20 May 1985.

publications, however, contained only the minimum amount of information the GCC and Galway IGRM could provide. Rather than announcing the location and type of events organised, the advertisements simply noted that a group existed for homosexuals in Galway and those wanting to get in contact could contact the P.O. box address for more information. In the below examples (Figure 6) from the *Mayo News* and the *Galway Advertiser*, the paucity of information, in contrast to the previous ads we have seen from the NGF and IGRM, is evident. The primary objective of these advertisements was to inform people of the existence of a gay group and to give them their contact address in the hope that individuals would then write to them.

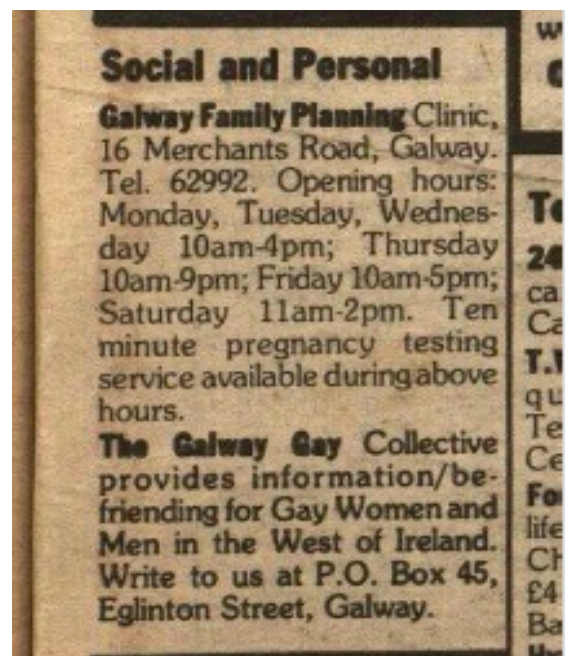


Figure 7. Advertisements for Galway IGRM and Galway Gay Collective. *Mayo News*, 31 March 1982. *Galway Advertiser*, 13 September 1983.

The importance of acquiring a P.O. box number, therefore, was critical for those looking to organise events/meetings for homosexuals in provincial regions. It facilitated the anonymity these groups wanted to retain. This explains not only why the Limerick Gay Community contacted the NGF for funds to help them retain their P.O. box number, but why Bernard Keogh expressed such delight at the GGC acquiring a P.O. address in two letters to Marese Walsh and John Porter in late 1980. In his letter, Keogh delighted in Porter's 'excellent work in securing post office box in Galway; this will prove of tremendous benefit to gay people writing to us from the West as we can now refer them directly to the local organisers in Galway where they

can begin to make friends.’⁶⁴⁵ The success in getting the P.O. Box number allowed Marese and John to promote the GGC, while not risking being publicly associated with it. The fact that they were granted a P.O. box number for a group called the Galway Gay Collective and Galway IGRM was, in itself, a big success and a sign of legitimacy from the Post Office.

Another means by which meetings were advertised was directly through the NGF, or the IGRM, particularly TAF, Gay Switchboard, Lesbian Line and the publications they produced. Once a meeting was decided upon, either Porter, or Walsh contacted the NGF directly, informing them of the details of that proposed meeting. Any individuals who then contacted TAF from surrounding regions would then be informed and provided with the GGC contact details.⁶⁴⁶ In 1981, the IGRM placed a notice in their journal *In Touch*, announcing the holding of the first Galway IGRM disco on 16 January 1982, in which they encouraged all members in the area to give it their full support. Anyone looking for further information was then advised to contact the Dublin based Gay Switchboard for the location of the event.⁶⁴⁷ Although this was a roundabout way of advertising, at the time, it was only one of two options available to provincial activists. This strategy, however, facilitated the promotion of the event to a much greater audience. As was evident from the discos, individuals often travelled from regions outside Galway.

‘People were looking, some people hadn’t a clue what it was because the banner just said Galway Gay Pride. Some people clapped, which was like wow. It was a bit surreal. I kept asking myself did we really do that? It was great.’⁶⁴⁸

Just as the Galway Gay Collective and Galway IGRM seemed to be enjoying some success in providing a space for a gay social scene to emerge in Galway, a situation emerged in October 1982 which turned these efforts on its head. For reasons unknown, the Lenaboy Arms Hotel, Rockland’s Hotel, and the Tavern Bar no longer tolerated the organisation of events, and in the case of the Tavern Bar did not apparently tolerate the custom of homosexuals. According to John Porter 30 homosexuals were refused sandwiches and coffee both day and night, something

⁶⁴⁵ NLI, IQA, MS 45, 948/7 – Bernard Keogh to John Porter, November 1980.

⁶⁴⁶ NLI, IQA, MS 45, 948/6 – Mary Kinane ‘All Concerned’

⁶⁴⁷ *In Touch: Newsletter of the Irish Gay Rights Movement*, Vol. 4, Winter 1981, Issue 14, in Personal Papers of Sean J. Connolly.

⁶⁴⁸

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wEGCILPIJ5Y&list=PLKKnW9AnvAmCjIegw9GbAoQs5gqjyK4e>- *Bród: Out in the Streets*, Accessed on 23 February 2016.

he maintained was the result of ‘one of the bar staff [who] helped this process along.’⁶⁴⁹ In the same letter, John Porter mentioned ‘other circumstances’ for the ending of the discos at the Lenaboy Arms Hotel, stating there was ‘an atmosphere of uncertainty around, we cannot say for sure if IGRM were unwelcome, the same applied to the collective.’⁶⁵⁰ Sean Rabbitte described this situation as a ‘boot in the bollocks.’⁶⁵¹

Whatever the reasons for the abrupt ending of these events, it demonstrated the fragility of provincial activism outside Dublin and the reliance of activists on sympathetic owners to tolerate their events. Without the tolerance of those running certain establishments, provincial activists had a difficult task in organising events. The barring from the Tavern Bar and both hotels resulted in an absence of events for homosexuals in the West of Ireland for almost one year, as new venues were sought. Moreover, this incident made clear that those organising events would have to consider alternative events and locations within Galway if they were to continue their efforts to promote a sense of a gay community. Therefore, while the discos were very popular, by the beginning of 1983, they had ceased to exist in Galway. Combined with the decision of the Irish Supreme Court to dismiss David’s Norris case against the Irish government, and the judgement handed down in the Declan Flynn case, 1983 was an *annus horribilis* for gay and lesbian activists in Galway.⁶⁵²

While organisers were successful in locating new venues, some, like the Connemara Gateway Motel, in Oughterard, were not long-term viable options due to the difficulty in arriving there without a car. Because of the insufficient public transport system outside Dublin, those organising the events at this location had to rely on individuals with cars to transport people.⁶⁵³ This resulted in moving events to the Glendower House, a smaller venue, but one which was more easily accessible. It is quite possible that the owner was gay or was at least particularly sympathetic to their cause because the Glendower House regularly used gay publications such as *Identity* and *Out* to advertise its business to gay consumers.

Despite the setbacks suffered in 1983; 1984 and 1985 witnessed somewhat of an improvement for Galway’s homosexuals. In particular, 1984 saw the establishment of a Student Gay-line, similar to TAF, under the Student’s Union at University College Galway.⁶⁵⁴ The Student Gay-line, (which was initially run by the University College Galway Gay society from 1984 to 1988, before being continued by members of the Galway Gay Collective), operated as

⁶⁴⁹ NLI, IQA, MS 45, 948/6 – John Porter to Walter, April 1983.

⁶⁵⁰ NLI, IQA, MS 45, 948/6 – Porter to Walter, April 1983.

⁶⁵¹ NLI, IQA, MS 45, 948/6 – Sean Rabbitte, Galway IGRM.

⁶⁵² NLI, IQA, MS 45, 948/6 – John Porter to Denis O’Neill, August 1983.

⁶⁵³ NLI, IQA, MS 45, 948/6 – John Porter to NGF, December 1983.

⁶⁵⁴ NLI, IR 369 07, *Out*, April 1985.

a telephone helpline out of the student union offices at the UCG campus. Its service was advertised through *Hot Press* and the *Galway Advertiser*, but according to the Deputy President of the Students Union, Garbhan Downey, securing advertising within the college itself was difficult because ‘Galway is a very conservative university still very much in the dark ages.’⁶⁵⁵

Meetings and events also began to re-emerge. Such events, included camping trips to Connemara, boat trips along the Corrib River, weekend cycling trips and a Galway Women’s Summer Camp.⁶⁵⁶ An important development, however, in 1986, was the decision of Nuala Ward move to Galway. After arriving in Galway, Ward made contact with the Galway Gay Collective and eventually took over the running of the Galway Gay Collective P.O. Box number from Marese Walsh later that year.⁶⁵⁷ Ward, in particular, pioneered a more public gay and lesbian presence in Galway. After attending the Cork Women’s Fun Weekend and witnessing the work of the Cork Lesbian Line, Walsh and 5 other lesbian women travelled to Belfast and Cork to be trained on how to run a telephone support service.⁶⁵⁸ In 1988, the Galway Gay Collective took-over the running of the student Gayline and renamed it the Galway Gay and Lesbian Line, which operated every Wednesday from 8pm-10pm.⁶⁵⁹

That same year the now renamed Galway Gay and Lesbian Collective hosted the first Galway Women’s Summer Camp at Castle Ellen, Athenry, Galway. In many respects, this was modelled on the Cork Women’s Fun Weekend and represented an outlet for lesbian women in the western part of Ireland to socialise and express their sexuality more freely. According to an account of the Galway Women’s Summer Camp, in the *Women’s Space Newsletter*, women from England, Germany, Denmark and France travelled to Galway for the summer camp.⁶⁶⁰ Gathered around a campfire, events included: badminton, juggling lessons, music sessions, workshops on lesbianism, volleyball, a cabaret, and disco. Colette, who attended the Galway summer camp, remembered that:

As we arrived in Castle Ellen on a Thursday afternoon a woman clown crossed our path on a monocycle and the atmosphere of festivity was set. Welcomes abounded from old friends not seen for years and the same wonderful faces seen at all these women’s gatherings. [...] Within about an hour of arriving I was in a sweat lodge with about 12 other naked women. It was absolutely amazing, hot, sweaty, soft, humming, singing cleaning us out. Afterwards we splashed each other with cold water in a child’s

⁶⁵⁵ NLI, UCC LGBT Society Archive, 49,655/4.

⁶⁵⁶ NLI, IQA, MS 45, 948/6 – Galway Gay Collective, 20 May 1985.

⁶⁵⁷ Author email correspondence with Nuala Ward, 22 April 2018.

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<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wEGCILPIJ5Y&list=PLKKnW9AnvAmCjIegw9GbAoQs5gqjyK4e>- *Bród: Out in the Streets*, Accessed on 23 February 2016.

⁶⁵⁹ Author email correspondence with Nuala Ward, 22 April 2018.

⁶⁶⁰ *Women’s Space Newsletter*, Issue No. 4 September/October 1988, <http://corklgbtarchive.com/items/show/62>. Accessed on 22 February 2016.

swimming pool and poured buckets of water over one another.¹² naked screaming women much to the delight of the women with the camera standing to the side. [...] What wild night was the disco in the orchards with lights and everything. Watching women being free and wild and expressing love for one another that night made you want to stay in Castle Ellen forever and forget about the rest of the world. But Sunday came and goodbyes and sadness but a renewed knowledge of our power and a pride in what we are achieving together.⁶⁶¹

Louise Walsh, who, by 1995 had attended all the summer camps, described the Galway Women's Summer camp as her favourite women's event in Ireland, revealing that 'These gatherings have formed the backbone of my lesbian community here, and I cherish these weeks with women and children in the Irish countryside. [...] It offers lesbians a safe and cheap holiday, a space where we can relax and celebrate, getting to know each other outside the pub or club atmosphere, free from the restrictions that dominate our everyday lives.'⁶⁶²

By the latter part of the 1980s the confidence of some gay and lesbian individuals to go more public with their sexuality in Galway was evident. This was no doubt helped by the awarding of a Peadar O'Donnell Achievement Award to the Galway Gay and Lesbian Collective in 1988, no doubt helped by the fact that the collective had been organising a range of different workshops at the Peadar O'Donnell Community Centre.⁶⁶³ Later, in 1989, a small number of gay and lesbian individuals, supported by some of their heterosexual friends celebrated gay pride for the first time in Galway. Preceding the parade, Nuala Ward handed in a letter to the police station in Mill Street informing them of a gay pride parade taking place at 1pm on Saturday. Ward recalled that this received a muted response, something she took to mean that they would not object to.⁶⁶⁴ Soon after she appeared on Galway Bay FM to advertise the holding of the first gay pride parade in Galway.⁶⁶⁵

Meeting in Eyre Square and marching down Shop Street, the busiest street in Galway, fifteen people, comprising 3 lesbians, 2 gay men and 10 of their straight friends held a banner

⁶⁶¹ *Women's Space Newsletter*, Issue No. 4 September/October 1988, <http://corklgbtarchive.com/items/show/62>, Accessed on 22 February 2016.

⁶⁶² Louise Walsh, 'Artist-Activist' in *Lesbian and Gay Visions of Ireland: Towards the Twenty First Century*, edited by Íde O'Carroll and Eoin Collins, (London, Cassell, 1995), 175.

⁶⁶³ Author email correspondence with Nuala Ward, 22 April 2018. According to Ward, the Peadar O'Donnell Community Centre was a centre for the unemployed in Galway.

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<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wEGCILPIJ5Y&list=PLKKnW9AnvAmCjIegw9GbAoQs5gqjyK4e>- *Bród: Out in the Streets*, Accessed on 23 February 2016.

⁶⁶⁵ <http://www.galwaypride.com/history.html> Accessed on 22 February 2016.

with the words ‘Galway Gay Pride’ and a giant pink carnation.⁶⁶⁶ Bob Pritchard, a lesbian who took part in the parade described her feelings leading up to the parade and afterwards:

I was very frightened. We didn’t know what the reaction was going to be to it. It was the first time any of us had ever done it and we didn’t know what to expect. I personally was very frightened. But there wasn’t any hassle, no eggs, no tomatoes. All your fears, you had beforehand were like, wow that went down quite well. It was a positive experience. The first parade was very much ground-breaking. To me, it proved we could do it and there was a need for it.⁶⁶⁷

Nuala Ward, who was equally nervous, was pleasantly surprised by the reaction they received:

I don’t think I ever felt so many different emotions, so intense. Then not sleeping because I was so excited, but also I was quite scared there would be some violence, but my gut feeling told me there wouldn’t be, but I was still worried there might be. People were looking, some people hadn’t a clue what it was because the banner just said Galway Gay Pride. Some people clapped, which was like wow. It was a bit surreal. I kept asking myself did we really do that? It was great.⁶⁶⁸

This parade was all the more significant because, since 1985, no public pride parade had taken place in Ireland. It was not until 1992, for example, that Dublin activists once more took to the streets celebrating gay pride. Such a positive response to a gay pride parade in a provincial city in 1980s Ireland might seem surprising in 2018. However, by the late 1980s, Galway seemed to be moving in the direction of greater tolerance towards homosexuals. As we have seen in the beginning of this chapter, the Galway Gay and Lesbian Collective were recipients of a Peadar O’Donnell achievement award for their contribution to Galway society. Moreover, by 1990, the *Galway Advertiser* was printing articles on the organisation of that years Gay Pride Parade.⁶⁶⁹ Today, Galway has the longest continuous running Gay Pride Parade in Ireland, a significant achievement for a region that did not enjoy the same resources available to gay and lesbian individuals in Dublin and Cork.⁶⁷⁰

Conclusion

⁶⁶⁶ <http://www.galwaypride.com/history.html> Accessed on 22 February 2016.

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<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wEGCILPIJ5Y&list=PLKKnW9AnvAmCjIegw9GbAoQs5gqjyK4e-> *Bród: Out in the Streets*, Accessed on 23 February 2016.

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<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wEGCILPIJ5Y&list=PLKKnW9AnvAmCjIegw9GbAoQs5gqjyK4e-> *Bród: Out in the Streets*, Accessed on 23 February 2016.

⁶⁶⁹ *Galway Advertiser*, ‘Galway March for International Gay Pride Day’, 28 June 1990.

⁶⁷⁰ *Connacht Tribune*, ‘LGBT parade will still have pride of place’, 14 June 2015 - <http://connachttribune.ie/lgbt-parade-will-still-have-pride-of-place-302/> Accessed on 12 January 2018.

Despite the more restrictive nature of the activism in Galway, it does appear that a strong sense of community did exist between those who attended such meetings and events. In fact, this restrictive nature may well have contributed to instilling a greater sense of community than more 'liberal' areas, such as Dublin. Writing in *Out*, in 1985, one individual who travelled to Galway from Dublin noted that 'the absence of an all-gay bar does not seem to have diminished the scale of the social scene here, and in fact has led to the removal of many barriers. [...] I don't know if I could bear living in Galway for an extended period of time, but those who do seem to have evolved sociability that we in Dublin, with all its crass commercialism could learn from.'⁶⁷¹ This is a view shared by James Quinn talking about his time in Clonmel, remarking that:

I certainly didn't have for a very long time, not until I was in Clonmel, any sense of a kind of community that I belonged to, and that was despite coming out, you know, with people like Don Donnelly and knowing that the Hirschfeld Centre was there more or less at that stage. I had no sense that there was a group of people that I belonged to and that I was caring about and concerned about and whatever else. It wasn't until I went to Clonmel that I discovered that at all.⁶⁷²

If anything, both comments demonstrate that creating a gay community spirit is not dependent on being in a large urban area, or necessarily dependent on having gay-only spaces. Gay-only spaces certainly do help, but in the case of Galway and Clonmel, activists were able to create a spirit of community without gay-only spaces.

This chapter sought to expand the realm of activism outside of Dublin by introducing another region, Galway, which although did not reach the heights of Dublin's gay organisations, nevertheless, provided an important, and often life changing, outlet for isolated homosexuals to meet others like them in an unthreatening and relaxed atmosphere. While the group was small, and meetings were irregular, it does seem that a spirit of community did develop and emerge in Galway. In many respects the disadvantages of living in a provincial region, ironically provided a greater means to develop closer bonds with those one met at events. The bonds of community were strengthened because individuals depended on each other to improve their own situations. Only by working together could this happen. Had those in Galway been relying on a Dublin based group to 'promote a spirit of gay community' in the provinces, then this would have taken considerably longer, and in fact may well have not happened.

⁶⁷¹ NLI, IR 369 07, *Out*, June/July 1985.

⁶⁷² Edmund Lynch interview with James Quinn, 28 September 2013, *Edmund Lynch, Irish LGBT History Project*.

This case study has shown the importance of small groups outside Dublin in furthering their own liberation and that of other homosexuals and helping change perceptions within their own localities. While they did not engage in so-called direct political activism, they nevertheless provided a space for social events which those who attended, nevertheless hoped for. In many respects, attending these events was a strong political statement. By resisting societies condemnation of homosexuality by engaging with other homosexuals, either through discos or meetings, provided a basis to embrace their homosexuality and resist heteronormativity. These efforts were later acknowledged in 1988 with the awarding of a community prize and the organisation of Ireland's longest running continuous gay pride parade. The history of the gay and lesbian liberation movement in Ireland must acknowledge their contribution to the wider transformation of perceptions of homosexuality in Ireland.

Chapter 5 - 'It's Poppycock to say homosexuals can be excused': the media and gay and lesbian visibility

*'It's poppycock to say homosexuals can be excused.'*⁶⁷³

On 19 August 1986, Cathal MacCoille of RTÉ's Morning Ireland spoke with Walter Kilroy about an article he had written in the July/August edition of *Out*.⁶⁷⁴ Kilroy's article had revealed that Raphael Gallagher's, *Understanding the Homosexual*, had been removed from Veritas' bookshop in Dublin on request of Archbishop of Dublin, Kevin McNamara. According to Kilroy, Archbishop McNamara had 'some theological objections' to the booklet.⁶⁷⁵ MacCoille's interview with Kilroy is highly significant. Not only did it demonstrate that an Irish gay magazine was an important source of news but, more crucially, it also demonstrated that a gay magazine was actually influential in the topics discussed in the mainstream media. MacCoille, for example, noted that this story only came to the fore when Kilroy published the article in *Out*.⁶⁷⁶ This was all the more significant considering the March/April edition of *Out* had revealed that RTÉ had refused to accept a radio advertisement for *Out* magazine, objecting to the use of the word 'gay.'⁶⁷⁷

Kilroy's appearance on Morning Ireland, however, was not an isolated case. In fact, since the mid-1970s, gay and lesbian individuals had sought to mobilise the media and other forms to make homosexuality more topical within Irish society. Through television, printed media, radio, press releases, letters, leaflets, and even the courtroom, gay and lesbian individuals had sought to develop a greater understanding, awareness, and tolerance for homosexuality in Irish society. Central to this was presenting a more positive narrative of homosexuality, to that, which many in Irish society had been accustomed to, since before, and after the foundation of the state in 1922.

Similar to the situation in other countries, homosexuals in Ireland were commonly associated with prostitutes, drug addicts, alcoholics, the sick and the mentally unwell. The vast majority of Irish society had grown up in ignorance of homosexuality, regarding homosexuals

⁶⁷³ *Sunday Independent*, Letters to the Editor, 26 November 1967.

⁶⁷⁴ <http://www.rte.ie/archives/2016/0812/808802-homosexual-booklet-withdrawn/> RTÉ, Morning Ireland, 'Objection to *Understanding the Homosexual*', 19 August 1986. Accessed on 21 January 2018. *Out* was an Irish gay magazine which was published from 1984-1988.

⁶⁷⁵ NLI, IR 369 0 7, *Out*, Issue 10, 1986, 'Bishops divided over book on gays.'

⁶⁷⁶ <http://www.rte.ie/archives/2016/0812/808802-homosexual-booklet-withdrawn/> RTÉ, Morning Ireland, 'Objection to *Understanding the Homosexual*', 19 August 1986. Accessed on 21 January 2018.

⁶⁷⁷ NLI, IR 369 0 7, *Out*, Issue 8, 1986, 'Anything Goes?.'

as deviant outcasts without actually ever meeting, talking, or even listening to one. This ignorance was reflected in one *Sunday Independent* reader's letter requesting that it 'please write all about homosexuality in your column next week? What is the cause of it? Lack of love? Or is it caused by T.B. or Cancer?'⁶⁷⁸ This image of homosexuals as sick or deviant is hardly surprising considering that experts, such as Dr. Austin Darragh, director of the UCD Psycho Endocrine Centre, who one might have expected to present a more balanced account of homosexuality, only helped to reinforce these opinions. In 1973, Dr. Darragh called on then Irish government to introduce new laws relating to homosexuality whereby convicted homosexuals would be sent for medical treatment, instead of to jail, stating his firm belief that homosexuals could in fact be cured.⁶⁷⁹ While the above reader's question demonstrated a considerable level of ignorance about homosexuality, it also, however, demonstrated a desire to know more about it and understand it.

Eamon Gilmore has argued that Ireland's successful passage of the 2015 marriage equality referendum owed much to 'education and to the women's movement. The introduction of free second level education in 1967 and the expansion of third level opportunities in the late Sixties and early Seventies gave rise to an educated new generation, less willing to take dogmatic dictation from their church.'⁶⁸⁰ Gilmore is justified in emphasising the role of education, however, it is hard to see how the type of education Gilmore referred to could have played a role during this period. Firstly, education on sexuality within Irish schools was practically non-existent, and secondly, homosexuality was taboo and certainly not a welcome topic for discussion within society, let alone in Irish schools. Even if schools had wanted to discuss homosexuality [which of course they did not] the stringent 1929 Irish censorship laws made this almost impossible.⁶⁸¹ According to the Campaign for Homosexual Law Reform (CHLR), all the major studies of homosexuality going back to Havelock Ellis, Kraft Ebbing and even Magnus Hirschfeld were banned in the Republic of Ireland in 1978. Even attempts to privately import books on homosexuality were subjected to inspection and seizure by what the CHLR called the 'minions of the State.'⁶⁸²

⁶⁷⁸ *Sunday Independent*, 13 April 1969.

⁶⁷⁹ *Irish Independent*, 'Don't Jail them, pleads doctor', 6 November 1973.

⁶⁸⁰ <http://www.independent.ie/irish-news/referendum/our-republic-of-equals-has-sent-a-message-of-hope-to-the-entire-world-31250554.html>, Eamon Gilmore, 'Our Republic of Equals has sent a message of hope to the entire world', *Irish Independent*. Accessed on 3 May 2017.

⁶⁸¹ <http://www.irishstatutebook.ie/eli/1929/act/21/enacted/en/html>, Censorship of Publications Act, 1929. Accessed on 21 January 2018.

⁶⁸² NLI, IQA, MS 46,051/1 – CHLR: Homosexual Legislation in Ireland: A Case for Reform, January 1978. Examples of books censored included, *East of Eden*, by John Steinbeck, *The*

What Gilmore should have referred to in his article was not the role of the state's educational system, but rather the considerable efforts of gay and lesbian activists in generating a greater public understanding of homosexuality in Ireland in the 1970s and 1980s. Gilmore is not alone in overlooking the educational activities of gay and lesbian individuals. For example, in *Occasions of Sin*, Diarmaid Ferriter has characterised the public debate on homosexuality, which ensued in this period, as *limited*.⁶⁸³ In comparison with the public debates on contraception, divorce, and abortion, homosexuality was not as 'topical.' Notwithstanding this, however, the efforts of gay and lesbian activists *certainly* were not limited. In fact, gay and lesbian activists worked tirelessly to promote a greater understanding and awareness of homosexuality in Ireland. Homosexuality and gay liberation were not absent from the public discourse in Ireland throughout this period. In fact, it is impossible to find a year in which homosexuality was not mentioned, to some degree, in the Irish media, particularly throughout the 1980s, thanks to the efforts of gay and lesbian activists.

With this in mind, this chapter will explore the efforts of gay and lesbian activists who sought to encourage a greater public discourse on homosexuality in Ireland and, in doing so, present a much more positive understanding of homosexuality. In particular, this chapter will focus on their media strategies and rhetoric. The first section explores the use of television, printed media, and the courtroom, as means by which activists sought to present a better understanding of homosexuality to Irish society, in what Mary Bernstein has described as activists use of identity for education.⁶⁸⁴ The second part focuses on how activists confronted those who opposed positive accounts of homosexuality. While activists use of the media was crucial in helping to educate Irish society on this topic, the media also enabled activists to challenge and confront those who spouted negative depictions about homosexuality without fear of backlash or resistance. This latter development was crucially important in helping undermine much of the negative assumptions associated with homosexuality. Crucially, this second part also demonstrates the extent to which the attempts to generate greater visibility also led to increased opposition. The fact that opponents were more vocal in the late 1970s and 1980s suggests the public debate was not as limited as Ferriter would have us believe.

African Queen, by C.S. Forester, *The Heart of Matter*, by Graham Greene and, in 1976, the Irish Family Planning Association's booklet, *Family Planning – A Guide for Parents and Prospective Parents*. In 1968, Kenneth Marlowe's *The Male Homosexual* was censored, while in 1971 *Boys in the Band* was banned. John Schlesinger's *Sunday Bloody Sunday* was also banned. In 1977 Rita Mae Brown's, *Rubyfruit Jungle* also fell afoul of the censorship board.

⁶⁸³ Ferriter, *Occasions of Sin*, 495

⁶⁸⁴ Mary Bernstein, 'Celebration and Suppression: The Strategic Uses of Identity by the Lesbian and Gay Movement', in the *Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 103, No. 3, (November 1997): 531-565.

‘I am happy. I am a human being. I just happen to have a different sexual orientation.’⁶⁸⁵

Andrew Jacobs in ‘The Rhetorical Construction of Rights: The Case of the Gay Rights Movement’ argued that ‘to create new social knowledge gays needed to re-constitute themselves in the public space and create new meanings for their group that would destroy and replace old meanings.’⁶⁸⁶ Central to this process, Jacobs argued, was visibility rhetoric, rhetoric that declared the existence of gays, but crucially one that presented them in a positive light. According to Jacobs, visibility rhetoric says, ‘I am.’⁶⁸⁷ From the mid-1970s Irish gay and lesbian individuals began to openly declare their sexuality to Irish society. The significance of publicly coming out and declaring their sexuality unashamedly cannot be underestimated as a crucial part of changing perceptions during this period. In 1974, for example, Conor McAnally writing in the *Sunday Independent* after attending the 1974 TCD symposium on homosexuality revealed that:

I am heterosexual. Five years ago, I made the ‘normal’ campy jokes about homosexuals. In jest I asked for protection going to the SLM seminar on homosexuality. I was embarrassed, nervous, ignorant and just a little afraid, so I joked - laughter is often an expression of fear. It’s amazing how much a person’s views can change in five hours. Walking to Trinity College for the meeting, I expected to find a bunch of effeminate caricatures of gay men and a collection of equally obvious lesbian women. I was in for a surprise. An hour later I was still embarrassed but at the countless insensitive jokes about homosexuals I have cracked in recent years. In Trinity’s junior common room were about 200 people. Three men dressed and postured like the comedy caricatures of screen and stage. The rest, I’m sure had as much difficulty guessing my inclinations as I had guessing theirs. Homosexuals can’t be spotted on sight. Four hours later I had a clearer picture as one by one gay men and women contributed to the discussion, questioned speakers and spoke seriously and a little angrily about repressive laws and attitudes such as mine. [...] Society is altered by a change of attitude. My attitudes to homosexuality and gay people were changed at the meeting.⁶⁸⁸

McAnally’s article gives an insight into the thoughts and actions of an individual before meeting a homosexual to those after meeting a homosexual. In the space of just a few hours, after listening to homosexuals, McAnally completely changed his mind. Rather than the

⁶⁸⁵ Joni Crone interview on *The Late Late Show*, 9 February 1980. Personal copy of this interview.

⁶⁸⁶ Andrew M. Jacobs, ‘The Rhetorical Construction of Rights: The Case of the Gay Rights Movement, 1969-1991’, in *Nebraska Law Review*, Vol. 72, Issue 3, 723-758.

⁶⁸⁷ Jacobs, ‘The Rhetorical Construction of Rights’, in *Nebraska Law Review*, Vol. 72, Issue 3, 723-758.

⁶⁸⁸ Conor McAnally, *Sunday Independent*, ‘I changed my mind about homosexuals’, 17 February 1974.

homosexual being the problem, McAnally now realised that it was his treatment of homosexuals that was actually the main problem, something which now embarrassed him. With no one speaking out against these jokes and caricatures of homosexuals, McAnally, like many more in Irish society, bought into them as an accurate reflection of homosexuals and homosexuality. It was for this reason that activists risked much to appear in public forums declaring their homosexuality in an attempt to bring about a change in mind-set similar to that of McAnally.

Speaking on the first broadcast of RTÉ (Radió Teilifis Éireann) in 1961, former president of Ireland, Éamon de Valera forewarned that ‘never before was there in the hands of men an instrument so powerful to influence the thoughts and actions of the multitude.’⁶⁸⁹ It was precisely this power that gay and lesbian activists sought to exercise with their appearances in television programmes in the late 1970s and early 1980s. In the period from 1975-1980, Irish gay and lesbian individuals bravely appeared on four separate television programmes to try to dispel much of the stereotypes surrounding homosexuality and set the tone of the rhetoric for the gay movement of the future.

The first of these programmes was an interview with David Norris on Last House with Aine O’Connor in 1975. This was followed by Tuesday Report, with Cathal O’Shannon, in February 1977, and in 1980 by an interview by Aine O’Connor with a Cork gay couple (Laurie Steele and Arthur Leahy) on Week End. Also, in that same year, Joni Sherrin appearing on the Late Late Show became the first openly Irish lesbian to appear on Irish television. The participants’ ability to resist their subjugation as second-class citizens and to present a much more positive, sympathetic, and confident image of gay and lesbian individuals was instrumental in beginning a process of changing perceptions and ultimately attitudes of homosexuality. The following examples demonstrate how gay/lesbian activists forcefully dismissed negative depictions of homosexuality, presenting instead a much more positive, sympathetic and, crucially, respectable image of homosexuals.

Broadcast in July 1975 and February 1977 respectively, both Aine O’Connor’s interview with David Norris and Cathal O’Shannon’s documentary presented viewers with a tour de force on the ‘facts’ of homosexuality and an insight into gay life in Ireland. With the support of their parents, of Dr. Noel Browne, of sympathetic clergy and of their international allies, Irish homosexuals spoke candidly about homosexuality, dismissing assertions that homosexuals were deviant, child molesters, perverted and naturally promiscuous. Explaining

⁶⁸⁹ RTÉ TV history, <http://www.rte.ie/tv50/history/1960s.html> Accessed on 12 May 2015.

why he decided to address the issue of homosexuality, O'Shannon noted that he wanted to examine:

the reasons why homosexuals themselves have become so vocal, so open in recent years. By this I don't mean that homosexuality is on the increase – there is no evidence of this; but what has happened is that more and more homosexuals are joining the various Gay Rights Movement and are unafraid to state quite openly that they are homosexual.⁶⁹⁰

In the opening moments of the 1975 interview, Frank Kameny, of the Mattachine Society, a homophile organisation in the USA, insisted that 'homosexuality is a preference for entering into close, intimate affectionate and sexual relationship with persons of the same sex.'⁶⁹¹ Addressing the popular ignorance surrounding homosexuality in Ireland at this time, O'Connor asked whether homosexuals were sick people, could homosexuality be cured, or what Norris would say to people who regarded a homosexual as a perverted person or an immoral person? Norris confidently dismissed all these statements, insisting that homosexuals were not sick, but like heterosexuals were subject to 'head-colds, influenza, hangovers, this type of thing, but in the basic sense, we are not sick.'⁶⁹²

In the 1977 documentary, Rose Robertson turned the tables on the heterosexual viewers, asking them to imagine how they would feel if their sexuality was not socially accepted, like homosexuality was? Dr. Noel Browne, an outspoken proponent of homosexual law reform, maintained that homosexuality was as normal as heterosexuality; it was just a different side of human sexuality. In his contribution, Sean Connolly simply explained what being gay meant to him, 'I discovered that my orientation was towards members of my own same sex, for the same reasons as anybody else, for companionship, emotional stimulation and the usual things one forms a relationship for.'⁶⁹³ One mother, whose appearance no doubt helped other parents come to terms with their child's sexuality, explained that she had come to accept her son's sexuality because 'that is just the way he was made.'⁶⁹⁴ In one of the most provocative and daring scenes of the documentary, the audience was taken inside the Phoenix Club and shown footage of lesbian women and gay men dancing unashamedly together.⁶⁹⁵

⁶⁹⁰ PRONI, D/3762/1/3/2 – *IGRM Newsletter*, Cathal O'Shannon, 'Homosexuals – their views', Issue No. 2, March 1977.

⁶⁹¹ NLI, IQA, MS 45, 951/1 – RTÉ Audience Research Service July 1975.

⁶⁹² NLI, IQA, MS 45, 951/1 – RTÉ Audience Research Service July 1975.

⁶⁹³ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ik19fvu6dP0> Edmund Lynch, *Did Anyone Notice Us?* Accessed on 7 July 2016.

⁶⁹⁴ Cathal O'Shannon, *Tuesday Report*, 'Homosexuality in Ireland', 22 February 1977. Personal copy of this programme.

⁶⁹⁵ *Tuesday Report*, 'Homosexuality in Ireland', 22 February 1977.

If the personal is political, then the participation of those in these two documentaries was as strong a show of public defiance to Ireland's sexual mores by a group of homosexuals seen at this time. While many in Irish society would have liked to believe that such individuals did not exist in Ireland or were foreign imports, these documentaries strongly challenged these assertions. To be Irish and homosexual, was not mutually exclusive. The disco scene and the number of homosexuals who appeared helped bring a very much hidden aspect of Irish society out into the open. Crucially, the documentary dismissed the sordid image of every homosexual lingering around public toilets waiting to pounce at the first opportunity. Rather, it showed homosexuals socialising in much the same way as the rest of society, in pubs and dance clubs.

Equally ground-breaking was Aine O'Connor's interview with Laurie Steele and Arthur Leahy, in February 1980, the first openly gay couple to be interviewed on Irish television. While O'Shannon's documentary had educated by helping to dispel many of the myths surrounding homosexuality and was in that sense educational, O'Connor's interview with Leahy and Steele was a much more personal poignant account of the turmoil and difficulties two individuals experienced as they tried to maintain a gay relationship in an unaccommodating Ireland. The interview was set in the home of Arthur and Laurie, who disclosed that they had been in a relationship for five years. At the same time, they highlighted the demoralising impact of society's attitudes on them and their families. According to Arthur, he was viewed as 'inadequate' by his family, and they in turn felt that they were inadequate because he was homosexual. Arthur explained that:

you are so long oppressed by the society around you, that you internalise that oppression and you oppress yourself that even if you do go to a situation which is free or open you still carry it with you. The oppression does damage the sexual development and you carry that for the rest of your life. Ideologically you can know that things are wrong, but you can never really escape from it. You carry the oppression with you always.⁶⁹⁶

For Laurie, the oppression had led to self-oppression and a sense of alienation, which impacted on his ability to build up emotional connections or strong bonds with other individuals. Speaking about the challenges they faced as a gay couple, Laurie stated that 'society does not accommodate gay couples, you don't see other gay couples.'⁶⁹⁷

Like Arthur and Laurie, Joni Sheerin's appearance on the Late Late Show was seminal.⁶⁹⁸ In appearing on the Late Late Show, Joni Sheerin sought to bring greater awareness

⁶⁹⁶ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HIEZxqa3TQcandt=639s> Cork Gay Couple RTÉ interview. Accessed on 8 May 2017.

⁶⁹⁷ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HIEZxqa3TQcandt=639s> Cork Gay Couple RTÉ interview Accessed on 8 May 2017.

⁶⁹⁸ Joni Crone interview on *The Late Late Show*, 9 February 1980.

of lesbianism to Irish society and provide hope to lesbian women that one could be lesbian and happy in Ireland. This, she revealed, was something that had sadly taken her ten years to realise, due to the absence of positive role models and positive representations in Ireland.⁶⁹⁹ The extent of the task Joni and other lesbian women had set themselves was summed up by an audience member who, on seeing Joni, remarked that ‘she doesn’t look like a lesbian.’⁷⁰⁰ This comment epitomised the level of public ignorance around homosexuality, particularly lesbian sexuality in Ireland at that time.

Similar to her male counterparts, Joni confidently discussed the difficulties of coming to the stage where she could come out publicly and speak positively about her lesbian identity. She declared to Gay Byrne that she was now a proud lesbian.⁷⁰¹ When asked whether she had any reservations about speaking on the show, Joni simply replied ‘No. I have my life to live and I only have the one life and I have to be true to myself too.’⁷⁰² Rather than seeing her sexuality as a problem, Joni highlighted that she had found love, caring friends, support from her family and was enjoying success in her career, even as an out lesbian woman. Her sexuality, she maintained, was only one facet of her life. She was happy with it and it was for society to change, not her.

Common themes recurred throughout these programmes that activists were keen to reinforce. The first of these was that homosexuals were *normal everyday individuals*, much the same as heterosexuals. Instead of disguising themselves, which many might have expected them to do, they looked straight into the camera and constantly reminded the audience of the ordinariness of themselves and homosexuality. While they may have been different because they were attracted to members of the same sex, homosexuals, as Sean Connolly noted, looked for the same qualities heterosexuals also looked for in a partner; emotional stimulation, companionship, mutual satisfaction, etc. They were not sex craved individuals, were not sick and being homosexual was not just about sex. As the disco scene clearly showed, they socialised just like anybody else, they looked and dressed much like everybody else and many held ‘respectable’ jobs. In other words, they were good upstanding Irish citizens.

In this context then, Laurie’s and Arthur’s appearance as a gay couple was important because it sent a clear message that gay couples existed in Ireland, who were not unlike other couples. Prior to the broadcast the *Irish Times* noted that:

⁶⁹⁹ Joni Crone interview on *The Late Late Show*, 9 February 1980.

⁷⁰⁰ NLI, Ir 369 I 23, *In Touch: Journal of the National Gay Federation*, Vol. 2, No. 3 March 1980.

⁷⁰¹ Joni Crone, ‘Lesbians: The Lavender Women of Ireland, in *Lesbian and Gay Visions of Ireland*, ed. by Íde O’Carroll and Eoin Collins, (London, Cassell, 2005), 62.

⁷⁰² Joni Crone interview on *The Late Late Show*, 9 February 1980.

This programme examines the lifestyle of what appears to be a normal couple in a stable relationship, except that they both belong to the same sex. This provides the jumping off point for a serious discussion of the failure of Irish people to realise that there is a homosexual community living in our midst and the futility of pretending otherwise.⁷⁰³

The fact that the author used the word ‘normal’ and ‘stable’, rather than ‘deviant’ or ‘unnatural’ was important in helping to promote the discourse gay and lesbian activists were advocating. By disclosing their relationship was five years old, Laurie and Arthur challenged the assertion that homosexuals were typically promiscuous. Both men’s public acknowledgment of their status as a gay couple resisted the ‘official’ view that heterosexual relationships were the only possible acceptable form of intimate relationship in Irish society.

Another key theme present throughout these programmes was the activist’s self-presentation as both *happy* and *proud* of their sexuality, rather than expressing guilt or shame. This was something which seemed to take Gay Byrne by surprise when Joni said she was proud. Responding, Byrne asked ‘When you say are proud, are you really Joni? Proud of it?’⁷⁰⁴ One of the most common beliefs about homosexuality was that homosexuality would lead to a life of despair, loneliness and isolation. While many people were sad, isolated and lonely, activists were keen to demonstrate that this was a result of society’s treatment of them, rather than an inherent condition caused by homosexuality itself. They could, if society allowed it, live happy fulfilling lives. In both the 1977 documentary and Late Late Show interview, individuals were asked, if they could, would they change their sexual orientation, to which each individual replied, *No*. Sean Connolly proudly asserted that ‘I could not wish to be anybody else than the Sean Connolly I am’, while an unnamed lesbian replied that ‘I am very happy the way I am.’⁷⁰⁵ This positive embracement of their homosexuality helped to counteract the belief that homosexuality was an affliction.

It is clear from watching these programmes that those appearing also wanted to emphasise the *oppression* homosexuals were subjected to. The articulation of this oppression was a common feature throughout all the documentaries, as each individual recounted the long process they had to contend with before finally accepting their sexuality. Speaking to O’Shannon, Reg, who moved to England for more freedom, explained his difficulty coming to terms with his sexuality, revealing that ‘The reasons were within me. Having been brought up to hate homosexuality, to fear and to loathe particularly homosexuals, I found it very difficult

⁷⁰³ *Irish Times*, ‘Television Today’, 11 February 1980.

⁷⁰⁴ Joni Crone interview on *The Late Late Show*, 9 February 1980.

⁷⁰⁵ Cathal O’Shannon, *Tuesday Report*, ‘Homosexuality in Ireland’, 22 February 1977.

once I realised, I was one to do otherwise than to continue to hate them. Which I did for about ten years. It was very difficult to admit I was a homosexual.’⁷⁰⁶ By forcing individuals to conform to its rigid social and sexual norms society oppressed a significant minority of the Irish community, forcing them to feel isolated and alone. While the cause of homosexuality was not clear, it was stated numerous times that homosexuals did not choose to be homosexual, but they were, as the mother of one gay man remarked, just made that way. Reg maintained that this treatment had left homosexuals feeling like ‘cuckoos brought up in alien nests.’⁷⁰⁷

By articulating the trauma and hardship they had to contend with before they could fully accept themselves, often having to leave the country to do so, but also the mundaneness of homosexuality, those who appeared in these programmes led some in Irish society to consider whether their treatment of homosexuals was merited. Cathal O’Shannon, for example, noted at the end of his documentary that ‘unless society changes, the homosexual will always be the outsider.’⁷⁰⁸ Rather than placing the burden on homosexuals to change, O’Shannon instead believed this was the responsibility of society.

The viewer reaction to these programmes demonstrated the impact such public appearances could have on developing a broader discussion on homosexuality in Ireland. Reaction both to the 1975 and 1977 shows appeared in the *Irish Times*, *Irish Press*, *Evening Press*, *Hibernia* and the *Sunday Independent*. With the exception of harsh criticism in the *Sunday Independent*, both programmes received considerable praise.⁷⁰⁹ Tony Wilson, for example, argued that Norris’ interview had ‘made an interesting and persuasive voice on behalf of a sexual minority.’⁷¹⁰ Similarly, Val Mulherns, in the *Evening Press*, described O’Shannon’s documentary as ‘probably one of the finest pieces of TV reporting that will come our way in 1977.’⁷¹¹ Interestingly, Patrick Galvin’s reaction in *Hibernia* almost resembled that of Conor McAnally after he attended the 1974 TCD symposium on homosexuality, remarking that:

If the *Tuesday Report* did nothing else for the homosexual it did, at least attempt to explode this particular myth (homosexuals are sick, weak and depraved human beings). Here was a group of normal, decent and intelligent people who just happened to be sexually orientated towards members of their own sex. They did not choose to be what they are – who does? And all they were demanding was the right to live their own lives in their own way without interference from the State, or anyone else. This is the same right that any heterosexual would demand – and get. So where’s the problem? You may well ask. It is not often these days that one can lavish praise on RTE, especially in the

⁷⁰⁶ *Tuesday Report*, ‘Homosexuality in Ireland’, 22 February 1977.

⁷⁰⁷ Val Mulherns, ‘Candid Report on difficult subject’, *Evening Press*, 26 February 1977.

⁷⁰⁸ *Tuesday Report*, ‘Homosexuality in Ireland’, 22 February 1977.

⁷⁰⁹ Peter Cleary, *Sunday Independent*, 27 July 1975.

⁷¹⁰ Tony Wilson, *Evening Herald*, 2 August 1975.

⁷¹¹ Val Mulherns, ‘Candid Report on difficult subject’, *Evening Press*, 26 February 1977.

area of current affairs programmes, but in this case they deserve to be congratulated. The programme was a winner.⁷¹²

Galvin's reaction cemented what gay and lesbian activists had hoped to achieve with these appearances. They wanted to dismiss the perception that they were a threat to Irish society, and instead be viewed as normal and only different to the majority of Irish society by their attraction to members of the same-sex. What is perhaps most noteworthy is the reaction of those who viewed the 1977 documentary and felt the need to contact RTÉ. Of the 40 or so calls RTÉ received about the show, only 4 expressed anger, with 26 commending it, 4 requesting information on the IGRM and 6 callers requesting the time the programme was aired.⁷¹³ One viewer who felt the need to write to O'Shannon personally, Margaret Kegley, applauded O'Shannon and the homosexuals who appeared on the show, writing that:

It was with some misgivings I sat to watch the program you presented on the above topic [homosexuality]. May I say I was impressed by your handling of such an explosive and unpopular subject. Being a viewer of BBC I was not too unaware, but certainly I gained a measure of respect for the men who talked and who admitted they were homosexual. I feel you may have let yourself in for a lot of flak but on the plus side, it is a social problem that must be faced squarely, not only by homosexuals, but by all the population, particularly parents.⁷¹⁴

Kegley herself appears to have somewhat changed her opinion of homosexuals following the documentary. Acknowledging her own misgivings prior to the documentary, and the bravery of O'Shannon in tackling this 'explosive subject', Kegley recognised that the homosexuals in the documentary could be respected and the topic itself was one that needed greater discussion within Irish society. Other letters were also addressed to O'Shannon demonstrating the extent to which this programme had persuaded segments of Irish society to consider a topic rarely, if ever, discussed.

Interestingly, however, O'Shannon does not appear to have received the level of flak Kegley believed he would. Following Aine O'Connor's interview with David Norris, for example, the Broadcasting Complaints Advisory Committee upheld a complaint by Maire Breathnach on the interview, declaring that:

At the present time, homosexual practices, even between consenting adults, are a criminal offence in Ireland, it is improper for RTÉ to present anything which could be reasonably regarded as encouragement or advocacy of such homosexual acts. [...] Any programme which could reasonably be regarded as facilitating or encouraging homosexual practices

⁷¹² Patrick Galvin, 'A Gay Dog', *Hibernia*, 4 March 1977.

⁷¹³ NLI, IQA, MS 45, 943/2, *Tuesday Report*.

⁷¹⁴ NLI, IQA, MS 45, 943/2, Margaret Kegley to Cathal O'Shannon, 23 February 1977.

neglects the requirements of Section 4 of the code of current public affairs broadcasting practice.⁷¹⁵

However, a similar complaint on O'Shannon's documentary was not upheld. While stating that they did have reservations about the dancing scene, the commission maintained that the programme did not fail to comply with the existing legislation.⁷¹⁶ This complaint had led one *Sunday Independent* journalist to quip that 'I think the Irish people must have a unique and disquieting definition of what obscenity is.'⁷¹⁷ In the space of just two years, it would seem, that advocacy on behalf of homosexuals was no longer in breach of the broadcasting code of practice.

The public reaction to Joni, Arthur and Laurie's appearances was similarly encouraging. One caller, in particular, remarked that 'if every heterosexual was as sincere and honest as that lady, the world would be a much happier place.'⁷¹⁸ An individual speaking for four persons complimented Joni, saying that 'she came across as a very nice person and will surely help many people of both sexes.'⁷¹⁹ Barbara McKeon, writing in the *Irish Press* on Laurie and Arthur's appearance, maintained that 'the two men, who live in Cork were quite courageous within the context of our society's hostility towards non-conformity. Long relationships between two 'gays' are unusual, but as suggested by one of the two, this is because they are not reinforced by society's acceptance of such relationships.'⁷²⁰

All four shows were unquestionably pioneering for their time and milestone achievements for those championing gay rights in Ireland. Cathal O'Shannon, speaking 25 years after his documentary, remarked that 'I am amazed looking at it now, at the courage of the people who took part in it. Although they had come out, among their own friends, they were now exposing themselves to the great Irish public. And this could in fact be shocking, and to a lot of people the film was shocking.'⁷²¹ O'Shannon, no doubt, was justified in his claim that his documentary was shocking to many. However, although the above reactions are only

⁷¹⁵ NLI, Personal Papers of David Norris, ACC 6672, Box 1 – Advice of the Broadcasting complaints Advisory Committee: Complaint of Maire Breathnach about an interview on Last House, 24 July 1975.

⁷¹⁶ *Sunday Independent*, 10 July 1977, 'Obscene Complaint.'

⁷¹⁷ *Sunday Independent*, 10 July 1977, 'Obscene Complaint.'

⁷¹⁸ NLI, IQA, MS 45, 940/4 – 'Summary of Telephone Reaction received on Friday 9 February 1980.'

⁷¹⁹ NLI, IQA, MS 45, 940/4 – 'Summary of Telephone Reaction received on Friday 9 February 1980.'

⁷²⁰ *Irish Press*, Barbara McKeon, 'Speaking out on a taboo subject', 12 February 1980.

⁷²¹ Cathal O'Shannon speaking 25 years after his Tuesday Report documentary on 'Homosexuality in Ireland.' Personal Papers of Sean J. Connolly.

a snapshot of those who actually watched the programmes, they nevertheless do demonstrate that to some, at least, the message that gay/lesbian activists wanted to get across was filtering through. Rather than shocking, these shows instead resulted in many now perceiving homosexuals in a more positive light. While the positive comments were to be welcomed, it was also equally important that Irish society was now beginning to recognise and discuss homosexuality on a much greater scale, than previously had been the case.

‘We feel that there is a place for a vehicle which will facilitate the discussion of issues relevant to lesbian and gay men in Ireland, and which will hopefully draw the attention of the wider community to our very existence.’⁷²²

If the 1975 and 1977 decisions of the Broadcasting Complaints Advisory Committee demonstrated anything, it demonstrated the fickleness of relying on outside organisations to promote gay rights. Instead, gay and lesbian activists sought to mobilise their own resources to disseminate not only the struggles facing gay and lesbian individuals, but also a positive narrative of homosexuality. As a result, in 1981, the NGF began producing its own gay magazines. Between 1981 and 1984 the NGF produced *Identity*, which was replaced in 1984 by the more popular and available *Out*. *Out* was published by a collective, which included amongst others: Tom McClean, Edmund Lynch, Walter Kilroy, Maurice Cafferkey, and Carol Laing.⁷²³ Housed at the Hirschfeld Centre, *Out* became an important vehicle to engage with the gay community, but also wider Irish society. It provided a voice for gay and lesbian individuals to respond to events, both directly and indirectly affecting the gay community in Ireland. This was clearly helped by the fact that Ireland’s leading book distributor and bookstore, Eason and Son, was willing to sell and distribute *Out*.⁷²⁴ According *Out*, the first 8 issues each had a readership of roughly 7000.⁷²⁵ Remarkably, only 490 were distributed through subscription or gay venues with 850 being distributed by Eason and Son, a further 550 supplied directly by the

⁷²² NLI, IR 369 0 7, *Out*, ‘Editorial’, Vol. 1 No. 1, January 1984.

⁷²³ NLI, IR 369 0 7, *Out*, Vol. 1, No. 2, February/March 1985 – Other members included Tom Britton, Aidan Bradley, Michael Carmody, John Duffy, Eugene Finnegan, Jean Fitzsimmons, Dez Fox, Robert Keegan, Richard Madigan, Niall McGrogan, Francis Scappaticci, David Twohig and Barry Warner.

⁷²⁴ <https://www.easons.com/about/about-us> Eason and Son is Ireland’s largest supplier of books, magazines and newspapers. Accessed on 21 January 2018.

⁷²⁵ NLI, IQA, MS 45, 989/2 – *Out Magazine: Report of feasibility study into potential sales and advertising revenue*, November 1985 – March 1986. The first edition was also sent to public representatives in Ireland.

Out collective to bookstores and newsagents throughout Ireland, and 610 exported outside Ireland.⁷²⁶

Out's first editorial summed up the reasons behind its publication, stating that:

We feel that there is a place for a vehicle which will facilitate the discussion of issues relevant to lesbian and gay men in Ireland, and which will hopefully draw the attention of the wider community to our very existence. Despite our numbers, gay people do not in general have adequate access to the media, and for many there is the basic lack of relevant information. We hope to go some way towards filling this gap.⁷²⁷

Out ensured that gay and lesbian individuals could present a favourable representation of homosexuality directly to its readers. In one such article, Carol Laing and Kate Harri introduced readers to 'Lesbian Mothers' and the struggles and turmoil faced by many dealing with being both a mother and a lesbian, at a time when there were very few openly lesbian women, let alone any publicly out lesbian mothers. Laing's article, much like the previous RTÉ programmes, sought to highlight the internalised and external oppression faced by these individuals, while also demonstrating the positive release these women felt when they were able to accept and express their sexuality. One lesbian mother explained that her mother found it easier to accept her pregnancy outside of marriage, than the fact that she was lesbian, because of the stereotyped image she had of lesbians.⁷²⁸ Considering the treatment of unmarried mothers in Irish society, this was a telling revelation about some Irish individuals' views on lesbians. Although, she explained she had lost many friends because of her sexuality, she also revealed that her new friends had accepted her sexuality and that now 'I believe in myself for the first time in my life.'⁷²⁹ Doreen, another lesbian mother, described how she felt trapped in her marriage and that it 'came to the stage where it was either end up having a nervous breakdown or get out. I had to make a decision. I had to be true to myself. It took me quite a while to do that. It's not an easy thing to do. Not in this country.'⁷³⁰ Similar to the previous lesbian, Doreen revealed that two years later she had 'no regrets about the decision she made [...] except perhaps that she should have made it earlier.'⁷³¹ These personal accounts allowed a much more humane account of lesbian sexuality to be shared with readers. These were real

⁷²⁶ NLI, IQA, MS 45, 989/2 – *Out Magazine*: Report of feasibility study into potential sales and advertising revenue, November 1985 – March 1986. The first edition was also sent to public representatives in Ireland.

⁷²⁷ NLI, IR 369 0 7, *Out*, 'Editorial', Vol. 1 No. 1, January 1984.

⁷²⁸ NLI, IR 369 0 7, *Out*, Issue 4, 1985, 'Lesbian Mothers.'

⁷²⁹ NLI, IR 369 0 7, *Out*, Issue 4, 1985, 'Lesbian Mothers.'

⁷³⁰ NLI, IR 369 0 7, *Out*, Issue 4, 1985, 'Lesbian Mothers.'

⁷³¹ NLI, IR 369 0 7, *Out*, Issue 4, 1985, 'Lesbian Mothers.'

individuals telling their stories, their struggles, and their relief on accepting their sexuality. They were not stories from medical professions or clergymen who offered a more clinical and impersonal account of homosexuality, which often did little to convey the real-life situation of being gay or lesbian in Ireland.

Kieran Rose, in an article for *Out*, elaborated on the everyday situation of gay and lesbian workers in Ireland. Although, Rose's article was primarily concerned with encouraging gay and lesbian individuals to get involved in their trade union, the language used also reveals that it was directed at members outside the gay community. This was an attempt to awaken amongst them the stresses faced by gay and lesbian workers. Drawing on the fallout from the Kincora boys home scandal⁷³², which Rose argued was an example of how effective trade union action could be, he called on as many gay and lesbian individuals to come out and work within their respective trade union.⁷³³ He did, however, acknowledge the difficulty this presented for many gay and lesbian individuals, noting that 'because jobs are so important it is here that discrimination is most effective and subtle and it is there that we are most vulnerable.'⁷³⁴ While Rose used the pronoun 'we' in this sentence, so as to speak directly to gay and lesbian individuals, his next sentence demonstrated how he wanted this article to be understood by members outside the gay community, declaring that 'there is no lesbian or gay man who can feel secure about getting, keeping and being fairly treated in their job.'⁷³⁵ This is less personal, but one gets the sense that he is directing this comment more so at the wider Irish society, who might be unaware of this lived reality for gay and lesbian individuals.

While the majority of articles were written by gay and lesbian individuals, some contributors included well-known and respected individuals in Ireland. For example, Nell McCafferty, an *Irish Times* journalist, and Fr. Joseph O'Leary, regularly contributed to *Out*, while authors Maeve Binchy and Liam O'Leary also contributed occasional articles to the magazine. This, in turn, added a greater level of credibility to *Out*, and the campaign for gay

⁷³² Kincora Boy's Home was a home for 15-18 year old boys from 1958-1980. In 1980, it closed following allegations of wide scale child sexual abuse. At least 29 boys were raped, prostituted or otherwise sexually abused by senior care staff while resident in the home. <https://www.commonspace.scot/articles/8553/explainer-what-happened-kincora-boys-home-abuse-scandal> Accessed on 25 January 2018. There have been numerous allegations that M15 sought to cover-up the abuse to 'protect its own intelligence-gathering operation.' <http://www.thejournal.ie/sexual-abuse-cover-up-kincora-1941502-Feb2015/> Accessed on 25 January 2018. At the time, gay activists claimed that 'a witch-hunt against gay social workers followed' from the Kincora scandal, as gay social workers were scapegoated. NLI, Ir 32341 g 24, *Galton*, No. 4, October/Nov. 1982 – 'Gay Rights at Work.' In a previous article in the *Reporter*, journal of the Local Government and Public Services Union, Rose claimed that when the Kincora scandal was made public 'scapegoats had to be found; management decided to fire all lesbian and gay social workers; paranoia reigned.' Personal Papers of Kieran Rose – copy of *Reporter*, Vol. 12, No. 6, October 1984 – 'Gay Rights: A trade union concern.'

⁷³³ NLI, IR 369 0 7, *Out*, Issue 3, 1985, 'Gays and Trade Unions.'

⁷³⁴ NLI, IR 369 0 7, *Out*, Issue 3, 1985, 'Gays and Trade Unions.'

⁷³⁵ NLI, IR 369 0 7, *Out*, Issue 3, 1985, 'Gays and Trade Unions.'

rights. Not alone were these individuals willing to write for and be publicly associated with *Out*, but they were also willing to actively promote a greater understanding of homosexuality and gay rights, while also condemning those who oppressed them.

Fr. Joe O’Leary’s articles, for example, often responded to the actions of the Catholic Church, which might have implications for the gay community. In the second edition of *Out*, Fr. O’Leary discussed the appointment of Dr. Kevin McNamara as the new Archbishop of Dublin, describing him as being ‘excessively conscious of the simple faithful who will vibrate in sympathy with his insistence and rather dismissive of the no less sincere, but questioning, faithful whom his too fool-proof conservatism is likely to scandalise and chill.’⁷³⁶ In terms of his attitudes towards homosexuality, Fr. O’Leary summed up the Archbishops attitude as ‘love the sinner and hate the sin.’⁷³⁷ Fr. O’Leary, however, was much more forthright in his criticism of the Vatican’s ‘Letter on the Pastoral Care of Homosexual People’, declaring his hope that the letter would play a role in ‘discrediting the present Vatican regime.’⁷³⁸ Fr. O’Leary insisted that:

Such a doctrinal innovation, introduced by a small handful of men, who have made no effort to dialogue with the gay community, with pastors, the laity, theologians, or the human sciences, and who show evident signs of prejudice and fear, cannot in my opinion be regarded as an authentic exercise of the Church’s teaching magisterium. [...] In teaching people to hate their own sexuality, the letter confirms a pastoral policy which has always been disastrous. How many young souls have been destroyed in the confessional?⁷³⁹

That an Irish priest would so publicly condemn a statement by the Vatican, while at the same time defend, as he referred to them, the ‘gay community’ was significant. It goes without saying, in the context of Ireland, that the Roman Catholic Church held a powerful position. Therefore, that a member of that Church would so condemn a pastoral letter, let alone one on homosexuality, was extremely rare in Ireland. This was even more so, when one considers that Fr. O’Leary used a gay magazine to expound his views. Fr. O’Leary’s article, in effect, encouraged readers to dismiss the document as not ‘an authentic exercise of the Church’s teaching.’⁷⁴⁰ In doing so, he further highlighted the central role the Roman Catholic Church had played in oppressing homosexuals and destroying their souls. He even went as far as to condemn the Church’s response to the AIDS crisis, arguing that it was ‘sad that the Vatican’s

⁷³⁶ NLI, IR 369 0 7, *Out*, Issue 2, 1985, ‘Dr. McNamara: The New Archbishop of Dublin.’

⁷³⁷ NLI, IR 369 0 7, *Out*, Issue 2, 1985, ‘Dr. McNamara: The New Archbishop of Dublin.’

⁷³⁸ NLI, IR 369 0 7, *Out*, Issue 12, 1987, ‘Cardinal Ratzinger’s Final Solution’

⁷³⁹ NLI, IR 369 0 7, *Out*, Issue 12, 1987, ‘Cardinal Ratzinger’s Final Solution.’

⁷⁴⁰ NLI, IR 369 0 7, *Out*, Issue 12, 1987, ‘Cardinal Ratzinger’s Final Solution.’

first response to AIDS is to use it as a stick to beat gays with.⁷⁴¹ Fr. O’Leary was an important ally, particularly as his criticism carried much greater weight than those from the gay community. Why? Because Fr. O’Leary was a priest, a theologian and an active member of the organisation he was publicly condemning.

Out enjoyed considerable success in getting other well-known individuals to appear in the magazine, particularly through interviews. These included well-known domestic and international individuals. Notable interviewees, for example, included Bronski Beat, who gave an exclusive Irish interview with the magazine, Tom Robinson, Mary McAleese, Sylvia Meehan (Employment Equality Authority), Tony Gregory T.D., Mary Harney T.D., and perhaps Ireland’s most renowned broadcaster, Gay Byrne. These interviews were a common feature of *Out* and allowed a much more positive image of homosexuality to be promoted.

