

Dublin Business School

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History of Lesbianism in Ireland.

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ABSTRACT

Throughout the years, Irish sexuality has been a hidden and concealed area. It has managed to stay secretive for hundreds of years, because homosexuality goes against all of the catholic church teachings. In this thesis i will be discussing the history of sexuality in Ireland, and in further detail the history of lesbianism. I will be analyzing the interviews I conducted and showing the real torment and discrimination lesbians in Ireland endured. That's why in this thesis I aim to examine in true detail to show how lesbians in Ireland have been treated over the years. How they have hid away from reality because they feared for what would happen if they opened up. I want to shine a light on the severity of actions people went to in order to punish someone for their sexual preference. How people can make other human beings feel worthless an insignificant.

I want to show that even though we are in the twentieth century, in some aspects it feels like we are living in the middle ages with the mindset of some people. That even through all the hardship these lesbians had to go through some how they are still optimistic about Ireland and its future. That they truly believe that we are on the right track. All in all, I want to show that they should not have to hid away, that they do not have anything to be ashamed of. They deserve to love, act and be carefree just as much as the next person. Discrimination of any one is not acceptable, your sexual preference does not define you as a person. ¹You fancy a person, not a gender.

¹ Subject 4, (See appendices 2, p.38)

Introduction

Throughout the years, homosexuality in Ireland has always been a talking point. The majority of laws that are pitted against the gay community has been focused on homosexuals. There has rarely been an act that has discriminated on lesbians alone. That's why in this thesis I aim to examine in true detail how lesbians in Ireland have been treated over the years. How they have hidden away from reality because they feared for what would happen if they opened up. I want to shine light on the severity of actions people went to to punish someone for their sexual preference. How people can make other human beings feel worthless and insignificant. I will be discussing through the decades the similarities.

In the last few decades, not a lot of focus has been on examining the history of lesbianism in Ireland. In fact, the limelight has more so been focused on homosexuality in Ireland. Throughout history, homosexuality has been the main issue of research. Which is why this research will examine the history of lesbianism in Ireland, the obstacles men and women faced throughout the years, but more so for the women who suffered in silence. The intent of the thesis is to show what pain lesbians went through behind closed doors. To acknowledge that these women, who have been harassed, discriminated against, and disrespected, are ordinary people just like the rest of us. How Ireland made these women feel, repressed and stripped of their basic human rights. How they felt they were not allowed to feel, think and act because of their sexual orientation. I want to shine light on what these women really went through with a chapter of interviews I conducted. I want to show some harsh realities of what the consequence was of being your authentic self. From women of all ages, how their experiences differed with being a lesbian in the twentieth century. I want to raise awareness that it is not ok to discriminate against people over their sexual preference.

History of sexuality in Ireland.

A topic deep rooted in Catholic religion and culture, from as early as the Eighteenth century in Ireland, expression of true sexuality has constantly been oppressed in a stringent catholic oriented society. The forbiddance of any sense of sexual self, with or without a partner was both preached publicly and practiced privately. Any sexual interaction outside the sanctity of marriage, even in a committed relationship was severely frowned upon. Any relationship between a man and a man or a woman with a woman, was blasphemy. The rigorous systems did not only focus on the area of sexual orientation but also sexual contraception. Sexual contraception only became available to the public in the late Twentieth century. To purchase contraception during this oppressive time had severe legal consequences. In July 1929, *The Censorship of Publications Act 1929* came to light, which prohibited the selling, publishing, distributing or importing any publication that related to contraception or abortion.² From here my essay begins, as I set out to look through the regression and the progression of Ireland's attitude towards sexual orientation, expression and contraception.

Twentieth century Ireland deemed relationships not as a vehicle for love but as a vehicle for reproduction. Any relationship they deemed unfit to reproduce were not true relationships. Coming to terms with the idea that sexual relations can be non-reproductive may challenge deeply imbedded cultural norms and assumptions.³ Ireland is one country in which access to reproductive rights has been staunchly resisted. The Roman Catholic Church condemns artificial methods of birth control and abortion in any circumstance, and its influence on Irish legislation and public policy regulated reproduction has been significant. For a society that at its core values preached love, forgiveness, redemption it seemed to force methodologies and strategies that were the opposite of their fundamental principles. If you did not obey, there would be consequences not forgiveness: if you were not baptized in a church you would not be able to attend school, if in school you

² Inglis, Tom, *Lessons in Irish sexuality*, p.3

³ Inglis, Tom, *Lessons in Irish sexuality*, p.3

disrespected priests or nuns you would get beaten, if you tried to purchase contraceptives you would be arrested. There were numerous barriers within the Catholic church society, these barriers were created not just maintain their vision of the ideal 'Lord obeying society' but to also hide, hide the corruption, hide the hypocrisy of principals to create this 'almighty holy land of no sins'.

So let us go back, back to when it was not just religiously unacceptable to be gay, lesbian, transsexual or bisexual in Ireland but when it was illegal by law by *The Criminal Law Amendment Act of 1885*. This criminalized homosexual acts between the same sexes. The act targeted 'gross indecency between males' in particular.⁴ A notable feature was that it expressly related to sexual conduct of a male, '*with another male*' (emphasizes added). The sexual act between men, regardless of whether it was in private or in public, and regardless of age or consent, was illegal. Anyone who opposed this law and was found guilty of this act, and would be punished by imprisonment, not exceeding two years, with or without hard labour. Even though the offence of buggary had been a law for several hundred years, there had been no legislation distinctly criminalizing homosexual acts between lesbian women in that time. A lot of the anger and prejudice was targeting dominantly the homosexual community. Ferreter states that they had⁵ 'the desire to hide sexual transgressions and prevent public discussion of them'. They succeeded as the ruling class of that committee repressed sexuality of any kind in Ireland. Robson describes the Republic of Ireland in 1988 as⁶ 'on paper at least, the worst legal regime in Western Europe for lesbians and gay men. There was no recognition or protection of any sort, and gay men faced a total ban on any type of sexual activity'. Sadly, this is true, with the heavy hand of the Catholic church, citizens were not permitted to be their true selves.

Michel Foucault, a famous French philosopher focused on how different sexuality and sexual desire define who you are as a person. When the buggary act in 1861 was instated, which under the unnatural offences section 61 in 1861, specified that 'whoever shall be convicted of the abominable crime of buggary, committed either with mankind or with any animal, shall be liable... to be kept in penal servitude for life.'⁷ This

⁴ Inglis, Tom, *Lessons in Irish sexuality*, p.57

⁵ Ferriter, Diarmaid, *Occasions of sin: sex and society in modern Ireland*, p.136

⁶ *A constant thorn in the side of the state*, Irish times, (13, May, 2006)

⁷ Leane, Maire; Kiely, Elizabeth *Sexualities and Irish Society*, p.59

offence addressed (as well as sexual intercourse with an animal) penal penetration of the anus of either a man or a woman and applied even if the couple were married to each other. The maximum penalty that could be imposed on conviction was life sentence of penal servitude, a mark of just how seriously the offence was taken.

In Foucault's history of sexuality, whether it be a man or a woman, they were never classified as being 'a homosexual', they were never defined as anything, it wasn't a part of their identity. Whereas he expresses that now, there was a turning point in the late Nineteenth century where people started to absorb the fact that their actions defined who they are. That now, if a man buggers another man, you are instantly ruled as being a homosexual. The same as if a woman has sexual intercourse with a woman she is defined instantly as being a lesbian. Foucault strongly believes that the influence of the Victorian regime was strong up until recent years. In the first volume of *The History of Sexuality* he writes how 'Other Victorians,'"': "for a long time, the story goes, we supported a Victorian regime, and we continue to be dominated by it even today. Thus the image of the imperial prude is emblazoned on our restrained, mute, and hypocritical sexuality" (Foucault 3). He describes this cultural mutation of anything sexual the reason for the "discursive explosion" (Foucault 17). Foucault also expressed because sex was hidden away and there was a certain pressure on it for it not to be spoken about, it became so suppressed it was oppressed. Even though the public and priests tried to silence it, it was not going to go away. In some cases it was the subject that was intensely studied.⁸ He argued that from the Eighteenth century, sex became the subject of public and private scrutiny. What was obvious and natural became the subject of rigorous analysis and examination. That we as women should be looking up to become like our lady, chaste mothers. Although society then tried to hide sexuality away, it was everywhere.⁹ It was in the bedrooms and bathrooms of every Irish home. It was present in every strategy of separation and supervision of girls from boys. It pervaded the pubs among the bachelor drinking groups. It was in every shy, awkward look, speech and touch of Irish men and women.

