

# ‘Homosexuals Are Revolting’ – Gay & Lesbian Activism in the Republic of Ireland 1970s – 1990s

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## *Abstract:*

The current historiography on the early gay and lesbian liberation movement in Ireland 1970s-1990s has resulted in a narrative which has focused solely on the battle to decriminalise sexual activity between males. In turn, this has presented a picture of a movement comprised of one individual, David Norris, and one goal, decriminalisation. This narrative is predominantly an urban one, which excludes the activities of provincial activists, and most notably lesbian women. In this paper, I move away from viewing David Norris’ legal battle as the only form of resistance to Ireland’s sexual mores. Instead, I explore the other, often forgotten, forms of resistance carried out by Ireland’s gay and lesbian citizens; such as their attempts to create public spaces for gay and lesbian individuals; the appearance of homosexuals in the media to try dispel the negative stereotypes of homosexuality, and finally, their organisation of public demonstrations to declare pride in their identity and demand their place in Irish society. By doing so, these actions facilitated a public dialogue around homosexuality, which ultimately helped change the negative assumptions surrounding homosexuality and renegotiated Ireland’s sexual mores.

*Keywords:* Irish Gay & Lesbian Movement, Liberation, Sexual Mores, Stereotypes, Resistance

## *1. Introduction*

On May 22, 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) (Hand 2015), overwhelming endorsed the following amendment to Bunreacht na hÉireann (Irish Constitution): “Mar-

riage may be contracted in accordance with law by two persons without distinction as to their sex”<sup>1</sup>. Internationally, Ireland received widespread praise and admiration as a beacon for LGBT civil rights, with United Nations secretary-general Ban Ki-moon remarking: “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”<sup>2</sup>. 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 society such as Ireland, which, since the foundation of the state up to decriminalisation in 1993 had viewed sexual acts between males as criminal activity and homosexuals as sick and perverted, how is it that Ireland has now become a beacon for the LGBT community throughout the world? Moreover, how was it possible for the leaders of the main political parties, most notably Prime Minister Enda Kenny of Fine Gael, often seen as socially conservative, to express support for marriage equality without suffering any political fallout or significant controversy? In the aftermath of Ireland’s historic decision to legalise same sex marriage, commentators sought to explain this dramatic transformation in a country once renowned for its so-called strict adherence to Catholic social teaching. In an article in the *Irish Independent*, titled, “Our Republic of Equals Has sent a Message of Hope to the Entire World”, former Labour party leader, Eamon Gilmore, argued that Ireland’s positive endorsement for marriage equality owed much to the efforts of the Women’s Movement. Gilmore stated:

The modernisation of Ireland, 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. (Gilmore 2015)

Others argued that the transformation was the direct result of an individual effort on the part of Senator David Norris. In Seanad Éireann (Upper House of the Irish Parliament), Senators congratulated David Norris on getting “the ball rolling many decades ago when it was neither popular nor profitable” (Lord 2015) Fianna Fáil’s Denis O’Donovan, who entered Seanad Éireann in 1989, argued: “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” (*ibidem*). Similarly, Senator Eamonn Coghlan

<sup>1</sup> “Wording of same-sex marriage referendum published”, *Raidió Teilifís Éireann* (RTÉ), 21 January 2015, <<http://www.rte.ie/news/2015/0121/674602-marriage-equality/>> (05/2017).

<sup>2</sup> “Ban Ki-moon praises Ireland on marriage equality vote”, *Irish Examiner*, 24 May 2015 <<http://www.irishexaminer.com/breakingnews/ireland/ban-ki-moon-praises-ireland-on-marriage-equality-vote-678570.html>> (05/2017).

remarked: “I take this 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” (*ibidem*). Prior to the referendum other politicians such as former prime minister Albert Reynolds and former justice minister Maire Geoghegan-Quinn had also been credited with helping this transformation. 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” (Brophy 2014). Although Reynolds was indeed prime minister when sexual activity between males was decriminalised, he had never been an outspoken proponent of decriminalization<sup>3</sup>. 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”<sup>4</sup>. While Maire Geoghegan-Quinn was justifiably lauded for introducing the Sexual Offences Bill in 1993, for many years Geoghegan-Quinn, along with Fianna Fail, Fine Gael and the Labour Party had studiously avoided introducing legislation to outlaw discrimination based on sexual orientation or to decriminalise male homosexuality.

An examination of the most notable grand histories of twentieth century Ireland reveal little, if anything, on the existence of nationwide gay and lesbian organisations in Ireland (Brown 2004, Keogh 1994, Ferriter 2004, Foster 2007). Other accounts, such as Chrystel Hug’s, *The Politics of Sexual Morality in Ireland*, focused solely on the legal treatment of homosexuality, excluding completely any account of the role of lesbian women in Irish society, not to mention a nationwide gay and lesbian movement. Hug concludes her analysis, for example, by mentioning the existence of a movement, while focusing completely on David Norris’s role:

[He 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 legalisation 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. (Hug 1999, 228)

Diarmaid Ferriter’s, *Occasions of Sin*, briefly explored the impact of AIDS and the split within the Irish Gay and Lesbian Movement, it specifically focused on the legal campaign and produces much the same kind of narrative as that of Hug. Moreover, Ferriter’s is very much an urban account restricted to Dublin, and it says very little about the early lesbian movement in Ireland.

<sup>3</sup> “Legislation on Homosexuality”, *Dáil Eireann Debate* 420, 6, 3 June 1992.

<sup>4</sup> “Five people who changed gay Ireland”, *Independent*, 1 May 2004, <<http://www.independent.ie/opinion/analysis/five-people-who-changed-gay-ireland-25912487.html>> (05/2017).

The current narrative has reduced a broad Irish Gay and Lesbian liberation movement to the actions of a single individual (David Norris) and to the single campaign for decriminalization. The overwhelming focus on the role of David Norris completely ignores the creation of a gay/lesbian identity in Ireland during the 1970s/1980s, and a movement which could not suddenly have appeared in 1993. By focusing on the role of a few pioneering politicians, historians exclude all those gay and lesbian individuals who were active agents in their own liberation. By focusing on the campaign for decriminalisation historians presume that legal reform was the sole concern of homosexuals, both male and female in Ireland. Furthermore, if lesbian acts were never criminalised, are we to believe that lesbianism constituted an accepted sexuality in Ireland during this period? One might be forgiven for thinking that the decriminalisation alone led to the emergence and acceptance of Irish homosexuals in Irish society. Societal attitudes in Ireland apparently could be changed almost overnight with the introduction of sympathetic legislation. A gradual process of education and discourse outside of the courts and parliament, it would seem, was not necessary in Ireland to change attitudes, to the extent with which it was in most other countries.