In the interviews with the Bronski Beat and Tom Robinson the texts were keen to highlight that both enjoyed successful careers, demonstrating that homosexuals too can be highly successful respected individuals, who served as role models for many in society.⁷⁴² *Out* described Bronski Beat ‘as one of the most phenomenal success stories in recent pop history. Being totally open about their homosexuality hasn’t stopped them having three major hit singles and an incredibly self-assured debut album which went gold on advance orders alone.’⁷⁴³ However, the interview also revealed the struggles the band members encountered because of their sexuality. Larry Steinbachek, for example, revealed that while working for British Telecom, prior to the Bronski Beat, he ‘suffered cos I was gay and oppressed by straight men [...]’.⁷⁴⁴ Later in the interview, Larry encouraged young people, gay or straight ‘to do what they want to do, whatever it is, and fight the oppression that stops them doing it.’⁷⁴⁵

Gay Byrne’s interview with *Out* may well have taken many by surprise.⁷⁴⁶ At the time, Byrne was Ireland’s leading television presenter and host of the much-watched Late Late Show. While the interview was focused on Byrne’s career, it did discuss Byrne’s possible reaction if he learned that one of his daughters was a lesbian. Although, his reaction to the question was not an overtly positive endorsement, Byrne, nevertheless, did not dismiss the possibility, nor did he present such a scenario as a nightmare. Rather he replied that ‘I suppose the answer is you would simply have to cope with it, you would have to live with it, you would

⁷⁴¹ NLI, IR 369 0 7, *Out*, Issue 12, 1987, ‘Cardinal Ratzinger’s Final Solution.’

⁷⁴² NLI, IR 369 0 7, *Out*, Issue 1, 1985 – ‘Bronski Beat – The Beat of a Different Drum’

⁷⁴³ NLI, IR 369 0 7, *Out*, Issue 1, 1985 – ‘Bronski Beat – The Beat of a Different Drum’

⁷⁴⁴ NLI, IR 369 0 7, *Out*, Issue 1, 1985 – ‘Bronski Beat – The Beat of a Different Drum’

⁷⁴⁵ NLI, IR 369 0 7, *Out*, Issue 1, 1985 – ‘Bronski Beat – The Beat of a Different Drum’

⁷⁴⁶ *Out*’s success in getting Byrne to do an interview may well have been a result of Edmund Lynch, who worked in RTÉ and carried out the interview with Byrne.

have to sit down and talk about it, and you would have to decide what to do about it.’⁷⁴⁷ In many respects this was quite a measured response for the time.

Others were less cautious than Byrne in advocating greater tolerance for homosexuals. Mary McAleese, professor of criminal law at Trinity College Dublin and future president of Ireland, offered her strong support for gay liberation, revealing that she had ‘always been a supporter of the building of a community in which gay people are able to live and operate freely and to be treated like every other citizen in this country.’⁷⁴⁸ Similarly, Sylvia Meehan dismissed any suggestion that individuals should be discriminated against on the basis of their sexual orientation, maintaining that she would support the introduction of legislation to protect workers from discrimination on these grounds.⁷⁴⁹ The significance of these particular interviews lays in the fact that these individuals were willing to be interviewed for a gay magazine in Ireland. This alone sent out a positive message that respected individuals were unafraid or unashamed to be associated with a gay magazine, or to lend their support to gay rights. This was something *Out* was clearly conscious of, writing that ‘the very act of agreeing to be interviewed in an openly gay magazine implies a generally favourable disposition towards gay people and gay rights.’⁷⁵⁰

These interviews may also have led many members outside of the gay community to purchase *Out* to read them. In one letter received by *Out*, June remarked that she had not realised that *Out* was published for gay, lesbian and bisexual individuals, rather she thought it was all about the Bronski Beat, which led her to purchase it.⁷⁵¹ Moreover, as we have seen at the beginning of this chapter, June was not the only individual outside the gay community who read *Out*. Others also appear to have read *Out*, resulting in it making headlines in other ways. For example, RTÉ’s decision to refuse to accept *Out* advertisements, which was reported in *Out*, ironically resulted in this being discussed on the Gay Byrne Show on RTÉ Radio 1.⁷⁵² This was also the basis for an image which appeared in the *Irish Times*, poking fun at RTÉ’s refusal to accept the advertisement (Figure 7). *Out* reported that RTÉ’s decision not to accept it and the reaction that generated, resulted in £1,000 worth of free advertising in the national

⁷⁴⁷ NLI, IR 369 0 7, *Out*, Issue 9, 1986 – ‘Out Interview with Gay Byrne.’

⁷⁴⁸ NLI, IR 369 0 7, *Out*, Issue 1, 1985 – ‘Out Interview with Mary McAleese.’

⁷⁴⁹ NLI, IR 369 0 7, *Out*, Issue 5, 1985 – ‘Out Interview with Sylvia Meehan.’

⁷⁵⁰ NLI, IR 369 0 7, *Out*, Issue 8, 1986 – Editorial Response

⁷⁵¹ NLI, IR 369 0 7, *Out*, Issue 3, 1985 – ‘Outpost.’

⁷⁵² NLI, IQA, MS 45, 989/2 – *Out Magazine: Report of feasibility study into potential sales and advertising revenue, November 1985 – March 1986. The first edition was also sent to public representatives in Ireland.*

media for *Out*.⁷⁵³ Later that year, the *Irish Independent* and *Sunday Tribune* quoted comments made by Gay Byrne in his interview with *Out* magazine. Byrne, speaking on the upcoming divorce referendum, had stated his belief that the Roman Catholic Church should not ‘impose their views on those people who are not members of their Church [...]’.⁷⁵⁴ These incidents suggest that the *Irish Times*, *Irish Independent*, *Sunday Tribune* and RTÉ Radio 1 were abreast of *Out* and the issues it raised.

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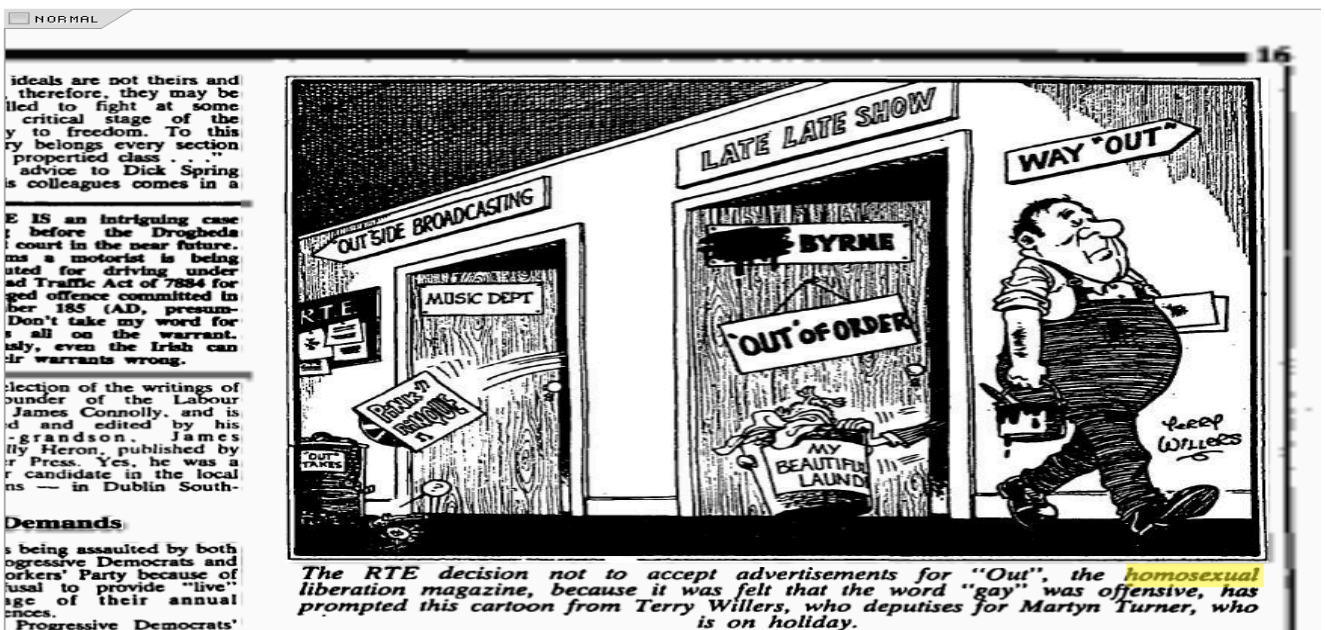


Figure 8. *Irish Times*, March 28th 1986.

*'If you do not accept my sexuality – you do not accept me.'*⁷⁵⁵

Grainne Healy, writing in the *Irish Times* in August 2017, noted that a central strategy adopted by Yes Equality, in seeking to convince people to vote yes to marriage equality, was the use of personal stories from LGBT citizens.⁷⁵⁶ These stories are now credited with having had a direct

⁷⁵³ NLI, IQA, MS 45, 989/2 – Out Magazine: Report of feasibility study into potential sales and advertising revenue, November 1985 – March 1986.

⁷⁵⁴ Jerome Reilly, 'Gaybo attacks Church line', *Irish Independent*, 14 June 1986. Lorna Donlon, 'Gaybo will just ref Late late divorce forum', *Sunday Tribune*, 15 June 1986.

⁷⁵⁵ Anthony Redmond, 'If you do not accept my sexuality – you do not accept me', *Irish Times*, 7 December 1977.

⁷⁵⁶ <https://www.irishtimes.com/culture/books/an-insiders-history-of-the-marriage-equality-campaign-1.3179551> Grainne Healy, 'An insiders history of the marriage equality campaign', *Irish Times*, 8 August 2017. Accessed on 19 January 2018. Yes Equality was the

impact on the successful passage of marriage equality in Ireland in 2015.⁷⁵⁷ There was, however, nothing novel in this strategic approach. Since the 1970s in Ireland, gay and lesbian individuals had done similarly in their attempts to engage with Irish society. While the platforms, cultural climate and objectives were different, these individuals nevertheless sought, in their own ways, to contribute to a greater understanding and acceptance of homosexuality within Ireland. As opposed to social media and the internet, the main platform adopted by individuals was to write letters to the editors of Irish newspapers and hope they would be published.

In one of *many* contributions in the *Irish Times* by Anthony Redmond, ‘If you do not accept my sexuality - you do not accept me’, Redmond sought to present the current scientific evidence and a personal account of homosexuality to challenge Ireland’s strict gender norms and stigmatisation of homosexuals. He argued that the Anglo-American doctrine of masculinity and femininity had resulted in the stigmatisation of those who did not conform to these rigid gender roles. Instead, he asked readers to understand that the ‘value of human beings cannot be determined by colour, religion or sexual propensities.’⁷⁵⁸ Redmond’s linkage with other discriminated groups or minorities was part of an active attempt to present homosexuals as an oppressed minority grouping in Ireland. In particular, Redmond took exception to those who often said to him that while they accepted him, they could not accept his sexuality. This, he argued, was not accepting him at all. Redmond ended his column with a personal plea to readers asking, ‘So what do I want? Nothing more than acceptance! I want the freedom to be myself, to express my love to the fullest in a truly human way. Until then, our struggle will continue.’⁷⁵⁹

The theme of acceptance was later taken up by Carl Berkeley in the *Irish Times* in 1981. Using the upcoming gay pride celebrations in Dublin as the backdrop, Berkeley began his article by asking his heterosexual readers to put themselves in the shoes of a young homosexual teenager who had to listen to jokes about queers and pooftas knowing that he or she is one of these. Not shying away from his own homosexuality, Berkeley stated that:

We, being gay, and of course I do not speak for all of us, grow up feeling miserable misfits, because we feel an attraction to our own sex. We do not choose to have this

main organisation campaigning for a Yes vote in the 2015 marriage equality referendum in Ireland. Grainne Healy was co-chair of this organisation.

⁷⁵⁷

https://www.atlanticphilanthropies.org/app/uploads/2018/01/Marriage_Equality_Case_Study.pdf Susan Parker, *The Path to Marriage Equality in Ireland: A Case Study*. Accessed on 19 January 2018.

⁷⁵⁸ Anthony Redmond, ‘If you do not accept my sexuality – you do not accept me, *Irish Times*, 7 December 1977.

⁷⁵⁹ Anthony Redmond, ‘If you do not accept my sexuality – you do not accept me, *Irish Times*, 7 December 1977.

attraction, just as a heterosexual person does not choose to be attracted to the opposite sex. It is something that happens – whether by nature or nurture.⁷⁶⁰

Berkeley sought to dismiss the belief that homosexuality was a choice, and instead presented it as similar to heterosexuality, something which heterosexuals had no choice over. The only difference was that homosexuals were attracted to members of the same sex. He ended his article by revealing to readers that he looked forward ‘to the day when a gay person need not be proud or ashamed of being gay. We do not ask for special treatment, we only ask for our rights, rights which most people do not have to ask for [...]’.⁷⁶¹

In a similar piece from the *Galway Advertiser*, in May 1985, an individual, who was too afraid to give his name, decided to tell his own personal story of coming to terms with his sexuality and his own misconceptions about homosexuality growing up. While the tone of the text is tinged with anger at a society which has denied him the ability to sign his name to the letter because of his sexuality, he nevertheless implored readers, who made jokes about homosexuals, to consider that these were in fact *human beings* who had no say over their sexual orientation. Rather than seeking to demonise or lecture these individuals the author, instead, sought to appease them, for like them, he too had grown up to believe that all homosexuals were what he described as, ‘the pansy type as depicted in films and TV, limp wristed, walking around like Mr. Humphries from *Are you being served?*’.⁷⁶² However, he pointed out that after learning about and meeting homosexuals he realised that a gay person is no different, nor acts no different from any heterosexual; they could be found everywhere in Irish society, saying he himself had met gay priests, office workers, barmen, waiters, civil servants and even Gardaí.⁷⁶³ The author sought to ease the minds of people afraid of change, by reminding them that only 15 years earlier many would have freaked at the word contraception, but now in 1985 contraception could be obtained more easily and the vast majority of society did not oppose it.⁷⁶⁴ Recognising the Christian nature of Ireland and the strong evidence suggesting homosexuals did not choose to be homosexual, the author argued that as Christians ‘we should accept people for what they are.’⁷⁶⁵ Like Redmond and Berkeley, this author ended his text with a personal message, one in which he hoped for a time when he would no longer have to hide his identity, ‘I am not courageous enough to sign my name to this letter but gradually I

⁷⁶⁰ *Irish Times*, Carl Berkeley, ‘Equal Rights for Gays’, 25 June 1981.

⁷⁶¹ Berkeley, ‘Equal Rights for Gays’, 1981.

⁷⁶² ‘Coming Out’, *Galway Advertiser*, 30 May 1985.

⁷⁶³ ‘Coming Out’, *Galway Advertiser*, 1985.

⁷⁶⁴ ‘Coming Out’, *Galway Advertiser*, 1985.

⁷⁶⁵ ‘Coming Out’, *Galway Advertiser*, 1985.

am getting stronger. Maybe in 15 years' time when things change, I might reveal my identity, at present I know my weaknesses.'⁷⁶⁶

Personalising the campaign for gay and lesbian rights was central to *Out for Ourselves: The Lives of Irish Lesbians and Gay Men*, the first book of its kind published in Ireland, in 1986. *Out for Ourselves* was a collection of personal stories from Irish homosexuals compiled by the Dublin Gay and Lesbian Collectives, which sought to provide a deeper understanding of homosexuality and offer some level of reassurance to an Irish audience that homosexuals were not seeking to destroy Irish society, but simply become part of it. In numerous accounts, Irish gay and lesbian individuals from urban and provincial Ireland recounted stories of coming to terms with their sexuality, discrimination in the workplace, in the health system, violence, and even in obtaining access to their children. While the tone and language vary throughout the book, the introduction to the text makes a strikingly clear and unapologetic statement that homosexuals are *everywhere* in Ireland and they are not an imported vice.⁷⁶⁷

In one rather powerful section an unnamed lesbian explained the impact of society's oppression on her self-confidence and self-worth, insisting that 'It is impossible to explain to someone who hasn't experienced it, how much daily secrecy and evasion about a central part of your life can wear down an already fragile self-confidence.'⁷⁶⁸ Another revealed that it took him leaving Ireland to accept his sexuality, noting that:

Apart from the difficulties of living in rural Ireland, the thought that someone would find out I was gay caused me lots of concern and added to the pressure I was under. [...] I came out to some people and the reaction I got made me more paranoid. I had to get away so I went to Denmark and lived there for eight months. This greatly helped me to develop and gain confidence [...]⁷⁶⁹

This was an experience shared by another individual who compared the feeling of freedom she experienced in America, to the restrictiveness she felt on returning to Ireland. Whereas, she felt 'free to express my sexuality' and say, 'I'm a lesbian' in America, back in Ireland, she revealed that the 'Feelings of oppression, brought on by obligations from family and friends and of being 'the only one', made me return once more to the closet.'⁷⁷⁰ In fact, these individuals were only two of many contributors to *Out for Ourselves*, who revealed that it took them leaving Ireland to finally come to terms with their sexuality. Other contributors sought to express the naturalness of homosexuality. One individual, for example, although noting he too had

⁷⁶⁶ 'Coming Out', *Galway Advertiser*, 1985.

⁷⁶⁷ *Out For Ourselves*, 7.

⁷⁶⁸ *Out For Ourselves*, 36.

⁷⁶⁹ *Out For Ourselves*, 20.

⁷⁷⁰ *Out For Ourselves*, 25.

misconceptions about homosexuality growing up, revealed that after meeting a guy at a club his whole attitude changed. He explained that:

I met a guy at the club and we chatted and danced together. After the disco, we went back to his place. We had a friendly talk and later on we went to bed. I remember thinking I was going to faint with the pleasure of kissing him – now I know why sex is sometimes called a knee-trembler. We made love for hours, caressing and kissing all the while and finishing with him fucking me and I fucking him. Gone was the clumsy fumbling I'd had with girlfriends and for me this was the real thing. [...] The excitement and complete naturalness of the sex left me feeling exhilarated for days.⁷⁷¹

The vocabulary used by this individual was important. Rather than describing this incident as casual sex, this individual expressed their actions as making 'love', they 'chatted', they 'kissed', they 'caressed' each-other. They had met in a club, where they had danced and got to know each-other. This, to him, was natural and exciting, not unnatural or deviant. In fact, what and how he described it was no different to the actions and experiences of many heterosexual couples. This was a view expressed by Patricia Murphy in her review of *Out for Ourselves* in the *Evening Herald*. Murphy described it as an 'honest and thought-provoking reminder that difference shouldn't be deviant even if it is a diffuse, often contradictory and patchy consideration.'⁷⁷²

Out for Ourselves, according to the *Irish Times* and *Irish Press*, was rejected by the majority of booksellers throughout Ireland, including Eason's in Cork and Limerick. Both papers did however note that copies could be obtained at Eason's on O'Connell Street in Dublin, one of Ireland's largest bookstores.⁷⁷³ Speaking to the *Irish Press*, the Women's Community Press stated their firm belief that such refusals to accept copies represented attempts to have the book censored.⁷⁷⁴ Surprisingly, the *Irish Press* noted that Veritas' Cork branch, one of Ireland's leading religious publishers, and owned by the Irish Catholic Bishops Conference, ordered copies of *Out for Ourselves*, only to immediately return them once the content became known.⁷⁷⁵ The novelty of *Out for Ourselves*, was reflected in the appearance of Maura Molloy and Clodagh Boyd, both involved in the book's production, on the popular Liveline radio show with Marian Finucane. Some callers, however, did not appreciate their appearance on the show, with comments calling both Maura and Boyd dirty sluts, to criticism of Marian for having these people on 'who are spreading AIDS all over the world.'⁷⁷⁶ However,

⁷⁷¹ *Out For Ourselves*, 59.

⁷⁷² *Evening Herald*, 'The Other Sides to Modern Ireland', 25 July 1986.

⁷⁷³ *Irish Press*, 2 August 1986, *Irish Times*, 1 August 1986.

⁷⁷⁴ *Irish Press*, 'Book on gays is censored', 2 August 1986.

⁷⁷⁵ *Irish Press*, 'Book on gays is censored', 1986.

⁷⁷⁶ Attic Press/Roisin Conroy Collection, University College Cork, BL/F/AP/ 1559.

while negative comments were received, it was nevertheless significant that homosexuality was getting air time.

‘The High Court judgment although it went against us was not by any means a total defeat.’⁷⁷⁷

One event which helped to generate considerable discussion both inside and outside the gay community was David Norris’ legal battle at the High Court and Supreme Court. The courtroom became an important means to promote a positive and sympathetic narrative about homosexuality. In the same year as Arthur, Laurie and Joni appeared on Irish television, David Norris’ legal case against the Irish state began in the High Court. Much has been made about David Norris’ legal victory against the Irish state at the European Court of Human Rights in 1988. Attention has focused primarily on the legal and constitutional arguments put forward by Norris’ attorney and the constitutionality of such laws within Ireland and Europe. But activists were keenly aware that legal reform alone would do little to alter society’s attitudes. An important facet of Norris’ case, which has not received as much attention, is the extent to which the case was also instrumental in deepening the public understanding of homosexuality in Ireland, thanks especially to the appearance of expert witnesses and gay individuals themselves whose evidence was reported extensively in the media.⁷⁷⁸ In this instance then, notwithstanding the reality that Norris lost both his cases in the Irish Courts, the case itself was crucial in spreading the opinions of those in favour of not treating homosexuality any differently to heterosexuality.

With the financial support of the National Gay Federation, Norris called respected domestic and international experts to give evidence in support of greater tolerance and understanding for homosexuality. For example, the former president of the American Psychiatric Association, Professor John P. Spiegel, informed the presiding judge that the association had removed homosexual orientation from its list of nervous disorders following thorough research.⁷⁷⁹ Similarly, Donald West, professor of clinical criminology at Cambridge argued that he did not believe that homosexual behaviour was a menace to the health of the society in any way.⁷⁸⁰ Echoing much of what gay and lesbian individuals had stated on

⁷⁷⁷ NLI, IR 369 I 23, *In Touch*, Vol. 2, No. 8, Oct/Nov. 1980.

⁷⁷⁸ NLI, IQA, MS 45, 969/6 – Constitutional Action to establish the legal status of homosexual citizens of the Republic of Ireland: Press Coverage of High Court Proceedings, June/July 1980.

⁷⁷⁹ *Evening Press*, ‘De-criminalise law and help homosexuals’, 26 June 1980.

⁷⁸⁰ *Daily Mirror*, ‘Gay Law fears wrong’, 26 June 1980.

television, Dr. Ivor Brown, professor of psychiatry at UCD, laid much of the blame for homosexuals seeking psychiatric help on the treatment they received from society.⁷⁸¹ Other supportive witnesses included, Rose Robertson, Rev. Michael MacGreil and Rev. Joseph O'Leary, who maintained that the catholic approach to homosexuality was now more liberal in 1980.⁷⁸²

The testimonies from this court case were covered extensively in the *Irish Times*, *Irish Independent*, *Daily Mirror*, *Cork Examiner*, *Irish Press*, *Hibernia*, *Evening Herald*, *Evening Press*, *Belfast Telegraph*, *The Guardian* and even the *New York Times*, ensuring that a broad spectrum of Irish society came into contact with the Norris case and the supportive evidence presented. The fact that the government did not call any witnesses to dismiss the plaintiff's evidence further strengthened what had been said in court. This was evident in Justice McWilliams ruling. Although, McWilliams ruled that the laws were consistent with the Irish constitution, his judgement included the following conclusions:

- There was probably a large number of people with a homosexual orientation in Ireland, of these a proportion are exclusively homosexual.
- The exclusively homosexual orientation is congenital and not a matter of choice.
- There is no satisfactory method of treatment to alter the exclusively homosexual orientation.
- There is no foundation for any of the common beliefs that homosexual men were mentally unbalanced, effeminate, vicious, unreliable, less intelligent or more likely to assault or seduce children or young people, than heterosexual males.
- There was a general prejudice against homosexuals with a lack of consideration for their problems.⁷⁸³

That Justice McWilliams accepted the positive evidence presented on homosexuality was a significant step forward for those attempting to generate a greater public understanding of homosexuality. By announcing this in his judgment, a judgement again which was covered in great detail by the Irish media, Justice McWilliams, in effect, undermined those who maintained that homosexuality was a choice, homosexuals were vicious or seducers of

⁷⁸¹ *Evening Press*, 'Man shocked at treatment as outcast', 27 June 1980.

⁷⁸² 'Catholic approach to homosexuality now more liberal – priest', *Irish Times*, 28 June 1980.

⁷⁸³ *Irish Times*, 'Judge holds laws on homosexuality not unconstitutional', 11 October 1980.
Irish Press, 'Homosexual will appeal case to the Supreme Court', 11 October 1980.

children. In one reaction to the judgement, the editor of the *Irish Press* confirmed this view, stating that:

Mr. Justice McWilliam drew an accurate picture of the average homosexual male – very different from the simpering sex maniac of so many sick jokes. [...] Their condition is congenital – not an illness or a perversion. [...] And how does the law regard such men? It states that any person who is party to a homosexual act, even in private, even between consenting adults, is liable to two years in prison. Ireland, North as well as South, is the only EEC country where such laws apply.⁷⁸⁴

Such a positive editorial even took gay activists themselves by surprise, with Tom McClean asking *In Touch* readers if anyone could have imagined five years ago such an editorial appearing in the Irish media, let alone in the *Irish Press*.⁷⁸⁵ In ‘Working Anita Bryant: The Impact of Christian Anti-Gay Activism on Lesbian and Gay Movement Claims’, Tina Fetner argued that ‘counter movements can also benefit the movements they oppose through unintended consequences of their actions.’⁷⁸⁶ While I recognise that the judiciary were not a counter movement to the gay and lesbian movement, the un-intended consequences and their benefits raised by Fetner is applicable to the actions of gay activists following the High Court judgement. The above *Irish Press* comment was certainly a positive unintended consequence for the gay liberation movement.

Recognising the significance of Justice McWilliams’ statement on homosexuality the NGF decided to adopt his conclusions and distribute them through a press announcement. In *The Rights of Homosexual Citizens of Ireland: A Declaration*, the NGF underlined the formal observations of Justice McWilliams, which they noted were now publicly and officially recognised as facts.⁷⁸⁷ The document also noted that these observations were supported by the findings of the European Commission of Human Rights in the *Dudgeon v. U.K.* case.⁷⁸⁸ *The Rights of Homosexual Citizens of Ireland*, which was also sent to Irish public representatives and trade unions, concluded with a list of 7 specific demands from the gay and lesbian movement; demands they considered to be basic fundamental rights.⁷⁸⁹ These demands

⁷⁸⁴ *Irish Press*, ‘Norris Judgement’, 14 October 1980.

⁷⁸⁵ NLI, IR 369 I 23, *In Touch*, Vol. 2, No. 8, Oct/Nov. 1980. *In Touch* was a newsletter distributed to members of the NGF.

⁷⁸⁶ Tina Fetner, ‘Working Anita Bryant: The Impact of Christian Anti-Gay Activism on Lesbian and Gay Movement Claims’, in *Social Problems*, Vol. 48, No. 3, 411-428.

⁷⁸⁷ NLI, IQA, MS 45, 936/9 – The rights of homosexual citizens in Ireland: A Declaration, 27 June 1981.

⁷⁸⁸ NLI, IQA, MS 45, 936/9 – The rights of homosexual citizens in Ireland.

⁷⁸⁹ *Irish Times*, ‘Norris says churches should get off fence’, 29 June 1981.

included full equality before the law, equality in employment opportunity and protection from unfair dismissal on the grounds of sexual orientation, full legal recognition of the rights of partners in a gay relationship and equality in the social benefits deriving from general taxation.⁷⁹⁰ This declaration and its demands were reported in the *Irish Times* on 29 June 1981.

Miriam Smith, in the *Canadian Journal of Political Science*, argues that ‘what matters for the success of a social movement is not legal victory or defeat, but the actual assertion of rights claims [...]’.⁷⁹¹ Norris and the gay community may well have lost at the Irish High Court and Supreme Court, but Justice McWilliams’ acceptance of much of what was presented by Norris and his witnesses helped to confirm and promote what gay and lesbian activists had been arguing since the mid-1970s. Win or lose, Norris’ legal case was another event vital in generating a public discussion on homosexuality. It captured the attention of the media up to and after its successful conclusion in the European Court of Human Rights in 1988.

‘Gays don’t have two heads.’⁷⁹²

One significant impact of the attempts by gay and lesbian activists to educate Irish society on homosexuality and encourage a greater discussion on it was the take up of this topic by journalists and other commentators in Irish society. Not only did articles begin to appear in religious publications, such as the *Church of Ireland Gazette*, the *Catholic Standard* and the *Furrow*, along with student and trade union magazines, but journalists in the mainstream media were also now writing about homosexuality. Crucially, these articles were positive and often involved interviews with gay and lesbian individuals themselves. For example, Terry Prone of the *Irish Farmers Journal*, citing a letter she read from Bernard Keogh in a provincial newspaper on Tel-A-Friend, requested a meeting to assist her in the production of a feature article on the problems and challenges facing young gays from country regions.⁷⁹³ It is worth noting that Prone used the word gay rather than homosexual, even at this early stage in the campaign for gay rights. Moreover, in July 1983, Senator Shane Ross writing in the *Sunday Tribune*, strongly condemned the treatment of Irish homosexuals. In particular, Rose took exception with Irish government for refusing to amend the 1861 and 1885 laws, arguing that:

 this is the let laws lapse era of Irish governments. Do not repeal bad laws, but do not enforce them. [...] Leave homosexuals – technically criminals – alone, but for God’s sake never acknowledge them as an identifiable, oppressed minority grouping who need

⁷⁹⁰ NLI, IQA, MS 45, 936/9 – The rights of homosexual citizens of Ireland.

⁷⁹¹ Miriam Smith, ‘Social Movements and Equality Seeking: The Case of Gay Liberation in Canada’, in *Journal of Political Science*, Vol. 31, No. 2, (June 1998), 285-309.

⁷⁹² *Irish Times*, Caroline Walsh, ‘Gays don’t have two heads’, 28 September 1984.

⁷⁹³ NLI, IQA, MS 45, 943/9 – Terry Prone of *Irish Farmers Journal* to Bernard Keogh of NGF, 11 August 1980.

specific attention and consideration. Then maybe they will go away, like so many other unpleasant problems in Ireland.⁷⁹⁴

One year later, Caroline Walsh, in the *Irish Times*, ran an article titled ‘Gays don’t have two heads,’ in which she interviewed Tonie Walsh, Don Donnelly, Willie McConkey and Christopher Robson about their experiences as gay men in Ireland. Tonie Walsh disclosed that his emotional problems started to affect him during his Inter Cert years when religion suddenly became a major preoccupation, revealing that:

when I was about 15 or 16 something clicked. It started becoming so apparent to me that those who had sex with people of the same sex as themselves were called queers and that they were a sort of deviant animal. At school we started hearing that homosexuality was a sin [...] One day one of the young fellows I’d been messing around with labelled me a homosexual and it was horrific. [...] ⁷⁹⁵

Walsh stated that it was only through meeting other gay individuals at the Hirschfeld Centre that he discovered ‘gay people didn’t have two heads – that it was all no big deal.’⁷⁹⁶ Walsh followed this article with another, this time interviewing five lesbian women, three of whom were willing to divulge their full name (Melissa Murray, Liz Noonan, and Ruth Jacob), and allow pictures of themselves appear in the paper. In fact, both Liz Noonan and Ruth Jacob also disclosed that they had been in a happy ten-year relationship together. This would appear to be the first time that Irish society was introduced to an openly lesbian couple who were unashamed to discuss their relationship. Liz went as far as to say that ‘the worst thing that could ever have happened to her would have been to be heterosexual.’⁷⁹⁷

To put this article into greater context, particularly understanding why details such as disclosing their full names and allowing their pictures to be printed is noteworthy, it is worthwhile contrasting this article with that of a similar *Sunday World* article published two years earlier, previously discussed in Chapter 2. In that *Sunday World* article, ‘Ireland’s sexual exiles’, the journalist interviewed three Irish lesbian women, Liz, Mary and Claire. To begin with it is interesting to note the difference in the titles of both articles. Whereas, the *Sunday World* article was titled ‘Ireland’s sexual exiles’, which suggests something almost devious and clandestine, the 1984 article was titled ‘Women who love women’, which was much more

⁷⁹⁴ *Sunday Tribune*, Shane Ross, ‘How our liberal let-laws-lapse legislators leave gays in limbo’, 31 July 1983.

⁷⁹⁵ Walsh, ‘Gays don’t have two heads’, 1984. The Inter Cert (today referred to as Junior Certificate) was a state examination for students who have completed the junior cycle of secondary school in Ireland.

⁷⁹⁶ Walsh, ‘Gays don’t have two heads’, 1984.

⁷⁹⁷ *Irish Times*, ‘Women who love women’, 12 October 1984.

positive and less threatening. In the 1984 article three lesbian women agree to have their full name and pictures shown, whereas, in the 1982 article, the three women interviewed would/could only divulge their first names. Moreover, the 1982 article was primarily concerned with the difficulties faced by lesbian women. However, while the 1984 article does address this issue too, one of its aims was also to explore the *joys* of being a lesbian. The 1984 article also presented a much more confident, unashamed and empowering image of lesbianism, but also a willingness to be more explicit about it. The author, for example, reproduced comments by Ruth on their sex life, who remarked that ‘Making love with another woman is very beautiful. As a lesbian I don’t measure lovemaking by orgasms. It doesn’t have a beginning or an end. It’s kind of communication that is there between us and it’s there as much in a look or a touch of the hand as in giving each other sexual pleasure. It’s as much a way of relating as talking... I feel my body is singing.’⁷⁹⁸ That two women publicly admitted to engaging in sexual intercourse at a time when sex outside marriage even between a man and woman was frowned upon was extremely courageous.

RTÉ had also continued their interest in the topic of homosexuality through Ireland’s Eye, in November 1981, an RTÉ Access programme in February 1984, (both of which featured interviews with Irish gay and lesbian individuals) and a Late Late Show interview with two former American lesbian nuns, Rosemary Curb and Nancy Manahan, in 1985.⁷⁹⁹ Manahan and Curb’s interview caused considerable controversy at the time. The Late Late Show had invited them on to discuss their book *Breaking Silence: Lesbian Nuns on Convent Sexuality*, which had generated considerable controversy in America, which in turn had made the book a bestseller. According to Caroline Walsh 1,500 copies of the book were seized by Irish customs, leading Carol Laing to complain that ‘the most upsetting aspect of all this is that once again lesbians are being subjected to the prurient curiosity and the nasty voyeuristic streak of the male establishment.’⁸⁰⁰ This decision was later overruled by an official in the Revenue Commission.⁸⁰¹

RTÉ’s invitation to Manahan and Curb, however, led Thomas O’Mahony, director of the Christian Community Centre in Dublin, to seek an injunction against the interview. O’Mahony argued that such an interview would undermine Christian moral values in Irish

⁷⁹⁸ *Irish Times*, ‘Women who love women’, 1984.

⁷⁹⁹ A clip of this programme can be viewed through the following link:

<http://www.rte.ie/archives/2016/1123/833947-hirschfeld-centre-national-gay-federation/>

Accessed on 13 December 2016.

⁸⁰⁰ *Irish Times*, Caroline Walsh, ‘Seizure of book on lesbian nuns overruled’, 13 September 1985.

⁸⁰¹ *Irish Press*, ‘Lesbian nuns book cleared’, 13 September 1985.

society, but also, the respect of the general public for nuns would be seriously compromised.⁸⁰² This undermining of moral values, he maintained, was in breach of Article 40 (6) 1 of the Irish constitution. Mr. Justice Barr, however, refused the injunction and the interview was allowed.⁸⁰³ Speaking after the interview, which had seen 80 protesters picket RTÉ, Manahan and Curb expressed their hope that ‘they had broken down some prejudice.’⁸⁰⁴ The topic itself continued to ramble on in the letters to the editor section of the *Irish Times* into late October, while in the *Irish Examiner* the ‘lesbian nuns’ appearance was still topical into mid-November, despite the interview airing in September.

‘Those of us who have shaken off the shackles imposed by lack of education and fear of social stigma can find better sources of reference for genuine research than dusty textbooks. We can no longer allow ourselves to be categorised by non-gay people, no matter how well intentioned.’⁸⁰⁵

The reaction of Gerard O’Mahony to the appearance of Curb and Manahan on the Late Late Show was characteristic of other segments in Irish society who were uneasy about the emerging wider discussion of homosexuality and appearance of homosexuals in the Irish media. One viewer reacting to Joni Crone’s appearance on the Late Late Show, for example, noted that while they realised ‘the Lesbian on this show was a genuine person, I am really tired of the topic.’⁸⁰⁶ This was a view shared by another individual who implored the then Fine Gael leader, Garrett Fitzgerald, to ‘put the rosary on the television and get rid of the homosexuals.’⁸⁰⁷ While members of the gay community welcomed the growing discussion and sympathy towards homosexuals, not everyone in Irish society welcomed this development. The wider recognition and discussion of homosexuality caused concern amongst opponents of homosexuality who feared its greater acceptance and toleration within Irish society.

Nicole E. Roberts has argued in the *Journal of Homosexuality*, that as visibility of homosexuals and their demands increased in San Francisco, so too did the voices of those opposed to homosexuality.⁸⁰⁸ In Ireland this was no different. In February 1980, the Irish

⁸⁰² *Irish Times*, ‘Order refused to ban ‘Late Late’ interview’, 14 September 1985.

⁸⁰³ *Irish Times*, ‘Order refused to ban ‘Late Late’ interview’, 1985.

⁸⁰⁴ *Irish Times*, ‘Lesbians appalled by curbs’, 17 September 1985. *Irish Times*, ‘RTÉ picketed over lesbian nuns’, 14 September 1985.

⁸⁰⁵ *Sunday Independent*, ‘Right to Reply – A word to Brenda from Gay’, 3 August 1975.

⁸⁰⁶ NLI, IQA, MS 45, 940/4 – ‘Summary of Telephone Reaction received on 9 February 1980.’

⁸⁰⁷ Unnamed woman to Garret Fitzgerald, *Irish Times*, 15 February 1982.

⁸⁰⁸ Nicole E. Roberts, ‘The Plight of Gay Visibility: Intolerance in San Francisco, 1970-1979’, in *Journal of Homosexuality*, Vol. 60, No. 1, 2013, 105-119.

Catholic hierarchy, recognising the growing discussion on homosexuality in Ireland, included a section on homosexuality in *Conscience and Morality*, a doctrinal statement of the Irish Episcopal conference. In it they reasserted for Ireland's Catholic community the Church's belief that homosexual acts were morally evil, and no motives or circumstances could change their nature.⁸⁰⁹ Later that same year, Mary Kennedy, secretary of the Irish Family League wrote to the *Irish Press* condemning homosexuality as a threat to society and any ideas of making it acceptable as criminal. In her letter Kennedy noted that 'It is becoming popular to picture homosexuality as an attractive alternative life-style.'⁸¹⁰

One of the most virulent attacks on homosexuals and the gay rights movement, however, appeared with the publication of an article on gay rights in *Our Family* in 1984. Thomas McFadden, editor of *Our Family*, described the publication as one dedicated to the new traditional family, which he characterised as 'a husband and wife actively working at their marriage and deeply interested in passing on to their children the knowledge and values, strengths of character and life priorities they themselves acquired in the Christian social and moral climate which prevailed in earlier times.'⁸¹¹ In its first edition, *Our Family* described AIDS as the gay plague and condemned the greater demand in Ireland for gay rights. This was something the author maintained received a warm reception within the Irish media. Citing statistics from the USA, the author argued that the average homosexual had 500 partners, with 30% having almost 1000, something which made homosexuals a threat to the very fabric of society. This demand for new partners, they noted, could only be met through the 'seduction or the rape of the young'⁸¹². Dismissing claims that homosexuals were born homosexuals, the article insisted that it was the result of 'false education and the lack of normal sexual development from habit, from bad example, or from other similar causes. This is not incurable.'⁸¹³ Credence was lent to McFadden's utterances by the Catholic Church in 1985 with the publication of *Love is for Life* which condemned homosexual acts outright. Drawing attention to what they considered the 'vigorous campaign in recent years to vindicate the rights of the homosexual community', the Bishops insisted that 'unfortunately, however, this campaign often claims for homosexual acts complete social, legal and moral parity with heterosexual acts. Such a campaign damages the homosexual community. It encourages others

⁸⁰⁹ <http://www.catholicbishops.ie/wp-content/uploads/images/docs/conscience%20and%20morality.pdf> *Conference and Morality: A Doctrinal Statement of the Irish Episcopal Conference*. Accessed on 13 December 2016.

⁸¹⁰ *Irish Press*, 21 October 1980.

⁸¹¹ NLI, IR 2805 o 13, *Our Family*, Vol. 1, No. 1, March-April 1984, 'Gay Rights? Why not.'

⁸¹² NLI, IR 2805 o 13, *Our Family*, Vol. 1, No. 1.

⁸¹³ NLI, IR 2805 o 13, *Our Family*, Vol. 1, No. 1.

whose sexuality is not exclusively or irreversibly homosexual, to indulge in homosexual acts and habits.’⁸¹⁴

Even members of non-Christian organisations expressed their unease and discomfort with the greater visibility and awareness of a gay community and gay movement in Ireland. For example, during the 1982 Annual Conference of the Garda Representative Association, its General Secretary, Jack Marrinan, curiously linked the increase in the crime rate with the demands by gay activists for civil rights, rights he claimed would have been unthinkable until recently.⁸¹⁵ According to the *Irish Times*, Mr. Marrinan claimed that ‘there are lobbies demanding rights to all sorts of unwholesome behaviour but too few talking about duties, he said in reference to homosexuals and those in favour of abortion.’⁸¹⁶

Whereas, in previous years this and other comments, (as evidenced by Dr. Austin Darragh’s comments in 1973), would have gone publicly unchallenged, since 1974, this was no longer the case. In fact, the gay movement kept abreast of any comment, positive or negative on homosexuality, and were quick to respond and to try to undermine the credibility of those who criticised homosexuals or sought to maintain the de facto position of oppressing and demonising them. A regular feature of *Out* magazine, for example, which demonstrated this was, ‘It must be true: It’s all in the Papers.’ In this section, *Out*, responded to comments on homosexuality which appeared in Irish nationals and provided a gay rights perspective. The extent to which gay activists followed such comments was evident in the range of newspapers which were covered. *Out*’s fourth edition of ‘It must be true: It’s all in the Papers, responded to 9 media outlets, including, *The Western People*, *Evening Press*, the *Evening Herald* and *Morning Ireland*.⁸¹⁷

Following Mr Marrinan’s comments, he fell victim to the newfound confidence amongst gay individuals to speak out against their oppression and discrimination. The IGRM, for example, issued a public statement in which they sought to distance Marrinan from his colleagues within the Garda Síochána. Along with highlighting that there had been no increase in the number of prosecutions for homosexuals acts in recent years, but rather a decline, the IGRM noted its ‘excellent relations with the Garda authorities both in Dublin and in other locations where our branches operate. The attitude of ordinary Gardaí and senior officers alike with whom we have had dealings stand in stark contrast to the attitude adopted by Mr. Marrinan

⁸¹⁴ NLI, 1A 2099, *Love is for Life*, Irish Bishops Pastoral, 1985.

⁸¹⁵ *Irish Times*, ‘Claim for gay rights attacked’, 3 April 1982.

⁸¹⁶ *Irish Times*, ‘Claim for gay rights attacked’, 1982.

⁸¹⁷ NLI, IR 369 0 7, *Out*, Issue 4, 1985, ‘It must be true: It’s all in the Papers.’

last weekend and makes his comments even less credible.⁸¹⁸ The *Irish Times* also carried a response from the NGF, who noted that ‘countries where gay rights have been recognised do not seem to have experienced problems vis-à-vis the crime rate. Mr. Marrinan was not reported as offering any scientific basis for the statement and one wonders if in his usual work he arrives at a conclusion first and then tries to justify it.’⁸¹⁹

Public denouncements and letters were a common strategy used by the gay movement to respond to these incidents. Previously, in the winter of 1980, this was a strategy also adopted to criticise Cardinal Tomas O’Fiaich. On the heels of Jeffrey Dudgeon’s legal case against the British government over laws criminalising sexual activity between males in Northern Ireland, it came to the attention of the NGF that earlier attempts to introduce law reform in Northern Ireland had been dropped following protestations by Cardinal Tomas O’Fiaich and the Rev. Ian Paisley [Save Ulster from Sodomy]. To the annoyance of gay activists in Ireland, the letter sent by O’Fiaich to the British government had not been disclosed to the wider public. While condemning Ian Paisley’s actions on this matter, the NGF nevertheless respected his decision to make his views known publicly, in comparison with Cardinal O’Fiaich who kept his own views private through this letter. At a time when the hierarchy of the Catholic Church refused to engage in dialogue with the gay movement around the issue of legal reform, this letter sent from one of the highest members of the Catholic Church in Ireland was seen as an opportunity to garner some insight into the Church’s reasons for opposing civil law reform.

With the Cardinal’s refusal to make a copy of his letter available to the public, the NGF sought to put pressure on him by issuing an open letter, much to his displeasure, which was sent to the main national newspapers in Ireland with the following message, ‘We would be most grateful if you would ensure maximum publicity for its content.’⁸²⁰ The letter dated 20 September 1980 damned the Cardinal and used the ongoing tensions and precarious situation in the North of Ireland to undermine his position and credibility. The letter was filled with words such as *discrimination*, *authoritarian*, *collusion*, *clandestine*, and *violation*. For example, in one sentence the NGF declared that ‘we find it both surprising and regrettable that Your Eminence should apparently join forces with the Rev. Paisley in a policy of collusion with the British Government, in the maintenance of a system of discrimination.’⁸²¹ In what was perhaps the most damaging accusation, the NGF claimed the Cardinal’s actions affected more than just the gay population:

⁸¹⁸ NLI, 1K 2139, *In Touch: Newsletter of the Irish Gay Rights Movement*, Vol. 4, Issue 15.

⁸¹⁹ *Irish Times*, ‘Garda Leader attacked for remark on gays’, 5 April 1982.

⁸²⁰ NLI, IQA, MS 45, 954/1 – Open letter to Cardinal Tomas O’ Fiaich, 20 September 1980.

⁸²¹ NLI, IQA, MS 45, 954/1 – Open letter to Cardinal Tomas O’ Fiaich, 1980.

It is a source of great pain and bewilderment to us that the Roman Catholic Church in Ireland should have supported the British Government in what is now officially recognised as a violation of the fundamental human rights of Irish people. We also believe that the revelation of the operation of this kind of diplomatic intrigue on the part of the Hierarchy will further widen the gap between the different communities in our island by seeming to confirm the view that the Roman Catholic Church, despite lip service to the ideals of human freedom and the dignity of the individual, in fact shows scant respect for the claims of individual conscience and the rights of minorities.

This paragraph is significant for two reasons. Firstly, there can be no doubt that the NGF were using the old fears of ‘Home Rule is Rome Rule’ to incite a level of fear amongst the non-Catholic population in Ireland, particularly at a time when relations between the two communities in Northern Ireland were so poor. Secondly, only two years before the Irish government had won a case against the UK government over its inhuman treatment of Irish prisoners. At that time, the ECHR had found the British government to be in violation of Article 3 of the European Convention on Human Rights.⁸²² The language that linked the Cardinal to the British government, in denying fundamental rights to yet another cohort of Irish people, harked back to this judgement.

In a further attempt to undermine O’Fiaich’s position, the NGF presented evidence in their letter demonstrating the extent of which O’Fiaich’s actions represented a considerable shift in the Church’s position regarding the separation of church and state in respect to civil legislation. This was similar to what the IGRM had sought to do with Mr. Marrinan, presenting him as being out of step with his peers. The NGF cited a letter it had received from Cardinal Conway that stated that the ‘law of the State on this matter [homosexuality], is essentially a matter for the civil legislators and their judgement as to its relevance to the common good.’⁸²³ Through his interference, the NGF argued, O’Fiaich had not respected this Church approach to civil legislation. If O’Fiaich had hoped that his position and the place of the Roman Catholic Church in Irish society protected him from the media reporting on the letter, then he was mistaken. Both the *Irish Press* and the *Irish Times* printed articles on the letter and reported much of its content.

While this incident may well have contributed greatly to widening the gap between the gay movement and the hierarchy of the Catholic Church it, nevertheless, demonstrated the extent to which the gay movement was not afraid to take on a powerful institution in the media, such as the Catholic Church. It was this fearlessness which allowed them to condemn *Love is*

⁸²² <http://www.hrcr.org/safrica/dignity/Ireland.html> Ireland v. United Kingdom, (5310/71) [1978] ECHR 1 (18 January 1978). Accessed on 16 November 2016.

⁸²³ NLI, IQA, MS 45, 954/1 – Diocesan Secretary of Archdiocese of Armagh to James Malone, IGRM, 21 September 1976.

for Life in 1985, describing the document as audacious and hypocritical. According to the *Irish Times*, the NGF called on Irish bishops to ‘take a leaf from some of the more mature and responsible clergy and help eliminate injustices and prejudice towards homosexuals.’⁸²⁴

Although the media was covering the issue of homosexuality and gay liberation in much more depth than in previous years, they themselves were also not immune to criticism from the gay community. Through the letters to the editor’s section of newspapers, gay and lesbian individuals sought to confront anti-gay sentiment. For example, in the winter of 1975 the desire of some provincial individuals to confront flippant comments on homosexuality within their own region was made abundantly clear to the editors of the *Longford Leader* when it printed, what it perceived to be, a seemingly ‘harmless’ column on 3 October 1975 noting that:

The Gay Rights Association (homosexuals) are really getting on the ball these days. Wonder will it ever catch on in Ireland where queers are still frowned upon. Is it natural? Should they be allowed to practise their relationships? What do you readers out there think?

This rather innocuous statement, as the *Longford Leader* would have it, is noteworthy for two reasons. Firstly, it demonstrates the success of gay and lesbian activists in making gay rights topical in provincial regions, such as Longford, where the *Longford Leader* felt it necessary to comment. Secondly, it is clear from the debate that followed that in giving what they considered to be a ‘tongue in cheek’ mention to the IGRM that those in the *Longford Leader* did not envisage the barrage of criticism it subsequently received.⁸²⁵ While the paper believed it was doing a service to the gay movement by advertising its existence (The IGRM did in fact thank them for doing so), those who sent in numerous complaints saw things otherwise and took particular exception to the description of homosexuals as *queer*. The *Longford Leader* defended its use of ‘queer’ since it was the common everyday term used to describe such individuals.⁸²⁶ This may well have been true, but in 1975 gay individuals were no longer willing to tolerate what they considered to be derogatory terms to describe them.

The irony of this situation for the *Longford Leader* was that, although it recognised that the gay rights association was ‘really getting on the ball’, its authors failed to appreciate what this actually meant for them; that they could no longer get away with using their accustomed derogatory terms to describe homosexuals without facing the wrath of the so-called ‘on the

⁸²⁴ *Irish Times*, ‘Gay Group Attacks Bishops’, 6 March 1985.

⁸²⁵ *Longford Leader*, 3 October 1975.

⁸²⁶ *Longford Leader*, 10 October 1975.

ball' gay movement. Throughout October, November, and even into December 1975, the *Longford Leader* received a high volume of letters condemning their actions, (some defended them). The sheer number took them so much by surprise it led one journalist to remark, 'So we thought there were no homosexuals in Longford. The place it seems is crawling with them.'⁸²⁷

Individuals such as Paddy Horan, another from 'One of Longford's many gays,' 'Gay and Proud', 'Gay Christian', 'North Longford', along with the IGRM itself, all criticised the use of the word *queer* and the ignorance surrounding homosexuality. In his contribution, Paddy Horan, who did not disclose whether he himself was homosexual, argued that 'the first lesson one must learn in trying to understand the position of some of our fellow men is that they are not abnormal or queer as you put it, but quite the opposite. They are just ordinary, everyday people who live, work and worry the same as everyone else.'⁸²⁸ In another letter printed on 26 December (It is worth bearing in mind the original queer comment was printed on 3 October), the author explained that homosexuals desired 'nothing more of society than the opportunity to behave in our own way as heterosexuals behave in theirs. The basic difference in homosexuality and heterosexuality lies in the bed and what happens in my private bedroom with a consenting adult, regardless of sex, colour or creed is nobody's business.'⁸²⁹

The *Longford Leader* did not apologise for using the term queer, and maintained that homosexuality was an unusual habit and that it had not broken any codes of journalistic best practise by using the word queer.⁸³⁰ However, in what can only be described as a significant climb-down by the *Longford Leader* and a sign of the importance in confronting such flippancy in the media, the *Longford Leader* agreed on 14 November 1975 that, since gay individuals did not like the term queer, they would drop it.⁸³¹ Their adoption of the word gay was also significant as this was a word homosexual individuals chose for themselves.

For all intents and purposes, the *Longford Leader* kept good to this statement. In 1978 it accepted an advertisement from the IGRM, which listed its services, demands for tolerance of homosexuals in Irish society, the removal of the laws criminalising sexual activity between males and even printed the address of the organisation itself.⁸³² Only two months previously, in January 1978, a sympathetic article on homosexuals had appeared in the paper, in which Anne Sweeney discussed the hardship of being homosexual in Ireland and drew her reader's attention to the fact that internationally homosexuality was not stigmatised as a disease, arguing

⁸²⁷ *Longford Leader*, 10 October 1975.

⁸²⁸ *Longford Leader*, 10 October 1975.

⁸²⁹ *Longford Leader*, 26 December 1975.

⁸³⁰ *Longford Leader*, 24 October 1975.

⁸³¹ *Longford Leader*, 14 November 1975.

⁸³² *Longford Leader*, 'The Gay Truth', 10 March 1978.

that, ‘one is born that way; it is genetically and environmentally determined.’⁸³³ Sweeney ended her article, in much the same way that Cathal O’Shannon had done in his documentary, by asserting that ‘the sooner Irish society cop on to the homosexual plight and realise that they are Christians too, the better. For far too long those people have lived dog’s lives and being subjected to slander and misunderstanding by intelligent sane people.’⁸³⁴ Even at this early stage in Longford, it might be conceivable to suggest that attitudes towards homosexuals were beginning to change in the direction of greater tolerance.

Similar incidents occurred throughout the 1980s and most encouragingly for those in the gay and lesbian movement, those writing to challenge the negative comments were not restricted to the gay community. In 1982, Patrick Conn writing for the *Southern Star* took the Kincora Boys Scandal as an opportunity to condemn homosexuality and the liberalisation of Irish laws.⁸³⁵ Conflating homosexuality with paedophilia, Conn stated that ‘this extension of legal acceptance to abnormal homosexual practices may well sound the death knell to cross border unity talks. For already Gay Rights in the Republic is mounting a case to be granted the same legal freedom as that imposed on the North.’⁸³⁶ Conn issued a warning to the Irish government not to follow dictates with regards homosexuality from ‘Euro-agnostics’, insisting such a move would lead to a ‘national campaign to be quit of the EEC and its loose moral stance.’⁸³⁷ Responding to this article, Ralph Doak confronted Conn’s conflation of homosexuality and paedophilia by pointing out that ‘paedophilic pederasty is no less of an anathema to most homosexuals than Mr. Conn suggests ‘buggery’ is to the population of the Republic.’⁸³⁸ Doak went on to argue that ‘the key phrase in U.K. law concerning ‘relations’ between male homosexuals is ‘consenting adults’.’⁸³⁹ He further maintained that ‘the ‘corruption of minors’ is not only still illegal under U.K. law but also unlikely to be made legal no matter what the dictat of any European Court may be to the contrary.’⁸⁴⁰ One year later a similar incident occurred in the *Irish Farmers Journal*. While the topic of the article was on whether parents can be trusted or not, a line appeared which stated that ‘Imagine then the

⁸³³ Anne Sweeney, ‘The not so ‘Gay’ one in ten!, *Longford Leader*, 6 January 1978.

⁸³⁴ ‘The not so ‘Gay’ one in ten!, *Longford Leader*, 1978.

⁸³⁵ Kincora was a home for young boys aged 15-18. In the 1980s allegations of child sexual abuse and its attempted cover-up were widely reported in the British and Irish media. For more information see <http://www.bbc.com/news/uk-northern-ireland-36413745/> <https://www.rte.ie/news/ireland/2017/0120/846491-kincora>

⁸³⁶ *Southern Star*, ‘The Kincora Scandal’, 13 March 1982.

⁸³⁷ *Southern Star*, ‘The Kincora Scandal’, 1982.

⁸³⁸ *Southern Star*, ‘Prejudice or reason?’, 3 April 1982.

⁸³⁹ *Southern Star*, ‘Prejudice or reason?’, 1982.

⁸⁴⁰ *Southern Star*, ‘Prejudice or reason?’, 1982.

anguish parents go through when they find that the secrets are not childish but are deeply serious. How awful to find that your son is a homosexual, [...].⁸⁴¹ While the author obviously deemed such a revelation to be terrible, one ‘non-gay’ reader of the *Farmer’s Journal*, who may well have been a father of a homosexual, took exception to this statement. In his letter to the editor, Graham criticised the article insisting that ‘here is one non-gay who does not share your AWFUL opinion about finding some member of the family is a homosexual – a person needing more caring, more charity yes, and certainly not a child who makes us feel awful.’⁸⁴²

‘It was National Gay Week on the Gaybo Show as the populace addressed themselves to the topic of homosexuality.’⁸⁴³

The extent to which gay and lesbian individuals had succeeded in making their voices heard and newsworthy was evident as the 1980s drew to a close. It was no longer possible to make flippant remarks without a vocal reaction by the gay movement, which was, more often than not, covered extensively in the mainstream media. Whereas, previously the anger had been confined primarily to articles in gay magazines or press statements, now detailed articles were appearing in the mainstream media. This new reality was made abundantly clear to Jon Bon Jovi and the Archbishop of Dublin, Desmond Connell, in 1990. Speaking at a concert in Dublin, Bon Jovi had referred to homosexuals as faggots, leading to considerable criticism from gay rights activists. As a result, he felt it necessary to issue a public apology to Ireland’s gay and lesbian citizens.⁸⁴⁴

More significantly, however, only a few days after Jon Bon Jovi’s comments, the Archbishop of Dublin Desmond Connell found himself in the midst of a public furore following comments he made in an interview with the *Sunday Tribune*, in which he stated his belief that homosexuality was a disorder.⁸⁴⁵ The fact that Archbishop Connell was even discussing the issue of homosexuality is representative of the greater debate which had emerged on homosexuality since the 1970s in Ireland. It also suggests that he felt it necessary to publicly state that homosexuality was a disorder, in an attempt to counteract the rhetoric of the gay movement. The comments led to such a heated debate, that the *Sunday Independent* remarked that ‘it was National Gay Week on the Gaybo Show, as the populace addressed themselves to the topic of homosexuality in the light of Archbishop Connell’s curious theory that gay people

⁸⁴¹ *Irish Farmers Journal*, ‘Can Parents be trusted’, 28 May 1983.

⁸⁴² *Irish Farmers Journal*, ‘Can Parents be trusted’, 1983.

⁸⁴³ *Sunday Independent*, ‘Good to be Gay – if you’re Byrne’, 21 January 1990.

⁸⁴⁴ *Irish Press*, 11 January 1990.

⁸⁴⁵ *Sunday Tribune*, 14 January 1990.

are victims of a disorder. Perhaps from now on, at five minutes to eleven, the proprietors of gay bars will announce ‘last disorders now, ladies and gents please.’⁸⁴⁶ It is not all that difficult to decipher with whom the sympathy of the *Sunday Independent* lay.

While much of the media focused on the Archbishop’s comment, it is striking to note how much coverage the media gave to supportive voices of the gay liberation movement to counteract the Archbishop’s remarks. In other words, the Archbishop’s comment produced a counter-discourse that was highly pro-gay and thus evoked the opposite reaction than it had intended. By making the comment the Archbishop created a situation where gay rights activists and their allies could have full media exposure to reply. For example, both the *Irish Independent* and *Irish Times* allowed David Norris to print a full response to the Archbishop’s comment. In his *Irish Independent* article Norris did not hold back on his criticism, calling into question the Archbishop’s expert competence and describing his opinions as discriminatory and misinformed.⁸⁴⁷ Citing the World Health Organisation, Norris drew attention to its characterisation of homosexuality as an ‘alternative view on sexuality rather than a disorder.’⁸⁴⁸ Supporting much of what Norris stated Tom Cooney, chairman of the Irish Council for Civil Liberties, lambasted Archbishop Connell, describing his remarks as ‘irrational, anti-homosexual and indefensible.’⁸⁴⁹ In an interview with Kathryn Holmquist on the topic, Professor Anthony Clare, Clinical Professor of Psychiatry at Trinity College Dublin, reaffirmed much of what those in the gay movement had been saying about homosexuality since the early 1970s, highlighting that:

the main reason homosexuals sought psychiatric treatment was not because of any intrinsic disorder, but because of the symptoms they developed in their attempts to come to terms with homosexuality in a hostile and antagonistic society [...] In the absence of social ostracism and persecution, there is little to suggest that homosexuals cannot enjoy the same levels of personal satisfaction and social cohesion as those enjoyed by their heterosexual counterparts.⁸⁵⁰

In a rather blunt comment on the matter, Declan Lynch, in the *Sunday Independent*, argued that ‘The most unique thing about gay people is that they are neither better or worse than anyone else, but that they have to put with much more nonsense than is their due.’⁸⁵¹

Whether the Archbishop expected such a fracas to ensue is unclear. However, there can be no doubt that the controversy caused some unease within the diocese. It resulted in the

⁸⁴⁶ *Sunday Independent*, ‘Good to be Gay – if you’re Byrne’, 21 January 1990.

⁸⁴⁷ *Irish Independent*, 20 January 1990.

⁸⁴⁸ *Irish Independent*, 20 January 1990.

⁸⁴⁹ *Irish Times*, Tom Cooney, ‘Calling a halt to discrimination’, 20 January 1990.

⁸⁵⁰ *Irish Times*, ‘Why are we so intolerant to difference?’, 20 January 1990.

⁸⁵¹ *Sunday Independent*, ‘Good to be Gay – If you’re Byrne’, 21 January 1990.

director of the Catholic Press and Information Office, Jim Cantwell, issuing a statement to try ease some of the tension by clarifying that the Archbishop ‘in no way implied a criticism or rejection of people with that orientation. It was quite the contrary. In fact, the Archbishop is exploring ways in which the pastoral care of homosexual people can be improved in the diocese.’⁸⁵² To many this may be viewed as somewhat of a stepdown, or attempt to soften the Archbishop’s original comments, lest the outcry worsen. It was extraordinary that such a powerful institution such as the Roman Catholic Church would even feel the need to issue such a statement in the first place, particularly one related to homosexuals.

