

# Exploring Collective Identity and Meaning in the Repeal Movement

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## Table of contents

Abstract.....	1
Introduction.....	2
Literature Review.....	4
Old Social Movements.....	4
New Social Movements.....	5
Social Movement Theory.....	6
Mobilisation.....	6
Collective identity.....	7
Collective action.....	8
Intersectionality in Social Movements.....	9
Summery.....	10
Methodology.....	11
Research Design.....	11
Participants.....	11
Procedure.....	12
Ethical considerations.....	12
Findings.....	14
Getting involved.....	14
Solidarity.....	16
Achieving the common good.....	19
Diversity and inclusion.....	23

Discussion .....	27
Getting involved .....	27
Solidarity .....	28
Achieving the common good .....	29
Diversity and inclusion.....	30
Limitations and future research.....	30
Conclusion .....	32
References.....	33
Appendices.....	37
Appendix A – Interview Questionnaire and prompts.....	37
Appendix B – Consent form.....	38

## **Abstract**

The aim of the research is to examine collective identity in activism in Ireland, specifically as part of the campaign to repeal the 8<sup>th</sup> amendment. It looked at the experiences of first-time activists in order to gain insight into their participation in the Repeal campaign. It was a qualitative study with four participants and used semi-structured interviews for data collection before carrying out a thematic analysis of the data. The researcher found that the participants experiences and interactions with their fellow activists were overwhelmingly positive. In turn it was found that they transcended differences, identified with each other and shared common goals and desires for justice and change. The study found that collective identity, while vital, is still a challenge for contemporary social movements. Despite adopting intersectionality and inclusiveness as strategy the Repeal campaign met with varying and limited degrees of success on the ground.

## Introduction

The following study will examine the collective identity of first-time activists in the Repeal movement. It will look at their experiences, relationships and the part they played in the campaign to repeal the 8<sup>th</sup> Amendment. It will do so in the context of ongoing international movements such as the *#metoo* movement, the women's movement, social justice and inequality. It will pay attention to the role of women in these movements and the relationship with feminism and with New Social Movements (NSMs). Ireland is seeing its culture of activism evolving. A feminist led change which goes beyond just fourth wave feminism and the use of social media but an inclusive approach using intersectional strategy to achieve cultural change. These methods are used to spread the message, to mobilise support across a broad base of supporters and to allow these people to identify with each other while perhaps bridging the generation gap.

In their 2014 study Cullen & Fischer state "Irish feminists still operate in spaces along generational lines where older and younger women question each other's approach" (Cullen & Fischer, 2014, p. 290). They go on to argue that younger feminists are excluded and that their contribution is somehow invisible. Furthermore, they discuss the side-lining of younger activists while acknowledging the benefits they brought to the pro-choice Action on X campaign (Cullen & Fischer, 2014, p. 290). However, Ireland has seen a massive grassroots pro-choice movement take hold across the country that has really engaged young voters and activists and has seen them campaign and canvass alongside older activists, both seasoned and new to activism. As was the case with the Same Sex Marriage Referendum of 2015, young people engaged to a much higher degree in what was seen as a cultural struggle. Not only was there a high turnout from across the board, a significantly large percentage of young people, 87% of those aged 19-24, voted for repeal (Leahy, 2018). At the same time the 2018

presidential race has shown that people are less inclined to engage in traditional politics (Ó Scannáil, 2018).

What emerged from the Repeal movement in Ireland is more than a movement to liberate and empower women. It is an intersectional movement that has incorporated a much broader range of problems in Irish society such as inequality, housing, immigration and ethnicity. Abortion is comparable to any other issue with gender inequality. Intersectionality means that

“While all women experience some aspects of gender inequalities (responsibility for domestic work, gender segregation at work, the threat of male violence) the specific nature of gender inequalities varies for different ethnic groups, class and age groups”

(Bradley, 2016, p. 142)

For example, under the previous abortion regime, when a woman seeking an abortion invariably had to travel abroad to access one, there were a plethora of barriers faced by the more vulnerable or marginalised women in Irish society. A wealthier woman, for instance, may have greater access to funds, a strong support network and freedom of travel whereas a woman in direct provision with very limited means will struggle. Intersectionality attempts to understand people through their lived experiences (Giddens, 2013, p. 490). *In Her Shoes*, a Facebook page set up to allow women of all backgrounds to share their own experiences of abortion and the 8<sup>th</sup> amendment, effectively conveyed this intersectionality. It was established by a 31 year old American mother of three living in Ireland for the last 12 years (Anonymous, 2019). It is also notable that a number of migrant advocacy groups, the Immigrant Council of Ireland, the Irish Refugee Council, the Migrant and Refugee Rights Centre (NASC) and Doras Luimní, also supported the Repeal movement and were involved in the campaign under the Together For Yes (TFY) umbrella (Edwards, 2018). Among other groups to join the campaign was Inclusion Ireland, an advocacy group for people with learning disabilities (Edwards, 2018).