The reality of course, is not so straightforward. While there can be no doubt that David Norris's victory at the European Court of Human Rights in 1988 was a watershed moment in the history of legal rights, it would be misleading to view the legal campaign as the only form of political resistance carried out by lesbian and gay individuals against their oppression in the 1970s and 1980s. I argue that this resistance involved women as well as men throughout Irish society who took up issues beyond narrowly legal ones, and that it was not restricted to urban Dublin. In the rest of this paper I argue that the untold stories of gay and lesbian activists throughout Irish society in the 1970s and 1980s were largely responsible for the sea change in public attitudes that characterizes the last decade of Irish history. The multiple forms of resistance and activism of gay and lesbian activists during the 1970s and 1980s contributed far more to the dramatic changes that have taken place in the last 40 years in Irish society than did the legal campaign against legal discrimination. The resistance I will discuss in this paper was highly diverse, it fought to create lesbian and gay spaces throughout Ireland, it promoted a greater understanding and tolerance of lesbian and gay individuals through the media and attempted to claim a full place in Irish society through public demonstrations.

Irish gay and lesbian activists in the latter half of the twentieth century began a dialogue around homosexuality, which ultimately helped to win over a vast proportion of Irish society and renegotiated Ireland's sexual mores. Its success was so notable, that by 1993, the then government could introduce legislation, not only to comply with the judgment of the European Court of Human Rights, but also, other legislation sympathetic to homosexuals, without much opposition, both inside and outside Leinster House.

## 2. *Everyday Resistance*

From infancy, we are taught and conditioned to believe that any expression of sexuality which does not conform to the rigid, procrustean heterosexual norm is perversion. We are, in fact programmed to regard all feelings of sexual or sensual attraction for a person of our own sex as a sign of moral degeneracy and decadence.<sup>5</sup>

In her analysis of queer life in San Francisco, Nan Alamilla Boyd argued: “the politics of everyday life became an important venue for resisting dominant social structures” (Boyd 2003, 71). Much like their gay and lesbian counterparts in San Francisco, Irish lesbian and gay individuals in the 1970s/1980s resisted society’s condemnation of their sexual orientation by choosing to live out, as openly as possible, a gay or lesbian lifestyle. Their refusal to follow the accepted social mores was crucial in the creation of a gay and lesbian identity in Ireland at a time when such behaviour was not welcomed. While, gay and lesbian individuals had lived out a gay/lesbian lifestyle prior to the 1970s; the 1970s heralded active attempts to foster a new sense of community amongst these gay and lesbian individuals, by creating venues openly advertised as gay/lesbian venues, and by taking part in events organised by gay/lesbian groups. Significantly, these efforts took place, not only in the larger cities of Dublin and Cork, but also in provincial areas such as Galway, Clonmel, Limerick, Kilkenny, Sligo and many more.

Following the founding of the first gay rights organisation in Ireland, the Irish Gay Rights Movement (IGRM) in 1974, groups inside and outside of Dublin quickly began to emerge, such as, Cork Irish Gay Rights Movement in 1976, Liberation for Irish Lesbians (LIL) in 1978, the National Gay Federation (NGF) in 1979, the Cork Gay Collective (CGC) Cork Lesbian Collective in 1980/1983, Dublin Gay Collective and the Galway Irish Gay Rights Movement and Galway Gay Collective also in 1980. In comparison with other countries, the number of gay and lesbian groups in Ireland was quite remarkable, particularly for such a small country. While these groups were not homogenous in their aims and the activism in these regions was different in scale, the groups, nevertheless, shared at least one common goal; the creation of gay & lesbian spaces for Irish homosexuals to socialise in, without judgment, ridicule or persecution. Together these spaces helped to foster a sense of a gay and lesbian community, at a time when their very identity was neither recognised nor tolerated.

The IGRM was responsible for the establishment of the first publicly recognised and run gay and lesbian centre in the Republic of Ireland, the Phoenix Club, at 46 Parnell Square, Dublin 1. In Cork, Cork IGRM and the Cork

<sup>5</sup> National Library of Ireland (NLI), Irish Queer Archive (IQA), MS 45,966/5, “Fairview Park”, *NGF News*, c. 1983.

Gay Collective also succeeded in acquiring premises shortly afterwards, known as the Phoenix Club on MacCurtain Street and Quay Co-Op on O'Sullivan's Quay, respectively (Egan 2014b). While, in 1979, the NGF established the Hirschfeld Centre on Fownes Street, which became the focal point of gay social life in Dublin for much of the 1980s<sup>6</sup>. What is perhaps most striking about both venues in Cork and Dublin was their acceptance by and amicable relationship with An Garda Síochána. Cathal Kerrigan, who was involved with the Cork IGRM and Cork Gay Collective, remembered how those involved in the Cork IGRM invited the local police to visit the centre to reinforce that "there were no drugs or fornication on the premises"<sup>7</sup>.

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away the burdens of a 9 a.m. and  
sleazy ending a cosy night's  
a bicycle. Yet those who compose on the  
"cycling crowd" must ride for at least 40  
miles per day to simply perform at a res-  
pectable level.

Aidan Looney, a cycle shop-owner in  
Cork, is one such competitor. He agrees  
there are other sacrifices a committed  
competitor must make: a rigid daily routine,  
proper rest and a balanced diet all pay  
dividends when stamina is put to the test.  
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Festival".  
The climax  
came with the twenty-second anniversary  
in 1974, when the four commissioned  
composers, Sir William Walton (UK),  
Igor Stravinsky (USSR), Karel  
Ančerl (Czech Republic), and Brian Boydell (Ireland)  
were given honorary doctorates of music  
by the National University of Ireland,  
and the conferring ceremony at UCC was  
attended over by Eamon de Valera as  
Quoniam, with the four composers  
quoted by the four Presidents of the  
university colleges: a historic occasion  
almost entirely ignored by the Dublin  
press.