The significance of the reaction to the Archbishop’s comments lies in the fact that there was such a strong public reaction in the first place. If we contrast the reaction to Archbishop Desmond Connell’s comments in 1990 with those of Dr Austin Darragh in 1973, it is striking to note that despite the similarity of both comments [illness 1973, disorder 1990], there was no public outcry or strong criticism over Dr. Darragh’s comments. Why? In 1973 there had been nobody willing to speak out or to publicly challenge such rhetoric. However, from the mid-1970s this was no longer the case. Since then individuals within the gay movement had successfully challenged such negative rhetoric. They promoted their own positive narrative about homosexuality, which many outside the gay community took on board. Their success in making their views noteworthy and acceptable to many is reflected in the interest shown by the media, who were willing to give them a voice in their newspapers to strongly challenge Archbishop Connell’s comments.

Conclusion

This chapter explored the efforts of gay and lesbian individuals to promote a better understanding of homosexuality throughout Irish society. In doing so gay and lesbian activists bravely appeared in public to offer an alternative account of homosexuality, one which was more positive and less threatening to the accustomed image in Irish society. At the heart of their attempts was the desire to present homosexuals, not as individuals completely different to the rest of society, but rather quite the same as the rest of society, except that they were simply attracted to members of the same sex. Homosexuality, they maintained, was something congenital and therefore they should not be persecuted because of it. The image presented by homosexuals in the media was a ‘respectable’ image, one which many in Irish society could relate to. They did not appear to look, act or dress very differently to mainstream society. Nor did those appearing want to come across different. In fact, on one occasion, David Norris took

⁸⁵² *Irish Independent*, ‘Church rebuff to gays denied’, 19 January 1990.

exception to an edition of *Out* which had images of men dressed up as women. Norris argued that since *Out* was ‘one of the very few positive points of contact between the gay community and the rest of the population it is vital that nothing should be done to confirm negative stereotypes. [...] I find it very disappointing that a constellation of articles and photographs appeared to give the impression that cross-dressing was an essential part of the gay lifestyle.’⁸⁵³ Through television, printed media, personal accounts, press releases, protests and the courtroom, gay and lesbian activists brought a new respectable narrative on homosexuality into mainstream society in Ireland. This was an image Irish society could tolerate.

Crucially, as we have seen, these efforts did succeed in winning over many to cause of gay rights, who in turn, felt compelled to challenge what they perceived to be negative comments on homosexuality. Much like Irish feminists, who had forced Irish society to recognise the existence of unmarried mothers, along with their demands for access to contraception, and equal treatment in Irish society, gay and lesbian individuals also forced society to recognise the existence of a minority, who for decades had been invisible and characterised as deviant sick criminals. This recognition, as we have seen, was not met too fondly by opponents of homosexuality who condemned what they considered the ‘vigorous campaign for gay rights.’ I maintain that despite their numbers and the conservative cultural climate of the 1980s, gay and lesbian activists utilised their resources successfully to ensure that a public discussion on homosexuality did emerge. In turn, this provided the platform for homosexuals to argue for their rights as Irish citizens.

⁸⁵³ NLI, IR 369 0 7, *Out*, Issue 8, 1986, ‘It must be true: It’s all in the Papers.’

Chapter 6 - ‘Our Patriotic Duty’: forging alliances for gay rights in Ireland

In November 2015 attempts to introduce same-sex marriage in Northern Ireland, 34 years after Jeffrey Dudgeon won his case at the European Court of Human Rights, failed following opposition from the Democratic Unionist Party.⁸⁵⁴ Three years later same-sex marriage is still not available in Northern Ireland. This situation demonstrates the extent to which a legal victory at the European Court of Human Rights does not *alone* guarantee the introduction, nor the continuation of progressive legislation, or more crucially, the changing of perceptions about homosexuality in societies. Rather, change depends on the ability of lesbian and gay activists, as part of a broad movement, to win over support for greater equality and tolerance for homosexual citizens. In the Republic of Ireland gay and lesbian activists, in the different gay and lesbian organisations throughout Ireland, actively sought to garner support for gay rights from outside the narrow confines of their movement and the courtroom. They saw that the movement for gay rights had to include a broad collective of groups, both inside and outside the gay and lesbian movement.

At the core of gay and lesbian activists’ efforts was an attempt to present gay rights not as unique or special rights, but rather as basic human rights comparable to those which heterosexuals enjoyed, but which were denied to homosexuals on the basis of their sexuality. This strategy allowed gay and lesbian activists to engage with other groups in Ireland, who were admittedly committed to the promotion of human rights. Activists also sought to incorporate Ireland’s decision to join the European Economic Community in 1973 into their arguments to pressure elected officials to end the discrimination of homosexuals. They asserted that doing so would not only improve the lives of homosexuals but would also crucially improve Ireland’s international reputation and standing within the EEC, which was moving in the direction of greater protections for homosexual citizens.⁸⁵⁵

With this in mind, this chapter explores the activities and rhetoric of gay rights activists, who attempted to open dialogue with other organisations in Ireland in the promotion of gay rights. In particular, this chapter focuses on the interaction with the Union of Students in

⁸⁵⁴ <http://www.bbc.com/news/uk-northern-ireland-politics-34692546> Same-sex marriage: Proposal wins assembly majority but fails over DUP block. Accessed on 1 February 2018.

⁸⁵⁵ An example of this is Recommendation 924 (1981) – Discrimination against homosexual. More information on this resolution can be found at the following link <http://assembly.coe.int/nw/xml/XRef/Xref-XML2HTML-en.asp?fileid=14958&lang=en> For Accessed on 6 December 2016.

Ireland, Irish Congress of Trade Unions, with international gay organisations, the Church of Ireland, Roman Catholic Church, and the Irish political class. Outside the courtroom where were the other centres where gay activists promoted their rights? What were the other arguments, not purely legal, that gay and lesbian activists promoted to make their case? How did they use discourses of human rights, oppression of minorities, workers' rights or Ireland's place in Europe to win support for gay and lesbian citizens?

These efforts were crucial in paving the way for a wider understanding and toleration of homosexuality in Ireland. They were instrumental in bringing groups outside the gay movement into the campaign for gay rights in Ireland, who even to this day, still advocate for the rights of the LGBTQ community. Only by moving away from viewing the courtroom as the only site where the rights of homosexuals were championed can we truly begin to understand the dramatic changes that have characterised the latter years of the twentieth century in Ireland for gay and lesbian citizens.

***'Denial of freedom for a specific section of the community makes us all less free, and as such should be firmly rejected.'**⁸⁵⁶*

In seeking to forge alliances with other groups in Ireland, gay and lesbian activists carefully adopted language which would appeal to potential allies, be that the student movement, trade union movement, or even the political class. In doing so, activists sought to highlight similarities in interests which existed between these groups and the gay movement, rather than the differences. While many in Ireland might have agreed with gay activists that the laws criminalising sexual activity between males were unjust, these laws did not affect the majority of people in the organisations gay activists sought alliances with. In this regard, they had very little incentive to become actively involved in a campaign to repeal them. Seeking to change this mind-set, activists focused not on the constitutionality of the laws, but instead, on how the situation gays and lesbians faced could represent dangers for wider society. In particular, they sought to emphasise the possibility of further state interference in the private lives of individuals, including that of heterosexuals. The primary intention of gay activists, therefore, was to relate their arguments to the audiences they addressed, and not necessarily to or exclusively about gay and lesbian individuals.

Central to these efforts was an attempt to convince society that the treatment of homosexuals had wider consequences for each individual's *personal freedom*. Where one is oppressed, all are oppressed. This was something gay rights activists sought to convey when

⁸⁵⁶ NLI, IQA, MS 45, 948/1 – USI Welfare Policy March 1981.

engaging with the student movement, a group that as Norris once remarked, constituted a minority just like homosexuals.⁸⁵⁷ Students in Ireland were represented by their respective college student unions who were affiliated to the Union of Students in Ireland (USI), a national all-island organisation representing the voices of students, both north and south of the border. According to a report in the *Irish Independent*, it was believed that almost 2,500 of the 47,000 students the USI represented at that time were homosexual.⁸⁵⁸

In a speech in 1977 to the USI's Annual Congress at Queen's University Belfast, Edmund Lynch sought to drive home the threat of state interference to student delegates. Lynch's speech titled, 'Aspects of Human Sexuality' was somewhat of a tour-de-force in laying out the evolution of discriminatory behaviour towards homosexuals over the centuries. It is clear from Lynch's speech that the gay movement was cognisant of events taking place, both inside and outside Ireland, and how they could be related to not only the gay movement, but also to other progressive groups in Ireland. Lynch contrasted the situation for homosexuals in Ireland with that of their neighbours in Europe, particularly England and Holland, where governments had amended discriminatory laws against homosexuals. In referring to homosexuals, Lynch described them as an 'oppressed sexual minority' who were denied basic civil rights.⁸⁵⁹ This was a minority he insisted who included students throughout Ireland who had to shoulder a heavy burden because of the social and religious prejudices they faced in Ireland. Particularly worrying for wider society, Lynch maintained, was what he described as the attempts by Ian Paisley and the Democratic Unionist Party to 'prevent civil rights in sexual matters in Northern Ireland.'⁸⁶⁰ Although Paisley's efforts were directed at attempts to prevent the introduction of homosexual law reform similar to that in England, Lynch argued that those efforts interfered with the privacy rights of the individual, noting that:

all dictatorships have discovered the psychological truth that one of the most efficient ways to subdue the individual is to interfere in his privacy by the imposition of rules and taboos on his sexual behaviour. [...] Let us make it quite clear to Mr. Paisley and his cohorts here in Northern Ireland and his like kind in the Republic that there is no place for any kind of dictatorship be it political or spiritual in a multi-dimensional society where both the gay and non-gay community can live and can exist in solidarity allowing

⁸⁵⁷ NLI, IQA, MS 45, 948/2 – Speech by David Norris to the Annual Conference of Union of Students in Ireland, 14 January 1978.

⁸⁵⁸ *Irish Independent*, 'USI Plea for Birth Law Change', 12 January 1974.

⁸⁵⁹ NLI, IQA, MS 45, 948/2 – Paper presented by Edmund Lynch to the conference 'Aspects of Human Sexuality, November 1977, Queen's University Belfast.

⁸⁶⁰ NLI, IQA, MS 45, 948/2 – Paper presented by Edmund Lynch to the conference 'Aspects of Human Sexuality, November 1977, Queen's University Belfast.

people to differ in their outlook, their mental attitudes and their values from the so-called norms of the majority.⁸⁶¹

Here, in Lynch's speech, the attempts to speak to a non-gay audience was evident. Rather than saying homosexual behaviour, instead, Lynch spoke of sexual behaviour, a much more open term, which could apply to any sort of sexual behaviour, either homosexual or heterosexual. Lynch's argument very much sought to utilise aspects of a speech he heard given by Terry Bruton at the 1973 Coleraine Conference on Sexual Freedom. In explaining why, the Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association supported gay rights, Bruton argued that 'internment meant in practice only a small number of actual internees but had implications for the whole of society. So, oppression of any minority implied something about the whole of society.'⁸⁶² As Lynch would have it, Paisley's efforts would have negative consequences for each individual's personal freedom, not just those of homosexuals.

David Norris had made similar comments in his speeches. For example, during a speech to the Dublin Rotary Club in 1977, Norris argued that 'one can either accept a pluralist society and treat the citizens as possessing certain basic individual rights, or one can as the Nazi's did, deliberately project a false sense of homogeneity by selecting scapegoats and ritually exterminating them.'⁸⁶³ This was a theme to which Norris returned to in his address to the USI Congress one year later in Wexford, insisting that 'when the government of a country perpetuates a legal system under which the privacy and integrity of the most personal aspects of human relationships are specifically and intentionally violated [...] then a situation obtains where the human dignity not only of the minority involved but of all citizens of the State is diminished.'⁸⁶⁴

There is a sense from both speeches that like Martin Niemöller's poem *First they came...* both activists sought to contextualise what exactly the situation for homosexuals might represent in the larger scale of individual freedom in Ireland. By ignoring the plight of homosexuals now heterosexuals might well facilitate greater interference in their own lives. For example, in a speech in University College Dublin in 1978, Norris warned students not to become complacent about social progress. Drawing attention to attempts by the Greek government to introduce anti-gay laws and the Briggs Initiative in California, Norris warned

⁸⁶¹ NLI, IQA, MS 45, 948/2 – Paper presented by Edmund Lynch to the conference 'Aspects of Human Sexuality, November 1977, Queen's University Belfast.

⁸⁶² NLI, IQA, MS 45, 948/2, Report on Coleraine Conference on Sexual Reform.

⁸⁶³ NLI, IQA, MS 45, 951/6 – Text of Speech by David Norris of IGRM to Dublin Rotary Club luncheon, 7 March 1977.

⁸⁶⁴ NLI, IQA MS 45, 948/2 – David Norris speech at the Annual Conference of USI, 14 January 1978.

that ‘in the face of such hostility it was more than ever necessary for those committed to the concept of human and civil rights for all peoples to understand that all forms of oppression, whether social, political or sexual, are equally vicious and ought to be opposed.’⁸⁶⁵ Norris and Lynch’s reference to ‘dictatorship’ and ‘Nazi’ was a common strategy adopted by gay activists internationally. In New York and California gay rights organisations had also adopted this rhetoric to oppose anti-homosexual legislation. According to Tina Fetner, gay activists opposed to Proposition 6, often referred to as the Briggs Initiative, distributed leaflets arguing that:

A collection of conservative groups – commonly called the New Right – are attempting to channel the anger and frustration millions of Americans are feeling about high taxes, unemployment, housing costs, the crisis within the family and the deterioration of the school system into attacks on the rights of minorities, women, public employees, the labor movement and gay people. This kind of scapegoating is similar to what took place in Nazi Germany.⁸⁶⁶

‘Gay rights are not extravagant demands. Gay rights are human rights!’⁸⁶⁷

As was evident in both speeches by Norris and Lynch they were eager to present homosexuals as an oppressed *minority*, rather than as deviant sexual *individuals*. In doing so gay activists often argued that homosexuals were one of the largest unrecognised oppressed minority groupings in Ireland. A common refrain from gay activists was that there were more homosexuals in the Republic of Ireland than there were religious minorities.⁸⁶⁸ During Dáil questions in 1977 Dr. Noel Browne, one of only a handful of elected officials to actually speak out against the oppression of homosexuals, argued that a conservative estimate put the number of homosexuals in Ireland at about 200,000, a significant minority he put it to the then Minister for Justice Gerry Collins.⁸⁶⁹ Presenting homosexuals as a social minority (rather than as unconnected individuals) allowed gay and lesbian activists to argue for civil or social rights. On International Human Rights Day 1981, the NGF issued a press release drawing attention to what it argued were the ‘continuing technical violations of the human rights of those Irish citizens who happen to be homosexual.’⁸⁷⁰

⁸⁶⁵ NLI, IQA, MS 45, 969/1 – Campaign for Homosexual Law Reform Press Release, 28 October 1978.

⁸⁶⁶ Tina Fetner, ‘Working Anita Bryant: The Impact of Christian Anti-Gay Activism on Lesbian and Gay Movement Claims’, in *Social Problems*, Vol. 48, No. 3, 411-428.

⁸⁶⁷ NLI, IQA, MS 45, 948/1 – *USI News*, Vol. 10, No. 2, November 1980 – Gay Rights Case for Europe?

⁸⁶⁸ NLI, IQA, MS 45, 955/2 – Gay Pride Week 22-29 June – Gay Rights: It’s Time.

⁸⁶⁹ Dáil Éireann Debates, Vol. 302. No. 8, 13 December 1977 – Homosexuality Laws.

⁸⁷⁰ NLI, IQA, MS 45, 969/4 – NGF Press Release, International Human Rights Day 1981.

While the gay and lesbian movement called for ‘Gay Rights’ it actively denied that these rights were somehow special rights to privilege a minority grouping. They were instead human rights. Nevertheless, others in society may not have understood completely what exactly gay rights meant. In an article in the *USI News*, the NGF explained to readers that ‘if you believe homosexual individuals should have human rights, such as the right to dignity, the right to privacy, the right to control over their body [...] then you believe in the same rights gay people are demanding. Gay rights are not extravagant demands, they are human rights.’⁸⁷¹ This mantra became a common feature of the gay movement through advertisements and press releases throughout the 1980s. *In Dublin*, for example, frequently featured an advertisement from the NGF which characterised gay rights as human rights.⁸⁷² (Figure 8) The advertisement argued that ‘each person in our society is entitled to these basic rights’, including ‘the right to dignity’, ‘the right to privacy’ and ‘the right to control over her/his body, providing it does not interfere with the rights of others.’⁸⁷³ During Cork gay pride celebrations in 1981 the Cork Gay Collective, Cork IGRM and University College Cork Gay Society, handed out leaflets which similarly declared gay rights to be human rights, noting that ‘gay men and lesbian women are now organising and demand the rights they deserve in dignity as human beings and Irish citizens.’⁸⁷⁴ (Figure 9)

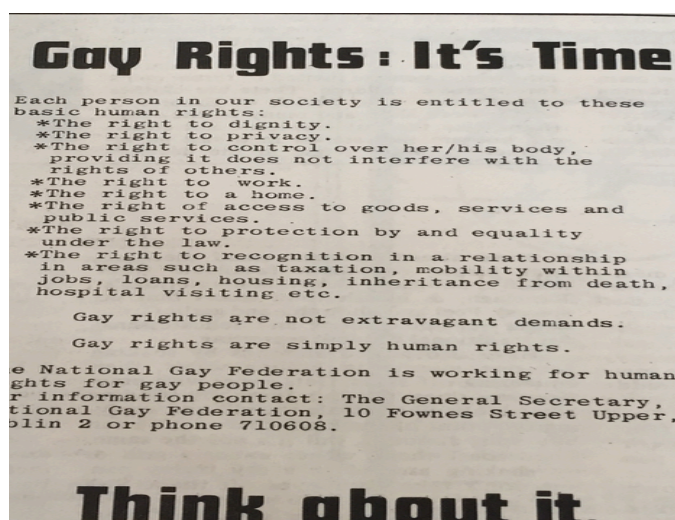


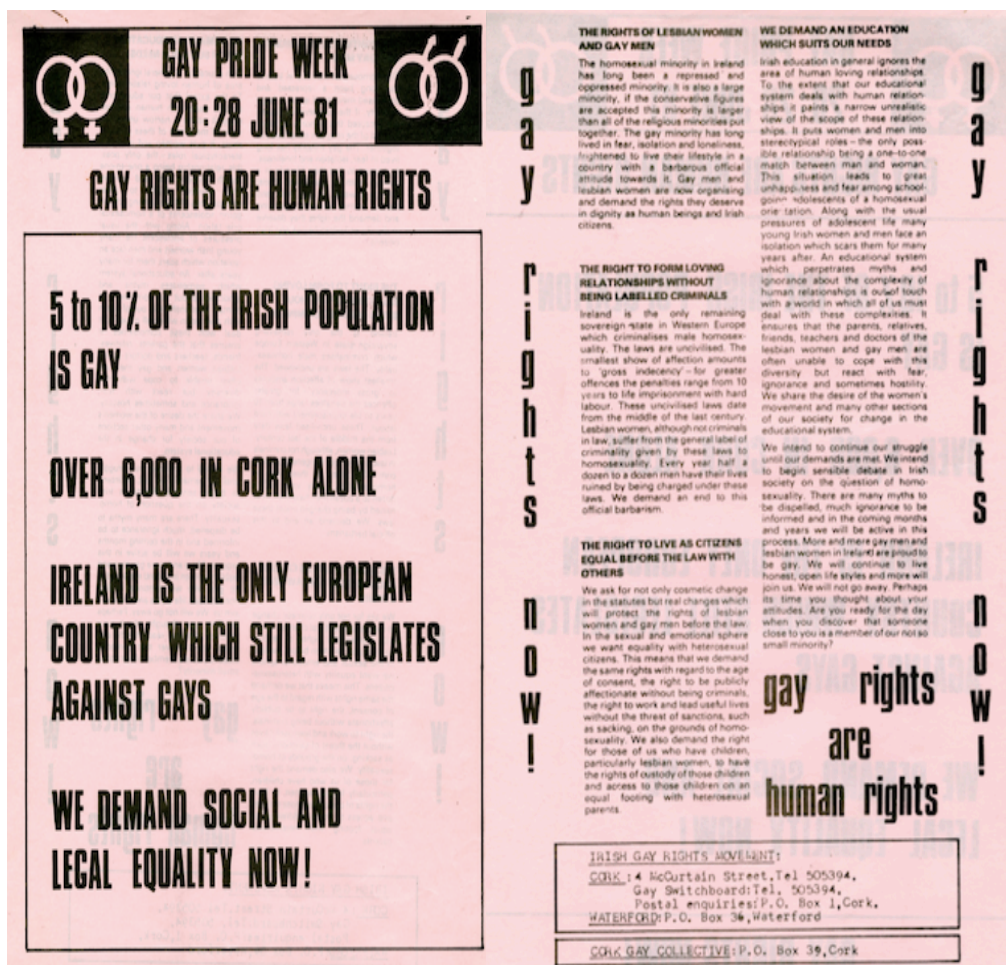
Figure 9. *In Dublin*, 13th-26th June 1980 - National Gay Federation advertisement.

⁸⁷¹ NLI, IQA, MS 45, 948/1 – *USI News*, Vol. 10, No. 2, November 1980 – Gay Rights Case for Europe?

⁸⁷² NLI, IR 94133 I 2, *In Dublin*, 13-26 June 1980.

⁸⁷³ NLI, IR 94133 I 2, *In Dublin*, 13-26 June 1980.

⁸⁷⁴ Irish Gay Rights Movement Cork, 1975- et al., ‘1980s Gay Rights Now Leaflet,’ *Cork LGBT Archive*. Accessed 24 April 2017, <http://corklgbtarchive.com/items/show/73>



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Figure 10. Leaflets distributed by Cork Gay Collective, Cork IGRM and University College Cork Gay Society during Gay Pride 1981.

It was this assertion, that gay rights were human rights, that led Hubert Mannion (University College Dublin Students' Union), to write into the *Irish Press* in July 1982 condemning two articles by Reverend Professor Denis O'Callaghan on homosexuality. In a strong defence of gay individuals, Mannion argued that 'since the students' union has a positive policy on gay people and represents approximately 500 gay students, I, as welfare officer feel bound to comment on this article.'⁸⁷⁶ Mannion clearly supported the rhetoric of the gay rights movement, arguing that 'gay people are the last minority which can be attacked and victimised with impunity. It says a great deal about the Catholic Church which received its emancipation in 1828 that in 1982 it is doing all in its power to prevent a minority in the community from being

⁸⁷⁵ 1981 Cork Gay Pride Week Poster / Leaflet, *Cork LGBT Archive*. Accessed 22 January 2018, <http://www.corklgbtarchive.com/items/show/1>

⁸⁷⁶ *Irish Press*, 'Rights of Homosexuals', Hubert Mannion, UCD Welfare Officer, 12 July 1982.

granted even the most basic of human rights, i.e. the right to love.’⁸⁷⁷ These arguments were important in framing the demands of the gay movement in terms of a wider campaign for human rights in Ireland. Mannion’s linkage of the oppression of homosexuals with that of Catholics in the eighteenth-and nineteenth century, however, was not shared by the hierarchy of the Irish Roman Catholic Church.

‘I certainly agree that there are many dark pages of very cruel oppression in the pages of the history of the Christian Church.’⁸⁷⁸

From its foundation the IGRM had been keen to build up some level of interaction with the different churches, realising the influence they could have not only over Irish society but also the Irish political system, and with that the laws of the land. So serious were the intentions of the IGRM to engage with the churches, that its founders created a separate portfolio within the organisation specifically dedicated to religious affairs, led by James Malone.⁸⁷⁹ In fact, the IGRM’s attempts to engage with the different churches was one of the first endeavours to build up alliances outside the gay community. These attempts, for example, took place even before the IGRM and NGF opened dialogue with the trade union movement.

In January 1975 the *Catholic Standard* reported that the IGRM had sent a letter to the different churches in Ireland following its attendance at an International Gay Rights Congress in Edinburgh in December 1974. This congress had discussed the relationship between homosexuality and Christianity. In the letter the IGRM argued that ‘the cruellest oppressive forces against homosexuality could be traced to sources in Christian moral teaching.’⁸⁸⁰ The *Catholic Standard* noted that while the IGRM had asked the bishops for a response to the letter, ‘it is thought to be extremely unlikely that any will consider the time ripe for any comment on this area of law reform.’⁸⁸¹ In relation to the response of the hierarchy of the Roman Catholic Church this was an accurate statement. However, the Church of Ireland Archbishop of Dublin, Alan Buchanan, did reply insisting that ‘I believe we are unwilling to shelve the problems that you set before us.’⁸⁸²

⁸⁷⁷ *Irish Press*, ‘Rights of Homosexuals’, Hubert Mannion, UCD Welfare Officer, 12 July 1982.

⁸⁷⁸ NLI, IQA, MS 45, 954/1 – Rev. G. Ferguson to David Norris, 14 January 1975.

⁸⁷⁹ NLI, IQA, MS 45, 951/4 – *IGRM Newsletter*, February 1976.

⁸⁸⁰ *Catholic Standard*, 17 January 1975 – Gay Letter for Bishops.

⁸⁸¹ *Catholic Standard*, 17 January 1975 – Gay Letter for Bishops.

⁸⁸² NLI, IQA, MS 45, 951/1 – Archbishop of Dublin Alan Buchanan to David Norris, 4 February 1975.

The Protestant churches were more disposed to engage with the IGRM and to obtain greater information on the situation for homosexuals in Ireland. Not only did they request the IGRM to send as much information as possible on homosexuality but James Young, of the Church of Ireland Social Services', also invited a member of the IGRM to give a talk on homosexuality.⁸⁸³ Young followed this invitation with another to the IGRM to send a representative to attend a meeting of the Social Services Committee, which was to discuss the possibility of recommending that the Board for Social Responsibility take up this issue through the organising of a seminar on homosexuality.⁸⁸⁴ This meeting subsequently supported the organising of a seminar on homosexuality.

In advance of the February 1976 seminar on homosexuality invitations were sent to all Bishops of the Church of Ireland whose dioceses fell within the 26 counties, and to the corresponding authorities in the Presbyterian and Methodist Churches, the Society of Friends and the Salvation Army.⁸⁸⁵ According to the *IGRM Newsletter*, those in attendance included numerous bishops, social workers, a district court justice and Frank Cluskey, T.D., who opened proceedings.⁸⁸⁶ In an upbeat report on the seminar, the *IGRM newsletter* reported that 'some very interesting questions were raised, many not so predictable, many clergymen displayed considerable awareness of the true homosexual capacity for living and loving.'⁸⁸⁷ The *IGRM Newsletter* described the seminar as 'the first really valuable exchange of ideas with such an influential body.'⁸⁸⁸ The IGRM's enthusiasm following the seminar was well founded. Only two months after the seminar, Archbishop Buchanan, speaking at the Church of Ireland General Synod, called for reform of the laws criminalising sexual activity between males. Addressing members, Archbishop Buchanan urged churchmen to 'to be more-ready to listen to medical advice on the nature of homosexuality', stressing that homosexuals 'have this tendency from birth, or soon after birth. They cannot be responsible for these tendencies any more than the rest of us for the heterosexual instincts we inherit. [...] There is a general uneasiness among ourselves and Social Responsibility about the laws against homosexuality which we feel need examination.'⁸⁸⁹ Reporting on this historic decision, the *Irish Times* described Buchanan's

⁸⁸³ NLI, IQA, MS 45, 951/1 – Church of Ireland Social Service to David Norris, 28 February 1975.

⁸⁸⁴ NLI, IQA, MS 45, 951/1 – James Young to David Norris, 17 September 1975.

⁸⁸⁵ NLI, IQA, MS 45, 951/1 – James Young to David Norris Re: Sub-Committee of the Board for Social Responsibility. Date not specified but sometime in late 1975.

⁸⁸⁶ NLI, IQA, MS 45, 951/4 – *IGRM Newsletter* February 1976.

⁸⁸⁷ NLI, IQA, MS 45, 951/4 – *IGRM Newsletter* February 1976.

⁸⁸⁸ NLI, IQA, MS 45, 951/4 – *IGRM Newsletter* February 1976.

⁸⁸⁹ NLI, LB 05 03, *Church of Ireland Gazette*, 21 May 1976 – General Synod 1976.

speech as *influential*, while also drawing attention to his remarks on England's decision to amend these laws in 1967, noting that 'no such change has been made in either part of Ireland. It is the opinion of the majority of the Role of the Church of Committee that the relevant laws in both parts of Ireland should be examined with a view to reform.'⁸⁹⁰

If the Church of Ireland was willing to support law reform, the hierarchy of the Roman Catholic Church certainly were not. From the very beginning it was clear that the hierarchy of the Roman Catholic Church was keen to distance itself from engaging with gay and lesbian organisations. In and around the time the Church of Ireland was preparing to meet the IGRM to discuss homosexuality, the Bishop of Ardagh and Clonmacnoise, Cahal Daly, speaking to the *Catholic Standard*, repeated his favourable remarks about the Vatican's recent statement, *Persona Humana*, which condemned premarital sex, homosexuality and masturbation.⁸⁹¹ In a subsequent letter to the *Catholic Standard*, in response to Daly's comments, Norris condemned the church for continuing to persecute homosexuals, highlighting the decision of the American Psychiatric Association to remove homosexuality from the register of disorders.⁸⁹² Adopting the rhetoric of human rights, Norris implored the Roman Catholic Church in Ireland to 'not use this already discredited document to justify interference with the political expression of the *individual human rights* of Irish citizens, catholic and non-Catholic alike.'⁸⁹³ In one of the rare occasions in which the gay movement actually received a response from the hierarchy in Ireland, the diocesan secretary of the Archdiocese of Armagh, Cardinal Conway, informed the IGRM that in regard to 'the moral teaching of the Catholic Church on homosexuality, the Cardinal can only refer you to Section 8 of the recent authoritative statement by the Holy See. With reference, to the law of the State on this matter, this is essentially a matter for the civil legislators and their judgement as to its relevance to the common good.'⁸⁹⁴ While Malone and the IGRM may well have been disappointed with the reference to Section 8 of *Persona Humana*, they most likely would have been content with the Roman Catholic Church accepting that civil laws were the responsibility of the state, not the Church. If the Church would have remained silent on homosexual law reform, rather than condemning it, the IGRM would have considered this a considerable achievement.

⁸⁹⁰ *Irish Times*, 'Support for Law Reform after plea on homosexuality', 13 May 1976.

⁸⁹¹ *Catholic Standard*, 'Statement on sex maligned by media – Bishop Daly', 30 January 1976.

⁸⁹² *Catholic Standard*, 'Statement on sex maligned by media – Bishop Daly', 30 January 1976.

⁸⁹³ *Catholic Standard*, 'Statement on sex maligned by media – Bishop Daly', 30 January 1976.

⁸⁹⁴ NLI, IQA, MS 45, 954/1 – Diocesan Secretary of the Archdiocese of Armagh to James Malone, 21 September 1976.

What happened was quite the opposite. The Roman Catholic Church was not willing to cede anything in terms of relaxing the laws on homosexuality, or for that matter on any other issue related to sexuality. By 1980 it was evident that the Catholic hierarchy in Ireland had moved away from the sentiments of Cardinal Conway in 1976. That year, Joseph Cunnane, Archbishop of Tuam, Thomas Morris, Archbishop of Cashel, Dermot Ryan, Archbishop of Dublin and Cardinal Tomás O’Fiaich, issued a doctrinal statement, *Conscience and Morality*. The introduction set forth the aims of the publication which sought to ‘recall briefly, for the guidance of Catholics, a few truths about conscience and morality [...] to clarify some central points which are not always well understood and are sometimes presented in a false light in contemporary writings.’⁸⁹⁵ The extent to which they objected to the rhetoric of the Irish gay and lesbian movement was evidenced in the document declaring that homosexual acts were ‘morally evil,’ and ‘no motives or circumstances can change their nature.’⁸⁹⁶ Extra marital intercourse, along with masturbation, and contraception were also characterised as morally evil. Although the comments raised about homosexuality were no different to those in *Persona Humana*, the significance of this particular condemnation lay in the fact that *Conscience and Morality* had been written specifically by the Irish hierarchy for a specifically Irish audience.

In 1985 Irish Roman Catholic Church hierarchy issued another pastoral statement, *Love is for Life*, which was even more forthright in its condemnation of homosexuality. Effectively, *Love is for Life* was a guide for Irish Catholics on the do’s and don’ts concerning sex and the family. It maintained, for example, that ‘the true meaning of sexuality is also negated in homosexual acts and sexual relationships between homosexuals. [...] Objectively homosexual acts are intrinsically and gravely immoral.’⁸⁹⁷ Expressing their discomfort with campaigners for gay rights, the Bishops claimed that ‘the campaign often claims for homosexuals’ acts complete social, legal and moral parity with heterosexual acts. Such a campaign damages the homosexual community. It encourages others whose sexuality is not exclusively or irreversibly homosexual, to indulge in homosexual acts and habits.’⁸⁹⁸ Speaking after its publication,

⁸⁹⁵ <http://www.catholicbishops.ie/wp-content/uploads/images/docs/conscience%20and%20morality.pdf> *Conference and Morality: A Doctrinal Statement of the Irish Episcopal Conference*, accessed on 7 February 2016.

⁸⁹⁶ <http://www.catholicbishops.ie/wp-content/uploads/images/docs/conscience%20and%20morality.pdf> *Conference and Morality: A Doctrinal Statement of the Irish Episcopal Conference*, accessed on 7 February 2016.

⁸⁹⁷ <http://www.catholicbishops.ie/wp-content/uploads/images/docs/love%20is%20for%20life%20pastoral%20letter%20popular%20edition.pdf>, *Love is for Life*, Irish Bishops Pastoral, accessed on 8 February 2017.

⁸⁹⁸ <http://www.catholicbishops.ie/wp-content/uploads/images/docs/love%20is%20for%20life%20pastoral%20letter%20popular%20edition.pdf> *Love is for Life*, Irish Bishops Pastoral, accessed on 8 February 2017.

Bishop of Galway, Eamon Casey, called for the incorporation of *Love is for Life* into the Irish school curriculum. Ironically, this was the same Bishop Casey who was later discovered to have had a sexual relationship with an American divorcée with whom he fathered a child.⁸⁹⁹ The rhetoric of the Irish Roman Catholic Church remained steadfastly opposed to any liberalisation on homosexuality or decriminalisation of sexual activity between males throughout the 1980s and even into the 1990s.

Notwithstanding the determination of the hierarchy of the Irish Roman Catholic Church to resist finding any commonality with the gay and lesbian movement, the hierarchy's views were not necessarily shared by all within the Irish Roman Catholic Church. A distinction should be drawn between the hierarchy and individual clergy who took a much more understanding approach to homosexuality and especially law reform. As we have seen previously in Chapter 5, Catholic theologian Fr. Joseph O'Leary was an outspoken proponent of gay law reform and greater tolerance for gay and lesbian individuals. This was a view shared by another catholic priest, Fr. Michael Cleary. In Cathal O'Shannon's 1977 RTÉ documentary on homosexuality, for example, Fr. Michael Cleary spoke positively about homosexuality, noting that 'people fear homosexuals, I don't know why they fear them, they are normal people. Their sexual desire and urges are in a different direction to others.'⁹⁰⁰ This was a particularly courageous statement coming on the heels of the Holy See's publication of *Persona Humana*. Not alone did Fr. Cleary appear in this documentary, but he also wrote articles in which he dismissed the typical representations of homosexuals as child molesters. In one such article in the *Catholic Standard*, 'Speaking up for the Homosexual', Cleary strongly dismissed the generalisations levelled at homosexuals and offered his support for homosexual law reform. Citing what he considered a particularly sad case of a decent man being sent to prison for breaking the 1861 and 1885 laws, Cleary argued that this 'would not have been the case had the companion been a woman.'⁹⁰¹ He agreed that the unfair image of homosexuals was one that grew out of ignorance and conceded that amongst many within the clergy this level of ignorance was prevalent.

Cleary's support for homosexuals brought him both praise and criticism from readers of the *Catholic Standard*. Andrew McDermott criticised Cleary's article, arguing that 'Fr. Cleary's defence of homosexuals is further evidence of the increasing blindness of those who

⁸⁹⁹ <http://politico.ie/archive/eamon-casey-opening-floodgates-scandal>, Colin Murphy, 'Eamon Casey: Opening the floodgates of scandal', www.magill.ie, 25 January 2006, accessed on 8 February 2017.

⁹⁰⁰ Cathal O'Shannon, *Tuesday Report*, 'Homosexuality in Ireland', 22 February 1977.

⁹⁰¹ Fr. Michael Cleary, 'Speaking up for the Homosexual', *Catholic Standard*, 27 August 1976.

ought to know the true dignity of man and teach it.’⁹⁰² In that same edition Cleary addressed the reaction to his article. The title of Cleary’s article, ‘Poison Pen Letters ruin my breakfast’ gave an insight into the type of letters he had received. The article highlighted a phone call he received from Parents Concern, who had received a call from the League of Decency reporting Cleary for his ‘glorification of homosexuality.’⁹⁰³ Cleary responded by informing the caller that the League of Decency might be interested to know that ‘I had a phone call from a priest to thank me for my article and to say that he himself is a homosexual.’⁹⁰⁴ The following edition of the *Catholic Standard* brought some support for Cleary in the shape of a letter from Cathal O’Flanagan, who took exception to the criticism levelled at Cleary. O’Flanagan praised Cleary, offering up his own account of meeting homosexuals who he described as dignified, reasoned and Christian. He ended his letter by expressing his hope that the nineteenth century laws would soon be repealed in Ireland.⁹⁰⁵

Even at that early stage, Cleary was developing a reputation as, what one Mayo priest described, the ‘national chaplain to homosexuals.’⁹⁰⁶ Fr. Colm Kilcoyne gave this label to Cleary in a sympathetic article he wrote for the *Western People* on homosexuals.⁹⁰⁷ The article came about following a phone call Fr. Kilcoyne received from an agony aunt columnist asking him to recommend a priest to whom young people with a homosexual problem could talk to.⁹⁰⁸ At the time of the call he could not think of one, until a few weeks later when Fr. Michael Cleary’s sympathetic article on homosexuals appeared in the *Catholic Standard*. The complete lack of an understanding priest counsellor for homosexuals in Ireland remarkably took Kilcoyne by surprise.

Throughout the article, much like Fr. Cleary’s, Fr. Kilcoyne defended the homosexual and lambasted those who might express annoyance that this topic would appear in the *Western People*, but would then laugh at Dick Emery jokes about homosexuals, arguing, ‘Aren’t we strange Christians?’⁹⁰⁹ He described how the actions of such ignorant individuals resulted in

⁹⁰² *Catholic Standard*, Letters to the editor, ‘Fr. Cleary’s Gay Friends’, 17 September 1976.

⁹⁰³ Fr. Michael Cleary, ‘Poison Pen Letters Ruin My Breakfast’, *Catholic Standard*, 17 September 1976.

⁹⁰⁴ Fr. Michael Cleary, ‘Poison Pen Letters Ruin My Breakfast’, *Catholic Standard*, 17 September 1976.

⁹⁰⁵ *Catholic Standard*, Letters to the Editor, ‘Fr. Cleary’s Right on Homosexuality’, 1 October 1976.

⁹⁰⁶ Fr. Colm Kilcoyne, ‘Homosexuals’, *Western People*, 18 September 1976.

⁹⁰⁷ *Western People* is a Mayo based provincial newspaper sold throughout the province of Connacht.

⁹⁰⁸ Fr. Colm Kilcoyne, ‘Homosexuals’, *Western People*, 18 September 1976.

⁹⁰⁹ Fr. Colm Kilcoyne, ‘Homosexuals’, *Western People*, 18 September 1976.

making ‘homosexuals feel more desperate, more lonely, more convinced that he lives in a world that doesn’t understand and, worse still, doesn’t want to understand.’⁹¹⁰ In what appears to have been a sign of approval for the actions of gay activists, Kilcoyne ended his article on an upbeat note, insisting that there is hope, hope on the basis that more people were openly talking about the problem now in Ireland. As a result of Kilcoyne’s article, this dialogue was taking place in counties like Mayo, Galway, Sligo, Roscommon and Leitrim. So pleased were the IGRM with Kilcoyne’s article that they wrote into the *Western People* to compliment him and to give details of their organisation, all of which was printed in the paper.⁹¹¹ Although individual clergymen like Cleary, O’Leary, and Kilcoyne were the exception rather than the norm, their contribution to promoting greater tolerance for homosexuals and the campaign for gay rights in Ireland should be acknowledged. When asked in 2017 about Fr. Joe O’Leary, David Norris described him as ‘absolutely wonderful. He was quite outstanding. He was fearless. He told the truth unashamedly as he saw it.’⁹¹²

‘The right to work and to a fair deal at work are basic worker’s rights which everyone is entitled to whether black or white, male or female, gay or heterosexual.’⁹¹³

In the same year as dialogue between the Irish Roman Catholic Church effectively ended, gay and lesbian activists started to look to the Irish Congress of Trade Union (ICTU) for support. The ICTU represented over half a million workers throughout the 1980s, and had considerable influence with the Irish government, who often sought the organisation’s views on issues related to worker’s rights. Support from such a group would be invaluable for a minority group looking to introduce protections for gay workers which were non-existent in Ireland, particularly considering the Unfair Dismissals Act of 1977 did not include protection based on sexual orientation. In fact, outside the gay movement, sexual orientation was not even a term that was widely known, understood or discussed.

The decision to open a dialogue with the trade union movement was strongly influenced by Ian Dunn of the Scottish Homosexual Rights Group, following a speech he gave to NGF delegates at their AGM in 1980. In his address, Dunn discussed the case surrounding John Sanders, a Scottish worker who had been dismissed from his job for his homosexuality. Dunn advised Irish activists to be conscious of the fact that ‘the step forward in our liberation

⁹¹⁰ Fr. Colm Kilcoyne, ‘Homosexuals’, *Western People*, 18 September 1976.

⁹¹¹ *Western People*, ‘Gay Rights Praise for Fr. Kilcoyne’, 2 October 1976.

⁹¹² Author interview with David Norris, 16 March 2017.

⁹¹³ NLI, IQA, MS 45, 949/6 – Text of speech on gay rights motion no. 35 to Cork branch of LGPSU by Kieran Rose, 30 March 1982.

movement was not merely to see oneself in isolation, but understanding the nature of our oppression, through organised political action.’⁹¹⁴ At that time, the Scottish Homosexual Rights Group were involved in a campaign to have John Sanders reinstated in his position following his dismissal. Dunn informed NGF delegates that Sanders had lost his job on the basis of information provided to the Scottish National Camps Association in August 1979 which stated that Sanders ‘indulged in homosexuality’; actions considered totally unsuitable by the Camps Association for someone working with school children and teenagers.’⁹¹⁵ To prevent further John Sander cases, Dunn, emphasised ‘the importance of working with the Labour Movement and the need for cooperation with trade unions as steps towards changing the discriminatory laws [...]’.⁹¹⁶

Although, at the time of the John Sanders case, the Scottish Trades Union Congress had not passed an official policy in support of outlawing discrimination based on sexual orientation, they had sent a letter to the SMG supporting John Sanders. Within one year, however, the Scottish Trade Union Congress unanimously adopted resolutions no. 156 and 157, which declared its opposition to discrimination against homosexual men and women and called for the introduction of legislation to protect homosexuals from discrimination. Citing the John Sanders case, the resolution, a copy of which was sent to the NGF, noted that Congress supported the resolutions because ‘legitimising discrimination against homosexual men and women’ also ‘endangers the job security of others whose views or characteristics are, irrationally, held to be dangerous.’⁹¹⁷ This was an argument later adopted by Irish activists in their efforts to get the ICTU to support gay rights.

Gay and lesbian activists were strategic in their engagement with the trade union movement. In one of their first actions to try to gauge trade union attitudes to gay rights, the NGF sent a questionnaire to 28 unions who fell under the terms of the Unfair Dismissal’s Act 1977. These 28 unions comprised almost 90% of the unionised non-teaching workforce. The questionnaire contained numerous questions varying from, ‘would your union be in favour of amending the Unfair dismissals act to include sexual orientation?’ to ‘would your organisation support the inclusion of a role in any such code dismissal on the grounds of an employee’s sexual orientation, and does your organisation support the ratification of the International

⁹¹⁴ NLI, IR 369 I 23, *In Touch*, Vol. 2, No. 6 June/July 1980.

⁹¹⁵ NLI, IQA, MS 45, 948/9 – John Sanders Case, Bulletin No. 1

⁹¹⁶ NLI, IR 369 I 23, *In Touch*, Vol. 2, No. 6 June/July 1980.

⁹¹⁷ NLI, IQA, MS 45, 969/4 – Scottish Trade Union Congress 1981 – Composite DD (covering resolution nos 156 and 157) – Discrimination Against Homosexual Men and Women.

Labour Organisation Convention No. 111 1958?'.⁹¹⁸ Of the 28 unions questioned, 10 returned the questionnaire, with only six of those having completed it. Some of those who completed the questionnaire included the Local Government and Public Services Union, Irish Federation of University Teachers, the Electricity Supply Board Officer's Association and the Amalgamated Transport and General Workers Union.⁹¹⁹ In general the questionnaire results were more positive than negative, with five unions supporting the amendment of the unfair dismissals act to include sexual orientation; the rare exception to this being the Irish Federation of University Teachers which replied, 'don't know.'⁹²⁰

The questionnaire was important not only for giving the movement a sense of where the trade union movement might stand in terms of gay rights issues but also, critically, it gave the NGF the practical knowledge about how to make gay rights a trade union issue. At the end of the report presented to the 1981 NGF AGM, delegates were informed that the 'ball is in our court.'⁹²¹ It was down to each gay and lesbian individual themselves to start making gay rights an issue within their respective unions. To do this, the advice from trade unions was simple; it was up to trade union members, not the executive council to propose gay rights motions.⁹²² Gay and lesbian individuals were encouraged to become actively involved in their unions by leafletting and setting up workshops on gay rights at work. Following this groundwork, they were then encouraged to bring motions at their annual general meetings in support of gay rights, which could then be proposed by that union to the Irish Congress of Trade Union's AGM.

Following the 1980 motion calling on the NGF to lobby trade unions, Kadar Asmal of the Irish Council for Civil Liberties and David Norris had sought to get the backing of their union, the Irish Federation of University Teachers (IFUT) to support an amendment to the Unfair Dismissals Act 1977 to include sexual orientation. In proposing the motion, Kadar Asmal called on the IFUT to support attempts to decriminalise homosexual behaviour between consenting male adults in private and to resist any attempts to discriminate against its membership in their employment on the basis of their sexual orientation.⁹²³ Although the

⁹¹⁸ NLI, IQA, MS 45, 936/9 – Report on Trade Union Activity presented to the Second Annual General Meeting of the NGF, 27 June 1981.

⁹¹⁹ NLI, IQA, MS 45, 936/9 – Report on Trade Union Activity presented to the Second Annual General Meeting of the NGF, 27 June 1981.

⁹²⁰ NLI, IQA, MS 45, 936/9 – Report on Trade Union Activity presented to the Second Annual General Meeting of the NGF, 27 June 1981.

⁹²¹ NLI, IQA, MS 45, 936/9 – Report on Trade Union Activity presented to the Second Annual General Meeting of the NGF, 27 June 1981.

⁹²² NLI, IQA, MS 45, 948/3 – John Hall, National Secretary of Association of Scientific Technical and Managerial Staffs, to Tom McClean, National Gay Federation, 28 January 1981.

⁹²³ *Irish Times*, 'IFUT Split on sexuality ruling', 27 April 1981.

motion was passed overwhelmingly by two thirds of the delegates, a subsequent meeting of the IFUT executive council overturned the decision of the union delegates by 13 votes to 8. The IFUT executive council maintained that this decision was taken as a result of their belief that the AGM motion in support of decriminalisation had not been ‘truly representative of the IFUT member’s views.’⁹²⁴ In a letter drafted by David Norris, he argued that the decision ‘seriously called into question the democratic nature of the Union’ and requested an emergency general meeting to discuss the matter further.⁹²⁵

While Asmal and Norris met resistance within the IFUT, activists in the Cork Gay Collective enjoyed greater success. During the first National Gay Conference in May 1981 a workshop was held on Gays at Work which included John McKay from Gays at Work U.K. McKay gave advice on the challenges of effective organisation in trade union lobbying.⁹²⁶ This workshop was chaired by Kieran Rose, who, with members of the Cork Gay Collective, strongly took up the call to use his membership in a union to pass supportive gay rights motions. Rose was a member of the Local Government and Public Services Union (LGPSU), which represented over 17,000 members nationally.

Rose actively involved himself in distributing leaflets on gay rights at LGPSU events. In July 1981 Rose also contacted the ICTU seeking permission to erect a stall and hold a fringe meeting on the theme of ‘gays at work’, during their AGM in Cork.⁹²⁷ Members of the Cork Gay Collective also leafletted the ICTU conference that year.⁹²⁸ During May Day celebrations in 1982 the Cork Gay Collective took part in a march carrying a ‘Gay Rights at Work’ banner.⁹²⁹ This was the first time publicly that such a banner appeared on an Irish street. Following this groundwork, Rose, with the support of Tricia Treacy, (a county planner who worked with Rose in the Cork County Council and fellow LGPSU member), proposed at the March 1982 General Meeting of the Cork branch of the LGPSU that:

This Union calls on the Irish Congress of Trade Unions to work for (1) Repeal of those laws criminalising consenting homosexual acts between men (i.e. section 51 and 52 of the Offences Against the Person Act 1861 and section 2 of the Criminal Law Amendment Act 1885) [and] (2) Amendment of the Unfair Dismissals Act 1977, the employment Equality Act 1977 and the legislation dealing with the employment of civil servants, the armed forces and the Gardai to prevent discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation.⁹³⁰

⁹²⁴ *Irish Times*, ‘IFUT Split on sexuality ruling’, 27 April 1981.

⁹²⁵ NLI, Personal Papers of David Norris, ACC 6672, Box No. 39. – date and to whom this letter was for not stated. Written by David Norris on University of Dublin headed paper.

⁹²⁶ NLI, IQA, 45, 940/9 – National Gay Conference Cork, 1981, Report.

⁹²⁷ NLI, IQA, 45, 949/6 – Kieran Rose to Secretary of ICTU, March 26th 1981.

⁹²⁸ Personal Papers of Kieran Rose – Cork Gay Collective notes.

⁹²⁹ Personal Papers of Kieran Rose – Cork Gay Collective notes.

⁹³⁰ NLI, IR 352 L 11, *Reporter*, Vol. 10, No. 10, May/June 1982.

Rose maintains that the support of Treacy was crucial in even getting the motion seconded, because ‘with few gay people out and political in those days support from heterosexuals was essential even to get the motion seconded.’⁹³¹ At the subsequent general meeting of the LGPSU in Tralee, in May 1982, the motion was put to the 360 delegates. According to a report in *Cork Examiner*, the motion led to a 20-minute contentious debate with Mr. Tom Henn of the Limerick branch describing the motion as nauseating, declaring that ‘if Cork have problems with homosexuality then let them go away and solve them quietly without publicity.’⁹³² Despite Mr. Henn’s intervention only 6 delegates voted against the motion.⁹³³ To his strong distaste, no doubt, the motions passage received significant media attention not only in the local *Cork Examiner*, but also the *Irish Times* and *Irish Independent*, a reflection of just how significant a decision this was.

In the months following the LGPSU vote, the IFUT membership appear to have succeeded, perhaps on the foot of the LGPSU decision, in ensuring that the IFUT council would support the motion passed by the delegates in favour of legal protections for gay workers. In turn, this allowed Bernard McCartan (IFUT) to propose motion 106 at the ICTU AGM in July 1982 in Belfast. Preceding this motion delegates, at the Second National Gay Conference in Dublin, had decided that the Cork Gay Collective would produce leaflets in favour of the motion, which would be distributed at the ICTU AGM.⁹³⁴ The IFUT motion titled, ‘Job Discrimination on Sexual Grounds’, declared that ‘Conference supports the decriminalisation of homosexual behaviour between consenting male adults in private and as a consequence of such support urges affiliated Unions to resist any attempt to discriminate against their members in their employment.’⁹³⁵ Rose maintains that this decision resulted ‘in significant practical and ideological progress.’⁹³⁶

In seeking to convince delegates of the merits in supporting gay rights the speeches of both Rose and McCartan sought to present rights for gay and lesbian workers as important issues not just for this cohort of workers, but for the wider worker’s movement. Both speeches also adopted similar language to that of the motion passed at the Scottish Trade Union Congress

⁹³¹ Email correspondence with Kieran Rose, 12 December 2017.

⁹³² *Cork Examiner*, ‘Union supports change in law on homosexuality’, 14 May 1982.

⁹³³ *Cork Examiner*, ‘Union supports change in law on homosexuality’, 14 May 1982.

⁹³⁴ NLI, IQA, MS 46, 005/3 – Report of the Second National Gay Conference held in Dublin between June 18-20

⁹³⁵ ICTU Annual Report 1982 – Copy obtained from ICTU headquarters, 31/32 Parnell Square, Dublin 1.

⁹³⁶ Hug, *The Politics of Sexual Morality in Ireland*, 233

in May 1981.⁹³⁷ In his speech to LGPSU delegates, in March 1982, Rose very much adopted the language of civil and human rights for a minority group, who were simply requesting basic worker's rights, insisting that:

This motion calls for civil and human rights for a minority that represents 5% to 10% of the population; that is the lesbians and gay men of Ireland. [...] Besides the threat of imprisonment, gay people experience the same range of discrimination, stigmatisation and prejudice as other minorities. Living as a gay person in Ireland is in many ways like being black in Alabama. [...] The right to work and to a fair deal at work are basic worker's rights which everyone is entitled to whether black or white, male or female, gay or heterosexual.⁹³⁸

Rather than presenting the demands of gay and lesbian workers as something unique to this group Rose, instead, situated the rights of gay/lesbian workers within the realm of basic worker's rights, rights which the trade union movement admittedly strived to uphold. Gay and lesbian workers did not want special treatment, but simply to be treated the same way as any other worker, who's heterosexuality was not a factor in their employment. Moreover, Rose sought to link the oppression of gay workers with that of other minority groups such as travellers, the disabled, and unmarried mothers.

Rose particularly sought to appeal to the long tradition of worker solidarity within the trade union movement. This tradition, Rose argued, should be applied to the rights of gay and lesbian workers for 'solidarity among workers is the basis of our strength and of the considerable social progress that has been achieved since the Movement was founded. I trust that this meeting will support the rights of its fellow workers who are gay by giving its overwhelming support to this motion.'⁹³⁹ By alienating the rights of their 'fellow' gay workers Rose contended that they would undermine the solidarity of the wider movement itself, which had sustained them for so long and brought about considerable progress for Irish workers. Failing to support their gay and lesbian colleagues could lead to the weakening of the trade union movement. At a time when 70% of the wealth in the country was in the hands of only 5% of the population, Rose argued that 'all of us here are a minority in power terms.'⁹⁴⁰

⁹³⁷ NLI, IQA, MS 45, 969/4 – Scottish Trade Union Congress 1981 – Composite DD (covering resolution nos 156 and 157) – Discrimination Against Homosexual Men and Women.

⁹³⁸ NLI, IQA, MS 45, 949/6 – Text of speech on gay rights motion no. 35 to Cork branch of LGPSU by Kieran Rose, 30 March 1982.

⁹³⁹ NLI, IQA, MS 45, 949/6 – Text of speech on gay rights motion no. 35 to Cork branch of LGPSU by Kieran Rose, 30 March 1982.

⁹⁴⁰ NLI, IQA, MS 45, 949/6 – Text of speech on gay rights motion no. 35 to Cork branch of LGPSU by Kieran Rose, 30 March 1982.

Bernard McCartan's speech at the ICTU, on the other hand, focused on the need for decriminalisation and the importance of ending discrimination. McCartan alerted the delegates to what he considered the disbelief that such laws still existed in Ireland even after the Wolfenden Report, the 1967 Sexual Offences Act, and the recent Council of Europe declaration that favoured the decriminalisation of sexual activity between males.⁹⁴¹ The current laws, which he labelled Victorian, concerned themselves with what individuals did in private, 'I don't think there is very much more to be said about that. It is very clearly not a question for public morality, and it's not a question for legislation.'⁹⁴²

The bulk of his speech was primarily focused on alerting delegates to the fact that discrimination against homosexual workers was a reality. While trade unions had no reported cases of such discrimination, something the government used to justify not amending the Unfair Dismissals Act, McCartan noted that this was not because no cases existed, but rather with no protection under the law gay and lesbian workers were too fearful to report discrimination. Reinforcing this point, McCartan highlighted John Sanders' case in Scotland, noting that despite no complaints being made against him Sanders had been dismissed simply because he was gay. McCartan argued that 'on the question of discrimination' we believe firmly that one's attitudes and one's activities away from the workplace should have no bearing whatsoever on employment.'⁹⁴³ The phrasing of this sentence very much resembled that of the language used in the resolution adopted by the Scottish Trade Unions Congress in May 1981, which had linked the discrimination of homosexuals with the possible discrimination of others who engaged in activities not generally accepted by the mainstream.⁹⁴⁴ Rather than saying 'we believe that one's homosexuality should have no bearing whatsoever on employment', McCartan, instead, used words such as 'attitudes' and 'activities' which were relatable to the vast majority of workers, who might have engaged in activities outside the workplace that were not socially acceptable but, nevertheless, should not be considered a factor in the hiring or firing of an individual. These arguments were later taken up by the ICTU itself when it successfully lobbied the Employment Equality Agency (EEA) to support the inclusion of sexual orientation into the Employment Equality Act 1977. In a 1986 letter to the Minister for Labour, which called on him to amend the act to include sexual orientation, Sylvia Meehan, chairperson of the EEA, noted that while there had been no documented cases of discrimination

⁹⁴¹ Bernard McCartan, ICTU AGM 1982, in ICTU Annual Report 1982.

⁹⁴² Bernard McCartan, ICTU AGM 1982, in ICTU Annual Report 1982.

⁹⁴³ Bernard McCartan, ICTU AGM 1982, in ICTU Annual Report 1982.

⁹⁴⁴ NLI, IQA, MS 45, 969/4 – Scottish Trade Union Congress 1981 – Composite DD (covering resolution nos 156 and 157) – Discrimination Against Homosexual Men and Women.

on the basis of sexual orientation, the Irish trade union movement had made clear to her that such discrimination did take place in the employment sphere.⁹⁴⁵

Despite the numerous other motions that passed at the 1982 ICTU AGM, the passage of motion 106 proved particularly newsworthy with the *Irish Times* leading with an article on the AGM with 'ICTU Supports Call for Homosexual Law Reform', while the *Irish Examiner* had an article titled 'ICTU backs gay rights and divorce.'⁹⁴⁶ The early success of gay activists in garnering support from the ICTU is all the more remarkable when one considers that countries with a much longer tradition of gay rights activism, such as the United States of America and England, did not generate such support until 1983 and 1985, respectively.⁹⁴⁷

'Homosexuality is not a problem – it doesn't do you any harm and can be lots of fun.'⁹⁴⁸

Both the student movement and the trade union movement actively bought into the rhetoric of the gay and lesbian movement, becoming two of the strongest allies in the quest for gay rights in Ireland. In a USI Welfare Policy booklet from 1981, the USI argued that 'denial of freedom for a specific section of the community makes us all less free, and as such should be firmly rejected.'⁹⁴⁹ Such a belief led the USI to demand that student officers throughout Irish campuses launch an immediate campaign on gay rights in cooperation with the gay organisations to create a 'positive gay consciousness.'⁹⁵⁰ In that same year, in consultation with the NGF, the USI drafted instructions which were sent to each university on how to go about establishing a gay society, listing the contact details of the NGF and IGRM, while also giving a briefing on the current state of gay rights in Ireland and encouraging students to support the legal fund for Norris' court case and gay rights generally.⁹⁵¹

The USI's early support was highly significant as it offered an opportunity for gay activists to engage with the wider student community on this topic. In turn, the Student Unions'

⁹⁴⁵ National Archives of Ireland, Folder 2014/32/928 – Sylvia Meehan, Chairperson of Employment Equality Agency to Minister for Labour, Ruairi Quinn, 2 December 1986.

⁹⁴⁶ *Irish Times*, 'ICTU Supports Call for Homosexual Law Reform', 10 July 1982. *Irish Examiner*, 'ICTU backs gay rights and divorce', 10 July 1982.

⁹⁴⁷ Sebastian Buckle, *The Way Out: A History of Homosexuality in Modern Britain*, (London, 2015), 99. John Sweeney, 'The Growing Alliance between Gay and Union Activists', in *Social Text*, No. 61, Winter 1999, 31-38.

⁹⁴⁸ NLI, 9A 212, U.C.C. Welfare Booklet 1980-1981, 'Homosexuality', 36

⁹⁴⁹ NLI, IQA, MS 45, 948/1 – USI Welfare Policy March 1981.

⁹⁵⁰ NLI, IQA, MS 45, 948/1 – USI Welfare Policy March 1981.

⁹⁵¹ NLI, IQA, MS 45, 948/2 – The Need for forming A Gay Society.

support for the gay movement facilitated the emergence of gay societies on campuses throughout Ireland in the 1970s and 1980s, most notably in University College Cork, Maynooth University, University College Dublin, Trinity College Dublin and University College Galway. These societies helped not only to promote gay visibility on campuses, but also helped many gay and lesbian students come to terms with their sexuality. The presence of a gay society on campus in Galway in 1984, for example, caught the attention of the *Connacht Sentinel* which, it appears, did not believe the adoption of pink was a wise move, insisting that ‘if the people involved in Gay Soc wished to shake off the traditional image of Gay people, which has been detrimental in the past then they have made a bad start. The dominant hue at their table was of a washed-out pink. Maybe it is the case that the aim of this society is to perpetuate the notion that all male homosexuals are handbag carrying effeminates.’⁹⁵²

The importance of the student movement’s support was significant for another reason. While the student movement was convinced of the merits of supporting gay rights in Ireland, those who ran Irish universities adamantly opposed the promotion of gay issues or gay societies on their respective campuses. The aforementioned article on the UCG Gay Society noted that it did not have official recognition from college authorities. Throughout the 1970s and 1980s, gay societies often ran into opposition from university authorities who refused to grant gay societies official recognition, funding, and the means of hiring rooms throughout the campus for their events. In turn, this meant gay societies were dependent on the support of other societies, most notably debating and law societies, along with the student union bodies themselves, to facilitate their engagement with students on the topic of homosexuality.⁹⁵³ The support from these groups on campuses ensured gay activists had an opportunity to promote gay rights on Irish campuses, despite the disapproval of the university authorities.

These efforts were reflected in the numerous debates on homosexuality which emerged in the late 1970s and continued into the 1980s. In 1979 UCD alone held two separate debates on homosexuality; one focused on homosexual law reform, chaired by Mary McAleese and a second chaired by student welfare officer Brigid Ruane, which focused on whether or not the ‘homosexual is a menace to a Christian society.’⁹⁵⁴ According to a report in *Hermes*, over one hundred individuals turned up to each debate.⁹⁵⁵ Speakers included IGRM members, the Rev. Dean Griffin of St. Patricks Cathedral, J.L. Healy of TCD Theological Society, and Joe

⁹⁵² *Connacht Sentinel*, ‘Gay Society a First at U.C.G’, 16 October 1984.