## Literature Review

### Old Social Movements

To look at the social movements of contemporary Ireland one must first look at past social movements and look the changes that have taken place in the nature of these movements. The high levels of emigration during the post-Independence period of Catholic control combined with other factors such as a higher emigration rate among women than men and low income contributed to a situation whereby the youth were gone from Irish society. This in turn minimised the chances of significant social and political change and allowed power to be controlled by the elite (Share, Tovey & Corcoran, 2007, p. 153).

During this period agriculture accounted for the employment of half Irelands labour force. During the post-independence period most farms were family owned and women lost any money or property to their husbands upon marriage (Tovey & Share, 2000, p.53). The church had opposed women's suffrage and saw their role largely as a domestic one. This would also be reflected in legislation such as the Conditions of Employment Act 1936 (Irish statute Book, 2018) as well as enshrining the role of women within the home in the Irish constitution under article 41, The Family (Bunreacht na hÉireann, 1937).

The law itself was used to oppress women both in Ireland and the US. "The law, whether common, statutory or constitutional, reduced women to spectators in the public sphere and sexual others in the private sphere" (McDaniel, 2015, p. 24). When discussing "*battered women's*" movements in the USA and Ireland McDaniel (2015) notes that they grew from being confronted by systems, legal, political and cultural, that excluded them from the public sphere.



Old Social Movements tended to be one group focusing on one issue, often a class issue. There are a number of examples of Old Social Movements (OSMs) in pre-independence Ireland such as the Nationalist, Labour and Suffrage movements. These movements, amongst others, played a vital role in the 1922 foundation of the Irish Free State (Connolly, 2006, p. 109). Post-independence saw a very conservative Ireland that was steeped in Catholicism and nationalism (Connolly, 2006, p. 6).

### **New Social Movements**

The social movements of the 1960s took a more confrontational approach. Ireland has a deep history of New Social Movements (NSM) from the women's movement in the 1960s and 1970s, the anti-drugs movement of the 1980s to the anti-war/anti-globalisation movement that erupted with unprecedented protests against the US-led Iraq war in 2003 and 2004 (Cox, 2006). The early 1970s saw the emergence of the Irish Women's Liberation Movement (IWLM). This marked the end of a period of abeyance and heralded a change in the form of how a movement could be mobilised (Connolly, 2003, p. 109). It also coincided with the establishment of the Commission on the Status of Women by the government at the behest of a committee comprised of representatives from a number of women's groups.

The IWLM fought for reproductive rights during the second wave of feminism in 1970s Ireland (Connolly, 2006, p. 96). Second wave feminism came about during the time of the civil rights movement of the 60s and 70s but focused on the liberation of women from oppression by the patriarchy (Giddens, 2013, p. 634). The IWLM was relatively short-lived as there were disagreements and a lack of consensus about issues such as tactics and ideology (Connolly, 2003, p. 123). Despite this many other women's groups and organisations were formed and the women's movement maintained its momentum. Women's Aid, one of the groups formed after

the IWLM continues its work today. Despite differences in tactics and other issues, these groups remained committed to the overall goals of the women's movement. For a social movement to be resilient and maintain momentum Bretherton (2018) highlighted the need for the individuals and groups need to have positive relationships between each other.

### **Social Movement Theory**

Social Movement Theory attempts to explain how and why social mobilisation occurs and the possible consequences. The causes of social movements can be economic, political or cultural and the 1980s saw a shift in the type of ongoing collective action from political movements to cultural (Melucci, 1985, p. 789). NSMs could be accused of ignoring class as an issue and that would be to ignore the diversity of emergent social movements (Anindya & Omer, 2016, p. 129). Participants in emerging social movements in Ireland might be from diverse ethnic or socio-economic backgrounds but they share a sense of belonging and a collective identity. Collective identity is when a number of individuals or groups share common goals and work together to achieve them (Melucci, 1989, p. 217).

### **Mobilisation**

Resource Mobilisation Theory, which focuses on the availability of appropriate resources in the beginning of a social movement, is useful when one looks at how technology such as social media is now a resource. However other resources such as money, labour or media support are not necessarily as important initially in the birth of a social movement. Through various means, including social media, groups establish and identify common goals. These groups form relationships between individuals and different groups and from there become emotionally invested in each other before other resources have necessarily been mobilised (Moscovici, 1981, as cited by Melucci, 1995, p. 45). While Melucci recognises the

strengths in Resource Mobilisation Theory, and several other theories, he highlights that these theories are limited to focusing on, and explaining, the “why” of social movements rather than the “how” (Melucci, 1989, p. 22). With contemporary social movements moving away from the political and into the cultural sphere one must understand what encourages participation in collective action, how those involved unite and how they can do so while being heterogeneous (Melucci, 1989).

### **Collective identity**

Maintaining solidarity within a social movement is not a new problem, as seen in the Irish women’s movement of the early 1970s. It is somewhat more complicated in contemporary social movements when there is such diversity amongst participating individuals and groups with overlapping and varied goals and identities. Melucci notes that due to the complexity of society, goals cannot be achieved by individuals (Melucci, 2001, p. 76). In his 2014 study “*The cult of the victim: an analysis of the collective identity of the English Defence League*” Oaten found the sense of shared victimhood to be so strong that the departure of the English Defence Leagues (EDL) then leader, Tommy Robinson, a long-time proponent of the victimhood narrative, was used by the EDL to bolster their claims of victimhood and allowed the EDL to maintain its solidarity and collective identity (Oaten, 2014, p. 341). Shared experiences or cultural background can also lead to a strong collective identity. In relation to immigrants, Iov and Bogden note how relationships can be formed through shared experiences, such as that of the immigration process or shared common traits such as language (Iov & Bogden, 2017, p. 210).