The Festival has encountered some  
trouble as well as some stirring scenes.  
When the Earl of Rosse was invited to  
perform the opening ceremony in 1964,  
the Earl had been invited because of his  
connection with the British Royal Family.  
He could have been invited because of his  
title. When a Member of the House of  
Peers is invited to accept the honours of  
the Arts Council to which a number of  
for support, and when the Earl was  
he was an accomplished pianist and had  
impressed everyone by his opening of a  
previous year. However, in the  
public meetings were held to establish  
the Total Council was dissolved, and  
threats of disruption by the Earl were  
taken so seriously by the Chair that we  
were advised to do. When the day came the  
city was like an armed camp. The Earl  
recruited on his journey by a fleet of  
Garda cars in case of a hostile recep-  
tional team. Placed between the Earl and  
his torch-bearers, a group of  
blocked access to the City Hall. However,

**STIRRING SCENE**

Alfred and Zoltan Kodaly each wrote a  
choral work for us. In Kodaly's case the  
Ole Mair was written as "A Greeting  
to the Cork Choral Festival". The climax  
came with the twenty-second anniversary  
in 1974, when the four commissioned  
composers, Sir William Walton (UK),  
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1 – Advertisements for Irish Gay Rights Movement (*The Cork Review*, April-May 1981)

<sup>6</sup> Anthony Redmond on the foundation of the National Gay Federation and the opening of the Hirschfeld Centre (see Redmond 1979).

<sup>7</sup> Cathal Kerrigan interview with author, 14 January 2016.

Rather than attempting to disguise the true nature of these premises, those involved actively sought to promote and advertise them as locations specifically geared towards or welcoming of homosexuals. The Hirschfeld Centre, not alone being named after a Magnus Hirschfeld, a pioneering gay rights activist in Germany, even placed a pink triangle outside its entrance, while the Quay Co-Op hung a banner outside the centre supporting lesbian and gay pride week in 1984 in Cork City. Moreover, while many publications, primarily the mainstream national newspapers refused to accept advertisements for these organisations and premises, gay and lesbian activists did succeed in placing advertisements in more liberal local publications, such as *The Cork Review*, *Hot Press*, *In Dublin*, and even regional publications such as the *Mayo News*, and the *Galway Advertiser* (see Figure 1). The advertisements, particularly those in the *Cork Review*, *In Dublin* and *Hot Press*, publicly stated the title of the organisations, their location, contact details and activities. In other words, anyone reading these journals was made aware of the existence of venues for gay and lesbian individuals in Ireland. Throughout the early 1980s, advertisements for both Phoenix Club's and the Hirschfeld Centre were a common feature of the aforementioned publications, so much so, that in October 1983, *In Dublin*, introduced a "Gay" section in their events guide, listing the different gay venues and activities taking place in Dublin<sup>8</sup>.

These centres presented Irish homosexuals with the opportunity to freely express their sexuality in a non-judgmental environment, and this they did in great numbers. In the Phoenix Club in Dublin and Cork, and the Hirschfeld Centre in Dublin, activities ranged from, discos, theatre groups, hiking groups, poetry reading, a telephone befriending and counselling service, known as Tel-A-Friend and a cinema in the Hirschfeld Centre. Discos, in particular, proved the most popular activity organised by gay groups in Ireland and were a clear sign of the willingness, intended or otherwise, of many Irish homosexuals to challenge Ireland's sexual mores. When the Phoenix Club first opened in 1976, the venue was equipped to hold 150 people, but according to a *Gay News* article over 180 people attended each Friday and Saturday night<sup>9</sup>. By the early 1980s, even in the face of a conservative backlash in Ireland, the Hirschfeld Centre was catering to close to 1,000 individuals, 4 nights a week. In one week alone in March 1981, 1,381 individuals from all over Ireland and abroad attended the discos at the Hirschfeld Centre<sup>10</sup>. One such individual who attended the Hirschfeld Centre, Gerard Lawlor, fondly remembered the Hirschfeld Centre in a 2013 interview, stating:

<sup>8</sup> NLI, Irish Section (IR), 94133 I 2, *In Dublin*, 6-20 October 1983.

<sup>9</sup> Public Record Office of Northern Ireland (PRONI), Northern Ireland Gay Rights Association (NIGRA), D3762/1/10/1, "Dublin Toast", *Gay News*, c. 1976, Belfast.

<sup>10</sup> NLI, IQA, MS 45,946/1, "NGF 1981 Weekly Disco Attendances".

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.<sup>11</sup>

South of Dublin, in Cork, the Quay Co-Op founded in 1982 facilitated the emergence of the Cork Lesbian Collective in 1983. Perhaps one of the most exciting events organised by activists involved in the lesbian movement in Cork was the ‘Cork Women’s Fun Weekend’ beginning in April 1984, which still takes place today. While this was essentially a mixed event, comprising lesbian and heterosexual women, there was an overwhelmingly strong lesbian influence and participation. According to Deirdre Walsh, a lesbian activist who helped organise the weekend, “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”<sup>12</sup>. The first Cork Women’s Weekend took place in the Quay Co-Op from 13 to 15 April 1984 (Egan 2014a). Organisers arranged for a disco, cabaret performance, women’s films, discussions, workshops and card games. Remembering her time at the Women’s Weekend, Louise Walsh fondly stated:

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 ... (1995, 172)

Another individual who attended the weekend in 1985, was Mary Flanagan, a lesbian who travelled from Galway. She remembers the Fun Weekend as an empowering and uplifting 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

<sup>11</sup> Gerard Lawlor, *Irish LGBT History Project 2014*, dir. by Edmund Lynch, 23 February 2013.

<sup>12</sup> Deirdre Walsh (1988), *Women’s Space Newsletter 2*, May-June, <<http://corklgbtarchive.com/items/show/60>> (05/2017).



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 ...<sup>13</sup>

The Cork Women's Fun Weekend, was an event where lesbian women were, firstly able to meet others like them, but secondly 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, for even a weekend, to claim a public space to express their sexuality. Rather than remaining "invisible" and "isolated" these events facilitated the creation of a lesbian identity in Cork and Ireland. Orla Egan, who attended these events writes that: "It 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" (Egan 2014a). As Mary Flanagan highlighted, the Cork Women's Weekend was an exhilarating and empowering weekend for those coming to terms with their sexuality. It offered hope that being lesbian in Ireland, but specifically for provincial lesbian women, did not have to be hidden or seen as intolerable. 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.