⁹⁵³ NLI, IR 3784105 B 1, *U.C.D. Students Bulletin*, ‘Gay Soc’, January 1979.

⁹⁵⁴ NLI, IR 369 H 6, *Hermes*, Vol. 5 – What about U.C.D? – *Hermes* was a short-lived gay newsletter.

⁹⁵⁵ NLI, IR 369 H 6, *Hermes*, Vol. 5 – What about U.C.D? – *Hermes* was a short-lived gay newsletter.

Ambrose of the UCD History Society. Remarkably, Mr. Ambrose was the *only* speaker to support the motion that homosexuals were a menace.⁹⁵⁶ Later, in November 1980, the philosophy society in University College Cork held a debate on the motion that ‘this house would support the establishment of a gay society in UCC.’⁹⁵⁷ According to a report in the *Cork Examiner*, over 350 students attended this debate and overwhelmingly voted to support the formation of a gay society at UCC. In January 1981, the UCC Gay Society was officially launched.⁹⁵⁸ That same year, David Norris travelled west to University College Galway at the invitation of the college’s Law Society to discuss ‘Homosexuality and the Law’; while in 1982 Tonie Walsh and Eamon Somers also took part in debates on homosexuality at University College Cork and the Dublin University Law Society.⁹⁵⁹ If it was remarkable that Mr. Ambrose was the only speaker to support the aforementioned motion in UCD, then it is equally remarkable that UCC’s ‘Homosexuality and the Law’ event was twice successfully advertised in the provincial newspaper the *Galway Advertiser*, bringing the topic to the attention of the wider public outside the university campus.(See Figure 8).

⁹⁵⁶ NLI, IR 369 H 6, *Hermes*, Vol. 5 – What about U.C.D?

⁹⁵⁷ NLI, IQA, MS 49, 655/3 – The Philosophical Society, Main Debates of the 131st Session.

⁹⁵⁸ *Cork Examiner*, ‘Gay Society Refused Recognition by U.C.C.’, 10 February 1981.

⁹⁵⁹ NLI, IQA, MS 45, 949/6

Galway Advertiser, 12th February, 1981 15

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ALL WELCOME

Rally cars and drivers leave our reporter breathless.

RACING FEVER HITS GALWAY CAR RALLY

The Galway International Rally marked the end of the road for the soft-spoken Derry man with a passion for fast cars. Cathal Curley, the man who came out of retirement in 1980 after four years to represent Shawson Supplies confirmed on Sat. that the WIP O'Malley Construction Rally marked his final participation in a sport which has commanded his attention for the past ten years.

Misfortune in the form of a broken engine put paid to his hopes of clinching the number one position on Sat. last in the 275 mile Rally which is the opening round of the Irish Tarmac Championship.

With an unspoken sadness Curley turned the final key on a fast moving life dominated by hair pin bends, crash helmets, split second navigation and sweet success over the weekend to direct his interests to horses and greyhounds in Derry city. And while one man laid the ghosts of a chequered rallying past to rest, an overjoyed Ger Buckley from Ballinater in his Vauxhall Ireland Chevette 2,300 sped his way to win the £1,000 first prize in the Galway three day international event which finished in Salthill on Sunday evening.

The 34 year old electric services expert who had lived in the shadow of his famous Millstreet cousin, Billy Coleman for so long, the Galway International victory represented the tallest feather in his rallying cap.

Leisureland was overflowing with keen motoring enthusiasts from the ages of six to sixty who had come primarily to get the feel of speed on the tracks.

Late entrant Billy Coleman captured a lot of attention in his delectable Lancia Stratos while speculation was rife about whether Jimmy McRae would regain his number one title this year.

In close knit groups people huddled from the chilling wind and mused over suspensions and the merits and demerits of left hand drives and hand cut racing tyres.

Of the 105 entries the event attracted 98 starters. Of the entries almost half were from Britain and Northern Ireland and a large number of spectators from the North bore testimony to this fact.

By Sunday the nerve racking excitement had peaked as Buckley and McRae closely battled for the top position while regrettably some other household names in Irish motor sport were seen slowly slip sliding away.

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Figure 11. Advertisement from Galway Advertiser for Debate on Homosexuality and the Law at University College Galway, February 1981.⁹⁶⁰

The Student Movement were keen to give gay activists a platform to further gay rights to as wide a student audience as possible. In 1980, while not only inviting Norris to write an article for *USI News* on his legal campaign, the USI also organised a full one-day conference on Gay Rights at Trinity College Dublin, with speakers from both the legal profession and Samaritans taking part, along with Bernard Keogh, David Norris and Edmund Lynch.⁹⁶¹

Lesbian voices also did not go unheard on Irish campuses. As part of the Women's Week Programme at Trinity College Dublin in 1981, a workshop on lesbianism was included. Liz Noonan spoke of the ongoing struggles facing lesbian women in Irish society, from the fear of coming to terms with their sexuality, fear of losing their children, to the many who were forced into conventional marriages to hide their sexuality. In a report on this particular talk, a journalist with the T.C.D. journal, *Union*, remarked that the meeting 'was certainly thought-provoking, forcing one to widen one's horizons and think of the problems faced by an

⁹⁶⁰ Galway Advertiser, 12 February 1981.

⁹⁶¹ NLI, IQA, MS 45, 948/2 – USI Conference on Gay Rights, 12 May 1979.

unpopular minority group.⁹⁶² Later in April 1988, Geraldine McCarthy and Deirdre Walsh, both of Cork Lesbian Line, spoke at UCC on the work of Cork Lesbian Line and the ongoing struggles of overcoming lesbian invisibility in Ireland.⁹⁶³

These activities, however, were not welcomed by everyone. On occasion they brought the student and gay movement into direct conflict with parents and college authorities. For example, in October 1980 the U.C.C students' union included a section on homosexuality in their welfare booklet. The booklet's aim, according to the union, was to provide information to first year students on common and uncommon problems, and to highlight where their rights were impinged upon. In discussing homosexuality, the booklet strongly condemned the general misconceptions surrounding homosexuality, while also giving a brief overview of the different gay and lesbian organisations in Ireland and their contact details. In what was a very positive introduction to homosexuality the booklet claimed that 'homosexuality is not a problem – it doesn't do you any harm and can be lots of fun.'⁹⁶⁴

While the U.C.C. student union believed that this information was important for students, some parents reacted angrily, leading the *Evening Echo* to write that the booklet was causing concern amongst 'parents who feel that their student sons and daughters are being indoctrinated and brainwashed by influences beyond their control, on issues which they feel has nothing to do with student life [...].'⁹⁶⁵ One mother, who spoke to the *Evening Echo*, maintained that the 'booklet simply assumes that all first year students are lacking in moral responsibilities and are going to be totally promiscuous from the time they enter college, getting their kicks from homosexual activities, sex and drugs.'⁹⁶⁶ According to Cathal Kerrigan, the Dean of Student Affairs, Prof. Teegan, prohibited the distribution of the booklet.⁹⁶⁷

However, conflict was not always the main obstacle. On occasion the interest on campus from students was not always there, as the TCD and UCD students' union found out in 1980. That year TCD and UCD sought to hold a joint student gay ride week on both campuses to include public seminars on the oppressive treatment of homosexual men and women.⁹⁶⁸ However, according to a letter to Bernard Keogh from Trinity College student

⁹⁶² NLI, ILB 378, *Union*, Nov. 1980-April 1981 – Lesbianism

⁹⁶³ NLI, UCC Gay Society Archive, MS 49, 655/4 – *UCC Gazette*, 'Lesbian and Gay Group' April 1988.

⁹⁶⁴ NLI, 9A 212, U.C.C. Welfare Booklet 1980-1981, 'Homosexuality', 36

⁹⁶⁵ *Evening Echo*, 'Come as a Shock to Parents', 30 October 1980.

⁹⁶⁶ *Evening Echo*, 'Come as a Shock to Parents', 30 October 1980.

⁹⁶⁷ NLI, UCC Gay Society Archive, MS 49, 655/1

⁹⁶⁸ NLI, ILB 378, *Union*, Nov. 1979-April 1980 – Student Gay Pride Week.

deputy president, Alex White, the ‘events planned for student gay pride week did not take place as we had hoped. Except for a reasonably successful showing of ‘Night Hawks’, I had no choice but to cancel the week. The response from students in college was disappointing and in UCD apparently non-existent.’⁹⁶⁹

The extent to which the NGF appreciated these efforts was reflected in the NGF voting to co-opt the USI’s Liam Whitelaw onto the administrative council of the NGF in 1981.⁹⁷⁰ Throughout the 1980s student union bodies continued to reach out to gay activists offering them both space and time to speak about gay rights at important events organised throughout the academic year, most notably, Fresher’s Week, Fairs Day and Welfare Week, three of the most popular periods in the student calendar. For example, in 1985, in the space of just six months, two deputy presidents of the Students Union at Bolton Street College of Technology, Willo Roe and Aidan Kerins, contacted the NGF. Kerins invited Tonie Walsh to come to the college to give a one hour talk on homosexuality in Ireland and the Hirschfeld Centre while, in September 1985, Roe contacted the NGF asking if they would, firstly, send NGF leaflets to the college for a new information campaign, and secondly if they would be willing during the upcoming Welfare Week to speak on homosexuality.⁹⁷¹ Later, during Fairs Day at Maynooth University in 1988, the Student’s Union granted Barry Byrne permission to set-up a gay and lesbian society stand. This was the first attempt at Maynooth University, which was also a seminary, to establish a gay and lesbian society. *Out* reported that, despite some ‘insults’ and ‘petty remarks’ being directed at Byrne, 176 students registered to be members of the gay and lesbian society.⁹⁷² Not only did this represent 10% of the entire college population but it also, according to *Out*, made it the biggest such society in an Irish college.⁹⁷³ This, however, did not prevent Maynooth college authorities refusing official recognition to the newly founded gay and lesbian society.⁹⁷⁴ According to *Out*, the ‘Joint board feared that the Gay Society would be an embarrassment to the College’ and there would be a ‘real danger that Maynooth would become the subject of barrack-room jokes among the press.’⁹⁷⁵ The latter proved accurate, but not for the reasons the college authorities feared. Seamus Martin detailing the college’s decision in the *Irish Times* quipped that ‘now who could be more right thinking that the

⁹⁶⁹ NLI, IQA, MS 45, 949/5 – Alex White to Bernard Keogh 8 May 1980.

⁹⁷⁰ NLI, IQA, MS 45, 948/1 – Bernard Keogh to Liam Whitelaw, October 1981.

⁹⁷¹ NLI, IQA, MS 45, 949/5 – Willo Roe to NGF, 17 September 1985.

⁹⁷² NLI, IR 369 0 7, *Out*, Issue 14, 1988 – ‘Gays are an embarrassment to Maynooth College’

⁹⁷³ NLI, IR 369 0 7, *Out*, Issue 14, 1988 – ‘Gays are an embarrassment to Maynooth College’

⁹⁷⁴ NLI, IR 369 0 7, *Out*, Issue 14, 1988 – ‘Gays are an embarrassment to Maynooth College’

⁹⁷⁵ NLI, IR 369 0 7, *Out*, Issue 14, 1988 – ‘Gays are an embarrassment to Maynooth College’

authorities of St. Patrick's College, Maynooth, our very own Pontifical University in the county of Kildare? Not many, one should imagine.'⁹⁷⁶

The efforts of gay and lesbian activists and student unions did, however, contribute to the changing of attitudes amongst some college authorities. In the same year (1989) as the USI announced the establishment of an All-Island Lesbian and Gay Students Action Committee, which would focus on information campaigns throughout Irish campuses, the UCC gay and lesbian society became the first constituent member of the National University of Ireland to receive official recognition by university authorities.⁹⁷⁷ Josephine O'Halloran, spokeswoman for the UCC gay and lesbian society which now had 70 members, described this decision as 'historic.'⁹⁷⁸ This decision was all the more significant because of the make-up of the UCC governing body itself. While a majority of the members were UCC academics, three were members of the Church of Ireland and Irish Roman Catholic Church hierarchies, including the Archbishop of Cashel, Dr. Dermot Clifford.⁹⁷⁹

Moreover, a similar vote by the UCD academic council prior to that of the UCC governing body had refused to grant official recognition to UCD's gay society.⁹⁸⁰ The Irish Council for Civil Liberties, in welcoming the decision of the UCC governing body, called on 'University College Dublin to finish once and for all its own ugly variation on the once obscene theme of the pink triangle by recognising its gay and lesbian society.'⁹⁸¹ Within eleven months UCD's gay and lesbian society were granted official recognition by UCD's academic council, without a vote being required.⁹⁸² According to the *Irish Times*, Lance Pettitt, spokesman for the gay and lesbian society, noted that that was the eighth time the society had applied for official recognition and it was 'about time that UCD has recognised the reality that there are a significant number of lesbians and gay people in its institution.'⁹⁸³ Other college authorities however, such as Maynooth and Galway, remained steadfast in their refusal to grant official recognition to their respective gay and lesbian societies. It would not be until February 1993 that University College Galway's Gay Society was granted official recognition by the college authorities.⁹⁸⁴

⁹⁷⁶ Seamus Martin, 'College balks at Bilko and gays', *Irish Times*, 13 February 1988.

⁹⁷⁷ NLI, ILB 05, *USI News*, October 1989, 'Lesbian and Gay Students Action Committee.' - *Irish Times*, 'UCC Recognises Gay Society', 26 April 1989.

⁹⁷⁸ *Irish Times*, 'UCC Recognises Gay Society', 26 April 1989.

⁹⁷⁹ *Irish Times*, 'UCC Recognises Gay Society', 26 April 1989.

⁹⁸⁰ *Irish Times*, 'UCC Recognises Gay Society', 26 April 1989.

⁹⁸¹ *Irish Times*, 'UCC Recognises Gay Society', 26 April 1989.

⁹⁸² *Irish Times*, 'University Recognises Gay and Lesbian Society', 6 March 1990.

⁹⁸³ *Irish Times*, 'University Recognises Gay and Lesbian Society', 6 March 1990.

⁹⁸⁴ NLI, ILB 305 G 2, *Gay Community News*, 'News from PLUTO', Issue 52, June 1993.

‘Underlying this discrimination is the usually unquestioned consensus that lesbian/gay sexuality is unnatural and/or inferior to heterosexuality. This consensus (heterosexism) is pervasive but is also open to challenge. Trade Unions must take up that challenge on behalf of their members.’⁹⁸⁵

The report of the Second National Gay Conference in Dublin in 1982, while recognising the significance of the ICTU supporting motion 106, nevertheless, acknowledged the limitations of passing a resolution only. The conference report noted that ‘this would be only the first, large step on the road [and] it will be necessary to make this resolution work in practice. It was said that this would require the passing of resolutions at section, branch and national level by more individual unions.’⁹⁸⁶ Some unions, however, did reach out to gay organisations to seek to improve the situation of their gay workers. The Electricity Supply Board Officers Association (ESBOA), for example, charged Bernard Keogh and a colleague with examining the question of gay rights within the union. According to a letter sent by Keogh to Tonie Walsh, the ESBOA were to begin a promotional campaign to bring greater awareness and understanding within the union on the issues affecting gay workers and hoped that the NGF could provide them with any information they considered suitable for such a campaign.⁹⁸⁷

At this time, however, the ESBOA was the exception, rather than the norm. Following the 1982 ICTU AGM gay activists had to work hard to prevent the side-lining of gay rights within the trade union movement. In doing so, they continued with their lobbying efforts, through letters, leafletting campaigns, workshops and even articles in trade union journals. In a letter to the ICTU secretary, in 1984, Kieran Rose noted the lack of progress which had emerged following the 1982 ICTU congress. Requesting permission to organise an information stand and workshop at the forthcoming ICTU conference in Waterford, Rose stated that ‘there has been little practical progress made and we feel that now is the time for the Trade Union Movement to renew its support for Lesbian and Gay workers.’⁹⁸⁸

At the subsequent workshop Rose, with the support of Inez McCormack of the British National Union of Public Employees, and Mickey Duffy of the Northern Ireland Public Service Alliance, spoke of the challenges facing not only gay and lesbian workers but all workers,

⁹⁸⁵ NLI, IQA, MS 45, 938/2 – ICTU, *Lesbian and Gay Rights in the Workplace Guidelines for Negotiators*.

⁹⁸⁶ NLI, IQA, MS 46, 005/3 – Report on the Second National Gay Conference in Dublin, 1982.

⁹⁸⁷ NLI, IQA, MS 45, 948/3 – Bernard Keogh of Social Justice Committee of Electricity Supply Board Officers Association, to Tonie Walsh, 5 September 1983.

⁹⁸⁸ NLI, IQA, MS 45, 949/6 – Kieran Rose to ICTU secretary. Exact date of letter not stated, but it is sometime in 1984.

irrespective of their sexuality.⁹⁸⁹ Both McCormack and Duffy referenced the Kincora Boys home scandal to emphasise the vulnerability of gay and non-gay workers. Duffy, for example, noted that as a result of the Kincora scandal positive vetting had been introduced for social care jobs, something McCormack maintained was a threat to all workers.⁹⁹⁰ She revealed that one social worker, who was not gay but shared a flat with a gay man, was suspended for 8 months.⁹⁹¹ These threats to lesbian/gay workers, Rose maintained, were dangerous for all workers.⁹⁹² In many respects, the Kincora Boy's Home scandal came to be for the Irish gay rights movement what the John Sanders case came to be for the Scottish gay rights movement.

Articles within trade union journals, such as *Reporter*, the journal of the LGSPU and *The Distributive Worker*, the journal of the Irish Distributive and Administrative Trade Union, (IDATU) also played a role in bringing the topic of gay rights to the wider working community. In an article for *The Distributive Worker*, Donal Sheehan, a member of the newly established Lesbian and Gay Rights at Work group⁹⁹³, alerted readers to the reality that the IDATU had close to 2,000 lesbian or gay members.⁹⁹⁴ Sheehan noted that 'one of the main problems in arguing the case for this change (inclusion of sexual orientation) is the absence of documented cases of discrimination.'⁹⁹⁵ This, he argued, was because gay people were afraid to fight back against their dismissal without any legal protections, contending that 'if they lose, what are their chances of getting another job.'⁹⁹⁶ Repeating a common refrain from the gay movement, Sheehan maintained that 'it is a basic principle of the trade union movement to collectively

⁹⁸⁹ Personal Papers of Kieran Rose – Discrimination against lesbian and gay workers: report of discussion at workshop at ICTU conference, 3 July 1984.

⁹⁹⁰ Personal Papers of Kieran Rose – Discrimination against lesbian and gay workers: report of discussion at workshop at ICTU conference, 3 July 1984.

⁹⁹¹ Personal Papers of Kieran Rose – Discrimination against lesbian and gay workers: report of discussion at workshop at ICTU conference, 3 July 1984.

⁹⁹² Personal Papers of Kieran Rose – Discrimination against lesbian and gay workers: report of discussion at workshop at ICTU conference, 3 July 1984.

⁹⁹³ Lesbian and Gay Rights at Work was set-up following a meeting at LGPSU's head office in Dublin, in May 1986. The purpose of the group was to raise the issue of the rights of lesbian and gay workers within the trade union movement, to get a charter for the rights of lesbian and gay workers from the ICTU and to act as an information exchange for those working on this issue. It was not confined solely to lesbians and gay men, or to trade union members. – Personal Papers of Kieran Rose, Report of meeting held in LGPSU head office in Dublin, 3 May 1986.

⁹⁹⁴ NLI, IR 33188 d 2, *The Distributive Worker*, Vol. LXIII, No. 4, November/December 1986 – Donal Sheehan, 'Discrimination against Sexual Orientation.'

⁹⁹⁵ NLI, IR 33188 d 2, *The Distributive Worker*, Vol. LXIII, No. 4, November/December 1986 – Donal Sheehan, 'Discrimination against Sexual Orientation.'

⁹⁹⁶ NLI, IR 33188 d 2, *The Distributive Worker*, Vol. LXIII, No. 4, November/December 1986 – Donal Sheehan, 'Discrimination against Sexual Orientation.'

defend the rights of each individual worker. [...] It is in everybody's interest that their jobs, pay and conditions are defended.'⁹⁹⁷

An important breakthrough, which followed this lobbying, was the hosting of an ICTU workshop on gay rights in November 1985.⁹⁹⁸ The workshop, at which over 60 delegates attended, discussed three main issues, 'The role of legal change in tackling this form of discrimination', 'role of lesbian and gay workers in fighting discrimination' and 'the role of Trade Unions.'⁹⁹⁹ The main speakers included: Prof. Michael MacGreil, who dealt with how prejudice operated in society, Kieran Rose, who discussed the present situation for gay and lesbian workers, Marie Mulholland of the National Union of Public Employees and Laurence Plumley of the Northern Ireland Public Service Alliance, both of whom pointed out that in light of the Kincora boys home scandal heterosexual workers could suffer from anti-gay discrimination because prejudiced management will privately and secretly decide who they think is lesbian or gay.¹⁰⁰⁰ Although the summary report of the conference did reveal that the seminar 'uncovered a lot of prejudice and discrimination' within the unions, delegates did agree to a set of recommendations of which included:

- Education and training programmes should deal with the issue of anti-lesbian/gay prejudice and discrimination.
- Information material should be prepared for the general membership, shop stewards.
- A person within the ICTU should have responsibility for implementing an anti-discrimination programme.¹⁰⁰¹

Arising out of this seminar was the establishment of an ICTU working group tasked with drafting a policy document for trade union action against discrimination.¹⁰⁰² In June 1987 the ICTU published the working group's document titled, *Lesbian and Gay Rights in the Workplace: Guidelines for Negotiators*. This was an historic document which not only set out guidelines for the protection of gay and lesbian workers but also argued that:

⁹⁹⁷ NLI, IR 33188 d 2, *The Distributive Worker*, Vol. LXIII, No. 4, November/December 1986 – Donal Sheehan, 'Discrimination against Sexual Orientation.'

⁹⁹⁸ NLI, IQA, MS 45, 952/6 – Summary Report of Seminar on Discrimination in Employment in Relation to Sexual Orientation, I.C.T.U, 29 November 1985.

⁹⁹⁹ NLI, IQA, MS 45, 952/6 – Reports on these workshops.

¹⁰⁰⁰ NLI, IQA, MS 45, 952/6 – Summary Report of Seminar on Discrimination in Employment in Relation to Sexual Orientation, I.C.T.U, 29 November 1985.

¹⁰⁰¹ NLI, IQA, MS 45, 952/6 – Summary Report of Seminar on Discrimination in Employment in Relation to Sexual Orientation, I.C.T.U, 29 November 1985.

¹⁰⁰² Personal Papers of Kieran Rose – Kieran Rose speaking on motion No. 50 at LGPSU conference 11-14 May 1988.

lesbians and gay men are women and men whose most important relationships, emotional and sexual are with other women and other men. Almost all of the popular stereotypes are untrue. [...] Underlying this discrimination is the usually unquestioned consensus that lesbian/gay sexuality is unnatural and/or inferior to heterosexuality. This consensus (heterosexism) is pervasive but is also open to challenge. Trade Unions must take up that challenge on behalf of their members.¹⁰⁰³

Two aspects are striking from this document; firstly, given how supportive the content was, one could be forgiven for thinking that the ICTU was in fact a gay rights organisation. Secondly, it is clear from the language adopted by the ICTU that they accepted gay and lesbian workers as important members of the trade union movement who should be entitled to basic worker rights. As far as the ICTU was now concerned, the rights of gay and lesbian workers was an integral part of the trade union movement. The 1987 document laid out a series of important measures unions affiliated to the ICTU should adopt to ensure that gay and lesbian workers would be protected such as:

- Negotiate equality agreements with employers which specifically refer to discrimination on grounds of sexuality.
- Communicate union policy throughout the Union pointing out that discrimination will not be tolerated and that the Union will treat such discrimination as a serious workplace issue.
- Cover the issue of discrimination on grounds of sexuality on union education and training course.
- Where equality clauses already exist in union agreements, it is recommended that these be amended to include discrimination on grounds of sexuality.¹⁰⁰⁴

On the heels of these recommendations unions, such as the Union of Professional and Technical Civil Servants, the Federated Workers Union of Ireland and the Local Government and Public Services Union, all passed resolutions affirming their commitment to follow the 1987 ICTU guidelines in relation to rights of gay and lesbian workers.¹⁰⁰⁵ Significantly, that same year, the civil service introduced a ban on discriminating against individuals based on their sexual orientation.¹⁰⁰⁶ Just as the ICTU decision to support motion 106 was a watershed

¹⁰⁰³ NLI, IQA, MS 45, 938/2 – ICTU, *Lesbian and Gay Rights in the Workplace Guidelines for Negotiators*.

¹⁰⁰⁴ NLI, IQA, MS 45, 938/2 – ICTU, *Lesbian and Gay Rights in the Workplace Guidelines for Negotiators*.

¹⁰⁰⁵ NLI, ILB 306 G 2, *Gay Community News*, ‘Continuing Progress for Lesbian and Gay Workers’, Issues 3/4 April/May 1988.

¹⁰⁰⁶ NLI, ILB 306 G 2, *Gay Community News*, ‘Civil Service Bans Anti-Gay Discrimination’, Issues 5/6 July/August 1988.

moment, so too was this civil service ban. Although this only applied to civil servants it, nevertheless, was the first time the Irish state introduced a positive directive protecting gay/lesbian individuals. Outside of the workforce, individuals also used their unions to promote gay rights.

Other non-trade union organisations also came out in support of protection for gay and lesbian workers on foot of gay activists' lobbying. In September 1986, for example, Maura Molloy and Kieran Rose had met with Sylvia Meehan, chairwomen the Employment Equality Agency (EEA), to request that the EEA support the inclusion of sexual orientation.¹⁰⁰⁷ This was a request the agency agreed to support within only one month of that meeting.¹⁰⁰⁸ In a letter to the Minister for Labour explaining the agency's decision and encouraging him to include sexual orientation in the Employment Equality Act, 1977, Meehan noted that representations by 'certain trade unionists' had been made to the agency 'that such discrimination takes place in the employment sphere.'¹⁰⁰⁹ While no known cases were documented in Ireland, Meehan argued that 'discrimination in employment against lesbians and homosexuals is well documented in Britain and the enclosed article from the publication 'Gays and the Law' outlines a number of cases of such discrimination.'¹⁰¹⁰ Along with the ICTU, the EEA became an important ally in the campaign for protections for gay and lesbian individuals.

By the latter part of the 1980s, the rights of gay workers were in a much stronger position than they had been in the earlier part of that decade. This was thanks to the efforts of gay activists in lobbying the trade union movement to support the rights of this minority group. The fact that unions themselves implemented these directives voluntarily, rather than being forced by a legal requirement, further demonstrates the extent to which change had come from society through gay activist lobbying. Later, activists would mobilise the support of the trade union movement to bring about further improvements in the early 1990s. No doubt, the engagement of gay activists with the trade union movement in the 1980s furthered a process of changing mind-sets not only amongst ICTU members but also those associated with those members. Unions were now willing to publicly speak out and lobby for the implementation of legislation to protect the rights of gay and lesbian workers.

¹⁰⁰⁷ Personal Papers of Kieran Rose – Lesbian and Gay Rights at Work – November 1986.

¹⁰⁰⁸ National Archives of Ireland – Folder 2014/107/76 – Sylvia Meehan to Ruáiri Quinn, Minister for Labour, 8 October 1986.

¹⁰⁰⁹ National Archives of Ireland – Folder 2014/107/76 – Sylvia Meehan to Ruáiri Quinn, Minister for Labour, 12 December 1986.

¹⁰¹⁰ National Archives of Ireland – Folder 2014/107/76 – Sylvia Meehan to Ruáiri Quinn, Minister for Labour, 12cDecember 1986.

‘Ireland’s voice will carry greater weight in the councils of international diplomacy when her politicians take the lead in putting an end to a form of discrimination that has been judged by the European Court at Strasbourg to be a denial of fundamental human rights.’¹⁰¹¹

The success of the NGF and Cork Gay Collective in garnering support from the Student and Trade Union Movements by the mid 1980s did not apply to their relations with the political class in Ireland. In fact, the efforts to engage with the political class came to resemble the movement’s interaction with the Irish Roman Catholic Church. Documenting the interactions between gay organisations and the different political parties in Ireland in detail is difficult due to the sparseness of sources. The almost complete absence of any mention of gay rights in the archives of Fianna Fáil and the Labour Party is striking.¹⁰¹² Scant material within the Irish Queer Archive, National Archives and a search through the main national newspapers offer few insights into the interaction between gay activists and the political class in Ireland. While records exist of rare invitations and questionnaires sent to political parties, along with requests to attend conferences, no follow up about these events was discovered. What can be said with certainty, however, is that the three major political parties, which today claim to be strong supporters of gay rights, preferred to ignore, rather than to engage with the issues raised by gay and lesbian activists throughout the 1970s and 1980s.

In attempting to engage with politicians, gay and lesbian activists positioned the situation of gay rights in Ireland in an international context. They attempted to frame the situation facing Irish gay and lesbian citizens as unique in comparison with their European counterparts in the 1970s and 1980s. Activists reiterated the degree to which Ireland compared badly to its European peers, given that the country maintained laws criminalising sexual activity between males and lacked any legal protections for gay and lesbian citizens. They used these arguments to put pressure on politicians, who by ignoring the plight of gay and lesbian individuals in Ireland, damaged Ireland’s international image. Much like those involved in trade union lobbying, who had argued that supporting gay rights would benefit the entire trade union movement, activists now maintained that removing discriminatory laws against homosexuals would present Ireland in a much more positive international light.

In the May 1972 Referendum, which saw a record turnout of 71%, over 83% voted Yes to EEC membership. This was a massive vote of confidence in the European Economic

¹⁰¹¹ NLI, IQA, MS 45, 948/9 – NGF Press Release, 24 July 1980.

¹⁰¹² The archives of Fine Gael are not yet accessible for this period.

Community and Ireland's willingness to join.¹⁰¹³ In many respects, as gay and lesbian activists viewed it, it was also a sign of Ireland's desire to become more closely aligned with their European counterparts. This was similarly reflected in the major political parties' manifestos throughout the 1970s and 1980s.¹⁰¹⁴ Fianna Fáil's 1977 and 1981 manifestos, for example, included a commitment to 'further European integration' and safeguarding of 'existing Community achievements and principles [...].'¹⁰¹⁵

Irish and international gay and lesbian activists used Ireland's enthusiastic decision to join the EEC to criticise Ireland's discriminatory laws. They persistently contrasted the situation of homosexuals in Ireland with their counterparts in Europe, presenting Ireland as *out of step* with the direction modern Europe was taking. International activists were particularly aggrieved at this and were not shy about condemning the Irish government for maintaining such a position. The NGF, Cork IGRM and Cork Gay Collective's memberships of the International Gay Association were particularly important in facilitating close connections with international organisations. The NGF, in particular, as information secretariat for the IGA in the early 1980s, ensured it had regular interaction with international gay organisations and were kept abreast of any changes which took place in relation to gay rights.¹⁰¹⁶

In 1975 a letter from INFOR Homosexualite C.C.L. in Brussels and another in 1980 from the Federation of Working Groups Homophily argued to the Irish ambassador in Brussels that Ireland's laws starkly contrasted to the rest of Europe. 'At a time when Ireland is becoming part of Europe and is striving to harmonise its legislation with that of its partners' declared INFOR, 'it seems abnormal that such a law should remain in force, particularly since Ireland is the president of the nine. We are counting on your intervention to ensure that in the near future progress will be made so that this legal discrimination against homosexuals may be ended.'¹⁰¹⁷

Similarly, in their letter, following Norris' defeat in the Irish High Court, the Federation of Working Groups Homophily maintained that 'from our own daily experiences in Belgium

¹⁰¹³ *Irish Times*, 'Yes to Europe by 5 to 1', 12 May 1972.

¹⁰¹⁴ Irish Election Manifesto Archive, <http://michaelpidgeon.com/manifestos/> Accessed on 25 January 2018.

¹⁰¹⁵ Irish Election Manifesto Archive, <http://michaelpidgeon.com/manifestos/docs/ff/Fianna%20Fail%20GE%201977.pdf> Fianna Fáil 1977 General Election Manifesto. Accessed on 26 January 2018. <http://michaelpidgeon.com/manifestos/docs/ff/Fianna%20Fail%20GE%201981.pdf> Fianna Fáil 1981 General Election Manifesto. Accessed on 26 January 2018.

¹⁰¹⁶ Diarmaid Ferriter, *Occasions of Sin: Sex and Society in Modern Ireland*, (London, 2009), 488.

¹⁰¹⁷ National Archives of Ireland, 2012/21/582 – Letter from Infor-Homosexualite to Irish Department of Foreign Affairs, 25 April 1975.

in the field of homosexuality we cannot understand such a condemnation in a European nation. At a time when in so many countries homosexual men and women can live openly their preference we are taken aback on the out of date philosophy hidden behind this recent sentence.’¹⁰¹⁸ The use of the word progress in the first letter signified the positive developments in Europe for gay and lesbian individuals, while Ireland, as the second letter highlighted was following an outdated philosophy, something which conflicted with progressive thinking in Europe. While these letters were addressed to the Ambassador in Brussels, it is clear from the fact that these letters are in the National Archives of Ireland that they made their way to the Irish government departments at the time.

Roy Dooney, the national chair of Young Fine Gael, used the assertion that these laws conflicted with modern thinking on homosexuality, particularly within European states, in proposing motion 106, ‘That this Ard Fheis calls for the repeal of the oppressive legislation against homosexuals in this country’, at the Fine Gael Ard Fheis in April 1979.¹⁰¹⁹ Motion 106 had, in fact, arisen out of Young Fine Gael’s first national conference earlier in January 1979.¹⁰²⁰ The UCD and TCD branches of Young Fine Gael had called for the repeal of Ireland’s ‘oppressive legislation against homosexuals’, with David Moane (TCD branch) arguing that ‘how dare any law in a democratic society be so base, so bigoted, as to refer to acts of homosexuality as gross indecency.’¹⁰²¹

At the subsequent Fine Gael Ard Fheis Dooney contended that in Ireland ‘basically what we have in our law is a deep seated religious prejudice which bears no relation to modern ethical systems, scientific understanding or social conditions.’¹⁰²² Dooney further argued that ‘Ireland is the only sovereign state in the E.E.C and Europe as a whole which continues its medieval persecution of the homosexual minority.’¹⁰²³ Dismissing the belief that homosexuality was a disease, Dooney maintained that ‘just as heterosexuality is a state of mind, so too is homosexuality, and not even the most repressive states in the world have started persecution on the basis of state of mind.’¹⁰²⁴ The *Irish Times*, which reported much of Dooney’s speech, noted that the motion was carried.¹⁰²⁵ Although this marked the first time

¹⁰¹⁸ National Archives of Ireland, 2015/51/1575 – Letter from Federation of Working Groups Homophily to Irish Department of Foreign Affairs.

¹⁰¹⁹ NLI, IQA, MS 45, 940/2 – Young Fine Gael Press Release on Motion 106, 1 April 1979.

¹⁰²⁰ *Irish Times*, ‘Young Fine Gael critical of senior leaders’, 29 January 1979.

¹⁰²¹ *Irish Times*, ‘Young Fine Gael critical of senior leaders’, 29 January 1979.

¹⁰²² NLI, IQA, MS 45, 940/2 – Young Fine Gael Press Release on Motion 106, 1 April 1979.

¹⁰²³ NLI, IQA, MS 45, 940/2 – Young Fine Gael Press Release on Motion 106, 1 April 1979.

¹⁰²⁴ NLI, IQA, MS 45, 940/2 – Young Fine Gael Press Release on Motion 106, 1 April 1979.

¹⁰²⁵ *Irish Times*, ‘Establishment of law reform group sought’, 2 April 1979.

that one of the major political parties in Ireland supported decriminalisation, Fine Gael did not, however, take up gay rights as a serious issue.

Irish gay and lesbian activists themselves were even more stringent in their criticism than Dooney or Moane. Some went further by comparing Ireland's attitudes with those of the Soviet Union, not the EEC. In two strongly worded letters to the Irish media in January and July 1978, Bernard Keogh and David Norris presented Ireland as a state which did not respect the human rights of certain of its citizens. In his damning letter to the *Irish Press*, Norris scolded Ireland, declaring that:

Our national press has rightly reflected the indignation of the civilised community at the mistreatment of Human Rights activists in the Soviet Union. However, lest our moral indignation be seen to be merely righteous, let us remember that even in Ireland, we are not always the Snow-White champions of individual liberty and freedom of conscience that we like to present ourselves as being, particularly when the issues involved disturb our personal complacency. Let us bear in mind, for example, that Ireland alone of the European countries shares with Russia an outdated legal code under which adult male homosexuals can be subjected to police harassment and jail for conduct of their private lives.¹⁰²⁶

Bernard Keogh contended in his letter, which similarly compared Ireland with the Soviet Union, that this is 'hardly a paragon where Human rights are concerned.'¹⁰²⁷ This was something picked up by *Cork Examiner* journalist Liz Doran in her interview with Kieran Rose in 1983. Beginning her article, she noted that:

To the ordinary straight people of Ireland, there are few similarities between Communist Russia and our beloved republican democracy. [...] Yet despite the sacred regard by the Irish for 'freedom' and 'civil rights' there are many citizens who believe they may as well be living in the U.S.S.R. as here. Thirty-year-old Kieran Rose feels this way. As a confirmed homosexual who came out many years ago, Kieran believes that he has been denied his inalienable right to live without fear, prejudice and oppression according to his sexual preference.¹⁰²⁸

This comparison was an attempt to highlight the hypocrisy of the Irish government and politicians who were quick to condemn breaches of human rights outside of Irish shores, most notably in the Soviet Union and Apartheid in South Africa, but equally willing to maintain the status quo as regards homosexuals in Ireland. Both Fine Gael and Fianna Fáil's 1981 manifestos prioritised the ending of apartheid in South Africa, while Fine Gael also stated their

¹⁰²⁶ *Irish Press*, 'Reform Campaign', 20 July 1978.

¹⁰²⁷ *Irish Examiner*, 'Homosexual Law Reform', 31 January 1978

¹⁰²⁸ *Cork Examiner*, Liz Doran, 'Kieran seeks rights for gays', 3 August 1983.

overwhelming opposition ‘to any idea of an extension of Soviet Power beyond its present sphere of influence [...].’¹⁰²⁹

Following ministerial statements concerning the injustices of the apartheid system in South Africa, the NGF released a strongly worded statement in which they described Ireland’s treatment of homosexuals as a form of ‘sexual apartheid that denied homosexual citizens their right to dignity and self-respect.’¹⁰³⁰ This comparison was later brought to the attention of T.Ds., in a December 1984 letter, when Edmund Lynch specifically alluded to this hypocrisy, by insisting that ‘What is more annoying is when TD’s of all parties stand up in Dail Éireann and talk about oppressed minorities both on and outside of this island and yet fail to notice that all around them – in their work, leisure circles and families – there are countless gay people who are as Irish as themselves and who will not simply go away if ignored.’¹⁰³¹ An attempt earlier that year by the NGF to acknowledge publicly the oppression of Irish homosexuals with a wreath laying ceremony at the Garden of Remembrance had been denied by the Department of Taoiseach on the basis that the Garden of Remembrance was for those who gave ‘their lives in the cause of Irish freedom.’¹⁰³² The NGF responded with a press statement insisting such a decision was a ‘perfect example of its [government] inability and unwillingness to acknowledge the existence and heritage of Ireland’s 250,000 lesbian women and gay men.’¹⁰³³

‘I do not believe they are our laws. As an Irishman, I repudiate them totally. They did not originate in this country.’¹⁰³⁴

In numerous documents issued by gay activists and their supporters the situation facing homosexuals in Ireland was frequently described as *barbaric, uncivilised, repressive, medieval, and antiquated*. In a 1980 letter to the *Irish Times*, *Irish Examiner* and *Irish Press*, Liam Whitelaw described the laws as *archaic* and *severe*, while the Irish Council for Civil Liberties in a statement condemning the banning of *Gay News* in Ireland in 1982 argued that ‘It is about time that the obnoxious nineteenth century laws against homosexual acts were

¹⁰²⁹ Irish Election manifesto archive,

<http://michaelpidgeon.com/manifestos/docs/ff/Fianna%20Fail%20GE%201981.pdf> Fianna Fáil 1981 General Election Manifesto.

<http://michaelpidgeon.com/manifestos/docs/fg/Fine%20Gael%20GE%201981.pdf> Fine Gael 1981 General Election manifesto.

¹⁰³⁰ NLI, IQA, MS 45, 969/4, NGF Press Release, 19 March 1981.

¹⁰³¹ NLI, IQA, MS 45, 943/16, Letter sent to Irish TDs, 14 December 1984.

¹⁰³² *Irish Times*, ‘Taoiseach says no to gay ceremony’, 10 November 1984.

¹⁰³³ *Irish Times*, ‘Taoiseach says no to gay ceremony’, 10 November 1984.

¹⁰³⁴ *Seanad Éireann Debate*, Vol. 127 No. 1 – ‘European Court of Human Rights Judgement: Statement’, 12 December 1990.

repealed. [...] Without these discredited and anachronistic laws, the Censorship Board would have little grounds to defend their ban.’¹⁰³⁵

In highlighting the archaic character of these laws some activists also sought to reinforce the fact that they did not result from Irish legislation but rather were the direct result of Victorian British legislation imposed on Ireland through colonialism. This was an active attempt to appeal to the nationalist sentiments of Irish society, particularly amongst the political parties. In June 1980 Dr. Noel Browne raised this issue in Dáil Éireann when questioning the Minister for Foreign Affairs Brian Lenihan about whether the government had abstained on a vote in the European Communities on the issue of the denial of human rights applied to homosexual behaviour between consenting adults. He noted that the laws, which applied in Ireland, had in fact been passed by the British parliament back in 1885.¹⁰³⁶ David Norris similarly noted this in two separate speeches, one at the 1978 USI conference and again in a speech arguing for gay rights at the ICCL AGM in 1980, declaring that ‘It could well be that next year’s conference would have the satisfaction of celebrating the victory of common sense over homophobic prejudice, and the striking down by an Irish court of one of the last and most disgusting remnants of British Colonial Rule.’¹⁰³⁷ Material sent to the Irish government also sought to reinforce this point. Under a heading, ‘Legal and Education’, an IGRM leaflet declared that ‘Many people, including some members of the legal profession are ignorant of the present laws applying to homosexual relationships in Ireland. The Irish law originates in fact from Acts of the British Parliament dated 1861 and 1885. They have subsequently been repealed by an act of 1967 in England, bringing them into line with their neighbours in Western Laws.’¹⁰³⁸ Gay activists sought to underline the irony of a situation where the colonial parliament that had introduced these laws (Westminster) had actually removed them in 1967 and 1982, while the parliament which did not introduce them, continued to defend them.

In seeking to reform the current situation, Irish activists maintained that they were simply fulfilling their ‘patriotic duty to make this last effort to prevent further humiliation of our country in the light of European public opinion.’¹⁰³⁹ Ireland’s voice, the NGF argued, would ‘carry greater weight in the councils of international diplomacy when her politicians

¹⁰³⁵ NLI, IR 340 I 7, Irish Council for Civil Liberties, *Bulletin*, Vol. 7, No. 3, September 1982. ‘USI and homosexuality’, *Irish Times* and *Irish Press*, 10 October 1980. *Irish Examiner*, 18 October 1980.

¹⁰³⁶ Dáil Éireann Debate, Vol. 322, No. 6, 18 June 1980 – EEC Human Rights Vote.

¹⁰³⁷ NLI, IQA, MS 45, 948/2 – Speech by David Norris at Annual General Meeting of USI, 14 January 1978.

¹⁰³⁸ National Archives of Ireland, Folder 2014/107/76 – IGRM Leaflet

¹⁰³⁹ NLI, IQA MS 45, 948/9 – NGF Press Release, 24 July 1980.

take the lead in putting an end to a form of discrimination that has been judged by the European Court at Strasbourg to be a denial of fundamental human rights.¹⁰⁴⁰ The emancipation of Ireland's homosexual community would send an important message to the world that Ireland did not condone repressive, barbaric and colonial treatment of its citizens. In this regard, the liberalisation of laws relating to homosexuality would not just positively impact on homosexuals, but on Ireland's reputation more generally.

In many respects, this was an argument with some merit. The European Commission of Human Rights had ruled in Jeffrey Dudgeon's case against the U.K., that the legal prohibition of private consensual sexual activity between males over 21 years of age breached Article 8 of the European Convention on Human Rights.¹⁰⁴¹ Particularly embarrassing and infuriating to some Irish politicians, however, was the intervention by the Dutch parliament on this matter in May 1980. According to a report in the *Irish Press* a motion proposed by the Dutch Liberal Party and the Christian Democrats was passed which condemned the legal situation facing homosexuals in Ireland and called on the Irish government to amend them. In defending their decision to interfere with internal Irish politics both parties argued that 'now there are such close links between the countries in the EEC, it feels it can state that the legislation is no longer in line with general norms.'¹⁰⁴² This act particularly incensed Noel Davern, a Fianna Fáil T.D. and M.E.P, who contacted RTÉ's Viewpoint to argue that homosexuals constituted a small minority and Dáil Éireann was busy with much more important legislation.¹⁰⁴³ Davern's annoyance was reiterated by fellow T.D. Michael Keating, Fine Gael spokesman on Human Rights and Law Reform, who insisted that 'no outside attempts to force Ireland to change its values would succeed.'¹⁰⁴⁴ This, despite the fact that Keating's party, only one year previously, had passed its own motion supporting homosexual law reform.

***'As socialists, we cannot be concerned about inequalities of class, wealth and privilege and ignore the inequalities experienced by minorities such as homosexuals.'*¹⁰⁴⁵**

¹⁰⁴⁰ NLI, IQA MS 45, 948/9 – NGF Press Release, 24 July 1980.

¹⁰⁴¹ [https://hudoc.echr.coe.int/eng#{'itemid':\['001-57473'\]}](https://hudoc.echr.coe.int/eng#{'itemid':['001-57473']}) Case of Dudgeon v. The United Kingdom – Judgement 22 October 1981.

¹⁰⁴² *Irish Press*, 8 May 1980 – Dutch Attack law here on homosexuals.

¹⁰⁴³ NLI, IR 369 I 23, *In Touch*, Vol. 2, No. 5, May 1980 – Media View.

¹⁰⁴⁴ *Irish Independent*, 'Gay laws: we won't bow to outside pressure', 9 May 1980.

¹⁰⁴⁵ '1981. Politics: The Right of Gay Men and Women', www.gayinthe80s.com, <http://www.gayinthe80s.com/2014/03/1981-politics-the-rights-of-gay-men-and-women/> Accessed on 6 December 2016.

The close relationship and interaction with international groups clearly helped the efforts of Irish gay and lesbian activists to lobby Irish political parties. In seeking to engage with public representative's activists often adopted international recommendations or material to strengthen their case for gay rights, particularly at a time when such information in Ireland was non-existent. Such documents were crucial in trying to convince public officials of the merits in supporting gay rights. In the personal papers of Sean Connolly a folder containing a submission to the then Minister for Law Reform, Dick Spring, in 1981, reveals that the IGRM presented a list of positive statements on homosexuality from influential American organisations such as: the American Civil Liberties Union, American Psychiatric Association and the American Psychological Association.¹⁰⁴⁶ The IGRM, quoting the American Civil Liberties, noted that 'just as governmental discrimination by race, religion or sex is a denial of equal protection, so too is governmental discrimination on the basis of sexual or affectional preference. Homosexuality per se implies no disability that would justify such discrimination.'¹⁰⁴⁷

That same year the NGF used Recommendation 924 (adopted by the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe), which outlawed discrimination against homosexuals, and the European Court of Human Rights decision in relation to Jeffrey Dudgeon's legal case to request a meeting with Dick Spring in the hope of convincing him 'to bring Ireland into line with the developing situation.'¹⁰⁴⁸ According to files within the National Archives, recommendation 924, in particular, caused some headache within the Irish government. Not only did the Department of Labour examine it, but so too did the Department of Justice, in light of the fact that laws existed in Ireland criminalising sexual activity between males.¹⁰⁴⁹ The recommendation explicitly demanded an end to this criminalisation. In one handwritten letter a J. Liddy advised that 'pending the Supreme Court decision in the Norris case it will be difficult for Ireland to take any clear-cut position on the recommendation as a whole, and the permanent representative may wish to consider ways of playing for time.'¹⁰⁵⁰ In hindsight, the

¹⁰⁴⁶ Personal Papers of Sean Connolly, Submission by the Irish Gay Rights Movement to Mr. Dick Spring, Minister of State for Law Reform, November 1981.

¹⁰⁴⁷ Personal Papers of Sean Connolly, Submission by the Irish Gay Rights Movement to Mr. Dick Spring, Minister of State for Law Reform, November 1981.

¹⁰⁴⁸ National Archives of Ireland, Folder 2015/51/1577, David Norris on behalf of NGF Administrative Council to Minister of State for Law Reform, Mr. Dick Spring, 23 October 1981. <http://assembly.coe.int/nw/xml/XRef/Xref-XML2HTML-en.asp?fileid=14958&lang=en> For further information on Recommendation 924 please click on link. Accessed on 6 December 2016.

¹⁰⁴⁹ National Archives of Ireland, 2012/21/582.

¹⁰⁵⁰ National Archives of Ireland, 2012/21/582.

Irish government were very successful in playing for time on this matter and the EEC quite weak in enforcing its own recommendations.

In looking into resolution 924 the Department of Labour, in an April 1982 letter to the Secretary of the Department of Foreign Affairs, reiterated its position that in so far as it was concerned ‘there is little evidence of discrimination in employment on grounds of sexual orientation.’¹⁰⁵¹ This was the exact same position the Department had adopted in 1976, and would adopt again in 1983, in its replies to letters from David Norris and Stephen Quillinan. In his letter, David Norris drew the then Minister for Labour’s attention to the inclusion in the district of Columbia, USA, of a sexual orientation clause in the human rights legislation.¹⁰⁵² Similarly, Stephen Quillinan, on the heels of a request from Dr. Veral Squarcialupi MEP and Rapporteur to the EuroDail Committee on Social Affairs and Employment, asked the Minister for Labour whether his department condoned the practice of job applicants being refused employment solely on the grounds of his/her sexual orientation?¹⁰⁵³ Both replies from the then ministers were remarkably similar despite a seven year gap. Each letter stated that the minister would consider amending the Unfair Dismissal’s Act to include sexual orientation *only* if strong evidence of such discrimination existed. As far as they were concerned no such evidence existed or had been furnished to them.¹⁰⁵⁴

At that time this was an argument gay and lesbian activists could *not* counteract with Irish examples, as none actually existed. In an attempt to overcome this lack of evidence gay activists in the mid-1980s began using evidence from outside Ireland to demonstrate that such discrimination was a reality. Activists were keen to emphasise that the lack of evidence in Ireland was a result of fear amongst gay and lesbian workers to raise this issue because of the lack of legal protections, not that no discrimination took place. Their attempts to do so were further strengthened following the ICTU’s decision to support the inclusion of sexual orientation in the Unfair Dismissal’s Act. This decision was one of several attachments sent to the Minister for Labour, Ruairi Quinn, in September 1986.¹⁰⁵⁵

¹⁰⁵¹ National Archives of Ireland, 2012/21/582 – Department of Labour to Department of Foreign Affairs, for the attention of Mr. B. Earls, April 1982.

¹⁰⁵² National Archives of Ireland, Folder 2014/107/76 – David Norris to Minister for Labour, 18 December 1976.

¹⁰⁵³ National Archives of Ireland, Folder 2014/107/76 – Stephen Quillinan to Minister for Labour, 23 June 1983.

¹⁰⁵⁴ National Archives of Ireland, Folder 2014/107/76 – Freda Nolan, Private Secretary to Minister for Labour to Stephen Quillinan, IGRM, 17 November 1983.

¹⁰⁵⁵ National Archives of Ireland, Folder 2014/107/76 – Lesbian and Gay Rights at Work to Minister for Labour, Ruairi Quinn, 22 September 1986.

In that same letter to Minister Quinn activists from the Lesbian and Gay Rights at Work Group, (Brenda Harvey, Maura Molloy, Donal Sheehan and Cathal Kerrigan), listed numerous cases from Great Britain to demonstrate that discrimination did actually occur. Such examples included the 1979 John Sanders case in Scotland, Philip Long, who was apparently sacked from his job after he left his suitcase on a bus containing papers related to the Campaign for Homosexual Equality, the Bell v. Devon and Cornwall Police case 1978, and the Boychuck v. H.J. Symons Holdings case 1977, along with numerous others.¹⁰⁵⁶ Other evidence presented included a European Parliament working document on sexual discrimination compiled by Mrs. Squarcialupi of the Committee on Social Affairs and Employment in May 1983.¹⁰⁵⁷ Similarly, the EEA wrote to Minister Quinn in 1986 voicing their support for the inclusion of sexual orientation in the Employment Equality Act. In doing so, they included copies of the British Labour Campaign for Lesbian and Gay Rights publication, *Legislation for Lesbian and Gay Rights: A Manifesto*, along with, *All in A Day's Work*, by the British based Lesbian Employment Rights organisation and Paul Crane's *Gays and the Law*, to back up their claims.¹⁰⁵⁸

Irish gay activists often sought to use such documents to influence internal policy within political parties, especially the Labour Party, who seemed somewhat more willing to engage with gay and lesbian activists. For example, in May 1981 Bernard Keogh sent a letter to Seamus Scally of the Irish Labour Party in which he attached a copy of the recently published British Labour Party's document on the rights of gay men and women. In this document, the British Labour General Secretary maintained that 'as socialists we cannot be concerned about inequalities of class, wealth and privilege and ignore the inequalities experienced by minorities such as homosexuals. The elimination of prejudice and injustice in our society is fundamental to the fight for socialism.'¹⁰⁵⁹ The same letter also highlighted the decision of the Scottish Trade Union Council to endorse the movement for civil rights for homosexual citizens.

The assertion that the elimination of prejudice and injustice in society was fundamental to the fight for socialism was furthered referenced in a letter to Jane Scott of Young Labour by Tonie Walsh later that same month. Quoting from a statement issued by the Homosexuelle

¹⁰⁵⁶ National Archives of Ireland, Folder 2014/107/76 – Lesbian and Gay Rights at Work to Minister for Labour, Ruairi Quinn, 22 September 1986.

¹⁰⁵⁷ National Archives of Ireland, Folder 2014/107/76 – Lesbian and Gay Rights at Work to Minister for Labour, Ruairi Quinn, 22 September 1986.

¹⁰⁵⁸ National Archives of Ireland, Folder 2014/107/76 – Employment Equality Agency to Minister for Labour, Ruairi Quinn, 2 December 1986.

¹⁰⁵⁹ '1981. Politics: The Right of Gay Men and Women', www.gayinthe80s.com, <http://www.gayinthe80s.com/2014/03/1981-politics-the-rights-of-gay-men-and-women/> Accessed on 6 December 2016.

Initiative Wien, a member of the International Gay Association and the Homosexuelle Initiative Salzburg, the statement called on Young Labour, while attending a European meeting of young socialists, ‘to urge their respective socialist parties to adopt as part of socialist policy, the reform of laws which discriminate against gay people on the grounds of their sexual orientation. These discriminatory laws are contrary to socialist ideals and the spirit of the UN Convention on Human Rights.’¹⁰⁶⁰

While the Labour Party did not publicly speak out in favour of decriminalisation, some high-profile party members did. Ruairi Quinn, Brendan Halligan and Michael D. Higgins, for example, made positive pronouncements in favour of gay rights.¹⁰⁶¹ Ruairi Quinn had attended the Hirschfeld Centre in June 1980 to lend his support to the launch of a public appeal for funds to finance David Norris’ legal campaign, remarking to the press that ‘he had received more encouragement than opposition’ for the stance he took.¹⁰⁶² It was during Quinn’s time as Minister for Labour that serious consideration was given to amending the Employment Equality Act to include sexual orientation. This consideration only came to an abrupt end with the departure of Quinn from government on the heels of Labour’s withdrawal from coalition with Fine Gael in January 1987. Similarly, Brendan Halligan was the only Irish M.E.P. in 1984 to vote in favour of a European Parliament proposal to outlaw discrimination of homosexuals in the workplace.¹⁰⁶³ Speaking in support of the proposal, Halligan stated that ‘the issue was not likely in the foreseeable future to be discussed in the Dáil and the European Parliament was the only parliamentary forum open to an Irish politician to debate this issue in public.’¹⁰⁶⁴ The *Irish Times* reported that Fine Gael’s M.E.P.s abstained ‘on the grounds that the issue was one for individual member states’, while Fianna Fáil’s M.E.P.s voted against the proposal.¹⁰⁶⁵ Halligan was later presented with the Magnus Hirschfeld Award by the NGF in gratitude for his support.¹⁰⁶⁶ Although these efforts, however, did not lead to the main political parties or governments implementing any positive change in law reform until the late 1980s and early 1990s they were, nevertheless, important in engaging public representatives and the wider public on the topic of homosexuality.

¹⁰⁶⁰ NLI, IQA, MS 45, 958/3 – Tonie Walsh to Jane Scott, Young Labour, 22 May 1981.

¹⁰⁶¹ NLI, IQA, MS 45, 940/3 – Tonie Walsh to Brendan Halligan, M.E.P., 15 May 1984.

¹⁰⁶² *Irish Times*, ‘Homosexuals seek legal action funds’, 4 June 1980.

¹⁰⁶³ Fergus Pyle, ‘Homosexual vote’, *Irish Times*, 14 March 1984.

¹⁰⁶⁴ Fergus Pyle, ‘Homosexual vote’, *Irish Times*, 14 March 1984.

¹⁰⁶⁵ Fergus Pyle, ‘Homosexual vote’, *Irish Times*, 14 March 1984.

¹⁰⁶⁶ NLI, IQA, MS 965/1 – *NGF News*, Vol. No. 3, Issue. No. 5, Sept/Oct. 1984 – Focus on – Brendan Halligan.

Conclusion

While the political elite did not support the gay rights campaign of the 1980s, as we have seen, numerous organisations such as the USI, ICTU, EEA and ICCL did join the campaign for gay rights in Ireland, and others such as the Church of Ireland lent their support to the decriminalisation of sexual activity between males. Interestingly, while this chapter has primarily focused on the attempts of the gay movement to reach out to other groups in Ireland, during the latter half of the 1980s the reverse occurred, and some groups started to reach out to gay organisations themselves for support. In November 1987 Ita O'Connor, (Divorce Action Group), wrote to Maurice Cafferky to offer their support to the NGF, which she described as a 'beacon of light to all those campaigning for a more human and tolerant society on this island.'¹⁰⁶⁷ In that same month Labour Youth contacted the NGF requesting that they formally back their protest demonstration at Parnell Square and to attend with a banner.¹⁰⁶⁸ Labour Youth was not the only political organisation to reach out to the NGF at that time. Desmond O'Malley, leader of the Progressive Democrats (PDs), had similarly contacted the NGF requesting their support. In his letter O'Malley noted that he was 'seeking to forge links with influential groups that share our views, ideas and outlook.'¹⁰⁶⁹ O'Malley also declared that 'the outdated laws prohibiting homosexual relationships between consenting adults in this country are a disgrace. The Progressive Democrats wholeheartedly support the immediate abolition of these laws. When we are part of the next government we shall campaign vigorously to this end.'¹⁰⁷⁰ In fact, the Progressive Democrats 1989 manifesto was the only party manifesto to support the 'incorporation of the European Convention on Human Rights as part of domestic law.'¹⁰⁷¹ Akin to those who recognised the value of the 'Pink Pound' in the latter half of the 1980s in Ireland, it would also appear that O'Malley recognised the value of the 'Pink Vote' and was willing to reach out to the NGF to get their backing. That he was willing to do so

¹⁰⁶⁷ NLI, IQA, MS 45, 949/11 – Ita O'Connor, Divorce Action Group Secretary, to Maurice Cafferky, 20 November 1987.

¹⁰⁶⁸ NLI, IQA, MS 45, 940/3 – Kevin McLoughlin, Labour Youth National Secretary, to NGF, 5 November 1987.

¹⁰⁶⁹ NLI, IQA, MS 45, 940/2 – Desmond O'Malley, Progressive Democrats' leader, to NGF. Date unknown, but most likely sent sometime either in 1987 or 1989.

¹⁰⁷⁰ NLI, IQA, MS 45, 940/2 – Desmond O'Malley, Progressive Democrats' leader, to NGF. Date unknown, but most likely sent sometime either in 1987 or 1989.

¹⁰⁷¹ Irish Election Manifesto Archive,

<http://www.michaelpidgeon.com/manifestos/docs/pd/Progressive%20Democrats%20GE%201989.pdf> Progressive Democrats 1989 General Election Manifesto. Accessed on 25 January 2018.

would suggest that O'Malley was confident that such a move would not be politically damaging, particularly, considering the Progressives Democrats were only founded in 1985.

As this chapter has demonstrated the gay and lesbian movement actively reached out to other groups in an attempt to build a broad movement for the promotion of gay rights in Ireland. In doing so they adopted rhetoric which appealed to their respective audience and allowed gay activists to situate gay rights within the realm of civil, human, and worker's rights. This was something organisations such as the USI, ICTU and others were willing to support. Gay and lesbian activists were successful in convincing these organisations that gay rights had wider implications for society, not just for gay and lesbian individuals. In turn, these organisations took up the campaign for gay rights both within their own organisations and outside them. Gay Rights became a topic on student campuses, within the trade unions, and even within the different churches in Ireland. The efforts to highlight how out of step Ireland was with its European neighbours was crucial to a broader campaign to educate Irish society, particularly the political elite. In this, gay and lesbian activists in Ireland had the strong support of their international allies who were unafraid to criticise Ireland's maintenance of the discriminatory legislation against homosexuals. These attempts, however, had implications outside of the organisations they directly interacted with. As their profile increased, and with it those supporting gay rights, other groups in Ireland sought to garner the support of the gay rights movement for their own campaigns. In turn, this brought them into contact with the issues affecting and concerning gay and lesbian individuals in Ireland. These efforts played a crucial role in the implementation of progressive legislation in the early 1990s; legislation that was not a directive from the European Court of Human Rights, but rather a directive from the gay rights movement, supported by the aforementioned groups. As a result of their efforts, Irish gay rights organisations were not alone in the campaign to bring about greater understanding and tolerance of homosexuality.

Chapter 7 - ‘The heterosexual community owe a debt to the homosexual community’: HIV/AIDS activism and Ireland’s gay community’s response

During a speech at Maynooth University in 2015 as part of the Project for Emerging Voices and Hidden Histories, Tonie Walsh, long-time gay rights activist, called on the government to build an Irish Aids Memorial, insisting such a memorial be erected ‘not down some side street or suburban square. [...] I might settle for Merrion Square, on the west side facing Leinster House, to remind the Dáil of its lack of purpose and shabby neglect as our brothers and sisters died throughout the 1980s and 1990s.’¹⁰⁷² To many this may have come as a surprise. Many in Irish society may not be aware of the extent to which AIDS impacted Irish society, not just among certain minority or so-called high-risk groups during this period. Unlike the situation in other countries, Ireland did not witness the type of mass protests which characterised AIDS activism in the USA, or even England. In fact, activists’ response to AIDS in Ireland seemed, for the most part, particularly civil and orderly, rather than confrontational and obstructive.

