

Same-Sex Marriage and Conservative Christian Values:
A Comparison Between
the Republic of Ireland and the State of California (US)
from a Post-Legalisation Perspective

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Declaration

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Summary

Insufficient research has been done to examine same-sex marriage discourse from a post-legalisation perspective in California and Ireland. This project investigates the topic through the lens of campaigns for and against the legalisation of same-sex marriage in both regions. It examines relational dynamics between pro- and anti-same sex marriage campaigners in California (US) and Ireland because, although different in population size and religious demographics, there are sufficient similarities between the debates, and among the primary activists, to prove informative. Building on existing work that investigates the ideologies involved in this conflict, this project looks at the subject primarily through the experience of the actors most immediately involved in its political campaign.

This research identifies ideological, religious and cultural factors that have played significant roles in the facilitation of polarisation between these two groups. After a review of relevant literature, a theoretical framework was constructed that is interdisciplinary in nature. Finally, a qualitative methodology was applied to data collected through semi-structured interviews. The subjects of these interviews were selected from four groups: (1) Pro-Same Sex Marriage Advocates in California (2) Anti-Same Sex Marriage Campaigners in California (3) Pro-Same Sex Marriage Advocates in Ireland and (4) Anti-Same Sex Marriage Campaigners in Ireland. Pro-same sex marriage advocates selected, in both California and Ireland, had secular worldviews, while anti-same sex marriage advocates were self-described conservative Christians. Selected to be representative of broader demographic trends, all anti-same sex marriage activists in California were evangelical, while their counterparts in Ireland were Catholic. A total of 19 people were interviewed for this research.

Once conducted, interviews were analysed to compare and contrast the experiences and observations of individuals on both sides of the debate and in both jurisdictions. Assessment of the campaign process, including its strategic design and implementation, demonstrated a clear transnational trend between campaigns in both locales. Further analysis of responses showed the outsized role emotion, especially personal grievance, played in post-legalisation perceptions of the campaign on the part of participants. Anti-same sex marriage advocates were especially emotional in their responses and expressed particular feelings of anger and marginalisation because of their conservative views, which they see increasingly marginalised in today's liberal political framework.

Jonathan Haidt's *Moral Foundations Theory* explains the role that moral instinct plays in political decision-making, especially in relation to emotionally complex issues like same-sex marriage. *MFT* helps explain why individuals involved in policy debates are so quick to shut down the possibility of authenticity or sincerity in opponents, while discerning nothing but righteousness in themselves.

Haidt's work underscores challenges, evident between pro- and anti-same sex marriage advocates, in overcoming the "us and them" narrative frequently employed to exacerbate tensions. Supported by observations made by activists, this project shows the value of personal narrative and storytelling as a means of connecting across otherwise intractable worldview divides.

A post-legislation assessment of the same-sex marriage campaign in Ireland and California shows that ideological, political and cultural barriers continue to prevent interaction and dialogue between the subjects of this project. A critical analysis of Rawlsian *liberalism* shows that his concept of the "proviso" is inhibiting inclusive discourse about same-sex marriage in the US and Ireland. An inclusive political framework is, in fact, better supported by Habermas's *post-secular theory*, which encourages the equal valuing of secular and non-secular voices in public discourse. As a result, it is better situated to include actors which Rawls's "proviso" appears to marginalise. The results of this project do, however, challenge Habermas's post-secular emphasis on the religious/secular worldview divide. Rather, they indicate the greatest gulf is the liberal/conservative one.

The wide range of views on marriage discussed throughout this research show the *either religious or queer* dichotomy is a false one; one that clearly hinders dialogue. Rather, those individuals who fall outside the limiting confines of these restrictive boxes, are uniquely posed to help facilitate dialogue moving forward. Individuals who are members of both LGBTQ+ and religious communities have a unique linguistic fluency that makes them capable of speaking to individuals across the spectrum in both communities.

By investigating a variety of avenues into the same-sex marriage debate in California and Ireland, this project critically assesses the possibilities for, and hindrances to, genuine dialogue between opposing groups. On the bases of such assessments, this dissertation recommends the implementation of dialogical practices that support non-judgmental engagement; ones that do not emphasise *resolution*, but *open dialogue*. It particularly advocates for a dialogical framework that draws on a *both/and*, not *either/or*, model because it allows for an understanding of participants as multifaceted individuals and does not limit discourse by creating a false dichotomy between the LGBTQ+ community and religious adherents.

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List of Abbreviations

CDF	Congregation of the Doctrine of the Faith
CFC	California Family Council
CHLR	Campaign for Homosexual Law Reform
DOMA	Defence of Marriage Act
GLEN	Gay and Lesbian Equality Network
LGBTQ+	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer/Questioning (+)
MEI	Marriage Equality Ireland
MFT	Moral Foundations Theory
NCLR	National Center for Lesbian Rights
NOM	National Organisation for Marriage

INTRODUCTION

The issue of LGBTQ+ rights has been on the political agenda in some form in most western countries since the 1960s. Until the 1990s or early 2000s, however, homophobia was commonplace and homosexual practice was outlawed in many countries, including the United States and the Republic of Ireland. It was the decades of activism between the 1960s and 2000s that successfully brought LGBTQ+ people out of the closet both socially and politically.

Early activism, in the US, focused on legalising same-sex relationships and sexual relations, and on passing laws to protect LGBTQ+ people from job, healthcare and housing discrimination. As anti-sodomy laws were successfully struck down in a number of US states, advocacy shifted to gaining protections for non-heteronormative relationships and families. Not until 2003, however, did federal law overrule all state anti-sodomy laws. Progress was being made more quickly at the state level, however. A place often at the forefront of LGBTQ+ rights advocacy and legislation, Berkeley, California became the first jurisdiction to recognise same-sex unions of any type in 1984. California, as a whole, finally passed a domestic partnership law in 1999 and was the first state to recognise same-sex unions, although the idea of marriage was still far off.¹

Like the US, early LGBTQ+ rights activism in Ireland focused on the decriminalisation of homosexual relationships and sexual acts. The *Campaign for Homosexual Law Reform* was established in the 1970s to fight for the decriminalisation of male homosexual behaviour. Their success came in 1993, the result of a case brought by David Norris to The European Court of Human Rights.² Over the next two decades, LGBTQ+ rights advocates in Ireland succeeded in gaining protections in employment, housing and healthcare for adults. They fought to criminalise hate crimes and, even before the legalisation of marriage equality, same-sex couples and individuals had gained the right to adoption, to IVF services and to a number of other familial protections for themselves and their children.

The political desire for something more than basic domestic partnership protections emerged in the 2000s in both jurisdictions. Civil union laws had provided same-sex couples with “marriage-like” protections, but they were significantly less inclusive than traditional marriage protections. Although

¹ Many other states have yet to include anti-discrimination laws for LGBTQ+ people in their constitutions. LGBTQ+ activists have not, as yet, been successful in getting these protections included in federal laws, although a number of cases are currently heading to the Supreme Court that have the ability to change that.

² "Case of Norris V Ireland," in *10581/83*, ed. Court (Plenary) (A1421988). His case was originally heard by the Irish Supreme Court, who voted 3-2 *against* legalising homosexuality because it violated the “Christian and democratic nature of the Irish State.”

a vast improvement on previous partnership recognitions, they remained, inherently, unequal. This frustration with continued “second class citizenship” became the flashpoint for a new LGBTQ+ rights priority: the legalisation of same-sex marriage. Over the first decade of the 2000s, marriage equality increasingly became a political priority in both locales.

The impetus behind this research’s comparative examination of same-sex marriage discourse in Ireland and the US arose from the fact both nations legalised same-sex marriage just months apart. Where one nation (Ireland) legalised it through a referendum process, which requires the engagement of everyday citizens, the other (the US) gained legalisation through the decision of its nine US Supreme Court judges. However, the relative autonomy of American states, and the country’s vast size, make California a more appropriate comparison with Ireland than the whole of the US. Furthermore, although Ireland’s population is more akin to, for example, California’s Bay Area alone, the whole state was selected because it provides a more comparably diverse demographic and government size. It also has a lengthy tradition of using referendums to make state-wide decisions.

In 2000, in the state of California, Proposition 22 passed by 61-39% of the vote. This referendum decision added Section 308.5 to the Family Code, stipulating that marriage could only be between one man and one woman. After a long court fight, however, the proposition was finally struck down by the state supreme court on May 15, 2008 as incompatible with the state constitution. What followed, between May and November in 2008, was arguably the most controversial time in the marriage rights movement in the US. Wary of the liberalising LGBTQ+ rights wave cresting over the nation at the time, anti-same sex marriage activists were not caught unawares. Within two months of the court’s decision, they had gathered enough signatures to place Proposition 8 on the ballot, which would reinstate the requirement that marriage be between “one man and one woman.” This time, however, it would enshrine it in California’s constitution. By November 2008, they had succeeded in their mission. The proposition passed by 52% of the vote. It took five years and a US Supreme Court ruling to overturn Prop 8 and establish same-sex marriage as legal in California. It took two more years for the US Supreme Court to rule on *Obergefell* (2015), establishing marriage equality as federal law. These cases’ high level of visibility helped transform same-sex marriage advocacy in the US and abroad.

Ireland’s unified legal system, which unlike the US lacks any state versus federal laws, made legalising same-sex marriage in its jurisdiction somewhat simpler, although not necessarily easier. In 2006, a lesbian couple who had sought recognition for their marriage, which had taken place in Canada, lost a case in the High Court. In the wake of their loss, the political advocacy group *Marriage Equality Ireland* was founded, the primary organisation behind what would become the successful

campaign for same-sex marriage in 2015.³ Then, in 2009, Ireland passed a civil partnership bill and, while some advocacy groups celebrated this achievement, a number of others saw it as simply another way to enshrine discrimination, since it intentionally privileged hetero-sex couples above same-sex ones. They found themselves forced into a legal corner, and were told a referendum was the only way out. Referendums, a legal solution that relies on the support of the majority, had rarely been kind to LGBTQ+ activists and, thus, were generally avoided. However, with no other option, the date of the 2015 Marriage Equality Referendum was set. On May 22, 2015, just over two decades since the legalisation of homosexuality in Ireland, same-sex marriage became established law.

As with all socio-political issues of this kind, controversy has erupted in the different jurisdictions in which same-sex marriage has become a political possibility. While the controversies in each locale have had different concerns and agendas, they have also shared a number of them. One of the most common features of the debate across many jurisdictions, the US and Ireland included, has been the way in which religious belief has been marshalled, often, although not exclusively, in opposition to same-sex marriage. This dissertation examines the controversy between groups who advocate for LGBTQ+ rights and those who oppose them through the lens of the same-sex marriage debate.

A polarisation has taken place during this time, fired by faulty collective assumptions on both liberal and conservative sides. Anti-same sex marriage campaigners associated with the *Iona Institute* in Ireland and the *California Family Council* in California grounded their advocacy in religious thought and values. In Ireland, they were aligned with the Roman Catholic Church, and in California, with Evangelical Protestant traditions. On the other side, pro-same sex marriage advocates stemmed from *Marriage Equality Ireland* and the campaign against California's Prop 8. These actors worked towards the political and legal rights of LGBTQ+ people and were driven by a secular belief in human rights. All four groups have had a significant role in the shaping of same-sex marriage discourse and each group had activists who worked at both grassroots and elite levels.

Notwithstanding the political impact of the debates about same-sex marriage, particularly in the western world, the study of the controversy, especially as it has played out between conservative Christian and pro-LGBTQ+ groups, is in need of further study. This is in part, because of the relatively recent emergence of the conflict and, in part, because political theory often treats religious actors as a monolith, while sociological theory often simply ignores the personal role of faith for its adherents. Whereas politics often treats religious actors as a potentially valuable voting bloc, sociology often sees religion as little more than a social tool. So, while the subject has received

³ *Marriage Equality Ireland* was developed solely to aid in the passage of the Marriage Equality referendum and, as such, were disbanded after its passing.

significant attention in legal studies, political science, gender studies, theology and queer studies, there appears little work being done to bring these varied aspects of the conflict together.

Most past theories on changing public opinion on LGBTQ+ rights have emphasised framing and elite-signalling and relied almost solely on mass media as a transmitter. They examined “the use of phrases and words that cause readers or viewers to apply certain values, like beliefs in equality and fairness, to gay rights.” The study of elite-signalling specifically examines individuals who adopt the “positions of political leaders on an issue when those positions are communicated through news media.”⁴ Their wide reach demands they not be ignored, and framing and media presentation are extensively treated here. However, there is also the powerful impact grassroots work can have on the social transformation that is often the underlying goal of policy. Whether advocating for LGBTQ+ rights or for the retention of more traditional sexual mores, activists in both locales, and on both sides of the issue, are working to win their respective cultural battles for the future of their nations. Recognising the importance of both grassroots activists *and* traditionally ‘elite’ political advocates, this project examines the same-sex marriage debate through the lens of political organisers and activists specifically involved in the campaigns.

The legalisation of same-sex marriage does not signal the end of controversy, but transforms it, creating new tensions and shifting old ones, signalling the beginning of a new/modified conflict still relatively unstudied and thus largely unpredictable. In both the American and Irish cases, broad tensions and social fissure seem to be largely ongoing.

Responding to the shift in public opinion and normalisation of same-sex marriage post-legalisation, religious conservatives have been forced to alter the strategies used to argue the case for *their* rights. This has spurred the rise of new terminology through which the battle for the legalisation of Christian values is now being waged. In America, “religious liberty” has replaced “gay marriage” in national political rhetoric, calling for laws which prioritise the “freedom of conscience” over the equal treatment of LGBTQ+ people in an attempt to work within the new marriage equality framework.⁵ For Roman Catholics, definitions of family and acceptability have been re-articulated by Pope Francis in recently published documents, opening the door to new conflicts and shifting perceptions

⁴ Jeremiah J. Garretson, *The Path to Gay Rights: How Activism and Coming out Changed Public Opinion* (New York: New York University Press, 2018), 6.

⁵ Anne Li, “‘Religious Liberty’ Has Replaced ‘Gay Marriage’ in GOP Talking Points,” *FiveThirtyEight*, 9 Mar 2016.

of acceptability.⁶ This change in language only indicates a shift in the framework used to confront marriage equality.⁷

In Ireland, according to many of those involved in the Marriage Equality Referendum, the matter seems to be more finalised than in the US. Its small size and restricted resources, as well as lack of states and individual state's rights, limit opportunities for religious objectionists to carve out legal space to codify their own rights. Nevertheless, conservative religious actors continue to argue for their right to respectful participation in what they see as an increasingly hostile secular public square. The examination of these arguments, and the cultural and political debates that spur them on, can provide insights into those who hold them, into national social dynamics and into questions about how to balance truly pluralist views in an increasingly multicultural and globalised age.

This dissertation has sought to give voice to, and to acknowledge the authenticity of, the points of view expressed by the interviewees in the hope of understanding the motivations, values and concerns of the different groups involved. However, in addition to asking the interviewees to reflect on these issues, I have also sought to investigate the extent to which the divisions that separate these groups can be bridged so that this project can support other work being done to bring together individuals across the liberal/conservative and religious/secular spectrum.⁸

Reaching out to Catholic and Evangelical groups generally dismissed by LGBTQ+ rights activists who assume, because of the stringency and inflexibility of their worldviews, that they are incapable of self-reflection or self-criticism, is necessary to address this common problem. Grassroots work focused on engaging, face-to-face, individuals often left out of public discourse, has shown itself to be effective in the continued effort to make political and legal discourse inclusive and successful.

My objectives in this project are to outline the recent theological, political and social points of animosity between conservative Christianity and its adherents and LGBTQ+ communities in California and the Republic of Ireland through the lens of same-sex marriage rights. To that end, I have examined the way the divisive issue of same-sex marriage rights has been received differently in the American and Irish political-cultural context. Viewed from a post-legislation perspective, this project looks at the major obstacles, thus far, to productive engagement on both a personal and political level. Methods of interaction that have been successful, and those which have not, have been

⁶ "Catholic Church: Pope Francis Urges Greater Family Understanding," *BBC*, 8 April 2016.

⁷ Martin E. Marty, "Fundamentalism as a Social Phenomenon," in *Evangelicalism and Modern America*, ed. George Marsden (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1984), 56-68.

⁸ For example: The *RISE Network* in America which represents the minority of evangelicals willing to dialogue with LGBTQ+ rights groups on the subject of same-sex marriage. Likewise, *We Are Church Ireland*, is campaigning for LGBTQ+ inclusion in the Catholic Church in Ireland.

reviewed with the aim of making recommendations towards improving engagement across an often seemingly intractable divide.

While the context for the evolution of this conflict is undoubtedly important, this project has shown the greatest hinderance to communication lies in our human instinct to form group allegiances, ones that assert a singular group righteousness and instil an exclusionary in-group pride. The tendency for such groups to shut down and dig in their heels in the face of conflict, while common in an increasingly divided social and political environment, does not have to be the only option. Through better understanding of human psychology, particularly in relation to interpersonal responses to conflict, more constructive communication strategies can lead to improved discourse. Such strategies need not require agreement, but only a greater willingness to listen, for even common experiences of that nature can facilitate a greater capacity for understanding and empathy, and lay the groundwork for future consensus.

Of course, nowhere does interpersonal dialogue exist free of its greater national and international political and governance framework. In order to make broader and more lasting transformations there, it may be necessary to reimagine the current adversarial structure of the prevailing theoretical and political frameworks to include a new, postponed-consensus kind of dialogue, an airing of views, so to speak, without threat of attack or prejudgement.

This thesis presents a detailed overview of the same-sex marriage conflict as expressed within its stated geographic limits, its history, its contemporary manifestation in those places, and those involved in its continuation. Although it analyses just one example of a broader trend in social and political discourse across the globe, the conflict over same-sex marriage can provide insight into the increasingly divided nature of many societies' politics and ideologies, and shed light on the challenges to more traditional forms of interaction presented by social media and the proliferation of highly partisan media sources. Not unsurprisingly, embracing these new tools has led to a lack of personal interaction among those who hold opposing views with the unfortunate result that those striving to make their voices heard have become more easily devalued to their opponents.

With particular focus on the challenge of religious participation in what appear to be dominantly secular socio-political frameworks, this thesis examines both the personal experiences of those who feel excluded and the broader implications such exclusion has on the successful implementation of inclusive political frameworks. The examination of a single conflict, in this case same-sex marriage, is thus used to illuminate broader trends of exclusion in secular political systems that require redress if a more truly inclusive socio-political system is to be envisioned. The search for answers to this dilemma are essential to the health and viability of any social fabric which relies on its capacity to

allow and promote discourse and accommodation among the full diversity of its citizens. This dissertation will address these ideas over the course of five main chapters.

Chapter 1 examines the political, cultural and theological history of the same-sex marriage debate. The first part investigates the complex relationship between politics and religion in the west, examining religion's function as a social tool to explain the world and bind communities. Religion as a political tool is then discussed in relation to current 'culture war' debates in Ireland and the US. Both countries have unique histories relating to the division of church and state which have created lasting legacies. The tensions causing polarisation between individuals and groups across the liberal/conservative spectrum are not limited to political expression. In fact, politics is just one practical manifestation of a debate that extends to identities fundamental to our self-understanding. Part two delves into these identities through the examination of the theological relationship between Christianity, sex and gender including its historical evolution and variation between denominations. Particular note is taken of the role that the theological concept of complementarity has played in the same-sex marriage debate. Now situated in the appropriate context, the history of same-sex marriage litigation and its relationship to religious objection in the US and Ireland is examined in detail.

Chapter 2 presents this project's methodology. First addressing its use of a post-secular theoretical framework, this chapter then examines the research methodology employed throughout the project. It explains the value of using qualitative analysis to examine the data as gathered primarily through semi-structured interviews. Likewise, it argues for the value of comparative research to the methodological make up of this project, including a defence of the comparability of Ireland and California specifically. Reflections on the process of contacting and engaging with respondents show a number of challenges the researcher faced throughout the interview process and insights gleaned from this experience. Recognising the inherent worldview bias that resides in everyone, myself included, the final part of this chapter examines the role of the interviewer and the impossibility of a "neutral observer."

Chapter 3 presents the data gathered for this research through first-person, semi-structured interviews. The data is structured around three major themes: (1) Personal Reflections from a Post-Legalisation Perspective, (2) Political Strategy Pre- and Post-legalisation, and (3) Perceptions of Religion in Today's Public Square. Reflecting the focus on California and Ireland, as well as the concern with both pro and anti-same sex marriage groups, the chapter is divided according to the four main groups engaged by this project: (1) *California: Pro-Same Sex Marriage Campaigning*, (2) *California: Anti-Same Sex Marriage Campaigning*, (3) *Ireland: Pro-Same Sex Marriage Campaigning* and (4) *Ireland: Anti-Same Sex Marriage Campaigning*. Patterns are extracted from

interviews that provide particular insight into the personal and public experience of campaigning, with special focus on the role of religion and religious reason in political discourse. This chapter mainly works to capture and organise data that will be analysed in Chapters 4 and 5.

Chapter 4 analyses some of this data as it pertains to the campaign process and result itself, with particular focus on comparisons between Ireland and California. Part one analyses the personal experience of advocates and shows that, despite the definitive outcome, the issue does not seem to have found a resolution in California, while in Ireland it appears to be, in many respects, moving forward. Data shows that much of this difference stems from the ways the personalisation of political criticism has led activists to deep feelings of grievance towards their opponents. Part one also examines the transference of strategy, rhetoric and financial aid between Ireland and the US. Noting connections, it demonstrates the increasingly global nature of these debates. The second part of the chapter uses Jonathan Haidt's *Moral Foundations Theory* as a lens through which to view the same-sex marriage debate. Haidt is chosen for his functionalist view of moral belief that allows for a relatively non-judgmental examination of the moral positions taken by the participants in this project. His examination and explanation of the moral foundations that impact one's moral worldview are particularly informative when looking at the moral convictions espoused by proponents and opponents of same-sex marriage. *MFT* further illuminates why "us and them" narratives prove so politically useful, while often socially detrimental. It underscores the importance of personal narratives in the garnering of empathy which, he argues, plays a significant role in successful dialogue.

The final chapter focuses on the challenges of communicating across worldview divides. Like Chapter 4, it draws on the data presented in Chapter 3, this time examining how various views on the role of religious voices in politics are reflected in the debates about same-sex marriage. It notes the limits of Rawlsian *liberalism* in the face of voices that do not abide by its expectation of public reason as a means to achieve an overlapping consensus, and highlights how this is exemplified in the cases of California and Ireland. This chapter proposes a way of addressing this limitation that might allow bridges between the various groups to be built. The value of Habermas's *post-secular theory* is recognised for making the case for a deliberative democracy in which religious and secular voices both have a role, without either being required to abandon its own language, metaphors or worldviews. However, notwithstanding its value in highlighting the need for mutual toleration and respectful engagement, this research challenges his assumption that the religious/secular divide is the greatest inhibitor to dialogue today. Rather, it posits that the most significant divide separating worldviews today is, in fact, the liberal/conservative one. Noting how few people fall neatly into boxes laid out by simplistic messaging at the political and cultural level, it argues that all people are

multifaceted and are thus not *either* religious *or* LGBTQ+ supportive, but that many can be *both/and* or, for that matter, *neither/nor*.

This project is not intended to be an exhaustive account of the same-sex marriage debate in either locale, but an investigation into one of its components. As such, it will inevitably leave out aspects of the debate. This is not to devalue or delegitimise the importance of said aspects, but is a necessary feature of a project this size. Furthermore, although grounded in Ireland's and California's historical, social, political and religious contexts, this study primarily focuses on the campaign, its framing and process, and the experience of those involved in its execution. The following chapter provides the contextual overview of the same-sex marriage debate in these two jurisdictions.

CHAPTER 1: HISTORICAL AND THEOLOGICAL CONTEXT OF SAME-SEX MARRIAGE

The debate about the role of religion in politics has been present, in some form, since the first boundaries were drawn to protect each from the overreach of the other. In recent years, this debate has become particularly prevalent in the discourse on sexuality, gender and sexual morality. Early debates over contraception, censorship, women's rights and sex education laid the groundwork for some of the most polarising issues of today: same-sex marriage and abortion. The steady breakdown of a onetime general Christian consensus about sexual morality and gender roles began in the early twentieth century. It came to a head in the 1960s, when a host of new debates about religion and gender began to surface. Thus, while gender and sex have been problematised in Christian theology for centuries, the particularities of today's debate are in many ways more recent. They are the result of shifting cultural notions of sexuality and female agency, shifts largely facilitated by the spread of birth control and women's education internationally. Political and theological debates over the role of women in private *and* public spheres, then, emerged alongside the rise of secular feminism. They precipitated broad discussions about gender roles, sexuality, heteronormativity and family life.⁹ Born out of both a theological and socio-political context, a recent, highly visible iteration is seen in the debate over same-sex marriage.

This chapter examines how this has emerged and played out in American and Irish politics. It introduces and analyses some of the major ideas, themes and historical-political events which have contributed to the development of today's conflict between LGBTQ+ and conservative Christian communities in both these locales.

The definition and purpose of the family “are not just about values but about social and cultural change and the meanings we attach to these.”¹⁰ Marital relationships and families can provide a lens through which to observe, more generally, what core tensions and transitions are taking place in Irish and American society today, i.e. the roles and responsibilities of men and women inside and outside the household, the gender configuration of households themselves and the relationship between the “private” family and diverse “public” world in which they must live. The consideration of marriage and families, therefore, becomes the consideration of gender, sexuality and the relationship between public and private life.

⁹ R. Marie Griffith, *Moral Combat: How Sex Divided American Christians and Fractured American* (New York: Basic Books, 2017), vii-x.

¹⁰ Sally K. Gallagher, *Evangelical Identity and Gendered Family Life* (London: Rutgers University Press, 2003), 3.

Not all evangelicals or Catholics subscribe to strict notions of heteronormative marriage and family life. Conservative leaders and organisations are, however, often the most vocal or amplified participants in ongoing cultural debates. This reinforces the perception that all members of faith are, for example, gender conservatives intent on preserving or returning a nation and culture to its historically traditional roots. Despite the vast array of dissenting opinions on same-sex marriage amongst Christians, the emphasis in this research is on those individuals and organisations who promise a so-called conservative agenda. It focuses on the ideas they propagate because these leaders and organisations are key players and contribute to the sense of political and cultural polarisation felt today.

Much of the division and debate between conservative Christians and LGBTQ+ rights activists surrounding same-sex marriage hinges on approaches to theological teachings on gender and sexuality, in particular the concept of complementarity. Although evangelical and Catholic theologies have clearly developed along differing trajectories, this chapter seeks to highlight those areas where commonality can be found. In particular, it focuses on the understanding of marriage as a heteronormative institution and the use of complementarity to justify this perspective.

Same-Sex Marriage: An Evolving Discourse

Tensions between opposing definitions of marriage have been playing out in legislation in the US since the 1970s. The first lawsuit seeking recognition of same-sex partnerships was *Baker v Nelson*. It was filed in 1970. In more recent years, similar discussions have blossomed in countries across the globe. Ireland's LGBTQ+ activism clearly has American roots in recent campaigns for marriage equality as well as in the movement more broadly.