Melucci questioned the social bond and what could ensure its persistence despite differences (Melucci, 2001, p. 76). According to Melucci solidarity can be viewed “in terms of

equality or difference” (Melucci, 2001, p. 76). Individuals might identify with that which is similar, for example style, taste in music or even social class, yet despite this still find common ground with others. They find solidarity and a sense of belonging to something that transcends these differences, which in turn can lead to the taking part in collective action.

### **Collective action**

Mobilisation against political institutions and their practices is done through collective action, which is action taken by groups of individuals that share a common objective. Much research has been carried out on what mobilises people to collective action such as feelings of injustice, efficacy and identity (Stuart, Thomas & Donaghue, 2018, p. 243). While the aims of social movements are for the betterment of society or liberation, the results of collective action can have the opposite effect and see a curtailing of rights rather than the desired reforms (Ellison & Martin, 2000). People will also avoid taking part in collective action, even when they agree with the principles and goals of those involved (Stuart et al, 2018, p. 245). Research has found that many people avoided partaking in social or protest movements for reasons such as agreeing with the cause but not with the actions of some of those participating and not wanting to be associated with those people with bad intentions (Stuart et al, 2018).

While it is important to look at what motivates people to act, it is similarly important to study the barriers and obstacles to taking part in collective action (Stuart et al, 2018). Technology has allowed people to get involved in collective action to varying degrees, while allowing them to avoid some of the above-mentioned impediments to collective action. Dolata and Schrape note that “the Internet allows for new forms of collective behaviour and action anywhere on the spectrum between individuals and organizations” (Dolata & Schrape, 2016, p. 1). In March 2018 TFY launched their online crowdfunding campaign to raise money for the repeal campaign and had raised €1.6 million by June (Together for yes, 2018). The rapid

emergence and growth of Internet-enabled crowdfunding has the potential dramatic change in terms of finance for personal savings, investment and business as well as charitable and fundraising markets (Gleasure & Feller, 2018, p. 223). As internet-enabled crowdfunding is a relatively new phenomenon it certainly needs to be studied further. Participants motivations are diverse, and this is of particular importance to stakeholders in social movements when seeking successful collective objectives (Gleasure & Feller, 2018).

### **Intersectionality in Social Movements**

Intersectionality as an idea emerged from black feminism in response to the exclusion of minority and marginalised groups in social movements. In the past, the needs of those from privileged backgrounds received priority over those from less well-off or from marginalised backgrounds (Laperrière & Lépinard, 2016, p. 375). While intersectionality was initially used in feminist research it is employed across a broad range of disciplines and often utilised to understand multiple oppressions (Kaushik & Walsh, 2018, p. 29). Intersectionality is used as a strategy by organisations and social movements to promote inclusivity for groups that have previously been excluded (Laperrière & Lépinard, 2016). Those from dissimilar class backgrounds and those from different marginalised and minority groups will develop collective identities differently (Melucci, 1989, p. 55). Similarly, immigrants from different backgrounds face different barriers and obstacles to in terms of integration, employment and other needs but research illustrates that an intersectional approach can remove or mitigate these obstacles and give an understanding of their needs (Kaushik & Walsh, 2018, p. 28).

In a study of Asian immigrants to Canada, Chun, Lipsitz and Shin (2013) looked at how Asian Immigrant Women Advocates (AIWA), a movement for social change, used intersectionality to combat oppression and give leadership opportunities to immigrant women

to effect social and economic justice (Chun et al, 2013, p. 917). With an intersectional approach it was recognised that these Asian women faced not only gender discrimination and harassment as women, but also racial, language and class discrimination (Chun et al, 2013). Taking an intersectional approach allowed for more than just giving them a voice and giving them the tools to meet their needs. The authors contend that this approach taken by AIWA gave the women a collective sense of empowerment as well as the tools to overcome whatever exclusion or discrimination they faced while also becoming leaders in the movement themselves. The study also showed the relationship between grassroots leadership and collective action (Chun et al, 2013).

### **Summery**

It is clear from the literature and previous research that social movements, both in terms of participants and aims, are far more diverse now than they were in the past. Therefore, achieving the collective identity and forming the positive relationships that allow for collective action and success in achieving shared goals takes more effort. It has yet to be determined if the repeal movement fostered such a sense of collective identity and if that may have contributed to the campaign's overall success. It also can be argued that the issues of intersectionality, inclusivity and diverse aims have been adopted to varying degrees by different groups as a means as well as an end. While the Repeal movement certainly appeared in the media to be intersectional, this research will examine whether this intersectionality was apparent on the ground. Furthermore, it will examine the collective identity of the activists and what it means to have been part of the Repeal movement.