Much of the exploration of Irish sexual nature and the repression of sexuality in Ireland focused on the origin of 'prudery'. A lot of scholars would go back into the Victorian era. It is deemed that the Victorian era is heavily influenced on sexual attitude

⁸ Inglis, Tom, *Lessons in Irish sexuality*, p.5

⁹ Inglis, Tom, *Lessons in Irish sexuality*, p.16

in Ireland, Tom Inglis an Irish author, describes that Irish sexuality as been hidden and kept a secret for many years. In those earlier years it was not talked about in fear that you would offend the Catholic Church. The ¹⁰contrast with the lengthy British tradition of reflecting (though often with moral opprobrium) on facets of national sexual mores. The actions of Irish prudery showed the same characteristics of the actions of the middle classes in Victorian Britain. Only after the Victorian era came the Elizabethan era and The Church of England was founded, it liberated the public through the sexual rebellion of King Henry VII, a huge contrast to what was happening just over the Irish Sea, Ireland remained strongly catholic and regimental with its core principals. When you link the Victorian era and Ireland, they have the same opinions in regards to gender, family and the marriage. The Victorians thought about sex as a dark space that should be controlled. For Victorian women, marriage was the only way to have sex. If a woman did not stay celibate, then they would automatically be classed as adulterers and/or prostitutes. On the other hand, men could act, in any way they pleased. They could have numerous prostitutes or mistresses and there not be a consequence. The Victorian era was said to be ¹¹ “the result of a struggle for order and decency on the part of a people just emerging from the animalism and brutality of primitive society”. Which is exactly how the Irish household and society was shaped. The family home played a huge part in the issues of repression for women. Women were restrained to their home; which was heavily influenced by protestant religion in England. Religion put emphasis on the nature of women, and what they should be. The Nineteenth century showed that women were the heart of the home, they were the care givers, the nurturers. They had to be at all times covered up and to be modest about their appearance. ¹² The lives of these women seemed drab and colorless to outsiders unable to understand the satisfaction and sense of moral superiority it gave those who kept their distance from temptation.

The similarities between Irish and Victorian prudery are very clear. Ireland even in the urban places was a place of sexual repression. Women were meant to be women of the house hold, the child bearer for a man, for his sexual needs only. As a woman in Ireland, you should not want more than to raise your child at home, and be the care giver

¹⁰ Ferriter, Diarmaid, *Occasions of sin: sex and society in modern ireland* , p.23

¹¹ Inglis, Tom, *Origins and legacies of Irish prudery:Sexuaity and social control in modern Ireland*, p.2

¹² Inglis, Tom, *Origins and legacies of Irish prudery:Sexuaity and social control in modern Ireland*, p.9

for your family. You should want nothing more than to get married and stay faithful, and be dependent and inferior to your other half. With women only being sexual active with their husbands, numbers in families were growing. This was shown in the times of the famine, where a sudden baby boom erupted. Where the numbers of children were growing and lack of food was taking its toll. These daughters of farmers were consequently harming their father's standards of living, by growing families, this jeopardized the amount of food that could feed the children. The lower class were the ones who were highly effected, because they relied on potatoes to feed their families. But because everyone wanted to silence and make sex disappear, girls from these classes were being talked about. The hiding and silencing of sex was the way these men and women perceived the world.¹³ Over the course of the Nineteenth century, external constraints on sexual behavior slowly became combined with internal self-control.

There has been Two regimes that have influenced sexuality in Ireland. The traditional and the liberal. The traditional regime has been in effect for a lot longer than the liberal because it is what people have been bred into for thousands of years. The Irish nation has been a product of Catholicism from the beginning of time. Therefore, people find it completely insane to look at their sexuality as a normal thing when it's something we had never dealt with for so many years. In Ireland, sexuality has always been a taboo subject that you would never dare to delve into. The Catholic Church ruled Ireland, in every way, even in the arts. There was no literature available (James Joyce's novels were banned), along with other authors who would have dipped into the thoughts of something sexual. It was all banned and immediately repressed. Everyone had to strictly live by the laws of the Catholic church, which was conceivable to the majority of people who were able to fit this 'norm' but for those who didn't they were trapped liked caged animals, trapped in a place they could not get out of, because they had no say in how they wanted to live their life. Women having children out of wedlock or living in sin would be disowned by their parents, relatives and the church. As a result of all of this pressure and contraceptives being out of reach, Ireland had a baby boom. With the boom in population increasing from the famine from 2.2 million to 8.2 million the only way to maintain a sustainable population was the diminution of marriage. Which ended in women marrying so they could have sexual

¹³ Inglis, Tom, *Origins and legacies of Irish prudery:Sexuality and social control in modern Ireland* p.10

intercourse and further on women becoming mothers. Ireland although a truly repressed place, through a demographic profile, Irish people show traces of being sexually rare. In Western countries ¹⁴Ireland has the lowest levels of marriage and the highest level of bachelors and the highest birth rate and the highest level of marital fertility. Which meant that the people who did get married in Ireland compared to other societies had more children.¹⁵ It was there for crucial to maintain the economic dominance of the new order... temptation must not be placed in their way. Sex, therefore, must be denounced as a satanic snare, in even what had been its most innocent pre famine manifestations. Sex posed a far more severe threat to the status of the family. Boys and girls must be kept apart at all costs. Educating people about sexuality, opening peoples' eyes to what is out there was not what the Catholic Church wanted. Regards to school, ¹⁶many bishops have recommended that what catholic pupils in their schools are taught about in relation to these issues- in other words the specific content- should be drawn from the religious education program, the children of god series, in other words the position of the church is that it agreed with sexuality education as long as it is corresponding with catholic teaching, ethos and philosophy.

People did not want to delve into the fine details of the other issues like ¹⁷multi-faceted role of the Catholic Church, fertility control or sex abuse scandals. As time passed their barriers started to crack and as the modern era approached people started to ask questions. The liberation regime only started coming of age in the last 50 years when people started seeing the light. Milestones started happening, and things were slowly progressing. It was only in 1963 that pharmaceutical companies achieved to introduce the contraceptive pill in Ireland as a menstrual cycle regulator, and a few years later that the first ever family planning clinic came to Ireland. The fertility guidance company LTD, which later became IFPA, was established in Merion square, Dublin 1. The organization was able to pass the law by having clients make a donation for them to provide free contraceptives. Then A group of

¹⁴ Inglis, Tom, *Origins and legacies of Irish prudery: Sexuality and social control in modern Ireland*, p.1

¹⁵ Inglis, Tom, *Origins and legacies of Irish prudery: Sexuality and social control in modern Ireland*, p.5

¹⁶ Inglis, Tom, *Origins and legacies of Irish prudery: Sexuality and social control in modern Ireland*, p.5

¹⁷ Inglis, Tom, *Origins and legacies of Irish prudery: Sexuality and social control in modern Ireland*, p.1

political women who travelled to Belfast in May 1971, were a part of the Irish women's liberation movement. They fled by train to purchase contraceptives and when they returned they challenged the customs office to arrest them for importation. To make a stand for the rights to contraceptives, but to their sadness the customs office allowed them to pass. The IFPA family planning guidebook was abruptly banned by the censorship board in November 1976. Then a breakthrough, contraception were legalized only if you had a prescription from a doctor. This was achieved by Charles Haughey Minister for Health enacted a Health (Family planning) Act 1979. Which meant that married couples were allowed legal access to contraceptives. In the late Twentieth Century Homosexuality was decriminalized in Ireland.