In 2015, the fight seemingly found conclusion: the US Supreme Court voted to legalise same-sex marriage (5-4) in *Obergefell v. Hodges*, and 62% of the Irish electorate voted “yes” in a referendum supporting “Marriage Equality.” The first country to pass a constitutional amendment granting the right of marriage to all citizens, Ireland not only challenged the age-long authority of the Catholic Church, but religious conservatism more broadly. The vote rejected its traditional dominance over family, law, and policy. But instead of settling the debate over how those societies were to define their moral and legal constraints, the legalisation simply marked the end of one phase and the beginning of another. For while the fight for *marriage equality* has been won, the practicalities of living with *marriage diversity* are now at the centre of the debate. Because there can only be one legal definition of marriage, the question becomes whether or how this legal definition can be harmonised with dissenting views. Both those advocating for and against the redefinition of marriage

see their mission as the most or only just and ethical way. For same-sex marriage advocates, to acknowledge the uniqueness of heterosexual marriage is to deny anyone outside its purview legitimacy as individuals and families. Those who object to same-sex marriage, however, view any widening of the definition to include non-heteronormative relationships as a complete disruption and degradation of an institution they see as “essential to the survival of not only the primacy of Christianity but of Western Civilisation itself.”¹¹

This new phase has seen a rise in citizens demanding the right to refuse service to or to engage, in any way, with those whose life choices violate their own beliefs. Florists, photographers, and wedding cake bakers who morally oppose same-sex marriage are now asking where their constitutional rights lie. This shift in tenor and framing has relocated, rather than concluded, the debate over same-sex marriage. Objections to the legalisation of same-sex marriage now centre on the right to individual conscience and religious freedom. Post-same-sex marriage legislation, related questions about free-market business practices, gender-related use of public space, and tax and family law have gained prominence. These issues have already proven significant and contentious. The question becomes: can public spaces be neutral spheres in the eyes of the law?

If viewed as a zero-sum debate, no side may ever truly win in a diverse national community. They may, however, engage in the process of debate with more civility and understanding, allowing for a different process, if not a different legal outcome. It requires continued engagement in the pursuit of greater fairness and justice concerning how and where to draw the line between religion and the public sphere. Not a simple or clear project, it has often led to feelings of injustice and intolerance on all sides.

Major Voices in the Debate

Most people believe they deserve to have a say in determining the policies or values promoted by the state in which they live. Among those for whom religion is important, each individual ultimately determines what faith means to him or herself and how it should be applied to public life. Liberal religious voices participate just as fully and valuably in the public square as conservative ones. This project, however, primarily engages with actors who call themselves *traditionalists* or *conservatives*. They see themselves as advocates for norms that help “regulate” and govern social expectation, especially heteronormative legal frameworks that regulate sex and gender.¹² In comparison, self-

¹¹ Kris McDaniel-Miccio, "You Can't Remain Neutral on a Moving Train; Marriage Equality in the States and Ireland: Thoughts on Freedom to Marry, Religious Heteronormativity and Conceptions of Equality," *DuPaul Journal of Women, Gender and the Law* 5, no. 2 (2016): 2.

¹² Griffith, *Moral Combat: How Sex Divided American Christians and Fractured American*, xi.

described *progressive* or *liberal* actors are more comfortable with shifting social norms and legal frameworks. They speak about valuing inclusivity, those rights that “expand access to power and influence for persons once excluded, marginalised, or stigmatised for behaving outside the norm.”¹³

The use of this “two sides” model is, of course, problematic as there exist a range of attitudes and understandings of sexuality by religious and non-religious actors alike. The current political culture has, unfortunately, made it increasingly difficult to break free from these either/or options, especially in reference to issues of sexuality and gender. Openness to changing sexual norms tends to align with a certain openness to other modern cultural and social changes. Inversely, resistance to changing norms is often accompanied by “resistance to—and fear of the effects of—many other forces of modern change. One’s stance on sex, then, has increasingly over time become shorthand for an attitude towards contemporary challenges to tradition.”¹⁴

These labels are by no means perfect or precise. They, like any such labels, are subject to stereotypes and broad generalisations. They are, however, commonly used to self-identify both culturally and politically. To focus on the examination of particularly *conservative* religious voices is not to dismiss the importance of any other religious voices, but because of their intense political interest and influence on the debate they are a major player in shaping policy on LGBTQ+ rights issues.

American Voices: The Christian Right

In the United States, the Christian Right¹⁵ sometimes claims to speak for Christianity’s entire religious tradition. This is, of course, not true. If it were, they would indeed be the unstoppable political force some critics fear. While the Christian Right seems to have struck the most responsive chord amongst those most deeply connected to Protestant evangelical denominations and associated values, they have yet to penetrate other large denominations successfully. In fact, many mainline Protestant and Catholic denominations have provided a large share of the leadership and membership in organisations which function specifically to oppose the Christian Right and its often exclusivist message.¹⁶

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid., xii.

¹⁵ Richard Kyle, *Evangelicalism: An Americanized Christianity* (London: Transaction Publishers, 2006), 201-02. The movement of politically conservative evangelicals that emerged in the late 1970s, claims various terms: *New Christian Right*, *Christian Right* or the *Religious Right*. They had no centralised headquarters or organised party. Not all evangelicals belong to the Christian or Religious Right, so while many agree its issue politics, evangelical churches exist, which embrace, sanction and even perform same-sex marriage.

¹⁶ The Interfaith Alliance is one. Likewise, many African American evangelical churches who, despite their alignment with much of the moral conservatism of the movement, remain apart from it are still quite loyal to the Democratic party.

That being said, the number of Protestant Evangelicals in the United States is not insignificant, although their numbers change depending on how religious identity is determined: denomination, religious views or values/labels given by the respondent to his or herself. This variance allows for the number of American evangelicals to be estimated to range from 10-40% of the population. Whatever their numbers, white evangelical Protestants clearly make up the base of the Christian or Religious Right.¹⁷ The racial component of this makeup is, likewise, not insignificant, for while there is a large non-white evangelical tradition in the US, they have, historically, been less interested in engaging with the politically active Religious Right. Also notable is the often racially motivated discriminatory nature of the Christian Right. But as a considerable amount of work has already been done to elucidate the importance of race and racial discrimination in the conservative religious movement in the US, this study will not address this issue directly.¹⁸

By stating that the Christian Right is rooted in white evangelical Protestantism, this work is *not* claiming the entire community supports its position on same-sex marriage or LGBTQ+ rights. The false view that these evangelical voters are monolithic, in large part, stems from the national focus on their “pro-family agenda,” the one area in which they have the most cohesion, although not all evangelicals support this agenda. Indeed, a diverse set of views is held on a range of issues, from economics to foreign relations to the environment. On the latter issues, they do not fall too far from attitudes and patterns found in other religious groups.¹⁹ But those Protestant evangelicals who *do* find representation in the Christian Right play a preeminent role in today’s debate, not only about marriage, but over religious freedom and the role of religious values and morality in politics, social policy and government. As such, they are clearly shaping the nature of such debates in the US and abroad.

Irish Voices: The Christian Right

Similarly diverse views exist amongst religious voices in Ireland, despite the fact that nearly 80% of its population self-identify as Catholic. In fact, a majority of the country has maintained its Catholic

¹⁷ Christian Smith, *Christian America: What Evangelicals Really Want* (Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2000), 225. Smith did a study in 2000 which concluded that “large majorities of conservative Protestants do not think women belong in the home; do not believe that people have the right to live by their own morality, whether Christian or not; do oppose Christian social activism that would cause social conflict;are not soft on racially, religiously, or ethnically bigoted “hate crimes”.” Their voices are drowned out by those who have enough power to do so.

¹⁸ Michael Barkun, *Religion and the Racist Right: The Origins of the Christian Identity Movement* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 1996). Damon T. Berry, *Blood and Faith: Christianity in American White Nationalism* (New York: Syracuse University Press, 2017).

¹⁹ Gallagher, *Evangelical Identity and Gendered Family Life*, 5.

identity despite rising rates of disbelief in God and falling rates of religious practice. Irish Catholicism has been, historically, a “sociological Christianity.” It is a contextualised and inculturated faith, where institution and hierarchy played a strong role in shaping and controlling cultural traditions and political decisions while providing nationwide education and healthcare. It has played a significant part in creating and maintaining culture in Ireland. This has resulted in an historically immense capacity to facilitate political mobilisation and organisation behind issues considered important to the church. Such capacity began to dwindle in the 1970s, however, leaving church authority increasingly anaemic.

The weakening of the traditional church establishment alongside the recent globalisation of culture and faith has worked to “Protestantize”²⁰ conservative Catholics in Ireland, alongside those in the US. The separation between religion and its social context has created an environment in which individual laity have taken on a more prominent role in political action. Conservative religious advocacy groups, like the Iona Institute, view themselves as necessary in the battle over the morality and strength of the nation. They see themselves as picking up where church establishment left off. Similar, in many ways, to organisations of the American Christian Right, they emphasise the ecumenical nature of their mission, blurring the lines between issue politics and religious affiliation.²¹

Opponents of the Christian Right’s objection to same-sex marriage can be found in many corners of the US and Ireland, in religious and secular groups alike. This research will focus on one: the largely, but by no means solely, secular LGBTQ+ activist community. The most vocal support for the redefinition of marriage can be found, unsurprisingly, in a group historically rejected by, and therefore suspicious of, both evangelical and Catholic churches.

American Voices: LGBTQ+ Rights

In the US, initially forced into hiding because of both social and legal punishment, gay men, lesbians and transpersons did not engage directly in politics as a group until the late 1960s. The Gay Liberation Front, the first of a wave of LGBTQ+ rights activist groups, was born out of an incident that took place in New York City on June 28, 1969: the Stonewall Riots. Sick of hiding, LGBTQ+ activist communities began developing in larger cities, especially San Francisco. Political manoeuvring began early on in California where, in 1977, Harvey Milk became its first openly gay elected official. Decriminalisation laws began to spread across the country in the late 1960s. Anti-sodomy laws were not federally disbanded until 2003, however, at which stage 14 states still had

²⁰ Oliver Roy, *Holy Ignorance: When Religion and Culture Part Ways*, trans. Res Schwartz (London, UK: Hurst & Co, 2010), 195.

²¹ Anatol Lieven, *America: Right or Wrong; an Anatomy of American Nationalism* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2012), 143.

statutes criminalising it.²² Such laws have been fought at both local and national levels. An increasingly confident LGBTQ+ community works together across state and national lines. Despite only 3.8% of Americans self-identifying as gay, lesbian or bisexual, they have become a significant lobbying force in today's politics. The lessons learned by LGBTQ+ activists in the US about successful campaign strategies have been shared with activists across the globe seeking to follow in their footsteps. Examples include movements in Ireland, Australia and Taiwan where LGBTQ+ advocates have modelled their campaigns after those waged in the US, globalising what had once been a small local movement.

Irish Voices: LGBTQ+ Rights

In Ireland, criminalisation laws, backed and defined by church leaders and teachings, forced the LGBTQ+ community underground until the 1970s. David Norris led the *Campaign for Homosexual Law Reform (CHLR)* from the Supreme Court of Ireland (where he lost) to the European Court of Human Rights (which ruled *against* the Irish government) in 1988. Alongside the Dublin University Gay Society, the CHLR was the first long-term LGBTQ+ rights organisation in Ireland. Born out of student groups made up of future lawyers and politicians, those early members eventually rose to positions of prominence as Senators and Presidents. Although not formally decriminalised until 1993, diminished Church authority, movement away from agriculture and toward urbanisation as well as the introduction of television and mass media were already helping to facilitate changing notions of gender and equality. Alongside such liberalising trends, legal and political arguments relating to civil unions and non-heteronormative marriage emerged in the 2000s. By then, the LGBTQ+ community had grown to include many new and diverse activist organisations.

Despite the rapid transition from criminality to equality, the memory of religious condemnation and degradation remains strong for many members of the LGBTQ+ community in the US and Ireland. Although there is significant support by some religious individuals and churches, suspicion of religion and religious influence on laws and policy continues to inform the attitudes and methods of political advocacy by LGBTQ+ rights activists.

In the battle over same-sex marriage, the level of polarised rhetoric does not match the actual beliefs of majority populations in the US or Ireland. Although approval numbers have risen significantly over the past decade, most of the population in the US and Ireland do not, in fact, have strong

²² Ellen Ann Andersen, *Out of the Closets and into the Courts: Legal Opportunity Structure and Gay Rights Litigation* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2006).

opinions on the issue.²³ The passion, instead, lies primarily within activist communities. Political rhetoric focuses heavily on issues in deference to these activist groups, creating a false sense of widespread polarisation.²⁴ The danger of this false sense lies in its ability, through continued iteration, to become real. Frequent emphasis on *us* versus *them* identities can, in fact, create the very phenomenon itself.

Engagement with policy advocates and activist organisations is, therefore, vital as they are major players, framing the debate within the public imagination and on the political stage. Debates surrounding how best to balance the rights of the LGBTQ+ community with the rights of religious communities, especially in regards to marriage, have been shaped by a variety of voices on the subject. This research investigates just two of them.

Part I: The Debate About Religion and Politics

Before discussing the intersection of religion and politics, it is necessary to examine what is meant by religion. Despite the vast and lengthy study of religion, a singular, unified definition remains elusive. Depending upon one's epistemology, religion can be defined as belief in or worship of one or more deities, systems and practices of faith, or the spiritual attitude expressed within them. It can be something singularly personal or profoundly communal.²⁵ Broadly speaking, theology holds religion as a manifestation of ultimate truth, while sociologists hold its importance lies not in whether it is true, but whether those adhering to it believe it to be. Social constructivists view religion as yet another set of discourses created through socio-historical constructions of language and social experience.²⁶ For the sake of this research, and in reflection of the author's own constructivist epistemology, I adopt Clifford Geertz's definition, recognising the intensely personal, yet communally influential nature of religion. Geertz identifies religion as:

²³ "Support for Same-Sex Marriage at Record High, but Key Segments Remain Opposed," Pew Research Centre, <http://www.people-press.org/2015/06/08/section-1-changing-views-of-same-sex-marriage/>

²⁴ Peter Berger, Grace Davie, and Effie Fokas, *Religious America, Secular Europe?: A Theme and Variations* (Hampshire, UK: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2008), 128.

²⁵ Derived from the Old French *religion*, meaning "religious community", and Latin's *religionem* (nom. *religio*), meaning "obligation, the bond between man and the gods", its origins, though varied, largely refer to commitment, obligation and community, not independence or autonomy. (OED)

²⁶ Vivian Burr, *An Introduction to Social Constructionism* (London, UK: Routledge, 1995).

(1) a system of symbols which acts to (2) establish powerful, pervasive and long-lasting moods and motivations in [individuals] by (3) formulating conceptions of a general order of existence and (4) clothing these conceptions with such an aura of factuality that (5) the moods and motivations seem uniquely realistic.²⁷

The ethnocentrism of this definition has been criticised by Talal Asad, who argues that Geertz's definition of religion is based in a Western, Christian understanding of religion and religion's role in relation to the sacred, the community and mediation.²⁸ Olivier Roy, while recognising the validity of Asad's critique, argues that globalisation has standardised and formalised religion into institutionally categorised norms which have been, in turn, imposed upon their followers.²⁹ The use of Geertz's definition of religion here both acknowledges the practical realities of Roy's assessment of normalised religion, as well as the fact that both of the faiths this project engages with, Roman Catholicism and American Protestant Evangelicalism, are products and continue to exist within Western, Christian nation states and cultures.

Emile Durkheim's proposed theory of religion is grounded in concerns for society. It posits the concept of "sacred" as the defining characteristic of religion, rather than faith in the supernatural. Though certain aspects have been robustly criticised, Durkheim's emphasis on the importance and function of religion both in and to society holds true. For society, as an "organismic analogy of the body, wherein all the parts work together to maintain the equilibrium of the whole, religion was understood to be the glue that held society together."³⁰ Although largely assumed invisible in today's Western secular state, this and subsequent chapters seek to point out that it remains very much present in implicit embedded assumptions in political and legal language and systems.

Max Weber, diverging from Durkheim, recognised religion's existence as a force of change in society. Insistent on the irrelevance of a particular faith's truth claims to the scientific study of its movement, Weber acknowledged the rationality of each religion as consistent within their respective societies. Like Durkheim, Weber recognised religion's strong social component, but through his examination of capitalism and the "protestant ethic", he observed the influence of religion on the spread of non-religious theories and their implementation. His thesis on the interaction between

²⁷ Clifford Geertz, "Religion as a Cultural System," in *Anthropological Approaches to the Study of Religion*, ed. Michael Banton (London, UK: Tavistock Publications, 1966), 4.

²⁸ Talal Asad, *Genealogies of Religion* (Baltimore, MD: John Hopkins University Press, 1993), 43.

²⁹ Roy, *Holy Ignorance: When Religion and Culture Part Ways*, 25-26.

³⁰ Kevin J. Christiano, Peter Kivisto, and William H. Swatos, *Sociology of Religion: Contemporary Developments* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers Inc, 2008), 39.

society and religion is in evidence today in the interaction between religion or religious actors and society in public political discourse.³¹

Peter Berger's *social construction theory* mirrors his teacher, Alfred Schutz's, rejection of the possibility of objective research, using the processes of externalisation, objectification and internalisation as evidence of a society's process of "world-construction", or the way in which they build meaning. Berger and fellow Schutz student, Thomas Luckmann, further examine the idea that human beings construct a shared social reality which includes everything from language to institutions and are undergirded by general assumptions about social reality.³² "The reality of everyday life is taken for granted as reality. It does not require additional verification over and beyond its simple presence. It is simply there, as self-evident and compelling facticity."³³ Berger refers to this assumed objective reality as *nomos*, a society's knowledge about how things are, its values and ways of living. This *nomos* is legitimised through the existence of a divine entity and the creation of a structure of knowledge which enhances its plausibility. Ergo, a person's actions within a fixed society are based on the universal and orderly pattern set in place by their beliefs.³⁴

Considering these varied definitions of religion, it is crucial that analysis of faith and religion is grounded in more than the simple notion of religion as social construct. Rather, alongside the social and cultural contexts within which various religions are born, shift and change, one must also recognise the intensely personal and individually real nature of faith. Accurate articulations of this stretch beyond the language provided by such social construction. It is what makes its role in the political realm so intensely personal and challenging.

There is a clear and necessary tension to the negotiation between religion and politics. This tension has existed in the United States and Ireland since the shaping of both countries into nation states. The increasing polarisation in most Western nations can, in fact, find its origins, in many ways, in the debate over the place of religion in the modern nation state. American politics, in particular, has become increasingly marked by "a conflict between religious and secular activists quite out of proportion [to the actual] beliefs of most Americans."³⁵ Not unique to the American context, however, such polarisation is becoming more visible in other countries. Narratives surrounding a

³¹ Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, trans. Talcott Parsons and Anthony Giddens (London, UK: Unwin Hyman, 1930).

³² Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge* (New York: Anchor Books, 1966).

³³ *Ibid.*, 23.

³⁴ Peter Berger, *The Sacred Canopy* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1969), 45-48.

³⁵ Kyle, *Evangelicalism: An Americanized Christianity*, 24.

host of issues have largely been hijacked by two extreme oppositional views. This creates a conflict disproportionate to the more moderate views of majority populations.

Polarisation is largely the result of highly ideological activists becoming the key constituencies of two major oppositional political stances. These activists have led political parties and actors to become more extreme in the interest of retaining their support. Committed activists have become essential to party politics in a democracy. They have become powerful foot soldiers. To retain these foot soldiers, major parties have gravitated to the wishes of their core. The United States, like so many other countries in today's modern political climate is, in fact, far less divided culturally than presidential elections would make it seem. Such narratives have only gotten stronger in the wake of 2016 and the election of Donald Trump in America. This is not to say that very real and legitimate divisions do not exist, but that not everyone finds resonance in their telling.

The most visible and polarising cultural and political division in today's political climate is evidenced in the religious gap that began to form in the early 20th century. The removal of religion from the public sphere encouraged throughout the 20th century created, in its perceived threat to the freedom of religious belief and practice, a common enemy amongst a diverse range of religious actors. Concern over a perceived growth in the privatisation of religion inspired an increasingly powerful interfaith force in our modern political system. Members of the so-called Christian Right, across the US, Europe and Australia, were brought together by the mutual worry over the role of religion in policy and governance.

This sense of *us* against *them* has dramatised political polarisation and socio-cultural fracture. Regardless of the objective reality of a group's minority or majority status, a sense of victimisation can have a strong influence on the mentality of a community and the rhetoric used to garner political involvement. As fundamentalist religiosity becomes integral to the radicalisation of the Right in the US, as well as increasingly so abroad, demonisation of political opponents has increasingly turned them from *opponents* into *enemies*.

Not disregarding the value of locational and cultural context, almost all societies have become increasingly subject to global constraints and the culturally integrational effects of globalisation. According to Roy, it is globalisation, primarily through the realities of secularisation, which has, in fact, provided the space, autonomy and thus conditions for the expansion and militant reformulation of religion. The secularisation and globalisation processes have "forced religions to break away from culture, to think of themselves as autonomous and to reconstruct themselves in a space that is no

longer territorial and is therefore no longer subject to politics.”³⁶ He argues that it is through the attempts at politicising religion that religion inevitably becomes secularised. The mixing of day-to-day politics with individual faith and the requirement of a collective shared system of norms, a challenging thing to accomplish in the diversity of a globalised society, walks a blurry line between individual allegiance to one’s faith and individual freedom to practice it. Thus, religious revivalism is deemed by Roy a direct product of secularisation, and as such is not “a religious comeback, but a transformation.”³⁷

More visible, to be sure, it is not a revival of ancestral religions, but a reformulation of faith, especially exemplified in the proliferation of evangelicalism and its global spread. It is “the relationship between religion and public life that is changing.”³⁸ Forced outside the public square by the onset of secularisation and globalisation, religion has been required, out of necessity, to adopt a more universalist, or decultured, approach to ensure its viability in an ever growing and culturally decentralising market. “Fundamentalism,” Roy thus notes, “is the religious form that is most suited to globalisation, because it accepts its own deculturation and makes it the instrument of its claim to universality.”³⁹

The success in growth and proliferation of faiths (like Evangelicalism) has resulted from the universality encouraged by religious participation in a globalised market of ideas. However, more sinister consequences can be found in the alienating and isolating quality of this deculturation. It “transforms the gap between the believer and the non-believer into a barrier, since now they no longer share either religious practice or common values....Deculturation is the loss of the social expression of religion.”⁴⁰ It is this sense of losing social norms or common culture which has left many believers to feel themselves surrounded by non-believers and their materialistic, atheistic, and perverted secular culture. It leaves them with the impression they are a minority or embattled few, even if they may *actually* be statistically in the majority.⁴¹ Ireland’s strong Catholic culture, outside of the church and as such still present even amongst “non-believers,” may, in fact, be an important framework upon which such a bridge can be rebuilt. The lack of a commonly shared religious culture within the US broadly, and California more specifically, makes such a bridge much more difficult to visualise.

³⁶ Roy, *Holy Ignorance: When Religion and Culture Part Ways*, 2.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 3.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 4.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 5.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 8.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 7-8.

Religious Demographic Breakdown: The State of California and Republic of Ireland

Before continuing, it is important to have a more holistic picture of the religious makeup of California and the Republic of Ireland. While Christianity is the dominant faith in both locales, they are, nevertheless, different in a number of ways.

California is incredibly diverse, religiously as well as culturally. The largest sect remains Protestant (32%), this includes a variety of Evangelicals (20%), Mainline (10%) and Historically Black Protestants (2%). Growing numbers of Hispanic and Filipino immigrants, however, have increased the number of Roman Catholics across the state to 28%. Home to the third largest community of Jewish Americans, they make up 3% of California's overall population. It has more members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints *and* temples than any other state outside of Utah. California is also home to the largest Hindu and Muslim populations in the US, 2% and 1% of the state's population respectively. Impressively, forty percent of all Buddhists in America reside in Southern California.⁴²

So, while, according to a 2014 Pew Research Center survey, California is less religious than the rest of the United States (at least 27% claim no religion), its religiosity is undeniable. Sixty-two percent of Californians say they are "absolutely certain" of their belief in "God or a universal spirit." Likewise, 47% of Californians say religion is "very important" in their lives, and 26% "somewhat important." 51% of Californians say they pray "at least daily" and 26% say the word of God "should be taken seriously." Finally, 29% say their religion is their source of guidance about right and wrong.⁴³ Discussions about the role of religion in public life continue to find themselves at the centre of political debates. It is unfortunate that the loudest voices continue to create the false impression that religion in California is a monolith.

The Republic of Ireland is undoubtedly more religiously homogenous than California, however, it too has become increasingly diverse over the last few decades. According to the 2016 Census, Roman Catholics make up 78.3% of its population, a decrease from 84% in 2011. The second largest portion of the population claim "No Religion" (9.8%), an increase of 3.9% from 2011. The next largest religious identity is Church of Ireland at 2.8%. Islam and Orthodox Christianity make up 1.3% of the population each, both having grown significantly over the last few decades. Just 3.7% of the population are practitioners of any other religion.⁴⁴

⁴² "Religious Landscape Study: Religious Composition of Adults in California," Pew Research Center, <https://www.pewforum.org/religious-landscape-study/state/california/>.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ "Religious Change," Central Statistics Office, <https://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/ep/pcp8iter/p8iter/p8rrc>

In keeping with broader global trends, those between 15-35 have generally become less religious over the last decade, yet young people in Ireland continue to be some of the most religious in Europe (as determined by weekly religious service attendance and prayer).⁴⁵ Also in line with global trends, those claiming “no religion” in Ireland are largely concentrated in urban areas. In contrast, a higher percentage of Catholics are concentrated in rural areas. Such divisions are not true of all religions in Ireland, however, with Church of Ireland members (55.1%) and Muslims (94.2%) more frequently based in urban centres.⁴⁶ The religious make-up of Ireland is rapidly changing and diversifying, with growing numbers of non-Catholics in Ireland forcing new and complicated discussions about the practice of religion in public space and the place of religion in public discourse.