An examination of twentieth century Irish historiography, however, would lead one to conclude that Ireland had managed to avoid the trauma of AIDS, such is its omission in the historiography.¹⁰⁷³ This, of course, is not true. As Walsh rightly noted, many Irish citizens died from AIDS. In fact, AIDS had far reaching implications for Irish society, not simply among those it directly affected. AIDS brought home to Irish society the extent to which drug addiction was a serious problem, it publicised the poor quality of facilities available to confront sexually transmitted diseases, it reinforced the fact that sexual activity outside marriage did occur, particularly amongst homosexuals who circumvented the law to engage in sexual activity, and it highlighted the almost complete absence of any form of sex education within the Irish educational system. AIDS also demonstrated the extent to which the Irish Roman Catholic Church was determined to resist any attempts to condone the use of condoms in the fight against AIDS, or to release its tight grip over the Irish educational system. This, in particular, put the government in a difficult position when it eventually decided to tackle AIDS. While, the Irish Roman Catholic Church’s position was no different from that in many other countries, the role played by the church in the educational sphere in Ireland made for a uniquely Irish

¹⁰⁷² <https://gcn.ie/activist-to-launch-campaign-for-irish-aids-memorial/>, ‘Activist to launch campaign for Irish AIDS memorial’, Accessed on 6 February 2017.

¹⁰⁷³ Dermot Keogh, *Twentieth Century Ireland: Nation and State*. Diarmaid Ferriter, *Transformation of Ireland 1900-2000*. Charles Townshend, *Ireland: The Twentieth Century*. Tim Pat Coogan, *Ireland in the twentieth century*.

experience when it came to education on AIDS and prevention. Furthermore, the strict censorship laws and restrictive laws on contraceptives further contributed to a distinctive AIDS experience in Ireland.

Like their international counterparts, Irish gay activists, through the establishment of Gay Health Action (GHA), led the fight against AIDS from the beginning. Gay Health Action was the first organisation in Ireland dedicated to combatting the spread of AIDS and to the promotion of a public education campaign on how to avoid contracting the disease. Yet, GHA's contribution to combatting AIDS has been comprehensively ignored. Donal Lynch, for example, writing in the *Irish Independent* in 2014 on the release a movie based on Larry Kramer's *The Normal Heart*, noted that:

The twist in the Irish version of this tale was that some of the unsung heroes of the Irish AIDS crisis came from the very last place you would think to look. Step forward Fr. Paul Lavelle, a reforming priest who had worked in Sean McDermott Street in Dublin's north inner city. [...] With the support of the bishops, he brought the gay community into the policy arena. [...] Lavelle made it so that the church became the vehicle for a dialogue between the gay community and the State in this country.¹⁰⁷⁴

At no stage in his article did Lynch recognise or acknowledge the considerable sacrifice of those within GHA, or the wider gay community, in combatting AIDS. They are not granted the title of unsung heroes like Fr. Lavelle or the Bishops. To suggest that it was Fr. Lavelle, with the support of the bishops, that brought the gay community into dialogue with the State is lamentable. If anything, the actions of GHA brought themselves into the policy arena as they developed a reputation as the most knowledgeable and up to date organisation on the means of combatting the spread of AIDS. GHA did not depend on any organisation to bring them into the policy arena but, rather, groups reached out to GHA recognising their expertise. Were it not for the GHA, a public dialogue would have developed much later, than it did, in Ireland.

This chapter aims to explore the activities of GHA and the wider gay community who sought to combat the spread of AIDS in Ireland in the 1980s and into the early 1990s. I maintain, that through these actions many in Irish society began to recognise that gay and lesbian individuals were not in fact deviant but, rather, could be seen as responsible citizens, committed to the betterment of Irish society. As a result of their efforts, gay and lesbian individuals received considerable praise from many sectors of Irish society. In turn, this proved crucial in furthering both institutional and cultural change with regard to the treatment of homosexuals in Irish society. Whereas, in other countries gay and lesbian individuals were

¹⁰⁷⁴ <https://www.independent.ie/lifestyle/aids-wiped-out-a-generation-of-brilliant-people-30299184.html> Donal Lynch, 'AIDS wiped out a generation of brilliant people', 26 May 2014. Accessed on 1 February 2018.

scapegoated for AIDS and received considerable backlash, in Ireland, the actions of GHA ensured that Irish homosexuals were, to a greater extent, protected from increased hostility or further institutional actions aimed at curbing their activities. Had it not been for an organised gay and lesbian community in Ireland, one can only assume that the situation would have been much worse.

Moreover, while John Ardagh, in *Ireland and the Irish*, has argued that ‘it was above all the growth of AIDS that in 1992-1993 pushed the Government into freeing the sale of condoms’, I maintain, that it was not AIDS *alone* that forced the government to act but, rather, the public actions of the GHA in the preceding years that facilitated such changes in 1992 and 1993.¹⁰⁷⁵ GHA’s explicit public campaign of promoting safer sex and the use of condoms, rather than monogamy and fidelity within marriage, resonated more with Irish society than the campaigns of both the government and the Irish Roman Catholic Church. By the time the government came to amend the laws in 1992 and 1993, Irish society had long come to terms with the importance of condoms in the campaign to combat AIDS. GHA were central to the ease with which the 1992 and 1993 legislations were passed.

Finally, GHA’s prominence in promoting condoms and safer sex, in turn, brought them into direct conflict with the Irish Roman Catholic Church who believed chastity and fidelity within marriage were the only moral ways to prevent AIDS. This conflict represented a much broader issue in Ireland at that time; it represented a struggle between those who sought a continuation, or more accurately, a return to the ideals of sexual morality espoused since the foundation of the state, championed by the Catholic Church, and those who represented a growing segment of Irish society who believed in individual freedom and greater sexual liberation, most notably Irish gay and lesbian activists and the Irish Women’s Movement. The Irish Roman Catholic Church persisted in upholding the church’s teaching on contraception, despite the threat of AIDS. GHA’s refusal to amend their campaign to satisfy the Irish Roman Catholic Church, and the government’s eventual adoption of much of what GHA had called for, was another moment in undermining the dominance and credibility of the Roman Catholic Church in Ireland. By the early 1990s condoms became freely accessible and schools were being educated on how to prevent AIDS, which included the use of condoms. This marked a dramatic shift away from sex education grounded in catholic morality, to one based on medical evidence, championed by gay rights activists.

¹⁰⁷⁵ Ardagh however completely ignores the contribution of GHA. John Ardagh, *Ireland and the Irish: Portrait of a Changing Society*, (London, Penguin, 1994), 184.

The first half of this chapter explores the arrival of AIDS in Ireland and the reaction of the gay community, the Irish Roman Catholic Church, and the Irish Government. The second half focuses on the impact of GHA's actions on Irish sexual mores. The gay movement, with the strong support of its international counterparts, were paramount in the fight against AIDS in Ireland, but also in resisting a backlash against the gay community and against sexual activity outside marriage. The movement's success in fighting its case, at the expense of the Irish Roman Catholic Church, and those who comprised the 'moral majority', represented another significant moment in the erosion of the Roman Catholic Church's dominance in Ireland and in the gradual acceptance of alternative sexual mores. Crucially, I maintain, the gay community's response to the AIDS crisis played an important role in the wider campaign for gay liberation in Ireland, helping to present gay and lesbian individuals as responsible Irish citizens.

*'Ignorance was the main deterrent long ago when sex education consisted of hear no sex, see no sex, speak no sex.'*¹⁰⁷⁶

Before discussing the response to AIDS in Ireland, it is important to put into context the situation facing those confronted with AIDS, and those trying to prevent its spread in 1980s Ireland. First and foremost, the Family Planning Bill 1979, which, although amended in 1985, still ensured that contraceptives were not easily accessible, particularly in the fight against AIDS. The 1985 Family Planning Amendment Act had allowed individuals 18 and over to purchase condoms, but only from chemists, doctors surgeries, health boards, family planning clinics and hospitals.¹⁰⁷⁷ Shops or vending machines were not permitted to sell condoms under this amendment. To complicate matters, doctors and chemists could refuse to sell condoms on moral grounds. Despite the act not granting wholesale access to condoms, and despite the presence of AIDS in Ireland, many TD's spoke out against the bill.¹⁰⁷⁸ The government only passed the amendment with a majority of just three votes. The subsequent collapse of the Fine Gael/Labour government and its replacement with a Fianna Fail government whose health spokesperson, Rory O'Hanlon, had strongly opposed the 1985 bill, did not bode well.

Other legislation complicated AIDS related-matters further. For example, the Indecent Advertisement Act of 1889, later amended in 1929 under the Censorship of Publications Act,

¹⁰⁷⁶ *Irish Times*, Letters to the Editor, 22 February 1985

¹⁰⁷⁷ <http://www.irishstatutebook.ie/eli/1985/act/4/enacted/en/html>, Health (Family Planning) (Amendment) Act, 1985, accessed on 8 February 2017.

¹⁰⁷⁸ Dáil Éireann Debate, Vol. 356, No. 2, Health (Family Planning) (Amendment) Bill, 1985, Second Stage (Resumed), 20 February 1985.

was still on the statute books. This Act made it an offence to print material advertising or referring to ‘any disease affecting the generative organs of either sex, or to any complaint or infirmity arising from or relating to sexual intercourse, or to the prevention or removal of irregularities in menstruation, or to drugs, medicines, appliances, treatment, or methods for procuring abortion or miscarriage or preventing conception.’¹⁰⁷⁹ It effectively made it illegal to print material in public spaces that offered information on AIDS. Although gay activists and the government itself circumvented this legislation, its existence gives an insight into the cultural climate of Ireland during this period, particularly in relation to sexually transmitted infections, which were not a matter for public discourse.

Coupled with this was the almost complete lack of sex education within Irish schools.¹⁰⁸⁰ Although education was considered a key method to prevent the spread of AIDS, implementing an AIDS education programme in Irish schools proved difficult and controversial. The fact that the vast majority of schools were under the patronage of the Irish Roman Catholic Church gave the hierarchy considerable influence over the education of students in these schools. In particular, it allowed them to flex their muscles to prevent anything they deemed not in keeping with the religious ethos of the school from entering the classroom. Finally, and equally problematic, there was what those in the profession deemed the poor facilities available to deal with STD’s. Dr. Derek Freedman, one of Ireland’s leading specialists in sexual health, remarked in 1987 that Ireland was ‘ill-equipped to deal with the AIDS epidemic. Our facilities for the control of STIs were lamentable in the 1970s and early 1980s.’¹⁰⁸¹ Combined these factors meant Ireland was ill-prepared to confront AIDS when it arrived.

¹⁰⁷⁹ <http://www.irishstatutebook.ie/eli/1929/act/21/enacted/en/html>, Censorship of Publications Act, 1929, accessed on 8 February 2017.

<http://www.irishstatutebook.ie/eli/1889/act/18/enacted/en/print>, Indecent Advertisements Act, 1889, accessed on 8 February 2017.

¹⁰⁸⁰ Nathalie Rougier and Iseult Honohan, ‘Religion and education in Ireland: growing diversity – or losing faith in the system?’, in *Journal of Comparative Education*, Vol. 51, Issue 1, 2015.

¹⁰⁸¹ NLI, IR 610 F 6, Derek Freedman, *AIDS: The Problem in Ireland*, 68.

*'It is true that AIDS kills, and that Gay men stand a better chance of most of catching it.'*¹⁰⁸²

The Irish gay community were particularly quick to recognise the threat posed by AIDS and the danger the media coverage associated with it presented.¹⁰⁸³ Crucial to this early awareness was the Irish gay community's connections with international gay organisations and knowledge of the development of AIDS in the USA. Writing in the *NGF News*, as early as 1983, Christopher Robson noted that:

So little has appeared either in the Irish or English papers that the above words may be meaningless to you. Kaposi's Sarcoma is a once rare form of cancer which has quite recently become more common in America, particularly among gay men. It has been accompanied by a vast range of scare literature, headlines like 'The Gay Plague Strikes' and a torrent of misinformed and prejudiced comment. We are lucky that before a similar wave sweeps over Ireland we can prepare our own reaction, perhaps most usefully by studying a long analysis of the whole issue published in the Canadian magazine 'The Body Politic.'¹⁰⁸⁴

Cathal Kerrigan also noted these transnational influences and the fear that a similar situation could emerge in Ireland. Remembering discussions with Arthur Leahy and Pat McCarthy, prior to the establishment of GHA, Kerrigan recalled that 'Arthur said Listen we had better be prepared, we need an organisation like they've got in New York. Pat said to me, [...] listen it's crazy in New York, what's going on and what's happening. Things are going crazy there. Ye better get ready in Ireland. This is going to be really difficult.'¹⁰⁸⁵

Even before the founding of GHA or the mainstream media began discussing AIDS, gay publications such as *Identity* and *NGF News* had highlighted the risks and precautions necessary to prevent the spread of AIDS. It was, however, an upsurge in AIDS coverage in the mainstream media which later prompted gay and lesbian activists to organise a meeting to discuss how best to co-ordinate a more public response to AIDS.¹⁰⁸⁶ Gay and lesbian activists

¹⁰⁸² NLI, IR 94133 I 2, *In Dublin*, 'The Gay Plague', August 1985.

¹⁰⁸³ In comparison with France, for example, where Frédéric Martel in *Pink and the Black: Homosexuals in France since 1968* was highly critical of some gay activists and gay publications, who he deemed not to have done enough in the early years to warn against the dangers of AIDS, Irish gay activists could not be described to have done the same.

¹⁰⁸⁴ *NGF News*, January-February 1983, Issue No. 1, Vol. 2, Special AIDS: Out of the Clinical Closet. Copy viewed through the Irish Queer Archive Facebook page. https://www.facebook.com/pg/IrishQueerArchive/photos/?ref=page_internal Accessed on 1 February 2018.

¹⁰⁸⁵ Edmund Lynch interview with Cathal Kerrigan, 28 September 2015, *Edmund Lynch, Irish LGBT History Project*.

¹⁰⁸⁶ *NGF News*, January-February 1983, Issue No. 1, Vol. 2, Special AIDS: Out of the Clinical Closet. Copy viewed through the Irish Queer Archive Facebook page.

had a justified reason to fear some sort of backlash, considering some national dailies were already falling into the trap of characterising AIDS as a disease confined to homosexual activity, rather than related to sexual activity more generally. On 3 January 1985, for example, the *Irish Press* reporting on a new AIDS case in Ireland not only noted that the individual who was a haemophiliac was not a homosexual but also that ‘homosexual activity is recognised as one of the main ways in which the disease is transmitted.’¹⁰⁸⁷ Although the individual to whom the article referred was not a homosexual, and AIDS was not a homosexual-only disease, the paper brought homosexuality into the article. Later that same year, *In Dublin*, which previously had been more sympathetic to the plight of homosexuals, produced an article titled ‘The Gay Plague’ in which it reported that the highest cases of AIDS were among ‘promiscuous homosexuals’, and noted that ‘the median number of sexual partners for gay American AIDS victims is over 1100.’¹⁰⁸⁸

This increased media coverage led the Cork Gay Collective, NGF, TAF, and the Dublin Gay and Lesbian Collectives to organise a meeting in January 1985 which resulted in the formation of Gay Health Action on 13 January 1985.¹⁰⁸⁹ Support was also forthcoming from NIGRA in Northern Ireland. GHA was housed in the Quay Co-Op and Hirschfeld Centre and was led by a small group of individuals, most notably, Mick Quinlan, Christopher Robson, Ciaran McKinney, Cathal Kerrigan, Bill Foley, Donal Sheehan and Arthur Leahy. GHA divided their work into two particular areas, Gay Men’s Health, specifically to combat AIDS and the poor state of facilities in Ireland, and secondly to respond to the media, which they feared would stir up anti-gay prejudice.¹⁰⁹⁰

A crucial aspect of GHA’s early response to AIDS was its close relationship with international gay and lesbian groups working to combat AIDS, particularly groups in the USA and UK, such as the Terrence Higgins Trust, the European AIDS Foundation, the New York Gay Men’s Health Crisis, and the Shanti Project. Interaction with these groups provided GHA with valuable advice and information at a time when such information and expertise was not readily available in Ireland.¹⁰⁹¹ In fact, a look through *Out* magazine gives an insight into the extent to which gay activists in Ireland relied on international publications and groups for

https://www.facebook.com/pg/IrishQueerArchive/photos/?ref=page_internal Accessed on 1 February 2018.

¹⁰⁸⁷ *Irish Press*, ‘A Young Irish haemophiliac has contracted the killer disease AIDS’, 3 January 1985.

¹⁰⁸⁸ NLI, IR 94133 I 2, *In Dublin*, ‘The Gay Plague’, August 1985.

¹⁰⁸⁹ NLI, IR 369 07, *OUT*, Vol. 1. Issue 2, Feb/March 1985, ‘AIDS Scare Response.’

¹⁰⁹⁰ NLI, IR 369 07, *OUT*, Vol. 1. Issue 2, Feb/March 1985, ‘AIDS Scare Response.’

¹⁰⁹¹ NLI, IQA, MS 45, 936/14 – GHA National Meeting, 8th February 1986 at Hirschfeld Centre.

information on AIDS. In April 1985, for example, *Out* reproduced an article on the use of condoms in combatting the spread of AIDS from Canada's *The Body Politic*. While noting that the language and some of the details might not be appropriate to Ireland, *Out* nevertheless maintained that the guidelines were relevant to all, insisting, 'So chaps, rubbers at the ready.'¹⁰⁹²

Practical support was also forthcoming from these international organisations. In August 1985 GHA organised a conference on AIDS at Trinity College Dublin, at which John Fitzpatrick of the Terrence Higgins Trust took part in a question and answer session. The Terrence Higgins Trust also provided financial support for the publication of the first AIDS information pack produced in 1986 by GHA. Reporting on this meeting, *Out* thanked Fitzpatrick for 'providing a lot of valuable information.'¹⁰⁹³ Later that year an important meeting took place between GHA and two doctors from San Francisco who specialised in treating people with AIDS. Around the time the GHA were hosting John Fitzpatrick at Trinity College, the NGF had received a letter from Dr. Glen Margo on behalf of himself and Dr. John Dupree, Director of Education for the East Bay AIDS Project in Berkeley and Oakland, offering their time to the Irish gay and lesbian community. In the letter they offered to give a two-day workshop on training and developing educational programs around AIDS, along with programs designed to train volunteer counsellors to help people living with AIDS.¹⁰⁹⁴ The importance attached to this workshop, by the GHA, was evident in a letter sent to the Director of TAF that informed him that TAF volunteers would have to attend the entire 16 hours of the workshop with no option to drop in and out, and they would be expected to attend even if it 'mean[t] giving up a day's work/holiday.'¹⁰⁹⁵

Along with the information delivered on AIDS education programmes and providing counselling to people with AIDS, both doctors also provided rare copies of videos which covered all aspects dealing with AIDS and support groups. These videos, which were not available in Ireland, and which cost the GHA £900 to convert from the American to European system, allowed the NGF/GHA to run AIDS information evenings at the Hirschfeld Centre.¹⁰⁹⁶ Along with these weekly sessions, the videos also provided a solid basis for GHA to provide training sessions to TAF volunteers in anticipation of calls related to AIDS.¹⁰⁹⁷ Dupree's and

¹⁰⁹² NLI, IR 369 07, *OUT*, Vol. 1, No. 3, April/May 1985, 'Condoms.' Articles from the *New York Native* also featured.

¹⁰⁹³ NLI, IR 369 07, *OUT*, Vol. 1, No. 6, Oct/Nov. 1985, 'Gay Health Action.'

¹⁰⁹⁴ NLI, IQA, MS 45, 943/8 – Dr. Glen Margo to Tonie Walsh, 8 August 1985.

¹⁰⁹⁵ NLI, IQA, MS 45, 943/8 – Michael Bergin to Director of TAF, 26 August 1985.

¹⁰⁹⁶ NLI, IR 369 07, *OUT*, Vol. 1, No. 7, December/January 1986, 'Gay Health Action.'

¹⁰⁹⁷ NLI, IQA, MS 45, 949/3 – Reg Deane of TAF.

Margo's workshop could not have come at a better time for GHA and TAF. Whereas, the TAF report for 1984 to April 1985 showed no calls related to AIDS, the following years report showed that 127 calls were AIDS related.¹⁰⁹⁸

Perhaps one of the most important developments to come from Dr. Margo's and Dr. Dupree's workshop was the foundation of Cairde in September 1985. Cairde was a sub-group of GHA dedicated to providing a confidential help service to people fearful they may have contracted the HIV virus or to those who had tested positive. Cairde, the Irish for friends, was modelled on the same organisation founded by the doctors in San Francisco, known as Buddies.¹⁰⁹⁹ It was the first support group for people with AIDS in Ireland, run entirely by volunteers and supported through fundraisers primarily from the gay community. According to a report in *Out*, in May/June 1986, Cairde's services were not confined simply to counselling. Rather, as the number of AIDS cases increased, but the information required was not forthcoming from public authorities, Cairde volunteers were requested to give informational talks and video showings at locations such as the Liberties, Trinity College Dublin and Richmond Hospital. Cairde also travelled outside Dublin. For example, in July 1987, the *Western People* reported that Cairde volunteer, Carl Berkeley, gave a talk at the opening of Western AIDS Alliance in Galway. Over the years Cairde organised numerous fundraiser events in Galway, along with awareness campaigns and a confidential helpline for individuals in the West of Ireland.¹¹⁰⁰

***'We do not suggest that you cut down on sex, but that you should have sex with fewer and healthy people.'*¹¹⁰¹**

GHA's transnational connections facilitated the distribution of informed and detailed information on AIDS to Irish society from as early as 1985. These public AIDS education campaigns, which centred around leaflets, cards and booklets, paved the way for later campaigns in Ireland. GHA was determined to challenge the belief that AIDS was a gay disease and that sex confined to marriage, something off limits to gay and lesbian individuals in Ireland, or celibacy, were the only means of combatting the spread of AIDS. Instead, GHA wanted to educate both the homosexual and heterosexual community on the best means of preventing the spread of AIDS. They believed this could be realistically achieved through a public education campaign promoting safer sex habits, specifically fewer partners and through the wider

¹⁰⁹⁸ NLI, IQA, MS 45, 949/3 – TAF Honorary Secretary's Report 1985-1986.

¹⁰⁹⁹ NLI, IR 369 07, *OUT*, Vol. 1, No. 7, December/January 1986, 'Gay Health Action.'

¹¹⁰⁰ *Western People*, 'Western AIDS Action Alliance, 8 July 1987.

¹¹⁰¹ NLI, IQA, MS 45, 966/5 – AIDS: Reducing the Risk.

availability and use of condoms. This they were keen to emphasise did not have to mean less sex. Rather than blaming casual sex as the root problem of AIDS GHA, instead, focused their attention on unsafe sex practices as the problem and altering this. Like their international counterparts, GHA recognised that celibacy was not a realistic solution not only within the gay community but also the heterosexual community. It was this reality which drove GHA's explicit campaign of safer sex, of which the condom and explicit information played a pivotal role.

GHA produced the first AIDS information leaflet in Ireland, in May 1985, having received a grant of only £800 from the Health Education Bureau. This would be the first and last grant GHA would receive from the Irish state for the remainder of the 1980s. In fact, this £800 grant did not even cover the cost of printing the first leaflet, of which almost 16,000 were printed. Had it not been for the existence of an organised gay community, particularly around the Hirschfeld Centre and the Quay Co-Op, the funds for such information leaflets would not have been raised. Not only did both centres provide office space and meeting points for GHA to co-ordinate their actions, but it also facilitated the equally important fundraising events for the activities of GHA. For much of the 1980s funding for such leaflets was the result of financial support from patrons of gay discos, *not* the Irish state.¹¹⁰²

It is keenly evident that one of the primary issues GHA wanted to confront in their first leaflet was the myth that AIDS was confined to gay individuals and that it could be contracted through everyday social interactions. This was also part of GHA's attempts to shield the gay community from unwarranted attacks thanks to the AIDS crisis. The leaflet emphasised that AIDS 'is not a homosexual disease, a gay plague, a moral problem, or a punishment from God', but rather a disease somewhat like Hepatitis B which was more severe and could affect any Irish individual irrespective of their sexuality.¹¹⁰³ They advised readers that it could not be contracted through social kissing, by touching, shared bathrooms or from drinking from another person's glass.

The second issue at the heart of this first information leaflet was how to reduce the risk through safer sex, as opposed to chastity. Safer sex recommendations included sex with fewer partners, and more explicit information such as avoiding anal sex, except with a regular partner, receiving other men's semen into one's body and rimming. Surprisingly, this publication was rather cautious about promoting the use of condoms, insisting that while condoms may help, 'do not rely on them for protection.'¹¹⁰⁴ This may well have been a result of the fact that they

¹¹⁰² NLI, ILB 780, *Hot Press*, February 1987.

¹¹⁰³ Cork LGBT archive, AIDS information leaflet, 1 May 1985.

¹¹⁰⁴ Cork LGBT archive, AIDS information leaflet, 1 May 1985.

had received a grant from the Health Education Bureau and some restraints on the promotion of condoms may have been necessary for its publication. I note this because, within the gay press, condoms, along with water-based lubricants, had been strongly advised and encouraged from as early as 1984. Moreover, in a revised version of that leaflet, in February 1986, which did not receive government funding, GHA stated that ‘If you choose otherwise [to cum inside one’s partner] use a condom and water-based lubricant.’¹¹⁰⁵ Omitted was ‘do not rely on them for protection.’

GHA placed considerable emphasis on making their information as ‘explicit’ as possible, recognising that such information was key to reduce the risk of AIDS.¹¹⁰⁶ Although what was meant by explicit was subjective, it appears that the naming of certain sex acts, as opposed to more general terms such ‘avoiding intimate sexual contact’, which members of GHA characterised as too vague, fell under ‘explicit.’ As early as 1984, *Identity* provided explicit information, informing its readers to avoid exchange of bodily fluids, ‘cumming’ inside one’s partner, swallowing cum, or even ‘cumming’ inside one’s mouth and advising the use of condoms.¹¹⁰⁷ Three GHA information campaigns which certainly came under the heading of ‘explicit’ were the: 1987 ‘condom card’, the 1987 ‘safe sex card’, and the 1988 ‘the joys of sex’ poster. The condom card, of which 20,000 were printed and distributed not only amongst the gay scene, but also amongst family planning clinics and student unions, recognised the general lack of knowledge about how to use condoms. In rather robust language GHA began the condom card by declaring that ‘fucking without a condom represents the highest risk for contracting the AIDS virus. [...] If you decide to fuck, using a condom will significantly reduce your risk; it is not an absolute safeguard, but it is greatly safer than unprotected sex.’¹¹⁰⁸ Central to the condom card was providing a guide on the do’s and don’ts of using condoms, emphasising that condoms were only effective if used properly. Readers were given detailed instructions on how to properly put a condom on, how to remove them, what lubricant to use, what not to do with them, and where to get them.¹¹⁰⁹

Similarly, the ‘Joys of Sex’ poster and ‘Safe Sex’ leaflet sought to provide up to date explicit information on the types of sexual activity which was safe, low risk and high risk,

¹¹⁰⁵ *Cork LGBT Archive*, ‘Gay Health Action, 1986 AIDS Leaflet’, <http://corklgbtarchive.com/items/show/162> Accessed on 10 May 2017.

¹¹⁰⁶ Nuala Fennell, *Seanad Éireann Debates*, Vol. 118, No. 14, 25 February 1988, Motion: Information and Education Programme on AIDS.

¹¹⁰⁷ NLI, IQA, 45, 966/5 – AIDS: Reducing the Risk.

¹¹⁰⁸ NLI, Personal Papers of David Norris, Acc. 6672 Box 31, ‘GHA Condom Card.’

¹¹⁰⁹ NLI, Personal Papers of David Norris, Acc. 6672 Box 31, ‘GHA Condom Card.’

advising readers that ‘the AIDS crisis does not mean that sex is a thing of the past.’¹¹¹⁰ GHA sought to remove the fear around sexual activity, insisting that once the safer sex guidelines were followed sex ‘should be an enjoyable, exciting natural experience.’¹¹¹¹ Amongst some of the acts considered ‘Safe’, were hugging, cuddling, wrestling, body rubbing, wanking together, and fucking or being fucked between the legs. Grouped under low risk was: finger fucking, anal intercourse with a condom and sucking cock. However, fucking or being fucked without a condom with an infected person, and ‘mouth to anus contact as blood or feces (shit) can easily carry the virus’ were characterised as high risk.¹¹¹²

By international standards such information may well have been characterised simply as information, but by Irish standards it was *explicit information*. For example, in August 1986, David Nowlan in the *Irish Times* noted that GHA had produced ‘explicit posters’ on reducing the risk of contracting AIDS amongst gay men.¹¹¹³ This poster would appear to have been the ‘Safer Sex’ posters which appeared frequently in *Out*. However, in comparison with the aforementioned campaigns, the 1986 ‘Safer Sex’ posters were much less explicit, but in 1986, the *Irish Times* deemed them explicit.

In the aforementioned *Irish Times* article, Nowlan also noted that ‘to date, the only explicit material produced in this country has come from the Gay Health Action group, and apart from a small grant from the Health Education Bureau towards its first leaflet, the group has produced everything at its own expense.’¹¹¹⁴ As a result of this, many groups outside the gay community contacted GHA for information. While the May 1985 leaflet was primarily directed at gay men it, nevertheless, was requested by a much broader audience than simply gay men. In a letter imploring Minister for Health Barry Desmond to support their actions, GHA noted that their first information leaflet was requested by public libraries, social welfare services, doctors, people working with I-V drug users and even prison welfare officers.¹¹¹⁵

¹¹¹⁰ NLI, ILB 305 G 2, *Gay Community News*, Issue 2, ‘The Joys of Sex.’ NLI, ILB 780, *Hot Press*, February 1987.

¹¹¹¹ NLI, Personal Papers of David Norris, Acc. 6672 Box 31, ‘GHA Joys of Sex’ poster.

¹¹¹² NLI, Personal Papers of David Norris, Acc. 6672 Box 31, ‘GHA Joys of Sex’ poster.

¹¹¹³ David Nowlan, ‘Gay action group issues explicit posters on AIDS’, *Irish Times*, 30 August 1986.

¹¹¹⁴ David Nowlan, ‘Gay action group issues explicit posters on AIDS’, *Irish Times*, 30 August 1986.

¹¹¹⁵ NLI, IQA, MS 46,001/1 – Christopher Robson of GHA to Barry Desmond, Minister for Health, 14 February 1986.

Remarkably, even organisations who would have received statutory funding and had access presumably to explicit information, such as An Bord Altranais¹¹¹⁶, and the Northern Ireland Family Planning Association, also contacted GHA to request their leaflets.¹¹¹⁷ In November 1985 Alison Wightman contacted GHA requesting 100 or 200 leaflets, describing them as ‘wonderful [with] really good language, positive approach, clear information, [and] great lay-out.’¹¹¹⁸ Wightman added that she would ‘love a supply of leaflets to have available in our information centre, which is widely used.’¹¹¹⁹ Recognising the considerable cost of producing such leaflets Wightman also enclosed a donation for GHA. This letter epitomized the different approach adopted by authorities North and South of the border. Whereas, in the North the Family Planning Association could afford to donate to the GHA, thanks to statutory funding, in the South, GHA had to depend on donations, due to the complete lack of statutory funding.

The pressure to meet these external demands was acknowledged by Mick Quinlan at a GHA meeting as early as February 1986. Quinlan noted that the:

Office has become very busy with requests for info and educationals. The main changes over the past few months have been the change to the I.V. Drug users as the main risk group and demands been made on GHA to meet information needs in this case. [...] It has become clear that we need to look closely at the structure and funding if we are to respond effectively to the growing demands being made on us.¹¹²⁰

It was around that same time that Cairde, which was initially a support group for members of the gay community dealing with AIDS, also began to feel pressure to assist individuals outside the gay community. As a result, it announced that ‘due to the lack of information and organisation by the Department of Health, we have decided not to limit ourselves to the gay section of the community and are available to support anyone who is affected from whatever

¹¹¹⁶ An Bord Altranais is the statutory body that regulates the nursing and midwifery profession in Ireland. <https://www.nmbi.ie/What-We-Do/Our-Role> Accessed on 22 February 2018.

¹¹¹⁷ NLI, IR 369 07, *OUT*, Vol. 1, No. 9, May/June 1986 – ‘Cairde Update.’

¹¹¹⁸ Cork LGBT Archive - Alison Wightman Regional Administrator of The Family Planning Association: Northern Ireland Region, to Cork branch of Gay Health Action, 7 November 1985. <https://s3-eu-west-1.amazonaws.com/corklgbtarchiveomeka%2Foriginal%2Fc939eca8f8c993bf4d6fa904647c4b46.pdf> Accessed on 1 February 2018.

¹¹¹⁹ Cork LGBT Archive - Alison Wightman Regional Administrator of The Family Planning Association: Northern Ireland Region, to Cork branch of Gay Health Action, 7 November 1985. <https://s3-eu-west-1.amazonaws.com/corklgbtarchiveomeka%2Foriginal%2Fc939eca8f8c993bf4d6fa904647c4b46.pdf> Accessed on 1 February 2018.

¹¹²⁰ NLI, IQA, MS 45, 936/14 – GHA National Meeting, 8 February 1986.

section of society.’¹¹²¹ Although, originally established to respond to the AIDS crisis within the gay community, within only one year both GHA and Cairde felt obliged to expand their activities outside the gay community as different groups and organisations now began to depend on them for information and support because the state neglected its duties in this regard.

In response to these demands and the dearth of information available to the wider community in Ireland, GHA produced an AIDS Information Pack in 1986. The information pack was primarily geared at health care workers, social service workers, politicians and journalists, who it was hoped would distribute accurate information to the public.¹¹²² In this pack were the National Union of Journalists’ guidelines on the reporting of AIDS, a publication from Gay Men’s Health Crisis in New York, called *Medical Answers About AIDS*, and a GHA produced *AIDS Information Booklet*. This booklet was sold throughout Ireland by Easons and local newsagents.¹¹²³ The *AIDS Information Booklet* provided an overview of the AIDS situation internationally and in Ireland, along with contact information for individuals worried about AIDS and detailed information on the means of transmission and means of avoidance. GHA informed readers that:

the only ways it can be passed are: blood to blood, either by transfusion, or by sharing intravenous needles while taking drugs, by semen in any sexual act where semen is passed from one body to another, in any sexual act which involves the exchange of vaginal fluids or menstrual blood; from mother to foetus or from an infected woman to her nursing child through breastmilk.¹¹²⁴

Recognising the demand placed on them to provide information relevant to other groups affected by AIDS, the booklet advised drug addicts to avoid sharing needles, while also reassuring haemophiliacs of the precautions taken in Ireland to prevent HIV+ blood from being used in transfusions, insisting that ‘it is now virtually impossible to get the AIDS virus from a blood transfusion or from blood products in Ireland as special precautions have been introduced.’¹¹²⁵ In particular, GHA emphasised the importance of their ‘Play Safe’ guidelines published earlier in 1986, insisting there should be ‘no intercourse without a condom [...]’¹¹²⁶

At the public launch of their AIDS Information Pack, GHA warned that without resources being put in place, and increased funding, there would be an average of one new case

¹¹²¹ NLI, IR 369 07, *OUT*, Vol. 1, No. 9, June/July 1986, ‘Cairde.’

¹¹²² David Nowlan, ‘One new case of AIDS each week forecast by gay group’, *Irish Times*, 18 December 1986.

¹¹²³ David Nowlan, ‘One new case of AIDS each week forecast by gay group’, *Irish Times*, 18 December 1986.

¹¹²⁴ NLI, 8A 2194, *Information AIDS Booklet*, Gay Health Action, 1986.

¹¹²⁵ NLI, 8A 2194, *Information AIDS Booklet*, Gay Health Action, 1986.

¹¹²⁶ NLI, 8A 2194, *Information AIDS Booklet*, Gay Health Action, 1986.

of AIDS each week in Ireland for the next two years. To combat this the booklet called for an accurate and detailed public education programme, arguing that moral considerations and embarrassment about sexual matters had to be overcome in order to actively prevent the spread of AIDS.¹¹²⁷ Reflecting the increased pressure they felt to do more with no statutory funding, GHA condemned the lack of practical and financial support being offered to voluntary groups from the Irish state. In fact, a constant feature of the aforementioned posters and leaflets was a statement from GHA noting that ‘this leaflet is produced by Gay Health Action using donated funds. GHA is a voluntary organisation which receives no state funding. To continue with our work donations are needed and welcome [...]’.¹¹²⁸

On occasion, however, the source of such donations caused tension within GHA. While the majority of funds would appear to have come from fundraisers organised at the Hirschfeld Centre, Quay Co-Op, Sides, and international organisations, establishments such as the Gym also made donations. The Gym, along with Incognito, were gay saunas operating in Dublin. Advertisements for both establishments featured frequently in *Out*. However, sometime in either late 1985 or early 1986, members of NIGRA sent a letter to ‘The Gay Press’ strongly condemning GHA for accepting financial support from the Gym. In a stinging rebuke of the Gym, Incognito, and GHA, NIGRA insisted that GHA ‘return this blood money’, labelling its acceptance as ‘utterly shameful.’¹¹²⁹ Describing the Gym as a ‘licensed brothel’ run by ‘greedy capitalists’ who ‘care not a whit for the welfare of the gay community’, NIGRA called on GHA to ‘actively campaign for the immediate closure of these health hazards.’¹¹³⁰

Whereas, in the USA, particularly in San Francisco and New York, public officials had called for the closure of such establishments, leading to intense public debate, no such demand, that I am aware of, was made by public officials in Ireland.¹¹³¹ Rather, this demand came from within the gay community itself, through NIGRA. Whether or not GHA returned the donation to appease NIGRA is not known. What is known is that no campaign was launched calling for the closure of the Gym or Incognito, either by GHA or by the Irish state. GHA did, however, contact both the Gym and Incognito to ascertain what precautions, if any, they had implemented to prevent the spread of AIDS. While Incognito stated that they supplied condoms, the Gym revealed that they would not do so because of legal reasons, but that

¹¹²⁷ NLI, 8A 2194, *Information AIDS Booklet*, Gay Health Action, 1986.

¹¹²⁸ NLI, Personal Papers of David Norris, Acc. 6672 Box 31, ‘GHA Joys of Sex’ poster and ‘GHA Condom Card.’

¹¹²⁹ NLI, IQA, MS 45, 943/8 – NIGRA letter to The Gay Press – date unknown.

¹¹³⁰ NLI, IQA, MS 45, 943/8 – NIGRA letter to The Gay Press – date unknown.

¹¹³¹ Randy Shilts, *And the Band Played On. Politics, People, and the AIDS Epidemic*, (New York, 1987)

customers could bring their own.¹¹³² As noted earlier, the 1985 Family Planning Bill placed strict restrictions on the selling of condoms. Venues such as saunas were not permitted to sell condoms under the 1985 legislation. The GYM did note, however, that they provided clients with GHA's safe-sex card. Both responses do not appear to have elicited any strong reaction or criticism from GHA. In fact, the Gym and Incognito continued to feature frequently in advertisements in *Out* and later *GCN*.

Donations were not the only issue causing problems for GHA. While GHA's workload expanded considerably, the numbers volunteering and engaging with GHA did not. On numerous occasions within the *NGF News*, *Out*, and at GHA meetings, the lack of volunteers was raised. In one such example, Michael Bergin, general secretary of the NGF, condemned the lack of new volunteers, insisting that:

The response to the initial work carried on by GHA has been nothing short of dismal. This work is not the concern of 10 or so people, it is the concern of you all. [...] A major programme of work is now underway by GHA and my primary aim at the moment is to request more and more of you to come forward and help with the work of GHA.¹¹³³

This plea, however, appears to have fallen on deaf ears. Rather than improving, the situation had worsened by 1986. During the course of a GHA meeting, in February 1986, it was noted that 'new people are not becoming active in GHA.'¹¹³⁴ Worse, however, was a revelation by members of Cork Gay Health Action that 'numbers active in Cork have dropped and in the future, it seems unlikely that there will be a growing level of activity.'¹¹³⁵ This led Arthur Leahy to suggest that 'given the small number of people who will be active in Cork that a monthly meeting should be held in Dublin, which people from outside could attend.'¹¹³⁶ Writing later in *Out*, a despondent Ciaran McKinney remarked that:

For the last few weeks I've been looking at Capital Gay and reading about all the pubs and clubs raising money for the Terrence Higgins Trust. As a worker for GHA I feel a bit envious and puzzled. What are they doing right that we're not? [...] One of the problems we in GHA experience is isolation. We rarely receive feedback from the gay community and we need it.¹¹³⁷

There is a sense from Bergin and McKinney's comments that the urgency to actively respond to AIDS in Ireland did not filter down to those outside GHA. Immediately after his September

¹¹³² NLI, IQA, MS 45, 936/15 – Dublin GHA meeting 17 February 1986.

¹¹³³ NLI, IR 369 07, *OUT*, Vol. 1, No. 5, *NGF News*, August/September 1985, General Secretary's Report.

¹¹³⁴ NLI, IQA, MS 45, 936/14 – GHA National Meeting, 8 February 1986, Hirschfeld Centre.

¹¹³⁵ NLI, IQA, MS 45, 936/14 – GHA National Meeting, 8 February 1986, Hirschfeld Centre.

¹¹³⁶ NLI, IQA, MS 45, 936/14 – GHA National Meeting, 8 February 1986, Hirschfeld Centre.

¹¹³⁷ NLI, IR 369 07, *OUT*, Vol. 1, No. 9, May/June 1986, 'Gay Health Action.'

1985 article, Bergin pleaded with NGF members to ‘get involved’, noting that at the AIDS conference at Trinity College Dublin, only ‘Two, yes, 2 people turned up who had not been previously involved [...]’.¹¹³⁸ This raises the questions as to what extent the vast majority of the gay community in Ireland viewed AIDS as a serious threat.

Notwithstanding these problems, GHA’s efforts appeared to have contributed significantly to combatting the spread of AIDS, particularly within the Irish gay community. In stark contrast with other European countries and particularly North America, the reported percentage of HIV cases in Ireland for the 1980s were highest, not amongst homosexuals, but rather among intravenous drug users, something Derek Freedman accredited to the early intervention by GHA. Writing in 1987 Freedman remarked that:

Gay Health Action on its own initiative and with little or no funding set about informing people, organising lectures, producing leaflets, providing a telephone helpline service and set up an HIVab+ counselling group. This occurred years before anybody else saw the need. [...] They have been rewarded with an apparent low HIVab+ rate and a reduction in the rate of AIDS cases in this group since 1985.¹¹³⁹

According to a report in the *Irish Times*, in 1989, the message of safe sex appeared to have resonated with gay men in Ireland, with 80% of respondents to a GHA survey declaring they had adopted safer sex practices.¹¹⁴⁰ The survey also revealed that 80% of respondents found the information provided by GHA to have been very useful, in comparison to only 38% who found the government’s campaign useful.¹¹⁴¹ More crucially, however, it would seem that GHA had also contributed to a high level of knowledge on AIDS amongst the wider Irish society. Prior to commencing its public AIDS education campaign in May 1987, the Irish government conducted a national survey on public knowledge of AIDS in Ireland. The results showed that a ‘high level of knowledge of the modes of transmission of the human immunodeficiency virus and of the groups most at risk.’¹¹⁴² In particular, 97% of those interviewed were aware that AIDS could be transmitted through sexual intercourse, and 96% were aware that it could be transmitted through sharing needles and equipment of I.V. drug abusers.¹¹⁴³ Interestingly, seventy-five percent regarded the use of condoms as an effective

¹¹³⁸ NLI, IR 369 07, *OUT*, Vol. 1, No. 6, October/November 1985, ‘Gay Health Action.’

¹¹³⁹ NLI, IR 610 F 6, Derek Freedman, *AIDS: The Problem in Ireland*, 85

¹¹⁴⁰ *Irish Times*, ‘80% of gay men practise safe sex’, 12 September 1989.

¹¹⁴¹ NLI, Personal Papers of David Norris, *AIDS Action News*, August 1989, Special Issue produced by GHA, ‘GHA Survey Results.’

¹¹⁴² Anne May Harkin and Mary Hurley, ‘National Survey on public knowledge of AIDS in Ireland’, in *Health Education Research*, Vol. 3, No. 1, 1988, 25-29.

¹¹⁴³ Anne May Harkin and Mary Hurley, ‘National Survey on public knowledge of AIDS in Ireland’, in *Health Education Research*, Vol. 3, No. 1, 1988, 25-29.

method of reducing the risk of infection.¹¹⁴⁴ As the only organisation to have conducted a public education campaign on AIDS at that time in Ireland, GHA's actions must be factored in when seeking to explain this high level of awareness.

The extent to which GHA was becoming one of the most respected authorities, if not the most respected authority, in the fight against AIDS in Ireland was evident as early as 1986. While the media did not directly state this, it is interesting to note that in two separate reports in the *Irish Times*, in 1986, GHA appeared to hold an influential and respected position in Ireland with regards AIDS prevention. The first such example appeared in July 1986 when an article on a new booklet on AIDS reported that not only did the Department of Health approve the booklet, but also Gay Health Action did.¹¹⁴⁵ That such an approval was considered important at that time is quite remarkable, considering that at that precise moment the Irish government were fighting to maintain the laws criminalising sexual activity between males. It would appear that having GHA's approval also lent more credibility and assurance to the document itself. While the state would never publicly acknowledge it, clearly it relied on the gay community in the fight against AIDS.

One month later the *Irish Times* advised readers to contact GHA for information on AIDS, specifically for 'explicit descriptions of what sexual practices should be avoided.'¹¹⁴⁶ GHA was the only organisation mentioned to contact in this article. That same month the *Irish Times* carried an article on AIDS posters in which they noted that the Deputy Chief medical officer of the Department of Health praised the gay community in Ireland for 'acting responsibly in the face of the AIDS threat.'¹¹⁴⁷ Writing in *Hot Press*, Helena Mulkerns also noted the actions of GHA. While describing the actions of the Department of Health and Health Education Bureau as tardy, Mulkerns maintained that 'there is however one organisation which has been working actively against the prevalent ignorance regarding AIDS in this country – the Gay Health Action group [...] Since GHA were the first group to provide information on the subject they have been consulted and contacted by a variety of groups and individuals such as prisons, doctors, psychologists, drug users, students and hospitals.'¹¹⁴⁸

Even before the Irish Roman Catholic Church and the Irish state had involved themselves in combatting AIDS, GHA had been reached out to by many different organisations who recognised their expertise on this matter. The early praise for the gay community's

¹¹⁴⁴ Anne May Harkin and Mary Hurley, 'National Survey on public knowledge of AIDS in Ireland', in *Health Education Research*, Vol. 3, No. 1, 1988, 25-29.

¹¹⁴⁵ *Irish Times*, John Armstrong, 'AIDS Leaflet out of date on day its issued', 31 July 1986

¹¹⁴⁶ *Irish Times*, John Armstrong, 'AIDS details cut from booklet', 14 August 1986.

¹¹⁴⁷ *Irish Times*, 'Gay Group Issues Explicit Posters on AIDS', 30 August 30 1986.

¹¹⁴⁸ NLI, ILB 780, *Hot Press*, Vol. 11, No. 2, 'The Gay Area', 12 February 1987.

response to combatting AIDS in Ireland was in stark contrast to the reaction some of their international counterparts received. For example, whereas the Irish Deputy Chief Medical officer praised Ireland's gay community for acting responsibly, in 1984, *The Australian* had reported that Dr. Tony Adam, the chief medical officer of New South Wales' Health Department, believed 'there may be a minority of homosexuals who are donating blood to rebel against society.'¹¹⁴⁹ This was a view shared by Brisbane's *The Courier-Mail*, which suggested that:

Clearly the medical authorities, both here and in other states, are doing everything possible to limit the spread of AIDS... Sadly, however, the actions of some members of the homosexual community have lacked responsibility and concern. Blood banks have appealed to male homosexuals not to give blood. Yet it seems for a number of reasons, these appeals have been ignored. It was not so long ago in our history that patients suffering other socially-unacceptable, contagious diseases, such as tuberculosis and leprosy, were locked away for what was considered the community good. No one is suggesting that this should happen to homosexuals, but the aggressive activists in the movement should not be surprised if there is a violent community reaction to their cause as a result of this serious public health problem.¹¹⁵⁰

In Ireland, the pro-active response by the gay community had, to a greater extent, shielded Ireland's gay community from similar public criticism and accusations to those expressed in Australia and elsewhere.

With that being said, an incident in 1985 nevertheless demonstrated the vulnerability of the gay community at that time. According to Chris Robson, in a letter to David Norris, a leaflet which was distributed in Dublin in 1985 by an organisation called the National Socialist Party. In the leaflet, titled 'Smash AIDS Blitzkrieg!' the National Socialist Party claimed that AIDS was being spread 'amongst all normal people by the Gay – AIDS spreaders and the Junkies.'¹¹⁵¹ To combat this, they proposed the enforcement of the law criminalising sexual activity between males, with a minimum of ten years, and the burning down of 'suspect discos, gay bars, clubs etc.'¹¹⁵² While Robson reported the leaflet to the police for incitement to crime, the police, however, informed him that 'they didn't think they had a case under existing

¹¹⁴⁹ Jennifer Power, 'The 'Homosexual Cancer': AIDS = Gay', in *Movement, Knowledge, Emotion: Gay Activism and HIV/AIDS in Australia*, ANU Press, 2011, 31–58. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt24hd2p.5.

¹¹⁵⁰ Jennifer Power, 'The 'Homosexual Cancer': AIDS = Gay', in *Movement, Knowledge, Emotion: Gay Activism and HIV/AIDS in Australia*, ANU Press, 2011, 31–58. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt24hd2p.5.

¹¹⁵¹ NLI, Personal Papers of David Norris, Acc. 6672, Box 21 – 'Smash AIDS Blitzkrieg' leaflet.

¹¹⁵² NLI, Personal Papers of David Norris, Acc. 6672, Box 21 – 'Smash AIDS Blitzkrieg' leaflet.

legislation.’¹¹⁵³ Although the gay community were actively involved in combatting AIDS, more so than any other group in Irish society, they nevertheless were vulnerable to such open hostile attacks. Without any legal protection, they had little options available to protect themselves from such threats. Incidentally, two years after this leaflet was distributed, the Hirschfeld Centre had to close because of a fire. Speaking in Seanad Éireann, on a motion to allocate lottery funding to help repair the Hirschfeld Centre, Senator Joe O’Toole remarked that ‘there is a lot of evidence to support the view that the recent fire which razed it to the ground was also started maliciously.’¹¹⁵⁴

While the vast majority of the rhetoric on the gay community’s response to the AIDS crisis was positive, and no doubt was welcomed by GHA, there was, nevertheless, a downside. GHA’s tenacity and success in providing a range of services and information leaflets, in fact, might have worked against them in trying to convince the government of the necessity in funding their activities and recognising the threat AIDS posed to the gay community. Whereas, in other countries, and in Ireland, gay activists had worked tirelessly to dismiss the notion that AIDS only affected homosexuals, the success with which GHA had done so in Ireland may well have worked against them in the long run. In a special issue of *AIDS Action News*, in August 1989, GHA touched on this issue, noting that despite an increase in AIDS cases amongst gay men, still ‘the media and the Department of Health, stress that in Ireland, AIDS is almost entirely a problem that affects IV drug users. It isn’t; it’s a problem that affects gay and bi-sexual men at least as much as IV drug users and their sexual partners. The national priorities, national campaigns and funding must reflect that fact.’¹¹⁵⁵ GHA’s success in getting the message out that AIDS was not a homosexual-only disease, and the subsequent spike in cases amongst I-V drug users, resulted in AIDS being perceived as primarily an IV drug user problem in Ireland.

‘One undeniable effect of the wider and wider availability of contraceptives has been to encourage sexual permissiveness.’¹¹⁵⁶

¹¹⁵³ NLI, Personal Papers of David Norris, Acc. 6672, Box 21 – Letter from Chris Robson to David Norris, 24 November 1988.

¹¹⁵⁴ *Seanad Éireann Debates*, Vol. 121 No. 4, 2 November 1988 – Adjournment Matter – Hirschfeld Centre, Dublin.

¹¹⁵⁵ NLI, Personal Papers of David Norris, *AIDS Action News*, August 1989, Special Issue produced by GHA, ‘GHA Survey Results.’

¹¹⁵⁶ NLI, 2A 3205, *Love is for Life: Pastoral Letter Issue on behalf of Irish Hierarchy*, (Dublin, 1985).

If the GHA's aim was to promote the message of safer sex, with the condom playing a central role, then the Irish Roman Catholic Church's aim was to challenge the very notion of safer sex and the role of the condom. At the centre of the Church's message was the promotion of chastity and fidelity. In the eyes of the Church these were the only certain and *morally* acceptable ways of preventing the spread of AIDS. Whereas GHA recognised AIDS as a medical issue, with public education to prevent its spread being fundamental, for the Irish Roman Catholic Church there was another dimension to the AIDS crisis, which was not simply a medical issue, but also a moral one. The moral issue, it would appear, was much more pressing in directing the Church's contribution to combatting AIDS.

From its entrance into the debate on combatting AIDS the message of the Catholic Church did not change. In December 1986, in one of the first statements by a member of the Irish Roman Catholic hierarchy on AIDS, Dr. John Buckley, Auxiliary Bishop of Cork and Ross, who singled out 'promiscuity' as the major factor in the spread of AIDS, attacked the condom and safer sex. Urging condoms not be used in the fight against the disease, Dr. Buckley asserted that the slogan Play Safe 'does not serve the best long-term interests of young people and disregards the moral principles held by the Catholic Church.'¹¹⁵⁷ Soon after, on 12 January 1987, the first official statement from the Irish Bishops Conference took up the issue of AIDS and further elaborated on how the Catholic Church in Ireland would respond to the AIDS crisis. First and foremost, the statement noted that the Church would be a place of understanding and tolerance for people with AIDS who would be treated with compassion and care, maintaining that 'the Christian community must be a sign of Christ's love, especially for the marginalised and the suffering.'¹¹⁵⁸

If the Church were willing to be compassionate to those who had contracted AIDS, they were not sympathetic with the campaign to promote safer sex or condoms. Echoing the same sentiment of Dr. John Buckley, the statement warned of the dangers posed by what they labelled the *abuse of sex*, insisting that 'the only reliable safe guard against contracting the virus by sexual means is through faithfulness to one's partner in marriage and through self-denial and self-restraint outside of marriage. It is vital that this be made crystal clear.'¹¹⁵⁹ To promote any other message, particularly the use of condoms would, it argued, 'give further

¹¹⁵⁷ *Catholic Standard*, 'Young People Lose Morals, 19 December 1986.

¹¹⁵⁸ Catholic Bishops Statement on AIDS, Statement by the Standing Committee of the bishops' Conference from its meeting of 12 January 1987. Copy obtained from Noelle Dowling Dublin Diocesan Archives.

¹¹⁵⁹ Catholic Bishops Statement on AIDS, Statement by the Standing Committee of the bishops' Conference from its meeting of 12 January 1987. Copy obtained from Noelle Dowling Dublin Diocesan Archives.

encouragement to permissiveness and this in itself would contribute to a further spread of the disease.’¹¹⁶⁰

The Catholic Church was particularly concerned with dismissing the concept of safer sex. In doing so, they sought to undermine the work and rhetoric of GHA, who, since 1985, had promoted safer sex. Whereas GHA sought to avoid passing judgement on an individual’s sexual activity, and emphasised that unsafe sex practices, rather than sex alone, were the main factors in spreading AIDS; the Church (and later the Irish government) did not restrain themselves from moralistic judgements. The church’s rhetoric presented sex in general (outside marriage/either safe or unsafe practices) as the main cause of Ireland’s AIDS crisis. This, in turn, led to the wider circulation of words and phrases, such as promiscuous, permissive, faithfulness, casual sex spreads, abuse of sex, when speaking about AIDS in Ireland.

Articles in *The Furrow* and publications by the Irish Roman Catholic Church challenged the very concept of safer sex and the reliability of condoms. In October 1987, Fr. Brian Power argued that ‘there is no such thing as safe casual sex, and ways of making it safer carry no guarantee that AIDS will be avoided.’¹¹⁶¹ Similarly, Fr. Maurice Reidy took aim at what he considered to be the preoccupation with focusing on how one could have sexual intercourse on a casual basis and not get HIV, or transmit it?¹¹⁶² This, in his opinion, appeared to be the burning question in Irish society with regard to AIDS. In a lengthy rebuke of the safe sex campaign Reidy asked:

Would it be wise to have sexual intercourse with a person who may be a carrier of the virus, but I don’t know the person well enough to know whether he/she has it or not, [...] I would suggest that no sane hedonist who is in love with life would risk himself/herself to such a sexual encounter. If he/she weighed the risks of condom failure, which can be higher than one in ten, it is very likely that he/she would decline the opportunity on grounds of safety and caution. [...] What sane parent would be relieved to hear a daughter’s assurance, as she left home for the weekend, that she had a pack of condoms in her handbag? [...] Considered in this light it is evident that the ideology of ‘safer sex’ accompanied by the condom, fails altogether on grounds of safety. [...] The ‘safer sex’ approach colludes with the very immaturity which is the main opportunity of the virus, and persuade youngsters that it is acceptable and responsible, or more responsible to have sexual intercourse with a condom.¹¹⁶³

¹¹⁶⁰ Catholic Bishops Statement on AIDS, Statement by the Standing Committee of the bishops’ Conference from its meeting of 12 January 1987. Copy obtained from Noelle Dowling Dublin Diocesan Archives.

¹¹⁶¹ Brian Power, ‘AIDS and Some Pastoral Implications’, in *The Furrow*, Vol. 38, No. 10 (October 1987).

¹¹⁶² Maurice Reidy, ‘AIDS: Education and Morality’, in *The Furrow*, Vol. 41, No. 10 (October 1990).

¹¹⁶³ Reidy, ‘AIDS: Education and Morality’, in *The Furrow*.

Fr. Paul Lavelle reinforced this view in *Understanding AIDS: A Christian Approach*, asking:

Can condoms prevent AIDS? – Correctly used condoms reduce the risk of infection, but they provide nothing like 100% protection. For example, consistently and correctly used, condoms greatly reduce the likelihood of conception, yet still two couples in every 100 will have a pregnancy within a year, with less careful use this number will rise to 15. The crucial fact is this: AIDS is a killer disease and there is no cure for it. In such circumstances can there be any acceptable level of risk?¹¹⁶⁴

Fr. Lavelle's above comments may seem more liberal to that of his peers, but rather than ending his comments there, he went on to ask, 'What's wrong with using condoms?'.¹¹⁶⁵ He answered by stating that 'sexual intercourse expressed the total, unconditional self-giving of husband and wife, with openness to the procreation of new life. The use of contraceptives contradicts this truth and is, therefore, morally wrong [...]'.¹¹⁶⁶ Although Lavelle lukewarmly acknowledged that condoms do help prevent the spread of AIDS, his comments seem to suggest that he only believed this to be the case for married couples. In other words, anyone not married should not be using them as 'acts of intercourse between single people, or between people not married to each other are thus untruthful and immoral'.¹¹⁶⁷ Even still, however, Lavelle made no attempt to provide information on how to properly use a condom which was vital to reducing the risk of failure, something GHA had recognised with their 'Condom Card.' Instead, he reminded readers that the use of condoms was morally wrong.¹¹⁶⁸

The result of this was that by the second half of 1987 the role of the condom in the campaign to prevent AIDS had reached fever pitch. Reporting on the increased coverage of the condom, Bernie Ni Fhlatharta and Cathy Halloran, in the *Connacht Sentinel*, remarked that 'It wouldn't be all that surprising if half the nation were using condoms on their fingers after watching some of the RTÉ programmes that dealt with AIDS where the displays of the rubber protection were a dime a dozen'.¹¹⁶⁹ The article focused on two RTÉ programmes, *Borderline* and the *Late Late Show*, which discussed the role of the condom. The *Late Late Show* controversially even demonstrated how to properly put on a condom. One couple, who took offence at this action, led Ni Fhlatharta and Halloran to state that 'it was pathetic to see a couple

¹¹⁶⁴ NLI, A 28230, Paul Lavelle, *Understanding AIDS: A Christian Approach*, (Dublin, 1989). 18.

¹¹⁶⁵ Lavelle, *Understanding AIDS: A Christian Approach*, 19.

¹¹⁶⁶ Lavelle, *Understanding AIDS: A Christian Approach*, 19.

¹¹⁶⁷ Lavelle, *Understanding AIDS: A Christian Approach*, 20.

¹¹⁶⁸ Lavelle, *Understanding AIDS: A Christian Approach*, 19.

¹¹⁶⁹ *Connacht Sentinel*, Bernie Ni Fhlatharta and Cathy Halloran, 'AIDS Programmes become crash sex education shows', 19 May 1987.

telling how offended they were at the sight of a condom on Irish T.V. when AIDS is claiming so many lives.¹¹⁷⁰ Both shows also demonstrated the considerable work still necessary to educate Irish society on AIDS. On the Borderline show one woman rang in to ask if she would be safe from AIDS by being on the pill, while another woman asked if her husband was sterilised would this protect her from contracting AIDS.¹¹⁷¹

Recognising the controversy surrounding condoms, the *Sunday World* conducted a survey on AIDS in 1987. In it they asked should condoms be promoted in the campaign to prevent AIDS, to which 51% responded that they should. Only 24% responded that they should not.¹¹⁷² Whereas, the debate on the condom pre-1985 had centred on its role as a contraceptive, by 1987 this debate had shifted. Now the public discussion on condoms was interlinked with AIDS and the importance, or not, of them being readily available and accessible as prophylactics.

While GHA promoted the condom as part of their safer sex campaign, in the eyes of the Irish Roman Catholic Hierarchy fidelity within marriage was the only form of ‘safer sex’ which was morally acceptable in preventing the spread of AIDS. As was evident from Fr. Reidy and Bishop Buckley’s comments, the ‘safer sex’ campaign was not only a fallacy, but also particularly damaging to Ireland’s younger generation, who were being put at risk through this campaign. For this reason, they continually sought to sow doubts about the reliability of condoms and safer sex into the minds of Irish society. Within only a few short months, therefore, the Irish Roman Catholic Church’s position was immediately at odds with the efforts of GHA. It was into this particularly divergent set of opinions that the Irish government haphazardly stepped in 1987.

‘If we are as successful in preventing AIDS as we have been in preventing unwanted pregnancies the outlook is bleak indeed.’¹¹⁷³

While GHA’s response to AIDS was rapid, urgent and considered, the Irish governments response could best be described as sluggish, lacklustre and negligent. The extent of the Irish government’s appreciation of the threat of AIDS and its seriousness about actually combatting the disease became particularly evident with the release of state files in 2015 at the National

¹¹⁷⁰ *Connacht Sentinel*, Bernie Ni Fhlatharta and Cathy Halloran, ‘AIDS Programmes become crash sex education shows’, 19 May 1987.

¹¹⁷¹ *Connacht Sentinel*, Bernie Ni Fhlatharta and Cathy Halloran, ‘AIDS Programmes become crash sex education shows’, 19 May 1987.