## **Methodology**

### **Research Design**

The aim of the research is to examine collective identity in activism in Ireland, specifically as part of the campaign to repeal the 8<sup>th</sup> amendment. In order to achieve this the study will utilise Qualitative research. It was decided that this approach would allow for a level of depth unattainable through the use of quantitative research and statistics. It will forgo observation or focus groups and instead use interviews for data collection. Ritchie and Lewis (2014, p, 22) note that “the aims of qualitative research are generally directed at providing an in-depth and interpreted understanding of the social world, by learning about people's social and material circumstances, their experiences, perspectives and histories” . This method was preferred as the information being sought cannot be observed. The study seeks to learn about the experiences, views and feelings of belonging and of collective identity of the participants through their own observations. The interviews will be of a semi structured nature (see appendix A) and use probing questions and prompts when necessary to maximise the amount of data collected. To ensure consistency and so that responses can be compared for analysis, all interviews follow the same schedule.

### **Participants**

This study will employ a non-probability sample using purposive sampling, also known as judgement sampling (Ritchie & Lewis, 2014, p, 78). The criteria for taking part in this research was that the participants must be over the age of 18, female and to have been campaigning (for the yes side) for their first time during the campaign to repeal the 8<sup>th</sup> Amendment. The study focuses on the campaign to repeal the 8<sup>th</sup> amendment rather than the no campaign as it reflects the evolving nature of activism in achieving cultural change. They were recruited through a closed Irish feminist Facebook group with the permission on the

group's admin. Four women were interviewed for this research. The women are aged between 33 and 44. Three of the participants live and campaigned in different parts of Dublin. The fourth participant, originally from Germany, lives in a commuter town just outside of Dublin.

### **Procedure**

The participants were all contacted personally via the Facebook Messenger app to arrange the interviews. All four interviews took place in one of the study rooms in the Dublin Business School library on the Aungier Street building over the course of two weeks. Fortunately, it suited all participants to meet in the city centre. The interviews were recorded using a Dictaphone and then transcribed verbatim. The method of analysis will be thematic and using NVivo. This will allow for data to be evaluated in great detail and will facilitate a more in-depth insight into experiences of the participants, one which would not be gained through other means.

### **Ethical considerations**

Prior to the commencement of this research a proposal to Dublin Business School ethics committee had to be approved. There were a number of ethical considerations. As abortion is a highly sensitive and personal issue and could be potentially upsetting, the interview questions were designed to focus on activism and identity to avoid any potentially upsetting topics. While every effort was made to ensure the interview was designed with little room for it to diverge towards sensitive areas the interviewer was prepared for unanticipated distress and unexpected revelations. This was of paramount importance, it is a requirement of The Sociological Association of Ireland (SAI) that no harm comes to the participants and a responsibility on the researcher to safeguard the interviewees well-being and be truthful in their research (SAI, n.d., p. 6).



There was informed consent and the nature of the research was fully explained to the participants. They were given the opportunity to withdraw from the interview before it began and made aware that they could opt out at any point during the interview. The participants were informed that there would be no names or identifying information in the project, the participants confidentiality would be assured, and consent forms kept separate from the password protected device containing audio. Once the participants were content and happy to proceed, they agreed to sign a consent form (Appendix B). In addition to omitting the names of the participants, it was necessary to omit the names of prominent people and activists some participants are still involved with.

## Findings

The aim of this research is to examine what it means to be an activist in the Repeal movement. To this end a thematic analysis was employed upon completion of the interviews. Several themes emerged from the interviews and these will be examined in this chapter. These themes were as follows. getting involved, solidarity, achieving the common good and diversity and inclusion.

### Getting involved

The first theme to emerge was the question of what led to the involvement of the interviewees in activism. What it was that led to them becoming involved when they did and why they had not previously participated in activism for any other cause or movement. Of the four participants Participant C and Participant D had considered taking part in the campaign for the legalising of Same Sex Marriage (SSM) in the 2015 referendum. Along with another participant, Participant B, they linked their support for a yes vote in the SSM referendum to their desire to get involved with the repeal movement.

I suppose with the marriage referendum it crossed my mind that maybe I should be doing something but... I don't know why I didn't. I suppose maybe I didn't have any friends that were particularly involved in it or whatever, whereas I did in this one. (Participant D)

During the marriage equality referendum, I was very much on the side of equality in marriage but I didn't really get involved locally (Participant B)

When asked if her support for SSM contributed to motivating her to get involved in Repeal Participant C simply said, “Yeah big time”. Interestingly Participant A, who had no interest or inclination towards activism prior to the repeal campaign and did not mention the SSM referendum, expressed an interest in supporting LGBTQ rights when asked about any activism she might get involved with in future stating “I'm interested in supporting LGBT teenagers in secondary schools I don't know how to do that but I'm going to find out”.

When it came to getting actively involved in the Repeal campaign and taking part in activism all four participants noted the role played by social media. They all mentioned being in various Facebook groups such as their local ‘parents for choice’ groups and they all mentioned attending events or meetings advertised through social media. In fact, the three participants based in Dublin all joined and participated in local groups that they found through Facebook. They went on marches and canvassed for these groups. Participant C on the other hand was not a member of any local groups but got involved independently of the groups, travelling to Dublin to take part in marches or demonstrations with friends, signing petitions and sharing repeal material on her social media. When asked about involvement with the various groups she stated

It was mainly just I'd see online where the marches were being held, where they were starting and just me and a couple of friends would go along and support. I wouldn't be in communication with organisations as such.