Even in areas without a gay centre, such as Galway and Tipperary, activists in the Galway Gay Collective and Galway IGRM succeeded in arranging venues to host social events for gay and lesbian individuals and played their own part in the shaping of a gay and lesbian identity in their respective regions and resisting heteronormativity. The events in these regions took on a very different character to those in Dublin and Cork, reflecting the much more challenging terrain activists in these regions had to contend with. In order to facilitate these events, symbols and code words were crucially important in resisting societies condemnation and in enabling individuals to participate. For example, in arranging an outing to Connemara in 1983, which involved meeting at Lyons Tower, in Eyre Square, Marese Walsh and John Porter of the Galway Gay Collective, informed those wishing to take part, that they would be recognised by a flower in their lapels<sup>14</sup>. Similarly, in the latter half of the 1980s, activists in Clonmel, Tipperary hosted meetings in Hearn's Hotel, under the name APEX. James Quinn, who attended these meetings in 1987, remembers: "The meeting

<sup>13</sup> Mary Flanagan, *Irish LGBT History Project 2014*, dir. by Edmund Lynch, 15 June 2015.

<sup>14</sup> NLI, IQA, MS 45,948/6, "Galway Gay Collective to NGF", December 1983.

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"<sup>15</sup>.

At these meetings, besides being able to meet and talk to other homosexuals, copies of gay magazines, which otherwise could not have been freely obtained in these regions, such as *Out*, published by NGF, London based *Gay News*, and later *Gay Community News* were handed out. In a clear sign of the emergence of a pink economy in provincial Ireland, James Quinn, remembered, 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"<sup>16</sup>. Discos, while not a regular phenomenon in Galway, did take place. In October 1981, the Galway Gay Collective organised the first gay/lesbian disco in the West of Ireland at the Lenaboy Hotel where 30 people turned up. Not long after, the Galway IGRM began discos in Rockland's Hotel, also in Salthill, which attracted up to 80 people from areas as far away as Cork and Waterford<sup>17</sup>. The success of these discos was reflected in their regular occurrence, which in the case of the Galway IGRM was every three weeks, something which Sean Rabbitte of the Galway IGRM stated led many to believe that "change of a type was beginning to happen" in the early 1980s<sup>18</sup>.

Although the activities in provincial Ireland were more secretive in comparison with events in Dublin and Cork, they nevertheless were crucial in facilitating gay and lesbian individuals to become part of a gay/lesbian community. The very existence of these meetings and events, and participation by many individuals was a strong force of personal resistance. Not only did they facilitate individuals to live out a gay and lesbian lifestyle, they also provided individuals with the opportunity to foster friendships, and in many cases homosexual relationships. One such individual who attended the APEX meetings in Clonmel, Joe O'Mara, stated in a 2013 that it was through attending the APEX meetings that he met his future partner<sup>19</sup>.

By taking part in these events, or crossing the threshold of the Hirschfeld Centre or Phoenix Club, each individual took a personal decision to act out a gay or lesbian lifestyle, thereby challenging the heteronormative lifestyle, which was the only accepted lifestyle in Ireland at this time. Moreover, the *laissez-faire* attitude of the aforementioned journals in advertising gay centres/gay organisations and the tolerance shown by An Garda Síochána helped to gradually

<sup>15</sup> James Quinn, *Irish LGBT History Project 2013*, dir. by Edmund Lynch, 28 September 2013.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>17</sup> NLI, IQA, MS 45,948/6, "John Porter to Bernard Keogh", 19 January 1982.

<sup>18</sup> NLI, IQA, MS 45,948/8, "Sean Rabbitte", Galway, Irish Gay Rights Movement.

<sup>19</sup> Joe O'Mara, *Irish LGBT History Project 2013*, dir. by Edmund Lynch, 4 August 2015.

normalise such venues/groups in their localities and lay claim to their right to a space within Irish society for such a community. The significance of these social events and venues should not be underestimated. Not only do they show that individuals were determined to circumvent societies negative opinions on homosexuality by taking part in these events, they also highlight the extent to which gay males were willing to risk prosecution. In fact, their determination in doing so, highlights one of the key desires of Irish homosexuals at that time, which was not so much focused on legal reform, but rather a strong desire to meet others like them and end their isolation.

### 3. *Challenging Stereotypes*

During his trial he [Oscar Wilde] spoke of the love that dare not speak its name. On last night's [Week-In] 'Week End', two homosexuals dared not only to speak the name of their love but openly face the television camera and assert their right to acceptance in a heterosexual society.<sup>20</sup>

In a 1974 article in *The Irish Times*, journalist Christina Murphy, who had just attended the first symposium on homosexuality in the Republic of Ireland at Trinity College Dublin, stated those who attended 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 ..." (Murphy 1974). What is evident from Murphy's comments is that she had obviously expected to see individuals who were in fact queer, freaky or weird and was surprised to find that the gay and lesbian individuals in attendance were in fact a diverse group, not the least bit queer, much like the rest of Irish society. Murphy's comments are, I believe, reflective of a broad cohort of Irish society's views on homosexuals at this time. For the vast majority, they had grown up to believe that homosexuals were freaky and weird, without actually ever meeting, talking, or seeing one, just like Murphy herself. This is hardly surprising, considering no organisation, let alone any individual, had at this point in time come out publicly to challenge these negative assumptions, or proudly declare their sexuality in a public setting. Without doing so, these negative stereotypes were sustained. Positive role models for lesbian and gay individuals, or for that matter, Irish society, did not exist in the Ireland before the 1970s. This in turn allowed the negative assumptions surrounding homosexuality to go unchallenged, thus preventing any acceptance or understanding of homosexuality in Irish society. One individual writing in *Out for*

<sup>20</sup> "Speaking out on a taboo subject", *Irish Press*, 12 February 1980.