¹¹⁷² *Sunday World*, February 1987.

¹¹⁷³ NLI, IQA, MS 45, 999/14 – Gay Health Action Press Release, 1 April 1987.

Archives of Ireland. These files clearly state that the government sought to benefit from AIDS by considering using the disease as a justification for maintaining the laws criminalising sexual activity between males.¹¹⁷⁴ While this information alone is quite shocking, perhaps most damaging is the fact that the government was provided with clear advice that the laws criminalising sexual activity between males in fact hindered the fight against AIDS. Barry Desmond, Minister for Health, wrote to John Rogers, Attorney General, in May 1985 that:

The disease has a 2 year 70% - 80% mortality rate. The best hope of its control rests with developing an effective vaccine. This is a difficult and complicated procedure and no vaccine can be expected in under 5-10 years. In the interim the developed countries are depending on valid reporting of cases, health education and counselling of groups at risk such as the 'Gay Community' and Drug Addicts. It is arguable that our laws relevant to homosexuality are a constraint on both of these measures. Certainly reputable medical experts working in the control of this disease would take this view. I would find difficulty in identifying a reputable expert at international level who would see our present laws on homosexuality as working in the interest of the Public Health. Indeed, any attempt to make a case for our present laws based on this premise could I believe have a rebound effect.¹¹⁷⁵

The files are particularly damaging for Desmond who, despite knowing this information, and stating in October 1985 'that every effort would be made to control its [AIDS] growth in Ireland', failed, along with his government colleagues, to amend those laws or act more speedily.¹¹⁷⁶ For example, despite numerous letters from GHA to Desmond requesting support for their activities, no reply or support was provided to the GHA. GHA lambasted their treatment in a February 1986 letter to the Minister, decrying that 'the entire responsibility of public education and training on AIDS in Ireland has landed on our shoulders: to put it bluntly, we are doing your department's job.'¹¹⁷⁷

The release of these files copper-fasten Tonie Walsh's statement in 2015 that the Irish government were negligent in the formative years of the AIDS crisis in Ireland. It would seem that while GHA was working to get as much information to the public in 1985, at considerable cost to themselves, the Irish government were seeking to take advantage of the AIDS crisis as a possible excuse for the continued maintenance of the laws. Although they subsequently did not do so, the fact that the government did not launch a public campaign on AIDS until 1987,

¹¹⁷⁴ National Archives of Ireland, File 2015/51/1574 – John Rogers, Attorney General to Barry Desmond, Minister for Health, 19 April 1985.

¹¹⁷⁵ National Archives of Ireland, File 2015/51/1574 – Barry Desmond, Minister for Health to John Rogers, Attorney General, 14 May 1985.

¹¹⁷⁶ *Irish Independent*, 'Desmond Pledge on control of AIDS', 26 October 1985.

¹¹⁷⁷ NLI, IQA, MS 46,001/1 – Chris Robson on behalf of GHA to Barry Desmond, Minister for Health, 14 February 1986.

or decriminalise sexual activity between males until 1993, nor aid GHA, while well aware of AIDS' severity as early as 1985, demonstrates the extent to which AIDS was not a priority for the Irish government. Despite Desmond's comments in 1985 every effort was not made. Not until 1991 did tackling AIDS become somewhat of a priority, as cases of AIDS amongst heterosexuals increased.

When the Irish government eventually involved itself in a public AIDS campaign, its early efforts clearly sought to appease the Irish Roman Catholic Church, rather than support the work of GHA. While the government wanted to give the impression that they were committed to preventing the spread of AIDS, the conservative restraint with which the government met the AIDS challenge is noteworthy. From the start, several critics derided the government for not properly educating Irish society on the severity of AIDS, or on the means of preventing its spread. The earliest attempt by a state sponsored body to provide some level of information on AIDS did not come until August 1986 with the publication of a booklet by the Health Education Bureau on AIDS and distributed at Health Boards throughout the country. The publication of this booklet immediately raised further controversy.

The controversy centred around the Health Education Bureau's decision to leave out explicit information on unsafe sex practices, for fear that including such information would result in some health boards refusing to distribute the booklet. According to the *Irish Times*, the original text, which they claimed had been amended, warned of the dangers of anal sex and oral sex, while also emphasising the vulnerability to AIDS of all partners, male and female, of promiscuous homosexual or bisexual men.¹¹⁷⁸ In contrast, the amended text simply warned against unsafe forms of sex, with no specific guidelines on what they might be. The fears that the booklet might provoke negative responses among certain health boards was a result of experience with a previous booklet, the *Book of Child*, which had included information on artificial contraception that created difficulties with certain health boards.¹¹⁷⁹

The director of the health education bureau, Dr. Harry Crawley, disputed the *Irish Times*' assertion that the booklet had been amended. Crawley stated that no amendments could have taken place because 'it was never intended that the booklet would include information recommending specific forms of sexual behaviour and no such text was ever compiled by the bureau.'¹¹⁸⁰ This in many respects summed up the entire public campaign by the Irish government, which seemed most fearful of upsetting an individual's morals, rather than facing up to the reality of AIDS. Recognising the public appetite for detailed information, John

¹¹⁷⁸ *Irish Times*, 'AIDS Details Cut from Health Booklet', 14 August 1986.

¹¹⁷⁹ *Irish Times*, 'AIDS Details Cut from Health Booklet', 14 August 1986.

¹¹⁸⁰ *Irish Times*, 'AIDS Booklet to Clarify Risk', 11 September 1986.

Armstrong, who detailed the controversy over the Health Education Bureau's booklet in the *Irish Times*, provided contact details for GHA, noting that they 'provided detailed information about AIDS and how to avoid it, including explicit descriptions of what sexual practices should be avoided.'¹¹⁸¹

The government's refusal to recognise the benefits of including explicit information on sexual activity persisted, even with the launch of their so-called 'major public information' campaign in 1987. When the government announced its intention in late 1986 to instigate a 'major' public health campaign on AIDS through television, advertisements and leaflets, the focus was on informing the 'Irish people of the facts and dangers they face from AIDS.'¹¹⁸² However, in a press release, GHA questioned the sincerity of the government's campaign. Although GHA welcomed the announcement of a public information campaign, they insisted, however, that they were:

very concerned at the promiscuity is out message being promoted by some officials. The problem is not that simple. The purpose of the campaign is to prevent the spread of AIDS. We need a realistic approach [...] If the focus of the campaign is on telling us that the entire population must confine themselves to a lifetime sexual partner, it is bound to fail.¹¹⁸³

Although the objective was to launch this campaign in January 1987, the collapse of the government led to its postponement until May 1987, a further sign of the lack of urgency in combatting the threat of AIDS. In the year the government actually got involved in a public education campaign, the number of AIDS cases had increased from 8 in 1986 to 24 in 1987, with intravenous drug users accounting for 10 of those cases, homosexuals 9, haemophiliacs 3, intravenous drug user/homosexual 1, and 1 other case reported as 'other.'¹¹⁸⁴ There were 13 AIDS related deaths in 1987, while 590 individuals had so far tested positive for HIV in Ireland.¹¹⁸⁵

At the launch of the government's AIDS campaign on 1 May 1987, the Minister for Health, Rory O'Hanlon, stated that 'it cannot be too strongly stressed that to avoid AIDS, the most effective way of all is to stay with one faithful partner and remain faithful to that

¹¹⁸¹ *Irish Times*, 'AIDS Details Cut from Health Booklet', 14 August 1986.

¹¹⁸² *Irish Times*, 'Campaign to combat AIDS', 12 November 1986.

¹¹⁸³ NLI, IQA, MS 45, 997/10 – GHA press release 14 November 1986. GHA's criticism was reported in both the *Irish Times* and *Irish Examiner*. *Irish Times*, 'AIDS campaign unrealistic', 15 November 1986. *Irish Examiner*, 'Gays protest on AIDS campaign', 15 November 1986.

¹¹⁸⁴ Kate O'Donnell, Mary Cronin, and Derval Igoe, 'Review of the Epidemiology of AIDS in Ireland (1983-1999): A report by the National Disease Surveillance Centre', <http://www.drugsandalcohol.ie/5265/1/1257-1017.pdf> accessed on 21 November 2017.

¹¹⁸⁵ *Dáil Éireann Debate*, Vol. 372, No. 13, AIDS Programme, 27 May 1987.

partner.’¹¹⁸⁶ This viewpoint was identical to that of the Irish Roman Catholic Church and came to characterise the government’s overall message in their ‘major’ public information campaign, which prioritised fidelity and abstinence. While the AIDS information booklet disseminated to doctors and health boards did highlight that oral and anal sex were dangerous and recommended the use of condoms as the single most effective defence against AIDS for sexually active individuals not in one faithful partner relationships, the overall message was remarkably vague. For example, the leaflets geared to the wider public through public advertisements in newspapers and journals were much vaguer and cautious about the use of condoms and more moralistic about sexual activity, despite being titled ‘AIDS: the facts.’

The ‘AIDS: the facts’ leaflets listed four ways which AIDS could be contracted: Receiving AIDS infected blood in countries without adequate screening services, from infected mother to unborn baby, sharing injection needles with an infected person, and intimate sexual contact with an infected person.¹¹⁸⁷ Nowhere in the public advertisement was ‘intimate sexual contact’ elaborated on, or given greater clarity as to what actually constituted intimate sexual contact. It is in this instance then that one can appreciate why GHA’s campaigns were often characterised as explicit and why the governments was branded as vague. In listing the four ways to avoid AIDS, the campaign encouraged staying with one faithful partner, remaining faithful to that partner, avoiding sharing needles or equipment, and if in doubt, ask your doctor about the use of condoms.¹¹⁸⁸ No advice on safer sex or how to put on a condom was given. Instead, much like the Irish Roman Catholic Church, the government sought to avoid actively recommending the use of a condom. Moreover, they adopted similar language to that of the Church, remarking that ‘the male or female partners of a promiscuous person also runs the risk of becoming infected by the virus’, while also insisting (in big bold letters) that ‘CASUAL SEX SPREADS AIDS.’¹¹⁸⁹ The message quite clearly was that casual sex, rather than unsafe sex practices, was spreading AIDS. ‘Safer sex’ guidelines were also noticeably absent. However, given the campaign’s indifference to the use of condoms, it is not all that surprising that explicit ‘safer sex’ guidelines were omitted.

GHA did not allow the rhetoric of the government or the Irish Roman Catholic Church’s campaigns to go unquestioned. Condemning Bishop Buckley’s comments, the *Irish Times* reported that GHA argued that ‘the prevention of the illness was not a moral issue insofar as

¹¹⁸⁶ NLI, IQA, MS 45, 999/14 – Addressed by Dr. Rory O’Hanlon, Minister for Health at the launch of the AIDS Public Information programme, 1 May 1987.

¹¹⁸⁷ Irish Times, ‘AD on AIDS – The Facts, How to Avoid AIDS’, 9 May 1987.

¹¹⁸⁸ Irish Times, ‘AD on AIDS – The Facts, How to Avoid AIDS’, 9 May 1987.

¹¹⁸⁹ Irish Times, ‘AD on AIDS – The Facts, How to Avoid AIDS’, 9 May 1987.

AIDS afflicted Catholics and non-Catholics, gay people and those who are not gay.’¹¹⁹⁰ Similarly, the *Catholic Standard* reported that David Norris had responded to the Church’s 1987 statement by asking if ‘bishops had paused to consider whether it was better to have someone alive wearing a condom rather than dead because what remained to most people obscure theological reasons.’¹¹⁹¹ It is particularly noteworthy that in both the *Irish Times* and *Catholic Standard* the responses to the Church’s comments came from the gay community. Similarly, reacting to the government’s reluctance to encourage the use of condoms or to promote safer sex, GHA released a press statement in which they denounced the campaign as ‘simplistic, ineffective, moralising and concerned more with reinforcing traditional moral values than with combatting the spread of AIDS. [...] Moralising because it chooses to repeat a traditional message about sexual morality rather than tackle the changes in attitude and behaviour required to combat AIDS.’¹¹⁹²

The criticism of the government’s campaign, however, was not limited to GHA. In fact, other sectors of Irish society spoke out against the government’s efforts and simultaneously praised the efforts of the gay community. In *Liberty News*, the journal of the Irish Transport and General Workers’ Union, the government’s campaign on AIDS was reported to have:

suffered in two respects – it has missed its target in the sense that the principal campaign of marital fidelity is one which is irrelevant to the known high-risk groups in this country, intravenous drug abusers, haemophiliacs and homosexuals. Secondly, even in dealing with the risk of transmission among heterosexuals the campaign has confused public health with public morality in underplaying the role of condom in preventing the spread of the disease.¹¹⁹³

In contrast, *Liberty News* characterised the gay community as ‘perhaps the best informed and most aware of the AIDS problem, but this has been achieved in spite of, rather than because of, the efforts of Government.’¹¹⁹⁴ Similarly, Nuala O’Faolain, in the *Irish Times*, criticised the government’s campaign which she felt was ‘short on street credibility’ and ignored ‘aspects of the real world’ in fighting AIDS.¹¹⁹⁵ However, she signalled out the efforts of the gay community for considerable praise, insisting that ‘they, alone in Ireland, took responsibility for

¹¹⁹⁰ *Irish Times*, 18 December 1986, ‘One new case of AIDS each week forecast by gay group.’

¹¹⁹¹ *Catholic Standard*, ‘Bishops blame AIDS on Sex and Drugs’, 16 January 1987.

¹¹⁹² NLI, IQA, MS 45, 999/14 – Gay Health Action Press Release, 1 April 1987.

¹¹⁹³ NLI, IR 3318 L 20, *Liberty News*, Vol. 3, No. 3, Summer 1987 – ‘Social Services under attack from New Right coalition.’

¹¹⁹⁴ NLI, IR 3318 L 20, *Liberty News*, Vol. 3, No. 3, Summer 1987 – ‘Social Services under attack from New Right coalition.’

¹¹⁹⁵ Nuala O’Faolain, ‘AIDS campaign short on street credibility’, *Irish Times* 11 May 1987.

themselves. Their continuing campaign should have been Government funded, if only because it is gay communities which offer the only example of people actually changing their sexual behaviour in each other's interests.¹¹⁹⁶ Even during a debate on the government's AIDS campaign in Seanad Éireann, Senators praised the actions of the gay community, while condemning the government's. Senator Nuala Fennell, for example, described the government's campaign (which she refused to endorse) as having the 'hallmarks of officialdom protecting the community from what they believed would be morally unacceptable to them and in doing so they shrank from an issue of responsible action.'¹¹⁹⁷ Echoing the same sentiment of *Liberty News* and Nuala O'Faolain, Senator Fennell maintained that:

It was the gay community which gave the lead in 1982 in this country in taking practical action. They realised the threat, understood the reality of it and pioneered the information circuit for public information. They saturated the country with information and developed a network of caring groups and information lines which have proved to be so useful and which are now the nucleus of what can be carried on. Indeed, one can say without the action which they took at that time, the problem would be an awful lot worse here.¹¹⁹⁸

It was because of GHA's actions that Monica Barnes, chair of the Oireachtas Joint Committee on Women's Rights, called on the Department of Health to hire a member of the gay community to 'help develop a realistic programme to combat AIDS', noting that 'after all, they had taken the time to study the problem.'¹¹⁹⁹

The Minister for Health did not take up this advice, nor was he willing to explain why he continued to refuse funding to GHA. In questions to Minister O'Hanlon on the government's AIDS efforts, Michael D. Higgins, TD, asked 'why groups working with the gay community were refused assistance – I am referring to the Gay Health Action group.'¹²⁰⁰ Responding, Minister O'Hanlon revealed that 'I am sure that in the booklet we produced reference was made to the Gay Health Action Group as one of those groups that persons who felt they might need assistance in combating or avoiding AIDS could approach for information.'¹²⁰¹ No answer, however, was given as to why assistance was refused to GHA. An examination of Figure 9

¹¹⁹⁶ Nuala O'Faolain, 'AIDS campaign short on street credibility', *Irish Times* 11 May 1987.

¹¹⁹⁷ *Seanad Éireann Debate*, Vol. 118, No. 14, 'Information and Education Programme on AIDS, Nuala Fennell, 25 February 1988.

¹¹⁹⁸ *Seanad Éireann Debate*, Vol. 118, No. 14, 'Information and Education Programme on AIDS, Nuala Fennell, 25 February 1988.

¹¹⁹⁹ *Evening Press*, 14 September 1988, 'Hire Gay to work on AIDS Campaign.'

¹²⁰⁰ *Dáil Éireann Debate*, Vol. 383, No. 6, 'AIDS Campaign', Michael D. Higgins, 2 November 1988.

¹²⁰¹ *Dáil Éireann Debate*, Vol. 383, No. 6, 'AIDS Campaign', Rory O'Hanlon, 2 November 1988.

shows that GHA could not even garner a share of the National Lottery funding throughout its existence, despite it being to the fore in campaigns to combat AIDS.

[575][576] AIDS Prevention Programme
National Lottery Funding

Name of Project	1987-88	1989
	£	£
Ana Liffey Drugs Counselling Services	40,000	20,000
Colemine Therapeutic Community	20,000	—
Ballymun Youth Project	15,000	5,000
Community Action against Drugs	5,000	5,000
Irish Haemophilia Society	5,000	30,000
Eastern Health Board Pilot Outreach Programme	150,000	300,000
Baggot Street Walk-in Centre	—	—
Trinity Court Methadone Programme	—	—
Eastern Health Board Educational Programmes	—	—
Mater Dei Counselling Service	5,000	—
Cairde — reprinting of leaflets	750	—
St. James's Hospital	15,000	43,000
Dental Council — Fact Pack on AIDS	3,500	—
Coombe Hospital — Paediatric AIDS Study	15,000	20,000
AIDS/STD Services, Waterford	30,000	—
AIDS/STD Services, Limerick	25,000	—
AIDS Committee, Southern Health Board	10,000	—
The AIDS Fund	30,000	250,000
Drug Reporting System — HRB	30,000	—
HIV Preventive Counselling Training Workshop	—	2,630
Development of an AIDS Walk-in Centre, Northside Dublin	—	50,000
Haemophiliac Trust Fund	—	1,000,000
Total	399,250	1,725,630

Figure 12. National Lottery Funding for AIDS Prevention Programmes¹²⁰²

In a sign of the numerous contradictions which have characterised many issues in Irish society, Minister O'Hanlon's counterpart in the Department of Justice was, however, willing to recognise that AIDS presented a threat to the gay community, not just in medical terms, but also socially and institutionally. As Chris Robson's aforementioned letter to David Norris noted, there were some segments of Irish society which were seeking to use the AIDS crisis to call for the strict enforcement of the laws criminalising sexual activity between males and for the burning down of gay venues. When gay activists learned that the government was introducing an Incitement to Hatred Act, they lobbied for the inclusion of sexual orientation. In one such letter to Anne Colley of the Progressive Democrats, Tonie Walsh noted that:

The Minister for Justice indicated that he would consider amendments at the committee stage which would include travellers among the groups protected by the Bill. This is a move which the National Gay Federation would of course welcome. We feel that it is also an ideal opportunity to include sexual orientation in the Bill's coverage, so that homosexual men and women may be protected from the kind of verbal attacks which they suffer along with other minorities. [...] I would ask you to use any influence you may have to see that an amendment to the Bill extending its protection to gay men and women is introduced and passed at the committee stage. It would be a sad day for all Irish men and women if this opportunity to create a stronger, braver, and more tolerant society was missed.¹²⁰³

¹²⁰² *Dáil Éireann Debate*, Vol. 399, No. 3, 'AIDS Prevention Programme', 29 May 1990.

¹²⁰³ NLI, IQA, MS 45, 940/2 – Tonie Walsh to Anne Colley, Progressive Democrats Spokesperson on Justice, 7 March 1990.

After numerous calls in Leinster House to include sexual orientation, the Minister for Justice, Ray Burke, decided to include sexual orientation in the Prohibition of Incitement to Hatred Bill, 1989. This marked a considerable shift from his predecessor in the Department, Gerry Collins, who had resisted such requests. In announcing his decision to do so, Burke noted the ‘impressive case made for these amendments [sexual orientation and travelling community].’¹²⁰⁴ Addressing specifically the inclusion of sexual orientation, he argued that ‘sympathy alone is of very little benefit to homosexuals when they are being verbally attacked and abused. An opportunity has now arisen to be more than just sympathetic, and I am happy to be able to avail of this opportunity to give the protection afforded by the Bill to homosexuals.’¹²⁰⁵

The widespread praise for GHA and the wider gay community, no doubt, facilitated the inclusion of sexual orientation and the strong support it enjoyed. Acknowledging the considerable cross-party support for the bill, Senator Shane Ross quipped that he did not want Minister Burke to ‘feel politically uncomfortable when there is an unanimity of support from these benches for what he is doing.’¹²⁰⁶ The introduction of sympathetic legislation for Irish homosexuals, at that time, represented a considerable contrast with international precedents. For example, only one year previously, the British government had introduced Section 28, a significant victory for those opposed to homosexuality.¹²⁰⁷ In contrast, the Irish government introduced legislation protecting the gay community, a significant victory for proponents of gay rights.

GHA continued to persevere with their attempts to provide as much detailed and practical information as possible, resulting, as we have seen, in the production of their ‘Condom Card’, ‘Safe Sex Card’, and ‘Joys of Sex’ posters. There was, however, some cause for optimism for GHA as some publications appeared to have endorsed their message and began to promote it. In April 1987, for example, *In Dublin* published an article on the different brands of condoms, insisting that ‘In the final analysis it all comes down to condoms. Nothing

¹²⁰⁴ *Seanad Éireann Debate*, Vol. 123, No. 6, ‘Prohibition of Incitement to Hatred Bill, 1988, Report and Final Stages, 22 November 1989.

¹²⁰⁵ *Seanad Éireann Debate*, Vol. 123, No. 6, ‘Prohibition of Incitement to Hatred Bill, 1988, Report and Final Stages, 22 November 1989.

¹²⁰⁶ *Seanad Éireann Debate*, Vol. 123, No. 6, ‘Prohibition of Incitement to Hatred Bill, 1988, Report and Final Stages, 22 November 1989.

¹²⁰⁷ Section 28 prohibited local authorities from promoting homosexuality or gay pretended family relationships and prevented council spending money on educational materials and projects perceived to promote a gay lifestyle.

<https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2003/nov/17/uk.gayrights>, Audrey Gillan, ‘Section 28 gone... but not forgotten’, 17 November 2003. Accessed on 20 December 2017.

else offers any hope for the salvation of this and future generations from the AIDS plague [...] To suggest abstinence is to deny the existence and nature of the life force itself.'¹²⁰⁸ Other publications such as the *Galway Advertiser*, which began its own AIDS awareness campaign in the latter part of 1987, reinforced much of what GHA had been promoting. Advising their readers that the AIDS virus could be passed on in any sexual act that exchanges bodily fluids, the *Galway Advertiser* insisted that 'sexual intercourse, either homosexual or heterosexual without the use of a condom is a very efficient transmitter of the HIV virus.'¹²⁰⁹ That the *Galway Advertiser* did not simply associate the spread of the virus with homosexual activity, but also heterosexual, was symbolically important.

If GHA remained focused on their efforts to promote safer sex, the government remained equally committed to its promotion of monogamy and abstinence throughout the 1980s, partly because the Minister for Health was wary of promoting any other message. Speaking in 1989, the Minister for Health, Rory O'Hanlon, insisted his plan was working and that people would continue to be told that the best way to avoid being infected was to have sex with only your marriage partner and to remain monogamous. He added that 'my own view is that to talk about condoms as the only dimension of AIDS prevention is trivialising the problem. There are a whole lot of strategies which are necessary before you use condoms.'¹²¹⁰ Defending the 1987 programme, O'Hanlon noted that 97% of people now knew that AIDS was spread by sexual intercourse, 98 percent knew it was spread by intravenous needle sharing and 94 percent knew it was spread from infected mothers to babies.'¹²¹¹ However, as we have seen previously in this chapter, this was almost the exact same percentage before the government conducted their public AIDS information campaign, and was a result most likely of the efforts of GHA, doctors and international AIDS campaigns, such as the 'Iceberg' and 'Falling Tombstone' campaigns in Great Britain, which many Irish households came into contact with.¹²¹²

If the Minister for Health believed his campaign was working, GHA did not. Writing in August 1989 GHA emphasised that the:

message for the Department of Health is simple: take seriously the question of HIV AIDS among gay and bi-sexual men. [...] Our statistics show clearly for the first time, the extent of the spread of the HIV among gay and bi-sexual men in Ireland, approximately 1,600 people. [...] For years, we have asked for a national campaign that provides explicit specific information for those gays and bisexuals whom we cannot reach. [...] It's about

¹²⁰⁸ NLI, IR 94133 I 2, *In Dublin*, 'Safer Sex and the Republic', 2 April 1987.

¹²⁰⁹ *Galway Advertiser*, 'AIDS Facts: Part 2', 22 October 1987.

¹²¹⁰ *Irish Times*, 'O'Hanlon says his plan is working', 11 December 1989.

¹²¹¹ *Irish Times*, 'O'Hanlon says his plan is working', 11 December 1989.

¹²¹² *Irish Times*, 'RTÉ shows AIDS ad in surprise breakthrough', 12 January 1987

time the Government took some responsibility for the health and welfare of their gay and bisexual citizens.’¹²¹³

This was a concern shared by Maureen Haughey, wife of the then *Taoiseach*, Charles Haughey. Speaking at Cairde offices in Dublin, in December 1989, Haughey declared that Ireland was losing the battle in AIDS awareness promotion, insisting ‘that the heterosexual community don’t see AIDS as an issue for them.’¹²¹⁴ GHA and Mrs. Haughey’s concerns were justified. The *Irish Times* reported that Ireland had the highest rate of increase of AIDS victims in the EEC for that year.¹²¹⁵ Statistics for 1989 showed that 886 people had tested HIV positive and 113 had AIDS in Ireland. Since 1984, 54 of these had died.¹²¹⁶

‘The move to set up a group in Dublin is an indication of the level of anger that many people feel at the government indifference and inaction.’¹²¹⁷

At the end of their article in *AIDS Action News* in 1989 GHA noted that ‘the government must also, at last give proper funding to GHA to continue our own work. We are a small group and frankly we are both exhausted and broke.’¹²¹⁸ This, however, was a plea which the government once more ignored. Combined with the fact that new individuals did not get actively involved with GHA, by the beginning of 1990, those running GHA had reached their limit and GHA itself had fallen into a state of abeyance.¹²¹⁹ In a July 1990 statement GHA announced ‘with sadness’ that they had ‘decided to disband.’¹²²⁰ Explaining the reasons behind this decision, GHA noted that:

Most of us have been with GHA from the start, in January 1985, and we now, as individuals wish to work in different ways, or in different areas, or to step back for a while. [...] GHA had perhaps become too specifically associated with a small group of people and instead of being the focus for a new phase of work, was in danger of being a barrier to it.¹²²¹

¹²¹³ NLI, Personal Papers of David Norris, *AIDS Action News*, August 1989, Special Issue produced by GHA, ‘GHA Survey Results.’

¹²¹⁴ *Irish Times*, ‘Campaign on AIDS failing’, 1 December 1989.

¹²¹⁵ *Irish Times*, ‘Campaign on AIDS failing’, 1 December 1989.

¹²¹⁶ *Irish Press*, ‘30% still believe myths on AIDS’, 1 December 1989.

¹²¹⁷ NLI, ILB 305 G 2, *Gay Community News*, December 1990, Issue 25, ‘ACT UP Dublin.’

¹²¹⁸ NLI, Personal Papers of David Norris, *AIDS Action News*, August 1989, Special Issue produced by GHA, ‘GHA Survey Results.’

¹²¹⁹ NLI, ILB 305 G 2, *Gay Community News*, ‘GHA News’, Issue 20 July 1990.

¹²²⁰ NLI, ILB 305 G 2, *Gay Community News*, ‘GHA News’, Issue 20 July 1990.

¹²²¹ NLI, ILB 305 G 2, *Gay Community News*, ‘GHA News’, Issue 20 July 1990.

Reacting to this decision, Outwaves stated that ‘the loss of Gay Health Action leaves a big gap in the provision of positive health and safer sex advice geared to the specific needs of gay men and lesbians.’¹²²² No doubt, it was also a blow to the wider community who, for many years, had depended on GHA for detailed information on AIDS. Speaking in Seanad Éireann, in December 1990, Senator Shane Ross commented that ‘the heterosexual community owe a debt to the homosexual community in that the gay community, especially in Ireland, took the initiative on the AIDS problem which the government [...] were slow to take [...] The gay community tackled this problem responsibly, and presumably, protected many in that community and many heterosexuals from the AIDS virus.’¹²²³

Although GHA disbanded in 1990 it, nevertheless, left behind an impressive legacy, which had generated a newfound respect and appreciation for members of Ireland’s gay and lesbian community. What is remarkable about GHA is the fact that they actually survived for five years, despite the government’s continued refusal to assist them. Even more remarkable, perhaps, is the extent to which this refusal did not result in GHA taking to the streets to express their outrage at the government’s treatment of them, or the AIDS crisis more generally. Instead, it would seem, GHA channelled their energy into campaigns to provide detailed and accurate public information, support services, video information evenings and telephone helplines. It is a testament to those involved with GHA, and the wider gay community who donated, that GHA lasted as long as it did and provided as much as it did.

However, while GHA remained peaceful and civil throughout its existence, some members of the gay community had reached a point in 1990 where they believed more direct action was now needed and looked to the example of groups such as ACT UP in New York for inspiration.¹²²⁴ While GHA had taken on the work of public information thanks to governmental neglect, a Dublin branch of ACT UP that formed in late 1990 sought to shame

¹²²² NLI, IQA, MS 45, 944/1 – Outwaves – Irish News – 7 May 1990. Outwaves was a programme on Horizon radio for Ireland’s gay and lesbian community,

¹²²³ *Seanad Éireann*, Vol. 127, No. 1, ‘European Court of Human Rights Judgment: Statements’, 12 December 1990.

¹²²⁴ ACT UP (AIDS Coalition TO Unleash Power) first emerged in New York in 1987 and eventually spread to other countries. It engaged in civil disobedience tactics to highlight the governments inaction on the AIDS epidemic. For more information on ACT UP see: Victoria Johnson and Jo Freeman, *Waves of Protest: Social Movements Since the Sixties*, (Maryland, Rowman and Littlefield, 1999). Josh Gamson, ‘Silence, Death, and the Invisible Enemy: AIDS Activism and Social Movement ‘Newness’’, in *Social Problems*, Vol. 36, Issue 4, October 1989, pages 351-367. Brett C. Stockdill, ‘ACT UP (AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power)’, in *The Wiley-Blackwell Encyclopedia of Social and Political Movements*, edited by David A. Snow, Donatella della Porta, Bert Klandermans and Doug McAdam, (Wiley-Blackwell, 2013).

the government into action. Announcing its establishment, ACT UP Dublin stated that ‘the move to set up a group in Dublin is an indication of the level of anger that many people feel at the government indifference and inaction. [...] It will also press for changes in the legislation on the sale of condoms and improvements in sex education in schools.’¹²²⁵

The issue of condoms and sex education had dominated the debate around AIDS throughout 1990. In March of that year reports appeared in the Irish media which highlighted objections by the Catholic hierarchy to the proposed Department of Education’s AIDS education programme for post primary schools. According to the *Irish Press*, the catholic bishops opposed the programme because it advocated the use of condoms as a means of preventing the spread of the disease, something they maintained was not in line with the Catholic ethos of Irish schools.¹²²⁶ In a statement issued from the Irish Episcopal Conference on AIDS, the bishops insisted that ‘the only adequate response lies in the promotion of responsible attitudes and behaviour among our people. In the sexual sphere this means leading them to understand fully why the expression of sexual love should be reserved to marriage. This is the proper Christian response. It is also the only certain protection from infection by sexual means.’¹²²⁷

In comparison with her cabinet colleague Minister for Health Rory O’Hanlon, Minister for Education, Mary O’Rourke, was somewhat more willing to resist the demands of the Irish Roman Catholic Church. Asked in an RTÉ radio interview about the Church’s opposition to condoms, Minister O’Rourke replied that ‘the bishops were fully entitled to their point of view. They have their bailiwick and I have mine.’¹²²⁸ O’Rourke’s assertive defence of the programme was in no part helped by the fact that she enjoyed the support of the Church of Ireland and the two main teachers’ unions, the ASTI and TUI, who backed the department’s pilot AIDS Education programme.¹²²⁹

The Department of Education’s AIDS education programme comprised six lessons of 40 minutes and was by no means radical in content. However, in an Irish context where sex education was non-existent, any form of education concerning matters of sex was radical. Lessons one, two and three outlined the threats posed by AIDS and explained how the disease

¹²²⁵ NLI, ILB 305 G 2, *Gay Community News*, December 1990, Issue 25, ‘ACT UP Dublin.’

¹²²⁶ *Irish Press*, Gregg Ryan, ‘Catholic Bishops have reiterated their opposition to an AIDS Education Programme for Schools’, 15 March 1990.

¹²²⁷ NLI, IR 26402 a 1, *Irish Catholic Directory*, ‘Statement issued from the Irish Episcopal Conference on AIDS’, 14 March 1990.

¹²²⁸ *Irish Independent*, ‘Teachers to get training on AIDS Scheme’, 15 June 1990.

¹²²⁹ *Irish Times*, ‘AIDS Programme for Schools gets off to controversial start’, 14 June 1990. *Irish Independent*, ‘Teachers support AIDS pilot’, 11 March 1990.

was spread. Lesson four, which was most likely at the centre of the controversy, dealt with preventive measures, including total sexual abstinence or the use of condoms.¹²³⁰ Celibacy, however, was stressed as the most effective preventive measure. The final two lessons dealt with taking responsibility for one's own actions and how society treated those suffering with AIDS.¹²³¹

The church's main criticism and opposition would appear to have centred around lesson four and the department's decision to avoid morally condemning the use of condoms.¹²³² The church's opposition was met with criticism and ridicule by some in the media. For example, an image on the front page of the *Galway Advertiser*, in April 1990, derided the Church's opposition. The image contained a drawing of a bishop saying, 'Just because it prevents unnecessary death doesn't mean it's right.'¹²³³ The caption then read: 'Bishops prevent condoms, condoms prevent AIDS, therefore Bishops prevent AIDS!'¹²³⁴ In an article in the *Irish Independent*, Mary Kenny, while being sympathetic to the church's defence of its position, nevertheless insisted that:

the bishops could show some flexibility as well. There is an old tradition in Christianity called the doctrine of necessity and there is the doctrine of the lesser evil. Facts should not be denied, and people cannot be shielded from them. It is a fact that the condom is a defence against the disease [...] And if we are talking about the lesser evil, a condom certainly is a lesser evil than an abortion and a lesser evil too, then transmitting a killer disease.¹²³⁵

In the midst of the furore over the Department of Education's AIDS education programme, the Irish Family Planning Association was fined £400 in the district court for 'unlawfully selling contraceptives' at a Virgin megastore in Dublin. According to the *Irish Times*, the Irish Family Planning Association were only permitted to sell contraceptives at its offices in Cathal Brugha Street and Synge Street.¹²³⁶ The IFPA appealed this decision on the basis that 'condoms are

¹²³⁰ *Irish Times*, 'AIDS Programme for Schools gets off to controversial start', 14 June 1990

¹²³¹ *Irish Times*, 'AIDS Programme for Schools gets off to controversial start', 14 June 1990

¹²³² AIDS: A Guide for Teachers and Educators who share with parents the responsibility of educating children and students about the disease, Diocesan Offices, May 1990. Copy obtained from Noelle Dowling of Dublin Diocesan Archives. – The Catholic Church produced its own AIDS education guide for teachers, which clearly stated that the use of contraceptives was morally wrong.

¹²³³ *Galway Advertiser*, Mary O'Connor, 'AIDS Education Still Below Standard', 19 April 1990.

¹²³⁴ *Galway Advertiser*, Mary O'Connor, 'AIDS Education Still Below Standard', 19 April 1990.

¹²³⁵ *Irish Independent*, Mary Kenny, 'Condoms ... And the lesser of two evils', 10 March 1990.

¹²³⁶ *Irish Times*, 'IFPA fined £400 for 'deliberate breach' of law', 16 May 1990.

prophylactic and should not be subject to the narrow laws governing the sale of contraceptives.¹²³⁷ Their appeal, however, was dismissed and their fine increased to £500, with Justice O’Hanrahan stating that the IFPA had ‘got off lightly.’¹²³⁸ Spurred on by these developments AIDS activists organised demonstrations calling for a change in the Family Planning Bill to ensure greater access to condoms. Public demonstrations and challenges to the existing legislation sprung up throughout the country, with some campaigns resembling domestic and international precedents. Central to these campaigns were ACT UP and Condom Sense, with the support of other organisations, most notably the Irish Family Planning Association, USI and the different gay and lesbian organisations throughout the country.

During the IFPA’s appeal at the Fours Courts, in February 1991, ACT UP Dublin staged a protest outside. Carrying placards with ‘Silence = Death’, ‘If it’s not on, it’s not on’¹²³⁹ and with some ACT UP Dublin members dressed up as a condom, ACT UP Dublin brought the rhetoric and strategies of international ACT UP campaigns to Ireland.¹²⁴⁰ Later that day, ACT UP Dublin took part in a ‘Love Carefully’ demonstration outside Leinster House with members from AIDS Helpline, the National Gay and Lesbian Federation, Irish Haemophilia Association, National Union of Students, and the Gay and Lesbian Equality Network. ACT UP’s placards were joined by others which stated, ‘We support the IFPA’, ‘Wake Up Rory O’Hanlon’ and ‘Don’t be stupid, don’t be silly, put a condom on your willy.’¹²⁴¹

Members of ACT UP Dublin, like their international counterparts, were not afraid to engage in controversial actions. For example, in March 1991, members occupied the office of Dr. James Walsh, the national AIDS co-ordinator at the Department of Health, to protest at the lack of action by his department with regards to AIDS. In particular, they condemned the fact that there was ‘only one clinic in Dublin where counselling is provided before and after HIV testing; only one needle exchange programme for drug users and inadequate availability of condoms [...]’¹²⁴² Before exiting the building (after the Gardaí were called), ACT UP Dublin produced a set of demands, which included a call for pre-and post-test counselling, a needle exchange scheme and the free availability of condoms in convenient locations.¹²⁴³ In that same year, ACT UP Dublin also confronted the actions and rhetoric of the Irish Roman Catholic Church. In one of their most popular events, ACT UP Dublin, as part of an international

¹²³⁷ NLI, ILB 305 G 2, *Gay Community News*, ‘Disgraceful ruling’, Issue 27, March 1991.

¹²³⁸ NLI, ILB 305 G 2, *Gay Community News*, ‘Disgraceful ruling’, Issue 27, March 1991.

¹²³⁹ NLI, ILB 305 G 2, *Gay Community News*, ‘Disgraceful ruling’, Issue 27, March 1991.

¹²⁴⁰ NLI, ILB 305 G 2, *Gay Community News*, ‘Disgraceful ruling’, Issue 27, March 1991.

¹²⁴¹ NLI, ILB 305 G 2, *Gay Community News*, ‘Disgraceful ruling’, Issue 27, March 1991.

¹²⁴² NLI, ILB 305 G2, *Gay Community News*, ISSUE 27, March 1991, ‘Walsh Zapped.’

¹²⁴³ NLI, ILB 305 G2, *Gay Community News*, ISSUE 27, March 1991, ‘Walsh Zapped.’

campaign, 'Fight AIDS not Condoms', protested outside the Pro-Cathedral in Dublin. Dressed up as bishops, ACT UP Dublin staged a public crucifixion at the command of the 'bishops' of a five-foot-tall condom.¹²⁴⁴ Writing in *GCN*, Izzy (ACT UP Dublin), described the overall reaction from mass-goers as 'surprisingly good with many people expressing support for the views contained in our leaflets, although some people felt uncomfortable with the idea of protesting outside a church.'¹²⁴⁵ Later, in 1992, they staged a 'wash-day' protest on the Halfpenny Bridge in the heart of Dublin city. ACT UP Dublin members draped a number of sheets on a long clothesline detailing the Irish governments record on AIDS issues. In particular, the sheets noted the limited availability of condoms and the AIDS pack distributed to schools which advocated 'celibacy, fidelity, no intravenous drug use as the only ways to avoid infection.'¹²⁴⁶

Similarly, Condom Sense were not afraid to generate controversy of their own. In the lead-up to Valentine's Day, in February 1992, a campaign called 'Use Condom Sense' placed vending machines in some pubs and clubs around the country, in direct contravention of the Family Planning Bill. Reporting on the placement of a condom vending machine in Setanta's nightclub in Salthill, the *Galway Advertiser* noted that one of the central issues Condom Sense saw with the present legislation was the fact that 'people cannot purchase condoms with anonymity, or at the times they may need.'¹²⁴⁷ By July 1992, the *Irish Times* reported that over 100 condom vending machines had been illegally installed in clubs and pubs throughout the country.¹²⁴⁸ The *Galway Advertiser* took this campaign as an opportunity to further poke fun at the existing legislation with an image of two men discussing a condom vending machine. In the image one man remarks to another that, 'It's a new smart condom machine for the Irish market.' Why smart? It had to qualify as a pharmacist.'¹²⁴⁹

In the midst of these demonstrations, statistics for heterosexuals with AIDS began to concern the government. Figure 10 shows that in the space of just one year, the number of

¹²⁴⁴ NLI, ILB 305 G2, *Gay Community News*, Issue 36, December 1991, 'Too sexy for your Church.'

¹²⁴⁵ NLI, ILB 305 G2, *Gay Community News*, Issue 36, December 1991, 'Too sexy for your Church.'

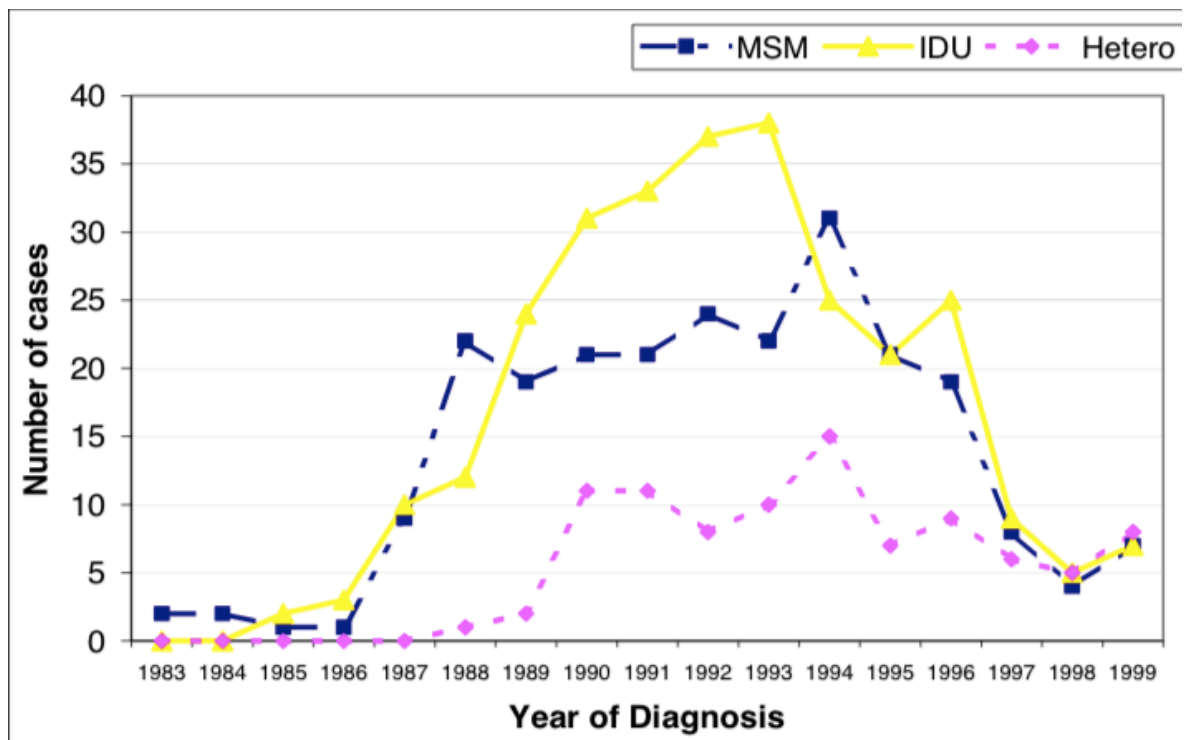
¹²⁴⁶ NLI, ILB 305 G2, *Gay Community News*, 'Dirty Laundry on the Halfpenny Bridge', Issue 38, March 1992.

¹²⁴⁷ *Galway Advertiser*, 'Condom Protest', 13 February 1992.

¹²⁴⁸ *Irish Times*, 'Clubs defying law by installing condom machines', 14 July 1992.

¹²⁴⁹ *Galway Advertiser*, 'Condom Protest', 13 February 1992.

heterosexuals diagnosed with AIDS went from 2 in 1989 to 11 in 1990.¹²⁵⁰ In comparison, the number of homosexuals diagnosed with AIDS went from 19 in 1989 to 21 in 1990.¹²⁵¹ For that period heterosexuals had the greatest increase in reported AIDS cases. In his influential account of AIDS in the USA, Randy Shilts remarked that ‘The Gay plague got covered only because it finally had struck people who counted, people who were not homosexuals.’¹²⁵² Although Shilts comment was concerned with the lack of media coverage until heterosexuals contracted AIDS, it is noteworthy that it was not until there was a substantial increase in the number of heterosexuals contracting the disease in Ireland that the Irish government began to recognise the seriousness of AIDS.



¹²⁵⁰ Kate O’Donnell, Mary Cronin, and Derval Igoe, ‘Review of the Epidemiology of AIDS in Ireland (1983-1999): A report by the National Disease Surveillance Centre’, <http://www.drugsandalcohol.ie/5265/1/1257-1017.pdf> accessed on 21 November 2017.

¹²⁵¹ Kate O’Donnell, Mary Cronin, and Derval Igoe, ‘Review of the Epidemiology of AIDS in Ireland (1983-1999): A report by the National Disease Surveillance Centre’, <http://www.drugsandalcohol.ie/5265/1/1257-1017.pdf> accessed on 21 November 2017.

¹²⁵² Randy Shilts, *And the Band Played On. Politics, People, and the AIDS Epidemic*, (New York, St. Martin’s Griffin, 1987), 126.

Speaking on World AIDS Day, in November 1991, at the opening of the ‘Sharing the challenge’ conference on AIDS, the Minister for Health, Mary O’Rourke, reflected this reality. Acknowledging her appreciation for those who had worked to combat AIDS, Minister O’Rourke stated that Irish society had two particular problems with regard to AIDS:

The majority of those who are HIV positive are intravenous drug abusers and there is a growing number of heterosexual cases who have tested positive for the HIV Virus and there is an increase in the number of heterosexuals who have developed AIDS. [...] While it can be seen that the majority of our HIV/AIDS population are still linked to drug abuse it is evident that the virus is becoming established in the heterosexual community.¹²⁵⁴ It is clear therefore that our strategies including our Preventive Strategies must focus on both of these groups if we are to be successful in tackling the problem.

Whereas Minister O’Rourke announced a public education campaign geared specifically at heterosexuals, no mention was made of any campaign geared towards homosexuals. In fact, Minister O’Rourke did not even mention the word homosexual throughout her speech. This is all the more ironic considering the title of the conference was ‘Sharing the Challenge.’¹²⁵⁵ Up to this point in time the government had left the burden of confronting AIDS to voluntary groups, most notably GHA, who they refused to financially support. However, when the number of heterosexual cases of AIDS increased, AIDS was suddenly a challenge to be shared. This was reflected in the Minister’s announcement of the establishment of the first National AIDS Strategy committee in Ireland, bringing disparate groups working in this area together. So important was it at that stage to combat AIDS, that the Minister took it upon herself to chair the new committee. This committee also included Dr. James Walsh who was zapped by ACT UP Dublin and Ms. Anne-Marie Jones who, in her address at the conference, insisted that:

The initial work of the sometimes marginalised voluntary sector must be recognised. As a professional working in a non-statutory organisation I acknowledged what I have learnt from my statutory colleagues. However, my training in this specific field came from involvement with voluntary groups – from contact and liaison with the now disbanded but wonderful Gay Health Action who produced the first HIV information in this country [...].¹²⁵⁶

¹²⁵³ Kate O’Donnell, Mary Cronin, and Derval Igoe, ‘Review of the Epidemiology of AIDS in Ireland (1983-1999): A report by the National Disease Surveillance Centre’, <http://www.drugsandalcohol.ie/5265/1/1257-1017.pdf>. Accessed on 21 November 2017.

¹²⁵⁴ NLI, IQA, MS 45, 976/11 – ‘Sharing the Challenge.’ Address by Mary O’Rourke, Minister for Health, 29 November 1991.

¹²⁵⁵ NLI, IQA, MS 45, 976/11 – ‘Sharing the Challenge.’ Address by Mary O’Rourke, Minister for Health, 29 November 1991.

¹²⁵⁶ NLI, IQA, MS 45, 976/13 – ‘The Challenge of HIV and AIDS in Ireland’ address by Ann-Marie Jones, 29 November 1991, ‘Sharing the Challenge’ conference.

Crucially, Mick Quinlan was later co-opted onto a sub-committee to develop recommendations to avoid discrimination against persons with HIV/AIDS.¹²⁵⁷

Four months after the committee was established it produced a number of significant recommendations to deal with AIDS in Ireland.¹²⁵⁸ Not only did the committee recognise ‘that knowledge of and instruction in safer sex and the wider availability and proper use of condoms has a major role to play in preventing the spread of AIDS’, (something GHA had championed since 1985), they also recognised that homosexuals should be targeted in any AIDS information campaign, particularly through the development of an Outreach programme, and that legislation should be amended to allow easier access to condoms.¹²⁵⁹ Most significant, however, was their recommendation that consideration of decriminalisation of homosexual acts between male adults should be given priority.’¹²⁶⁰ The report noted that ‘it was represented to us, however, that the law which made male homosexual acts a criminal offence discriminated against persons at high risk of infection. The law had driven homosexual activity underground. [...] This made the control of the spread of infection so much more difficult for public health authorities.’¹²⁶¹

The recommendation to decriminalise sexual activity between males was heavily influenced by the efforts of Mick Quinlan. In late 1991 Quinlan, with the support of David Wyse, had carried out a detailed survey on sexual and HIV risk behaviour of gay and bisexual men in Dublin.¹²⁶² After visiting gay bars, clubs and saunas, Quinlan and Wyse presented the results of their survey (481 respondents) to the Eastern Health Board (EHB). After consulting

¹²⁵⁷ <http://www.lenus.ie/hse/handle/10147/575367> National AIDS Strategy Committee: reports and recommendations of the sub-committee on care and management of persons with HIV/AIDS, HIV/AIDS surveillance, interim report, education and prevention strategies, measures to avoid discrimination against persons with HIV/AIDS, adopted by the main committee, 13 April 1992. Accessed on 22 November 2017.

¹²⁵⁸ NLI, IR 614 P 14 – National AIDS Strategy Committee Report April 1992.

¹²⁵⁹ <http://www.lenus.ie/hse/handle/10147/575367> National AIDS Strategy Committee: reports and recommendations of the sub-committee on care and management of persons with HIV/AIDS, HIV/AIDS surveillance, interim report, education and prevention strategies, measures to avoid discrimination against persons with HIV/AIDS, adopted by the main committee, 13 April 1992. Accessed on 22 November 2017.

¹²⁶⁰ <http://www.lenus.ie/hse/handle/10147/575367> National AIDS Strategy Committee, 13 April 1992. Accessed on 22 November 2017.

¹²⁶¹ <http://www.lenus.ie/hse/handle/10147/575367> National AIDS Strategy Committee, 13 April 1992. Accessed on 22 November 2017.

¹²⁶² <http://www.hse.ie/eng/services/list/5/sexhealth/gmhs/research/GMHS-Celebrating-25-Years-Report.pdf> ‘Celebrating 25 Years of the Gay Men’s Health Service’, Accessed on 22 December 2017.

the survey, and the recommendations of the National AIDS Strategy Committee Report, the EHB established the Gay Men's Health Project; a dedicated service to deal with Sexual Health amongst the gay community in Dublin.¹²⁶³ The Gay Men's Health Project opened in October 1992 at the AIDS Resource Centre on Haddington Road; the first of its kind in Ireland and seven years after Gay Health Action was established. It marked a significant moment for the gay community in terms of combatting AIDS in Ireland, but equally in terms of the state actually recognising a gay community in Ireland, who could be trusted with statutory funding. Patrick Reeves, writing in *GCN* on the opening of the Gay Men's Health Project clinic, stated that 'ten years after the onset of the HIV epidemic it is being recognised that the needs of gay and bisexual men deserve special treatment. [...]'¹²⁶⁴ Reeves also revealed that his own experience with the clinic was 'very positive' and he would have 'no hesitation in recommending a visit to it for sexually active gay and bisexual men.'¹²⁶⁵

If the establishment of the Gay Men's Health Project was a positive departure from the past treatment of the gay community, so too was the amending of the Family Planning Amendment Act in July 1992 to ensure greater access to condoms. In introducing the bill, the Minister for Health John O'Connell noted that 'it is universally recognised that a good quality condom, properly used, does provide significant protection against the transmission of the virus. The wider availability of this protective measure must be seen, therefore, as a practical and sensible contribution to the prevention of its [HIV] spread.'¹²⁶⁶ This statement contrasted sharply to O'Connell's party colleague and former health minister Rory O'Hanlon's message of 1987. While the bill did loosen the restrictions of the 1985 bill, particularly with regard to lowering the age limit to 17, and to increasing the locations of sale to include supermarkets and pubs, along with permitting the supply of free condoms in certain circumstances, such as to drug users or HIV positive individuals, it did not receive the level of support the minister would have liked. Reacting to the bill, Proinsias De Rossa stated that, 'it is time the State was finally and unceremoniously evicted from the bedroom. Unfortunately, this Bill does not do that. Having waited almost 12 months for its publication and having listened with great expectation

¹²⁶³ <http://www.hse.ie/eng/services/list/5/sexhealth/gmhs/research/GMHS-Celebrating-25-Years-Report.pdf> 'Celebrating 25 Years of the Gay Men's Health Service', Accessed on 22n December 2017.

¹²⁶⁴ NLI, ILB 305 G2, *Gay Community News*, 'Drop-in Clinic Opens, Issue 46, *GCN*, November 1992.

¹²⁶⁵ NLI, ILB 305 G2, *Gay Community News*, 'Drop-in Clinic Opens, Issue 46, *GCN*, November 1992.

¹²⁶⁶ John O'Connell, *Dáil Éireann Debates*, Vol. 422, No. 4, 'Health (Family Planning) (Amendment) Bill, 1992, 8 July 1992.

to the promises of three successive Ministers for Health, especially the present occupant of that office, the reaction to the Health Bill 1992, has to be one of utter disappointment.¹²⁶⁷

The main objections centred on the age limit imposed, which many felt discriminated against those under 17, and thereby did not recognise the reality that individuals under 17 were sexually active. More crucially the bill also still prevented the selling of condoms through vending machines which, it was argued, allowed for greater anonymity when obtaining condoms, thereby ensuring their greater use. If opposition TDs were angry because the bill did not go far enough, then the Catholic Church were disappointed because, in their opinion, the bill went too far, insisting that ‘the promotion and widespread availability of condoms certainly [will] give further encouragement to casual sex. In the age of AIDS, casual sex can be lethal. One dare not take risks where the life of oneself or one of one’s partners is at stake.’¹²⁶⁸

Despite the limitations in the bill it, nevertheless, did represent a considerable acknowledgment of a shift with regard to sexual mores in Irish society. This debate did not focus on the moral implications of the condom, which had dominated the debate in 1985, but rather it focused more on their use as a prophylactic in the fight against AIDS. Critics of the 1992 Bill did not have to wait long, by Irish standards, for a further amendment to the Act. In June 1993, the new minister for Health, Brendan Howlin, introduced further amendments, in particular, permitting the sale of condoms through vending machines, and the removal of an age limit, insisting ‘the primary purpose of the Bill, therefore, is to provide for improved access to condoms, as a necessary and practical response to the evolving HIV/AIDS problem here. The bill implements the recommendations of the National AIDS Strategy Committee, which called for the supply of condoms through vending machines. It also brings us into line with public mores and thinking in Ireland and with the situation in other EC member states where condoms are supplied through vending machines.’¹²⁶⁹ In contrast to the 1992 Bill, Minister Howlin’s bill received cross-party support, a clear indication of how far Ireland had come with regard to the use and acceptance of condoms. The *Irish Independent* described its passage without a vote as marking a watershed in the history of late twentieth century Ireland, as old Ireland gave way to the new.¹²⁷⁰

¹²⁶⁷ Proinsias De Rossa, *Dáil Éireann Debates*, Vol. 422, No. 4, ‘Health (Family Planning) (Amendment) Bill, 1992, 8 July 1992.

¹²⁶⁸ *The Furrow*, Vol. 43, No. 9 (September 1992), Health Amendment Act 1992, statement issued by four Archbishops in the name of the Irish episcopal conference, 17 July 1992.

¹²⁶⁹ Brendan Howlin, *Dáil Éireann Debates*, Vol. 431, No. 8, ‘Health (Family Planning) (Amendment) Bill, 1993, 3 June 1993.

¹²⁷⁰ *Irish Independent*, ‘Condom Politics’, 5 June 1993.

During comments on the passage of the bill, the efforts of the gay community in bringing Ireland to this point did not go unnoticed. Jim Kemmy, TD, for example, noted that ‘The work of groups, gay groups in particular, in raising our awareness and educating people on AIDS is to be welcomed. Their pioneering work has also pushed the politician to take action in this area.’¹²⁷¹ Mr. Kemmy’s views were endorsed by Joe Costello who complimented the ‘gay community on their responsible approach to dealing with this problem and particularly their emphasis on awareness in the community at large when other sections of the heterosexual community were turning a blind eye.’¹²⁷² If the gay community came in for praise, then the Irish Roman Catholic Church did not. Writing in the *Irish Independent*, after the passage of the 1993 Bill, Bruce Arnold summed up this moment by noting that ‘whether the Church is noisy or silent, moderate or extreme, specific or general, dictatorial or persuasive, no longer really matters as it once did. It certainly still has a role to play. But it is circumscribed. In terms of the way we live our lives, and in terms of the rules under which we live them, that role is minor.’¹²⁷³

Conclusion

For a country which maintained laws criminalising sexual activity between males, the arrival of AIDS, initially considered a gay disease, could well have resulted in considerable public apathy and institutional clamp down on gay individuals and gay venues, something which had occurred with gay bathhouses in San Francisco. This did not happen. In fact, in Ireland had it not been for the gay community, AIDS may well have become a much worse crisis than it was. As Costello and Kemmy rightly recognised, the gay community were to the fore in combatting AIDS in Ireland, and these efforts did not go unnoticed in Irish society, particularly amongst the medical profession and segments of the media. In Ireland, AIDS contributed to changing perceptions of homosexuals as irresponsible citizens, as evidenced by both politicians’ comments, and the praise they received over the years with regards their work on AIDS prevention. The response of the gay community to the AIDS crisis was a vital part of the campaign for gay liberation in Ireland.

¹²⁷¹ Jim Kemmy, *Dáil Éireann Debates*, Vol. 431, No. 8, ‘Health (Family Planning) (Amendment) Bill, 1993, 3 June 1993.

¹²⁷² Joe Costello, *Dáil Éireann Debates*, Vol. 431, No. 8, ‘Health (Family Planning) (Amendment) Bill, 1993, 3 June 1993.

¹²⁷³ Bruce Arnold, ‘New Moral order arises in ashes of the old hypocrisies’, *Irish Independent*, 5 June 1993.

Speaking at the 8th International Congress on AIDS, in July 1992, Dr. James Walsh insisted that AIDS had brought Ireland out of the dark ages concerning human sexual attitudes, believing that young Irish people now were very well-informed and open about sexual practices.¹²⁷⁴ The passage of the 1992 and 1993 Family Planning Bills and the public AIDS video campaign instructing Irish society on the use of condoms, along with the wider discussion of sex, including the AIDS education programme in post-primary schools, supports Walsh's remarks. AIDS forced the Irish state to take steps which it necessarily would rather not have taken - to avoid confrontation with the Roman Catholic Church - had it not been for AIDS.

However, AIDS alone did not bring Ireland out of the dark ages concerning sexual attitudes, but rather the actions of those combatting AIDS, most notably GHA did. AIDS did not guarantee a greater public debate around sexual activity, and had the church had its way, no such debate would have involved considerable debate with regard to sexual activity, particularly explicit information on safe sex practices. By not only seeking to defend the gay community, but also the wider community who engaged in sexual activity outside marriage, GHA and their allies ensured that those who did not comply with the teachings of the Roman Catholic Church, or the accepted social mores, were neither demonised or scapegoated. Instead they sought to confront the government who, by refusing to recognise the reality that chastity alone could not prevent AIDS, in fact, facilitated the spread of AIDS. This is not to say that the primary concern of GHA was the defence of sex. Rather, they recognised the reality that individuals were going to continue to engage in sexual activity and efforts had to be made to provide these individuals with the most accurate information and tools available to prevent contracting the disease. Their leaflets and information campaigns reflected this realisation.

The willingness of GHA to stand up to the Irish Roman Catholic Church's message on preventing AIDS and highlighting the insufficiency of the government was crucial in ensuring that many Irish citizens were likely saved from the ravages of AIDS. Their considerable personal sacrifice in instigating a public campaign on prevention was, as we have seen, widely acknowledged for contributing to a low case of HIV amongst Ireland's gay population for much of the 1980s. Their defence of sex, and particularly homosexual activity, ensured that the progresses gay activists had made in the 1980s in ensuring a more public gay community emerged did not result in the sudden submersion of this community once AIDS arrived. Rather, gay activists became even more public as they took the lead in the public education campaign, when no one else did. This, I maintain, was a contributory factor in changing the negative

¹²⁷⁴ *Irish Times*, 'AIDS Changes Irish Attitudes', 23 July 1992.

perceptions of homosexuals as irresponsible and deviant in Ireland. Instead, the actions of GHA helped generate an image of respectability and responsibility amongst the wider community, which they had not been accustomed to.

There can be no denying that AIDS drove a further wedge between the state and the Irish Roman Catholic Church who, despite its opposition to the government's AIDS education programme and relaxation of the laws on condoms, were unsuccessful in insuring their objections were met. These objections further undermined the position of the church who, as we have seen, failed to convince Irish society of the hazard in using condoms against AIDS. This undermining of the Church's position was helped by GHA who were more successful in convincing Irish society of the merits of using condoms and practising safer sex. These actions must certainly be recognised as another factor in diminishing the creditability and influence of the Irish Roman Catholic Church in Ireland, particularly amongst the younger generation.