(Participant C)

Participant A got involved as she was worried that there was a negative image of the yes campaigners “I don't want the face of the yes vote to have the image of college students either very young or very crusty”.

I thought I don't see anybody doing this like me I really want to do this to give another face to it and people see me just like local mum from Clontarf that everyone knows you know me you know my children and I'm not a hippie or an activist or anything like that don't have purple hair or whatever.  
(Participant A)

### **Solidarity**

It is apparent from these interviews that the participants found significant common ground during their activism. In some instances, it is no surprise that there was a sense of solidarity as the participants have clear similarities to identify with. When discussing her early involvement, Participant B clearly identifies with her fellow activists as a parent.

It started off through Parents for Choice the group in Dublin South West. The group started off very small but there was a core group of 4 or 5 people, so I got in early on. The Parents for Choice thing was great. I had lots in common with them being a parent myself. (Participant B)

She goes on to identify with fellow activists from a political ideological perspective and notes how she participated with both Parents for Choice and the Social Democrats political party.

I had always been a feminist and I always been left wing a bit socialist liberal, so I decided then to get involved with the Social Democrats coming up to the

referendum around January 2018. I canvassed and went out with social Democrats as well as parents for choice. (Participant B)

Participant B acknowledges that as the movement grew it became more diverse with varied identities however, they still maintained a common identity through sharing the same locality, common goals and a passion for change.

Being involved with together for yes in Dublin South West, after all the groups came under the umbrella of together for yes, when the campaign began to really move forward that was brilliant as well because people, not only parents but also young people, trans people, all sorts of people but the one thing we all had in common was that we're from the same area. It was great, I got to make some great friends and there was a great social aspect and all the people were very passionate about change. (Participant B)

Despite Participant A's initial reservations and worries about the image of the yes campaigners when asked about how she got on with the "typical" activists she admitted "I got on great, really fantastic. Just they were ordinary people".

When you get to know them you can identify with them in lots of ways. Lots of them were parents like me or lived locally. We have children in the same school when you get to know them. We had the same values and we all identified as feminists and pro-choice and that sort of overlaps with lots of other issues. Like most of them were probably out canvassing for a marriage equality vote which I hadn't been and I felt like I ought to have been. Really just normal people with jobs, with lives, families who happened to be a lot

more active than me, or than I had been up to date. Except for vegan thing there are a lot of vegans. (Participant A)

While Participant B really connected with and identified with fellow activists through the politics of the left, in particular the Social Democrats who she interacted with the most, Participant D felt she connected with activists, in her case People Before Profit (PBP) despite their left-wing political beliefs.

People Before Profit were the kind of organisers of the canvassing in our area. They were really admirable in their dedication and the work that they did and so for that reason I've kind of stayed in touch with people before profit. They are probably a little bit slightly too left for me but I love their feminism and all of that. I do believe in things like water charges (...) So people like them, it's been really interesting to get access to politics, even at a really low grassroots level but they organise talks to do with homelessness and all that sort of thing that have gone along to, so yeah the people have been inspirational really. (Participant D)

In the case of Participant D and PBP, repealing the 8<sup>th</sup> amendment and common feminist ideals transcends some of their differences and allows them to find common ground.

When discussing the activists she met during the campaign Participant C states “I suppose because you're on the same wavelength and you're all trying to fight for the same reason your united and you're just supporting each other I guess” Again noting the shared common goals and being united for a cause. As the youngest of the research participants it is

interesting that, after noting “I think it brought out, it brought a lot of young people”, she was the only participant that mentioned identifying with fellow activists on age grounds.

I was surprised by how many young people were out. But there were more for the yes campaigners (...) I suppose I would have identified (...) they would have been more my age, like younger generation so I could definitely identify with them more. (Participant C)

The various people, groups and political parties mentioned by the participants came together under the umbrella of TFY. People from all walks of life and of different political persuasions came together and maintained solidarity until the successful completion of the campaign.

### **Achieving the common good**

When asked what activism meant to them all the participants talked about activism and the desire to change things for the better. All the participants identified with this idea. Participant C said it meant “to bring change, to bring justice”, Participant D said it was “attempting to create change as part of the bigger movement”, Participant B said activism was “getting involved trying to make changes if you don't like the way something is being done” and Participant A said “Activism Means to me to put your money where your mouth is if something is that important to you or if you're that concerned about it to get up and do something about it”.

As mentioned in the literature review people are mobilised to collective action by feelings of injustice, efficacy and identity (Stuart, Thomas & Donaghue, 2018, p. 243). From

the interviews this is quite apparent in this particular cohort. There was a sense of injustice towards women in general with the church being specifically mentioned by two interviewees.

I suppose the Catholic Church has been responsible for so much of the patriarchy and the oppression of women that we have experienced, and I think this was the absolute two fingers to them and I think it completely cut the ties.