*Ourselves* remembered some of the negative stereotypes of homosexuals he was accustomed to hearing when growing up in Ireland before the 1970s:

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. (Dublin Lesbian and Gay Men's Collectives 1986, 122)

Challenging these negative assumptions and presenting a more humane and positive image of homosexuals was paramount to the long-term liberation of Irish homosexuals. In fact, the 1975 constitution of the IGRM had as one of its main objectives "the promotion of [a] better understanding of homosexuality by the community at large, by education and example"<sup>21</sup>. In trying to do just that, members of the IGRM, along with the NGF, LIL and CGC sought to utilise the media, particularly television, to speak directly to an Irish audience about being either gay or lesbian and what exactly that entailed. Speaking on the first broadcast of RTÉ (Raidió Teilifís Éireann) in 1961, former president of Ireland, Éamon de Valera forewarned: "Never before was there in the hands of men an instrument so powerful to influence the thoughts and actions of the multitude"<sup>22</sup>. It was precisely this that gay and lesbian activists sought to achieve with their appearances in the media. In the period from 1977 to 1980, Irish homosexuals bravely appeared on three separate television programmes to try dispel much of the stereotypes surrounding homosexuality. The first of these programmes was, *Tuesday Report*, with Cathal O'Shannon in February 1977. This was followed in 1980 by an interview by Aine O'Connor with a Cork gay male couple (Laurie Steele & Arthur Leahy) on *Week In/Week End*. Also, in that same year, Joni Sherin of LIL appearing on the, *Late Late Show*, became the first lesbian woman to appear on Irish television. For a society which, hitherto, had been unaccustomed to dealing with this topic, these appearances played an important role in confronting the misinformation and misunderstanding around homosexuality and initiating a dialogue around this topic. The participant's 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, as we shall see, vital in helping to win over many supporters for the case of greater tolerance and freedom for gay and lesbian individuals in Ireland. Throughout Cathal O'Shannon's forty-minute-long documentary

<sup>21</sup> NLI, IQA, MS 45,951/2, "Irish Gay Rights Movement Constitution", 28 September 1975.

<sup>22</sup> *RTÉ TVHistory* (1961), 31 December, <<http://www.rte.ie/tv50/history/1960s.html>> (05/2017).

viewers were given an insight into gay life in Ireland. Numerous members of IGRM and some of their parents, with the support of Nancy Diuguid of London's Gay Sweatshop and Rose Robertson of England's Parents Enquiry spoke candidly about homosexuality and attempted to dispel many of the myths surrounding homosexuals as perverted, promiscuous child molesters. Diuguid began the documentary by declaring "You are looking at a screaming lesbian, a raving dyke a pervert, deviant, queer, fairy, fruitcake, freak, daughter, sister, niece, mother, cousin, actress, bishops wife, MP, machinist, typist, teacher. I am everywhere. ... Yes here, right in front of you. I am here to stay" (O'Shannon 1977). In his contribution, Sean Connolly, a founding member of the IGRM 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" (Lynch 2003). Instead of disguising themselves, which many might have expected them to do, those who appeared looked straight into the camera and presented a picture of homosexuals, as normal everyday individuals, who, with the exception of who they were attracted to, were much the same as every other Irish citizen; respectable up-standing individuals. Those who spoke, were neither insecure nor shameful; instead they were confident, articulate and for the most part happy individuals, who were proud of their sexuality, despite the cultural climate they had grown up in. In one of the most daring and provocative scenes of the documentary, the audience were taken inside the Phoenix Club and shown footage of lesbian women and gay men dancing unashamedly together (O'Shannon 1977). If the personal is political, then the participation of those in this documentary was as strong a show of public defiance to Ireland's sexual mores by a group of homosexuals at this time. While many in Irish society would have liked to believe that such individuals did not exist in Ireland and were foreign imports, this documentary strongly challenged this assertion. To be Irish and homosexual was not mutually exclusive. The disco scene and number of homosexuals who appeared helped bring a very much hidden aspect of Irish society out into the open, in a way which had never been seen before. For 1970's Ireland, this documentary was radical. Speaking 25 years after the production of the documentary, Cathal O'Shannon remarked:

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.<sup>23</sup>

<sup>23</sup> Cathal O'Shannon speaking 25 years after his *Tuesday Report* documentary on "Homosexuality in Ireland". Personal Papers of Sean J. Connolly.

The reaction to the documentary demonstrated the positive impact of such public appearances by Irish homosexuals. While the documentary did, unsurprisingly, receive complaints, particularly the disco scene, the openly positive media and viewer response to the documentary highlighted the extent with which the documentary had, to a certain degree, begun a conversation within Irish society on homosexuality. For example, Ken Gray of the *Irish Times* wrote:

What was most surprising even to those who haven't adopted hard attitudes and haven't thought much about the subject one way or another, was that the people to whom Cathal O'Shannon talked to were not as he said himself the 'prancing queens' he expected to find, but very ordinary, rational and apparently well-balanced human beings.<sup>24</sup>

The *Hibernia* journal similarly demonstrated the success of the documentary in challenging the negative assumptions surrounding homosexuals in Irish society:

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 RTÉ, especially in the area of current affairs programmes, but in this case they deserve to be congratulated. The programme was a winner.<sup>25</sup>

What is perhaps most interesting is the reaction of those who viewed the documentary and felt the need to contact RTÉ. Of the 40 or so calls RTÉ received following the show, only 4 expressed anger at RTÉ for airing it, with 26 congratulating RTÉ, 4 requesting information on the IGRM and 6 callers requesting the time the programme was aired<sup>26</sup>. One such viewer, who felt the need to write to O'Shannon personally, Margaret Kegley, commended O'Shannon and the homosexuals who appeared on the show, writing:

<sup>24</sup> PRONI, NIGRA, D3762/1/3/2, Ken Gray, "When Boy Meets Boy", *Irish Times*, 28 February 1977.

<sup>25</sup> Patrick Galvin (1977), "A Gay Dog", *Hibernia*, 4 March.

<sup>26</sup> NLI, IQA, MS 45,943/2, "Summary of calls received by RTÉ on *Tuesday Report*" between 22 February 1977 and 24 February 1977.

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.<sup>27</sup>

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 should 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 the documentary had got segments of Irish society to consider a topic rarely if ever, discussed. Perhaps most encouraging for those involved with the programme was the decision by the Broadcasting Complaints Commission not to uphold a complaint by one viewer, who argued that the documentary was in breach of legislation due to the nature of the programme. 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 (Lynch 2003). A considerable victory for all those who took part. Equally ground-breaking was Aine O'Connor's interview with a Cork gay couple, Laurie Steele and Arthur Leahy both of the Cork Gay Collective in 1980, the first such couple to be interviewed on Irish television. While, O'Shannon's documentary was significant in 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 of two individuals, who were trying to maintain a gay relationship in an unaccommodating Ireland. The interview set in the home of Arthur and Laurie, who disclosed that they had been in a relationship for five years, highlighted the oppressive and demoralising impact society's attitudes had on both men 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 had turned out to be homosexual. Arthur explained that the oppression does do damage. For Laurie the oppression led to self-oppression and a sense of alienation, which impacted on how he related to other people, in particular his struggle to build up emotional connections or strong bonds with other individuals. Speaking

<sup>27</sup> NLI, IQA, MS 45,943/2, "Letter from Margaret Kegley to Cathal O'Shannon", 23 February 1977.