The Rise of American Culture Wars: A New Type of Polarisation

The term “culture wars”⁴⁷ was used in 19th century Germany to refer to conflicts between church and state. It suggested a religious basis for cultural conflict. In the 20th century, it was co-opted to refer to political debates in the United States which “pit advocates of ‘traditional values’ against people who adopt more liberal positions on a range of policy issues.”⁴⁸ Marked by opposing or very distinct worldviews, advocates of “traditionalism” often find inspiration for their understanding of the world in religious orthodoxy, consciously rejecting many of those ideas relating to standards considered modern. Likewise, “progressives” are often considered those who reject “the legitimacy of traditional religious doctrine in favour of moral authority drawn from human reason and experience.”⁴⁹

Not novel in the United States, the tension between church and state is enshrined in its constitution: a balancing act between the free exercise of religion and protection against the dominance of any one form. The lack of a national church and the emphasis on religious freedom embedded in America’s founding documents created a unique religious environment. The First Amendment of the US Constitution directly instructs Congress to “make no law respecting the establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof.”⁵⁰ Despite Thomas Jefferson’s early advocacy for a “wall of

⁴⁵ Stephen Bullivant, “Europe’s Young Adults and Religion: Findings from the European Special Survey (2014-16) to inform the 2018 Synod of Bishops,” *Benedict XVI Centre for Religion and Society at St. Mary’s University Twickenham London* (2018), 1-12.

⁴⁶ “Religious Change.”

⁴⁷ James Davison Hunter, *Culture Wars: The Struggle to Define America* (New York: Basic Books, 1992). The culture war theory was first coined by sociologist James Davison Hunter in the early 1990s. It argues the development of two definable polarities—“progressivism” and “orthodoxy”—began in the 1920s with public struggles between conflicting visions of the fate and identity of America and American society.

⁴⁸ Kenneth D. Wald, *Religion and Politics in the United States* (Oxford, UK: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc, 2003), 173.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰ U.S. Const. art. I, sec. 1.

separation” between religion and the state, the Founding Fathers were, themselves, mostly deeply religious. So, while religious tolerance was a significant factor in the creation of the First Amendment, tempered by the rational and humanistic values of the Enlightenment, religiosity and religious ideas have been foundational to the creation of the United States.

God, the church and organised religion play an integral role in US culture, values and system of governance. Where the boundary lines should be drawn between religion and the state, however, remain the subject of legislative debates and constitutional challenges. Opinions on how to accomplish a healthy balance between the two has a lengthy history and has been the subject of debates since Jefferson’s first proposal. Today’s discourse on religious freedom and individual rights, however, developed specifically out of the countercultural revolutions that emerged in the second half of the 20th century. Tensions that had once been between government and churches, now unfolded between individuals who increasingly saw religion and its role in public life differently. The connection between religion and politics is not solely restricted to the constitutional interpretation of the First Amendment. In fact, it plays a fundamental role in the self-identification, political self-definition, and electoral participation of many Americans.

Evangelical Protestantism, and the conservative moral and cultural values it espouses, were an animating force in American political life for much of the nation’s early history.⁵¹ Displaced from prominence as a major cultural force in the 1920s, the rising tide of social revolution, swift urbanisation, spreading trends of science, technology and rapidly rising birth rates amongst non-Protestant immigrant communities weakened its stronghold. Seeds of doubt among mainline Protestants regarding claims of biblical literalism and the rejection of science created the sense, among fundamentalists, that orthodox Christianity was under threat. Those defending such faith resisted secular encroachment through concentration on issues they viewed as symbolic of this shift: prohibition of alcohol and the teaching of evolution in public schools. Despite temporary successes in both these areas, evangelical political power was weak and it eventually lost favour to the modernity taking hold in increasingly powerful cities. Withdrawing from the more urbanised North, the centre of fundamentalist evangelicalism shifted to the South. This withdrawal helped reshape the evangelical faith and the political participation of conservative Christians in general.⁵²

Decades after their Scopes “Monkey” Trial defeat and retreat from popular culture, fundamentalism faced a new enemy, one which would eventually bring them back into the political fold: the

⁵¹ It was used to both support the antislavery movement in the north and reinforce Southern commandment to the slave economy; its impulse was a driving force behind currency reform, regulation of corporate abuses and international conflicts, women’s suffrage and support for initiatives, referenda and recall elections in the manner of “direct democracy.”

⁵² Wald, *Religion and Politics in the United States*, 202-04.

counterculture of the 1960s. Marked by anti-establishment movements which began in the US and UK, this counterculture quickly spread throughout much of the Western world. Initially gaining momentum from the Civil Rights Movement, it grew to include a host of other social issues: Vietnam and anti-war movements, liberalising sexuality, environmentalism, women's and gay rights and the questioning of previously established authorities (including religious ones). Exemplified through the growth of alternative life styles, these new cultural forms presented a threat to previously established ways of life.

Religious involvement in politics did not cease during fundamentalism's hiatus. Rather, studies conducted in the 1960s noted conservative Protestant clergy were simply less likely to get involved in politics or take public stands on policy issues than their liberal counterparts.⁵³ Conservative religious communities remained focused on individual faith and the conversion of sinners, instead of legislation. When conservative clergy eventually did re-enter the scene in the 1970s, they focused on different issues than their mainline counterparts. Liberal and mainline churches focused largely on peace and social justice issues, like hunger and poverty. These issues allowed for alliances with non-religious social movements and enabled them to find a home within the spreading counterculture. Conservative clergy and activists, instead, focused their efforts on responding to social and political forces which sought to liberalise sexuality and bodily autonomy: pro-family issues like abortion, homosexuality, traditional gender roles and education.⁵⁴ Not all evangelicals approved of this shift away from the otherworldly abstention which had, until then, been a distinct feature of fundamentalist evangelicalism. Enough members of the community came to embrace the new political activism, however, that they were able to build a lasting movement of their own.

The "Year of the Evangelical" (1976), marked by Jimmy Carter's presidential bid, saw the emergence of evangelicals in significant positions of political power. The cracks in Jefferson's wall of separation were beginning to show more clearly. Carter, himself an evangelical, centred his campaign around the idea of national salvation. He emphasised the restoration of trust, honesty and morality to American public life. Despite disappointment in Carter and his policies, evangelicals found purpose in this mission. It helped facilitate a growing recognition within the conservative Christian community that "government should not be totally independent of moral considerations and paved the way for morally based criticism of national policy."⁵⁵ The cracks widened as organised religion and conservative religious believers gained influence over elections and policy outcomes.

⁵³ Ibid., 226.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 222-23.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 223.

Responding to social changes which increasingly encouraged the application of religious or moral values to public policy, evangelicals were in fact following, not starting, a trend. Lines between the traditional view of morality as the sole prerogative of individual behaviour and new public concerns over ethical standards of public institutions began to blur at national levels. Growing trends were encouraged in particular by the debate over the public immorality of the Vietnam War, the Watergate scandal, and Supreme Court decisions that institutionally and symbolically linked government to morality. They emphasised the importance of ethical approaches to public policy. The decision to enter into the political sphere necessarily brings with it a sacrifice: compromise. The decision to enter into politics inevitably engendered a transformation of values and priorities. With them, the line between theological and political beliefs became less clear.

Contemporary tensions between religion, politics and religious-political alliances on the Right became increasingly noticeable in the wake of *Roe v Wade* and the Catholic Church's objection to the legalisation of abortion. Church leaders, from the Pope to parish priests, sought to challenge the decision through an array of lobbying efforts, demonstrations and directives to the faithful. The evangelical community did not take up the issue with any real enthusiasm until years later. The Catholic Church similarly expanded their political agenda to include opposition to same-sex marriage, originally primarily an evangelical cause.⁵⁶ The result was a new interfaith-political collaboration. Although Catholics are not entirely unified in their objection to abortion or same-sex marriage, sufficient support for the church's position has allowed a tenuous political alliance between these two major American denominations.

Political consolidation, amongst those who viewed themselves in opposition to the countercultural revolution, grew rapidly throughout mid-century America, eventually becoming the Christian or Religious Right. Opening in Washington, DC in anticipation of the 1980 Presidential election of Ronald Reagan, four conservative organisations helped shape this new movement: the *Christian Voice*,⁵⁷ the *Moral Majority*,⁵⁸ the *Religious Roundtable*, and the *National Christian Action Coalition*. A "social movement that attempts to mobilise evangelical Protestants and other orthodox

⁵⁶ Pope Francis has shifted much of the church's position on migration, global warming, income inequality, environmentalism, and even limited acceptance of homosexuality (his response of "who am I to judge?" softened the church's position on homosexuals). However, he continues to oppose same-sex marriage, contraception and abortion (although he did authorise priests to forgive women who have had abortions in a statement in late 2016).

⁵⁷ The *Christian Voice*, the oldest of the Christian Right groups, was founded by Rev Robert Grant and Richard Zone in 1978. It emerged out of the unsuccessful attempt by California evangelicals to limit access to public employment to homosexuals and homosexual advocates. It lobbied against gay rights, producing "report cards" on political candidates that highlighted their views gay issues.

⁵⁸ The *Moral Majority* was created by Jerry Falwell in January 1979. It helped shape the character of both evangelical Christianity and the Republican Party. The California chapter of the *Moral Majority* seceded, arguing too much compromise had created a liberalising national organisation. They saw evidence of this in Falwell's condemnation of their own efforts at instating the death penalty for homosexuality.

Christians into political action,”⁵⁹ the Christian Right continues to source its authority directly from scripture, the Bible often interpreted literally.

Concerned primarily with the spread of the doctrine of “secular humanism,” conservative religious groups worry about a general secular orientation amongst strategically placed members of America’s elite. The relative disparity of power, in the Christian Right’s early days, helped to create a vision of themselves as the embattled few. Concern over secular humanism’s infiltration of schools, media and government became the bond that brought together conservative religious activists across denominations. As these groups became more sophisticated and politically savvy, their strategies, too, developed. Initial organisations, like the Moral Majority, cited scripture as the basis for its political engagement. Learning from such mistakes, later groups, like the Christian Coalition, traded overt quotations of biblical commandments for the liberal language of “rights, equality and opportunity.”⁶⁰

Arguing that the sexual revolutions of the 1960s led directly to the decline of American culture, the drive to return America to her Christian roots became entwined in the struggle for a return to traditional family. Changing concepts of gender roles and family structures maintained a strong sense of cultural embattlement within the evangelical community. The perceived corruption of America’s Christian foundation by sexual liberationists and secular humanists encouraged the decision to fight such cultural changes increasingly through party politics. As the mid-century sexual liberation settled into normalcy within popular American culture, evangelicals saw their views increasingly pushed out of mainstream representation.

From the Christian Right’s perspective, not only do the actions of a secular authority offend traditional moral values, but they threaten the ability of members of the Christian Right to protect themselves and their families from the onslaught of corrupting forces. Worry over loosening regulations on various moral issues drives much of the Right’s political action today. Still engaged in the broad cultural battles which drew them out of political silence, the struggle between traditional and countercultural visions remains at the forefront of political rhetoric. Political disappointments and strategic failures at the national level throughout the 1980s and 1990s as well as the memory of local and state level successes have returned conservative evangelical activists to their political roots. Despite the fact that evangelical voters have been moving towards the Republican party since the

⁵⁹ Clyde Wilcox, *Onward Christian Soldiers? The Religious Right in American Politics* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1996), 5.

⁶⁰ Matthew C. Moen, "From Revolution to Evolution: The Changing Nature of the Christian Right," in *The Rapture of Politics*, ed. Steve Bruce, Peter Kivisto, and William Swatos (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 1994), 130.

1950s, the emphasis the Christian Right has placed on the importance of “morality issues” is perhaps their most enduring contribution to the rancorous political climate of today.

Fights over definitions of religious freedom and individual rights show no sign of quieting down at local courts and state houses. Despite Jefferson’s emphasis on the importance of separation between church and state, the reality of American politics is that religion and religious organisations have always influenced national policy and political debates. As a nation of churchgoers, religion’s role in politics seems inevitable. Increasingly skilful and politically coordinated denominations and religious organisations make the true privatisation, i.e. its complete removal from the public square, of religion an unlikely thing. Thus, tensions between church and state remain a vibrant and visceral aspect of the negotiation between American citizens about how best to run their nation.

Church and State Tensions in Ireland: A Different Kind of Conflict

The history of negotiation between Church and State has looked rather different in Ireland, a nation dominated by a single, all-controlling church. The Irish word *pobal*, literally meaning both “church” and “people,” once handily exemplified the homogeneity of the Irish identity. Recent developments in tensions over the role of religion in politics increasingly resemble the social and political polarisation demonstrated by the American culture wars. However, the history of church/state conflicts go back to the country’s founding.

The Irish Catholic Church’s present power over public policy is rooted in its historical role as the protector and provider for a nation struggling to reclaim its identity and authority after centuries of colonisation. Immense poverty post-Irish independence gave the church an opportunity to act as the defender of national identity and cohesion. In the process, patriotism became inseparable from religious devotion. The more the nation and religion fused into a single popular identity, the more authority the church gained in politics. Like evangelical Protestant churches in the US, this political involvement brought with it compromise. The Catholic Church could no longer be identified with purely theological interests. Trust in it did not stem directly from its influence in politics, however. Instead, it was grounded in a “widespread identification of the church with the common good.”⁶¹

Before Irish independence, the Irish Church walked a fine line as it sought to balance its nationalist constituents with the conservative Vatican who demanded quiet obedience and did not support conflict with the English. The church sought emancipation for Catholics in Ireland, supporting

⁶¹ Anna Grzymala-Busse, *Nations under God: How Churches Use Moral Authority to Influence Policy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2015), 8-9.

Catholic-based education and religious practice, but did not wish to challenge the British. They thus reached a rather tenuous agreement in the 1800 Act of the Union, which gave the British control over politics, while the church was granted authority over moral education and religious life. This changed little over the next century.

Until the middle decades of the 20th century, the Church maintained near-ultimate authority, dictating not just the shape of Ireland's legal framework but a vast array of social norms. It provided health care, helped run schools and the welfare state with state funding. This agreement was the result of a nation too poor to run these institutions itself. Direct influence peaked in the 1960s. The Irish Catholic hierarchy "saw itself as an active, equal (and at times superior) partner in governance...The church influenced politics through a variety of institutional means."⁶² They held consultations with top officials, had clerical presence on various commissions, pervasive control of education, welfare and "an anticipatory deference by policy makers possessed of a deep individual faith and...fear of the political consequences of crossing the church."⁶³

Catholicism was at the core of Irish identity, a defining factor in opposition to English Protestant oppressors. As such, the church intentionally promoted the fusion of national and religious identities, particularly during the nineteenth century. This fusion stemmed not only from church sponsored protection of national identity, but also from popular "willingness to adhere closely to the Catholic Church...located in a desire to be and be perceived as morally equal, if not superior, to their colonisers."⁶⁴ Under the guise of protecting the Irish nation-state, the church took on the role of policing both the moral and the public sphere, arguing that the two were actually one and the same. Until the late 20th century, the church's authority went largely unquestioned. Despite "frequent public debates and critical assessments of the State, political parties, trade unions and other national organisations, the Catholic Church remained above rigorous criticism and public accountability."⁶⁵

In the last decades of the 20th century that began to change. Disillusionment with the church shifted the once robust fusion of national and religious identity. The first fissure came when Ireland no longer needed the Church's support and protection as it once had. Joining the European Economic Community in the 1970s had a major impact. It forced a relaxing of isolationist practices and sentiments, loosened tariffs and allowed for an influx of immigration which facilitated rapid modernisation. At the same time, Ireland's formal relationship with England began to improve. The

⁶² Ibid., 63.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Tom Inglis, *Moral Monopoly: The Rise and Fall of the Catholic Church in Modern Ireland* (Dublin, IR: University College Dublin, 1998), 98.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 2.

result was a diminishing of the Irish identity as one in direct opposition to English-Protestant colonisation. The official relationship between the Catholic Church and state was abolished in a 1972 referendum, but the demise of its unofficial relationship has been much slower.

Revelations and scandals illuminating the hypocrisy of church proclamations of moral authority began in the 1990s. These included reports of sexual abuse by priests and investigations into institutional mistreatment of children and young women in places like Magdalene Laundries, mother and baby homes (for unwed mothers), and industrial schools. After a string of victims came forward, the government set up an investigative Commission (the *Commission to Inquire Into Child Abuse*). It concluded, after a decade, that “endemic neglect and emotional and sexual abuse in church-run institutions took place from 1936 onward, with the denial or covering up of the abuse by the church hierarchy, and the complicity of government officials.”⁶⁶ The moral arbiter and valiant protector of the Irish people had not only failed, but taken part in those very things it was supposed to be protecting them against. This loss of authority trickled into a variety of social and political areas. It particularly affected those that had already begun to change as a result of the countercultural movement that entered Ireland in the 1970s.

Over the course of the next few decades, the Irish high court ended the ban on contraception, legalised homosexuality, and introduced the possibility of no-fault divorce. While this can easily be seen as an unraveling of the religious-nationalist identity in Ireland, it should also be noted that the church and the religion it embedded in national discourse continues to frame political rhetoric. Recent debates, like those held over abortion and same-sex marriage, are no longer between an authoritative church and a grassroots countercultural movement. Instead, the debates are being driven by two independent sets of activist groups. Increasingly filled with animosity, such discussions sometimes turn into personal attacks in public forums, the loudest voices being the most polarised. It is, therefore, in this latest political development that we see growing similarity to the culture war framework employed in American political rhetoric. While public opinion and religiosity have certainly shifted over the last few decades, policy debates and some of their outcomes continue to reflect Catholic church doctrine. The church and Catholic teachings continue to play a significant role in the shaping of political discourse in Ireland.⁶⁷

⁶⁶ Grzymala-Busse, *Nations under God: How Churches Use Moral Authority to Influence Policy*, 70. It included a 1992 media report that the “popular and charismatic” Bishop of Galway, Eamon Casey, had fathered a son in the US with a woman who was divorced. Dublin priest, Michael Cleary, was discovered to have fathered two children and also to have abused his young housekeeper. At least 30,000 women were incarcerated between 1922-1996 in the Magdalene Laundries; more than 170,000 children and adolescents were residents in the 50+ industrial schools between 1936-1970; and at least 2,000+ children and adolescents passed through a reformatory during this same time.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 82.

With the waning of the institutional Church's power in Ireland, new voices are taking its place as moral arbiter. American-style religious lobbying, particularly those developed by evangelical Protestant groups, has arrived in Ireland with the creation of groups like the Iona Institute and Mothers and Fathers Matter. These symbolise the shift of socially conservative lobbying power from the church to the religious individual. The dynamics of socially-oriented political disagreement in Ireland are changing as individuals, instead of institutions, become the face of conservative opposition.

While tensions between cultural groups have, historically, manifested quite differently in the US and Ireland, increasingly similar and overlapping qualities are beginning to show. In the last ten years, Irish politicking and lobbying have begun to adopt characteristics of the once uniquely American style of cultural and political conflict. A transatlantic cultural phenomenon has facilitated a largely analogous debate about the role of religion in politics in the US and Ireland today.

The real or perceived defeats that fuel nostalgia for the idealised version of the 1950s stem from the desire for a time before the onset of the sexual revolution and the rise of queer culture, feminists, and other minority groups. It is a time envisioned both in the US and Ireland as homogenous (racially, religiously, culturally) and wholesome.⁶⁸ The sexual revolution, which ushered in movements in support of women's and LGBTQ+ rights, struck at the very heart of the conservative concept of the family. Considered the bedrock of a healthy and successful society, the counterculture that rose to prominence during the 1960s and 1970s appeared to be "an unspeakably hateful, diabolical attack on [the conservative Christian] idea of society."⁶⁹ Such was the fear of its impending disaster, that Catholics and Protestants, who had previously viewed one another as enemies, began to see each other as comrades. Hard-line ideas of "family, sexual morality and manly behavior"⁷⁰ slowly replaced the centuries of theological and denominational feuding. In the process, new lines were drawn; different, broader camp divisions were made which rewrote exclusionary notions of "us" and "them."

As the culture wars show no sign of diminishing, and citizens, intentionally or not, self-sort into opposing camps, it becomes increasingly necessary for those who hold positions of leadership to engage with the *other*. The tribal mentality which encourages such oppositional alignment threatens cross-communal and cross-political communication. Derision, exemplified through the ridicule or

⁶⁸ Lieven, *America: Right or Wrong; an Anatomy of American Nationalism*, 86.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 142.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

dismissal of those outside one's social and political tribe, especially when leveled at a group already suffering a sense of marginalisation or social exclusion, only further entrenches suspicions and rigidity. Such actions reinforce the sensation of embattlement that has fueled political drive and policy engagement amongst those on the Religious Right since their early political establishment. In doing so, it makes future dialogue that much harder. The responsibility for altering this pattern must, therefore, lie with those who currently hold both political and social power.

Despite historical, political and institutional differences between the US and Ireland, recent developments in the politicisation of social issues demonstrate distinct overlaps. The social and political developments occurring in the US over the second half of the 20th century also influenced those occurring in Ireland. The politicisation of social issues has increased in recent decades, as those on the left as well as the right move further away from the centre. The rise of the Christian Right as a political movement has played a significant role in this gulf. It rose and gained traction as a response to rapidly changing notions and legal definitions of appropriate sexuality and social structure. The second half of this chapter examines the dynamic that has created such polarisation between conservative Christian and LGBTQ+ communities. It examines this tension through the lens of a single issue: same-sex marriage.

Part II: The Debate About Religion and Gender

Theological discourse has long found itself divided over issues of sex and gender. This is true of all major faiths, yet Christian theology has played a particularly significant role in defining gender roles and sexuality in the West. Central to the reproduction and maintenance of community and identity, the relationship between the sexes continues to be the focus of most contemporary religions, the cultures from which they have developed and those in which they now reside.

A Short Account of the Evolution of Sex and Gender in the Christian Tradition

Despite significant variations, the Christian understanding of sex and gender that has developed across historical, geographical and denominational boundaries draws upon the first three chapters of Genesis. The Christian narrative of creation has, undeniably, informed the lens through which much theology has historically interpreted gender. The story of Adam and Eve presented in Genesis 2:18–24, in which Eve is made from Adam to be his companion, has been given greater attention by certain groups, however, than the story of the male and female as created in the image of God (Genesis 1:26–28). The narrative of creation (Genesis 2) and, likewise, the fall (Genesis 3) has been employed by some theologians and scholars throughout history to justify the subordination of women to men. Eve was created after Adam so she is necessarily his inferior, his unequal.

Traditionally, however, theologians have made a differentiation between (1) the *hierarchical* ordering of the sexes and (2) the domination of women in marriage and the physical and emotional suffering many women face in both childbirth and throughout motherhood. While the first is considered the result of the original goodness of the order of creation, the latter is deemed the consequence of original sin. Thus, this argument posits, while men and women are equal in the order of redemption, there exists a legitimate hierarchical relationship between them. This hierarchical relationship is a part of God's plan for the proper ordering of creation and those human relationships and institutions that necessarily reside within it.⁷¹ Such beliefs about the proper roles and innate differences between men and women have governed society for centuries and can be seen manifest in every corner, from home to government.

Various perspectives have developed subsequently regarding the eschatological importance of the sexual difference of the person. The Western tradition is largely grounded in Augustine's theory that the creation of a sexed humanity in Genesis means sex and/or gender is an eternal characteristic of the human. This view has generally taken precedence, an indication of this importance seen in the resurrected body retaining its sexual characteristics. In the same vein, he argues that both sexes participate in the fall (Adam and Eve), just as they do in redemption (Christ and Mary) and as such are a necessary balance to one another.

Despite these obvious engagements with the concepts of sex and sexual difference, theologies of sexuality and the study of gender are, in fact, uniquely modern phenomena. While pre-modern theology and philosophy focused primarily on sexual acts and their potential sinfulness or immorality, the concept of *sexuality* is a product of modernity. This is to say, the concept of a person's sexual behaviour as insightful to a person's self is relatively new.⁷²

Thomas Laqueur's discussion of theological interpretations of gender and sex posits that, in pre-modern texts, the female/female body was understood as an inferior variation of man. It was a common belief that men and women simply represented two different forms of a single essential sex. This meant a women's biological make-up, their reproductive structure, was simply an inversion of the male one. Post-Enlightenment, such a one-sex model (in which the only sex was male) was pushed aside in favour of a two-sex model which postulated a completely oppositional biological difference between men and women. The argument that emerged at this time was that "not only are the sexes different, but they are different in every conceivable aspect of body and soul, in every

⁷¹ Tina Beattie, "The Theological Study of Gender," in *The Oxford Handbook of Theology, Sexuality and Gender*, ed. Adrian Thatcher (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2014), 40-41.

⁷² Elizabeth Stuart, "The Theological Study of Sexuality," *Ibid.*, 18.

physical and moral aspect. To the physician or the naturalist, the relation of woman to man is a series of opposites and contrasts.”⁷³ This became the foundation for arguments emphasising the essential physiological as well as philosophical difference between men and women in which they are viewed as polar opposites. Such an evolution of thought over time strikes at the assertion that sexual difference follows from a natural dualistic pattern, rather than is the product of social construction.⁷⁴ Despite his work’s exposure of this evolution in thought, however, and its implication that further evolution is possible, a significant portion of westerners, both Christian and otherwise, retain a strong belief in both the biological as well as the philosophical Enlightenment two-sex model as the only legitimate model and one intentionally designed by God for the welfare of society and the family.

The shift in Catholic teaching towards this two-sex model seemed to be supported by modern biology and was encouraged by romantic sexual stereotypes. Its vision of male/female difference initially took prominence even in the theological campaigns for women’s ordination and political ones for their reproductive rights that emerged mid-20th century. The Congregation of the Doctrine of the Faith (CDF) cautioned, in 2004, that the desire to liberate women from “biological determinism” would lead to ideologies which undermine “the family, in its natural two-parent structure of mother and father, and make homosexuality and heterosexuality virtually equivalent.”⁷⁵ In doing so, it emphasised the antagonisms women and gender politics presented to the heterosexual familial establishment, saying little to nothing of the role of men. The Catholic magisterium continues to uphold the foundational quality of these stereotypical heterosexual gender roles in society. To fundamentally reorient this, they caution, would “radically undermine the status quo.”⁷⁶ For some conservatives, such a radical shift poses an apocalyptic threat to modern Western culture.

While Catholic theology draws upon natural law, tradition and magisterial authority alongside scripture, evangelical theology has historically focused predominantly on the bible. For evangelicals, the Bible is “both the shaper of a worldview, and...a moral and spiritual guide for personal and communal life [...] The Bible unites evangelicals and remains the key source of understanding for their faith.”⁷⁷ But, the debate about gender within evangelical theology has itself become polarised

⁷³ Thomas Laqueur, *Making Sex: Body and Gender from the Greeks to Freud* (Boston, MA: Harvard University Press, 1990), 5. He references ideas put forward by well-known Enlightenment era physician and philosopher Jacques-Louis Moreau.

⁷⁴ Ibid. The existence of transsexual and intersex persons confirms the existence of categories outside of this strict dualistic male/female divide. Their existence has yet to be recognised in most societies as such evidence, however. Instead, those who do not fit the normative model of male and female continue to be seen as forms of dysmorphia, deviations from the norm that need hormonal or surgical intercession to help uncover an individual’s ‘true’ biological identity (either male or female).

⁷⁵ "Letter to the Bishops of the Catholic Church on the Collaboration of Men and Women in the Church and the World," (Congregation of the Doctrine of the Faith, 2004).

⁷⁶ Beattie, "The Theological Study of Gender," 39.