Although liberal people were sparse in Ireland in the 1970s to 1990s, there were a few examples of liberality in education,¹⁸The health promotion unit of the Department of Health has been actively engaged in promoting safe sex for a number of years. In 1990, it introduced an AIDS programme for use in post primary schools. They even set up seminars for teachers and over 1,500 of them attended. Then in 1993 they set up six TV advertisements strictly after 9pm, that were heard on the radio too. All six advertisements had six different individuals, speaking into the camera, advising people to protect themselves by using condoms.¹⁹ Pat O'Mahony, a television presenter says 'So whatever your previous sexual history, if you are having sex make sure you or your partner wear a condom.', Mary McCarthy a mother of a person with AIDS says: 'I urge all mothers to talk to their children about safer sex, and I ask them to please, please tell your children to use a condom if they are having sex. The introduction to sex education was deemed an enormous liberal step. In 1995 the Irish youth and the national youth federation put a lot of focus on sexual education being taught in schools, deeming it necessary for the younger generations. They wanted the aim of youth work to exercise their freedom and not try and control and manipulate young people.²⁰ It attempted to do this by raising consciousness through encouraging young people to challenge the values of society. However, they argue that youth workers must continually engage in a process of critical self-reflection, examining their personal motives for being involved in sex education, and what they hope to achieve. Inglis describes the teaching of sexuality to be liberating not just for the students but for the

¹⁸ Inglis, Tom, *Lessons in Irish sexuality*, p.85

¹⁹ Inglis, Tom, *Lessons in Irish sexuality*, p.85

²⁰ Inglis, Tom, *Lessons in Irish sexuality*, p.86

teacher too. That both people, in fact, are learning from each other. It is key that the teacher has to be sympathetic towards the student. In furthering their knowledge about sexuality but also not making them feel more isolated and alienated.²¹ In a liberal approach, teaching young people about sex and sexuality is not like teaching them any other subject. It is about helping them to know, understand and be able to reflect critically about themselves, others and their culture, community and society in which they live. They not only learn about sexual education but that they have learnt to be socially aware about all aspects of life. They have to learn to recognize the agendas of groups/organizations which produce different messages. Sexual Education is critically important for teenagers because we can not restrict what is in our magazines, on our shows. You can educate them not to copy whatever they see on TV screens or magazines.²²The main example of such an approach in Ireland comes from the program developed by the Irish youth work center and the nation youth federation.

Chapter two; History of Irish Lesbianism.

²¹ Inglis, Tom, *Lessons in Irish sexuality*, p.87

²² Inglis, Tom, *Lessons in Irish sexuality*, p.89

Throughout the course of Irish history any person who negated from heterosexuality have often been portrayed as deviant, debauched and even demonic. It is deeply intertwined in religious culture and in Katherine O'Donnell's thesis 'Lesbianism', she describes that there always has been a type of lesbian woman that has ran through history since the age of ²³ classical Rome, as sapphiists, fricatrices, tribades, tommies, lesbians: women with unnatural monstrous appetite for sex with women. The destiny of these women in any sort of literature was often her getting the fate that she 'deserves' e.g. ending up alone and segregated from society or a shameful death. Although that being the common theme with lesbians, O'Donnell differentiates the treatment of these women through different periods. She begins in the age of classical Greece, which shows definite similarities with Irish tradition. Early Greek and Irish literature both showed signs of erotic love for women, with the women constantly partnering and playing in erotic situations. It is still a controversial topic whether these women mentioned represent the Lesbian community, as it is easy to force your own interpretation on a text that was written century's ago, so this is the first task O'Donnell had to overcome, how does a person accurately decipher whether a relationship between the women in these texts were romantic or plutonic.

There are very early spotting's of these characteristics, as far back as the hagiographies of St. Bridget. Which ²⁴ recounted that her resistance to marriage was so strong that she plucked out her eye rather than marry her betroed. O'Donnell described St. Bridget to be a bishop more than an abbess. As it was often common for women to wear men's clothes and act as if they were male, this begs the question has Ireland's ethos towards sexuality as the years passed progressed or regressed. As the years went by the prejudice and segregation strengthened, in the pre-modern to early modern era came the penalties. Only for acts if a phallic substitute is used. The penalty was worse if it was between two males than two females. But suddenly a more sinister agenda seemed to emerge against women through the cracks of a conservative Western society. Women who were seen to be uninterested in men, interested in women or in any way diverted from the 'norm' were linked to demonic behavior, even witch craft. Close friendships between women were deemed demonic and just like the women of Early Irish literature they would see an untimely demise.

²³ O'Donnell, Katherine, *Lesbianism*, p.1

²⁴ O' Donnell, Katherine, *Lesbianism*, p.3

Power was clearly segregated between the sexes, women would dress as men, sometimes to further their career.²⁵ Women who dressed and passed as men was an ongoing phenomenon throughout European history and perhaps still is where the sexes are severely segregated. The penalties on discover could mean death if the woman was found to have used a phallic substitute. These circumstances were quite common, the most famous cross dressing woman was Anne Bonny, in Cork in the seventeenth century,²⁶ she disguised herself as a man to become a pirate and met another passing woman, Mary Read, together they were notorious not only as pirates but as lovers. She describes the modern age to be a time where because of the tragic surroundings of women, they were pushed together for survival.²⁷ This was a time of arranged marriages, early deaths of women in childbirth and a strict segregation of the sexes so it is little wonder that women formed deeply passionate relationships with each other. But historians found it hard to completely classify them as lesbians. They would see a lesbian as being a woman who has genital sex between women, not a woman who has romantic and emotional attachment towards another woman. It was in the twentieth century that there was a turn of events for lesbian women in Ireland. Known women like Kathleen Lynn, Constance Markievicz and her sister Eva Gore Booth were involved in the *suffrage movement*, and later became involved in the Irish Revolution and in unions involved in that period.

Eva Gore Booth was a playwright and sister of Constance, she played a huge part in the *suffrage movement* and although she did not live in Ireland she was constantly visiting and had a lot of lesbian friends there. Her views were one of that gender roles were only embedded into our heads because of our culture. In 1915 she founded a magazine called 'Uranian' which was a known synonym for homosexual, as we would now say homosexuality. It was published six times a year but this dropped to three times a year after 1920 and ended production in 1940.²⁸ Each issue between 10 and 20 pages long consisted almost entirely of clippings of articles from newspaper all over the world, on cross dressing, lifelong transvestism, passing women, hermaphrodites, transsexualism and same

²⁵ O' Donnell, Katherine, *Lesbianism*, p.4

²⁶ O' Donnell, Katherine, *Lesbianism*, p.4

²⁷ O' Donnell, Katherine, *Lesbianism*, p.5

²⁸ O' Donnell, Katherine, *Lesbianism*, p.9

sex 'marriages'. Each issue of *Urania* said ²⁹ *Urania* denotes the company of those who are firmly determined to ignore the dual organization of humanity in all its manifestations. They are convinced that this duality has resulted in the formation of two warped and imperfect types. They are further convinced that in order to get rid of this state of things no measures of 'emancipation' or 'equality' will suffice, which do not begin by a complete refusal to recognize or tolerate the duality itself. If the world is to see sweetness or independence combined in the same individual, all recognition of that duality must be given up. For it inevitably brings in its train the suggestion of the conventional distortions of character which are based on it. There are no 'men' or 'women' in *Urania*'. Booth describes sex to be a mistake, that no one knows what they are only for what your cultural upbringing makes of you. If people just let go of their gender, same sex relationships would not just be accepted but they would be as equal to heterosexual relationships.

She describes Ireland after independence as not an easy place to live in. If you did not conform to the stereotypical woman, who would get married have children and stay at home, you were not accepted in any shape or form. Although there seem to be an underground society and rendezvous for gay men but little to no outlets for lesbian women. Meet ups would only occur through word of mouth in hope that someone else would join. ³⁰However, actress Marie Conmee and her partner Marie Brady were a notorious couple in Dublin in these dark decades. Limerick-born lesbian writer Kate O'Brien also kept the scandalmongers active. O'Brien's two novels were banned because in one of them two men were having sexual intercourse, and in another was a story of a woman falling deeply in love with another woman. It was only in the 1960s that real lesbian activism started happening with influence from feminism and civil rights movements, O'Donnell states that even though thousands walk in Lesbian and gay parades the majority of lesbians feel the need to keep their happiness a secret. That even though they fight hard to get equality they feel like aliens on earth. This takes effect with their jobs, lesbian women who are teachers or work in hospitals would fear for their jobs because these sectors would follow the Catholic church's views through and through.