(Participant D)

I'm not trying to be a victim when I say this but this sort of woman shaming thing. I think it was big in the Catholic church. We are a Catholic country for example when the repeal movement started the thing that people said was that we were shrill witches, just shaming women. (Participant B)

Participant A was worried about what she perceived as the negative image of activists but for her it was something that motivated her to participate rather than prove an obstacle.

Oh my god we need some normal people in here, I need the 70 year old man in that house to not open the door and say oh my god look at all those piercings and crazy hair. (Participant A)

Stuart et al (2018) noted that people might avoid participating in social movements or collective action that they agree with due to negative associations. That does not appear to have been an issue in this particular movement or with the interviewees.

There was never (...) in a protest or in a march, there was never any trouble or anything, within, you know the way like, what's it called like riots or



severe, I suppose because you're on the same wavelength and you're all trying to fight for the same reason your united and you're just supporting each other.

(Participant C)

There was coffee mornings and there was chats about what we would do going forward and towards the end it was things like standing at roundabouts and at busy intersections holding a banner and it was great fun. (Participant B)

Oh yeah they were all... everyone was just wonderful. I didn't come across anyone unpleasant at all like everyone was just lovely. (Participant D)

However, despite her own positive experiences Participant A did still feel that there was a negative image of activists which could hinder movements and be an obstacle to people taking part in collective action.

I would like to see the face of activism to move away from what people generally see when they think about student if he type thing that people might not take very seriously, unfortunately. (Participant A)

On the other hand the tactics of the no campaign were viewed negatively with Participant C noting that some of the strengths of the repeal movement were that they did not emulate these tactics stating “the yes side had clear facts whereas the no campaign were just stumbling over themselves or brought religion in”, “I mean they didn't stoop low like the no campaign and kind of even poster wise” and “not getting nasty and not getting dirty... not stooping, they kept it to the point, they didn't use dirty tactics”.

Participant B discussed the conduct of the No campaign online, their tactics and their alleged use of fake accounts or “bots” on twitter.

They were very good at drawing people into these arguments and it would immediately push buttons. My experience at the start was it would lead me into these really nasty conversations with these people. They probably didn't even exist; they were probably bots. It would get really, really personal.

(Participant B)

The Together for Yes campaign very much tried to address that and tried to kind of give them guidelines and keep everyone informed, that these people that you're talking to on Twitter and Facebook may not actually be who they say they are. (Participant B)

Another issue was that of funding. Participant C, rather than donating cash, contributed by purchasing Repeal merchandise such as badges and clothing. Participants A and B both mentioned being worried about funding but also how successful the crowdfunding page set up by TFY was in a short time.

We didn't know if we'd be able to compete with that (Love both campaign) and then there was a big gofundme campaign where they raised a whole load of money. It was actually so brilliant. It really gave people hope. We didn't have enough but it was just enough, and it was very very nerve-wracking as to whether we could do it or not. (Participant B)

Participant A said “What was remarkable was the amount of money that people donated, it took off. People were happy to get involved in such a positive thing”.

### **Diversity and inclusion**

Intersectionality was discussed in chapter one and it appeared the repeal movement may have taken an intersectional approach to its campaign, in terms of trying to include different groups representing different people. However, from the answers given by the participants it seems to have had varied success or visibility and this seems to have varied from area to area. When asked about the diversity within her group in in the Dublin Bay South area Participant D said it was

relatively diverse but like how diverse is anything in South County Dublin, you know really. In terms of am... there was a few different accents I guess...  
Laughter.... It was relatively diverse, but I wouldn't say massively diverse. It was mainly white, kind of working or middle class people. (Participant D)

When asked specifically if there were people from ethnic minorities or people from lower socio-economic backgrounds, she said “there were but probably not as heavily represented”. This is not to say it was an exclusionary group, when asked if this was the case Participant D was emphatic that it was not, stating “Oh god no. I don't know what the reason for it, I think it's just the area”. When elaborating on the lack of diversity Participant D continued

It was very much an Irish experience in terms of we've lived under the banner of the 8th for so long that you wouldn't expect maybe someone who moved

to the country, someone that hasn't felt the impact, they're probably not going to be as affected by it... But here, ok yes all women are impacted by the 8th but I would imagine that Irish people were the only ones completely aware of it and the impact of it. Other non-Irish... mightn't have realised, they might just have assumed as they could get one? (Participant D)

Participant A notes that everyone canvassing in her area of Clontarf were of a similar socio-economic background however once they began linking up with groups from other areas the group dynamic changed somewhat.

But when we joined together for monster canvasses and joined with groups from Kilbarrack and Donaghmede etc... it was really broad. There were people from all walks of life, they were all pretty well informed and educated to a point at least. So maybe less socioeconomic and more in terms of how educated people were that was a factor. There was less interest in more deprived areas, many not aware of the date or not registered to vote.  
(Participant A)

Participant B seemed to have a very different experience in her area of Dublin South West compared to the participants in Dublin North Central and Dublin Bay South. On the one hand there were activists she could directly relate to from a similar background or similar circumstances.