⁷⁷ Elaine Storkey, "Evangelical Theology and Gender," in *The Cambridge Companion to Evangelical Theology*, ed. Timothy Larsen and Daniel J. Treier (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 164.

between *complementarians* (biblical manhood and womanhood) and *egalitarians* (biblical gender equality). Each claims biblical justification for their positions. The development of the concept of *complementarity*, and the crystallisation of its theology, has established a new common ground between conservative Catholics and evangelicals who see gender polarity under threat by progressive members both inside and outside their churches.⁷⁸ These theological positions will be examined in detail later in this chapter.

In the 1960s and 1970s, in reaction to countercultural trends, religion and gender were newly questioned by feminist theologians who criticised theological assumptions of male dominance in church and society and the lack of attention to woman in traditional theologies. Reconstructing theological categories entirely from a feminist perspective, they began questioning heteronormativity itself, exploring homosexuality and other relationships outside the traditional male/female dyad.⁷⁹

There has been significant theological resistance by conservative theologians to gender theory, as well as the feminist and queer theology⁸⁰ it has inspired. Tina Beattie argues the strongest resistance arose from the Catholic magisterium and the movement known as “theology of the body.”⁸¹ Inspired by a series of talks given by Pope John Paul II in 1979-81 reflecting on the Book of Genesis, it generated a significant following amongst both Catholic and North American Protestant theologians. Almost entirely concerned with the sexual and reproductive body, this theology evinces little concern for how the feminine body is affected by economics or political systems.

Many of the debates and divisions over the acceptability of homosexuality and the legitimacy of same-sex marriage hinge on denominational approaches to complementarity and its resistance to gender equality. But all beliefs and traditions necessarily reflect cultural assumptions of particular historical periods, and views on marriage and sexuality are no exception. Laws restricting the rights of individuals to marry once included those of mixed faith, race, or nationality. Today, the restrictive

⁷⁸ Sarah Coakley, "Is There a Future for Gender and Theology? On Gender, Contemplation, and the Systematic Task," *Criterion* 47, no. 1 (2009): 2.

⁷⁹ Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Religion and Sexism* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1973).; Kari Borresen, *Subordination and Equivalence: The Nature and Role of Women in Augustine and Aquinas* (Kampen, Netherlands: Kok Pharos, 1995).; Mary Daly, *The Church and the Second Sex* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1986).; Kwok Pui-lan, *Postcolonial Imagination and Feminist Theology* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005).

⁸⁰ Elizabeth Stuart, "The Theological Study of Sexuality," in *The Oxford Handbook of Theology, Sexuality and Gender*, ed. Adrian Thatcher (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2014), 20. In the wake of the emergence of other minority theologies, gay and lesbian Christians too began to publicly reflect theologically upon their experiences of oppression and marginalisation. In the mid-1970s, a distinctly gay branch of theology emerged eventually birthing a new umbrella category: queer theology. It built upon queer theory and the works of Michel Foucault, Judith Butler and others.

⁸¹ Some Catholic theologians have used this development as the basis of a new form of feminist theology. Generally hostile to secular feminists, they tend to defend the Church's official teachings on contraception, abortion, homosexuality and marriage.

theologies and ideologies that reject non-heteronormative marriage across the globe, are heavily grounded in theologies of “natural law” and the “doctrine of complementarity.” New developments in the use of these terms are prominent features in current cultural and political debates.

Complementarity: A Theological View of Marriage and Sexuality

Have you not read that he who created them from the beginning made them male and female, and said, 'Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh'?

Matthew 19:4-5

Natural law, a type of moral and legal theory, was first conceived in ancient Greek philosophy. Further developed through Roman and Medieval Catholic philosophy, natural law understood itself as the articulation of moral standards derived from the nature of human beings and the world. Throughout history it has referred to the use of reason in the analysis of human nature. This, in turn, helped define a set of rules of moral behaviour derived from this concept of nature or reality (believed to be God’s creation in Christian theology). It saw renewed significance with the emergence of the Enlightenment and its emphasis on rationality during which natural law theorists further developed the concept by incorporating ideas from Roman law and social contract theory.⁸²

The modern Christian understanding of natural law, in particular as it relates to sexuality, was shaped more fully in the 18th and 19th centuries. For the purposes of this research only natural law which addresses sexuality, that which is required by nature for sexuality to be proper or justified and marriage to be legitimate, will be explored. Many of its proponents seek not just to defend the equal rights of women and children, but to enshrine the traditional norms of lasting and exclusive monogamous heterosexual marriages in something beyond the biblical Christian tradition.⁸³ Recognising shifting cultural trends, religious scholars looked to construct a natural account of these traditionally biblical features of marriage and sexual morality through the new concepts of rationality, empiricism and those utilitarian arguments which were designed to apply across religious divisions. Building upon Aristotelian-Thomistic theories, common Greek, Roman, Jewish, Catholic, and Protestant cultural marital norms, as well as early developments in modern evolutionary biology, they took all these as evidence of a natural law at work.⁸⁴

⁸² Jr John Witte, "Sex and Marriage in the Protestant Tradition, 1500-1900," in *The Oxford Handbook of Theology, Sexuality and Gender*, ed. Adrian Thatcher (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2014), 314-15.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 314.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 315-15.

The theological proposition that maleness and femaleness are theological categories and that sexuality is necessarily a part of the process of salvation are, in many ways, relatively modern ideas. They are legitimised, however, through reference to scripture and tradition. Like Augustine, Karl Barth contended that humanity bears the image of God specifically through the male/female dynamic. Equal yet different, he argued that men and women can fulfil their calling to the image of God by finding oneness through each other. Thus, the fulfilment of maleness and femaleness that is the result of a marriage between a man and a woman allows one to reflect on and participate in the divine, mirroring the relationship between the male Christ and the female Church. As such, homosexuality is problematic. It not only inhibits the fulfilment of *imago dei* but, by choosing a partner of the same sex, one is committing idolatry, substituting an image of oneself where a complementing other should be.⁸⁵

Pope John Paul II created the doctrine of complementarity which placed sexuality at the core of his theological anthropology. Developed as a cogent term in the 1970s, it is often referred to as the *traditionalist* or *hierarchical* view (although many who hold it refute these terms). This reorientation toward the good and sacredness of human heterosexuality amongst Protestant and Catholic theologians marked the embrace of a new concept of sexuality. Observed in biblical and theological scholarship since Pope John Paul II, the doctrine of complementarity posits the idea that male and female (in this case the classic understanding of a man and a woman as defined by their sex organs) are equal, but different.⁸⁶ Complementarians believe each sex, independently, bears God's image fully in his or her own unique and diverse way. However, a relationship which brings both sexes together reflects truths about Christ that cannot be reflected by a man or woman alone. The belief that males are designed to highlight Christ's relationship to the church in a way that females are not, and vice versa, declares we, as humans, do not get to determine what manhood and womanhood mean. Rather, God does. Living in accordance with this belief is the best way to honour God.⁸⁷ The official doctrine of complementarity is grounded in the belief that the differences between male and female are ontological. They are essential to the human being and not the product of social construction.

The need for a specific word to articulate this concept arose in response to new thinking on equality and emancipation by feminist biblical scholars in the 1970s and 1980s.⁸⁸ Biblical feminists,

⁸⁵ Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, vol. iii (Edinburgh, Scotland: T&T Clark, 1961), 165-66.

⁸⁶ Other scholars argue that such a concept has yet to be found. While there is evidence of those who stressed the equality of the sexes, they also stressed the essential sameness of the sexes. Likewise, those who emphasised the essential differences between the sexes, also asserted the superiority of men.

⁸⁷ Mary Anne Case, "The Role of the Popes in the Invention of Complementarity and the Vatican's Anathematization of Gender," *Religion & Gender* 6, no. 2 (2016): 155-57.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 155-72.

criticising centuries of female oppression in church practice and theology called their new concept of equality, *egalitarianism*. It insists only role-interchangeability is true equality. Egalitarianism believe there should be no gender-based role distinctions or limitations. In this, they are primarily referring to the role of women in the home, church and society, since the structure of complementarianism tends to favour men. The reframing of biblical and theological texts towards justice, equality and inclusiveness can be seen in the work of queer and feminist theologians who generally continue to refute the concept of complementarianism. The debate over the relationship between gender and Christian theology is clearly one of constant evolution. A number of scholars have recently taken on the task of reinterpreting complementarity, and sexual ethics more broadly, to be more inclusive.⁸⁹

The sacralisation of natural law and complementarity has led to a disregard, sometimes criminalisation, of alternative ways of thinking. More specifically, the theology of complementarity has been significant in the development of the debate over same-sex marriage. Despite differing socio-political contexts, four main overlapping arguments can be found in both the American and Irish objection to same-sex marriage. They are each rooted in the concept of complementarity. First, that marriage must be open to the possibility of procreation (with certain exceptions). Second, that the mother and father family unit is the most stable and suitable for children. Third, that the male/female dyad fits the ancient, biblical concept of family. And fourth, that opposite-sex marriage is the cornerstone of Western Civilisation ⁹⁰

Different denominations have emphasised various aspects of the theory of complementarity. They range from the pragmatic (division of church and household labour) to the spiritual (the spiritual unity achieved by opposite-sex marriage). This process has transformed a once general concept into something unique to different traditions based on denomination, geographical location and political context. The concept of complementarity is not unique to the Christian tradition, but is held, as a theological view, in a variety of religious and philosophical traditions. This research will only focus, however, on the evangelical and Catholic traditions and the development of their unique cultural, historical and political contexts.

⁸⁹ Margaret Farley, *Just Love: A Framework for Christian Sexual Ethics* (New York: Continuum, 2009). Todd A. Salzman and Michael G. Lawler, "Catholic Sexual Ethics: Complementarity and the Truly Human," *Theological Studies* 67 (2006).

⁹⁰ McDaniel-Miccio, "You Can't Remain Neutral on a Moving Train; Marriage Equality in the States and Ireland: Thoughts on Freedom to Marry, Religious Heteronormativity and Conceptions of Equality," 7.

Protestant Evangelicalism and Gender: Complementarity

Today's anti-same-sex marriage agenda, rooted in the sacralisation of complementarity, is not just a product of biblical literalism, but of a long history of theology and religious ideology inspired by socio-cultural development. Unlike in Catholicism, no single authority in Protestantism (other than interpretations of the Bible) instructs views on sex or gender. The enthusiastic adoption of the concept of gender complementarity and the significance of sex, marriage and the family to conservative evangelicals has evolved out of social and cultural practices as much as out of theological or religious ones.

Early Protestant preoccupation with marriage stemmed, in large part, from criticisms of Roman Catholic sacramental theology and canon law which had dominated the West for a millennium. The medieval Church, having almost unilateral jurisdictional control over marriage, was seen by Protestant reformers as appropriating state authority. Canonical prohibition on marriage for clergy and monastics was disrespectful of God's gift of marital love and the Bible's cautions against sexual sin. They saw marriage as the natural and biblical right and duty of each able adult. In time, a new Protestant "gospel of marital and sexual freedom"⁹¹ was established. This was transformed into new civil laws by Luther and subsequent reformers beginning in the sixteenth century.

Like Catholicism, mainline Protestant teachings on marriage start from the narratives of Genesis 1 and 2. They see them as clear directives on the order of creation and the use of natural law in the determination of legitimate marriage. Believing God created marriage as a two-as-one union of the flesh between a man and a woman, it was designed to allow the couple to be "fruitful and multiply" (Genesis 1:28) while being protected from sexual sin as defined by church teachings. Laws commanding right practice within such marriages and families were further outlined by drawing on biblical passages that addressed conjugal rights, household codes, etc.⁹² From this developed a robust Protestant tradition of catechetical, confessional and casuistic teachings on sex, marriage and family life that followed them as they travelled to new lands. Protestants on both sides of the Atlantic developed these theologies more fully in the 20th century. Despite shifting temporal, geographical and denominational characteristics, the central Protestant teachings on marriage remained relatively unchanged until the twentieth century: God created marriage for the mutual security of men and women, their procreation and their protection from sin and temptation.⁹³

⁹¹ John Witte, "Sex and Marriage in the Protestant Tradition, 1500-1900," 305.

⁹² Ibid., 305-06. This included teachings on divorce and second marriage (Matthew 19 and Romans 7), conjugal rights (1 Corinthians 7), and household codes (Colossians 3, 1 Peter 2-3, Ephesians 5-6).

⁹³ Ibid., 308-14.

Following in this vein, New England Puritans viewed the man as the head of household and the spiritual guide and nurturer of his family, especially his children. Interpreting Paul's insistence on women's silence as the male prerogative to religious leadership in all capacities, early evangelicals retained the view of women as fallen, sinful and lost. Toward the end of the eighteenth century, however, this began to change. As women became more involved in church life, femininity became associated with virtue, tenderness and pious love.⁹⁴

Over the nineteenth century, the daily responsibilities and expected social characteristics of men and women changed. They increasingly belonged to "separate spheres," each important, but neither complete without the other. Men gained responsibility for the public sphere as factory and office work became commonplace, including its competition, politics, paid labour and corrupting earthly concerns. Women, meanwhile, were increasingly segregated to the private sphere where they reigned over religion, family and piety.⁹⁵ The nineteenth century saw a transition from Puritan-based spiritual patriarchy to Victorian-era emphasis on the family. This gave new focus to religious instruction and socialisation, reinforcing the pious domesticity of the female nurturer. Early-nineteenth century revivals pushed aside strict Calvinist doctrines of depravity and original sin, instead emphasising an individual's ability to control his or her spiritual destiny.⁹⁶

The Calvinist covenantal model of sacralising marriage without ascribing a sacramental function to it remained. This marital model viewed the union as a holy and loving fellowship created in the image of the bond between Christ and his church. The lesson of Ephesians 5:32⁹⁷ was not to make marriage a sacrament, but to teach the importance of faithfulness and sacrifice to one's spouse, like Christ to his Church. The roles ascribed to the man and woman engaged in this union were in service of this goal: honouring God in their union. After Adam and Eve's expulsion from the Garden of Eden, God increased the labour both man and woman must endure: one in terms of his use of creation, the other her bearing of children.⁹⁸

⁹⁴ Randall Balmer, "American Fundamentalism: The Ideal of Femininity," in *Fundamentalism and Gender*, ed. John Stratton Hawley (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1994), 48-50. Virtue had previously been a term that referred to the melding of civic humanism and evangelical passion in a political context. It was, therefore, largely used in reference to men, as they were the only ones involved directly in politics at the turn of the 18th century.

⁹⁵ Kathy Rudy, *Sex and the Church: Gender, Homosexuality, and the Transformation of Christian Ethics* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1998), 18.

⁹⁶ Balmer, "American Fundamentalism: The Ideal of Femininity," 51-52.

⁹⁷ "(31) For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall be joined unto his wife, and they two shall be one flesh. (32) This is a great mystery: but I speak concerning Christ and the church. (33) Nevertheless let every one of you in particular so love his wife even as himself; and the wife *see* that she reverence *her* husband." (Ephesians 5:31-33; King James Version).

⁹⁸ John Witte, "Sex and Marriage in the Protestant Tradition, 1500-1900," 311-12.

Female responsibility for the sanctity of the home and male responsibility for overseeing the sacred conversion of the world were based on this logic. Fundamentalists eventually attached great theological significance to a father's role in the household. It modelled the absolute sovereignty God has over creation; without God, there could be no provision for his wife's spiritual salvation. Women had become the point of contact between God and family. Thus, to ensure a place in the theological order, every person needed membership in a family that had the spiritual balance of a mother and father. A mother provided moral and spiritual instruction. A father braved the inhospitable world and protected his family. American Evangelicals eventually came to articulate this concept as complementarity, the view that "God has created men and women equal in their essential dignity and human personhood, but different and complementary in function with male headship in the home and in the Church."⁹⁹ No longer the economic necessity it had been for rural farming communities, the family unit became a theological one. The balance achieved within such a relationship lead directly to sanctity and a personal relationship with God.¹⁰⁰

Traditional notions of family began to shift with the movement towards urbanisation in the middle of the twentieth century. There emerged new realities from prolonged single life to homosexual relationships to mixed families. Alongside these changes developed a new sense of urgency among those who continued to revere traditional concepts of the family. Worry over loosening views of gender and sexuality, in particular the effects such loosening would have on the sacredness of marriage, became central to their concern for the preservation of a "Christian nation". It was and is perceived to threaten societally sanctioned ways of life and the very foundation of faith as articulated, at least in part, by the doctrine of complementarity.

By the 21st century, Evangelicals had seized on gender relations as their most pressing issue.¹⁰¹ Evangelical positions on sexual ethics include topics ranging from contraception, extra-marital sex and cohabitation to the sacredness of marriage and the complementarity of the sexes. Even among the most egalitarian evangelicals, there is usually an emphasis on the complementarity and "fundamental created otherness" of male and female, the place for sex solely within a marriage. Despite some evolution on the topics of contraception, divorce and gender equity, the issue of homosexuality and same-sex marriage remains relatively stagnant. Evangelical objection to homosexuality and same-sex marriage are based on particular (and relatively uniform) biblical

⁹⁹ John MacArthur to The Council of Biblical Manhood and Womanhood, December 15, 2004, <https://cbmw.org/Resources/Sermons/Male-Authority-and-Female-Equality-In-the-beginning-Genesis-1-3>.

¹⁰⁰ Rudy, *Sex and the Church: Gender, Homosexuality, and the Transformation of Christian Ethics*, 20-25. Where once *family* meant a group of people with varying degrees of kinship who shared a living space and worked together to survive, for the last hundred and fifty years, *family* has come to generally mean only a heterosexual couple and their directly related offspring.

¹⁰¹ David W. Bebbington, "Evangelical Trends 1959-2009," *Anvil* 26 (2009): 104.

passages from both Old and New Testaments.¹⁰² Both Jews and Christians have interpreted such texts to disapprove of homosexual behaviour throughout history. That, paired with the uniformity of such biblical teaching, has largely contributed to the issue's authoritativeness for evangelicals.¹⁰³

A new, slightly more inclusive position has been adopted among some evangelicals in recent years: "welcoming but not affirming."¹⁰⁴ This acknowledges and even apologises, in some cases, for the negative and sometimes antagonistic nature of the historic evangelical attitude towards homosexual attraction. Like more recent positions taken by the Catholic Church, this position refuses to affirm same-sex sexual relationships, or in some cases even lesbian or gay identity. Despite such lack of recognition or approval, they are beginning to welcome homosexuals into the church. They often make a distinction between orientation (although there is some hesitancy with this term as it can have implications for ontology and identity) and practice. Those who continue to reject homosexuality now mostly stress homosexual *behaviour* as the point of friction. They emphasise the need to refrain from same-sex activity. The role of the church, in these instances, include both simply providing guidance and support as well as more extreme interventions, including prayer, counselling and more formal reparative therapy that seeks to change the orientation and behaviours of homosexuals. These have been, unsurprisingly, problematic in multiple ways. Such extreme approaches have now been abandoned by many.¹⁰⁵

Some evangelical scholars are looking to fully re-examine the historical position of evangelicalism on homosexuality to acknowledge that there does and should exist a gradient of empathy. Further along this gradient, lie those evangelicals who are looking to reread texts traditionally cited as condemnation in a more inclusive manner. Grounded in a historical reading, they acknowledge the Bible does not refer to contemporary Christian homosexual people in traditional passages of condemnation. Such an understanding of sexuality and identity did not yet exist.¹⁰⁶ Activist groups grounded in this thinking have begun to emerge across the globe. Organisations like Evangelicals Concerned and Gay Christian Network work to challenge dominant evangelical positions on homosexuality grounded in the traditional interpretation of complementarity.

Despite evidence of tendencies to bridge the gap between faith and sexual orientation, the evangelical community remains overwhelmingly traditionalist. Their biblical understanding of the ontological

¹⁰² These include: Genesis 19, Leviticus 18:22/20:13 (Old Testament); 1 Corinthians 6:9-10, 1 Timothy 1:9-10, Romans 1:26-27 (New Testament).

¹⁰³ Andrew Goddard, "Theology and Practice in Evangelical Churches," in *The Oxford Handbook of Theology, Sexuality and Gender*, ed. Adrian Thatcher (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2014), 387-88.

¹⁰⁴ S. J. Grenz, *Welcoming but Not Affirming: An Evangelical Response to Homosexuality* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1998).

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁶ Goddard, "Theology and Practice in Evangelical Churches," 389.

differences between men and women informs the conservative evangelical view on the roles of men and women in marriage, the church and community at large. Despite movements within certain corners of the faith to embrace greater gender and sexual diversity, especially amongst younger generations, it remains small.¹⁰⁷ The strong tradition of headship that has evolved out of Calvinist order-of-creation theology and complementarity continues to challenge progressive gender roles and the inclusion of non-heterosexual sexuality.¹⁰⁸

Presently, the majority of evangelicals view all sex outside of heterosexual marriage as “falling short of God’s purpose”¹⁰⁹ and, therefore, as sinful. Until this changes, the loudest and most politically powerful voices will continue to see their mission as that of protecting individuals and society from the damage legal permittance of marriages that do not fall in line with the teachings of complementarity can have.

Catholicism and Gender: Complementarity

Where evangelicals traditionally view gender complementarity as justification for a host of pragmatic, day-to-day divisions of labour and social and power dynamics, Catholic emphasis has remained, in large part, on its spiritual significance. Grounded in natural law, key scriptural interpretation and arguments from tradition, it soon became a foundational idea in Catholic teachings on human sexuality. According to Pope John Paul II, it signified “that certain realities belong together in the created order and that they together produce a whole which neither produces alone.”¹¹⁰ Drawing on claims of biological dualism, he in fact translated and emphasised the division of male/female along dualistic philosophical lines.

Familiaris Consortio (1981) presented two types of complementarity: natural (or biological) and personal. A marriage, “this conjugal communion,” is grounded in a natural complementarity of the sexes, but must be cultivated through a couple’s personal willingness to share the entirety of their lives with one another. When done, the Lord God will elevate and sanctify this union of the character, body and soul, revealing to the world a new “communion of love given by the grace of Christ.”¹¹¹ This natural gender complementarity is further divided into two parts: heterogenital and reproductive

¹⁰⁷ Josh Lowe, "Same-Sex Marriage Support Rises, Even among Republicans and White Evangelicals," *Newsweek*, 27 June 2017.

¹⁰⁸ Goddard, "Theology and Practice in Evangelical Churches," 390.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.* (see Romans 3:23)

¹¹⁰ Todd A. Salzman and Michael G. Lawler, "Deconstructing and Reconstructing Complementarity as a Foundational Sexual Principle in Catholic Sexual Ethics: The (Im)Morality of Homosexual Acts," in *Moral Theology for the 21st Century: Essays in Celebration of Kevin T. Kelly*, ed. Julie Clague, Bernard Hoose, and Gerard Mannion (London, UK: T&T Clark, 2011), 121.

¹¹¹ Pope John Paul II, "Familiaris Consortio: The Role of the Christian Family in the Modern World," (1981).

complementarities. Heterogenital complementarity, a reference to functioning male and female genitalia, is a necessary dimension of a truly human sexual union. Reproductive complementarity, on the other hand, is the unitive-procreative principle that states only a relationship that is open to procreation can fall in line with Catholic sexual teaching. There are exceptions to this second aspect, for example in cases of infertility. As same-sex couples are incapable of fulfilling either of these requirements naturally, they will never be able to enter into valid marital unions.¹¹²

In 1995, Pope John Paul II issued a Papal letter to women in which he expanded the notion of complementarity to include *ontological complementarity*. Similarly addressed in a 2004 letter issued by the magisterium addressing Catholic Bishops,¹¹³ they both claim “womanhood and manhood are complementary not only from the physical and psychological points of view, but also from the ontological.”¹¹⁴ The foundation of John Paul II’s theology of the body and the sexual human being links biology and the personal spiritual complementarity between a man and a woman. God creates man and woman as perfect in themselves. Until they form a couple, however, they are incomplete. Marital union makes them whole. They complete one another physically, ontologically and psychologically throughout each day of their marriage.¹¹⁵ Condemnation of homosexual acts on the grounds they violate heterogenital and reproductive complementarity seems relatively straightforward. The violation of personal or ontological complementarity is less so. It is in this space that theologians have been working to develop alternative approaches to gender, sexuality, natural law and sexual ethics.

Pope Francis recently addressed the issue. While he did not dismiss John Paul II’s emphasis on the importance of complementarity as the root of a stable and sacred marriage and family, he did note the concept of complementarity was dynamic and evolving. Complementarity, he cautioned, is not a simplistic notion that “all the roles and relations of the sexes are fixed in a single, static pattern.”¹¹⁶ Pope Francis is not opening the sanctity of marriage to non-heteronormative couples, but simply noting nuance in the rigidity of previous definitions. Like John Paul II, Pope Francis retains a classicist definition of complementarity, in which gender roles are stereotypically allocated. In this understanding, definitions of femaleness are primarily related to motherhood, nurturing and submissiveness. Maleness, alternatively, is related to fatherhood, protectiveness and strength. Such

¹¹² Linda Hogan, "Conflicts within the Roman Catholic Church," in *The Oxford Handbook of Theology, Sexuality and Gender*, ed. Adrian Thatcher (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2014).

¹¹³ "Letter to the Bishops of the Catholic Church on the Collaboration of Men and Women in the Church and the World."

¹¹⁴ Pope John Paul II, "Letter to Women," (1995).

¹¹⁵ Card. Joseph Ratzinger, "Letter to the Bishops of the Catholic Church on the Collaboration of Men and Women in the Church and in the World," (Offices of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, 2004).

¹¹⁶ Pope Francis, *The Complementarity of Man and Woman in Marriage*, podcast audio, Vatican Radio 2014.

views are constantly questioned by Catholic theologians and laypersons alike, the official line of the church never the adopted line of all.¹¹⁷

The contemporary debate over the ethics of homosexuality stemmed from John Paul II's 1975 *Declaration on Certain Questions Concerning Sexual Ethics. Persona humana* introduced the distinction between the "homosexual condition" and "homosexual actions." By drawing this distinction, it affirms the position that the inclination of a homosexual person is not a sin, although it is still considered "a strong tendency ordered toward an intrinsic moral evil."¹¹⁸ Therefore although the individual is not culpable for his or her orientation, the orientation itself is regarded as disordered.

As recognition of same-sex marriage spreads, the Church is under new pressure. Its formal response continues to be shaped by its condemnation of homosexual sex. Reluctance to advocate for the protection of same-sex marriage stems from concerns it will damage the body politic and trivialise the institution of marriage.¹¹⁹ Such positions have played a part in the growing chasm between "the Roman Catholic Church's approach to sex and gender and the views and practices of a significant number of Catholics worldwide."¹²⁰ Despite shifting rhetoric to appear more egalitarian, many continue to critique misogyny and sexism in Church teachings on sexual morality and the role of women and queer people in the Church and greater Catholic community.