Lesbianism in Ireland was much more hidden from society than homosexuality. The ratio of women who were heterosexual, in a committed relationship for

²⁹ O'Donnell, Katherine, *Lesbianism* p.9

³⁰ O'Donnell, Katherine, *Lesbianism*, p.11

many years, married with kids, and were of a lesbian sexual preference was highly compared to a homosexual male in a heterosexual relationship. Thousands of women had to go through the torture, of not understanding why, or how they were attracted to another female. These doubts and anxieties were not diminished when and if they came out to their families and friends. To ask questions like how am I a lesbian? Shows how small minded our society works. That if you do not follow society's rules that there is something very wrong. So of course women and their families were confused. These women suppressed these emotions and sexual desires because it was something society said that they could not be. They hid their emotions because they did not want to face reality. To a lot of women, holding on to this secret that was eating them up inside was easier than risking abandonment from society and their loved ones. During the first studies of homosexuality it was common for people to study genes, if being homosexual was genetic. ³¹A great deal of publicity was generated by this 'discovery' of the 'gay gene' by geneticist Dean Hamer (Hamer et al.,1993) and by neuroscientist Simon le Vay's 1991 discovery that the brain structures of gay and heterosexual men differ, with gay men being more similar to that of a woman. But Le Vay and Hamer's research never gained visibility in the public eye. In contrary to their beliefs, Lesbianism when thoroughly researched was never deemed to be related to genetics. The research of women's sexuality was more tenuous. That from the researches of ³²Peplau and Garnets, they conclude that any research 'has so far failed to identify major biological or childhood antecedents of women's sexual orientation'(peplau and garnets,2000:329). They conclude their research by stating that there is no actual evidence that biological factors play minor roles in women's sexual orientation.

Even though homosexuals and lesbians go through a lot of the social changes and agony, in Ide O'Carroll and Eoin Collins book, *Lesbian and gay visions of Ireland*, they discuss how different the lesbian and gay subcultures are. Joni Crone, a gay woman in Ireland who has lived through two gay liberation movements, describes lesbians as ³³ an underground minority, a subculture whose members have been unwilling or unable to court publicly, because to do so may have invited violence, rape, or even death. These are the hard facts of lesbian life in Ireland, they are not easy to live with but I believe it's time they

³¹ Inglis, Tom, *Lessons in Irish sexuality* p.216

³² Inglis, Tom, *Lessons in Irish sexuality* p.217

³³ O Carroll, Ide; Collins, Eoin, *Lesbian and gay visions towards the twenty first century* p.60

were stated and acknowledged. Although she states that she does not want to take away from any of the hardship that homosexuals endure, she feels like lesbians have always lived a hidden life. Homosexual men have always fought their way for political movements and law reform. But that their gender differences make their experiences very different. Being a lesbian in Ireland, she describes it to be very difficult, because you as a woman are born into the caring, nurturing role, when you come out, you have to go against the way you have been conditioned. Because society makes you feel like because you are emotionally physically and sexually attracted to another woman, you have to let go of all these instincts, and train yourself otherwise. In contrast to men, they have set up these laws and been fighting for human rights for themselves and protected their human rights. Women in contrary have never done this because they have never had the authority to do so. In history they have been the inferior and been in control by the man.³⁴ As wives and daughters we have been valued primarily for our capacity to be 'The vessels which carried the seed' as Aristotle taught. We have been valued solely for our bodies, the means to ensure the reproduction of males. This leads even into current affairs as with the abortion debate in Ireland. People argue that women can/can't be in control of their own body. There is a deeper root of the problem here, that any woman, heterosexual or lesbian, throughout history is constantly denied a right that if the sexes were reversed, would be allowed. This is the heart of the problem, women being inferior to men.³⁵ Historically, men have decided what is best for the human race, men have declared themselves to be made in the image of God, men have assumed the right to decide the fate of other men and all women and children. They have always been the hierarchy.

Diarmaid Ferriter tells of multiple women's stories in order to break the mold for lesbians. In 1980 a journalist Brigid McLaughlin highlighted the absence of any lesbian voice when it had to do with the strong opinions of the Catholic Church,³⁶ why is there never a lesbian representative available to speak out? McLaughlin suggested that lesbians were carrying more burdens than gay men because many of them had children and less money at a time when 'the economy is now realizing the spending potential of single gay men'. Women like Hazel Robinson, from Limerick went to talk on Gay Byrne's RTE radio

³⁴ O Carroll, Ide; Collins, Eoin, *Lesbian and gay visions towards the twenty first century* p.62

³⁵ O Carroll, Ide; Collins, Eoin, *Lesbian and gay visions towards the twenty first century* p.62

³⁶ Ferriter, Diarmaid, *Occasions of sin: sex and society in modern ireland* , p.512

show, to urge lesbians to 'come out' and not be afraid. During this she was said to have got numerous calls off women who had been married with children, saying that they were lesbians in hiding. Another woman who rang in to a BBC radio show 'telling lies', told her secret that she was married with children but had been having secret affairs with women for years. But she could not come to terms with socially coming out.³⁷ She eventually lost custody of her children and became 'estranged from her parents in Ireland who regard lesbianism as some kind of sinister cult'. All of these women, are ordinary women, with ordinary feelings but being made feel alienated, and that they do not deserve the right to feel love, and happiness and freedom.

All of these women paved the path for the final and inspirational moment in history when Ireland won the vote for marriage equality in May 2015. Mary McAleese, the former president of Ireland, stated that³⁸ there are moments in the history of a country that define, reflect and showcase the very best instincts and character of its people. That wonderful weekend of 22nd and 23rd of May 2015 when Ireland said a resounding yes to equality for its gay and lesbian citizens was a pivotal moment. In the most democratic way possible Ireland became the first country in the world to embrace her gay and lesbian children by way of popular vote. In record numbers Irish voters decided that past branding, stereotyping and isolating of our gay and lesbian citizens was and ever will be unacceptable. Finally, all the hardship and agony that the lesbians and gay people of Ireland went through, they were finally under law, equal to heterosexuals and could marry and live their life like every other ordinary person. After many battles, organizations and debates finally, the people of Ireland accepted the lesbian and gay community. The yes vote meant that the lesbian and gay community could finally live their life and not be shamed for being who they are and legally be equal to heterosexuals.³⁹ We should remember too and honor those who took the first brave and lonely steps that led us to this this day: those who pointed out the discrimination, the inequality, the segregation: those who refused –often at great personal cost- to be silenced or intimidated by the voices of intolerance: those who fought for equality, inclusion and recognition. They laid the foundations out for today's transformative

³⁷ Ferriter, Diarmaid, *Occasions of sin: sex and society in modern Ireland*, p.514

³⁸ Healy, Grainne; Sheehan Brian; Whelan Noel, *Ireland says yes, the inside story of how Ireland won the vote for equality*, foreword.

³⁹ *Truly a nation of equals*, Yes equality, (ND)

and historic change. The yes vote made a huge stamp on the history of Ireland, acceptance of everyone whatever gender or race, every person deserves love, happiness and freedom. There is no longer discrimination against people because of who they love. Ireland is a place of equality and a place where people can be themselves. The people of Ireland made a huge step in making the country a better and selfless place.

Chapter Three; Interviews.

On the 20th of March 2015, I interviewed four lesbian women to talk about their experience growing up in Ireland. (see appendices 1 for interview questions, 2 for interviews) These interviews were conducted in the Palace pool hall on Camden street Dublin 2. For over three years I have got to know these women, their stories and heard some horrible times they

have been through. From these interviews I want to show how low these women have felt, how alienated society has made them feel, and how they felt so trapped that they had to escape from the emotional turmoil they were in. There are a cross section of ages which ranges from 20-50 years of age. Which depicts the different upbringings the women have had and how there are definite similarities between all four, even though years in the difference. There are some running themes that run through these womens' lives. Some underlying issues that some of them do not even recognize. The main patterns that overlap these women are, hiding their sexuality, The Church's influence on people, Optimism for the future and Escaping reality.