What is perhaps most remarkable about AIDS in Ireland is the extent to which the debate was not so much centred around AIDS, but rather centred around the condom. In this instance, it is hardly surprising that intravenous drug users accounted for the highest percentage of individuals testing positive for HIV. Whereas other AIDS activists in developed countries were taking to the streets demanding greater funding to find a cure for AIDS, in Ireland AIDS activists were still fighting to ensure a basic level of detailed information on the means of transmission and prevention were publicly advertised, of which included greater access to condoms. This overwhelming focus on the condom is yet another insight into Irish society in the latter years of the twentieth century. Even in the face of a deadly disease some segments of Irish society were willing to resist greater access to condoms to discourage any public acknowledgement that Irish citizens were not living up to the ideals of catholic morality with regards chastity outside marriage, and fidelity within marriage. The passage of the 1993 bill, in particular, was in many respects one of many changes that year which gave official recognition and acceptance of sexual mores which Irish society of previous eras would not have been accustomed to.

AIDS, but particularly the actions of GHA must be recognised as having contributed significantly to this renegotiating of Irish sexual mores. Had it not been for the AIDS crisis and the efforts of GHA and others, there is little evidence to suggest both the 1992 and 1993 bills would have been introduced when they were. The 1993 Family Planning Amendment Bill effectively ended one of the longest running debates in Irish society and cemented the transformation which had taken place, both inside and outside Leinster House, with regards sexual activity outside marriage and the use of condoms. Finally, any examination of the AIDS crisis in Ireland during the 1980s must acknowledge the work and actions of the gay community

who, more than anyone else, led the efforts to combat AIDS from the beginning. This was despite the considerable social and institutional constraints they faced. Their ability to do so was crucial in changing the perception of homosexuals in Ireland, but also, as we have seen, bringing about institutional reform both for the gay community and wider society.

Chapter 8 - ‘At its most basic level, what is at stake is what it means to be Irish’: gay legal reform and cultural change in 1990s Ireland.

‘The passage of this bill through the house will be a tribute to those members of the gay and lesbian community who have courageously championed for reforms in this area over many years [...]’¹²⁷⁵

On 23 June 1993 Minister for Justice Maire Geoghegan-Quinn introduced the Criminal Law (Sexual Offences) Bill 1993 to Dáil Éireann which decriminalised sexual activity between males.¹²⁷⁶ From now on there would be an equal age of consent (17) for both heterosexual and homosexual sexual relations in the Republic of Ireland, something Ireland’s closet neighbour England had failed to accomplish in 1967. In introducing the bill Minister Quinn remarked that:

while it is the case that the main sections of the Bill arise against a background of the European Court decision in the Norris case, it would be a pity to use that judgement as the sole pretext for the action we are now taking so as to avoid facing up to the issues themselves. What we are concerned with fundamentally in this Bill is a necessary development of human rights.¹²⁷⁷

Rather than taking shelter behind the ECHR judgement for political expediency, Quinn presented the Bill as a necessary development in the area of human rights. Quinn was correct, the Bill she introduced could not have been accredited solely to the ECHR judgement. The 1988 decision in the Norris case did not stipulate the type of law reform that the Irish government would have to introduce, rather it simply stated that the laws in question would have to be amended. In other words, Quinn and her cabinet colleagues could easily have introduced a much more restrictive law, akin to that introduced in England and Wales in 1967. But they choose not to. Why?

For an answer we must look to the actions of the gay and lesbian activists in the period following the 1988 ECHR judgement. In particular, how they lobbied for their demands not only to the political class but also to the wider society. Whereas in the first half of the 1980s gay and lesbian activists had used the media to educate Irish society on homosexuality, in the latter half of the decades they sought to use the media to promote their aims and objectives in

¹²⁷⁵ Dáil Éireann Debate, Vol. 432 No. 7, Eamon Gilmore, ‘Private Members’ Business – Criminal Law (Sexual Offences) Bill 1993: Second Stage’, 23 June 1993.

¹²⁷⁶ Dáil Éireann Debate, Vol. 432 No. 7, ‘Private Members’ Business – Criminal Law (Sexual Offences) Bill 1993: Second Stage’, 23 June 1993.

¹²⁷⁷ Dáil Éireann Debate, Vol. 432 No. 7, Minister for Justice, Maire Geoghegan-Quinn, ‘Private Members’ Business – Criminal Law (Sexual Offences) Bill 1993: Second Stage’, 23 June 1993.

as non-threatening a manner as possible. Central to this aim was the gay movement's decision to utilise the support for its objectives it had garnered from the ICTU, USI, ICCL and others. In doing so, gay and lesbian activists emphasised the extent to which wide support already existed for gay law reform and that gay law reform would not have any negative impact on Irish society. Crucial to this, once more, was the gay movement's deliberate references to the situation of homosexuals in other European countries, particularly to those that were predominantly Catholic.

Gay and lesbian activists also continued to work to convince other organisations to support legal reform while at the same time their opponents also mobilised to oppose the 1988 ECHR decision and reform of the existing legislation. Rather than winning over support, however, these opposing actions tended to produce the opposite effect. They often provided the gay movement with an opportunity not only to respond to their opponents' claims but also to undermine and alienate them. The gay movement's success resulted in even greater numbers speaking out in favour of gay law reform at the expense of opponents.

This chapter will explore these developments. In addition, the chapter will assess the extent to which the gay and lesbian movement had successfully renegotiated popular attitudes to homosexuality, both institutionally and culturally. By 1993 the rhetoric on homosexuality was considerably different to that from 1974 when the IGRM was founded. Gay and lesbian activists convinced those in power of the merits of supporting their demands. More crucially, however, I will demonstrate the extent to which a considerable cultural shift had occurred in the Republic of Ireland by the time Quinn introduced the Criminal Law Bill, 1993. While Quinn's decision was a watershed moment, it merely recognised the change that had already occurred.

*'I only wish, about homosexuality, that we'd made the advance ourselves and that we hadn't had to wait for Europe.'*¹²⁷⁸

When the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) ruled in favour of David Norris on 26 October 1988 it marked eleven years since Norris first lodged his legal case against the 1861 and 1885 acts.¹²⁷⁹ Norris had taken his case to the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) following his defeat at both the Irish High Court and Supreme Court in 1980 and 1983

¹²⁷⁸*Irish Times*, Nuala O'Faolain, 'Bringing homosexuality out of the closet', 4 February 1991.

¹²⁷⁹ <https://hudoc.echr.coe.int/eng#%7B%22itemid%22:%5B%22001-45392%22%5D%7D>, David Norris v. Ireland, Report of the European Commission on Human Rights, 12 March 1987. Accessed on 13 October 2017

respectively.¹²⁸⁰ On both occasions, the Christian nature of the Irish constitution had factored heavily in the overall judgements against Norris. In his ruling at the High Court, Justice McWilliam, while accepting much of what David Norris had claimed, nevertheless found that:

it is reasonably clear that current Christian morality in this country does not approve of buggery, or of any sexual activity between persons of the same sex. [...] Having regard to the observations of Mr. Justice Walsh in the McGee case, this morality must be associated with the morality generally advocated by the Christian Churches in the country. Considering the matter in that manner and having regard to the fact that marriage was recognised and guaranteed by the Constitution and that homosexual relationships were not, he was of the opinion that the statutes relating to buggery did not offend against the Constitution.¹²⁸¹

The Supreme Court shared this view in a 3:2 majority decision against Norris on 22 April 1983. Chief Justice O'Higgins in the majority ruling argued that:

On the ground of the Christian nature of our State and on the grounds that the deliberate practice of homosexuality is morally wrong, that it is damaging to the health both of individuals and the public, and finally, that it is potentially harmful to the institution of marriage, I can find no inconsistency with the Constitution in the laws which make such conduct criminal.¹²⁸²

At the ECHR Norris argued that the Irish laws were in breach of Article 8 of the European Convention on Human Rights.¹²⁸³ The European Commission of Human Rights had previously declared Norris' case admissible by 6 votes to 5 on 12 March 1987, finding that the case was indistinguishable from that of Jeffrey Dudgeon's.¹²⁸⁴ The Irish government disputed the Commission's findings arguing that 'although a Catholic society, Ireland should not be seen as intolerant. Nor should it be assumed that, in the sphere of judicial review, orthodox Catholic teaching is a touchstone when considering the curtailment of liberty.'¹²⁸⁵ The ECHR ruled, by

¹²⁸⁰ For a more detailed analysis of David Norris' legal battle, see Hug, *The Politics of Sexual Morality in Ireland*.

¹²⁸¹ *Irish Times*, 'Judge holds laws on homosexuality not unconstitutional', 11 October 1980.

¹²⁸² NLI, IQA, MS 45, 952/4, Judgement of the Supreme Court on David Norris V. Attorney General, 22 April 1983.

¹²⁸³ Article 8 of the European Convention on Human Rights recognised the right to respect for private and family life. http://www.echr.coe.int/Documents/Convention_ENG.pdf Accessed on 26 October 2016.

¹²⁸⁴ <https://hudoc.echr.coe.int/eng#%7B%22itemid%22:%5B%22001-45392%22%5D%7D>, David Norris v. Ireland, Report of the European Commission on Human Rights, 12 March 1987. Accessed on 13 October 2017.

¹²⁸⁵ [https://hudoc.echr.coe.int/eng#{'fulltext':\['David%20Norris'\],'documentcollectionid':\['GRANDCHAMBER','CHAMBER'\],'itemid':\['001-57547'\]}](https://hudoc.echr.coe.int/eng#{'fulltext':['David%20Norris'],'documentcollectionid':['GRANDCHAMBER','CHAMBER'],'itemid':['001-57547']}) Case of Norris v. Ireland, ECHR judgement, 26 October 1988, accessed on 13 October 2017. <https://hudoc.echr.coe.int/eng#%7B%22itemid%22:%5B%22001-45392%22%5D%7D>,

8 votes to 6, that Ireland's laws breached Article 8 of the convention. Ireland was now required to change the law or face suspension from the Council of Europe.

In anticipation of a judgement in the Norris case, 37 members of the NGF, the Lesbian Discussion Group, Gay Health Action, TAF, and the ICCL met on 17 September 1988 to prepare a united response.¹²⁸⁶ In promoting the meeting the organisers had stressed that 'this is one battle we cannot lose. More than anything else we win or lose, this will set the limits for the progress lesbians and gay men can make in Ireland.'¹²⁸⁷ While many believed that the stakes were high for the gay and lesbian community, there was also a strong sense of determination and confidence amongst those in attendance. Whereas the original law reform bill drafted in the late 1970s by the IGRM would have introduced a higher age of consent (18) for homosexuals compared with heterosexuals, by the late 1980s, gay activists would now only accept an equal age of consent.¹²⁸⁸ Speaking at the seminar, Tom Cooney (ICCL) argued that what 'is needed is legislation based on the principle of equality [...] The ICCL believes gays and lesbians should not accept less than this.'¹²⁸⁹ It was this emphasis on *equality* which subsequently became the central tenet of the law reform campaign, hence the group later adopting the name of the Gay and Lesbian Equality Network (GLEN).

To achieve equality GLEN demanded the introduction of a law ensuring that same sex activity would not be subjected to any restrictions that did not apply equally to other forms of sexual behaviour. It also demanded the recognition of same-sex relationships, protection in employment, removing sexual orientation of parent as a factor in child custody cases, the right to have public displays of affection, the right to promote positive images of lesbian and gay lifestyles and protection against physical assault.¹²⁹⁰ In particular, activists were determined to avoid the introduction of a law akin to that introduced in England in 1967. In a letter to Liam O'Leary, on 12 November 1988, Norris revealed his unease about such a reform, insisting that although 'we have won a significant victory in the European Court of Human Rights [that] does not necessarily mean the end of the road. I feel that it will be necessary to be vigilant in

David Norris v. Ireland, Report of the European Commission on Human Rights, 12 March 1987. Accessed on 13 October 2017.

¹²⁸⁶ NLI, IQA, MS 45, 976/2 – Unite for Change: Seminar on Lesbian and Gay Law Reform, 17 September 1988.

¹²⁸⁷ NLI, IQA, MS 45, 976/2 – Unite for Change: Seminar on Lesbian and Gay Law Reform, 17 September 1988.

¹²⁸⁸ PRONI, D3762/1/10/1 'Irish to debate law bill.'

¹²⁸⁹ NLI, IQA, MS 45, 976/2 – Unite for Change – Report on Seminar on Lesbian and Gay Law Reform, 17 September 1988.

¹²⁹⁰ NLI, IQA, MS 45, 976/2 – Unite for Change – Report on Seminar on Lesbian and Gay Law Reform, 17 September 1988.

order to avoid the possibility that the Irish people are once again presented with an Irish solution to an Irish problem.¹²⁹¹ By this Norris was alluding to the possibility that the Irish government might adopt the British law of 1967. Such a restrictive law would have ensured Ireland complied with the ECHR judgement, while still curtailing legal sexual activity between males. To avoid this, and to bring about equality, Kieran Rose argued that they needed to:

win over the doubtful [...] listen to what they are saying and answer their questions. Mistakes were made in this regard during the Divorce Referendum debate. We must divide the opposition and isolate the bigots. As we are a small grouping we have to get others to do some of the work. We must involve other organisations, get good advice and recognise that there is a role for everyone.¹²⁹²

GLEN divided its campaign into two phases.¹²⁹³ The first phase focused on identifying the key decision makers on the relevant issues. Crucial to this was ensuring that lawmakers did not reach an early consensus on reform before GLEN were able to publish their views. The second phase focused on the development of a broad-based public debate on the issues in which they could effectively mobilise their own constituency and influence other people to support, or at best not oppose their demands.¹²⁹⁴

From the different workshops organised at the seminar plans of actions were drawn up. The ICTU, for example, was to lobby the Minister for Justice to include sexual orientation in the Unfair Dismissals Act, while the Irish Family Planning Association and U.S.I were to lobby the National Youth Council of Ireland to support not only decriminalisation but also an equal age of consent. Politicians of all political parties were also to be lobbied, including the youth sections, especially the Fianna Fáil youth group, while efforts were to be made to encourage members of the domestic and international gay and lesbian community to lobby politicians themselves.¹²⁹⁵ The media, in particular, was prioritised as a means of promoting their message among a wider public. Articles and features were to be written promoting positive images, while sympathetic journalists were to be identified, contacted, and encouraged to promote law

¹²⁹¹ NLI, Liam O’Leary Archives, MS 50,000/16 – Letter from David Norris to Liam O’Leary 12 November 1988.

¹²⁹² NLI, IQA, MS 45, 976/2 – Unite for Change – Report on Seminar on Lesbian and Gay Law Reform, 17 September 1988.

¹²⁹³ NLI, IQA, MS 45, 976/2 – Unite for Change – Report on Seminar on Lesbian and Gay Law Reform, 17 September 1988.

¹²⁹⁴ NLI, IQA, MS 45, 976/2 – Unite for Change – Report on Seminar on Lesbian and Gay Law Reform, 17 September 1988.

¹²⁹⁵ NLI, IQA, MS 45, 976/2 – Unite for Change – Report on Seminar on Lesbian and Gay Law Reform, 17 September 1988.

reform.¹²⁹⁶ So important was the role of the media that each group within GLEN was requested to choose a media person who would be sent on a training course. This person would then ensure strict control over the information given out.¹²⁹⁷ A central motivation for broadening the strategy outside GLEN was the desire amongst activists to ensure that the campaign for homosexual law reform was actually ‘not too gay orientated.’¹²⁹⁸

‘In all of the traditional Catholic countries of Europe in Italy, France, Poland, Spain, Belgium and Portugal homosexuality is legal and the age of consent are the same for all their citizens.’¹²⁹⁹

Although GLEN had limited resources it, nevertheless, was meticulous in both the planning and implementation of its strategy. While its primary objective was to ensure equality for gay and lesbian citizens, its public strategy was to present demands in as reassuring and non-threatening a manner as possible. In other words, while the enacting of their demands would have signalled a tremendous positive change in the lives of gay and lesbian citizens in Ireland, GLEN sought to downplay their importance to Irish society. Central to this strategy was the example of homosexuals in continental Europe, but particularly homosexuals in other so-called ‘Catholic countries.’ Whereas, gay and lesbian activists had condemned the role of the Catholic Church in the 1980s and the Christian nature of the Irish society/constitution had been used by both the High Court and Supreme Court as justification for the constitutionality of the 1861 and 1885 laws, GLEN strategically embraced Catholic Ireland in an attempt to reassure Irish society about homosexual law reform.

After numerous attempts to table a discussion on the judgement of the ECHR in Seanad Éireann, David Norris, (who had been elected to Seanad Éireann, in 1987), finally succeeded on 12 December 1990.¹³⁰⁰ In the course of numerous statements supporting law reform, including from the Minister for Justice Ray Burke, Norris, noting the position of homosexuals in other Catholic countries, highlighted that:

¹²⁹⁶ NLI, IQA, MS 45, 976/2 – Unite for Change – Report on Seminar on Lesbian and Gay Law Reform, 17 September 1988.

¹²⁹⁷ NLI, IQA, MS 45, 976/2 – Unite for Change – Report on Seminar on Lesbian and Gay Law Reform, 17 September 1988.

¹²⁹⁸ NLI, IQA, MS 45, 976/2 – Unite for Change – Report on Seminar on Lesbian and Gay Law Reform, 17 September 1988.

¹²⁹⁹ *Irish Times*, Christopher Robson, ‘Homosexual acts should not be crimes’, 19 July 1991.

¹³⁰⁰ *Seanad Éireann*, Vol. 127, No. 1, ‘European Court of Human Rights Judgment: Statements’, 12 December 1990.

France reformed its law with a common age of consent of 15 in 1791 and Catholic Spain in 1822 with a common age of consent of 12. Portugal has a common age of consent of 16 since 1852 [...] Poland, good Catholic Poland, an ideal analogue to the State of Ireland, has an age of consent of 15 since 1932.¹³⁰¹

Spain was now ‘Catholic Spain’ while Poland was ‘good Catholic Poland.’ These were examples Catholic Ireland should be following. Although they had decriminalised sexual activity between males and introduced an equal age of consent, the intended message was that the moral fibre of both nations had not suffered. In fact, as Nuala O’Faolain stressed in the *Irish Times*, despite an equal age of consent of 15 years, Poland had nevertheless managed to produce a Pope.¹³⁰²

This was a reoccurring theme in both interactions with politicians and newspaper articles. One such article in the *Irish Times*, by Chris Robson, raised this exact point. Robson noted that ‘in all of the traditional Catholic countries of Europe in Italy, France, Poland, Spain, Belgium and Portugal homosexuality is legal and the ages of consent are the same for all their citizens. There is no suggestion that these laws be changed. Not from politicians. Not from the church.’¹³⁰³ Similarly, Cathal Kerrigan remembered going to a meeting with John Bruton in 1990, then the leader of Fine Gael, at which he ‘presented ILGA documentation about how it has been legal in Poland and Spain, these Catholic countries and there has been no problem for years.’¹³⁰⁴

In almost identical letters sent to Maire Geoghegan-Quinn, on her appointment as Minister for Justice in January 1993, and to Fergus Finlay, Programme Manager at the Department of Foreign Affairs, in March 1993, Robson and Suzy Byrne pointed out that ‘all of the major Catholic countries, including Poland, have common ages of consent, in some cases for hundreds of years. It is also to be noted that Ireland’s proposed common age of consent of 17 years, which GLEN endorses, will be the highest common age of consent in Europe.’¹³⁰⁵ By making these comparisons GLEN sought to emphasise the extent to which the introduction of an equal age of consent would align Ireland closely with other Catholic countries in Europe.

¹³⁰¹ *Seanad Éireann*, Vol. 127, No. 1, ‘European Court of Human Rights Judgment: Statements’, 12 December 1990.

¹³⁰² *Irish Times*, Nuala O’Faolain, ‘Bringing homosexuality out of the closet’, 4 February 1991.

¹³⁰³ *Irish Times*, Christopher Robson, ‘Homosexual acts should not be crimes’, 19 July 1991.

¹³⁰⁴ Edmund Lynch interview with Cathal Kerrigan, 28 September 2015, *Edmund Lynch, Irish LGBT History Project*.

¹³⁰⁵ NLI, IQA, MS 45, 977/5 – Suzy Byrne of GLEN to Fergus Finlay, Programme Manager, Department of Foreign Affairs, 1 March 1993. – NLI, IQA, MS 45, 977/4 – Chris Robson to Maire Geoghegan-Quinn, 18 January 1993.

Moreover, they emphasised that their proposed age of consent of 17 years would be one of the highest in Europe. In plainer terms, this was a relatively conservative amendment, rather than particularly radical. In taking up this point in the *Irish Times* Nuala O’Faolain commented that ‘If you look on 17-year olds as young adults, and if their independence is what first strikes you, and if you think of sex as one of the great adventures, then 17 may seem a bit old.’¹³⁰⁶

While this strategy was primarily focused on trying to reassure Irish society that homosexual law reform would not herald a moral decline in Ireland, it was also, of course, an attempt to undermine the Irish Roman Catholic Church itself which, since the foundation of the IGRM, had continually spoken out against a liberalisation of the laws. By comparing Ireland to other Catholic countries that had a much more liberal regime with regard to homosexuality, particularly ones where the church did not demand a change in the law, GLEN hoped either to convince the Catholic Church to support law reform, or at best remain silent. GLEN was helped in this matter by an article which appeared in the *Furrow* in January 1990.¹³⁰⁷ Although the Pastor did not allow his name to be published in the article, he, nevertheless, called for a more sympathetic and tolerant approach to gay people. The Pastor began the essay by asking why he knew so few of his gay neighbours. The blame for this, he argued, lay at the feet of the Church and society who, he maintained, encouraged gay people not to exist. While the main body of the text examined how the church dealt with homosexuality, the pastor ended by encouraging Christians to leave behind their prejudice, insisting that they ‘have become blinkered. We do not see the tramp, the drunk, the drug addict, the gay person. We must learn to see again, for when we see people, then we can love them. And St. John assures us that if we love our fellow person whom we can see, then we love God, whom we cannot see.’¹³⁰⁸

In the same year as the Pastor’s article, the ICCL’s working party on Lesbian and Gay Rights, which included Ursula Barry, Tom Cooney, Aideen McCabe, Chris Robson and Kieran Rose, published a comprehensive 60-page report, *Equality Now for Lesbians and Gay Men*, which was sent to every member of the Oireachtas (houses of Irish parliament).¹³⁰⁹ The ICCL prefaced *Equality Now* by stating that the ‘time is therefore surely ripe for a contribution to the

¹³⁰⁶ *Irish Times*, Nuala O’Faolain, ‘Bringing homosexuality out of the closet’, 4 February 1991.

¹³⁰⁷ *The Furrow* is a monthly journal for the contemporary Church. Previous contributors have included Cardinal O’Fiaich and Cardinal Daly. <http://thefurrow.ie> Accessed on 17 October 2017.

¹³⁰⁸ ‘What are we doing to Our Gay People?’, *The Furrow*, Vol. 41, No. 1, (January 1990), 27-33.

¹³⁰⁹ *Irish Times*, ‘Complaint over delays in legalising homosexuality’, 12 March 1990.

debate by an independent, broad-based civil liberties organisation such as the ICCL.¹³¹⁰ To what extent the ICCL was actually independent is certainly debatable, but this statement sought to lend credibility to the publication as one based on an objective approach to the subject, in comparison to one from either the gay movement itself, or Family Solidarity, for example. David Norris also emphasised this independence at the book's launch, insisting that it represented the work of a 'non-gay organisation.'¹³¹¹ Its publication suited the strategy devised at the 1988 meeting which sought to ensure the campaign was not 'too gay orientated.'

At the beginning of *Equality Now*, Tom Cooney reiterated the ICCL's strong commitment to the law reform campaign declaring that:

ICCL firmly holds that lesbians and gay men have an inviolable human right to equality of treatment. Unequivocally, we claim that homosexuality is a normal variation in the range of diverse human sexualities. Unconditionally, we say that the law relating to homosexual behaviour should be placed on the same basis as the law relating to heterosexual behaviour.¹³¹²

While GLEN had argued that a common age of consent was typical in other European Catholic countries, *Equality Now* sought to reassure readers why this change should not be feared. Citing the Dutch 1968 Speijer committee, the ICCL noted that of the 17 experts who gave evidence to that committee, 16 'rejected the assumption that a 16-year-old person can be transformed into a lesbian or gay man through seduction.'¹³¹³ Coupled with this report, they presented evidence from two expert committees in Denmark and Switzerland which concluded that sexual orientation was settled before the age of 14, and a recommendation from the Royal College of Psychiatrists in Britain which advised that the 'age of consent for homosexuals and heterosexuals be fixed at 16.'¹³¹⁴ This was even one year younger than the age of consent GLEN was recommending.

Not only should law reform and a common age of consent not be feared, but actually, *Equality Now* argued that it should be embraced for its positive benefits for Irish society. To make this point ICCL cited a Geis, Garrett and Wilson survey of gay men, district attorneys, and police in seven states in the United States of America, which had decriminalised homosexuality. According to the ICCL, the survey suggested that not only was there no evidence that decriminalisation of homosexuality had been socially disruptive, the police

¹³¹⁰ NLI, IQA, MS 45, 949/9, Irish Council for Civil Liberties, *Equality Now for Lesbians and Gay Men*, 1990, iii.

¹³¹¹ *Irish Times*, 'Complaint over delays in legalising homosexuality', 12 March 1990.

¹³¹² *Equality Now for Lesbians and Gay Men*, preface.

¹³¹³ *Equality Now for Lesbians and Gay Men*, 26

¹³¹⁴ *Equality Now for Lesbians and Gay Men*, 26.

actually felt that it ‘enabled them to devote more time and resources to real crime.’¹³¹⁵ Moreover, based on a 1985 study by Fr. Sinclair and Dr. Ross on a comparison between gay men in two Australian states, Victoria before decriminalisation and South Australia eight years after decriminalisation, the ICCL noted that ‘decriminalisation did not include an increase in what were alleged to be negative aspects of homosexual activity, such as public solicitation of partners or sexually transmissible disease.’¹³¹⁶ In fact, they emphasised that the study showed that the incidence ‘of sexually transmissible diseases was higher in Victoria, a fact attributable to the pressure the criminal law put on gay men to find anonymous sexual partners in public spaces.’¹³¹⁷ In making these points, *Equality Now* sought to, as Kieran Rose had suggested in September 1988, win over the doubtful by listening to their concerns and presenting evidence to counter them.

‘Lesbian and gay citizens of Ireland deserve better from a country founded on opposition to oppression and religious bigotry.’¹³¹⁸

As part of their strategy to maintain pressure on the Irish government, GLEN had sought to utilise its connections within the International Lesbian and Gay Association. In July 1989, GLEN’s Cathal Kerrigan travelled to the ILGA’s annual conference in Vienna to encourage the organisation to become actively involved in the Irish reform campaign. In a subsequent letter to David Norris, Kerrigan noted that he had requested members to write to *An Taoiseach* (Prime Minister) Charles Haughey and other members of the government supporting law reform and to publicise the issue in their own countries.¹³¹⁹ In doing so, Kerrigan sought to present the issue of law reform in Ireland as an issue affecting gays and lesbians throughout Europe, not just Ireland, insisting that ‘a defeat in Ireland would be a set-back for lesbians and gay men internationally and particularly in the E.E.C. as moves are being made to harmonise social legislation with the creation of the Single European Market in 1992.’¹³²⁰

GLEN was highly conscious of the timing of their letter writing campaigns, choosing moments that would optimise their potential impact. In a December 1989 letter encouraging

¹³¹⁵ *Equality Now for Lesbians and Gay Men*, 52.

¹³¹⁶ *Equality Now for Lesbians and Gay Men*, 52.

¹³¹⁷ *Equality Now for Lesbians and Gay Men*, 52.

¹³¹⁸ NLI, IQA, MS 45, 944/6 – Arthur S. Leonard, Professor of Law at New York Law School to Charles J. Haughey, *An Taoiseach*, 21 October 1989.

¹³¹⁹ NLI, Personal Papers of David Norris, Acc. 6672 Box 33, Letter from Cathal Kerrigan to David Norris, 23 September 1989.

¹³²⁰ NLI, Personal Papers of David Norris, Acc. 6672 Box 33, Letter from Cathal Kerrigan to David Norris on 23 September 1989.

ILGA members to write to the Irish Prime Minister on gay law reform, Kieran Rose maintained that because Ireland was taking over the presidency of the EEC Council of Ministers in January 1990, 'our government is more sensitive than ever to European pressure.'¹³²¹ The sample letters issued by GLEN to ILGA members sought to both shame and appease the Irish government into action. In the letter campaign immediately prior to the Ireland assuming the presidency of the EEC, GLEN's sample letter argued that because of 'the swift moves towards democracy and human rights in Eastern Europe, it is sad to see inaction in the face of a ruling which makes it quite clear that human rights have been abused.'¹³²² The letter also highlighted the hypocrisy of Ireland's relationship to the Council of Europe and ECHR, pointing out that Ireland had 'resorted to the European Court in the past, in settling matters of human rights abuses in another Council of state.'¹³²³

In another GLEN drafted letter on the accession of Charles Haughey to the Presidency of the European Council, in January 1990, this time the government was placated for its decision to include sexual orientation in the Incitement to Hatred and Video Recordings Bills in 1989. The letter encouraged the Prime Minister to 'continue his principled policy by responding to the European Court of Human Rights decision of October 1988 on the basis of equality between heterosexuals and homosexuals, as was recommended by your Law Reform Commission.'¹³²⁴ Highlighting once more continental Europe's more tolerant approach to homosexuals, the letter called on the Prime Minister 'of a country with a traditional concern for justice, [...] to dismantle this barrier of prejudice.'¹³²⁵ Such a move, the letter maintained would 'be widely welcomed by Europeans especially when Ireland is undertaking the Presidency of the Council of Minister of the European Communities.'¹³²⁶

As events unfolded in Ireland, GLEN was quick to update the ILGA. For example, in early 1993, sensing an opportunity to put pressure on the newly elected government, GLEN drafted a new letter which was sent to Albert Reynolds, the then Taoiseach, and Dick Spring, leader

¹³²¹ NLI, IQA, MS 45, 979/5 – Kieran Rose to Athens ILGA conference delegates, 12 December 1989.

¹³²² NLI, IQA, MS 45, 999/22 – GLEN's sample letter for ILGA to Irish Prime Minister calling for repeal of anti-gay laws in Ireland.

¹³²³ NLI, IQA, MS 45, 999/22 – GLEN's sample letter for ILGA to Irish Prime Minister calling for repeal of anti-gay laws in Ireland.

¹³²⁴ NLI, IQA, MS 45, 979/5 – Proposed letter to be sent in support of Irish law reform campaign, January 1990.

¹³²⁵ NLI, IQA, MS 45, 979/5 – Proposed letter to be sent in support of Irish law reform campaign, January 1990.

¹³²⁶ NLI, IQA, MS 45, 979/5 – Proposed letter to be sent in support of Irish law reform campaign, January 1990.

of the Labour Party and *Tánaiste* (Deputy Prime Minister). Instead of highlighting Ireland's position within Europe this letter, instead, focused on events which had occurred in Ireland, such as the 1990 Law Reform Commission recommendations and statements by organisations, such as the ICTU, which had argued that the 'delay shows little regard for the status of the European Convention on Human Rights and the commitment of the Irish Government to abide by its provisions.'¹³²⁷ The Irish Queer Archive holds numerous copies of these letters sent to the *Taoiseach* and *Tánaiste* from gay organisations in Spain, Germany, Sweden, Great Britain and even the USA.¹³²⁸

Some of these organisations such as *Die Andere Welt*, the Swedish Federation for Gay and Lesbian Rights and *Landsforeningen for Lesbik og Homofil Frigjoring-Bergen* did not limit their letter writing campaigns to the *Taoiseach* and *Tánaiste*, nor to Irish politicians generally. For example, Tobias Wikström of the Swedish Federation for Gay and Lesbian Rights wrote to the Irish ambassador in Sweden, Paul Dempsey, calling on him to convey its views on the 'absolute necessity of gay law reform in Ireland.'¹³²⁹ Similarly, the *Landsforeningen for Lesbik* sent copies to the Norwegian Foreign Minister and Norwegian ambassador to the Council of Europe.¹³³⁰ *Die Andere Welt*, on the other hand, focused its attention not only on the German Foreign Minister, but also on 20 members of the European Parliament Assembly.¹³³¹

On some occasions GLEN and the ILGA sought to generate media attention. In December 1992, Charles Kerrigan once more travelled abroad, this time to the ILGA European regional conference in Brussels. At this conference Kerrigan succeeded in persuading the ILGA to send a delegation to the Irish embassy to present a letter of complaint.¹³³² At the same time, ILGA issued a press release to the Irish media in Brussels which was subsequently picked up by the *Irish Times*.¹³³³ The letter, which had the support of 115 delegates from 25 countries and was also sent to the director of the Human Rights Directorate of the Council of Europe, insisted 'that should the required legislation not be introduced within three months, then Ireland should

¹³²⁷ NLI, IQA, MS 45, 977/1 – Letter from Verein zur Förderung lesbisch-schwuler Emanzipation und Integrationsarbeit to *An Taoiseach*, 19 January 1993.

¹³²⁸ NLI, IQA, MS 45, 977/1.

¹³²⁹ NLI, IQA, MS 45, 977/1 – Tobias Wikström of the Swedish Federation for Gay and Lesbian Rights to Irish Ambassador to Sweden Paul Dempsey, 13 January 1993.

¹³³⁰ NLI, IQA, MS 45, 977/1 – Letters from the *Landsforeningen for Lesbik og Homofil Frigjoring-Bergen* to the *Taoiseach*, *Tánaiste*, Norwegian Foreign Minister and Norwegian ambassador to the Council of Europe, 20 March 1993.

¹³³¹ NLI, IQA, MS 45, 977/1.

¹³³² NLI, IQA, Ms 45, 979/1 – ILGA 14th European Regional Conference, Brussels, 27-31 December, 1992, Draft Report.

¹³³³ *Irish Times*, 'Gays demand Irish reform', 31 December 1992.

be suspended from the Council and remain suspended until the Court's decision has been implemented.'¹³³⁴ The *Irish Times* noted that the ILGA highlighted the huge discrepancies between EC countries over gay rights, with 'Denmark, which has an anti-discrimination law, [being] the most progressive with Ireland the least.'¹³³⁵

Lobbying was not confined to organisations only. In fact, individuals had also got behind the efforts to support law reform. While using much of the same content as the GLEN letter, some individuals added their own personal twist. In particular, some sought to play on Ireland's tradition of opposing oppression and its alleged reputation as being a welcoming society. For example, Philip Bockman in his letter to Charles Haughey, in October 1989, noted that 'some of my ancestors came from Ireland, and I was taught that the Irish hate oppression. Bring your tradition to bear on the lives of gay people in your country. Enact legislation. Freedom-loving people everywhere await your attention to this important matter.'¹³³⁶ In an almost identical letter sent 4 years later to Albert Reynolds, Donald R. McDaniel noted that 'it has been my lifelong dream to visit Ireland, the home of my forefathers, and I recently subscribed to the magazine 'Ireland of the Welcomes', in anticipation of the visit. Apparently, however, welcomes are only extended to a certain class of visitors. *Céad míle Fáilte* does not apply to homosexuals, even to those of your own citizens.'¹³³⁷ Other individuals such as Bernie Moloney and Alan F. Reekie got involved by passing on information to GLEN on possible arguments it could use, or examples of positive law reform. In 1991, Moloney wrote to GLEN enclosing publications from the Anti-Discrimination Board in Sydney, while, Alan F. Reekie contacted Cathal Kerrigan to provide additional information to support GLEN's law reform campaign, particularly its attempts to avoid a British style law reform bill.¹³³⁸

These letters demonstrate the extent to which many outside Ireland viewed reform as important, even though it did not directly affect them. GLEN succeeded in convincing organisations and individuals outside Ireland of the necessity in supporting the gay rights campaign in Ireland and the symbolism attached to either a positive or negative law reform bill. GLEN provided them with the necessary information and arguments to do so.

¹³³⁴ NLI, IQA, MS 45, 979/7 – ILGA letter to the Director, Human Rights Directorate, Council of Europe, 30 December 1992.

¹³³⁵ *Irish Times*, 'Gays demand Irish reform', 31 December 1992.

¹³³⁶ NLI, IQA, MS 45, 944/6 – Philip Bockman to Prime Minister Charles Haughey, 19 October 1989.

¹³³⁷ NLI, IQA, MS 45, 977/1, Donald McDaniel to *An Taoiseach* Albert Reynolds and *Tánaiste* Dick Spring, 22 February 1993.

¹³³⁸ NLI, IQA, MS 45, 978/9 – Bernie Moloney to GLEN, 4 October 1991. NLI, IQA, MS 45, 977/8 – Letter from Alan F. Reekie in Belgium to Cathal Kerrigan, 24 April 1993.

‘The 1861/1885 British Statues have created an Irish problem: the one certain thing that is not needed is a British solution.’¹³³⁹

Stressing the flaws of a British style law reform to the Irish government was a pressing issue for GLEN. In the immediate aftermath of the December 1992 general election, GLEN and its allies immediately lobbied the new government against a British style law reform bill. GLEN and the ICCL had sent proposals to the Fianna Fáil and Labour Party during their coalition negotiations, urging the government to commit to law reform. The subsequent Programme for Government devised by both parties was particularly important, as it not only committed the government to introducing law reform to comply with the ECHR judgement, but it also crucially prioritised greater general equality throughout Irish society.

This emphasis on equality linked up perfectly with GLEN’s own objective of equality in law reform and was particularly useful in lobbying terms. In letters sent to members of the government, GLEN was not shy in highlighting the government’s commitment to equality in its programme for government. In one such example, sent to the newly appointed Minister for Equality, in the newly created Department for Equality and Law Reform, Chris Robson contended that ‘we think it crucial that this reform must proceed on the basis only of equality. If it were to be otherwise, then one of the earlier acts of this government would be to legislate that people of a different sexual orientation did not have equal status and thus contradict the first remit of your Ministerial brief.’¹³⁴⁰ Not only would it be against the programme for government and Taylor’s own Ministerial portfolio, but should the Irish government follow the ‘failed attempt at reform in 1967’ in England, it would mean, Suzy Byrne argued, that ‘the Oireachtas, for the first time in its history would be legislating to make some Irish citizens less equal than others. The 1861/1885 British Statues have created an Irish problem: the one certain thing that is not needed is a British solution.’¹³⁴¹

In a subsequent letter to members of cabinet, Chris Robson once more referred to the 1967 bill as a failure, one he said the main political parties in Britain were committed to change. The introduction of antiquated laws would, Robson maintained, be a step backwards and be against the government’s own programme for government, which was based on ‘equal status to all citizens including those of us of a different sexual orientation.’¹³⁴² Three days later, at a

¹³³⁹ Chris Robson, ‘Giving Equal Status to the Gay Community’, *Irish Times*, 26 March 1993.

¹³⁴⁰ NLI, Personal Papers of Mervyn Taylor, MS 46, 452/3 – Chris Robson to Mervyn Taylor, Minister for Equality and Law Reform, 19 January 1993.

¹³⁴¹ NLI, IQA, MS 45, 977/5 – Suzy Byrne to Fergus Finlay, 1 March 1993.

¹³⁴² NLI, IQA, MS 45, 977/1 – Chris Robson to Joe Walsh, Minister for Agriculture, Forestry and Food, 20 April 1993.

specially convened press conference to promote equal law reform, GLEN implored the government to introduce an Irish solution, not a British solution, harking back once more to the 1993 programme for government. Speaking at the press conference, Kieran Rose insisted that the ‘programme for government gives priority to the achievement of equality; it would be a travesty of the Government’s policy if they were to start by legislating for inequality.’¹³⁴³

Those with a personal experience of the 1967 law also sought to encourage the Irish government to avoid its introduction. In a persuasive letter to Minister Quinn, in April 1993, Jeffrey Dudgeon sought to stress the hurt and trauma which the 1967 bill had allowed manifest, recounting that:

In 1982, Westminster passed an Order in Council for Northern Ireland which was an exact replica of the 1967 Act in Britain. We have now had ten years’ experience of that Act, which was already fifteen years old. Quite simply, it is a discriminatory, unfair and antiquated law, which serves neither to protect non-homosexuals, nor to control gay men. It is frequently used in Northern Ireland in an inhumane and cruel fashion, for no useful purpose. [...] Here in Northern Ireland, as in Britain, there have been a series of local round ups or purges of gay men. These have invariably concerned acts of so-called public indecency and have had no under-age aspect. For each group, eventually rising to twenty men in the Antrim town case, there is almost always a suicide, as the fear of one’s name appearing in the newspapers, even after being fined a trivial amount, is totally devastating – even to gay activists. [...] In a phrase, I hope that you can accept the concept of not making gay people specially subject to any law that could convict them of a victimless crime.’¹³⁴⁴

In a similar vein, Michael Ritchie, of the Northern Ireland Civil Liberties Council, wrote to Minister Quinn, in April 1993, adopting much the same rhetoric of Dudgeon and GLEN. Ritchie remarked that ‘the experience of gay people in Northern Ireland has been that the supposed reform of 1967/82 has not dealt adequately with their concerns. Gay groups and individuals have experienced the current law as creating a considerable degree of misery and there is a growing consensus that it both is unacceptable and requires amendment.’¹³⁴⁵ In particular Ritchie emphasised the extent to which the privacy aspects of the bill were unnatural and actually led to considerable police harassment of gay men.¹³⁴⁶

¹³⁴³ NLI, IQA, MS 45, 977/8 – GLEN Press Conference, 23 April 1993.

¹³⁴⁴ NLI, IQA, MS 45, 977/7 – Jeffrey Dudgeon to Minister for Justice, Maire Geoghegan-Quinn, 5 April 1993.

¹³⁴⁵ NLI, IQA, MS 45, 976/4 – Michael Ritchie of the Committee on the Administration of Justice: The Northern Ireland Civil Liberties Council, to Minister for Justice Maire Geoghegan-Quinn, 30 April 1993.

¹³⁴⁶ NLI, IQA, MS 45, 976/4 – Michael Ritchie of the Committee on the Administration of Justice: The Northern Ireland Civil Liberties Council, to Minister for Justice Maire Geoghegan-Quinn, 30 April 1993.

The appearance of these letters in and around the same time was not a coincidence, but rather a strategic plan of action following reports in the media that the government was in fact considering the 1967 British law reform bill as one of two options to comply with the ECHR judgement. The other being the complete repeal of the laws and introduction of an equal age of consent. GLEN sought to undermine the credibility of introducing the 1967 law. In doing so, they and others sought to not only use the government's commitment to equality to restrict the governments room for manoeuvre on this issue, but also emphasise the actual reality of the introduction of a British style law reform, as demonstrated by Jeffrey Dudgeon's letter.

***'Important to work with other groups. Campaign should not be too gay orientated.'*¹³⁴⁷**

As was evident at the launch of *Equality Now* and the Unite for Change seminar, ensuring non-gay organisations and individuals not directly involved with gay organisations got involved in, or became supportive of the law reform campaign was very important to GLEN's overall strategy. Chris Robson, writing in *Lesbian and Gay Visions of Ireland* after decriminalisation, stated that 'our programmes had to be clear, well argued, highly specific and above all, be seen to demand no special privileges. An effective way to present demands is to get others to argue them on your behalf.'¹³⁴⁸ Thanks to the previous efforts of the IGRM, the NGF, the Cork Gay Collective, and LIL, GLEN could now rely on numerous organisations to lobby for and promote positive law reform for gay and lesbian individuals. At the same time, GLEN and their allies worked to convince other groups, who had previously remained silent on law reform, to now come out in support of the campaign.

The ICCL, for example, used their resources to lodge a complaint with the Council of Europe over Ireland's refusal to comply with the ECHR ruling and also published a comprehensive document supporting law reform in 1990. The ICTU, on the other hand, got involved by lobbying the Minister for Justice. In one available example from May 1991, the ICTU contacted the Minister to express 'its concern at the inordinate delay in dealing with this matter which affects the quality of life of thousands of Irish citizens. This delay also shows little regard for the status of the European Convention on Human Rights and the commitment of the Irish government to abide by its provisions.'¹³⁴⁹

¹³⁴⁷ NLI, IQA, MS 45, 976/2 – Unite for Change – Report on Seminar on Lesbian and Gay Law Reform, 17 September 1988.

¹³⁴⁸ Chris Robson, 'Anatomy of a Campaign', in *Lesbian and Gay Visions of Ireland*, ed. by Íde O'Carroll and Eoin Collins, 50.

¹³⁴⁹ NLI, IB 799, GLEN Resource material on lesbian/gay law reform, 175.

Interestingly, a similar letter was sent to the Minister for Justice from the Director of the National Youth Council of Ireland (NYCI), in which he unequivocally called on the Minister to end the ‘present anomalous situation which discriminates against young homosexuals and which contravenes the European Convention on Human Rights. We would now request, Minister, that you introduce a gay law reform bill that would implement the law reform commission proposals that there be an equal age of consent for both heterosexuals and homosexuals.’¹³⁵⁰ It is worth noting that the Director’s letter marked a considerable shift in attitude from the mid-1980s when the NGF youth group could not even become an affiliated member of the NYCI. Even at the time the letter was sent, July 1991, the NGF Youth Group, which had now renamed itself the Lesbian and Gay Youth Federation of Ireland (LGFYI), was still not an official member of the NYCI. It was not until November 1992 when they were granted this status.¹³⁵¹ This was a result of the LGFYI who successfully lobbied members of the NYCI, in June 1991, to pass a motion not only backing law reform but also crucially to back an age of consent of 17 years.¹³⁵²

As an organisation representing youths, the main group opponents of law reform admittedly sought to protect, the NYCI’s support for an age of consent of 17 was highly symbolic and significant. In fact, in his aforementioned letter to the Minister for Justice, in January 1993, Chris Robson used this support to lobby the Minister, arguing that the ‘effect of any different reform would be to discriminate against young gay men and to turn them into criminals. It would lead also to further conflict and legal campaigns. The recent election of the lesbian and gay youth federation of Ireland onto the National Youth Council surely points the way.’¹³⁵³ The support from the NYCI played into one of GLEN’s main objectives, which was to provide vital public reassurance to the public about law reform and an equal age of consent.

Pressure to include sexual orientation in the Unfair Dismissal’s Act was also put on the government during this period. In its January 1991 *Programme for Economic and Social Progress* the government had committed itself to amend the Unfair Dismissals Act 1977. The Programme did not, however, stipulate what type of amendments would be made. As we have seen in Chapter 6 the ICTU and EEA had publicly called on the government to include sexual orientation. Over the years, however, the government had resisted these calls, arguing that no cases of dismissals on the grounds of sexual orientation had been brought to their attention. In

¹³⁵⁰ NLI, IB 799, GLEN Resource material on lesbian/gay law reform, 175.

¹³⁵¹ NLI, IQA, MS 45, 957/4 – Paul Gorry letter to friends of LGYFI.

¹³⁵² NLI, IQA, MS 45, 957/4 – LGFYI Newsletter.

¹³⁵³ NLI, IQA, MS 45, 977/4 – Chris Robson to Minister for Justice Maire Geoghegan-Quinn, 18 January 1993.

a marked shift, most likely reflecting a greater sense of confidence amongst some homosexuals, but also a reflection of the fact that organisations such as the EEA and ICTU were supportive of including sexual orientation in the bill, some homosexuals in Ireland were now willing to raise their dismissal. The *Irish Times* noted in September 1991 that the EEA had recommended to the government that discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation be included in the amendments to Unfair Dismissals Act.¹³⁵⁴ While this in itself was significant, perhaps more significant was the fact that the report noted that the EEA had received 20 complaints from individuals who stated they had been sacked because their employers discovered they were not heterosexual.¹³⁵⁵ The government's defence that no cases had been reported could no longer be maintained, because the EEA now had reported cases to counteract the government's narrative.

Phil Flynn, general secretary of the trade union IMPACT (Irish Municipal, Public and Civil Trade Union), further supported this view in his letter to the Minister for Labour in April 1992. In urging the Minister to include sexual orientation, Flynn contended that 'while such cases are difficult to establish we are satisfied that an already vulnerable group in our society are made even more vulnerable by the absence of such a provision.'¹³⁵⁶ The Gay Switchboard followed up Flynn's letter with their own 6 days later, in which they sought to reinforce the fear amongst many homosexuals about losing their jobs because of their sexual orientation. Of the 50,000 calls they received since 1974 the Gay Switchboard revealed that a common theme had been:

the real fear expressed by a very large proportion of our callers, that their colleagues, or more significantly their employers, will find out that they are gay or bisexual. They fear that should this be discovered, they would be discriminated purely on the basis of their sexual orientation. This fear is a terribly real and powerful one. All too often, we are made aware of instances where this discrimination results in dismissal.¹³⁵⁷

Gay and Lesbian organisations were cognisant of developments outside the gay movement, which could be utilised to influence positive law reform. In particular, they were conscious of the different state sponsored bodies which were considering necessary changes to Irish laws at this time. They sought to ensure that a voice for Ireland's gay and lesbian community was heard in their deliberations. One such body was the Council for the Status of Women. According to Senator Mary Jackman, speaking in Seanad Éireann in December 1990, lesbian groups in Ireland had affiliated to the Council for Status of Women for quite some time, noting:

¹³⁵⁴ *Irish Times*, 'EEA dealing with tip of iceberg', 7 September 1991.

¹³⁵⁵ *Irish Times*, 'EEA dealing with tip of iceberg', 7 September 1991.

¹³⁵⁶ NLI, IB 799, GLEN Resource material on lesbian/gay law reform, 6.

¹³⁵⁷ NLI, IB 799, GLEN Resource material on lesbian/gay law reform, 6.

it is interesting to point out that for many years now the Lesbian Support Group has been an affiliated group of the Council for the Status of Women and it does not attract any negative publicity one way or another because it is an accepted state of affairs and events. That council has a cross-section of affiliated groups from all corners of Ireland, urban and rural, old and young women. There is no question at all of any confusion, guilt, shame, disrespect or discrimination against that support group.¹³⁵⁸

Interestingly, Jackman sought to emphasise the extent to which the Council was not simply an urban phenomenon, but rather comprised of, as she said, members from rural as well as urban Ireland who did not object to the lesbian groups' affiliation. This was an attempt to dismiss the possible suggestion, often made in Ireland, that a divide existed along urban and rural lines over homosexuality. Within the CSW this was admittedly not the case and perhaps a wider reflection of a change in attitudes towards lesbian women, and homosexuality more generally.

The decision and ability of lesbian groups to affiliate and generate support from the Council had proved particularly beneficial following the 1989 General Election. During the course of that election the CSW sought support for a 10 point charter for women's right, which included a 'second commission on the status of women to be established to advise on programmes and to review progress since publication of the report of the First Commission in 1972.'¹³⁵⁹ Following the General Election a 19 member commission comprised of 16 women and 3 men was appointed by *Taoiseach* Charles Haughey.¹³⁶⁰ In the course of its two-year investigation, the Cork Lesbian Line, Lesbian Discussion Group Dublin, Lesbian Line Dublin and individuals such as Joni Crone and Ann-Louise Gilligan, made numerous written and oral submissions to the Second Council for the Status of Women. In their subsequent report to the government, the Commission noted that it had been represented to them that:

There is not a single open or 'out' lesbian woman in any position of power or public office in Ireland and that only rarely have individual lesbians spoken out in the media so the vast majority of the population hears little or nothing factual and positive about lesbians. [...] Lesbians are dismissed from jobs, lose custody of children, are evicted from housing, are rejected by their families, are beaten up and harassed, are ejected from political, religious or other social groups and are barred from public places in Ireland – all for revealing their sexual orientation., or having been identified as lesbian. [...] Sexual orientation is not included as a category for protection in the Employment Equality Act or Unfair Dismissals Acts.¹³⁶¹

¹³⁵⁸ *Seanad Éireann*, Vol. 127, No. 1, 'European Court of Human Rights Judgment: Statements', 12 December 1990.

¹³⁵⁹ Yvonne Galligan, 'The report of the second commission on the Status of Women', *Irish Political Studies*, Volume 8, Issue 1, 1993.

¹³⁶⁰ Yvonne Galligan, 'The report of the second commission on the Status of Women', *Irish Political Studies*, Volume 8, Issue 1, 1993.

¹³⁶¹ NLI, OPIE Y/29 – Report to government from Second Commission on the Status of Women, January 1993.

The Commission described this situation as repugnant, and produced a number of significant recommendations which included: legislation to decriminalise sexual activity between males, the inclusion of sexual orientation in the Unfair Dismissals Act, the inclusion of a module on homophobia in the proposed sex and relationship education course in second level schools, and that lesbian groups be made eligible for funding from the Department of Social Welfare's scheme of grants for local women's groups involved in development.¹³⁶²

These recommendations along with the CSW's report were presented to the government in January 1993 and proved highly influential. An example of just how influential this report was can be seen in a letter sent to GLEN, in February 1993, from the Department of Equality and Law Reform. In this letter, Brian Fitzpatrick requested GLEN to provide its thoughts on amending legislation in relation to employment equality, noting the government's desire to 'respond as soon as possible to the considered recommendations of the Second Commission on the Status of Women.'¹³⁶³ It is also particularly noteworthy to recognise the fact that the Department *was actually reaching* out to a gay/lesbian organisation in Ireland, seeking its thoughts on proposed legislation. Moreover, while GLEN was primarily a male dominated network, had it not been for the work of lesbian groups throughout Ireland, who involved themselves in the Council for the Status of Women, then it is highly unlikely that this state sponsored body would have come out in support of gay law reform, like it did. The behind-the-scene efforts of these lesbian groups was influential in bringing the Council for the Status of Women to the point where they were willing to produce highly progressive and liberal recommendations in favour of gay rights, in particular, the reforming of the 1861 and 1885 acts, and the inclusion of sexual orientation in the Unfair Dismissal's Act.

The Second Commission on the Status of Women was not the first state sponsored body to become involved in the debate over gay law reform in Ireland. Previously in this chapter mention has been made to recommendations from the Law Reform Commission. These recommendations heralded a pivotal moment in GLEN's efforts to garner support and justification for an equal age of consent. As we have seen GLEN and others often referenced the recommendations in correspondence with the Irish government. While the Law Reform Commission had existed since October 1975 to examine areas of Irish law which might need reform, no consideration had been given to the issue of gay law reform. However, in the course

¹³⁶² NLI, OPIE Y/29 – Report to government from Second Commission on the Status of Women, January 1993.

¹³⁶³ NLI, IQA, MS 45, 977/4 – Brian Fitzpatrick, Principal of Employment Equality Section of Department of Equality and Law Reform, to Kieran Rose, 24 February 1993.

of the new Commission's investigations into the laws on sexual offences, in particular, the law relating to rape and the sexual abuse of children, the commission noted that:

it became obvious at an early stage that no sensible proposals for the reform of the substantive criminal law in the area of child sexual abuse could be formulated unless it was prepared to undertake an examination of the entire law relating to what might be broadly described as consensual sexual activity. That in turn led the Commission to examine the present state of the law as to consensual homosexual offences in the light of the decisions of the Supreme Court and the European Court of Human Rights in *Norris*.¹³⁶⁴

With the Commission investigating law reform in this area, GLEN, Gay Health Action, the NGF and the ICCL all made written submissions.¹³⁶⁵ The Commission also invited oral submissions, with Don Donnelly and Kieran Rose representing GLEN and John Bergin representing the NGF. Des McDonald of Family Solidarity, which was strongly opposed to gay law reform, also provided an oral submission to the commission. In their recommendations, which can only be described as one of the most effective propaganda tools for GLEN, the commission found that the same legal regime *should* obtain for consensual homosexual activity as for heterosexual and that *no* case had been established for providing that the age of consent should be any different.¹³⁶⁶ The commission noted that while there was 'little dissent from these provisional recommendations', one submission (most likely Family Solidarity), did take issue strongly with their proposals in this area and suggested that they were in disregard of the decision of the Supreme Court in *Norris*.¹³⁶⁷

While this was only one of numerous recommendations to come from the Law Reform Commission, it was the one which generated most reaction in the media. The *Irish Independent* led one article on the Law Reform Commission with the title 'PDs (Progressive Democrats) to press for action on homosexual's law change'¹³⁶⁸ The *Cork Examiner* and *Irish Times* also focused on the Commission's recommendation on homosexual law reform. The *Cork Examiner* argued that the 'recommendation of a common age of consent, whatever one's sexual

¹³⁶⁴ <http://www.lawreform.ie/fileupload/Reports/rChildSexAbuse.htm>, Law Reform Commission: Report on Child Sexual Abuse, September 1990, accessed on October 17th 2017.

¹³⁶⁵ NLI, IQA, MS 45, 976/5 – Frank Ryan secretary to the Law Reform Commission letter to Kieran Rose, 23 October 1989.

¹³⁶⁶ <http://www.lawreform.ie/fileupload/Reports/rChildSexAbuse.htm>, Law Reform Commission: Report on Child Sexual Abuse, September 1990, accessed on 17 October 2017.

¹³⁶⁷ <http://www.lawreform.ie/fileupload/Reports/rChildSexAbuse.htm>, Law Reform Commission: Report on Child Sexual Abuse, September 1990, accessed on 17 October 2017.

¹³⁶⁸ *Irish Independent*, 'PDs to press for action on homosexuals law change', 26 September 1990.

preference, put paid to the myth that people could be converted from or to homosexuality.’¹³⁶⁹ Crucially, the Irish Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children welcomed the report, along with the Workers Party, who singled out the recommendation on homosexual law reform as being particularly welcome.¹³⁷⁰ According to the *Irish Times*, Family Solidarity was the only organisation to publicly speak out against the report, criticising the recommendation on homosexual law reform.¹³⁷¹ Surprisingly, the Catholic Church remained silent. As state-sponsored bodies with expertise in the areas they were investigating, their recommendations carried considerable weight. For the likes of GLEN and their allies it was the ideal platform from which to put greater pressure on the government to introduce an equal law reform bill. It also put the government in a considerably tricky position of having to either adopt the recommendations or reject them.

‘A simple mechanism for the public declaration of support for our main aims.’¹³⁷²

One new initiative which developed from the premise of ensuring that the campaign was not too ‘gay orientated’ was GLEN’s involvement in the founding of ‘Campaign for Equality’, a coalition of different minorities groups, in particular, travellers, the disabled, those living with HIV and AIDS, and lesbians and gay men. At the launch of the campaign on 17 October 1991 at the European Commission offices in Dublin were members of the Dublin Travellers Education and Development Group, Forum of People with Disabilities, the Labour Party, the Workers Party, the Green Party, the Council for the Status of Women, ICTU, Young Fine Gael and GLEN.¹³⁷³ There can be no doubt that the location chosen for the campaign’s launch was symbolic, particularly as GLEN was continually trying to shift the law in the direction of European standards.

As a specifically non-gay alliance committed to equality for everyone, the organisation brought gay activists into contact with groups and individuals with whom they otherwise may not have had contact with. In turn, it allowed GLEN to reinforce the wide cross-section of individuals and organisations now supporting homosexual law reform. GLEN described the campaign as ‘a simple mechanism for the public declaration of support for our main aims.’¹³⁷⁴ For example, one such organisation which offered its support to the campaign was the Church

¹³⁶⁹ *Cork Examiner*, ‘Report urges change in buggery laws’, 25 September 1990.

¹³⁷⁰ *Irish Times*, ‘Child sexual abuse report gets mixed reception’, 26 September 1990.

¹³⁷¹ *Irish Times*, ‘Child sexual abuse report gets mixed reception’, 26 September 1990.

¹³⁷² NLI, IQA, MS 45, 974/10 – GLEN, ‘After the Parade: Report Back 1992.’

¹³⁷³ NLI, IQA, MS 45, 974/10 – GLEN, ‘After the Parade: Report Back 1992.’

¹³⁷⁴ NLI, IQA, MS 45, 974/10 – GLEN, ‘After the Parade: Report Back 1992.’

of Ireland. In a letter to GLEN, Archbishop of Armagh, Most Rev. Dr. Eames, stated that ‘while the Church of Ireland does not regard homosexual practices as an acceptable norm, it does approve of the law being changed to allow sex between consenting adults.’¹³⁷⁵

Others who lent their support included Monica Barnes, TD, and chairperson of the Oireachtas Committee on Women’s Affairs, who, in her speech at the launch, stated that they would continue to remind the Minister for Justice to keep law reform on the agenda, noting that they had ‘already written to the Minister for Labour supporting amending legislation to include sexual orientation under the terms of the Employment Equality Act and Unfair Dismissals Act.’¹³⁷⁶ Speaking at a subsequent press conference in November 1992, Sylvia Meehan, of the EEA, insisted that ‘we must put an end to the discrimination which excludes groups from employment, dignity, and power in the community.’¹³⁷⁷ While Suzy Byrne reminded Irish society that ‘not a single one of our requests would give us special privileges. Our case is simply part of a wider movement towards dismantling of prejudice and towards a society that welcomes diversity.’¹³⁷⁸

Whereas, the initial launch saw only a handful of groups and individuals commit their support to the campaign, within the space of just one year this number had grown to 37 organisations ranging from, Waterford Women’s Federation, to Focus Point, to the Rape Crisis Centre and Divorce Action Group.¹³⁷⁹ Crucially the signatories also included a respectable number of TDs, Senators, and MEPs, including Pat Cox, Mary Banotti, Proinsias DeRossa, Ruairi Quinn, Des Geraghty and Senator Brendan Ryan. In fact, it was in and around this time that more public figures were becoming vocal in demanding homosexual law reform. For example, in February and October 1992, Proinsias DeRossa raised the issue of homosexual law reform with the Minister for Justice Ray Burke and Taoiseach Albert Reynolds. Whereas Ray Burke had explained that work was progressing on the legislation in February 1992, Albert Reynolds replied that homosexual law reform was not a priority in October 1992.¹³⁸⁰ This was characteristic of the government’s ambivalence to the issue of Law Reform. In that same month, Roger Garland of the Green Party, along with Emmet Stagg of the Labour Party and Pat McCarten and Eric Byrne of Democratic Left took part in a protest outside Dáil Éireann

¹³⁷⁵ NLI, ILB 305 G 2, *Gay Community News*, Issue 35 ‘Archbishop comes out.’

¹³⁷⁶ NLI, ILB 305 G 2, *Gay Community News*, Issue 35 ‘Archbishop comes out.’

¹³⁷⁷ NLI, IQA, MS 45, 979/7 – Campaign for Equality Press Conference, 16 November 1992.

¹³⁷⁸ NLI, IQA, MS 45, 979/7 – Campaign for Equality Press Conference, 16 November 1992.

¹³⁷⁹ NLI, IQA, MS 45, 979/7 – Campaign for Equality – Declaration of Support: Signatories.