Part III: The Debate About Politics and Gender

Politics as a real-world phenomenon is significantly impacted by our social understanding of gender and sexuality. The relationship between gender and politics is, therefore, complex and ever-evolving. It codifies how we define gender, who is included in this definition, and how individuals thus labelled should behave. Policies that address these questions become the location of powerful debates about who gets to make these determinations for the rest of the country. The debate around LGBTQ+ rights in recent years has pushed questions about gender identity and gender presentation to the forefront of many people's minds as it never had been before. The emergence of same-sex marriage as a policy debate, especially, forced discussions about some of the most fundamental assumptions we have about gender and families. It raised questions about the meaning of marriage, the role of mothers and fathers, and what constitutes a family. The discussion, while similar in many respects in the US and

¹¹⁷ Benjamin J. Vail, "The Battle over the Sexes: Catholic Perspectives on the Gender Debate," 10 Apr 2015.

¹¹⁸ "Letter to the Bishops of the Catholic Church on the Collaboration of Men and Women in the Church and the World."

¹¹⁹ "Considerations Regarding Proposals to Give Legal Recognition to Unions between Homosexual Persons," (Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, 2003).

¹²⁰ Hogan, "Conflicts within the Roman Catholic Church," 336.

Ireland, is the result of diverse socio-political, cultural and religious histories. As such, the relationship between gender and politics is unique to each.

American Evangelicalism: Politics and Gender

The politicisation of social issues in recent decades has taken on a distinctly bi-partisan nature in the US. A significant factor in this politicisation has been the rise of a Christian Right, a political movement that gained traction as a response to rapidly evolving notions and legal definitions of appropriate gender identity and sexuality. The rest of this chapter intends to examine this dynamic through the lens of one particular issue, LGBTQ+ rights, and the socio-political tensions it has created.

The number of Americans who claim no religious preference has risen over the last decade. Twenty percent of 18-25 year olds describe themselves as such.¹²¹ This very real phenomenon has been co-opted by conservative politicians and some religious leaders to wield as a sword of fear. They argue this secular-leaning demographic threatens American society and will eventually weaken America's traditional values. The conservative religious fight against secularisation has been encoded as the fight for "family values" over the course of the last 40 years. This term includes opposition to abortion, homosexuality, especially same-sex marriage, broad condemnation of sexually exploitive pop culture and the disassembling of traditional gender roles.

Not monolithic, there are divisions within the Christian Right regarding which issues should be addressed and included in their movement. When, in 2007 for example, Rev. Richard Cizik, the National Association of Evangelicals Washington Policy Director, sought to address global warming, he was heavily criticised by some prominent members of his community. James Dobson of Focus on the Family and Tony Perkins, President of the Family Research Council, called for his resignation. They saw his inclusion of global warming a distraction from "the great moral issues of our time."¹²² While the debate over the future direction of the Christian Right continues, one thing is clear: they have no intention of giving up on those issues, namely the sanctity of the family, which first brought them together.

¹²¹ "Religious Landscape Study: Religious Composition of 18-29 Year Olds," Pew Research Center, <http://www.pewforum.org/religious-landscape-study/age-distribution/18-29/>

¹²² Laurie Goodstein, "Evangelical's Focus on Climate Draws Fire of Christian Right," *New York Times*, 3 March 2007.

Evangelicalism and the LGBTQ+ Community: The Early Years

Today's official opposition to LGBTQ+ rights began as a political grassroots project in 1977 in Miami-Dade County, Florida. Singer and evangelical activist Anita Bryant led a successful crusade to overturn an anti-discrimination law based on sexual orientation. She drew on concerns about homosexuality's sinfulness and was backed by the newly formed Religious Right.¹²³ Her campaign spread across the nation. In response, it galvanised the LGBTQ+ community into action and launched a formidable opponent. Riding the momentum, she and Jerry Falwell worked to repeal anti-discrimination laws across the country. Although the Briggs' Initiative (her California project) ultimately failed, it set a precedent which her campaign strategy modelled for years to come.¹²⁴

Not until the 1990s did the Religious Right truly shift its critical gaze from abortion to homosexuality and same-sex marriage. An increasingly vocal and visible LGBTQ+ community encouraged an increasingly vocal and visible response from opponents. Before the issue of same-sex marriage became central, conservative evangelical suspicion of the entire homosexual community stemmed from the view that homosexuals were *choosing* to take on same-sex partners. Such a choice demonstrated rejection of gender complementarity on the part of the LGBTQ+ community. The Religious Right saw it as a desire to stay single, ignoring the fact that same-sex couples were neither socially encouraged nor legally allowed to enter into long term commitments. Such rejection of opposite-sex relationships demonstrated, in their eyes, dismissal of desire for a "complete relationship with God."¹²⁵

Although President Clinton claimed opposition to anti-gay discrimination, his 1996 signing of the Defence of Marriage Act (DOMA), supported just that: the idea that marriage should only be available to heterosexual couples.¹²⁶ Created as a kind of compromise between the Right and Left, DOMA removed the federal government from the debate. It left marriage rights to the discretion of individual states. Ambiguous at best, many saw DOMA as governmental cowardice, allowing continued state-by-state discrimination. Condemnation and fear of the 'gay lifestyle' or 'gay agenda' persisted as the Religious Right insisted same-sex attraction was a chosen way of life. This assertion

¹²³ The ordinance would have allowed the IRS to deny tax-exempt status to Christian schools on the basis that, in denying hiring rights to non-heterosexuals, they were de facto segregationists.

¹²⁴ The Briggs Initiative sought to make pro-gay or even neutral statements about homosexuals or homosexuality by public school employees cause for dismissal.

¹²⁵ Gay men and women could have, and did, marry those of a different sex. However, to do so would not result in a relationship with God as it would be based on false commitments and inauthentic gendered relationships.

¹²⁶ Bill Clinton, "President's Statement on Doma," (1996).

is generally refuted by medical and scientific evidence, but crucial to the legitimization of a political agenda.¹²⁷

Randal Balmer maintains homosexuality, like abortion, remains a durable issue for the Right because it allows its base to externalise the enemy.¹²⁸ Assuming no true believer could be non-heteronormative, it allows members of the conservative evangelical community to remain removed from personal connection to the sin of this population. Evangelicals campaign for its eradication because they see sins of the individual as implicative of the sins of American society at large. Reverend Billy Graham, amongst others, stoked anxieties about sexual identity and gender roles in the very early days of political mobilisation: “social sins, after all, are merely a large-scale projection of individual sins and need to be repented of by the offending segment of society.”¹²⁹

Drawing on this fear, local fights played out across the country. The Right worked hard to stem the tide of LGBTQ+ liberation cresting over the nation. The early 1990s saw Colorado,¹³⁰ Oregon,¹³¹ and Idaho presented with (narrowly defeated) ballot measures and amendments looking to ban protections for the LGBTQ+ community at all levels of state and local government. Not until nearly ten years later did Hawai’i become the first state to make provisions for homosexual couples, allowing them to be “reciprocal beneficiaries.” In doing so, they launched the official battle over same-sex marriage rights. As Vermont legalised civil unions in 2000 and the Massachusetts Supreme Court cleared the way for same-sex marriage in 2003, both sides seized on this developing political issue. By the 2004 Presidential election, referenda banning same-sex marriage appeared on the ballot in many key states. This ensured a high turnout of conservative voters who saw this as a crucial issue.¹³²

¹²⁷ Brian Stallard, "Homosexuality Is Genetic: Strongest Evidence Yet," *Nature World News*, 18 Nov 2014.

Tia Ghose, "Being Gay Not a Choice: Science Contradicts Ben Carson," *Live Science*, 5 March 2015.

¹²⁸ Balmer, "American Fundamentalism: The Ideal of Femininity," 25-27.

¹²⁹ (Graham quoted in) Edwin Gaustad and Leigh Schmidt, *The Religious History of America: The Heart of the American Story from Colonial Times to Today* (New York: Harper One, 2002), 336. Reverend Billy Graham, a Christian evangelist, was born in 1918 and rose to celebrity status in the early 1950s. He was well known for his enormous rallies, radio and TV sermons and role as advisor to numerous American presidents.

¹³⁰ In 1992, Dobson sought the passage of Colorado’s Amendment 2. Seeking to ban “all legislative, executive, or judicial action at any level of state or local government designed to protect the status of persons based on their ‘homosexual, lesbian or bisexual orientation, conduct, practices or relationship’,” the referendum passed. It was struck down as unconstitutional four years later.

¹³¹ In Oregon, Measure 9 attempted to add a similar addendum to the Oregon Constitution that denied protections to LGBTQ+ people based on sexual orientation and gender identity. That same year, Idaho endeavoured to pass Proposition 1 which sought to ban gay rights ordinances, prevent teachers from discussing homosexuality, and limit library books with gay content to adults only. It was defeated by a less-than-1-percent margin.

¹³² Balmer, "American Fundamentalism: The Ideal of Femininity," 25-27.

Prop 8 to the Supreme Court: The Legalising of Same-Sex Marriage

Almost twenty years after the attempted passing of the Briggs Initiative, the Religious Right seemingly succeeded in protecting that which Bryant and Falwell worked so hard to achieve: legal protection for a definition of marriage grounded in theologically sanctioned definitions of gender.

The Right's anti-LGBTQ+ crusade returned nearly 40 years later to the birthplace of evangelical movements like Fundamentalism and Pentecostalism: California. In fact, twenty percent of Californians still identify as evangelical Protestant. Debates over sexuality, gender and the definition of marriage are not new in California. In 2008, in reaction to San Francisco mayor, Gavin Newsom's, dispersal of marriage certificates to same-sex couples, the California Supreme Court voted to support the legal rights of gays and lesbians to marry. It passed by a narrow 4-3 decision. This, ultimately, instigated the move to hold a state-wide referendum to settle the debate over the legal definition of marriage. Proposition 8, passed by a 52% majority, saw a victory in the fight for "traditional marriage" and overturned the previous California Supreme Court decision. Approved on November 4, 2008, making same-sex marriage *illegal* in the state, Prop 8 created a new amendment to the California Constitution: "only marriage between a man and a woman is valid or recognised in California."¹³³ This was the first time a change to the state's constitution had even been proposed.¹³⁴

Its passage sent shock waves through both liberal and conservative groups invested in its outcome across America. As the highest funded state ballot campaign run in 2008, it outspent every campaign in the country (excepting presidential ones). It was notable, too, for the number of conservative religious organisations that put aside historical and theological differences to work together. Though its highest spenders were the Mormon and Roman Catholic Churches, the decades long, continual campaigning by evangelical Christian organisations like Focus on the Family and the American Family Association ultimately facilitated their coalescence. Through exorbitant spending and exceptionally clever grassroots efforts, the Religious Right succeeded in gaining a sizeable foothold over the most populous and presumed liberal state in America.

¹³³ "California Proposition 8, the 'Eliminates Right of Same-Sex Couples to Marry'," (BallotPedia: An Interactive Almanac of U.S. Politics, 2008). Official title: "Proposition 8: Eliminates Right of Same-Sex Couples," it was an amendment to the California Constitution: Section 7.5 in Article I.

¹³⁴ "Religious Landscape Study: California," Pew Research Center, <http://www.pewforum.org/religious-landscape-study/state/california/>. 1977, California explicitly defined marriage as between a man and a woman for the first time when the California State Legislature passed a law that said marriage is a "personal relation arising out of a civil contract between a man and a woman." Previously, marriage was defined in California as, "a personal relation arising out of a civil context, to which consent of the parties making the contract is necessary." This meant, technically, anyone could apply for a valid marriage license.

It was eventually overturned, after a lengthy and heated series of appeals that led all the way to the US Supreme Court. Yet, it remains a story of victory and blueprint for success amongst its supporters. Their grassroots interfaith efforts prevailed. Thus, it held implications and hope for future successes. On June 26, 2013, the same day Prop 8 was officially made null, another major US ruling on marriage rights was struck down: DOMA. Clinton's legacy *allowed* states to refuse recognition of same-sex marriages granted under the laws of other states. A decade later, it was recognised for its damaging effects on marriage equality.¹³⁵

Friday, June 26, 2015, exactly two years after the overturning of Prop 8, evangelicals, and the Religious Right en masse, suffered yet another blow: the federal legalising of same-sex marriage. In a 5-4 ruling, nearly forty-six years after the gay rights movement began,¹³⁶ the Supreme Court handed LGBTQ+ advocates their greatest victory yet. The US was the twenty-first country to legalise same-sex marriage nationwide. Fifty-five percent of Americans favoured same-sex marriage in 2015, while only 39% opposed. This was a dramatic change from a poll just ten years earlier which showed 63% of Americans were opposed to same-sex marriage.¹³⁷ Despite shifting numbers, however, both sides maintain aggressive and well-funded national and state organisations that continue to lobby legislatures and mobilise grassroots supporters.

Current tensions can be seen in actions taken, post-legalisation, by citizens as well as members of the court. Kim Davis, a county clerk in Rowan, Kentucky, has been one prominent figure in the post-legalisation debate. Refusing to sign marriage licenses for gay and lesbian applicants, she cited her religious beliefs as grounds for refusal. After a lower federal court upheld the Supreme Court decision, she was ordered to comply. Davis continued to refuse and was sentenced to jail (for being in contempt of court). The national recognition of her jailing helped solidify opposition to same-sex marriage. It birthed the next phase of the battle over religious freedom and the rights of citizens to adhere to personal faith. Despite an eventual compromise (she allowed others into her court to sign same-sex marriage licenses), her ordeal shed light on complications resulting from the passage of same-sex marriage. Incredibly and perhaps significant to the shifting cultural tide, she lost her bid for re-election to a Democrat.¹³⁸

¹³⁵ "Defense of Marriage Act," in *1 U.S.C. 7 and 28 U.S.C. 1738C*, ed. 104th Congress Public Law 199, 110 Stat. 2419 (1996).

¹³⁶ "The Stonewall Riot," *History* 2010.

¹³⁷ "Changing Attitudes of Gay Marriage," Pew Research Center, <http://www.pewforum.org/factsheet/changing-attitudes-on-gay-marriage/>

¹³⁸ Martin Belam, "Us Clerk Kim Davis Faces Gay Man She Would Not Let Marry in Election," *The Guardian*, 8 Dec 2017. David Ermold, one of the members of a same-sex couple she denied a marriage license to. He ran against her in 2017, but lost to Elwood Caudill Jr in the democratic primary.

For conservatives and liberals, secular and religious, the union of marriage symbolises something more profound than the mere legal joining of two people. Within evangelicalism, it moves beyond the human realm, creating a bond with God. Though concerns and understandings about sex and gender divide the major players in the same-sex marriage debate, they agree on at least one thing: marriage is a meaningful and symbolic institution.

The passage of same-sex marriage in the US was celebrated loudly by national and international communities. Yet, four out of the nine Justices did not vote to pass it. Claiming misuse of justice and the Constitution, Justice John Roberts and Antonin Scalia blasted the passing of this constitutional amendment as a “threat to American democracy.”¹³⁹ Rather than outright criticism of the LGBTQ+ community, high-powered figures on the Right have begun to shift their rhetoric. The last decade of increasing acceptance has necessitated the engagement of new language. Instead of pro-LGBTQ+ legislature supporting “immoral and destructive lifestyles,” they argue it “threatens democracy” and “violates the Constitution.”¹⁴⁰ Thus, the sentiment remains the same. The sanctity of the family, support of gender-based theology, and one’s relationship with God remain at the heart of conservative Christian arguments against same-sex marriage. A legal defeat does not mean a theological one. For many, it goes far deeper than a society’s laws.

As of May 2019, 30% of Americans remains opposed to legal sanctioning of same-sex marriage.¹⁴¹ Nine in ten Evangelicals disagree with the ruling, both because it goes against their understanding of God’s instructions and because they fear restriction of religious freedom.¹⁴² *Christianity Today* began its coverage of the June 26 ruling: “Here’s What Supreme Court Says About Same-Sex Marriage and Religious Freedom.” The article’s first statement read: “How will gay right and religious rights *be balanced?*”¹⁴³ Such a concern, largely ignored in the liberal aftermath of marriage equality, has a lengthy history amongst religious America.

¹³⁹ Deena Zaru, "The Best Lines from Scalia’s Dissent and Kennedy’s Decision," *CNN*, 26 June 2015.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid. In *Lawrence v Texas* (2003), Justice Scalia wrote that laws forbidding the gay lifestyle should be supported as heterosexuals merely hoped to, “protect themselves and their families from a lifestyle that they believe to be immoral and destructive.”

¹⁴¹ "Majority of Public Favors Same-Sex Marriage, but Divisions Persist," Pew Research Center, <https://www.people-press.org/2019/05/14/majority-of-public-favors-same-sex-marriage-but-divisions-persist/>.

¹⁴² Jonah Hicap, "9 in 10 Evangelicals Not in Favour of Us Supreme Court’s Same-Sex Marriage Ruling," *Christianity Today*, 6 July 2015. It should be noted, however, that nearly twenty-seven percent of white American evangelicals support LGBTQ+ rights.

¹⁴³ Morgan Lee and Jeremy Weber, "Here’s What Supreme Court Says About Same-Sex Marriage and Religious Freedom," Ibid., 26 June 2015.

Irish Catholicism: Politics and Gender

The Irish Catholic Church was once viewed by itself and its citizens as a strong institution with significant social and political prestige, “whose paternalistic governance and teaching were carried out and received in a relatively uncritical way.”¹⁴⁴ It no longer holds such power. One particularly notable space this appears true in is the interpretation of sexuality and gender. Beginning with the second (successful) divorce referendum (1995), Irish bishops seem increasingly at odds with the general population. Twenty years later, interpretations of church teachings that limit the power and role of women and sexual minorities both inside and outside its walls are creating an increasingly strong disconnect between institution and culture. This is especially true among younger generations.¹⁴⁵

Archbishop Diarmuid Martin has warned the church of encroaching cultural irrelevance in post-Catholic Ireland. He frequently speaks of the need for the Church to listen to its faithful if they wish to avoid triviality. Ironically, he was one of the main church voices to speak out against the Marriage Equality campaign.¹⁴⁶ Similar shifts have been noted by scholars who see faith in Ireland as increasingly individualised and de-institutionalised. This is exemplary of anti-institution and anti-establishment culture common in other areas of contemporary life in the West. Similar instincts are found often in evangelical faith and culture in the US. This helps explain the emergence of contemporary faith-based lobbyist and activist culture in both locales.¹⁴⁷

Throughout Ireland’s Marriage Equality campaign, clergy spoke to their own constituents. Some were in support of and some were against same-sex marriage. They were all relatively quiet on the national stage. Aware of the problematic nature of the church’s moral authority in today’s Ireland, it made a calculation to let independent groups take the lead. In the last ten years, a number of these independent policy advocacy groups have formed. They seek to implement or support existing laws and regulations which draw from conservative Christian teachings on issues of sexuality, procreation, marriage and the family. These groups argue for a way forward that would “return to the more traditional form of Catholicism, even at the risk of becoming culturally irrelevant. This nostalgic turn...respects the mission of the Church to be counter-cultural and respects the fragile identity of

¹⁴⁴ Gerry O’Hanlon SJ, "The Catholic Church in Ireland Today," *Studies: An Irish Quarterly* 106, no. 421: 10.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 10-11.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁷ Gladys Ganiel, *Catholic Ireland: Religious Practice in Late Modernity* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2016).

younger Catholics in a post-modern world who require greater certainty.”¹⁴⁸ They see their mission as one of cultural and societal protection against loosening sex and gender norms at a time when the Church is lacking the strength it once had to do so.

Despite self-identifying claims by these groups, not all of their beliefs or policies align directly with more mainstream Catholic Church teachings. In fact, many of them seem to increasingly align themselves with religious and political ideologies propagated by American conservative Christian lobbyist groups. It must be acknowledged, then, that a disconnect lies between official church teachings and how they are being interpreted by those individuals who seek to implement them in the political realm.

Civil Unions to Same-Sex Marriage Rights: An Irish Battle

By the time civil unions entered the debate in Ireland in the 2000s, the church no longer held the moral authority it once had. Homosexuality, illegal until 1993, was legalised against church opposition. Rather remarkably, by 2012 two-thirds of the population was in favor of same-sex marriage, a rapid change in only twenty years.¹⁴⁹

After years of groundwork by the Irish LGBTQ+ community, the issue became widely visible in 2004 when Ann Louise Gilligan (Irish) and Katherine Zappone (American) sought to file joint taxes as a married couple. They had been married in Canada in 2003. They argued neither the 1937 Irish Constitution nor the tax code¹⁵⁰ defined marriage as strictly between a man and a woman. This was the same argument that allowed the issuing of same-sex marriage licenses in California, prompting the creation and passage of Prop 8. The High Court ruled against them in December 2006, interpreting the Constitution as “limiting marriage to relations between a man and a woman.”¹⁵¹ The Court did, however, suggest legislation be passed by the Dáil granting civil and financial partnerships to same-sex couples.

By 2008, the Minister for Justice, Equality, and Law Reform, Dermot Ahern, announced that the government had approved a Civil Partnership Bill. It proposed to “set up a system for registration of same-sex partnerships and to set out the duties and responsibilities attached to the legal partnership.”¹⁵² This did not extend to adoption or non-biological parental rights. It was, nonetheless,

¹⁴⁸ SJ, "The Catholic Church in Ireland Today," 12.

¹⁴⁹ Kathy Sheridan, "How Gay Marriage Went Mainstream," *Irish Times*, 14 July 2012. Hugh O'Connell, "Poll Finds Two-Thirds of Irish Adults Support Gay Marriage," *The Journal*, 21 Oct 2012.

¹⁵⁰ The Taxes Consolidation Act, 1997 (Part 44).

¹⁵¹ Grzymala-Busse, *Nations under God: How Churches Use Moral Authority to Influence Policy*, 102.

¹⁵² *Ibid.*

signed into law by President Mary McAleese in 2010. It extended marriage-like benefits to gay and lesbian couples in areas such as “property, social welfare, succession, maintenance, pensions, and taxes.”¹⁵³

While in 2006, 41% of the Irish population favored same-sex marriage, by 2011 that number had risen to 67%. The particularities of the cases plaintiffs, two women, both of “unthreatening, almost nun-like ordinariness,” arguably aided in the feasibility of accepting same-sex marriage and civil rights. It made the idea seem familiar and, as such, non-threatening.¹⁵⁴ Rapid acceptance and pride in this acceptance as a nation is not the result of church apathy on the subject. Instead, by the 2010s, Church authority had dwindled so vastly that their views were seen as increasingly irrelevant. This narrative leaves out, however, the 30+% of voters who did not support the redefinition of marriage and family.

Opposition to civil marriage, and later the Marriage Equality Referendum (2015), was grounded in objections to the idea that sex, defined as “natural” procreative conduct, should be legally sanctioned outside of heterosexual marriage.¹⁵⁵ Catholic teachings on sex and morality played a significant part in informing such views.¹⁵⁶ They were couched in commitments on the common good. Many arguments made by church clergy leading up to the referendum called on Catholic citizens, as good Christians, to think of their duty to care for the common good, “the good of everyone in our society.”¹⁵⁷

Despite the church’s opposition, civil unions were introduced in 2010. Support for same-sex marriage was, in fact, already polling above 60%.¹⁵⁸ In the past, the church relied upon corresponding civil activists and social movements to promote their position. In this case, the Iona Institute was its only high-profile ally. In fact, the church had lost so much authority by the time the real debate over same-sex partnerships had begun, it stayed largely silent. When the referendum was announced in 2015, the Catholic Church, instead of simply stating its opposition, cautiously informed the public that it would “participate fully in the democratic debate leading up to the referendum.”¹⁵⁹

¹⁵³ Ibid.

¹⁵⁴ Sheridan, "How Gay Marriage Went Mainstream."

¹⁵⁵ For an outline of such arguments see: "Charter of the Rights of the Family," (Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, 1983).

¹⁵⁶ McDaniel-Miccio, "You Can't Remain Neutral on a Moving Train; Marriage Equality in the States and Ireland: Thoughts on Freedom to Marry, Religious Heteronormativity and Conceptions of Equality," 6-7.

¹⁵⁷ Bishop John Fleming, "Pastoral Letter 'Reflect on the Meaning of Marriage'," (2015).

¹⁵⁸ Grzymala-Busse, *Nations under God: How Churches Use Moral Authority to Influence Policy*, 102.

¹⁵⁹ "Ireland's Gay Marriage Referendum to Be Held in 2015," *Agency France Presse*, 5 Nov 2013.

Aware of polling and public sentiment, the church implored its members to vote with their heads and not their hearts. In doing so, it was apparent they recognised the empathetic pull of the pro-same-sex marriage campaign's "vote for equality" slogan. In response, they called for their members to reject personal empathy for the wellbeing of future generations and the greater good. One of the most prominent church voices in the debate, Archbishop Martin, argued for the importance of maintaining distinction and complementarity between men and women at both a social and constitutional level. He explicitly appealed to church teachings on natural law, sexuality and gender. He, however, fell short of his mission as large numbers of self-identified Catholics refused to follow his lead. This was, in part, because of dissenting clergy who broke with the church in their support of the referendum.¹⁶⁰

Those voices who did find representation in Archbishop Martin also found representation in the Irish Bishops' Conference. It warned the Joint Oireachtas Committee in April 2005 that same-sex marriage would "threaten the institution of marriage and the centrality of the family in Irish society."¹⁶¹ They focused on its threat to national tradition and the health and wellbeing of the upbringing of children. Amending Article 41, the bishops argued, ran the risk of "emptying or removing the special position of the family based on marriage," an institution they viewed as already weakened by the passage of divorce. They worried Ireland would be swept up in the tide of LGBTQ+ rights flowing across the globe. They were right. Archbishop of Armagh, Sean Brady, asserted it was not the time "for Ireland to undermine an institution which has served it so well."¹⁶² He was not alone in wondering if "we will have the courage to go against the trend and to defend what has contributed to our success, or will we simply roll over and give ourselves up to the prevailing trends?"¹⁶³ They argued for its incompatibility with the Irish constitution as well as the idea of the family unit, based on marriage, as the "necessary basis of the social order."¹⁶⁴

In the weeks coming up to the referendum, the Irish Catholic Bishops Conference circulated a pastoral letter on "The Meaning of Marriage." It outlined their position on marriage and the family. The letter argued for the importance of opposite gender marriage. It grounded this claim's legitimacy in faith and reason, shared teachings by other faith traditions, and the importance of such a marriage format for the health and success of children, mothers and fathers, the family and society. It warned against the government's failure to give proper consideration to such a complex issue, one with legal and moral implications for "family life and law, for accepted values in society and for recent

¹⁶⁰ Carey Lodge, "Ireland Gay Marriage Referendum: Meet the Priests Who Are Voting Yes," *Christianity Today*, 21 May 2015. Michael Sheils McNamee, "This Donegal Priest Will Be Voting Yes in the Same-Sex Marriage Referendum," *The Journal*, 8 May 2015.

¹⁶¹ Grzymala-Busse, *Nations under God: How Churches Use Moral Authority to Influence Policy*, 103.

¹⁶² Quoted in: *Ibid.*

¹⁶³ Quoted in: *Ibid.*, 104.