A lot of the women were in hiding, hiding from their families, peers, and society. Subject one (see appendices 2) is a true example of being in hiding, but she can not see it. She describes her mother to be the only one in her family to know she is a lesbian, and by accident. 'Behind closed doors they make very hurtful comments about people who they have no right to judge. Little do they know that while they are judging women for being lesbian, I am sitting across the room and they are oblivious'. When asked if there was a specific moment she felt discriminated against she said 'I don't feel like I've been discriminated against as I am subtle about my sexuality'. But why should she feel like she has to be subtle? She is hiding her sexuality in fear of discrimination and not Can she not live her life they way she is? she contradicts herself by putting on a brave face that she isn't hiding by stating 'Seriously though, I do not let the opinion of others stop me from doing what I want, I may not tell my family about who I am, but at the end of the day I'm a private person. I don't need their permission or acceptance to be who I am.'if she actually did not care about other people opinions she would not care about if her parents disagreed with her. Subject four, tried to repress and hide her sexuality to the extent she kept a three-year relationship a secret 'I spent the next 6 years trying very hard not to be gay. It was a horrible time.'

Between all four women there was a mutual opinion of the church, that they were set in their ways, and they were never going to change their mindset. Therefore, the only thing these women could do was to accept it. Subject 1 has little interest in what the catholic church does or say, but she feels like they should give up the control they have over education etc, 'To me it doesn't matter if the church changes its opinion, they are but another group in the country with different opinions, they do need to step away from

control over are schools, hospitals and other areas as they are not impartial to other people's lifestyles'. Subject 3 states that the church had such an impact on her life that it made her feel like 'I was not a worthwhile human, which definitely made me feel suicidal though luckily I never acted on this'. She also feels like their influence has considerably weakened, and hopes it will soon become 'insignificant'. Subject 4 has a very strong opinion of the catholic church, it seems that she feels as if she had given it too many chances, 'I feel like the catholic church are hypocrites. I had 'hoped' that their attitude would change but I have given up hoping'. She states that she did have hope until the election, where these 'people who think they are Christian. Spreading hatred is not what religion is supposed to be about.' But mindboggling she is optimistic that they will lose control and 'they will lose what little support they have left'.

All of the women, even though through all the discrimination and violence they have endured they all surprisingly had a happy outlook on others. Subject A acknowledges that things are changing 'It is changing, I know kids now and they are so open about anything different. I was speaking to a 13-year-old and asked if she liked the guy she was with, her answer was yeah but not in a couple way, he is gay... that was it... just yep he is gay'. Which just shows the level of honesty and openness some people can be in the next generation. Subject two has hope for the future 'I always hold hope for the future, I would hope that the next generation has it easier than I had it and I would hope that there would be no slurs towards gay people anymore'. Even after being bullied at school being called a 'faggit' and a 'queer' she has not given up hope on the people who were bad to her. She hopes for it to be easier for the families of the next generations explaining 'a lot of the LGBT people suffer with depression due too being scared to come out of having hatred towards themselves because of others' opinions but I sincerely hope that will change'. Even though subject three spent most of her time away from Ireland, she thinks that we are definitely on the right track, and with the help of the church weakening they have more of a chance to push forward. She feels like things will change in a short amount of time, and the LGBT community will be accepted more. Shockingly after Subject 4 had been raped, spat on, her own brother trying to get her signed out of their fathers will, her cousin trying to have sex with her and getting groped by her previous employer, she still feels optimistic about the Future. For her the marriage referendum and the decriminalization were huge events in her life. The marriage referendum gave her the most hope, 'The referendum was not about

‘Marriage’ for most of the LGBT people. It was purely about being treated equal under the law. If you are not equal, you are ‘less than’. Being viewed or treated as defiantly impacts your confidence and finally achieving equality has given people confidence, the confidence to be honest recognized not having to hide their relationships or sexual orientation. To recognize yourself as being ok to be gay’.

Three out of the four women had to escape where they were, they felt so repressed that they had to be free and that meant by moving away. Subject 2,3 and 4 all moved away from home. Targeted horrifically for their sexuality they left their homes and moved to a better place. Subject three moved from County Meath to Dublin, ‘In my early teens as I was being horrendously bullied about it since I was 13 when I came out to my friend, the bullying stopped as I moved away from home for college’. Which shows the only way out of the torment was to move away from these people. Subject 2 moved from a cold Northern Ireland to Australia and that’s when she felt at most at home. She even went to London after Australia because she was not ready to come home to tell her parents. ‘The four months in Sydney which included my first ever Mardi gras, that I felt comfortable identifying as a lesbian and a further year living in London before I felt I could come out to my parents in 2005’. Subject 4 describes the extent of being gay in the 80’s and 90 as a ‘no-no, you were a freak!’ which was also because being gay was linked with the AIDs epidemic. She describes the aids epidemic to be ‘talked about as an act of God sent to kill the queers. She escaped to England and America. Where she tried to get away from the repression of Ireland. Each woman hid their sexuality, emotions, desires and then finally when they had the courage to come out, or tell people about their sexuality they were bashed, tormented and violated by human beings just the same as them.

Throughout the course of the interviews, I felt shocked, angry, embarrassed and I felt like these women were the most influential and inspirational women I had ever met. To go through such hardship and be able to talk about such brutal events, I was amazed. It was very upsetting to me that, these women who could be your sister, mother, niece, aunt, are being treated unequally because of who they love. I was shocked and appalled by the actions of other people from their stories. These women are four, only four of thousands and thousands of lesbians in Ireland, and this is exactly why lesbians and homosexuals do not have the courage to come out. In fear that they could be attacked, shunned, disowned, fired, alienated, violated from people and society. Why? Because they

do not follow the traditional rules that have been set out. Because they love a person that could just so happen to be the same gender as them? Because this is the way they are, and that's not wrong. Discrimination of sexuality is wrong.

I was so shocked to see all of what that these women have had to battle, and majority of the time they have been battling it by themselves. They are the most inspirational women I have ever met. It really shows how inspirational they are by how after being treated with such disrespect and brutality, they can hope for a better Ireland. They do not resent anything. They accept the fact that some people's opinion will not change, that is amazing.

Chapter 5; Conclusion

The hurdles lesbian women have faced from as far back as the Greek era to now has been enormous. Lesbian women have lived this underground culture, where they have hidden away their feelings for years. They have felt like they could not be their true self without being ridiculed and tormented because Ireland has always been a deeply religious country.

The church has taken huge effect on the mindset of certain people. The result of this is, certain people can not adapt or understand that people do not live their life by the teachings of the church. Which effects the LGBT community hugely.⁴⁰ Ireland is, in the terms of Ann Swidler (1986), an “unsettled culture” in which there is deep ideological conflict about sex and sexuality. Anything having to do with sex if usually cast as a social problem hotly debated and discussed in the public sphere.

But times are changing, people are opening their eyes to a new Ireland. Where people are able to live their lives freely regardless of gender race or sexuality. It is taking small steps into becoming a better Ireland. With the help of these people who openly speak about their sexuality they are spreading awareness to many others that are hiding from fear. Fear of not being accepted, fear of losing love ones, but this should not be the case. People should not be able to judge you just on your sexual preference. Everyone is equal in this world, its only in people’s mindsets that they class themselves higher than the next person. From Foucault’s theory of sexuality, the Criminal law amendment act in 1885, Lesbian pirates dressing as men so they could have a relationship with a woman, and the lesbians of today, all of you women are shaping and paving the way for a better Ireland, an Ireland that there is freedom, freedom to be yourself and not to be discriminated against. All of these women throughout the years have made this turn in history.

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Appendix 1;

1) How was your experience growing up as a Lesbian woman in Ireland? Did/Do you feel accepted?

2) Was there a specific moment where you felt extremely discriminated against? / If constantly- do you feel like this will ever change?

3) Do you resent the Catholic Church for the negative light it shed on the LGBT community?

Do you think it has caused people to behave like this?

4) Will their view ever change?

5) Has Ireland become more accepting towards the lesbian community through these years?