Most of the people that I met were from all walks of life and although they were from the same area, from all different walks of life, all different

backgrounds some of them were mammy's living on housing estates like me

(Participant B)

On the other hand, it seems there was a far more diverse demographic amongst her fellow activists. When discussing the two women that set up her local group, one from the Social Democrats and the other from PBP, participant B specifically notes that they “were trying their best to include everybody. When discussing her fellow activists, she goes on to say;

Some of them were students, we had some trans people, we had some LGBTQ people, we had lots of young girls that had been raised in the area and it was just so diverse, and it was brilliant. Then we had dads. Loads of men involved, we had some guys from the pro repeal parties, but they were not just there because of their party, they genuinely wanted that the 8th amendment to be repealed. (Participant B)

Participant B elaborated when prompted specifically about ethnic minorities.

It was very diverse. They were ethnic minorities involved. Not as many as we would have liked to see, especially in Dublin South West because it is a very diverse area and there are lots of ethnic minorities in the area, but we didn't see as many in our area. However I know that in other areas Dublin city centre they would have been more ethnic minorities but there was some. (Participant B)

Participant C did not discuss the diversity she encountered amongst other activists beyond the younger cohort of activist as mentioned previously. She did not campaign in her local town and the marches she participated in were the larger marches such as the Annual March for Choice in Dublin.

## **Discussion**

The aim of this research was to examine the motivations of first-time activists and what it meant for them to be part of the Repeal campaign. The literature illustrated the importance of solidarity and of having positive relationships between individuals and groups for a contemporary social movement to maintain its momentum. Given the diversity of groups involved in the repeal campaign, for example political parties with different ideologies and tactics or supporters from different socioeconomic backgrounds, it was vital for the repeal campaign to foster a sense of belonging and collective identity. It was intended that the research would examine the diversity and inclusivity of the movement and look at how the participants identified with their fellow activists in terms of both their shared experiences and goals, as well as their differences. As stated previously, the specific topic of abortion would be avoided given its sensitivity and this proved to be a straightforward matter in the end. As seen from the literature, New Social Movements are complex in nature, comprising of more than just a single issue, in this case abortion. Given the cultural significance of women's place in Irish society and the relationship with, and power of the Catholic church it was about making a positive change in a broader sense.

### **Getting involved**

It is clear from the literature that social media is hugely significant when it comes to mobilising people to become involved in collective action and this is reflected overwhelmingly in the findings. However, this research indicates that there was already somewhat of an inclination to support a cause such as the repeal movement. What stands out is that all four of the participants became actively involved because of social media. They most likely would have voted to repeal the 8<sup>th</sup> amendment had they not been involved, however social media provided all interviewees the means to participate enabling access to the groups, events and people that they would go on to spend the subsequent months participating in or with.

Although, according to Cullen and Fischer (2018, p. 223), the women's movement somewhat excluded younger women in the past, age does not seem to have been a barrier to involvement in this instance. It could be that the broad use of multiple social media platforms in addition to traditional media may have allowed young people to be engaged at a level not previously possible for movement which appealed to their desire for cultural rather than political change? Social Media and the internet also allowed the Repeal movement to acquire funds which they otherwise would not have been able to. Lacking these funds would have left them at a severe disadvantage to the well-funded no campaign.

### **Solidarity**

Maintaining solidarity is not a new problem for social movements and forming a collective identity is as important as ever for any successful social movement and it seems to have been largely achieved in the case of the Repeal movement. Some of the participants felt they initially identified with others through shared experiences such as parenthood, through being from the same community or sharing similar political ideology, while others did not identify with fellow activists from those perspectives at all. It is important to note that they all found common ground, despite some differences. The word feminism and the idea of women being shamed arose a number of times, perhaps indicative of a shared sense of victimhood? None of the participants expressed this explicitly, however it does match up with Oaten's research into victimhood and the EDL (Oaten, 2014, p. 341). It is of great significance that the participants found common ground and a sense of shared identity despite their differences and that what they shared was more than simply a desire to repeal the 8<sup>th</sup> Amendment. It was a shared sense of injustice and a shared desire to not only tackle a particular issue, but to change Irish society for the better.



### **Achieving the common good**

Gleasure and Feller noted the emergence of online crowdfunding and the potential it has for those seeking collective objectives and this appears to have been borne out with the repeal movement (Gleasure & Feller, 2018, p. 223). A successful crowdfunding campaign by TFY allowed the campaign to raise significant funds in a relatively short time period. This allowed the Repeal campaign to compete with a well funded No campaign. This was felt by the Repeal activists on the ground, not only in practical terms but in terms of boosting morale, bringing hope and enhancing the overall positive experience of those involved. Gleasure and Feller (2018, p. 223) noted the importance of “Internet-enabled crowdfunding” and while new, it seemed to have an impact in this case. The importance and benefits of the successful crowdfunding campaign was evident in the responses of participants A and B.

The fact that the campaign was perceived to be conducted so positively indicates that traditional barriers to involvement in activism can be overcome. Participants mobilised over a sense of injustice, efficacy and identity. Stuart et al highlighted that negative perceptions of activists could pose a barrier to involvement by people that agree with the cause but do not wish to be associated with those they view negatively (Stuart et al, 2018, p. 245). This was a concern for Participant A. However, Participant A felt she had to be involved to counter what she believed to be a negative image of activists and rather than pose an obstacle to involvement it drove her further to get involved. While it seems to be the case, from the experience of this cohort, that there was a broad range of people participating and that it was not just the “typical” activist, it is possible that others were deterred from getting involved for similar reasons. Other movements in future may look to the repeal movement and how it was conducted to make sure the issue of image is not detrimental to inclusion and allow more people to take part that might otherwise be reluctant.