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” (*ibidem*). Most of Irish society at the time did not consider the treatment of Irish homosexuals to be in fact oppressive. Homosexuals were considered deviant individuals. If homosexuals felt insecure or like second-class citizens, then that was a result of their own actions, rather than society’s. In this context the importance of Arthur and Laurie articulating the mundaneness of their existence as a gay couple, not unlike heterosexual couples, was important in garnering support and greater tolerance. Moreover, Laurie’s and Arthur’s appearance as a gay couple sent a clear message that gay couples did exist in Ireland and it was time Irish society recognised that reality. This was something noted in the *Irish Times* prior to programme:

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.<sup>28</sup>

By disclosing their relationship was five years old, Laurie and Arthur challenged the assertion that homosexuals were typically promiscuous. Not only did Laurie and Arthur openly declare themselves to be a gay couple in Ireland, thus resisting much of their own social conditioning, they were also sending a clear message that such couples did exist in Irish society. Both men’s public acknowledgment as a gay couple, offered resistance to the belief heterosexual relationships were the only possible acceptable form of intimate relationship in Irish society. One of the few shortcomings of the aforementioned documentaries, was the predominance of gay male voices, at the expense of lesbian women. While two lesbian women did appear in the 1977 documentary, neither of them were Irish. Whereas the 1861 and 1885 laws had criminalised sexual activity between males, lesbian women were not subjected to these laws since women historically were not seen to be sexual “actors”. Lesbians were, as one Cork woman described them, the “invisible phantoms of Irish society” (“A Lesbian in Cork”, 1985). Perhaps the one and only advantage of the 1861 and 1885 laws was the fact that it acknowledged a certain type of individual, a male who engaged in sexual activity with other males. By the late 1970s, with the founding of Liberation for Irish Lesbians, lesbian women were no longer willing to remain the “invisible phantoms” of Irish society. Rather than depending on gay males to take up their case, lesbian women actively took it upon themselves to begin a process of generating

<sup>28</sup> “Television Today” (1980), *Irish Times*, 11 February.



a greater sense of community, awareness and understanding of lesbianism in Irish society. Particularly important was the appearance of Joni Sherrin, a lesbian activist who had been involved with the Irish Gay Rights Movement and a founding member of LIL, on the popular late night chat show, *The Late Late Show*, to discuss being a lesbian in Ireland. The extent of the task Joni Sherrin and other lesbian activists set themselves was summed up by a comment in the audience that same night when Joni appeared on stage: "But she doesn't look like a lesbian"<sup>29</sup>. Joni Sherrin's appearance on the show was particularly courageous. While those involved in the previous documentaries had appeared with other homosexuals and the shows had been pre-recorded, Sherrin appeared alone on live television on one of the most watched television shows in Ireland. This however did not seem to faze her. Like her male counterparts, Joni Sherrin confidently discussed the difficulties coming to the stage where she could come out publicly and speak positively about her lesbian identity, declaring to Gay Byrne that she was a proud lesbian (O'Carroll and Collins 1995, 62). When asked had she had any reservations about speaking on the show, Sherrin simply replied: "No". She went on to explain that while her family was still coming to terms with her sexuality: "I have my life to live and I only have the one life and I have to be true to myself too" (Lynch 2003). Sherrin's appearance was important in introducing the term 'lesbian' to an Irish audience, a word that many would have had little or no knowledge of previously and in introducing Irish society to a lesbian individual. While, many were aware of the word 'homosexual', this was a term predominantly associated with men, rather than females as well. Moreover, by actually declaring herself to be an Irish lesbian Sherrin, like Arthur and Laurie, challenged Irish society to recognise that lesbian women too existed, as she said in their thousands throughout the country. Much like the 1977 documentary, the public's reaction to Joni's appearance was mixed. One caller who contacted RTÉ, complained: "He (Gay Byrne) had a prostitute on last week and he insults us further by bringing on a lesbian". Another caller stated: "I do not want to pay a license fee to see that filthy person." While the negative comments were to be expected, the impact of Joni's appearance did lead many to contact the show to commend her bravery and sincerity. One caller stated: "If every heterosexual was as sincere and honest as that lady, the world would be a much happier place". An individual speaking for four persons complimented Joni, saying: "She came across as a very nice person and will surely help many people of both sexes"<sup>30</sup>. Again while the positive comments no doubt were welcomed by Joni and other lesbian women, it was more

<sup>29</sup> NLI, IR 369 I 23, *In Touch: Journal of the National Gay Federation* 2, 3, March 1980.

<sup>30</sup> NLI, IQA, MS 45,940/4, "Summary of Telephone Reaction received for Raidió Teilifís Éireann (RTÉ), Programmes", Friday 9 February 1980.

the fact that people were recognising and discussing her lesbian identity that was crucial. Writing 15 years after her appearance on the show, Joni Sheerin stated: “so many lesbians have told me over the years how important it was in their lives that I had appeared on the *Late Late Show* and proclaimed: I am Lesbian and I am proud” (O’Carroll and Collins 1995, 62). Within the lesbian community Joni’s appearance had a profoundly positive impact. One individual who contributed to *Out for Ourselves* in 1986, Máire Ní Bheagliach described the impact of Joni’s appearance: “Joni’s coming out on the *Late Late Show* had a more dramatic effect and as a result of this I contacted the NGF, read some literature and met my first lesbians, who surprised me by being very ordinary! Life would never be the same again” (Dublin Lesbian and Gay Men’s Collectives 1986, 81). Ní Bheagliach’s comment underlines the extent to which many Irish lesbian women had come to believe that there was something strange about their sexuality. Joni’s appearance no doubt, like with Ní Bheagliach, encouraged many lesbian women and members of the broader society to have a much more positive outlook on their sexuality and lesbian women. At a time when most households only received one or two channels, it is conceivable to suggest that a vast proportion of Irish society might have viewed some, if not all of these three programmes. In turn, they provided a much more positive representation of homosexuality to Irish society and to Irish homosexuals themselves, than had ever before been seen in Ireland. More crucially these appearances instigated a dialogue around homosexuality in Irish society, which was not confined to urban areas, thanks to the willingness of these individuals to appear on national television. The extent to which these lesbian and gay individuals were successful in igniting a debate was reflected in one viewer’s comment who wrote: “While I realised the Lesbian on this show was a genuine person, I am really tired of the topic”<sup>31</sup>.