6) In the 1990s things in Ireland started to shift, the first gay kiss on Fair City was aired in 1996, and in July '93 only 23 years ago it was decriminalized for the LGBT community to have consensual acts between two adults. Was there a moment for you that gave you hope that things were going to change?

7) Did these events switch people's views towards the LGBT community? Or do you think they became more hostile because they didn't like the transition?

8) Since the Yes vote, has it given the LGBT more confidence?

9) Do you find it hard to accept that some counties in Ireland didn't want the Yes vote to go through? For example, the whole county of Roscommon voted no?

10) Has it made an impact on your everyday life?

11) Do you have hope for the generations to come?

Appendix 2.

Subject 1.

29

Dublin.

1) How was your experience growing up as a Lesbian woman in Ireland? Did/Do you feel accepted?

No, I'm 28 and my mother is the only person in my family who knows about my sexuality and she only found out by accident about 3 weeks ago. My family are homophobic, to the extent that when I was about 14/15 my aunt made me wash my hands after shaking hands with a distant relative. They would not say anything to people's face or gay bash as such, but behind closed doors they make very hurtful comments about people who they have no right to judge. Little do they know that while they are judging women for being lesbian, I'm sitting across the room and they are oblivious. It doesn't bother me though, because in their tiny world ignorance is bliss and they have no idea what they are missing out on living a close minded life. From when I was 13/14 I knew I had attraction to women and men, but believed for a long time that I can't be both and I spent a lot of time listening to other people's opinions on who I should be or why I am lesbian or why they think I'm straight. Then you have the comments of 'you can't be on the fence your whole life', sometimes lesbians can be quite hurtful about it too, I'm not judging a book by a cover because everyone is different, but some lesbians don't accept the fact that

2) Was there a specific moment where you felt extremely discriminated against? / if constantly- do you feel like this will ever change?

I don't feel I've been discriminated against as I'm subtle about my sexuality, almost suppressed, because of the way I was raised mostly. But because I don't fly a pride flag doesn't mean I am any less gay than the next person. I do know of people who have been beaten up and harassed because of their sexuality, and I don't agree with it at all, no person should feel threatened for who they are because another person thinks they are superior to them. But on the other hand I have had situations where I was in town and I was called a homophobe because I said no thank you to a LGBT leaflet, which is amazing, because that is inciting hatred in itself, forcing someone to accept an opinion and categorizing them immediately because they didn't accept a leaflet, I was harassed by a lesbian because I didn't accept a leaflet to tell me that she was a lesbian, it's baffling in itself. I didn't dare say I was gay either because I know I would have received the usual attitude of it being convenient.

3) Do you resent the catholic church for the negative light it shed on the LGBT community? How has it impacted on your life?

I wouldn't consider myself an active member for the LGBT community, not for any particular reason, I just like to do my own thing. In a similar way to how I made my confirmation, and was raised catholic, I don't practice religion, I choose to exclude myself from religion and the LGBT community, I don't see my sexuality a pass to a club, I just do me. The older generation of my family are quite religious, but my mother got divorced, so they can't be that godly. I think everyone is entitled to an opinion, and although we may not agree with each other, we should leave it be, let other people live how they wish to, once they

4) Will their view ever change?

All religions rely on context from hundreds of years ago, this will never change. The fact that condoms were against the law in the 1970s is enough to realize that they still have a backward view of life, they choose to live in the past and on beliefs which are unrealistic in this generation. To me it doesn't matter if the church changes its opinion, they are but another group in the country with different opinions, they do need to step away from control over areas schools, hospitals and other areas as they are not impartial to other people's lifestyles. I think sex in Ireland isn't spoken about because of how the church ran everything, people were encouraged to only have sex if they were married and wanted children, if they didn't want kids. Then don't have sex. I wouldn't speak to my mam about it, I've never had the talk even with her, it was more a case of we figure it out ourselves. Then sex aid in school is the most pathetic excuse for an education if I've ever seen one. They divide the students by gender, instead of treating them like competent people for those few hours and to explain what happens with the other sex. Then to add to it they don't have any education for lesbian women, it's all, here is a condom, put it on and that's it. But again, it's more than what would have ever been thought to women 30+ years ago, they were thought how to obey their husband. It is changing, I know kids now and they are so open about everything, then I know teens who have friends who are gay and similarly they don't see it as anything different, I was speaking to a 13-year-old and asked if she liked the guy she was friend's with was, he answer was Yeah but not in a couple way, he's gay. That was it. Nothing

more. No like big blow out shock. Just yep he's gay. And then started talking about getting food. Since I left school I wouldn't be in touch with anyone from then, but I've seen that about 7/8 people in my year have come out as gay or lesbian, but this was never ever mentioned in school. My own brother who is 7 years younger was with a group of friends and he used to slag off gay men. He wouldn't ever bash on them, but words can be more hurtful at times, he was about 14/15 and it was mostly because of his macho group of friends, now two of his best friends are gay men and if I'm honest I think he may be bisexual too. The problem with Ireland is religious suppression, but on the other hand, we are centuries ahead of other countries, if you consider the fact that women in places like the middle east cannot leave the house without a man, or having their faces covered, how many women would you say are lesbian living a life of hell being forced into marriage and and have children for a man they have no attraction towards. To compare Ireland to that, we have it very very easy. Another issue which I think is holding progression for lesbians is the amount of men in government, it doesn't matter if they mop floors or are the president, they still have the little pea brain attitude that lesbians are butch and / or they can't get a man so they sleep with each other. Then they also assume that lesbians need a penis. Ha-ha I know right. Any lesbian I know is disgusted at the thought of a penis near her. But the amount of times a guy has said to me I can make you straight is unbelievable, heterosexual men who think they hold a magical wand of sorts that can change sexual preferences. Which I laugh off. But, then you have these same Muppets saying it to lesbian women thinking that they like his attempt at flirting. I'm sure that hasn't changed much in the last 100 years either. It's like their brain slips down their spine into their balls or something I do not know.

5)Do you think Ireland became more accepting towards the lesbian community through these years?

Yes, I agree totally with this comment, the stigma attached to same sex has been plagued by the idea that disease is rampant, and that gay men primarily. One issue I do have with what's been seen as acceptance is that celebrity figures are lesbian all of a sudden, then

they're straight, then oh wait. Lesbian again, instead of being bisexual, it's all about the headlines, and the fact that the media cannot accept that bisexual and also pansexual people exist. I have come to love being in town compared to ten years ago, whether it's because my eyes are open now to the fact of who I am, but I love nothing more than to see a happy gay or lesbian couple in town being affectionate, no one to bother them and to see the love people have for each other.

6) In the 1990s things in Ireland started to shift, the first gay kiss on Fair City was aired in 1996, and in July '93 only 22 years ago it was decriminalized for the LGBT community to have consensual acts between two adults. Was there a moment for you that gave you hope that things were going to change?

I know the change regarding the civil partnership is a huge step in the right direction, but as mentioned above, 22 years ago it was illegal, if that's not progress I don't know what is. I think acceptance comes from within also, someone is always going to judge, Ireland is never going to be a perfect country, and LGBT people are one of thousands of groups who are discriminated against.

7) Did these events switch people's views towards the LGBT community? Or do you think they became more hostile because they didn't like the transition?

In my grandmother's words, did you see they passed a law so that the gays can get married... it won't be in a church though so it doesn't count. That is the stupid mentality some people have, but on the other hand I know people who spoke about it and truth be told, it did not affect them so they could not care less. What also can be realized from this is that to these people I am seen as straight, so they have no temptation to lie so not to hurt my feelings.

8) Since the Yes vote, has it gave the LGBT more confidence?

I don't know, for me nothing has changed, I don't really believe in marriage inside or outside the church. It's a contractual agreement to me, if you love and care for someone enough, it shouldn't matter. But I do understand the requirement for it for adoption etc. sometimes it is unavoidable.

9)Do you find it hard to accept that some county's in Ireland didn't want the Yes vote to go through? For example, the whole county of Roscommon voted no?