### **Diversity and inclusion**

As with other groups such as AIWA, from Chun et al's 2014 Canadian study, TFY attempted to weave intersectionality into their strategy. TFY recognised that an intersectional approach can remove or mitigate obstacles and give an understanding of the needs faced by those from different backgrounds (Kaushik & Walsh, 2018, p. 28). Despite this strategy and the inclusion of numerous different advocacy groups representing people of different background it seems to have met with varying and limited levels of success on the ground. This seems to have been more apparent in the experience of participants A and D who campaigned in two of the more affluent areas. Participant A noted that there was a difference, and an increase in diversity when her group branched out into area with lower socio-economic status.

It is interesting to note that participant C, the only non-native Irish participant, was the only one that did not join a group or participate in organised activities such as canvassing beyond large national protests. Participant C also displayed the least integration or bonding with fellow activists. Although participant B felt that there was a wide range of people represented in her area and that there was much diversity, she acknowledged that it was less than she would have liked or expected. There was no suggestion that any individuals or minorities were actively excluded, and all four participants felt the campaign was welcoming and inclusive at ground level. This suggests that despite the strategy of the campaign forming a collective identity in some cases is still a real challenge.

### **Limitations and future research**

There were a number of limitations to this study. The sample size was small, and the study would have benefited significantly from a more diverse cohort of participants by perhaps including more from outside of Dublin or from different ethnic, cultural and class backgrounds.

A closer look at the demographics of the areas in which the participants campaigned could yield rich results in further studies, however due to the limited size of this research it was not possible to examine this. Further research could build on this study by looking at people from minorities or marginalised groups that may have supported the repeal of the 8<sup>th</sup> Amendment, that voted yes but that did not get involved in the campaign and ascertain the reasons why. This could be of great benefit for any social movements looking to take an intersectional approach in the future. Another suggestion would be to look at the minority advocacy groups that were under the banner of TFY and examine the problems they encountered in being represented on the ground during the campaign.

## Conclusion

After conducting this study, the researcher can conclude that being part of the Repeal campaign fostered a sense of shared identity among the participants, regardless of their levels of participation, where they participated and despite their differences. This was far more than just sharing the common goal of legalising abortion. It was being part of a wider cultural movement and a feeling of belonging to something bigger than oneself, of fighting injustice and striving for a more equitable Ireland. The experience of being part of the Repeal movement was overwhelmingly positive for those involved. From their experiences this was reflected across the campaign in everyone they interacted with. It can be surmised that this played a significant part in the success of the campaign and has potentially galvanised a host of new activists from all walks of life with the potential to instigate massive cultural changes for Ireland through future social movements. However, if these progressive movements are to be as inclusive and intersectional as possible, the apparent lack of engagement from certain sections of Irish society during the Repeal campaign should be subject to scrutiny, lest they risk alienating them.

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## Appendices

### **Appendix A – Interview Questionnaire and prompts**

1. Tell me about your background and experience in activism.
  - How you got involved?
  - Was it through friends, social media etc...?
2. Did you participate in activism as part of an organisation or political party?
3. Describe the experience.
4. What motivated you to get involved?
  - Had you considered activism previously?
5. What is your experience of the repeal movement? Strengths, weaknesses, etc.
  - Do you believe you were influential in the success of the repeal campaign?
  - Do you believe you received adequate training to carry out your activist activities?
  - Do you believe your organisation/party invested adequate resources to effectively assist you in your activism?
6. What does activism mean to you?
7. Tell me about the people you met and participated with during the campaign?
  - Did the people you met meet your preconceptions of typical activists?
  - Did you find you had similar shared experiences or cultural background?
8. Have you formed new lasting relationships through the repeal movement?
  - Social, political, professional etc...? Describe them.
9. Will you continue your involvement with the repeal/prochoice movement?
  - What do you feel should be the aims of this movement?
  - What other movements are you interested in participating in and in what ways?
10. Do you have any suggestions to encourage people to take part in activism?

## **Appendix B – Consent form**

### **Exploring Collective Identity and Meaning in the Repeal Movement**

My name is Gareth Murphy and I am conducting research that explores activism in contemporary Ireland, specifically the repeal movement.

You are invited to take part in this study and participation involves an interview that will take roughly 40 minutes.

Participation is completely voluntary and so you are not obliged to take part. If you do take part and any of the questions do raise difficult feelings, you do not have to answer that question, and/or continue with the interview.

Participation is confidential. If, after the interview has been completed, you wish to have your interview removed from the study this can be accommodated up until the research study is published.

The interview, and all associated documentation, will be securely stored and stored on a password protected computer.

**It is important that you understand that by completing and submitting the interview that you are consenting to participate in the study.**

Should you require any further information about the research, please contact Gareth Murphy, 10060888@mydbs.ie

Thank you for participating in this study.

Participant Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_