#### 4. *Taking to the Streets*

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 evening, at least a homosexual is unlikely to wink at you. Let us, by all means, get our values right.<sup>32</sup>

<sup>31</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>32</sup> Hugh Leonard, “I’ll not be moved from Mr. Dukes’ Ireland”, *Sunday Independent*, 13 March 1983.

Hugh Leonard's above reaction to the suspended sentence of five individuals for the killing of Declan Flynn at Fairview Park on 9 September 1982, who, according to the trial was attacked because it was believed he was homosexual, exemplifies the courage of the individuals, who sought to live out a gay and lesbian lifestyle and those who were willing to speak publicly about their sexuality. For many gay and lesbian citizens, and members of the heterosexual community, as highlighted by Proinsias De Rossa of the Workers' Party in Dail Éireann:

The only reasonable interpretation that can be drawn from the sentencing policy adopted in this case is that the life of a person who was alleged by his attackers to have been a homosexual – and there was no evidence whatever to support this – was considered in some way to be of less value than the life of any other person.<sup>33</sup>

The immediate impact of this case led to the Dublin Gay Collective, National Gay Federation, Cork Gay Collective, IGRM, and LIL with the support of their allies, taking to the streets in the first large scale public demonstration organised by gay and lesbian individuals in Ireland. The holding of this large scale protest is hard to envisage, had it not been for the creation of the aforementioned centres where homosexuals came together and fostered bonds as a community. Moreover, the role played by homosexuals who appeared in the media to dismantle much of the stereotypes of homosexuals also significantly contributed to encouraging heterosexuals to take part in the demonstration. In other words, had Declan Flynn been murdered prior to 1974, I maintain that no such large scale demonstrations could or would have taken place. 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 following the Flynn court case, there can be no doubt, that the treatment of homosexuals in Irish became irreversibly intertwined with the Declan Flynn case. According to Kieran Rose, many within the gay and lesbian community experienced it as an attack on their very existence. Explaining why he had travelled from Cork to take part in the subsequent protest march, Rose explained:

Well because it's a matter of gay rights for everybody and in fact it's a matter of life and death for gay people in Ireland, and of course we came up here to march and we'll be up again and I hope people from up here will be down in Cork anytime gay people are threatened.<sup>34</sup>

<sup>33</sup> "Criminal Case Sentences" (1983), *Dáil Éireann Debate* 340, 12, 10 March.

<sup>34</sup> NLI, IQA, MS 45,941/1, "Interviews with Tony Gregory, Michael Keating, Tonie Walsh and Charles Kerrigan among others following the demonstration march after the judgement in the Declan Flynn case", March 1983.

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 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"<sup>35</sup>. The support garnered from these groups owed much to the efforts of the different gay organisations who had opened dialogue with these groups in the late 1970s and early 1980s. For example, on foot of a request from the International Gay Association in 1981 the NGF sent questionnaires to all the political parties seeking their views on gay rights. In replying both Sinn Féin and the Republican Socialist Party stated their support for the gay rights movement<sup>36</sup>. While the USI, who the IGRM and NGF had lobbied extensively since 1974, wrote to the *Irish Times* in 1980 stating their support for decriminalisation of homosexuality<sup>37</sup>. Similarly, the Democratic Socialist Party issued a strongly worded statement preceding the march condemning 'queer-bashing' and calling on the government to amend the laws<sup>38</sup>. Particularly important, however in garnering support from these groups was the affiliation of the NGF, Dublin Gay Collective and the CGC to the Anti-Amendment Campaign (AAC) of 1983. This brought the gay movement into close alliance with all the aforementioned groups who were willing to come out and support gay rights, just as the gay movement had supported the AAC<sup>39</sup>. Remarkably, while both Fine Gael and the Labour Party had passed motions calling for decriminalisation as early as 1979 and 1981 respectively neither party took part in the Fairview March. The number of individuals who took part was reported by the media to have been 400, while the different gay rights organisations 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. Speaking in Fairview Park, Charles Kerrigan of the Dublin Gay Collective

<sup>35</sup> "Demo over attacks on 'gays'" (1983), *Evening Herald*, 19 March.

<sup>36</sup> NLI, IQA, MS 45,940/3, "Naomi Brennan General Secretary to NGF", 3 February 1981; "International Gay Association Political Parties World Survey 1981"; "Response from Sinn Féin to NGF".

<sup>37</sup> "Homosexuality and the USI", *Irish Times*, 10 October 1980, <<http://www.irishtimes.com/search/archive.html?q=Homosexuality+and+the+USI&fromDate=09%2F10%2F1980&toDate=11%2F10%2F1980&rm=listresults&filter=>> (05/2017).

<sup>38</sup> NLI, IQA, MS 45,940/3, "Democratic Socialist Party Press Statement", 9 March 1983.