¹⁶⁴ Kevin Jones, "Civil Partnerships Begin in Ireland, but 'Gay Marriage' Still Debated," 6 April 2011.

developments in medical technology which stretch ethics to their very limits, and perhaps beyond. This is not about equality," the letter argued, "it is about changing the definition of marriage and the family as we know it."¹⁶⁵

Such ideas and attitudes continue to inform both cultural and political views on homosexuality and same-sex marriage. The extreme ideological quality of the objection as put forward by groups like the *Iona Institute* and *Mothers and Fathers Matter*¹⁶⁶ is, in many ways, mirrored by extreme ideological groups on the other side. Ones like *Marriage Equality Ireland* who see their mission as similarly critical to the salvation of society. The Iona Institute exemplifies a new type of integration of religious and political ideology into sophisticated political organising in Ireland. Its anti-same-sex marriage platform clearly resembles both Catholic encyclicals and the pastoral letters of Popes and local bishops. Yet, this platform also demonstrates a surprisingly close connection to the ideological anti-same-sex marriage movement in the US, a movement largely shaped by Protestant evangelicals and their own unique views on theology and gender. Organisations like the *Iona Institute* and *Mothers and Fathers Matter* have mirrored, in their tactics, "the often insolent, tough and polarised position of the religious right in the United States."¹⁶⁷ Despite the historical, political and institutional differences between the US and Ireland, recent developments in the politicisation of social issues across the globe have led to distinct overlaps between these two countries.

The debate leading up to the referendum was carried out almost entirely by lay citizens and individual church officials. They, like their campaign opponents, brought strategies and rhetoric over from the US. Laws prohibiting political advocacy in public media, radio, television, and newspapers have limited how such lobbying can be done in Ireland. It favors grassroots efforts over well-funded professional lobbying, like those carried out in the US. Unfortunately, increasingly deculturated and often degrading arguments and shaming techniques created a polarising public discourse. One that too clearly resembled those witnessed in America.

Conclusion

The similar nature of the same-sex marriage debate in California and Ireland is a clear example of the globalisation of previously localised issues. The passage of Prop 8 in California, and the lessons learned from it by pro- and anti-LGBTQ+ activist groups alike, significantly influenced strategies within the US and abroad. It motivated the restructuring of arguments, the inclusion of specific

¹⁶⁵ Fleming, "Pastoral Letter 'Reflect on the Meaning of Marriage'."

¹⁶⁶ *Mothers and Fathers Matter* is an anti-same-sex marriage group grounded in faith-based objections to the raising of families with same-sex parents.

¹⁶⁷ McDaniel-Miccio, "You Can't Remain Neutral on a Moving Train; Marriage Equality in the States and Ireland: Thoughts on Freedom to Marry, Religious Heteronormativity and Conceptions of Equality," 8.

rhetoric and the expansion of targeted demographics. Such lessons were first applied to local and national campaigns within the US. In time, however, these lessons moved outside of the US and were applied to campaigns internationally. They were employed directly and intentionally by marriage equality advocates in Ireland. Likewise, similar market research and emerging campaign strategies were shared between advocates of traditional marriage in the process of countering marriage equality legislation in both locations.

While the 2015 US Supreme Court's *Obergefell* decision and Ireland's Marriage Equality referendum established same-sex marriage as settled law, they did not stop attempts to shun, restrict or in some places even outlaw same-sex marriage. Kim Davis's rise to prominence as a heroine of the grassroots right, for denying same-sex marriage licenses in her jurisdiction, is just one example of such conflicts. Others, like the refusal of wedding cake, flower or venue services are now seeing their day in court. Those on the Right are hoping the judicial system will support their freedom to refuse service based upon belief. LGBTQ+ advocates are hoping their right to non-discrimination in the receipt of services will override claims of religious exemption. These issues are not just legal or political, they strike at the very emotional core of beliefs and worldviews on both sides. As such, they are not simple ones to address.

A long history of interpreted tradition, both theological and cultural, informs ideas and practices relating to gender among American evangelicals and Irish Catholics. For many members of these two traditions, "notions of gender are explicitly tied to a particular understanding of human nature, the order of the universe, the person of God, and a sense of how these are related."¹⁶⁸ This does not mean most members necessarily have the *same* view on such matters, but that identity, including gender identity, is integral to one's worldview. This is true for LGBTQ+ advocates too. They see sexual and gender identity as fundamental to the self and one's relation to the world. Likewise, concern for the importance of marriage and the family permeates both camps. It is nothing new. Nearly every generation has worried over some perceived desertion of tradition or family values. Such sentiments have been echoed by political and social critics and philosophers time and again. The persistence and volume of the debate suggests the nature and make up of marriage and the family, and how one chooses to interpret and define them, are indicative of a host of other issues. "Because concern about family values is really concern about social values, debating and defending the family becomes a way to both critique and defend our culture as a whole. By arguing about what family should be, we take the temperature of our larger society."¹⁶⁹

¹⁶⁸ Gallagher, *Evangelical Identity and Gendered Family Life*, 177.

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 3.

Such ideas are most clearly and loudly articulated by those authors and activists who are seen or see themselves as leaders of their community. Conservative Christians seek to present a definitive vision of truth about gender and their vision of how the world works. Equally definitive are the claims made by LGBTQ+ activists who push an agenda of sexuality, gender diversity and inclusion. There is necessarily a compromise when one enters politics, liberal or conservative, secular or religious alike. This compromise often makes tension over issues like LGBTQ+ rights and same-sex marriage even more complicated. Positions become less clear and hypocrisy more real.

The next chapter, Chapter 2, will present my methodological approach to this project. It will examine research methods, methods for data collection (i.e. in-person, semi-structured interviews and observations of participants), data analysis, the value of a comparative study, an outline of interview participants and general reflections about research participants as well as on my role as an interviewer. The final three chapters will address the data gathered during the project itself. Chapter 3 will present data gathered primarily during interviews that details the way the political and legal campaign for same-sex marriage was addressed, engaged with and presented in California and Ireland. Chapters 4 and 5 will present observations and analysis of the emotional as well as intellectual responses to the process of campaigning for and against same-sex marriage in California and Ireland, including challenges to pluralism, genuine inclusion and the potential for more productive future engagement.

CHAPTER 2: METHODOLOGY

The previous chapter examined same-sex marriage discourse in California and Ireland from a historical and theological perspective, and shall serve as the foundation for an investigation into this issue post-legalisation. This chapter presents the theoretical framework and practical methods of data collection, and an analysis of four case studies: (1) Californian Pro-Same Sex Marriage Advocates, (2) Californian Anti-Same Sex Marriage Campaigners, (3) Irish Pro-Same Sex Marriage Advocates, and (4) Irish Anti-Same Sex Marriage Campaigners. It addresses the design of the research study as well as reflections on the process of its execution.

Theoretical Framework

I have employed an interdisciplinary framework, pairing perspectives from sociology and gender studies with the insights of psychology and religious studies in the pursuit of meaningful dialogue. The insights and strategies of these various disciplines were useful in developing new approaches to tackling this particularly complex conflict. This study suggests that dialogical platforms that allow for an exchange of ideas without the presumption of identity may prove particularly effective in bridging worldview divides.

Post-secularist thought, which recognises religion as a significant and elemental aspect of humanity and the human social condition, has contributed an important theoretical framework for understanding the modernisation of global societies, which have generally involved a drift towards secularism. This drift has often giving religious actors the impression that they have been left out of the process. Jürgen Habermas's *post-secular theory*, by emphasising the need for fruitful dialogue and tolerant coexistence between the secular and religious spheres, has re-opened the doors to religion, faith and spirituality that were largely closed by the rise of the secular age.¹⁷⁰ While religion continues to be a vital aspect of both individual lives and socio-political agendas, the constructivist epistemology of this research maintains that religion, religious beliefs, and the perceived "truths" found within them, are necessarily the creations of the communities from which they emerge.

Research Methodology

Though affirmation of religion's significance is essential to this work, its hermeneutic is neither religious nor does it seek to push a religious agenda. Indeed, I acknowledge that my own perspective

¹⁷⁰ Jürgen Habermas, "Secularism's Crisis of Faith: Notes on a Post-Secular Society," *New Perspectives Quarterly* 25, no. 4 (2008): 17-29.

lies on critical side of religion, with special connections to the LGBTQ+ community. Recognising my own inability to be a “neutral observer,” it is true that every researcher brings assumptions which intentionally and unintentionally inform the researcher’s perspective. I strived to remain vigilant that my personal thoughts and actions did not intrude into the interactive process.

A qualitative methodology was chosen because I believed it would promote a more detailed understanding of human action, reasons, opinions and motivations. A subject-driven focus, by showcasing in-depth observation and self-articulation on the part of the research subjects, created space in which they could outline their own rationalities and micro-worlds. Though a qualitative approach necessarily limited its scope, it offered a deeper and more complex understanding of the subject and individuals involved than a quantitative one might.¹⁷¹ This methodological choice was consistent with the project’s aim of prioritising the voices, insights and opinions of activists on both sides of the same-sex marriage debate in the US and Ireland.

Data Collection

While including secondary sources for the provision of context, the majority of this research’s focus was on primary source material collected through (mostly) in-person, semi-structured interviews and observation. The value of semi-structured, in-depth interviews was their ability to provide insight gleaned from context, subtext and prolonged exposure to the communication style of the interviewee.

Interviews

As researchers, we approach the subject of our research with particular questions, theories and hypotheses, which naturally arise from our own assumptions. The researcher must, therefore, view their research as a “co-production between themselves and the people they are researching.”¹⁷² The interviewee must not be seen merely as a clear and uncomplicated mechanised product of his or her so-called ‘worldview,’ rather, they are the product of the interview interaction. Acutely aware of my personal views on the subject matter, I worked hard to clean my questions of language that would automatically demonstrate my bias on the subject of LGBTQ+ rights. I was aware of my need to be careful about bias, in both language and non-verbal reactions. When I failed in this task, I observed how it affected the nature of my interactions and the comfort and/or security of interviewees.

¹⁷¹ William Lawrence Neuman, *Social Research Methods: Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches* (New York: Pearson Education Press, 2010), 500-13.

¹⁷² Burr, *An Introduction to Social Constructionism*, 160.

What I had previously understood to be neutral language and neutral ideas were, in fact, not perceived by a number of interviewees as impartial. Despite my efforts, they had the unwelcome sheen of my own worldview. In fact, one of the most notable examples of this was the language used to describe the debate itself: *marriage equality*. The phrase “Marriage Equality,” despite being the government’s official label for Ireland’s 2015 referendum, and one used frequently in public and political discourse in the US, produced an immediate negative reaction amongst NO campaigners in both locales. To them, it implied a lack of equal rights before legalisation and suggested that anyone who campaigned against legalisation was campaigning against equality itself. My use of the phrase “Marriage Equality,” even in its official capacity, elicited assumptions on the part of all four groups of interviewees about my position. YES advocates largely assumed I was on their side, while NO campaigners generally assumed I was not. In some of my early interactions with NO campaigners in both California and Ireland, my “biased language” nearly lost me access to interview subjects. These individuals feared my interest in them was only to gain access so I could deliver a rebuke of their public positions on same-sex marriage.

I approached interviews with a previously considered agenda and list of interview questions, but was willing to adjust the interview to suit the subject and their experience/interests. A list of the interview questions, designed for each of the four groups of research participants, are listed in Appendix 2. Although most subjects were interviewed a single time, this format allowed for follow up interviews (of which I conducted two) in those cases where they were possible and valuable. The sensitive nature of this research meant it was important that I, as the interviewer, prepared a respondent before asking particularly sensitive or complex questions. This was far easier to do in-person. Additionally, face-to-face meeting made it harder for respondents to remain on “script,” since they were part of a two-way discussion and not simply asked a set of pre-determined questions that allowed for pre-scripted answers. All interviews, when possible, were recorded and accompanied by handwritten notes to assist with their most accurate replication as the research proceeded.

Observation

In-person interviews allowed me to obtain supplementary information through the observation of non-verbal reactions, which included dynamic facial expressions, the volume and character of the interviewee’s voice and body language; one interviewee cried. Informal data helped further illuminate a subject’s behavior and attitude. This is not to say that the expression of emotion or the use of body language cannot also be scripted or contrived. Aware of the Hawthorne Effect, I accepted

that the interview may have a distorting effect on the subject's honest self-expression. This is a challenge to all observation-based research.¹⁷³

Obstacles and Mitigation Strategies

Challenges to a PhD research project are often related to the restricted time and resources allotted to it. Other obstacles, however, such as the problems of rigor, generalisation, and biases, can be mitigated. The ability to repeat measurements and replicate results are at the core of the reliability of natural science research, however, one cannot ever exactly replicate semi-structured interviews. The reliability of qualitative research must stem from its academic rigor, its methodology and the consistency of its results, including an awareness of its limitations. A clear presentation of the data and findings must permit the readers to view the results themselves. Nor must data that appears to undercut the researcher's hypothesis be ignored. In the presentation of data in the following chapters, I underscore where individual belief diverges from the general consensus. Rather than treating this as a problem which undermines broad claims, however, I see such divergences as illustrative of the range of experiences and viewpoints that prove what a complex and multifaceted issue same-sex marriage discourse is.

As a researcher endorsing a qualitative approach, I had to come to terms with the problem of generalisability.¹⁷⁴ This project's research objectives are not looking to represent fluctuations in a large population, although it does seek to speak generally about trends in same-sex marriage discourse through data collected in specific contexts. Instead of claiming that this research will definitively represent trends on a large scale among secular LGBTQ+ rights and conservative religious activists, this project will speak to particular jurisdictional challenges to dialogical breakdown between pro- and anti-same-sex marriage campaigners or religious participation in same-sex marriage discourse. Where it does make generalisations about this narrow topic, it acknowledges the broad range of views and practices that exist and the need for further research to expand upon them.

To combat researcher bias, it is important that the fundamental thoughts behind the study's epistemology are outlined in its methodology. Reflections on the challenges of being a "neutral observer" is discussed more fully in "Reflections as an Interviewer" later in this chapter.

¹⁷³ Ranjit Kumar, *Research Methodology: A Step-by-Step Guide (2nd Edition)* (London, UK: Sage Publications, 2005), 120-21.

¹⁷⁴ Nigel Bruce, Daniel Pope, and Debbi Stanistreet, *Quantitative Methods for Health Research: A Practical Interactive Guide to Epidemiology and Statistics* (Chichester, UK: John Wiley & Sons Ltd., 2010).

Ethics

Due to the personal and sensitive quality of the subject matter, interview topics were potentially uncomfortable or emotionally fraught for many participants. I looked to the Trinity College Dublin Policy on Good Research Practice to guide my ethical practices. I sought to abide by its guiding principles of respect for the individual subject or group, benevolence in terms of the research's intention, and impartiality in treating all research subjects and populations fairly and equally.

Cognisant of issues of consent and power dynamics between researcher and research participant, I sought to mitigate some of the effects of these dynamics by gaining consent from all research participants. I introduced myself as a PhD researcher from Ireland interested in LGBTQ+ rights and the role of religion in public discourse. While always clear about my project and its concerns, the language I used to discuss it played a significant role in the way I was received and the trust I was given. I sought consent before the start of every interview. Sometimes the consent was given verbally, after I had explained any data gathered from the interview could be used anonymously if they wished. Subjects were also granted permission to stop the interview at any time and could choose to withdraw their information at a later stage. All participants were eventually asked to sign a consent form at the end of our interview. I began interviews with a request for *verbal* consent because the introduction of a written form would have disrupted both the conversation and the time allotted for the interview. I discovered the written form often created a sense of suspicion in interviewees, although less so when introduced at the end of our engagement.

Data storage was secured to ensure privacy, which included the confidentiality of research subjects when they sought it. I made sure all interview data was obtained *after* I explained the respondent's right in relation to their participation in the research and the data they provided. They were each informed of their right to obtain a copy of their data on request. Likewise, for those who wished to remain confidential, they were allotted specific titles that demonstrated their general role but were vague enough to keep from revealing their identity. Data was saved securely and backed up separately to make sure none of it was lost. It is guarded on the researcher's laptop behind a secure password and will not be used for any other purposes besides this PhD. According to the institution's ethical requirements, the data storage and the grounds for continued storage will be reviewed within 3 months of completion of this project. Any data no longer required will be destroyed or erased in a safe and secure way and any data still required will be reviewed every 12 months. It may be kept for up to 10 years.

Ethical concerns revolved mainly around interactions between the researcher and activists or political advocates. They and other individuals contacted for the purpose of the research were viewed as vulnerable, so, although data collected did not focus on sensitive information such as drug use or

sexual activity, other personal concepts like religious belief and sexual orientation were discussed; the data gathered from these discussions have, therefore, been treated as sensitive personal data.

Data Analysis

Discourse analysis was used to analyze the data because it prioritises language as a means of understanding discursive frameworks. Discourse analysis maintains that “structure[s] of signification which construct social realities” produce ways of “being in and responding to the world.”¹⁷⁵ It trains analytical focus on the worldview of its subjects, specifically how language is used in the construction of socio-political communities and the framing of moral beliefs. It facilitated this examination of ideologies relating to same-sex marriage and how those ideologies impacted the perceptions and actions of interviewees involved in local and national politics. I had entertained the use of narrative analysis early in the research because of the strong narrative content of the interviews, however, I ultimately replaced it with discourse analysis which explores narrative also, but as only one expressive means of discourse in a wider web of meanings, ideas, practices and expressions, all of which are the concern of this research.

This study took an in-depth thematic approach to analysis using an inductive research methodology to search for patterns. An analysis of language, texts and observation then led to the development of explanations for those patterns.¹⁷⁶ The inductive method builds on layers of experience with a subject, thereby encouraging a focus on the data stream instead of marshalling the data into pre-determined boxes. Although I entered the project with a loose hypothesis, I was more curious to follow wherever the data might lead, even if it proved my hypothesis incorrect. And indeed, a number of unanticipated themes in policy advocacy emerged, such as the role of emotion, and the underlying bases of moral instinct as discussed in Chapter 4.

Pre-defined questions played a role in determining the analytical themes. This initial pre-coding helped guide the data collection and ensured a comparability across all four case studies. Their perspectives and themes formed the major ‘codes’ through which data was analysed. Grounded in established literature, the questions connected the theoretical background to the raw data. Once cleansed of inconsistencies and incompleteness, the interviews were transcribed and coordinated with the notes, labelling those parts which seemed potentially significant or relevant to the “social worlds” of the subjects.¹⁷⁷ To open the door to new and unanticipated findings, the documents were

¹⁷⁵ Jennifer Milliken, "The Study of Discourse in International Relations: A Critique of Research Methods," *European Journal of International Relations* 5, no. 2 (1999): 229.

¹⁷⁶ H. Russell Bernard, *Research Methods in Anthropology*, 5th ed. (Lanham, MD: AltaMira Press, 2011), 7.

¹⁷⁷ Alan Bryman, *Social Research Methods* (Oxford, UK: OUP Oxford, 2012), 568.

scanned for new codes, beyond those structured by the questions and the theme selection. Then, these were grouped and interpreted in relation to the initial coding. Finally, it was integrated into the text of the report.

A Comparative Study: Ireland and California

The decision to use Ireland and the US as the locations of comparison initially stemmed from the synchronisation of their legalisations. Both jurisdictions legalised same-sex marriage in 2015, however, they did so through very different means. In Ireland, they held a referendum. In the US, the nine justices of the US Supreme Court handed down the ruling.¹⁷⁸

The relative autonomy of American states and the country's vast size make comparisons with Ireland challenging. It would seem more suitable, therefore, to compare a single American state with the whole Republic of Ireland. So, although the size of Ireland's population is more analogous to that of California's Bay Area by itself, the state as a whole was selected because it provides a more comparably diverse demographic.¹⁷⁹ Likewise, the state's practice of direct democracy through state-wide referendums, and its similar government size, make California a relatively fair match to Ireland. While referendums are not used at the federal level, all states are subject to superseding federal law and must obey federal court decisions. So, where its influence imposes itself, the United States as a whole must also be considered. That being said, California's frequent perception as a national bellwether state, means its local decisions often have far national and international-reaching consequences. All these factors helped determine that it should serve as a focal point of this study.

The cross-sectional design of this study focuses on a subsection of the political advocacy/activist communities in Ireland and California. Rather than a before-and-after or longitudinal study, they have been chosen to represent an overall "picture" of the conflict as it stands at the time of this study. Emphasis on contextualisation in trans-national comparisons provides a better understanding of how same-sex marriage conflicts have played out across different societies, their structures and institutions.¹⁸⁰ It is within this wider social context that explanations were sought. The researcher's intimate knowledge of both California, in which she was born and raised, and Ireland, in which she has lived for many years, provides some advantage in analyzing these two contexts.

¹⁷⁸ By virtue of the federal court's decision in *Hollingsworth v Perry*, marriage equality was legalised a few years earlier in the state of California.

¹⁷⁹ The area that includes San Francisco and Oakland, located in along the central coast of California. It is well-known as a progressive area in relation to the rest of California.

¹⁸⁰ Linda Hantrais, "Comparative Research Methods," *Social Research Update*, no. 13 (1995): 1-3.

These are four significant points of comparison between Ireland and California:

1. Both the US and Ireland saw the passage of same-sex marriage rights in 2015, however, in Ireland the issue is considered generally settled, while in California (and the US more broadly) it is not.
2. Both sides of the same-sex marriage debate in Ireland have received strategic (and in some cases, financial) support from the United States, creating an increasingly common set of language and rhetoric surrounding the issue, despite religio-cultural and political difference.
3. Both nations have complex relationships with the role of the church/state in the development of 'rights talk' and policy.
4. Both nations have strong ties between religion and national identity.

Comparative examination of the tensions surrounding the issue of same-sex marriage post-legalisation should illuminate the roles of political and religious culture and institutions in this very recent and still heated conflict.

Two Jurisdictions, Four Case Studies

This project is comprised of four specific case studies: (1) Californian Pro-Same Sex Marriage Advocates, (2) Californian Anti-Same Sex Marriage Campaigners, (3) Irish Pro-Same Sex Marriage Advocates, and (4) Irish Anti-Same Sex Marriage Campaigners. Selected for their relative symmetry, each of these four groups have played a significant role in the shaping of public mentalities about same-sex marriage.

Citizens who are not directly involved in the political or activist process derive their understanding of the issue primarily through political campaigns and the media's portrayal of those campaigns. Many people, in particular older generations, have little to no frame of reference for same-sex relationships outside of that presented by the campaigns and their associated activists, so there is no doubt these activist communities and their leaders play a powerful role in shaping same-sex marriage discourse in their respective jurisdictions.

While both national movements are unique in their historical, political and cultural context, they also have a great deal in common. The following chapters address both their similarities and differences.

Interview Participants

This project presents data collected from four distinct sets of participants involved in the campaigns for/against the legalisation of same-sex marriage in California and the Republic of Ireland. However, it is important to note that all those who hold views that oppose the legalisation of same-sex marriage are not entirely grounded in religion or religious ideology. In fact, there are myriad views about same-sex marriage that refuse to sit neatly into stereotypical boxes.¹⁸¹ However, the individuals selected for this study, key informants and experts determined to be of significance to the campaigns because of their roles in radio or televised debates, political activism, or as prominent columnists, largely fall into two groups traditionally viewed in opposition to each other. They continue to play the most visible role in policy advocacy and campaigning.

In Ireland, those selected in favor of legalising same-sex marriage were members of *Marriage Equality Ireland* and associated LGBTQ+ activists. The size of the Irish LGBTQ+ policy advocacy community is such that there is no longer a specific *Marriage Equality* organisation. Instead, the activist community now works across several issues and organisations. There is no clear division between ‘grassroots’ and ‘elite’ activists in this group as they work integrally. The most accessible group by far, they provided the largest pool of research participants. Aware of the disproportionate number of interviews conducted from this group, I was careful to balance my analysis accordingly. Eight interviews were conducted with members of the pro-same sex marriage campaign in Ireland, five women (Moninne Griffith, Grainne Healy, Orla Howard, Ailbhe Smyth, and Michelle Thomas) and three men (Ronan Farren, Brian Sheehan and Noel Whelan, who is sadly now deceased). Six of these were members of the LGBTQ+ community and two were political consultants with no special ties to the LGBTQ+ community. All eight interviewees consented to the use of their real names in this work. All eight interviews were conducted in-person in Dublin, Ireland.

All subjects were given the option of remaining anonymous. This option was discussed at the beginning and end of each interview to ensure the subject was fully aware of the implications of their decision. I offered to submit any quotes I might use for approval to those who continued to be unsure at the time of our interview’s conclusion. Three took me up on this offer: two pro-same-sex marriage advocates in California and one Irish senator. Those who are named, provided informed consent for the use of their names and positions. Those who wished to remain anonymous are simply described

¹⁸¹ This includes heterosexual and homosexual atheists who *oppose* same-sex marriage because they see a one man one/woman marriage as the foundation of society and, as such, as something entirely unique. It also includes members of the LGBTQ+ community who see the institution of marriage as the legacy of a patriarchal system and blanketly oppose its privileging in society. Further discussion of these different positions occurs at various points throughout this dissertation.

as from their institution or campaign such that their personal identification remains concealed. The inclusion of their associated organisation or campaign was deemed necessary to provide contextualisation and to ensure the findings did not lose their viability.

The Irish opponents to same-sex marriage interviewed were all members of, or associated with, the conservative, faith-inspired organisation: *the Iona Institute*. A small organisation, the majority of the NO campaign was, in fact, run by only a select few, and not all of those wished to be included in this project. Like their Irish pro-marriage equality counterparts, there was no real division between ‘grassroots’ and ‘elite’ advocacy in this group. The bulk of the data collected from this group came from four main subjects. They included the head of the *Iona Institute* (David Quinn), two of its most vocal associates (Breda O’Brien, the only female, and John Waters) and one Irish senator (Ronan Mullen). All four participants agreed to the use of their real names. Three of the interviews were conducted in-person in Dublin, Ireland while the interview with John Waters took place over a series of email exchanges.

In California, there were a multitude of organisations on both sides. This study focused largely on individuals who were significant participants in California’s ‘NO on Prop 8’ campaign (the proposition called for a constitutional ban on same-sex marriage), but who were also involved in more recent campaigns leading up to the *Obergefell* decision, which legalised same-sex marriage in all 50 states. Four participants were interviewed from four different organisations, four different levels of advocacy and three different parts of the state (one who now lives in Oregon). Kathleen Campisano, who continues to work primarily at the grassroots level and is currently the deputy director of the *Los Angeles LGBTQ+ Center*, was interviewed in-person in Los Angeles. Kate Kendell, a lawyer who recently stepped down as the executive director of the *National Center for Lesbian Rights*, was interviewed in-person in San Francisco. Thalia Zepatos, who was the director of research and messaging for *Freedom to Marry*, a national organisation that continues to do international consulting work, was interviewed in-person in Portland, Oregon. Finally, a psychologist from Northern California who worked as a political consultant on Prop 8 was interviewed via Zoom, an online video conferencing platform. She wished to remain anonymous. The last three are considered more typically ‘elite’ advocates. They included two members of the LGBTQ+ community and two with no special ties to it. All were women.