Have you been to Roscommon, it's a not exactly the cultural capital of Ireland, the population is generally old and the younger generation is more around Athlone etc. rural areas will find it harder to change as the mindset is very different, the community is close knit and they have strong connections with the church. It doesn't surprise me, but that's their opinion, they're entitled to it.

10)Has It made an impact on your everyday life?

No, as I said above I don't see myself ever getting married, although heaven does sound tempting, but I would probably melt or daemons would leave my body if I entered a church ha-ha-ha my family would love me to be in debt for thousands though so they can have a night on me too. Seriously though, I do not let the opinion of others stop me from doing what I want, I may not tell my family about who I am, but at the end of the day I am a private person, I don't need their permission or acceptance to be who I am. I also go persecuted by my grandmother because I have tattoos, my entire back is tattooed, she didn't know for 2 years I had it, her disgust changes nothing, the same way it would change nothing if she seen me kissing a woman.

11)Do you have hope for the generations to come?

Life is what the people make it for themselves, if your happy in yourself what else matters.

Subject 2.

Age: 20

Meath.

1)How was your experience growing up as a Lesbian woman in Ireland? Did/Do you feel accepted?

My experience was varied from hate to acceptance but it was mostly not accepted by society. I am very lucky my family came round to the idea after a while but they were initially surprised and thought it was a "phase". In my early teens as I was being

horrendously bullied about it since I was 13 when I came out to what I thought was a friend. Since leaving school, the bullying stopped as I moved away from home for college. I got my first girlfriend at 17 and we were together for 2 years. Society didn't really accept us when walking around holding hands and there were jeers of "faggits" at times unfortunately. However, we still never let it stop us from being our true selves. I sometimes do not feel accepted by society and now that I am in a new relationship, it is kind of sad that I have to go to somewhere like The George to feel comfortable, yet it is great that that outlet exists for people like me. I have accepted myself since I was 17 and I think once you accept yourself, the hate might still hurt or whatever but ultimately, it will still never stop you from being your true self.

2) Was there a specific moment where you felt extremely discriminated against? / if constantly- do you feel like this will ever change?

Apart from when I was being bullied in school, there were a few public issues with partners where I was called a faggit or queer so in that sense I did feel discriminated against about that but for any other situations like friendships or college, my sexuality never to date has been brought into the question.

3) Do you resent the catholic church for the negative light it shed on the LGBT community? How has it impacted on your life?

I don't resent the Catholic Church for its views on LGBT people. I mean of course I find it annoying to hear the things they have to say about LGBT people but I believe everyone has the right to an opinion, even if I wouldn't necessarily be in agreement with it. I am a Catholic myself but not a practicing one so I don't ever have dealings with the Church or I have not come out to them or anything. So far, their views have not impacted on my life as such as they're a separate entity to how I live my life.

4) Will their view ever change?

I don't think their view will ever change – their beliefs are rooted in history for years and years and they have ruled Ireland for years up until about 1996 when divorce and contraception came into law. Of course I would like to see their views being changed for my own personal self but then again, I cannot expect everyone to agree with how I live my life.

5) Do you think Ireland became more accepting towards the lesbian community through these years?

That is a tough question to answer. The Catholic Church has less of a hold on the country yet most people who grew up in the 50s and 60s and before it are still against LGBT people because the teachings of the Church was all they have ever known. I'd say most young people in their 20s-30s are more accepting but I believe influencers like Catholic-run schools greatly distort the minds of people on LGBT issues. With the decriminalization of homosexuality, that itself has helped gay people live their lives how they want to as well.

6) In the 1990s things in Ireland started to shift, the first gay kiss on Fair City was aired in 1996, and in July '93 only 22 years ago it was decriminalized for the LGBT community to have consensual acts between two adults. Was there a moment for you that gave you hope that things were going to change?

I myself was only born in 1995 so I wasn't born when homosexuality was decriminalized but in my generation so far, I feel that the Marriage Equality Referendum result was a huge moment for the LGBT Community to feel more accepted and acknowledged. Upon hearing the result, I remember bursting out crying with happiness and pride that Ireland overall voted to acknowledge me to have a marriage like the majority of straight people can have.

7) Did these events switch people's views towards the LGBT community? Or do you think they became more hostile because they didn't like the transition?

There will always be people who are against LGBT people and I don't think their minds will ever be changed and there are/will always be hostility towards gay people no matter what exciting event occurs but I think once the gay person themselves is comfortable with themselves, it won't matter. I think the Referendum did highlight to people that gay people are here and they're not going away to bow down to the pressures of parts of society that aren't accepting. I overall think the Referendum DID change people's views towards gay people as 63/64% of the country were in favor for gay marriage and the rest of the people that voted no, I don't think about nor care what their views are.

8) Since the Yes vote, has it given the LGBT more confidence?

I do think the Yes vote gave more confidence to gay people all across Ireland and especially to those who were scared to “come out”. It gave them confidence to know that they can have the equal chance to get married like heterosexual couples can and also to know that the majority of Ireland recognizes them as equal to straight people in that sense. However, I do think annual events like Pride give huge confidence to LGBT people also.

9) Do you find it hard to accept that some county's in Ireland didn't want the Yes vote to go through? For example, the whole county of Roscommon voted no?

I was surprised to read that Roscommon voted No after the results were tallied but I didn't really care to be honest. I was just happy that the majority of the country did in fact vote yes. I wouldn't be the type of person to hate a specific section of society so it didn't bother me that some counties were against it. I was just happy that the majority of counties were for it.

10) Has it made an impact on your everyday life?

My home county of Wicklow votes yes for it and most people were very accepting so it didn't have an impact on me that a small few counties were against it.

I always hold hope for the future. I would hope that the next generation has it easier than I had/have it and I would hope that there would be no slurs towards gay people anymore.

11) Do you have hope for the generations to come?

Realistically I don't think that will happen but I would just hope that life would be easier for the next generation of LGBT people in terms of acceptance by families and friends. A lot of LGBT people suffer with depression due to being scared to come out or having hatred towards themselves because of others' opinions but I sincerely hope that will change.

Subject three.

Northern Ireland

38

1)How was your experience growing up as a Lesbian woman in Ireland? Did/Do you feel accepted?

Definitely didn't feel comfortable being a lesbian in Northern Ireland and remained in the closet until my mid 20s. It was only after leaving and spending a year in Australia (2003/2004), specifically the 4 months in Sydney which included my first ever Mardi Gras, that I felt comfortable identifying as a lesbian, and a further year living in London before I felt I could come out to my parents (2005).

I've lived in Australia for the last 8 years and feel very comfortable over there. However, there's definitely been a massive shift in the last 10 years in Ireland and with civil marriage being legal, they are now ahead of Australia in some regards and I definitely feel comfortable being entirely out over here now.

2)Was there a specific moment where you felt extremely discriminated against? / if constantly- do you feel like this will ever change?

Definitely would have feel discriminated against on numerous occasions in the past, such as negative perceptions in the media or casual remarks about what constitutes 'normal'
Don't believe this is the case any more, so believe it has already changed

3)Do you resent the catholic church for the negative light it shed on the LGBT community?
How has it impacted on your life?

Yes, don't just think it is the LGBT community that the Catholic Church has impacted.
I don't think there has been a lasting impact but categorically during my teens they were instrumental in making me feel like my feelings were inappropriate and must be kept hidden and I was not a worthwhile human, which definitely made me feel suicidal, though luckily I never acted on this.

4)Will their view ever change?

No, but I feel their influence is considerably weakened and will become insignificant.

5)Has Ireland become more accepting towards the lesbian community through these years?

Yes, I think so.

6) In the 1990s things in Ireland started to shift, the first gay kiss on Fair City was aired in 1996, and in July '93 only 22 years ago it was decriminalized for the LGBT community to have consensual acts between two adults. Was there a moment for you that gave you hope that things were going to change?

Not really, especially as I lived outside the country (Northern Ireland) from 2001. But I would say the commercial success and mainstreaming of Queer as Folk, despite the fact it portrayed all aspects of gay lifestyles.

7) Did these events switch people's views towards the LGBT community? Or do you think they became more hostile because they didn't like the transition?

Both. I think as the acceptance of the LGBT community edged towards becoming the majority it was always going to result in the remaining minority becoming more hostile in their views.