<sup>39</sup> The Anti-Amendment Campaign sought to prevent the insertion of a constitutional ban on abortion. The amendment was successfully passed, becoming the 8<sup>th</sup> Amendment to the Irish constitution.

declared: "This march was not an isolated event, but rather, it was only the start of a new campaign for lesbian and gay rights, for equal rights, for protection at work and for decriminalization"<sup>40</sup>. The demonstration was headline news throughout the country. Reports on the march, appeared in the *Sunday World*, *Evening Herald*, *Sunday Independent*, *Sunday Press* and *Irish Times*<sup>41</sup>. Asked how he felt after the march, Eamon Somers of the NGF, stated: "Excellent, absolutely amazing, because it was such a show of solidarity its' just incredible. I'm amazed so many people turned up and a lot of local people turned up and they were in favour of what was going on it was very good"<sup>42</sup>. Three of those local people who turned up were Fr. Jack Harris and an unnamed married couple. Giving his reaction Fr. Jack Harris stated: "First of all I was very happy at the number of people that turned out today I thought it was really terrific and it was a clear indication to me that people were disgusted at what happened here and they were also disgusted with the result of the court case"<sup>43</sup>. Speaking on behalf of herself and her husband, the unnamed woman gave their reasons for participating as:

Well we all felt very strongly when we heard of the sentence so called that the guys got for murdering the man in the park. The gay people were the only people seemingly who took a stand on this and though we are not gay ourselves we supported them in this march against injustice really.<sup>44</sup>

While both comments were not a ringing endorsement of gay and lesbian rights, rather a reflection of their anger at the sentences handed down, nevertheless they, along with other members of the heterosexual community were willing to stand side by side with gay and lesbian individuals who carried banners calling for the better treatment of gay and lesbian individuals in Irish society. The Fairview Park march was a symbolic moment for Irish gay and lesbian individuals, who demonstrated their unwillingness to no longer be abused, or mistreated 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 many. The public outcry demonstrates the extent to which a vast majority of

<sup>40</sup> NLI, IQA, 46,053/3-4, "The March to Fairview Park", *Quare Times*, c. 1983.

<sup>41</sup> NLI, IR 369 I 25, "Fairview Park", *Identity* 5, April-June 1983.

<sup>42</sup> NLI, IQA, MS 45,941/1, "Interviews with Tony Gregory, Michael Keating, Tonic Walsh and Charles Kerrigan among others following the demonstration march after the judgement in the Declan Flynn case", March 1983.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibidem*.

Irish citizens 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. Much like the Stonewall Riots in 1969, the Declan Flynn case and the subsequent protest march became the catalyst to fight back in the streets. The march itself, led to the organisation of the first gay pride parades in Ireland later that summer, which previously had been celebrated without a parade. Over the next few years, Irish gay and lesbian individuals took to the streets in increasing numbers and increasing places, in Dublin, Cork and Galway declaring pride in their sexuality. In one of the most blatant public acts of public resistance, 30 gay and lesbian individuals, in front of 100 on lookers, staged a kiss-in outside government buildings in 1988. Four years later, in 1992, at a time when gay and lesbian individuals were banned from marching in the New York St. Patrick's Day Parade, a group of gay and mainly lesbian women in reaction to this ban marched in the Cork St. Patrick's Day parade. Singing Tom Robinson's anthem "Sing if you're glad to be Gay", these individuals became the first openly Irish lesbian and gay group to participate and be recognised in a St. Patrick's Day parade in Ireland. As an event which is synonymous with Irish identity, the presence of gay and lesbian individuals openly marching in a St. Patrick's Day parade in Cork reinforced the claim that one could in fact be Irish and gay/lesbian. This was strongly reinforced by the awarding of the prize for "best new entrant" to the lesbian and gay float. If anything, this prize was a symbol of recognition and acceptance by Cork city council. Speaking after the parade, Orla Egan, a lesbian activist in Cork, declared: "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"<sup>45</sup>.

### 5. Conclusion

By the time Maire Geoghegan-Quinn introduced the Sexual Offences Bill 1993, which decriminalised sexual activity between males, legislation had already been introduced which was sympathetic to gay and lesbian individuals. For example, the 1989 Prohibition of Incitement to Hatred Act included sexual orientation, while the Unfair Dismissal Act of 1977 was amended in 1993 to include sexual orientation as one of the grounds for unfair dismissal<sup>46</sup>. This owed much to the efforts of the Cork Gay Collective and the NGF

<sup>45</sup> NLI, ILB, 305 G 2, "History Victory", *Gay Community News*, April 1992.

<sup>46</sup> "Unfair Dismissal (Amendment) Act, 1993", *electronic Irish Statute Book* (eISB), <<http://www.irishstatutebook.ie/eli/1993/act/22/section/5/enacted/en/html>>; "Prohibition of Incitement To Hatred Act, 1989", *electronic Irish Statute Book* (eISB), <<http://www.irish->

in garnering support from the Irish Congress of Trade Unions in 1982. In 1987, the ICTU published *Lesbian and Gay Rights in the Workplace: Guidelines for Negotiators*. What is perhaps most surprising about all three legislative decisions is the ease with which the then governments were able to pass these legislations into law. While one might argue that the Sexual Offences Bill was inevitable in light of the 1988 decision by the European Court of Human Rights, the overwhelming support for the other two bills demonstrated the extent to which the political class were now willing to support the rights of gay and lesbian individuals on these matters, without it would seem the fear of a public backlash. While there was strong conservative mobilisation in 1983 in support of the amendment to the constitution banning abortion and during the 1986 divorce referendum, the lack of any organised opposition to the introduction of these legislative changes indicated the change in mind-set which had taken place within Irish society about recognising the right of gay and lesbian individuals to basic human rights and self-determination. This is not to say that gay and lesbian citizens had achieved a full place in Irish society, rather that Irish society began to acknowledge the many restrictions placed on the citizenship rights of gay/lesbian individuals as unjust. This paper has outlined many forms of resistance carried out by lesbian and gay activists throughout Ireland in the 1970s and 1980s, a period that has been ignored in the achievement of lesbian and gay rights in Ireland. Irish homosexuals did not hide behind David Norris's court case and did not suddenly appear in Irish society in 1993 with the introduction of the Sexual Offences Bill. Instead, throughout Ireland, gay and lesbian individuals had actively resisted their own subjugation, either by choosing to act out a gay or lesbian lifestyle, organising lesbian and gay social life, publicly challenging the misunderstandings around homosexuality, or by taking to the streets to demand their rights to live openly as gay and lesbian individuals in Irish society. These earlier actions were crucial to begin a public dialogue around homosexuality, which ultimately influenced public opinion, so much so, that the 1993 Sexual Offences Bill could be introduced with cross party support. Rather than viewing other groups, such as the Women's Movement, or individual politicians, as the sole agents behind the renegotiation of Ireland's sexual mores, it was Irish Gay and Lesbian individuals who, by challenging the dominant social mores with which they had been raised, became active agents in their own liberation. The sites of their on-going activism could be found in some shape or form throughout all Ireland. Together with Norris' victory in 1988, their resistance ultimately laid the foundations for the subsequent changes that have taken place in recent years for gay and lesbian citizens.

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