¹³⁸⁰ *Dáil Éireann* Debate, Vol. 415 No. 3, ‘Written Answers – Legislation on Homosexual Activities’, 4 February 1992. – *Dáil Éireann*, Vol. 423 No. 4, ‘Questions. Oral Answers – Legislative Programme’, 13 October 1992.

organised by GLEN to mark the 4th anniversary of the ECHR judgement. Speaking at the event, Eileen Walsh of the Dublin Lesbian Line declared that ‘human rights are very low on the agenda’ of the government.¹³⁸¹ Previously, in September 1992, Des Geraghty had raised Ireland’s refusal to amend the laws in the European Parliament, questioning whether the Commission had ever ‘given consideration to proposals which would provide effective redress for citizens, in such circumstances, whose rights are being denied by a Member state [...]’.¹³⁸² Only a few short months later, in January 1993, the *Evening Herald* reported that Dublin city councillors agreed a motion in the name of Progressive Democrats councillor Liz O’Donnell and Claire Wheeler of the Green Party, calling on the Minister for Justice to bring forward legislation decriminalising sexual acts.¹³⁸³

Perhaps, however, one of the most momentous and important acts by a political figure in 1992 was the decision taken by President Mary Robinson to invite representatives from gay and lesbian groups throughout Ireland to a reception at *Áras an Uachtaráin* (President’s residency). While Robinson had remained relatively silent on the issue of law reform since becoming president, despite having represented David Norris at the ECHR, her decision to invite gay and lesbian individuals to the *Áras* was, as Uinsionn Mac Dubhghaill of the *Irish Times* noted, an affirmation of the gay and lesbian community in Ireland.¹³⁸⁴ Remembering the event in 2016, at which 34 representatives of homosexual groups from Dublin, Belfast, Derry, Cork, Limerick and Galway attended, Robinson asserted that ‘it was something that I really felt was important to do. I’d been reaching out to various groups; this was an important group to do it.’¹³⁸⁵

In his address to President Robinson, Kieran Rose affirmed that ‘by welcoming an often excluded and stigmatised community into the symbolic home of all Irish people, you are creating a powerful image which will work to heal the wounds of prejudice. On this bright day for our community, we can remember those who did not survive the wounds of prejudice.’¹³⁸⁶ In a sign of just how fitting Rose’s comments were the *Evening Herald* reprinted a letter it received, in which the author stated that ‘all my life I have felt an outsider in my own country.

¹³⁸¹ Catherine Foley, ‘Gays protest at inaction on change in laws’, *Irish Times*, 29 October 1992.

¹³⁸² Historical Archive of European Union, HAEU, PE3 34714.

¹³⁸³ *Evening Herald*, ‘Council Supports Gays’, 5 January 1993.

¹³⁸⁴ Uinsionn Mac Dubhghaill, ‘Gay and lesbian group received by President’, *Irish Times*, 14 December 1992.

¹³⁸⁵ Edmund Lynch interview with Mary Robinson, 28 April 2016, *Edmund Lynch, Irish LGBT History Project*.

¹³⁸⁶ Uinsionn Mac Dubhghaill, ‘Gay and lesbian group received by President’, *Irish Times*, 14 December 1992.

But now our President is making me feel that this is a place where, at last, I can be proudly at home. While we have an immense distance to travel to attain justice and equality for gay and lesbian people, the Presidents gesture is at least proof that the journey is beginning.’¹³⁸⁷

Reacting to the reception, Mary Holland remarked that:

What was left unsaid although the message came through clear as a bell was that now perhaps, after this a new government will be shamed into changing the laws on homosexuality. [...] Re-reading the shameful catalogue of excuses and prevarications it seems that successive governments have seen no real need to change the laws at all, let alone to do so as a matter of urgency. [...] Not for the first time, our President effortlessly and generously subversive of entrenched prejudice has given a signal that cannot be ignored.¹³⁸⁸

Mary Holland was one of many journalists to whom GLEN had reached out to in previous years. In February 1991 Holland had been invited to be guest speaker at two workshops on ‘Lesbians and law reform’ and ‘Young lesbians and gay men and law reform’.¹³⁸⁹ This was followed by a meeting with Emily O’Reilly (*Irish Press*) and Fintan O’Toole (*Irish Times*), during lesbian/gay pride week.¹³⁹⁰ Both Holland and O’Toole became outspoken critics of the government’s refusal to comply with the ECHR judgement. In fact, this was true of a considerable number of journalists. While statements such as that of Dublin city council were more conciliatory in their nature, those in the media, who choose to write on the issue, were much more forthright in their criticism of the Irish government. In 1989 an article appeared in the *Evening Herald* which strongly condemned the coalition government’s lack of urgency in repealing the 1861 and 1885 acts, labelling such a delay as ‘shameful.’¹³⁹¹ Describing the hostility homosexuals faced in Ireland, including hostility from the Irish Roman Catholic Church and queer bashing, the author argued that ‘it is to help end this rotten oppressive situation and allow gays to live ordinary lives that the law must be changed.’¹³⁹² While taking aim at Fianna Fail, describing it as a party ‘happy to form alliances with the most backward strands of Irish Catholicism’, it was with the Progressive Democrats the author seemed most annoyed with, questioning ‘how they can decently support the retention of laws which have been declared to violate human rights [...]’.¹³⁹³ This was a theme taken up by Dick Walsh in

¹³⁸⁷ *Evening Herald*, 15 December 1992.

¹³⁸⁸ Mary Holland, ‘Afraid to be identified’, *Irish Times*, 17 December 1992.

¹³⁸⁹ NLI, IQA, MS 45, 974/10 – GLEN, ‘After the Parade: Report Back 1992.’

¹³⁹⁰ NLI, IQA, MS 45, 974/10 – GLEN, ‘After the Parade: Report Back 1992.’

¹³⁹¹ *Evening Herald*, ‘Act now to change gay laws’, 24 November 1989.

¹³⁹² *Evening Herald*, ‘Act now to change gay laws’, 24 November 1989.

¹³⁹³ *Evening Herald*, ‘Act now to change gay laws’, 24 November 1989.

the *Irish Times*, in January 1990. In an article titled, 'Moral imperatives are for the birds', Walsh critiqued the government for not budging on the ECHR judgement, maintaining that:

in spite of its constant references to the obligation of States to abide by the rule of law, its newly discovered European consciousness and its insistence on the rights of minorities, it is content to let the Victorian laws stand and let the decision of the Court of Human Rights hang unheeded in mid-air. You don't have to be an unreconstructed cynic to get the message that the rule of law is for Britain to observe, or that it's a case of what Europe can do for us, rather than how we can meet European standards of justice.¹³⁹⁴

Once more Ireland's abuse of the ECHR was highlighted. It was the government's, but particularly *Taoiseach* Albert Reynolds' willingness to let the decision of the ECHR hang in the air, which most aggravated the editor of the *Irish Times* in May 1992. In dismissing the belief that homosexuality was repugnant to official Ireland, the editor took aim at Reynolds' professed liberalism, insisting that:

if he does not now act on the assurance which his representative has given to the council of Europe, his liberal claims will be questionable. His predecessor was a master of the Irish solution to the Irish problem. The non-enforcement of the existing legislation is such a solution. The Reynold's era had seemed to promise a departure from such ambiguities. It is time that it lived up to that promise.¹³⁹⁵

Reynolds was also the target of Fintan O'Toole's criticism later that year on the same subject. Reacting to Reynolds' comments that law reform was at the bottom of the list of priorities, O'Toole argued that:

we know already that the law on homosexuality in the Republic is a bad and stupid law which helps to bring the criminal justice system into disrepute. [...] If he believes that it should be repealed but finds that he and his ministers don't have the time or the courage or the commitment to do so, then he should simply announce that his government will not obstruct a Private Member's Bill from the opposition parties which puts into effect the European court ruling [...]¹³⁹⁶

These articles ensured that the topic of law reform remained in the public domain, while also ensuring pressure was kept on the Irish government to introduce reform. And not just any law reform, but an equal law reform bill. The willingness of non-gay and lesbian individuals and groups to publicly support gay rights was also an important tool in helping to counter fears that supporting gay rights would have negative consequences. Their positive messages on law reform was important.

¹³⁹⁴ Dick Walsh, 'Moral Imperatives are for the birds', *Irish Times*, 20 January 1990.

¹³⁹⁵ *Irish Times*, 'Homosexual Law Reform', 16 May 1992.

¹³⁹⁶ Fintan O'Toole, 'The law is the law-unless it is not on the priority list', *Irish Times*, 16 September 1992.

‘It is naïve to proclaim that the gay lifestyle should not be a problem, in simple terms, it is a problem and should be a problem.’¹³⁹⁷

By the beginning of 1993 the Irish government was well aware of what GLEN wanted, the support it enjoyed amongst many sectors of Irish society, and the recommendations of its two state sponsored bodies, which had considered the issue. GLEN, however, did not have it all their own way. Opponents did succeed in having their voices heard too. On occasions these voices came from outside Ireland, and while not directly dealing with the issue of law reform, nevertheless impacted on the public debate regarding homosexuality. However, what is highly significant about the actions of opponents is the extent to which they actually played into the hands of GLEN and their allies. Rather than winning over support, opponents’ actions actually facilitated GLEN in taking advantage of their actions and further convincing many in Irish society of the necessity in changing the laws.

But who were these opponents? As we have seen in previous chapters, the Irish Roman Catholic Church did not support amending the 1861 and 1885 laws. However, while it did not welcome the amending of the law in 1993, the Irish Roman Catholic Church, nevertheless, was remarkably silent in the public debate leading up to law reform, focusing its attention instead on condemning contraception, divorce and abortion. All subjects which were topical in Ireland during this period. The Irish Roman Catholic Church does not seem to have considered homosexuality to have been as serious an issue as the other three. It may also have been the case that they recognised the considerable support for reforming the law and considered it a losing battle, unlike the other three issues. The main organised opposition to law reform came from a relatively small group, Family Solidarity. Family Solidarity was an advocacy group run by lay Catholics committed to promoting what it called the ‘interests of the family in Ireland.’¹³⁹⁸ Following the 1988 ECHR judgement, Family Solidarity had vocally condemned the decision, arguing ‘that in the midst of an AIDS epidemic, any measure which would increase the practice of homosexuality was to be deplored.’¹³⁹⁹ The group further argued that the ECHR’s judgement would not be valid in Ireland, citing the Supreme Court judgement of

¹³⁹⁷ ‘State has to balance homosexuals rights with Christian values’, *Kerryman*, 7 May 1993.

¹³⁹⁸ http://www.fafce.org/index.php?option=com_contact&view=contact&id=3:family-solidarity-ely-house&catid=18&Itemid=112&lang=en Family Solidarity about the organisation, accessed on 10 November 2017.

¹³⁹⁹ *Irish Times*, ‘Decision deplored by family group’, 27 October 1988.

1983 which had found the laws to be consistent with the Irish constitution because of its Christian character.¹⁴⁰⁰

Family Solidarity sought not only to stir up Irish nationalism, claiming that an outside court had forced this decision on Ireland, but also to play on the fear of AIDS, laying the blame for its prevalence at the feet of homosexuals. Like GLEN, Family Solidarity sought to lobby Irish politicians and use the media to get their message out. In the same year as the ICCL published *Equality Now*, Family Solidarity followed up with its own booklet, *The Homosexual Challenge: Analysis and Response*, which it also sent to Irish politicians. Whereas, *Equality Now* had sought to reassure Irish society and to emphasise the positives of law reform, *The Homosexual Challenge* sought to instil a sense of fear and doom about *any* reform of the law.

In the opening section of the book, Family Solidarity described homosexuality as something which was acquired or learned, not inborn, insisting that there were three specific types of homosexuals: the compulsive homosexual, the symptomatic homosexual and the episodic homosexual.¹⁴⁰¹ Homosexuals, they maintained, were more promiscuous than heterosexuals and ‘do not engage in a sexual life in the context of a lifelong relationship with one other person [...] [thereby making them] the perfect vehicle for spreading the disease [AIDS].’¹⁴⁰² To amend the laws in any form they argued would ‘be understood by some members of the public, especially young people as approval for the Acts [...] and have great public consequences for education, health and the general good of society.’¹⁴⁰³

A central feature of this booklet was the attempt by Family Solidarity to criticise the rhetorical progress they believed the gay movement had achieved, in particular, what it described as the linguistic changes, whose acceptance in Irish society ‘at face value have already gone halfway to accepting the ideology which informed them.’¹⁴⁰⁴ In particular, they took exception to the gay movements use of the word ‘gay’, insisting that ‘those who out of politeness or fashion start to use it are taking on board its approving content, whether they know it or not.’¹⁴⁰⁵ Family Solidarity argued that the wider acceptance of this rhetoric had closed off other interpretations of homosexuality, particularly the ‘once accepted vocabulary’ used to describe homosexuality, such as: immoral, contrary to the law, unnatural, indecent,

¹⁴⁰⁰ *Irish Times*, ‘Decision deplored by family group’, 27 October 1988.

¹⁴⁰¹ NLI, IQA, MS 45, 978/11 – Family Solidarity, *The Homosexual Challenge: Analysis and Response*, 1990, 11.

¹⁴⁰² Family Solidarity, *The Homosexual Challenge: Analysis and Response*, 15

¹⁴⁰³ Family Solidarity, *The Homosexual Challenge: Analysis and Response*, 62

¹⁴⁰⁴ Family Solidarity, *The Homosexual Challenge: Analysis and Response*, 18.

¹⁴⁰⁵ Family Solidarity, *The Homosexual Challenge: Analysis and Response*, 20.

abnormal.¹⁴⁰⁶ Rather than being abusive terms, Family Solidarity argued that they were ‘polite and academic.’¹⁴⁰⁷ This rhetorical shift now unfairly presented those who condemned homosexuality as unkind or unloving. In the age of AIDS they contended that:

when homosexual behaviour is discussed in the context of AIDS, and is framed in the context of *compassion*, it is very difficult to say that such behaviour is wrong without appearing hard and unloving. Thus, since the advent of AIDS, discussions involving homosexual matters have often been presented so as to make one feel guilty for questioning homosexual practices – as if doing so were tantamount to refusing sympathy toward those who suffer.

Crucially for Irish Society, Family Solidarity warned that just as the gay movement had re-defined the terms used to describe homosexuality, they were also intent on re-defining the definition of the family to include ‘male-male, female-female, temporary or permanent, exclusive or non-exclusive forms.’¹⁴⁰⁸ The implication being that the continued acceptance of the gay movement’s rhetoric only facilitated the re-definition of the family in Ireland.

Just as GLEN had used the mainstream media to promote their views, so too, did Family Solidarity. In an article, in the *Irish Times* in May 1991, Dr. Joseph McCarroll (Family Solidarity) challenged Irish society to confront the ideology of homosexuals, maintaining that although homosexuals should be respected as persons their ‘ideology’ should not, noting that ‘one is not showing real respect for an alcoholic by agreeing with his denial that he has a problem. In the same way, for those who regard homosexuality as a disorder, real respect and compassion demands that we challenge the homosexual ideology.’¹⁴⁰⁹ Rather than being the enemy of homosexuals, Family Solidarity wanted to be seen as the true allies of the homosexual, who they were trying to help overcome this ‘disorder/problem’ for the betterment of the individual and society at large. By claiming that homosexuality was not a problem, those who supported the ideology of homosexuals, on the other hand, were the real enemy. In this regard then, McCarroll argued that the ‘laws against them [homosexuals] should be retained for their socially valuable educative function. They send an effective social signal, especially to the young, that society regards these types of behaviour as unacceptable.’¹⁴¹⁰

McCarroll, as did the *Homosexual Challenge*, signalled out the importance of maintaining the 1861 and 1885 laws to protect the youths of Ireland who were particularly

¹⁴⁰⁶ Family Solidarity, *The Homosexual Challenge: Analysis and Response*, 20.

¹⁴⁰⁷ Family Solidarity, *The Homosexual Challenge: Analysis and Response*, 20.

¹⁴⁰⁸ Family Solidarity, *The Homosexual Challenge: Analysis and Response*, 21.

¹⁴⁰⁹ Joseph McCarroll, ‘Why homosexual acts should not be legalised’, *Irish Times*, 30 May 1991.

¹⁴¹⁰ Joseph McCarroll, ‘Why homosexual acts should not be legalised’, *Irish Times*, 30 May 1991.

vulnerable, they argued, to any change in the law. In a separate article, in April 1993, McCarroll once more contended that ‘society must safeguard the sexual development of the young. Each change made in response to gay pressure enhances the legitimacy of the gay ideology, increases the likelihood of young people, whose developing sexual orientation is ambivalent, being drawn into the gay sub-culture, because it is normalised by such social changes.’¹⁴¹¹

While we have seen in Chapter 7 that the Irish government eventually opted against using AIDS as justification for the maintenance of the law, Family Solidarity chose to embrace this argument. McCarroll, referencing the ECHR, which permits a government to pass laws interfering with the privacy of an individual when it is necessary to protect health or morals, insisted that ‘sodomy and such acts pose a significant danger to health. They put those who practise them at high risk of contracting the fatal AIDS disease. The need to protect health, then provides a compelling and sufficient reason for maintaining the present laws against these acts.’¹⁴¹² McCarroll further argued that the government should derogate from the ECHR decision because the Strasbourg Court could not overrule the Irish Constitution as interpreted by the Irish Supreme Court. Whereas the decision to join the Council of Europe in 1949 had been taken by the Government, the Irish Constitution expressed the will of the people who had approved it in 1937. The Irish people had not voted to join the Council of Europe.

Writing in the *Southern Star*, Patrick Conn, who also noted that ‘sodomy has brought down empires’, similarly adopted this argument, maintaining that ‘many otherwise liberal folk wonder if the Brussels Eurocrats are not interfering overmuch in national matters of moral impact and could cause offence to the majority, or at least a substantial minority. [...]’¹⁴¹³ Others shared a similar view that reform would contravene the interests of Irish society. Bridget Randles, of the Christian Family Movement, wrote into the *Irish Times* in May 1993 pleading with the government to reflect carefully before pushing society in the wrong direction, arguing that ‘after the Government has decriminalised homosexual acts for over-17s then it will be too late to make an objection to homosexual information being available in our schools.’¹⁴¹⁴ Writing in the *Kerryman*, Monsignor Denis O’Callaghan argued that the ‘general perception would be that such removal would send the wrong message, particularly to young people, that

¹⁴¹¹ Joseph McCarroll, ‘The case against homosexual law reform’, *Irish Times*, 23 April 1993.

¹⁴¹² Joseph McCarroll, ‘Why homosexual acts should not be legalised’, *Irish Times*, 30 May 1991.

¹⁴¹³ Patrick Conn, ‘Archaic Fundamentalism, or sodomy is sodomy by any other name’, *Southern Star*, 22 May 1993.

¹⁴¹⁴ Bridget Randles, honorary secretary of Christian Family Movement, ‘Legalising homosexuality’, *Irish Times*, 19 May 1993.

society has changed its attitudes and now accepts and approves of homosexual activity’, insisting that ‘It is naïve to proclaim that the gay lifestyle should not be a problem; in simple terms, it is a problem and should be a problem.’¹⁴¹⁵

Family Solidarity’s campaign provoked many to answer its rhetoric, and not just from the gay community. When *The Homosexual Challenge* was published not only was it met with harsh criticism from GLEN and the NGF, who described it as ridiculous and very dangerous, but it also received strong condemnation from Waterford councillor Gary O’Halloran and members of Young Fine Gael.¹⁴¹⁶ Young Fine Gael’s statement described the document as a witch hunt, which demonstrated a total lack of compassion, understanding and tolerance on the part of Family Solidarity. The statement insisted that the ‘claim by the booklet that homosexuals engendered a pool of infection and disease is typical of the type of misinformed claims and statements used by this organisation in this and other publications.’¹⁴¹⁷ Speaking, during a meeting of the Waterford County Council, Gary O’Halloran justified speaking out on the issue because he did not want ‘his silence to be interpreted as tacit support for the Family Solidarity documents.’¹⁴¹⁸ He described the document as the ‘worst kind of bigotry by people who may also be religious maniacs [...]’ and even described Family Solidarity as part of an international fascist movement.¹⁴¹⁹ Both Councillor O’Halloran and Young Fine Gael called on the Director of Public Prosecutions to charge Family Solidarity under the Incitement to Hatred Act.¹⁴²⁰

These were not isolated incidents. McCarroll’s article of May 1991 provoked numerous condemnations, and not simply from the ICCL or Kieran Rose. David Thompson wrote ‘enough of this black, medieval tyranny. Let us accept our friends on equal terms, encourage them to get on with their lives and so rid the *Irish Times* columns of further tedious outpourings on homosexuality.’¹⁴²¹ This was a sentiment shared by Colm Hegarty who called for a ‘finish with the apologetics of this debate and begin to educate the public to its homophobia and eliminate the internalised oppression faced by all homosexuals and lesbians in our very

¹⁴¹⁵ Monsignor Denis O’Callaghan, ‘State has to balance homosexuals’ rights with Christian values’, *Kerryman*, 7 May 1993.

¹⁴¹⁶ Christine Newman, ‘Booklet described as inciting hatred’, *Irish Times*, 22 August 1990.

¹⁴¹⁷ Christine Newman, ‘Booklet described as inciting hatred’, *Irish Times*, 22 August 1990.

¹⁴¹⁸ *Munster Express*, ‘Councillors attack on Family Solidarity’, 24 August 1990.

¹⁴¹⁹ *Munster Express*, ‘Councillors attack on Family Solidarity’, 24 August 1990.

¹⁴²⁰ *Munster Express*, ‘Councillors attack on Family Solidarity’, 24 August 1990.

¹⁴²¹ *Irish Times*, ‘Letters to Editor’, 8 June 1991.

‘Christian’ society.’¹⁴²² Hegarty’s letter, which appeared almost one month after McCarroll’s original article, rounded off a number of highly critical interventions.

‘I hope the gays float gets a good cheer from the crowd. Actually, I hope they win a prize. What better thing to do on St. Patrick’s Day, than banish a few more snakes.’¹⁴²³

The extent to which homosexuality was a topical issue in Ireland during the early 1990s was evident in two events which occurred outside of Ireland in 1992 but generated considerable debate within Ireland. These incidents demonstrated the extent to which much of Irish society apparently wanted Ireland to be perceived as tolerant and welcoming of homosexuals. The first of these events was the decision taken by the Ancient Order of Hibernians (AOH) to ban the Irish Lesbian and Gay Organisation (ILGO) from marching in New York’s 1992 St. Patrick’s Day parade. The ILGO had marched in the 1991 parade, but its presence had been met with considerable protest by many onlookers and members of the AOH.¹⁴²⁴ Despite the abuse they had received in 1991, ILGO sought permission to march once more in the 1992 parade, but the AOH refused, and after a court ruling ILGO was prevented from marching in the 1992 St. Patrick’s Day parade.¹⁴²⁵ Despite taking place thousands of miles outside of Ireland, the banning of ILGO led to a series of highly critical statements on the matter. Preceding the march, Monica Barnes sent a letter to the *New York Times* lambasting the AOH’s decision, insisting that the ‘Irish people are decent, compassionate and tolerant, and this action of the AOH does not reflect this.’¹⁴²⁶ This was a view shared by William J. Walsh in an article for the *Irish Times*, in which he insisted that:

If gay marchers are excluded from tomorrow’s St. Patrick’s Day parade in Manhattan, the historic cultural meaning of the event will be subverted. What is at stake on 17 March this year is much larger than ILGO, the AOH or the 1992 St. Patrick’s Day parade. At its most basic level, what is at stake is what it means to be Irish. The Hibernians are in effect saying that if you are gay you cannot be Irish.¹⁴²⁷

¹⁴²² *Irish Times*, ‘Letters to Editor’, 25 June 1991.

¹⁴²³ Nuala O’Faolain, ‘New York could learn a lesson from St. Patrick’s Day in Cork’, *Irish Times* 15 March 1993.

¹⁴²⁴ Katherine O’Donnell, ‘St. Patrick’s Day expulsions: race and homophobia in New York’s parade, in *Irish Postmodernisms and Popular Culture*, eds. W. Balzano, A. Mullhall, M. Sullivan, 2007.

¹⁴²⁵ Katherine O’Donnell, ‘St. Patrick’s Day expulsions: race and homophobia in New York’s parade, in *Irish Postmodernisms and Popular Culture*, eds. W. Balzano, A. Mullhall, M. Sullivan, 2007.

¹⁴²⁶ NLI, IB 799, GLEN Resource material on lesbian/gay law reform.

¹⁴²⁷ William J. Walsh, ‘Everyone should be allowed to march tomorrow’, *Irish Times*, 16 March 1992.

This was very much a battle over what it meant to be Irish, but more crucially over who decided what it meant to be Irish. In reacting to events in New York, members of the Cork Lesbian Collective successfully sought permission to march in the 1992 St. Patrick's Day parade. In Cork, the organisers of the Cork St. Patrick's Day parade depicted the actions of the AOH as totally unacceptable. In explaining its reason for granting the gay and lesbian groups permission, Kieran Murphy, of the Cork Junior Chamber of Commerce, remarked that:

I suppose you could say we are fairly progressive down here in Cork. The junior chamber as the organisers of this parade recognise that this group are a part of our society and have as much right to march as anybody else. We do want to demonstrate to the people in the US that not everybody in Ireland agrees that marchers from gay and lesbian groups should be banned from taking part in parades in US cities.¹⁴²⁸

During the subsequent 1992 Cork St. Patrick's Day Parade, 30 members of the Cork Lesbian and Gay Collectives, primarily lesbian women, marched through Cork City singing Tom Robinson's 'Sing if you're glad to be Gay' and carrying placards saying, 'Hello New York.'¹⁴²⁹ Orla Egan, writing after the parade in *GCN*, described the overall reaction as 'amazingly positive [...] all along the route there were people shouting, clapping and waving in support. [...] We had reason to celebrate. We brought the words lesbian, gay and bisexual into people's vocabulary and consciousness and we had made ourselves visible in a proud, happy and positive way.'¹⁴³⁰ Not only was the reaction of the crowd reason to celebrate but so too was the awarding of a prize for best new entrant to the gay and lesbian float.¹⁴³¹

Mary Holland took the participation of a gay and lesbian group in the Cork St. Patrick's Day parade as an opportunity to once more condemn the government's inaction on law reform, arguing that 'our present legislation is both cruel and socially damaging. Until such time as the 1861 Act is changed or repealed by the Oireachtas, the reality remains that homosexual acts between consenting males are illegal in this State. Those who marched, very bravely, in the Cork parade were proclaiming their public defiance of the law.'¹⁴³² Holland was right to highlight the defiance of those who marched. The Cork Chamber of Commerce also showed considerable defiance. By granting permission to the gay and lesbian float, the Cork Chamber of Commerce showed a strong desire to confront the AOH and others who prevented gay and lesbian individuals from being welcomed or acknowledged as part of Irish society.

¹⁴²⁸ *Irish Times*, 'Gay Group to march in Cork Parade, 16 March 1992.

¹⁴²⁹ NLI, ILB 305 G2, *Gay Community News*, 'Historic Victory', Issue 39, April 1992. NLI, ILB 305 G2, *Gay Community News*, 'It's a Queer Day After All', Issue 39, April 1992.

¹⁴³⁰ NLI, ILB 305 G2, *Gay Community News*, 'Historic Victory', Issue 39, April 1992.

¹⁴³¹ NLI, ILB 305 G2, *Gay Community News*, 'Historic Victory', Issue 39, April 1992.

¹⁴³² Mary Holland, 'Parading gays make the law look an absolute ass', *Irish Times*, 26 March 1992.

The Cork lesbian and gay collectives and Cork Chamber of Commerce set a precedent which, for example, led the National Lesbian and Gay Federation to request permission to march in Dublin's St. Patrick's Day parade in 1993 and for PLUTO (People Like Us Totally Outrageous), the gay and lesbian society of University College Galway, to do the same for the Galway parade. Both requests were successful.¹⁴³³ Reacting to the participation of PLUTO in the 1993 Galway St. Patrick's Day Parade, Micheline Sheehy Skeffington, who was not alone in doing so, wrote to the *Galway Advertiser* arguing that 'lesbians and gays, like everyone else, are entitled to a life free of harassment and to equal rights and respect within our society.'¹⁴³⁴

As an event which is synonymous with Irish identity, the presence of gay and lesbian individuals openly marching in St. Patrick's Day parades throughout Ireland reinforced the claim that one could in fact be Irish and gay/lesbian. In fact, in the lead up to the 1993 St. Patrick's Day parade, Nuala O'Faolain commented that it is 'all the more surprising then, that in the matter of accepting gay and lesbian Irish people, it is Ireland that is progressive and New York not. Who would have thought that a St. Patrick's Day parade of all things would become a vehicle for social change.'¹⁴³⁵ Rather than being a vehicle for social change, however, the participation of gay and lesbian groups in the St. Patrick's Day parade's in Ireland confirmed the change which had actually taken place within Irish society.

Only a few months after the furore over the participation of a gay/lesbian group in the St. Patrick's Day parade in New York, the issue of homosexuality was once more making the headlines in Ireland. This time, however, the Vatican was at the centre of the controversy. In July 1992 an RTÉ news bulletin reported that the Vatican had issued a statement that discrimination against homosexuals is sometimes justified when it comes to employment, housing and adoption. While the Vatican Press office insisted that the document was not an official instruction and had been intended as a resource for bishops in the US, many individuals from within and outside the gay community in Ireland condemned the document.¹⁴³⁶

In a letter printed in the *Evening Herald*, S. O'Reilly, of the National Gay and Lesbian Federation, argued that it was 'totally unacceptable for them to say that people should be sacked or refused employment on the basis of their sexual orientation.'¹⁴³⁷ Noting the support gay and

¹⁴³³ *Galway Advertiser*, 'Readers respond to inclusion of gays in St. Patrick's Day Parade', 25 March 1993. NLI, ILB 305 G 2, *Gay Community News*, Issue 49, March 1993.

¹⁴³⁴ *Galway Advertiser*, 'Readers respond to inclusion of gays in St. Patrick's Day Parade', 25 March 1993.

¹⁴³⁵ Nuala O'Faolain, 'New York could learn a lesson from St. Patrick's Day in Cork', *Irish Times*, 15 March 1993.

¹⁴³⁶ <https://www.rte.ie/archives/2017/0717/890883-vatican-statement-on-gays/>, RTÉ News, 'Catholic Church bias against homosexuals', 24 July 1992, accessed on 12 November 2017.

¹⁴³⁷ *Evening Herald*, 'Discrimination', 6 August 1992.

lesbian individuals enjoyed from the ICTU, EEA, and Council for the Status of Women, O'Reilly called on individuals to express their support for 'equal right for lesbians and gay men by writing to the Papal Nuncio in Ireland and the Vatican.'¹⁴³⁸ Both the Green Party and the Worker's Party similarly condemned the Vatican statement, with the Worker's Party describing the document as 'fascist in fashion and clearly designed to incite hatred and discrimination against a sizeable section of society.'¹⁴³⁹ Writing in the *Sunday Independent*, Patricia Redlich argued that the Catholic church had gone too far with this document, noting that while 'we may be hazy on how to handle homosexuality, we have no doubts about human rights. Sexual orientation should not be used to discriminate against any brother, sister, daughter, friend, or unhappy husband who married in order to hide.'¹⁴⁴⁰

Surprisingly, support for this view came from columnists and individuals outside the mainstream nationals and gay communities. For example, an article appeared in the provincial newspaper the *Kerryman*, in which Mick MacConnell reported on one Limerick priest's reaction to the Vatican document. Condemning the Vatican document, Fr. Flannery extended a hand of friendship to homosexuals who felt alienated from their church, leading MacConnell to remark that 'I must confess that I have never regarded Limerick City as a bastion of liberalism, so imagine my surprise at the weekend when the Rector of the Redemptorists there not only displayed such a streak and then even delivered an implied criticism of the Vatican.'¹⁴⁴¹ MacConnell himself said the document smacked of McCarthyism and maintained that 'to attack an entire section of the population and describe them as less responsible and less trustworthy than heterosexuals is a vile slur. One would imagine that Men of God would be capable of making rational judgements based on intellect rather than indulging in wild groundless and very damaging accusations.'¹⁴⁴² As had Mary Holland with the St. Patrick's Day parade, Kieran Rose too sought to situate the Vatican statement within the wider campaign for gay rights in Ireland. Writing in the *Irish Times*, Rose contemplated whether 'after the Fairview Park killing 10 years ago some individuals claimed that a service had been done and paraded in the park shouting we are the champions. If a similar case occurs, will the defence quote the Vatican and say that they were ridding the world of an 'objective moral disorder'?'¹⁴⁴³

¹⁴³⁸ *Evening Herald*, 'Discrimination', 6 August 1992.

¹⁴³⁹ *Irish Times*, 'Vatican report called incitement to hatred', 25 July 1992.

¹⁴⁴⁰ Patricia Redlich, 'Church's sad response to Gay Issue', *Sunday Independent*, 26 July 1992.

¹⁴⁴¹ Mick MacConnell, 'Straight talk about gays', *Kerryman*, 15 January 1993.

¹⁴⁴² Mick MacConnell, 'Straight talk about gays', *Kerryman*, 15 January 1993.

¹⁴⁴³ Kieran Rose, 'Defy church ruling on homosexuals', *Irish Times*, 17 August 1992. Rose further argued in this article that 'The contrast with recent events in Ireland is startling. *Fianna*

Both instances offered supporters of gay rights in Ireland the opportunity not only to confront their opponents but also to spread their message and to demonstrate the level of support for their campaign. This is what Rose had sought to achieve by juxtaposing the Vatican's document to the changes that had occurred in Ireland, the support these changes enjoyed and the support for future changes that were still needed. In both instances, proponents of law reform sought to isolate their opponents and to present them as out of step with the direction in which Irish society was moving with regard to the rights of minorities. Opponents of gay law reform, particularly the likes of Family Solidarity failed miserably to mobilise even a respectable level of public opposition, both inside and outside Dáil Éireann. GLEN on the other hand were extremely successful in mobilising strong public support.

***'Do I detect a new maturity on our part? Is there a desire to respect the other persons views and sexuality however much we might disagree with it?'*¹⁴⁴⁴**

November 1992 proved an important month in the campaign for gay law reform in Ireland for two reasons. Firstly on 11 November 1992, during a Council of Europe meeting, Ireland was given six months to comply with the 1988 ECHR judgement.¹⁴⁴⁵ GLEN had ensured pressure was kept on the Irish government through letters to the Director of the Human Rights Directorate of the Council of Europe in July and September 1992 informing them of the governments continued refusal to amend the laws.¹⁴⁴⁶ In their September 1992 letter GLEN proposed that the Council of Europe suspend Ireland from the Council should legislation not be introduced within three months.

Also, in November 1992, Fianna Fáil, then Ireland's largest party, suffered its worst electoral result since 1927, while the Labour Party, enjoyed its best result ever. Crucially for GLEN, the Labour Party manifesto, unlike Fianna Fáil's, had unequivocally stated its support

Fáil was widely praised for including the category 'sexual orientation' in the Prohibition of Incitement to Hatred Act. [...] Already, the Government's employment code for civil servants forbids discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation, and among others, the ICTU, EEA, and the entire Oireachtas Committee on Women's Rights have urged that the same protection be extended to all workers under the Unfair Dismissals and Equality Employment Acts. [...] In this concern for the legal protection of minorities, we are at last joining the best of Europe.'

¹⁴⁴⁴ Senator Ann Ormonde, *Seanad Éireann* Debate, Vol. 137, No. 3, 'Criminal Law (Sexual Offences) Bill, 1993, 29 June 1993.

¹⁴⁴⁵ Sean Flynn, 'Delay in altering gay law criticised', *Irish Times*, 11 November 1992.

¹⁴⁴⁶ NLI, IQA, MS 45, 979/ 7 – Kieran Rose to the Director, Human Rights Directorate, Council of Europe, 30 September 1992.

for the ‘implementation of the Norris judgement.’¹⁴⁴⁷ Following the election both Fianna Fáil and the Labour Party devised a programme for government, which included a commitment to bring Ireland’s law into conformity with the European Convention on Human Rights.¹⁴⁴⁸ The two Ministers who became central to GLEN’s campaign, were Maire Geoghegan-Quinn, the Minister for Justice, and Mary O’Rourke, the Minister for State at the department of Enterprise and Employment.

In an interview with Edmund Lynch, in 2015, Maire Geoghegan-Quinn remembered the discussions within her department on the issue of gay law reform, recalling that:

On the legislation, I was going down through it and almost at the bottom was the decriminalisation of homosexuality. And I kinda’ thought to myself like what on the list is the most difficult to do and by far that was going to be the most difficult, politically. And I said, at the table, when did David Norris take this case? And they said when and I said that’s x number of years ago and you know it’s coming up to a time when he probably will go back to the courts and I don’t think that Ireland should be shamed again for not doing the right thing. So, I said, I feel that we should push that up the list and bring it up to the top. And I think a few people around the table kind of said, not maybe directly, but kind of hinted that this could be a difficult political hot potato to handle.¹⁴⁴⁹

As we have seen, GLEN had sent Minister Quinn a letter in January 1993 congratulating her on her appointment and drawing attention to the recommendations of the Law Reform Commission, the support of the National Youth Council of Ireland, and highlighting the situation of homosexual legislation in other Catholic countries. According to Quinn, she also met with a delegation from GLEN during this period. In particular, Quinn singled out the role of Phil Moore, founding member of Parents Enquiry.¹⁴⁵⁰ Recalling in great detail an event from almost 22 years ago, Quinn remembered how Moore discussed her own son’s coming out experience and her acceptance of it, stating, ‘What am I going to say to him now? I don’t like what I am hearing, it goes against everything I believe in. But I love the man, and I’m going to continue to love and support him. [...] You tell me that he is a criminal.’¹⁴⁵¹ Quinn described

¹⁴⁴⁷ Irish Election Manifesto Archive, <http://michaelpidgeon.com/manifestos/docs/lab/Labour%20GE%201992.pdf> 1992 Labour Party Manifesto, accessed on 13 November 2017.

¹⁴⁴⁸ Irish Election Manifesto Archive, <http://michaelpidgeon.com/manifestos/docs/pfgs/PfG%201993%20-%201994%20-%20FF-Lab.pdf>, Fianna Fáil and Labour Programme for a Partnership Government, 1993-1997. Accessed on 13 November 2017.

¹⁴⁴⁹ Edmund Lynch interview with Maire Geoghegan-Quinn, *Edmund Lynch, Irish LGBT History Project*.

¹⁴⁵⁰ The NGF established Parents Enquiry in 1980 to provide support for parents who were coming to terms or struggling to accept their child’s sexual orientation. Phil Moore was centrally involved in Parents Enquiry from its establishment.

¹⁴⁵¹ Edmund Lynch interview Maire Geoghegan-Quinn, *Edmund Lynch, Irish LGBT History Project*.

this as the ‘most profound statement that had happened during that conversation and it really affected me. Afterwards, when I came back to the Department, I said we have to do something and that was the catalyst really, that caused the change.’¹⁴⁵²

While Quinn and the Department of Justice considered what type of law reform to introduce, Minister O’Rourke and the Department of Enterprise and Employment moved swiftly to amend the Unfair Dismissal’s Act; a commitment which had been agreed to in the Programme for Government following the recommendations of the Second Commission on the Status of Women.¹⁴⁵³ On 10 March 1993 Minister O’Rourke announced a series of amendments which included the inclusion of sexual orientation in the Unfair Dismissals Act. With this amendment it would no longer be legal to dismiss someone from their employment on the basis of sexual orientation. O’Rourke announced that the bill is ‘about people, about workers’ rights and the creation of a proper business environment [...] I hope the house will welcome it.’¹⁴⁵⁴

What is perhaps most interesting is the extent to which the inclusion of sexual orientation in the bill did not factor in the debates about the bill. Rather, the exclusion of the travelling community was the centre of this criticism.¹⁴⁵⁵ In terms of cultural attitudes with regard to sexual orientation or homosexuality, this suggested a markedly positive shift since, unlike the process of amending the 1861 and 1885 laws, the amendment of the Unfair Dismissal’s Act 1977 had not been a requirement of any judicial ruling, but rather the direct result of lobbying on the part of gay and lesbian activists and their allies.

The bill, which was passed on 24 June 1993 in Dáil Éireann and in Seanad Éireann on 7 July 1993 with cross-party support, has historically been overshadowed by the passage, later that year, of the Criminal Law Bill. In fact, during this period, it would appear that the inclusion of sexual orientation remained under the radar, incurring little public debate since the primary focus that year was on the decriminalisation of sexual activity between males. However, the behind the scenes efforts of the NGF, GLEN, the ICTU, EEA and the Council for the Status of Women, were crucial to the inclusion of sexual orientation in the Unfair Dismissal’s Act. In

¹⁴⁵² Edmund Lynch interview with Maire Geoghegan-Quinn, *Edmund Lynch, Irish LGBT History Project*.

¹⁴⁵³ Irish Election Manifesto Archive, <http://michaelpidgeon.com/manifestos/docs/pfGs/PfG%201993%20-%201994%20-%20FF-Lab.pdf> Fianna Fáil and Labour Programme for a Partnership Government, 1993-1997. Accessed on 30 January 2018.

¹⁴⁵⁴ Minister Mary O’Rourke, *Seanad Éireann* debate, Vol. 135, No. 6, ‘Unfair Dismissals (Amendment) Bill’, 1993, 10 March 1993.

¹⁴⁵⁵ Minister O’Rourke did eventually agree to include the travelling community in the bill, due to the level of criticism she received for not doing so.

many respects, it was a much more important law for the majority of homosexual citizens in Ireland, since it affected both male and female homosexuals in their employment.

While the inclusion of sexual orientation in the Unfair Dismissal's Act does not appear to have caused any political headache for Minister O'Rourke, Minister Quinn, on the other hand, was not as lucky. In the aforementioned interview, Quinn remembered how difficult an issue this was for her within Fianna Fáil, with some threatening to bring down the government over this issue because, according to Quinn, they believed this was not an issue on which Fianna Fáil should lead.¹⁴⁵⁶ In a draft memo of possible legislation, it was clear that Quinn was also fearful of alienating both opponents and proponents of law reform. According to the *Irish Times*, in April 1993, Quinn had produced a memorandum for the government which included the two options her department had devised to comply with the ECHR judgement.¹⁴⁵⁷ Option 1 would have introduced legislation similar to that introduced in England and Wales in 1967, while Option 2 would have repealed the 1861 and 1885 laws and introduced an equal age of consent for both heterosexual and homosexual sexual activity. In comments on both options, Quinn noted that Option 1 'might attract less opposition from people who are opposed to changing the law on homosexuality', while 'it would be strongly criticised by those pressing for change on the ground that it does not go far enough [...]'.¹⁴⁵⁸ Similarly, she maintained, Option 2 would find 'most favour with those groups which have been pressing for change', but 'would be strongly criticised by those opposed to change who would see it as marking society's approval of homosexuality as an acceptable or parallel lifestyle.'¹⁴⁵⁹ A major distinction, however, between Option 1 and Option 2, as pointed out by Quinn, was the fact that Option 2 conformed to 'the Law Reform Commission's recommendations.'¹⁴⁶⁰ This memorandum, as we have seen, led GLEN and its allies to mount a letter writing campaign to Quinn in an attempt to discredit Option 1.

Almost two months after this memorandum, on 23 June 1993, Minister Quinn announced the Criminal Law (Sexual Offences) Bill, 1993. Not only did this bill decriminalise sexual activity between males but, crucially for GLEN, it introduced an equal age of consent

¹⁴⁵⁶ Edmund Lynch interview with Maire Geoghegan-Quinn, *Edmund Lynch, Irish LGBT History Project*.

¹⁴⁵⁷ Geraldine Kennedy, 'Gay Law change is defined in Victorian moral terms', *Irish Times*, 23 April 1993.

¹⁴⁵⁸ NLI, IQA, MS 45, 977/8 – Draft Memorandum for the government: the decriminalisation of homosexual acts, April 1993.

¹⁴⁵⁹ NLI, IQA, MS 45, 977/8 – Draft Memorandum for the government: the decriminalisation of homosexual acts, April 1993.

¹⁴⁶⁰ NLI, IQA, MS 45, 977/8 – Draft Memorandum for the government: the decriminalisation of homosexual acts, April 1993.

for homosexual and heterosexual sexual activity. Option 2 had prevailed over Option 1. In introducing the bill, which passed without a vote being required, Quinn argued that ‘it is right that we should take the opportunity now of rolling back over 130 years of legislative prohibition which is discriminatory, which reflects an inadequate understanding of the human condition and which we should, rightly, see as an impediment, not a prop, to the maintenance and development of sound social values and norms.’¹⁴⁶¹ Quinn’s reasoning adopted the same argument GLEN had made for many years, affirming that:

there is nothing revolutionary in having a common age of consent. [...] If we could raise our sights beyond our nearest neighbour to the European mainland, we would realise that a common age of consent is the norm on the European mainland. For example, in France, the common age of consent is 15 years; in Italy 14 years [...] All those countries have a religious heritage similar to ours.¹⁴⁶²

These were views supported by the vast majority of TDs and Senators who spoke on the provisions of the bill which concerned homosexuality. Giving her thoughts on these provisions, for example, Mary Harney (Progressive Democrats) affirmed that they were about ‘freedom, tolerating difference and respecting the rights of other consenting adults – I think 17 is the appropriate age for young people to fulfil their sexual orientation and not be declared criminal in the process.’¹⁴⁶³ Echoing this sentiment, Mervyn Taylor sought to ease the mind of opponents, declaring that ‘it is important to recall that what is proposed is the enabling of persons in the gay community to pursue loving relationships. What could be more important, for us as legislators, than to create a climate and a space in which two people who have chosen each other can express and share their love?’¹⁴⁶⁴ Recognising the role of gay and lesbian activists, Deputy Joe Costello paid tribute to their ‘well-structured and carefully and calmly reasoned arguments they have made in recent years to promote education and awareness of the normalcy of homosexual orientation [...]’.¹⁴⁶⁵ In Seanad Éireann the provisions on homosexuality were equally praised. In a rather heartfelt and honest reaction to the bill, Senator

¹⁴⁶¹ Minister for Justice Maire Geoghegan-Quinn, *Dáil Éireann* debate, Vol. 432, No. 7, ‘Private Members’ Business, Criminal Law (Sexual Offences) Bill, 1993, 23 June 1993. - Geraldine Kennedy, ‘No vote as sexual offences bill passes all stage’, *Irish Times*, 25 June 1993.

¹⁴⁶² Minister for Justice Maire Geoghegan-Quinn, *Dáil Éireann* debate, Vol. 432, No. 7, ‘Private Members’ Business, Criminal Law (Sexual Offences) Bill, 1993, 23 June 1993.

¹⁴⁶³ Mary Harney, *Dáil Éireann* debate, Vol. 432, No. 7, ‘Private Members’ Business, Criminal Law (Sexual Offences) Bill, 1993, 23 June 1993.

¹⁴⁶⁴ Mervyn Taylor, *Dáil Éireann* debate, Vol. 432, No. 7, ‘Private Members’ Business, Criminal Law (Sexual Offences) Bill, 1993, 23 June 1993.

¹⁴⁶⁵ Joe Costello, *Dáil Éireann* debate, Vol. 432, No. 7, ‘Private Members’ Business, Criminal Law (Sexual Offences) Bill, 1993, 23 June 1993.

John Dardis described ‘the day as highly significant and historic, when we look back at today, we can say with some satisfaction that a good days’ work was done. [...] People have a right to happiness and homosexuals and lesbians have the same right to happiness as heterosexuals and they must not be discriminated against.’¹⁴⁶⁶ Senator Dick Roche similarly expressed his pride at the provisions of the bill dealing with homosexuality and the debates on it, remarking that this:

is a Bill which could have engendered the most base form of public debate and quite the opposite has been the case. The debate here has been meaningful, humanitarian and humane. It is interesting that in the past two weeks, when this country could have been sundered by very negative forces, excluding one contribution in the other House where there was what I would only regard as a homophobic comment made by an Independent Member of that house, the contributions have generally been positive and thoughtful. [...] I think it is right that we should examine ourselves occasionally and say what form of society we want. We are not heading towards a libertarian society because we are taking these steps. I believe we are taking a step to a more humane and understanding society, which has more in common with Christian and traditional Irish principles [...]¹⁴⁶⁷

Perhaps most insightful is the extent to which a last-minute campaign by Family Solidarity to rally support for a rejection of the legislation, ‘failed spectacularly’, and an eleventh-hour statement by the Irish Roman Catholic Church denouncing the proposed provisions of the bill had little impact on the passing of the bill¹⁴⁶⁸

‘I came to a country with more restrictions on my sexuality than my own, only to see such a change as to leave my own country standing. Ireland should be proud of itself. I’m very proud of it.’¹⁴⁶⁹

Quinn has deservedly received considerable praise for her tenacity in withstanding pressures and for introducing a progressive piece of legislation concerning law reform. In October 1993 Niall Moloney, writing in *GCN*, reported on the presentation of a Royal Tara China piece to Minister Quinn at her constituency office in Galway in appreciation of her efforts. The funds to purchase the gift had been raised during the previous gay pride celebrations by the ‘Buy Marie a Present’ team.¹⁴⁷⁰ In a happy coincidence for those involved in the campaign for gay

¹⁴⁶⁶ Senator John Dardis, *Seanad Éireann* debate, Vol. 137, No. 3, ‘Criminal Law (Sexual Offences) Bill, 1993, 29 June 1993.

¹⁴⁶⁷ Senator Dick Roche, *Seanad Éireann* debate, Vol. 137, No. 3, ‘Criminal Law (Sexual Offences) Bill, 1993, 29 June 1993.

¹⁴⁶⁸ Denis Coghlan, ‘Government bites bullet on gays issue’, *Irish Times*, 23 June 1993. - *Irish Times*, ‘Bishops statement on homosexuality’, 23 June 1993.

¹⁴⁶⁹ NLI, ILB 305 G2, *Gay Community News*, ‘Proud of You and Me’, Issue 54, August 1993.

¹⁴⁷⁰ NLI, ILB 305 G2, *Gay Community News*, ‘Thank you Maire’, Issue 56, October 1993.

legal reform, the 1993 Dublin gay pride weekend coincided with the passage of the Criminal Law Bill. Speaking to the almost 500 individuals who marched, Kieran Rose declared that:

this is a great achievement for Irish society and its lesbian and gay community. Today we can be here, proud to be Irish citizens and proud to be lesbians and gays. We really believe that Irish people are progressive, that Irish people do support the lesbian and gay community, do support human rights and equality and have no time at all for bigotry. I think we also have to say that this law reform that we have got was not inevitable. It could have been delayed, we could have got the British reform. I think we've got equality because of the Irish tradition of struggling for civil, political and religious freedom. Everyone here did it. Everyone here helped. Everyone one who came out to their parents, everybody who said I'm not going to put up with discrimination.¹⁴⁷¹

Rose's comment fairly reflected the claims of the campaign for gay and lesbian rights in Ireland. There had been nothing inevitable about the introduction of a progressive law reform bill to comply with the ECHR decision, nor in the amendment of the Unfair Dismissal's Act. In reality, the particular character of these achievements constituted the work of the many gay and lesbian individuals and their allies who had soldiered since 1974 to bring about this change. This activism had taken many forms, from those who openly challenged the stigma of homosexuality, to those who appeared in the media, wrote letters and articles, to those who marched, to those who had involved themselves behind the scenes, by providing social spaces for homosexuals, or by those who decided to cross the threshold to enter a gay centre at much personal risk. The successes of 1993 did not result from fortune or luck, but from considerable planning, sacrifice, determination, bravery, debate, and the implementation of considered strategies. At times strategies had to be changed to adapt to the many different obstacles activists encountered. At the heart of their campaign, however, activists had framed their demands in terms of basic human rights, something to which Irish society could relate to. In promoting this agenda, they had succeeded in mobilising people from different backgrounds and different organisations. These efforts were paramount to the introduction of progressive legislation, as with the inclusion of sexual orientation in the Unfair Dismissal's Act. More crucially, these efforts had changed public attitudes. This is not to say that gay and lesbian citizens had achieved a full place in Irish society in 1993. Rather, Irish society began to acknowledge the many restrictions placed on the citizenship rights of gay/lesbian individuals as unjust. A strong foundation had been put in place for the achievement of a full place in Irish society for gay and lesbian individuals in later years.

¹⁴⁷¹ Edward O'Loughlin, 'Carnival atmosphere pervades Gay Pride celebrations', *Irish Times* 28 June 1993.

While institutional change is highly significant, alone it cannot change cultural attitudes. By 1993 the efforts of gay and lesbian activists had produced a marked shift in cultural attitudes and, in turn, made the introduction of the laws much easier for politicians. This was clearly evident when Minister Quinn introduced the bill and the numerous TDs from the different political parties supported it. At no point did Minister Quinn seek to hide behind the ECHR and lay the blame for the law at the court's feet. She could have done so for reasons of political expediency. Instead, Quinn sought to downplay the role of the ECHR, insisting that reform was endorsed by the government. No opposition party sought to profit from an allegedly unpopular issue by condemning the bill or by calling for a derogation. Like Quinn, the vast majority appeared to welcome the bill and saw its introduction as a positive step for Ireland.

In 'Nothing Ventured, nothing gained? Conceptualising Social Movement 'success' in the lesbian and gay movement', Mary Bernstein argued that 'shifts in discourse represent important cultural effects of social movements.'¹⁴⁷² Both in the debates on the Criminal Law Bill and Unfair Dismissals Act, and in the media, it is quite evident that by the late 1980s, early 1990s, a considerable rhetorical shift had taken place concerning the subject of homosexuality. In this chapter we have seen how individuals from outside the gay and lesbian community adopted the rhetoric of the gay movement, in particular, the adoption of the word 'gay', rather than 'homosexual', the wider usage of 'lesbian', the mainstreaming of the use of the term 'sexual orientation', the greater understanding of homophobia, the recognition of gay rights as human rights, the recognition that homosexuals have the same right as heterosexuals to engage in consensual sexual activity, and the recognition of the existence of an Irish gay community. Crucially, as was evident during the 1992 and 1993 St. Patrick's Day parades in Cork, Galway and Dublin, it seemed that being gay and being Irish were no longer mutually exclusive identifications. Whereas throughout the early 1980s the Irish media, for example, had written gay with inverted commas, by the early 1990s this practise had ended. While this may be a mundane point it, nevertheless, reflects a marked change in perception and an important one. Family Solidarity had cautioned against the acceptance of linguistic changes which, they believed, helped further the 'gay ideology.' By 1993 Family Solidarity certainly had much to fear in this regard. In the same vein, it is worth repeating how small the organised opposition was to the liberalisation of the laws. Whereas well-organised campaigns had developed to oppose the 1986 divorce referendum and the 1992 referendum on abortion, in contrast, the opposition to decriminalisation was almost non-existent. Moreover, if one contrasts this to the

¹⁴⁷² Mary Bernstein, 'Nothing Ventured, nothing gained? Conceptualising Social Movement 'Success' in the Lesbian and Gay Movement', in *Sociological Perspectives*, Vol. 46, No. 3, (Autumn 2003), 353-379.

‘Save Ulster from Sodomy’ campaign in Northern Ireland in the late 1970s, then one can really appreciate the complete lack of an organised opposition to law reform in the Republic.

More evidence of a cultural shift was also evident by this time. For example, during the course of the 1990 Irish presidential election a relatively unknown group, *Clann na Bfinini* (The Family Group), had sought to use the issue of supporting homosexuals to undermine Mary Robinson’s campaign. In a leaflet circulated to Irish households, *Clann na Bfinini* stated that Mary Robinson wanted to give homosexuals marital status and for them to be on par with the natural family.¹⁴⁷³ This was something they clearly believed would be off-putting to Irish voters, but evidently was not. Robinson’s support for gay law reform had previously been raised in an interview with *Hot Press* magazine during the course of the election. In that interview, Robinson revealed that she would take part in the opening of a contraceptive stall in the Virgin megastore and felt strongly that sexual activity between males should be decriminalised.¹⁴⁷⁴ What is most interesting about this interview is the extent to which the controversy which greeted these comments centred not on her support for decriminalisation, but rather on her willingness to officiate at the opening of a contraceptive stall at a Virgin Store. On 5 October 1990 the *Irish Times* carried an article in which Robinson sought to clarify her remarks on the contraceptive stall, insisting that the President of Ireland should never be involved in an illegal action and that her response had been misinterpreted.¹⁴⁷⁵ No clarification, however, was needed for her support on gay legal reform, nor was it deemed controversial according to the *Irish Times*, nor more crucially did it hinder Robinson winning the Presidential election.

In her opinion piece in the *Irish Times*, reacting to the Dublin gay pride celebrations and passage of the Criminal Law Bill, Mary Holland also observed a cultural shift, remarking that:

having been in the US for St. Patrick’s Day this year and watching as people spat and threw empty beer cans at the young leaders of the Irish Lesbian and Gay Organisations in New York, I was quite fearful that an ugly incident or some abusive jeers would ruin the atmosphere of last Saturday’s march. Instead, middle aged women, laden with shopping bags smiled indulgently and caught pink carnations.¹⁴⁷⁶

This was a view confirmed by her colleague Edward O’Loughlin who wrote that:

some people believe in opinion polls, but experienced march-watchers can read a lot from what happens when a procession draws up at the crucible of Irish politics, the busy

¹⁴⁷³ Geraldine Kennedy, ‘Campaign of shame’, *Irish Times*, 3 November 1990.

¹⁴⁷⁴ NLI, ILB, 780, *Hot Press*, Vol 14 No. 2, 18 October 1990.

¹⁴⁷⁵ *Irish Times*, 5 October 1990, ‘Robinson clarifies interview remark.’

¹⁴⁷⁶ Mary Holland, ‘They’re here, they’re queer, and now they’re legal’, *Irish Times*, 1 July 1993.

crossing where North Earl street and Henry street join O'Connell Street. On this occasion, the loiterers seated around the Floozie in the Jacuzzi eyed the boisterous procession for a moment and then gave a round of ragged but unprecedented applause.¹⁴⁷⁷

Outside of Dublin change of a kind was also evident. One month after the Dublin gay pride parade almost 70 people marched in Galway's gay pride parade.¹⁴⁷⁸ This was the largest group ever to march in gay pride parade in Galway and was no doubt helped by the *Galway Advertiser's* willingness to promote it and advertise it.¹⁴⁷⁹ Earlier that year, PLUTO had received official recognition from the UCG college authorities.¹⁴⁸⁰ In another incident an individual, who wrote to the *Galway Advertiser* on the topic of homosexuality, was treated to a tolerant response by the agony aunt columnist who insisted that 'being homosexual is just a different way of loving and being different isn't wrong, it's just different.'¹⁴⁸¹ In comparison with previous agony aunt columnists' responses to the issue of homosexuality discussed in this thesis, this represented a changed view of homosexuality. In Limerick, the parish of Dooradoyle, during an Easter vigil heard from Joan, a lesbian, who told her story of growing up lesbian in Ireland.¹⁴⁸²

One incident which suggests the degree to which positive change had occurred, and which stood out during the course of researching this topic, was a letter I found in the personal archives of David Norris. In this letter, written in October 1989, Norris responded to a student from Sligo Grammar School who had written to him about an assignment she had been given. The assignment concerned the subject of homosexuality and gay rights for the school's magazine. Recognising just how significant this student's letter and assignment was, Norris responded by saying that he was not at all offended by her request, noting that 'such a subject would have been quite taboo in my own days in school, but that of course was twenty-five years ago and things I am glad to say have changed since then.'¹⁴⁸³ The fact that homosexuality and gay rights was not only topical within a secondary school, but actually the subject of an assignment marked, as Norris noted, a considerable shift from his own time in school. The vast majority of Irish schools may have been under the patronage of the Catholic Church, yet in

¹⁴⁷⁷ Edward O'Loughlin, 'Carnival atmosphere pervades Gay Pride celebrations', *Irish Times* 28 June 1993.

¹⁴⁷⁸ NLI, ILB 305 G2, *Gay Community News*, 'We Were Proud!', Issue 54, August 1993.

¹⁴⁷⁹ *Galway City Tribune*, 'Celebration march for Galway gays', 2 July 1993.

¹⁴⁸⁰ NLI, ILB 305 G 2, *Gay Community News*, 'News from PLUTO', Issue 52, June 1993.

¹⁴⁸¹ *Galway Advertiser*, 29 April 1993.

¹⁴⁸² NLI, ILB 305 G 2, *Gay Community News*, 'Church Welcomes Limerick Gays', Issue 52, June 1993.

¹⁴⁸³ NLI, Personal Papers of David Norris, ACC 10, 345, Box 111, letter of 27 October 1989.

Sligo a young student carried out research on homosexuality and gay rights for her school magazine. It was no longer a taboo subject, neither in Dublin nor in the many other corners of Irish society.

Epilogue

Writing after the passage of the Criminal Law Bill, David Norris explained why he believed he had acquired such a high profile during the campaign:

Because of my personal circumstance, I had an unusual freedom of manoeuvre. I was employed by the University of Dublin, a liberal environment; and both my parents were dead, so that neither family nor employer could bring undue pressure to bear. For this reason I was able, as many others were not, to speak out publicly early on. As a result I have received a disproportionate amount of praise for the tenacity with which we have fought for our rights, but I should like to place on record my gratitude to the very many courageous people in the various organisations, such as the Irish Gay Rights Movement, National Lesbian and Gay Federation, Campaign for Homosexual Law Reform and the Gay and Lesbian Equality Network who selflessly and for the most part anonymously, dedicated themselves to the task of social reform.¹⁴⁸⁴

To understand the changes of 1993, and subsequently in 2015, one must recognise the degree to which gay rights in Ireland were not fought for and achieved by one gay man, not fought simply through the courts, and not fought only in Dublin. The fight for gay and lesbian rights was much more complicated than a simple victory at the European Court of Human Rights. It resulted from the collective endeavour of many, many individuals both inside and outside Dublin and inside and outside of Ireland. It was a collective of gay and lesbian individuals who formed social movements and social connections throughout Ireland and fought for their human rights. In the space of just twenty years they had achieved considerable successes. These efforts, particularly their efforts to engage with the wider Irish society, have paved the way for the subsequent changes that have taken place in Ireland. In the last three years Ireland's international reputation as a socially conservative country has been shattered with the passage of the same-sex marriage referendum in 2015 and the 2018 referendum which repealed the 8th Amendment, which was inserted into the Irish constitution in 1983 and placed a constitutional ban on abortion.¹⁴⁸⁵ These two moments have for many heralded the dawn of a new Ireland in the twenty-first century. These changes, however, are rooted in the grassroots activism which begun in the twentieth century. To understand these so-called dramatic changes, this PhD offers only one explanation, but perhaps crucially a guide as to how one might further contextualise

¹⁴⁸⁴ David Norris, 'Decriminalising homosexual act an historic event', *Irish Times*, 25 June 1993.

¹⁴⁸⁵ <http://www.thejournal.ie/yes-ireland-votes-to-repeal-eighth-amendment-4034416-May2018/> Christine Bohan, 'It's Yes: Ireland has voted to repeal the Eighth Amendment', 26 May 2018.

the new Ireland of the twenty-first century. Scholars must adopt a bottom up, rather than top down approach to the history of twentieth century Ireland, for to do otherwise will result in a very narrow and distorted account of a changing Ireland. Only by recognising the considerable efforts of often marginalised groups in society to change Irish society can we develop a broader understanding of twenty-first century Ireland. Speaking after the passage of the 2015 referendum on marriage equality, Archbishop of Dublin, Diarmaid Martin described it as a social revolution. As this PhD has demonstrated, Irish gay and lesbian individuals were central to this revolution, and to many others in Irish society.¹⁴⁸⁶ Their contribution, however, to the wider history of modern Ireland has yet to be acknowledged. *Homosexuals are Revolting: A History of Gay and Lesbian Activism in the Republic of Ireland*, is but one attempt to do so.

¹⁴⁸⁶ <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/may/23/gay-marriage-ireland-yes-vote>, Henry McDonald, 'Ireland becomes first country to legalise gay marriage by popular vote', *The Guardian*, 23 May 2015. Accessed on 25 May 2015.

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