8) Since the Yes vote, has it given the LGBT more confidence?

Not being here at the time, it's hard to answer but I'd think yes. Though you'd have to have confidence to go for the vote in the first place and withstand the caustic negative media that came with it in the run-up to the vote.

9) Do you find it hard to accept that some counties in Ireland didn't want the Yes vote to go through? For example, the whole county of Roscommon voted no?

No, because I believe in a really short amount of time it will be accepted more. Especially as 17,615 people in Roscommon South Leitrim voted Yes, which was just 1,029 short of those who voted No. Though if I was living in Roscommon, I would probably have been disappointed by the result.

10) Has it made an impact on your everyday life?

No

11) Do you have hope for the generations to come?

I think hope for this generation has already been significantly realized and I would hope we achieve more in relation to transgender acceptance and rights before the next generation .

Subject 4.

Age; 50

South Dublin.

1) How was your experience growing up as a Lesbian woman in Ireland? Did/Do you feel accepted?

Being gay as a teenager in Ireland in the 80's & 90's was a no-no. You were a freak! Most people went to England or America as soon as they could. I went to London.

As a teenager in school in the 80's being gay was largely connected to the AIDS epidemic. Before people even knew what AIDS was, it was talked about as an act of God sent to kill the queers. It was said to me in 1985 by another student that I was a lesbian and I was going to get AIDS. I was not sure what 'Lesbian' was, and the only association I had with that word was of a female who wore Doc Martins and wore black. I wore neither of these. I was not aware that I was attracted to women, even though I was. I thought I just had special connections to certain females. The word Gay or lesbian was very rarely used, and only ever in a negative sense. It was used as a term of abuse. So it was always something you did not want to be. And AIDS, well that was 'The Gay Disease'.

The first gay kiss on TV that was huge for me was Brookside on channel 4 in 1994. Anna Friel as Beth Jordache kissing Nicola Stephenson as Margaret Clemence. I was nervous and excited, scared and ashamed all together. Everyone was talking about it everywhere. I was embarrassed; I went red every time it came up in conversation. It was another 5 years before I came out, but it was definitely a turning point in my thinking, it opened up a possibility that maybe, just maybe....

I did have a relationship with a girl from '91 – '93, but we told ourselves that we were not gay, we just loved each other. It was a secret, or so we thought. I spent the next 6 years trying very hard not to be gay. Drinking to excess, sleeping with fellas to dispel rumours - to

prove that I wasn't gay. It was a horrible time.

2) Was there a specific moment where you felt extremely discriminated against? / If constantly- do you feel like this will ever change?

There have been many moments in my life that were significant in relation to discrimination.

When I returned from London aged 29. My sister picked me up from the airport. On the journey home she told me she didn't want her friends to know anything about me and I was not to talk to any of her friends

A second time, My brother trying to have me written out of my father's will because I was queer and he didn't want to have to deal with me. He was going to buy me out (at 0.1% of the value of my inheritance) and I was to sign a disclaimer, agreeing to never have any further claim on any part of my dad's estate. My brother made it clear he didn't want to deal with a queer, and I should be grateful that I should get anything.

Also, being sidelined from my father's funeral.

In my job. Twice. Both directly being called a dyke and once spat on and laughed at for being a dyke.

Being refused a double room in a hotel that had been booked a month previously when the owner realized we were a same-sex couple

Male Cousins trying to have sex with me, as they see a gay woman as a sexual object, or sexual deviant. I still find this is their thinking in 2016, despite how far we have come. They still try to feel me up; as recent as last week!

Being raped by an ex boyfriend who was trying to 'straighten' me out

An employer putting me up against a wall and feeling me up and telling me I just need a real man.

There are many more incidents or occasions. I find that the attitude of society as a whole is changing but family opinion is not. Most of my family voted no in the referendum.

3) Jesus, I am so sorry. Do you resent the Catholic Church for the negative light it shed on the LGBT community? Do you think it has caused people to behave like this?

I feel the Catholic Church are hypocrites. I had 'hoped' that their attitude would change but I have given up hoping. I still had respect for the Church up until the debate for the

Referendum. Some of the things that were said by the Church advocates were hateful. I had hoped that the new Pope would bring positive change in relation to how people who happen to be gay are viewed and treated. I always had a strong faith, but that has been shattered by people who think they are Christian. Spreading hatred is not what religion is supposed to be about. I don't waste my energy resenting them, but the Church is not part of my life anymore.

4) Will their view ever change?

I believe it will. Social Media has helped educate people, and has also given people the ability to form their own opinions. The thinking of most Irish people used to be controlled and conditioned from the pulpit on a Sunday. Thankfully they no longer have control. It will have to change or they will lose what little support they have left

5) Has Ireland become more accepting towards the lesbian community through these years?

Yes. The view of lesbians has changed. The stereotypical description of a lesbian was short-haired, checked-shirt wearing butch woman. If you weren't butch people thought, you couldn't be a lesbian. You just hadn't had the right man yet. Now it's cool to be a lesbian.

6) In the 1990s things in Ireland started to shift, the first gay kiss on Fair City was aired in 1996, and in July '93 only 23 years ago it was decriminalized for the LGBT community to have consensual acts between two adults. Was there a moment for you that gave you hope that things were going to change?

Decriminalization. The fact that Decriminalization is even a thing is disgraceful. We have come a long way. And Decriminalization was hard won. It started a well-needed conversation and it started a change in thinking. Fair City took a risk; maybe doing it for ratings as Brookside's viewer's ratings was huge two years previous. Or maybe they had gay writers!! I hope the latter. We still had to hide our sexuality at work and at home. Teachers who were gay could not be open about their relationships in the workplaces, as they could lose their jobs. Most workplaces were not suitable to be openly gay in. As long as the law discriminates against a person or group then it allows organizations and individuals to do the same. Most gay people that I know would not take part in the Gay Pride Parade in case someone from work saw them and they were outed. The moment for me and for most gay

people that I know was May 23rd 2016. "Finally Equal" was how we felt.

7)Did these events switch people's views towards the LGBT community? Or do you think they became more hostile because they didn't like the transition?

I don't know about switching people's views, but it started the conversation and debate. People believed (and some still do) that being gay is related to paedophilia. This conversation that it started educated people that the two are not connected. Those who still hold the view that pedophilia and being gay are connected are the people that are hostile. They just need to be educated

8)Since the Yes vote, has it given the LGBT more confidence?

Absolutely. The referendum was not about 'Marriage' for most LGBT people. It was purely about being treated equal under the law. If you are not equal, then you are 'less than'. (it was never a possibility that we were more than) Being viewed or treated as less than definitely impacts on confidence and finally achieving equality has given people confidence. The confidence to be honest recognized, not having to hide their relationships or sexual orientation. To recognize yourself as being ok to be gay.

9)Do you find it hard to accept that some counties in Ireland didn't want the Yes vote to go through? For example, the whole county of Roscommon voted no?

Yes, but I do understand it. The county I come from voted No but the adjoining county voted yes and as the two are combined in a constituency that then brought the vote up to 50.65%. A lot of young people have moved abroad, and even though some young people came home to vote, not enough young people were in my county to vote on the day. That is what happened in Roscommon. I think.

10)Has it made an impact on your everyday life?

Yes, most definitely. It has allowed me to feel equal, to feel like I cannot be discriminated against again for my sexual orientation. I do not allow family members to put me down anymore, and due to the debate on homophobia I have called them out on their behavior. Publicly. I don't go shouting it about, or have PDA's but I do not feel less than anymore. That in itself has made a huge difference to me

11) Do you have hope for the generations to come

I hope that, nobody ever has to go through the confusion and ridicule that I went through. Soon it will not even be a topic of conversation, that being LGBT will not be a thing. That people will just be people, not described as a section of society. That words like queer and faggot and dyke won't be terminology that is used in everyday life. In twenty years' time people will be saying the same thing about equality (or the lack of until last year) that I have said about decriminalization. That it is shameful that it was even a thing. That people who are attracted to the same sex will not be described as confused. You fancy a person, not a gender. One of my school friends said that looking back, people will wonder what all the fuss was about. I hope so.