Advocates of “traditional” marriage in California were the most challenging group to connect with. Those that finally did agree to speak were largely contacted through their association with the *California Family Council*, although a some have ties to other similarly motivated organisations. As the most challenging group to engage with, it was, unsurprisingly, the smallest. Two of those participants wished to remain anonymous. The first holds a significant position in *California Family*

Council and was interviewed on the phone. The second, once held a position of authority in the *National Organisation for Marriage* and was communicated with via email. The third was Ken Williams, a self-proclaimed ‘once-gay’ minister and founder of *Equipped To Love*, an organisation that was founded “to establish a resource for people longing to understand homosexuality better and find resolution,” i.e. walking “away from homosexuality...into sexual wholeness.”¹⁸² He has most recently worked with the *CFC* on issues pertaining to “conversion therapy” practices. He represents the more grassroots aspect of this group, while the other two were/are well-entrenched at the ‘elite’ level. All three interview subjects were men.

These four sets of participants were chosen specifically to demonstrate symmetry between movements and discourses in Ireland and California. In both places, where informant interviews were not possible, other resources (i.e. social media posts, recorded interviews, op-eds) provided supplementary material.

Reflections on Engagement with Respondents: Challenges and Insights

The process of trying to secure interviews with potential participants was informative. The different levels of trust and scepticism displayed towards me across all four groups of research participants appeared indicative of larger trends.

Pro-Same Sex Marriage Campaigners

I was surprised at the scepticism towards me within the LGBTQ+ community in the California. When I did get responses from individuals I had reached out to (through a variety of platforms, a number of times) I generally travelled to meet them on their ground, in their office or home. I was often met with scepticism. It became apparent scepticism was a prevalent sentiment in Californian activism in general. I saw competitiveness among activists on the same side, including disagreements about who developed campaign strategies, who had been an activist longer, and who deserved to take credit for progressive accomplishments (it was generally a critique of ‘elites,’ not grassroots workers). This was in sharp contrast to the eagerness and openness of comparable actors in the Republic of Ireland.

Whereas in Ireland both those for and those opposed to same-sex marriage rights were easily identifiable and locatable, in California this was not the case. Not only is California a particularly large state, but Prop 8 was passed nearly ten years before the Supreme Court ruled on *Obergefell*.

¹⁸² "Equipped to Love," <https://www.equippedtolove.com/about/>.

People had moved on, emotionally and jurisdictionally, and were less interested in giving their time to discuss it. Despite setbacks, I managed to secure interviews with individuals involved in the three major branches of the activist community: ‘grasstop’ political strategists, legislative battles/bill-drafting consultants, and local grassroots campaigners.

In California, all LGBTQ+ rights activists I interviewed were women. This was not for lack of trying. In fact, I reached out to many men who had been involved in earlier campaigns. None agreed to meet with me. Their reasons were their own and I make no assumptions. Many of them are now local politicians or the heads of major LGBTQ+ rights organisations, often no longer located in California. In some cases, I was contacted by subordinates, mostly women. The number of female YES advocates in Ireland, likewise, outweighs the men. This is reflective of the inter-community battle they fought leading up to the 2015 referendum in which *GLEN*,¹⁸³ a majority gay male LGBTQ+ rights organisation, appeared to settle for civil partnerships while *MEI*, a majority lesbian female organisation, refused to accept anything less than full marriage rights. Thus, the gender divisions present in all four interview groups were notable: the majority of pro-same sex marriage activists were women, the majority of anti-same sex marriage activists were men.

Anti-Same Sex Marriage Campaigners

One significant, and incorrect, assumption was that actors grounded in religious reasoning would be open about their religiosity. I underestimated the reluctance of those who took public positions as a person of faith to acknowledge faith as integral to their understanding of marriage. I intentionally identified significant actors who (through self-proclamation or through organisational affiliation) were publicly and politically associated with religion. I assumed the relationship they had between faith and political activism was something these activists would be proud of, or at least be willing to talk about. After all, they were acting publicly and very visibly under its seeming directive. I was wrong. In fact, many were particularly unhappy with any line of questioning I proposed that implied religion had played a significant role in their political advocacy. It was a lesson I learned quickly and became more careful of how I phrased questions about the role of faith in their own advocacy, although they were more than willing to discuss the role of religion in politics and public discourse.

Individuals who opposed same-sex marriage rights in California were the least enthusiastic of any group. Multiple forms of communication, repetitive attempts and long stretches between contact and response made it a lesson in persistence. Headquarter locations were largely kept secret and not open

¹⁸³ *Gay and Lesbian Equality Network (GLEN)*, a now disbanded but once prominent LGBTQ+ rights group in Ireland.

to members of the public, even those seeking to make appointments. The responses I got from members of the evangelical community, who were self-described conservatives but who sought to challenge, at least intellectually, the dogma of the politically active arm of their own community, reinforced my own experience and, in doing so, provided their own insight.

One self-described conservative evangelical professor who I contacted in the early days of my research responded:

In [my view], extreme conservatives are wary of the press, and of academia. I sponsored a "bridge-building" talk about gay marriage -- at my house, just four faculty and students we'd invited - and the conservatives were very worried that I had an agenda, they'd be mocked or somehow sabotaged, or something like that. It was a very small-scale, personal event, but required more carefulness than I expected....That has been my experience with the far right - very guarded, hard to establish rapport.¹⁸⁴

The majority of participants in this group felt comfortable being interviewed only if their names were kept secret. This lack of trust in those outside their own community is undoubtedly problematic. America, especially post-2016, is a suspicious place. In Ireland, some members of this same 'category' displayed wariness or suspicion, but minimally in comparison to their American counterparts.

Reflections as an Interviewer

Months of communication with individuals with whom I shared little cultural or political belief, helped me to examine, more thoroughly, my own worldview bias. We all come to the table with our own set of beliefs, experiences and agendas, even if unconsciously.¹⁸⁵ This project spends much of its time concerned with the worldview of its participants, but they are not the only actors involved in its process. As a researcher, being aware of my own assumptions and biases is essential to the research process. A member of the secular liberal community, my experience and understanding of religious communities, especially conservative or fundamentalist ones, stemmed largely from books, articles and mainstream or liberal-leaning news sources before this project. Engaging with real people from these communities, through written communication or face-to-face dialogues, made my own biases glaringly obvious. Despite my best efforts, the questions I asked and the responses I gave undoubtedly affected the outcome of the interviews.

¹⁸⁴ Anonymous Professor at a Christian College in America, email correspondence, 1 May 2018.

¹⁸⁵ Jayne Seminare Docherty, *Learning Lessons from Waco : When the Parties Bring Their Gods to the Negotiation Table*, Religion and Politics (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2001).

I understand my own privilege in relation to this issue and society in general. I am a white, middle class, highly educated, English speaking, able-bodied, straight, American woman. Of all these descriptors, only my sex is generally considered in any way a hindrance to social power, but the other factors go a long way to level that out. This is relevant in the implications it has for my willingness to take a detached and long-term view of the issue this research addresses. My social security, my personal security and my job security are not at risk because of the lack of the legal protections discussed in this work. My assessment of the vulnerable populations addressed in this project is, therefore, acknowledged as a luxury many others do not enjoy. The urgency of certain protections are indeed life and death for some individuals affected by the material and ideas debated here. So, with an eye on the broader social devolution observed in contemporary society that sees this as one of the causes of fracture, this study seeks to present new information that may help to heal a divide while still protecting those in need of protection.

I discovered that engagement with the ideas and individuals with whom my own worldview differed so extremely was, at times, exhausting and challenging. What began as an externalised research exercise became an individual and internalised experiment in managing worldview conflict. It gave me a much deeper understanding of and respect for the challenges to dialogue these two groups face.

The following data primarily reveals the effects of activism on campaigners, the similarities and differences between campaigns in the US and Ireland and the complex relationship between religion and political engagement. For anti-same sex marriage campaigners, the grievance felt in the aftermath of defeat seemed to have reinforced group barriers and battle lines. For pro-same sex marriage advocates, their victory seemed to have relieved them of the responsibility to engage with those they defeated. I began this research believing intellectual reason was a central aspect of this debate, however, the following data demonstrates the outsized role emotion has played in its continued polarisation. Although this research engages, primarily, with highly polarised activists, it, ultimately, addresses a much wider audience. The public narrative controlled by these activists, through the campaign process, trickled down and affected wider citizen understanding and attitude towards the groups they represented. So, while grassroots work is, indeed, being done to try and shift dichotomous thinking, the “intractable two-sided conflict” narrative remains dominant even post-legislation. It maintains false assumptions about both groups and inhibits productive engagement between them.

CHAPTER 3: PRESENTATION OF RESULTS

Chapter 3 will examine pro and anti-same sex marriage campaigns through the experience of individuals central to the execution of campaigns in California and Ireland. The majority of this research's focus is on primary source material as collected through in-person, semi-structured interviews, although some secondary sources are provided for context. Where in-person interviews were not possible, email correspondence and interviews through an online platform were conducted. Interview questions were devised to encourage discussions about two main subjects: the same-sex marriage campaign itself, its content and process, and the role of religion in public political discourse. While a list of questions helped to guide the meeting, as the interviewer, I did not wish to overly restrict the parameters of the discussion. Where interesting or different but pertinent information emerged, I allowed the conversation to move along with it. Once interview transcripts were typed, their data was cleaned and codified. In the analysis of the data three themes emerged. They are presented below.

Presentation of Data: Organising Themes

The data collected during this project was personal and integral to the individual subject's identity and lived experience. As such, the topics they covered and responded to are multi-faceted and layered, not neatly quantifiable or slotted into disassociated columns. Qualitative data analysis was used to allow for greater analytical flexibility.

The research addresses four main groups of individuals: Pro-Same Sex Marriage Advocates (California), Anti-Same Sex Marriage Campaigners (California), Pro-Same Sex Marriage Advocates (Ireland) and Anti-Same Sex Marriage Campaigners (Ireland). Within and across each of these four groups three major themes emerged:

1. Personal Reflections of Campaigners from a Post-Legalisation Perspective
2. Political Strategy Pre- and Post-legalisation
3. Perceptions of Religion in Today's Public Square

These three categories capture the flow of thinking shared with me by campaigners on both sides of the issue.

The first theme (*Personal Reflections of Campaigners from a Post-Legalisation Perspective*) examines the language and concepts individuals used to describe themselves, their opponents, their beliefs and their reactions to the process of campaigning and engagement in public space. Within

this theme, particular focus is paid to the reactions of respondents to the *result* of the referendum, to their “victory” or their “failure”. This subtheme emerged as perhaps the strongest, unsurprisingly, as it is the most personal, most emotional, most *instinctual* response to the realities of worldview conflicts. It became clear that grievance was a major hindrance to dialogue and healing. The very personal nature of its offence encouraged people to dig their heels further into their own feelings of righteousness and oppression. Analysis of this theme will largely be presented in Chapter 4.

The second theme (*Political Strategy Pre- and Post-Legalisation*) addresses the more practical side of the debate through an examination of political and marketing strategy. It examines the spread of such strategies and rhetoric from a US state to national and transnational campaigns. It also addresses the transformational effect such globally coherent strategies have had on the socio-cultural and legal debates in a number of jurisdictions. It particularly examines issues that are receiving attention post-legalisation. Analysis of this theme will be presented in Chapter 4.

The third theme (*Perceptions of Religion in Today’s Public Square*) presents the respondents’ reflections on the role of faith or religious reasoning in the political realm. This includes reflections on post-legalisation religious freedom laws, challenges to the use of religious rhetoric in public discourse and the viability of divorcing religious conviction from political participation. It presents some of the challenges religious actors, in particular, see in navigating the fine line between private and public space. Analysis of this theme will primarily be presented in Chapter 5.

California, USA

Although both the US and Ireland legalised same-sex marriage in 2015, just one month apart from each other, their histories and the means through which it was accomplished provide an interesting juxtaposition. The history of LGBTQ+ rights and marriage equality in the US is vast and encompasses at least 50 different social, cultural and political state histories. Each unique, California is seen by many as a bellwether state as it often appears to have an outsized role in determining wider national trends and discourse. A particularly large and diverse state, it has a multitude of campaigns, organisations and communities existing alongside one another, not always in agreement.

California: Pro-Same Sex Marriage Campaigning

California’s Proposition 8 was significant in the history of same-sex marriage rights activism. Its passage and the subsequent *illegalising* of same-sex marriage had seismic consequences that ultimately transformed and launched, a decade later, the successful US campaign for federally

mandated marriage equality. Culminating in the 2015 US Supreme Court's decision that legalised same-sex marriage across all 50 states, lessons and strategies developed in relation to Prop 8 were learned, taught, and employed successfully in a number of international jurisdictions. The lessons from Prop 8 helped transform not just legal precedent and political rhetoric across the US, but cultural attitudes so thoroughly that approval ratings of same-sex marriage have increased nearly 20% in the last decade. While it was a victory for conservative activists, its lessons would come to shape same-sex marriage activism for LGBTQ+ rights advocates that led to a number of successes at state and national levels.

Since the campaign 'No on Prop 8,' which sought to stop the *illegalising* of same-sex marriage, was made up of numerous different LGBTQ+ rights groups, the interview participants were selected from a variety of positions within California's pro-same sex marriage movements more broadly. They advocated *for* same-sex marriage for a number of years before Prop 8 was finally overturned and marriage equality was realised in California (2013). Interviewees were chosen specifically because of their influence and expertise on local as well as national campaigning, including grassroots activism, legal advocacy and political messaging.

Part I: The Personal Reflections of Pro- Campaigners from a Post-Legalisation Perspective

Dramatic Language and Emotions: Grief, Anger, Elation, and Pride

The feelings of pride and sense of victory that surrounded the passage of same-sex marriage legislation in 2015 were mixed for those who had seen both great successes and great failures in their advocacy experience.

Still highly emotional, there was a tendency to describe events and responses with dramatic and often violent or aggressive language, metaphors, and imagery: "they are in a *skirmish* with us," they're a "threat," "very fraught" or "very dangerous," they "use faith or religion as a *weapon*," "*you can feel the shark in the water circling you*."¹⁸⁶ When discussing the defeat suffered at the hand of Prop 8's success, they used language associated with grief, depression, and brutality. Lawyer and Executive Director of the *National Organization for Lesbian Rights*,¹⁸⁷ Kate Kendell described "a grief associated with it that was like losing my parents and my brother." Raised as a member of the Mormon Church in Utah, she was no stranger to the feeling of being at odds with her larger

¹⁸⁶ Kate Kendell, interview by Bryana Tunder, 20 Sept 2018, San Francisco, CA.

¹⁸⁷ An LGBTQ+ rights organisation that focuses on litigation, public policy advocacy and public education. It is based in California.

community, yet when discussing her participation in debates at that time, she admitted that “every single one of those debates took 5 years *off my life*.”¹⁸⁸ The stakes of those debates and the amount of pressure she felt to succeed for her community were heavy.

Because California is a state of 40 million people, many of the individuals and groups working to further the rights of LGBTQ+ people had never met each other. Some demonstrated anger or grievance at individuals on their own side but who are “above their pay grade” and who they felt took credit where it was not necessarily due. They also expressed frustration at the complacency of voters who wrongly assumed, because they believed society had progressed beyond such discrimination, that anti-LGBTQ+ legislation would not pass. Moreover, they condemned and complained about Americans in general. When asked why marriage rights are still unsettled in the US, one participant derided: “Americans are nothing if not completely self-involved and feel like they should have a say on everything.”¹⁸⁹

Not all the heightened emotional rhetoric was violent or negative, however. It was also ecstatic in relation to victory, full of pride and transformation. Participants spoke of the elation and unbelievable joy in witnessing the city celebrating marriage licenses when San Francisco mayor Gavin Newsom first began issuing them back in 2004. They spoke about being brought to tears by the love and pride they felt for volunteers who stayed late to keep issuing marriage licenses despite it being a three-day weekend. They described similar feelings in relation to support they received after the *Obergefell* ruling just over a decade later. Despite this, most primarily praised individuals working at their own level, grassroots, legal advocacy, or campaign strategy, and not those working at other levels of advocacy.

Grievance Towards Opposition: Accusations of Unfairness and Suspicions of Subterfuge

While advocates on both sides of the same-sex marriage debate spoke extensively about unfair distribution of funding and resources, YES advocates, in particular, accused their opponents of engaging in backroom deals, manipulating congregations and keeping their funding sources suspiciously secret. YES advocates speculated about coordination between churches and across denominations. They determined this coordination to be motivated by self-serving power grabs. They described the coercion of local churches and organisations by powerful religious political players who did not want to be seen to dominate the campaign effort. By encouraging smaller groups to take up the mantle, YES advocates speculated, a select few religious actors could make it appear a

¹⁸⁸ Kendell.

¹⁸⁹ Ibid.

widespread, diverse grassroots movement. They described faith-based advocacy groups as having the “unfair advantage” of centralised power and instruction, citing extensive mailing lists and weekly gatherings (i.e. church services, church run events, etc.) among other advantages. Accusations of disproportionate power, manipulation, and self-interest were sprinkled liberally throughout their descriptions of opponents to same-sex marriage. Ultimately, grievance and suspicion were the most common themes expressed throughout their description of their opponents.

Part II: Political Strategy Pre- and Post-Legalisation

Transformation in the Rhetorical Framing of Pro-Same Sex Marriage Campaigns

Campaign strategies designed to garner support for marriage equality transformed in the mid-2000s in the wake of multiple defeats at the ballot box. They moved away from emphasis on legal protections and equal rights. Activists noticed the detached and rather abstract concepts of rights and legality were unsuccessful in galvanising or persuading voters. Through careful analysis and a large quantity of focus groups, they developed a new strategy which emphasised love and commitment, rather than rights and legal protections. This change shifted the refrain of the campaign from “changing minds” to “changing *hearts* and minds.”

The most successful way to develop empathy in those not directly connected to the LGBTQ+ community was through storytelling. In contextualising same-sex couples and families, in developing their humanity, it became increasingly difficult for people to see clear divides between *us* and *them*. More than simply getting voters on their side, this style of campaigning became about transforming the voter through a more personal connection. They moved away from fact-telling. To change people’s minds, activists Kathleen Campisano observed, you must engage them in “a story, not a debate.”¹⁹⁰

There was a sense that LGBTQ+ rights activists began this fight on the backfoot, forced to operate in *response* to rhetoric and arguments put forth by their opponents. LGBTQ+ rights advocates described *anti*-same sex marriage campaign strategies as “fear tactics” used to “spread lies and misinformation built on fear,” claiming such strategies sought to “stigmatize and stereotype gay people.” To combat these strategies they tried to:

¹⁹⁰ Kathleen Campisano, interview by Bryana Tunder, 1 March 2018, Los Angeles, CA.

- 1) drown them out
- 2) interact as little as possible
- 3) use stories as soothers

This strategy maintained that “when people are taken over by fear, facts don’t actually help resolve that fear. It’s values and personal stories that really do.”¹⁹¹ They used stories to reassure voters that only members of the LGBTQ+ community would be affected by its passing. YES advocates described their opponents’ arguments as “really crazy,” “ridiculous” or “absurd,” yet they were “simultaneously personal and painful.” Thus, while dismissing their validity, LGBTQ+ recipients of ridicule and dehumanisation acknowledged even that erroneous accusations and depictions could be profoundly hurtful.

Beyond *how* the message was delivered, they discovered it mattered *who* presented the message. Messaging was most successful when it came *from* and was targeted *at* the middle. Those further to the extreme more often than not turned off undecided voters. Thus, they had to augment the framing of arguments to appeal to the most voters. In this case, the main demographic they needed to target were those outside the LGBTQ+ community. Part of this process was the coordination of messaging: “Every movement has a lot of groups and subgroups and perspectives, but when you create a campaign, it really has to be laser focused on the people you have to persuade.”¹⁹² Although frustrating at times, most same-sex marriage advocates acknowledged: “It’s not to make us feel good about what we think.”¹⁹³

Thalia Zepatos, director of research and messaging for *Freedom to Marry* in the years leading up to *Obergefell*, worked on winning campaigns in a number of different states. She also spent years working internationally as a campaign and messaging strategist and provided a number of insights into the increasingly global nature of this debate. Beyond her extensive work in the US, she consulted on campaigns, including Australia, Taiwan and, most importantly, Ireland. She argued the challenge to marriage equality broadly falls into two buckets. First, homophobia is remarkably similar across the globe and is grounded in “the same types of misinformed stereotypes.” Second, each culture has its own values in relation to marriage. In the US, it is “love and commitment.” In Ireland, “it is all about the family.” It was important for campaigns to understand what marriage means to their own culture and to speak specifically to that. She noted what they had learned about breaking down stigmas around homophobia and transphobia are not very different the world over.¹⁹⁴

¹⁹¹ Thalia Zepatos, interview by Bryana Tunder, 30 Jan 2018, Portland, Oregon.

¹⁹² Ibid.

¹⁹³ Ibid.

¹⁹⁴ Such commonalities are also visible in places like Taiwan, where American Christian groups and *Freedom To Marry* have both assistant groups with whom they share political goals: Ho Hsin-Jie, “Who Is

The Importance of Religious Voters: The Role They Can Play in Bridging A Gap

Kathleen Campisano, now working at the *LA LGBTQ Centre*, was previously a field coordinator for the *National LGBTQ Task Force*. She has worked primarily at the grassroots level. Beyond a single campaign, she spoke at length about the importance of the larger project of cultural transformation. She was critical of the ‘grasstop’ strategy which, she argued, focused predominantly on individuals or areas that already hold great power in the hopes that acceptance would trickle down. Instead, she posited the value of grassroots work designed to reach beyond stereotypes. She spoke about the need for full-time organisers dedicated to faith communities not already in favour of same-sex marriage. It was imperative religious actors were *not* ignored, not simply viewed as “a lost cause” or “not worth it.” They were and continue to be, she argued, potentially valuable allies.

Reflecting on initial forays into *deep canvassing* and her experience with people and communities of faith, Campisano observed a grey space between disapproval/objection and love/compassion. Voters of faith who did not support same-sex marriage were “totally torn between their faith and what they felt would be shameful to admit: they had nieces and nephews and sons and daughters who were gay. Not being able to support them was really breaking their heart. That was a big eye-opener for us.”¹⁹⁵ This instinct to love and accept challenged the beliefs of individuals for whom instincts towards tradition and biblical authority had long been determinative of views on sexuality, society and stability. She recognised the importance of “winning over” members of the faith community not just to ensure enough votes, but as genuine and lasting social transformation. She noted a distinct lack of faith directors or organisers during early, failed attempts at same-sex marriage legislation. She likewise noted the success of campaigns which had them. The value of such a strategy played a role in diminishing tensions between individuals and the differing style of LGBTQ+ rights activism they participated in and represented.

A Problem with Legalisation: When People Believe Equality Has Already Been Achieved

While the 2015 Supreme Court decision was heralded by LGBTQ+ advocates as a major accomplishment, it worried some members of the community who saw:

Behind Taiwan’s Opposition to Same-Sex Marriage, and Why Are They So Afraid?," *Taiwan Gazette*, 2 Apr 2017.

¹⁹⁵ Campisano.

...the Supreme Court decision about marriage as a lose/lose. If [the US Supreme Court] voted that it wasn't legal then of course we lost, because so many more states wouldn't be covered and it would just be a kick in the gut to the progressive community overall. However, if the Supreme Court voted in our favour then what that meant is we stopped talking about it.¹⁹⁶

When you stop talking about it, Campisano explained, you stop educating people and encouraging the creation of field teams to aid in that education. You let people fall into the trap of complacency. The legalisation of same-sex marriage did not imply an immediate transformation in support. Interviewees were not concerned same-sex marriage was at risk of repeal. However, those working at the grassroots level were particularly worried that hard won protections could be chipped away. Citing evidence for increased support for religious exemptions since pre-*Obergefell*, they worried individuals inside and outside the LGBTQ+ community might become apathetic or complacent.¹⁹⁷

'Grasstop' actors, like Zepatos and Kendell, expressed less concern than Campisano. Their energies were largely focused on the success of state-wide and national campaigns, including both legislative and legal battles. They recognised there were negative side effects of those "final last gasps," however, they appeared less concerned with regressive attitudes and their potential impact on day-to-day social atmospheres. Likewise, they recognised the individual harms religious exemption narratives could allow to flourish, but saw the solution residing more with elite advocates than with localised grassroots activists.

Part III: Perceptions of Religion in Today's Public Square

Many LGBTQ+ rights advocates saw religion as the main opposition to their community's progress throughout history and in the present day. Same-sex marriage advocates were largely sceptical, however, about the authenticity of claims that religious actors' opposition to marriage equality was grounded in "sincere or deeply held beliefs." They saw them, rather, as "a strategic weapon." LGBTQ+ advocates described their community as the collateral damage of a sinister political plot to encourage voter turnout amongst socially conservative voters. They saw religious opponents of LGBTQ+ rights as merely mindless or manipulated masses:

¹⁹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁹⁷ "Lgbt Policy Spotlight: State and Federal Religious Exemptions and the Lgbt Community," (Movement Advancement Project, 2015).

I find this whole ‘anti-gay crusade’ a really cynical topic that the evangelicals have picked up on in order to manipulate people's time and attention, to keep people coming to church, to keep them scared and whatever else. *I don't think they really believe this is the biggest threat to society.* Or that it's something they should be spending all their time on....it just seems something they latched on to and the LGBT community is the collateral that they're playing with because they need social issues to whip people up.¹⁹⁸

The Problem with Religious Exemptions: Providing Freedom to Discriminate Indiscriminately

Along with the discussion of sincerity of belief, came one about the difference between religious objection and moral objection. Objections to the provision of goods to same-sex couples “stems from a moral, not religious, disagreement” many argued. They saw a line *between* moral and religious belief, instead of accepting morality as *one component* of religious belief. This will be discussed at length in Chapter 5. Many activists saw any allowance of space for theologically justified anti-LGBTQ+ sentiment as dangerous because it would “open the floodgates.”

Interviewees emphasised the important difference between public and private space. They recognised the right of religious individuals to practice their faith, but only if they limited it to the private sphere. They saw no problem in requiring religious adherence to keep their faith out of the public sphere:

When you enter the grounds of your religious institution, you're allowed to believe however you want and you're allowed to act on those beliefs....you're protected in that way, whether it's a church or mosque or synagogue. But when you go on main street, in any town, and you open a business to the public you're essentially saying that you're willing to serve the public... you're not allowed to discriminate against anyone, so....I don't think there is room for that. ¹⁹⁹

While irritated by the emergence of religious exemption cases, most saw such protestations as the final skirmishes at the end of a long battle and not as a long-term problem. There remained little belief that, beyond presenting roadblocks for a generation or so, the pendulum would ever swing back. “It just wouldn't happen anymore.” There would be “a little bit of a war between constitutional protections and guarantees and hardcore bigots who want to use their religion as a weapon,”²⁰⁰ but ultimately enthusiasm would wane and the rights of same-sex couples to state certified marriage would remain.

¹⁹⁸ Zepatos.

¹⁹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰⁰ Kendell.

Flexibility and “Hearing Both Sides”: The Difference Between Theory and Practice

Interviewee’s allowed little space for negotiation on LGBTQ+ issues, particularly those relating to religious exemptions. Kendell, who’s work focuses heavily on policy and litigation, did admit they had conversations about what “we could live with in order to just put this to bed.”²⁰¹ She spoke of concerns about the continued erosion of a sense of civil belonging and the circumstantial benefits of “just letting it go,” of agreeing: “we don’t like you, I’m never coming to your bakery but have a nice life and just go on.”²⁰² Every legal challenge or journal article written about an individual who was ostracised from their family and community solely because of their sexual orientation, she believed, affected the psyche and lives of queer people everywhere. “I worry about people who feel triggered by their rejection. I’d kinda like to just tamp it all down. For this small number of things, fine [we’ll compromise]. And then we just move on.”²⁰³ Broad consensus, however, refused even the smallest compromise. Any concession on the part of the LGBTQ+ community was deemed dangerous. They feared it would open the door to a flood of discriminatory practices and laws.

Many advocates spoke about the importance of “hearing both sides” or allowing space for other sides to express concerns or beliefs. Such comments often held contradictions, however. Where sentences would start out praising the importance of hearing both sides, “I think it always is important, if legislators are making a decision on a bill, to hear both sides,” they would often conclude with some variation of: “even if I think the other side is ridiculous.”²⁰⁴ Similar ridicule extended to assessments of individuals from the opposition who spoke about the value of feeling heard.

California: Anti-Same Sex Marriage Campaigning

Conservative religious advocates in California were selected for their visible role and impact on the framing of same-sex marriage as well as other past and current debates about LGBTQ+ rights and religious freedom. It was particularly challenging to gain access to this group. This group is notoriously suspicious of outsiders, especially academics, like myself, from liberal institutions looking to engage them on culturally progressive issues like marriage equality. Some were willing to speak to me, however, they did not want their names used. In fact, advocates on both sides of the issue in California were noticeably more hesitant and wary about engaging with me than any of their Irish counterparts. The general air of mistrust was palpable between communities in California and,

²⁰¹ Ibid.

²⁰² Ibid.

²⁰³ Ibid.

²⁰⁴ Ibid.

right away, demonstrated one major inhibition to engagement between these two groups. To provide more robust data, I consulted social media statements and informal and public interviews beyond those I was able to conduct myself.

Part I: Personal Reflections of Anti- Campaigners from a Post-Legalisation Perspective

Suspicion Towards Outsiders and Feelings of Grievance

Suspicion and defensiveness underlay nearly all evangelical activist community responses to my initial contact. They explained their wariness about me and extensive questions about my background as “self-protection,” as the result of “repeated attacks” by outsiders looking to “catch them out,” make a “mockery of them” or whose aim was to take something they said out of context in order to make them look “stupid” or “bigoted” or “hateful.” I was warned of this early on in my research by a professor of anthropology at a Christian college and self-identified semi-conservative evangelical: “I asked all my students today (if they had any suggestions for how a PhD student may connect with conservative evangelical activists), and got mostly silence, but snickering laughter from one man.”²⁰⁵ Despite that, the tenacity of their suspicion still managed to surprise me.

One individual who played a significant role in the development of Prop 8 and of today’s “anti-gay marriage” strategy, took his initial exchange with me to:

...clarify just one thing...Prop 8 has not been repealed. It remains part of the California constitution. When the US Supreme Court imposed same-sex 'marriage' on the nation, Prop 8 ceased to be enforced. However, should that court ruling be overturned, Prop 8 would be restored to the law of the land in California. ²⁰⁶

He was both defensive and suspicious of my motivations and his main impetus for communicating with me seemed to be to “set the record straight.” He sought to defend himself and his work. He appeared to feel my request for him to discuss his own engagement on the issue was an attack in and of itself. Many others expressed similar feelings. Simply being asked about their position on this or other similar policy issues felt like a personal attack. They were prepared for criticism. They were unprepared for a discussion.

²⁰⁵ Professor at a Christian College in America.

²⁰⁶ Anonymous National Organisation for Marriage Associate, email correspondence, 3 May 2018.

The Use of “Who I Am” Language to Describe Religious Identity

The ‘coming out’ narrative and the importance of ‘self-discovery’ within the LGBTQ+ community was interestingly mirrored by members of the faith community. The phrase “it’s who I am” appeared to elevate faith to the same level of importance as sexual orientation or gender identity. Ken Williams, founder of *Equipped to Love* an evangelical ‘once-gay ministry,’²⁰⁷ mirrored rhetoric commonly used by the LGBTQ+ community to express these identities: “It’s not just what I believe, *it’s who I feel that I am.*”²⁰⁸ The use of language that mirrored that of LGBTQ+ identity experience encouraged association with the struggle of feeling lost, of pain, of searching for a sense of self that is a part of many LGBTQ+ coming out stories. Rather than finding one’s self through recognition of orientation or gender identity, this self-discovery happened in the search and discovery of God, faith being both self-defining and self-affirming.

Stereotypes and Assumptions Based Upon a Person’s Religious Identity

Opponents of same-sex marriage argued the worst terms a person could be called were “racist, bigoted or homophobic.” This put them at a disadvantage, they felt, because it meant others saw them as incapable of having a “rational conversation.” They felt stereotyped because of their faith. Williams described observing his ministry partner speak about faith during her congressional testimony. He “saw people stereotype,” he said. “I see this often if someone sees a Bible or if they say anything about being a Christian....all of a sudden you’re filed into this category. And that’s really frustrating because I don’t fit in that category.”²⁰⁹ Beyond not feeling well represented, he felt the stereotype, “that suggests that I just hate gay people,” was the most hurtful and untrue. “I don’t. I actually care deeply.”²¹⁰ Many NO campaigners did not see a disconnect between caring for LGBTQ+ peoples and supporting policies that deny them equal access or opportunities.

Political Representation and Media Engagement: Perceptions of Both as Fair and also Biased

Interviewees often expressed frustration at feeling underrepresented in media or political institutions. They complained about feeling a sense of minimisation and about being mocked or dismissed for

²⁰⁷ “Once Gay” is a phrase he and other evangelical Christians have used to describe individuals who had “worked through” or “overcome” their homosexual desires to live a heterosexual lifestyle. He runs an organisation to help others achieve the same transformation.

²⁰⁸ Ken Williams, interview by Bryana Tunder, 19 Sept 2018, Redding, California.

²⁰⁹ Ibid.

²¹⁰ Ibid.

their positions. Reflecting on his experience communicating with California's government, Williams lamented: "My side, and this is of course my opinion, my side did not get a fair shake."²¹¹

For many this did not mean they dismissed the media entirely, however. In fact, NO campaigners intentionally utilised the media as a resource when the political process did not "do them justice." When they did not feel they had been given equitable time within the courthouse, it provided an outlet to which they could speak directly. It gave them the space and time to make a range of points not provided for in chambers. Perhaps more importantly, the outlet to whom they spoke could be vetted for sympathies. However, even with that, activists were disappointed and frustrated by the relative bias they felt: "There were interviews where we got a fair shake," Williams admitted. "Where the message I wanted to get out, got out. Mostly, it was not though. Mostly it was a soundbite that was ancillary to the issue...the meaning can be completely different than what you mean it to be."²¹² This sense of misrepresentation and lack of equitable access was widely felt by conservative faith-based activists.

Part II: Political Strategy Pre- and Post-Legalisation

Details of campaign processes were not made public and since there was no single source for the campaign, but rather quiet and often concealed coordination between churches, lobbyists and grassroots activists, these details may only be exposed by further investigations beyond the scope of this work.²¹³ Unlike *pro* same-sex marriage advocacy, which is relatively well-documented for the public, the evolution of politically strategic thinking on the subject of same-sex marriage by Californian activists in its opposition must mostly be gleaned from interviews and informal commentary.

Pre- and Post-Legalisation: Changing Approaches to the Debate About Same-Sex Marriage

Early anti-same sex marriage campaigns in California required a generalised strategy. They pointedly drew arguments and advocates from the middle, not the extremes, and emphasised that legislation, like Prop 8, was meant to protect traditional marriage. They understood, even then, their messaging could not be about the wrongness of homosexual relationships *per se*. Instead, they criticised the legalisation of same-sex marriage because it enshrined "the principle that mothers and fathers are

²¹¹ Ibid.

²¹² Ibid.

²¹³ A few strategies have been uncovered and "exposed" in books, articles and documentaries like *8: The Mormon Proposition* or *Redeeming Prop 8*. Despite the fact that Prop 8 *passed* and was deemed a strategic success by its proponents it is nearly impossible to find anything of substance and publicly available written about it from their perspective.

interchangeable or irrelevant, and that marriage is essentially an institution about adults, not children; marriage would mean nothing more than giving adults recognition and benefits in their most significant relationship.”²¹⁴ This focus on children emerged prominently during the campaign for Prop 8. The success of Prop 8 cemented it as a prime strategy going forward.

In the larger national debate over the place of religion in public life, the trend has been towards highlighting stark cultural divisions where one group is victorious and the other defeated. This zero sum game has led lobbying groups, like *California Family Council*, to place the freedom of religious practice above all other rights, employing it in references to conscience, rights of refusal, and religious liberty. Broad references to religious freedom now permeate conversations about everything from abortion and contraceptives to same-sex marriage and LGBTQ+ history and education. Interviewees inserted the phrase “religious freedom or religious liberty,” frequently used interchangeably, throughout our conversations, whether relevant or not. Often it seemed nearly an afterthought: “oh and of course religious freedom.”²¹⁵ In the US, and increasingly so in Ireland, it has been the frame elevated above all others.

The defense of religious freedom as an increasingly common rhetorical and legal strategy has further complicated emerging debates by its use of the technical phrase “sincerely or genuinely held” to denote beliefs worthy of legal exemption.²¹⁶ It is impossible to measure and, in newly emerging religious exemption cases globally, has undergone significant scrutiny. Faith respondents saw nothing strange about the use of this phrase, however. “I don't personally see value in having a religion or faith if it's not genuine...it's more than a religion for me it's a relationship,” Williams explained. Religiously grounded activists saw faith as a living, reciprocal experience, not a passive one. And certainly not something that could be sectioned off and relegated to some hidden private sphere. Such a request, they argued, made no sense. Faith is all encompassing. Such a request, they speculated, clearly came from someone who did not understand faith.

²¹⁴ "Archbishop Cordileone States Case against Gay Marriage," *USA Today*, 21 March 2013.

²¹⁵ Anonymous Member of California Family Council, interview by Bryana Tunder, 5 Apr 2018, Telephone Interview.

²¹⁶ Legal precedent for the term is nearly as vague as the term itself; it stems from the atheist conscientious objection of the 1960s where the definition was: "...whether it is a sincere and meaningful belief occupying in the life of its possessor a place parallel to that filled by the God of those admittedly qualified for the exemption." (United States v. Seeger 380 U.S. 163, 1965). As long as your belief takes a place in your life similar to that of established religion or religious practice, and you *act* in accordance with those beliefs in your life, they are considered a “sincerely held belief”.

Storytelling and Emotion as Political Strategies

The practice of “testifying,” the use of powerful emotional storytelling for transformation of self and others, is old and well-established within the evangelical community. It was not surprising, then, that it was absorbed into their political rhetoric. Williams talked about the importance of giving political “testimony,” that is, presenting material that would “appeal to your heart.” Then, in a statement that mirrored many YES advocates, he continued, “*because it's not just facts. People actually care how you feel...I watched it in the room. That was the most powerful tool: stories.*”²¹⁷ Both sides spoke at length about the power of storytelling and its ability to move past peoples’ heads towards their hearts.

While most rhetoric surrounding these issues painted the opposition as morally corrupt, hypocritical, self-serving, manipulative and agenda driven, William spoke of a bipartisan willingness to “lay down swords” and listen. Spending time telling and listening to stories, he noticed, enabled a more genuine appreciation of sincerity on both sides.

Part III: Perception of Religion in Today’s Public Square

I want to advocate for the fact that people should be able to pursue whatever they want to. Certainly, then, people should have the freedom to align with whatever they feel like their faith is telling them.

Ken Williams

Easy Overt Religiosity, Uncomfortable (Queer) Sexuality

Communications I received from NO campaigners always included variations of “bless you,” “grace be with you,” or “bless your efforts.” These clearly and intentionally demonstrated a self-proclaimed religious identity not present in similar communications I had with their counterparts in Ireland. Yet Californian NO campaigners dismissed the idea that religion was the *only* root of their political reasoning. Instead, they emphasised secular concerns about social stability, diminishing values, promiscuity, child safety, and the (selective) rights of individuals to make choices for themselves and their families. They mostly presented these concerns through sociological, psychological and biological studies, acutely aware the secular system they worked within would not accept purely religious justifications. They understood they could no longer testify about religion in the public square if they wanted to be taken seriously. To remain engaged in public discourse they had to present secular theories which included arguments concerning procreation, nature and evolution. On this list were the “negative psychological effects of homosexuality” and the disadvantage of a child growing up without access to both a male and a female parent. Despite this adaptation, there still remains far

²¹⁷ Williams.

more ‘god language’ in campaigning done by religious adherents in California than there does in Ireland.

In contrast to this comfort with personalised religious rhetoric, there was a distinct discomfort with language describing non-heteronormative identities and experiences. Conservative religious campaigners generally lowered their voices whenever speaking about homosexuality and transsexuality. This included discussions of those “experiencing homosexuality or gender confusion,” about being “sexually enticed by boys” as a youth, about the effects of “homosexuality or transgenderism upon a person’s health,” about people who have “left homosexuality,” about “who I’m sexually attracted to,” or even about the context within which their religion said sex was acceptable. This reticence to discuss all things sexual was noticeable among advocates in both Ireland and California.

The Church as an Institution: Reflections and Criticisms

Faith-inspired activists demonstrated a much greater ability to critique religious institutions in Ireland than in California. This is perhaps understandable, since in Ireland the institutional Catholic Church has always been the single historical, political, cultural and moral arbiter, whereas in California there are hundreds of denominations adding their voices. One of the few institutional criticisms made by a California NO campaigner disparaged the wholesale rejection of LGBTQ+ people’s concerns throughout American evangelical church history. Williams criticised the lack of space for homosexual discourse in the church generally. Until recently, there had been “no ‘safe space’²¹⁸ for people to come out and say I have homosexual attractions...especially if you're a person of faith, right? I would say that the church is responsible for that. They did not do a good job.”²¹⁹ This he attributed to the church’s “lack of understanding due to a lack of experience” with homosexuality. The church did not provide adequate space for people “struggling with homosexual desires,” he continued, because it did not have the language or resources to provide such space. Williams did not acknowledge the well-documented history of the problematic relationship between the LGBTQ+ community and the church.

Religious Liberty and Conscience Objection: Reframing Power Dynamics

“Individuals should be able to retain their own views without persecution.” This phrase was often repeated throughout my interviews with NO campaigners. Government, they maintained, through

²¹⁸ The use of the phrase “safe space,” so despised and disparaged on the Right, demonstrates how ideas are often dismissed in association with our “opposition” but embraced when we seek it to aid in our own ends.

²¹⁹ Williams.

laws and policies, was seeking to take away the rights of Christians to practice their faith. As such, NO campaigners framed their plight as one of an increasingly marginalised people. This claim elicited significant backlash and ridicule from LGBTQ+ activists who compared their own history of marginalisation and saw no experiential overlap. YES advocates noted the strikingly similar language used by NO campaigners and traditional minority rights advocates, like themselves. Other similar rhetoric included frequent complaints from NO campaigners about “underrepresentation,” about “our voices not being heard,” as well as self-descriptions of “victimhood and marginalisation.”

The Republic of Ireland

In Ireland, in contrast to the size and diversity of California’s activist communities, *Marriage Equality* activism and political history has been more, albeit not entirely, cohesive. This is not to say there have not been contestations between organisations or within the LGBTQ+ community there. Indeed, there have been conflicts concerning the articulation of queer identities, how best to approach political engagement and which policies serve the community best, among others. However, the small and localised nature of Irish political engagement is well-exemplified by the final days of the same-sex marriage campaign. While a number of groups existed separately in the early days of the campaign, these disparate groups, who had been in their own internal battle over the policy, put aside differences and successfully worked together under a single umbrella organisation. The natural product of a significantly smaller population and a unified government (not 50 state governments struggling to retain independence under a single federal one), it nevertheless demonstrated an impressive ability to unify for a common goal.

The American and Irish campaigns did not exist in vacuums, one unaware of the other. The engagement of individuals and ideas across the Atlantic were clearly discernible in the commonality of campaign strategy and rhetoric. More than the observation of the other from afar, there were clear and direct personal connections between Ireland and the US. Irish advocates brought over Thalia Zepatos, one of the major messaging strategists involved in American state and nation-wide campaigns, to consult with them. The following account of the Irish context must thus be examined against the backdrop of the previous account of the Californian one.

Ireland: Pro-Same Sex Marriage Campaigning

As mentioned above, in the final days of the Marriage Equality Referendum, previously disparate groups of LGBTQ+ rights activists joined forces. I selected my interview subjects from this final group. They were, understandably, more excited than their opponents to share stories and the easiest

group of actors to access. People went out of their way to contact me, to tell me their story, to make sure it was recorded. The late Noel Whelan, a well-known political pundit and journalist who passed away in 2019, called me months after I had concluded my interviews to apologise for failing to respond to the initial email I had sent him. He asked if I would still like to record his story. The disproportionate volume of respondents from the pro-same sex marriage campaign in Ireland meant I had to be careful not to value quantity over quality. The following material is the synthesis of their reflections, experiences and insights.

Part I: Personal Reflections of Pro- Campaigners from a Post-Legalisation Perspective

Overt Homophobia: No Longer an Irish Problem

There was a general sense that little overt homophobia remained in Ireland. By the time the debate began to really emerge in Ireland, “the global narrative had already shifted away from the ‘pedophile’ homosexual to the ‘importance of having a mother *and* a father, [to] children’s rights to know their parents, etc.’” It had become clear that “it wasn’t very socially acceptable to be homophobic. Even in Ireland.”²²⁰ As an American consultant, Zepatos’ use of the phrase “even in Ireland” is both telling and problematic. She was, undoubtedly, drawing on particular and prevalent stereotypes about Irish society as highly religious. The unacceptability of homophobia was less shocking to Irish advocates, however.

While most interviewees claimed the overtly hostile homophobia found in other countries was not still present in Ireland, they did not deny its existence. Rather they spoke about people being “uncomfortable” with homosexuality or demonstrating an “unconscious homophobia.” They spoke about the national project of recognising and working through the latent homophobia in all of us.²²¹ Interviewees believed NO voters made their choice based on more subtle concerns than an outright hatred of homosexuals, e.g. about two parent households or children growing up without knowing who their “real” (i.e. biological) parents are (although this is neither always the case nor a unique “problem” to same-sex parenting). Their conclusion was, then, that legalisation was both a blessing, as it demonstrated a certain level of acceptance and inclusion, and a curse that suggested people might stop paying attention to remaining LGBTQ+ inequalities.

²²⁰ Zepatos.

²²¹ In this discussion many LGBTQ+ advocates mentioned Panti Bliss’s (aka Rori O’Niell) “Noble Call” speech at the Abbey Theatre (2014).

Shouting Matches and Battle Metaphors: Beyond an Image Problem

Interviewees complained repeatedly about the debate style promoted throughout the campaign: “they don't want to talk *with*, they want to talk *at*.”²²² This was not entirely the fault of their opponents, they admitted. The media was also culpable, complained Ailbhe Smyth, long time LGBTQ+ and radical feminist activist: “every opportunity for conversation, because the impact of the media is set up as oppositional, provides a practical problem in actually establishing channels for open communication.”²²³ The media created an environment where everyone found themselves stuck in a unhelpful war:

One of the things we all find very difficult is that [the discourse] is constantly set up as a battle, as a pitched battle and the only way we can communicate is by shouting. You constantly hear the 60% of people in the middle saying, ‘we can't bear all the shouting.’ So, people will actually turn off their radios or TVs when the debates start because they can't bear the shouting.²²⁴

YES advocates sought to mitigate this by avoiding situations deliberately set up as a “pitched battle.” They recognised the impossibility of sitting there and saying nothing, yet knew it was inevitable any engagement in such situations would turn into a shouting match.

Battle metaphors were frequently employed to describe the sense of opposition that stemmed from these interactions. These included descriptions of the two sides “aligned in their *trenches*,” advice that “in any *war*, it is very difficult to cross the lines,” and assumptions that “if I leave my *trench* to go over there, they'll just say, ‘what are you doing over here?’” They spoke about the inability to have conversations between opposing people during “a referendum *battle*.” Yet while they expressed unease about this battle metaphor, they acknowledged their natural instinct to use it.

Emotional Responses to the Campaign: Pride in Self, Grievance Against Opposition

YES campaigners were generally clinical and dispassionate in their discussion of the campaign process. They talked more about the practical and strategic aspect of the campaign than their personal experience within it. Their passions came out in predominantly two ways: as pride in their fellow countrymen and as grievance about the unfairness of the unequal resources granted their opponents.

²²² Ailbhe Smyth, interview by Bryana Tunder, 31 Aug 2017, Dublin, Ireland.

²²³ Ibid.

²²⁴ Ibid.

They felt pride in what surfaced during the Referendum: “the values of Irish people being really generous and loving and welcoming and accepting. When we won the referendum, it was like a celebration of Irish people feeling proud of being their best selves.”²²⁵ The vote allowed citizens to “determine the moral character” of their country, to demonstrate their nation as one of generosity, kindness and acceptance not just to themselves but to the rest of the world. More than anything, members of the LGBTQ+ community felt “validated and welcomed.” In contrast to these feelings of pride and joy were those of hurt and grievance which emerged as the main emotions present in their descriptions of the NO campaign. They described the use of dehumanising language toward them, of fear mongering, and emotional manipulation. These often felt like personal attacks.

The rules that pertain to representation in and access to media coverage leading up to any referendum in Ireland are designed to be fair and impartial, with an emphasis on equal time for all sides.²²⁶ Despite this strict allocation of time and exposure, however, both sides saw themselves as victims of bias. YES advocates argued that requirements for equal time gave NO campaigners a greater proportion of media representation than the percentage of voters they spoke for. In fact, they felt it privileged the voice of a minority of the electorate over the majority. In particular, they described a “vast over-representation” of the NO side in print, which did not have to abide by referendum guidelines. YES advocates noticed this less on radio and television, likely because both these mediums are traditionally restricted by referendum guidelines.²²⁷

Further, YES advocates accused the NO campaign of “stealing all right to the moral high ground”²²⁸ and, in doing so, devalued their own claims to morality. Activists like Moninne Griffith,²²⁹ former Director of *Marriage Equality Ireland*, expressed this sentiment when she argued the NO campaign’s claim that their objection to same-sex marriage as grounded in concern for the welfare of children implied the YES campaign did not care about the welfare of children. The implication appeared to be that same-sex marriage advocates were only interested in achieving a privilege for themselves without concern or awareness of its implications for others while the NO campaign was making the

²²⁵ Zepatos.

²²⁶ “Guidelines on Coverage of Referenda in Ireland” are put out by the Broadcasting Association of Ireland who clarified that balance is not necessarily achieved through a “stopwatch” approach to airtime given to both sides. This leaves it, ultimately, up to the presenter. They write that: “Fairness, objectivity and impartiality can be achieved during programming by including referenda interests from both sides of the debate. It may also be achieved effectively by the input from the programme presenter playing the role of ‘devil’s advocate’.”

²²⁷ Darryl Broderick and Ciara Ni Longaigh, “Eight Amendment: Reporting Restrictions on Media Coverage of Referenda in Ireland,” *Ronan Daly Jermyn: Media Law Report*. While a complex thing to measure, it is largely enacted by ensuring equal time and representation in radio and television debates as well as limiting certain kinds of advertising, and implementing a complete moratorium on all coverage for final day and a half. These rules apply only for the final 6-8 weeks, depending, and do not apply to print or social media.

²²⁸ Smyth.

²²⁹ She is the current Director of LGBTQ+ youth rights organisation, *BeLong To*.

tough moral choice YES voters were too self-centered to consider. Both sides viewed their own positions as morally superior.

Many YES advocates expressed suspicions about the financial and strategic backing of their opposition. They wondered about “secret funds.” They further speculated about the coordination of strategy between the lay NO campaign and both the Irish Catholic Church and the American Religious Right. They admitted they were unable to prove any of these allegations, but believed them nonetheless.

Part II: Political Strategy and Post-Legalisation Concerns

Trans-Atlantic Lessons in Strategy: Making It Their Own and Winning

*There's no point in talking about human rights issues if people don't understand them.
You need to talk in human story.*

Noel Whelan

Taking notes from lessons learned and strategies honed in the US in the years leading up to *Obergefell*, *Marriage Equality Ireland* adopted several of them. In doing so, however, they made them their own. Many Irish YES advocates mentioned the passing of California's Prop 8 as significant and noteworthy, in particular because of the lessons its tragic conclusion helped advocates learn, even across the ocean. While many lessons were adopted through observation at a distance, some were learned through direct collaboration with Zepatos. Arriving as a consultant part way through the campaign process, she reinforced the idea that discussing legal rights and benefits would not help. This strategy failed in California in 2008 and was likely to do so in Ireland. Rather, she emphasised the importance of speaking to the human as an emotional person and was confident a campaign that was based on authentic Irish values would succeed. The YES campaign was never secretive about their connections with US LGBTQ+ rights groups. They spoke openly about the flow of ideas and strategies that have gone back and forth over the years. This was in stark contrast to denials of any aid or collaboration on the part of NO campaigners.

In line with this advice, *Marriage Equality Ireland* sought to frame the idea of marriage as the foundation of the family instead of marriage as simply about love. They replaced vague references to human or individual rights with language of “compassion and fairness” and values “rooted in a national memory of injustice.”²³⁰ Marriage equality would “provide family stability and social cohesion.” Further strategies, borrowed from their American counterparts showed images of multi-

²³⁰ Noel Whelan, interview by Bryana Tunder, 27 Nov 2017, Dublin, IR.

generational families in which “the gay one wasn’t obvious,” to demonstrate that LGBTQ+ couples were members of families and communities, not individual disassociated pairs. They were indistinguishable parts of Ireland’s social fabric. A YES vote, this message said, would show Ireland to be the progressive and welcoming nation it wished it to be.

Speaking To and From the Middle: A Political Strategy Designed to Reach the Most Voters

The major voices of the Marriage Equality campaign emerged from, and targeted, the middle: “the Irish electorate tends to not work in extremes, it’s a very moderate electorate...[we had to] appeal to the moderate sensibilities and value systems of the Irish people....You can’t go wrong when your message is: ‘we’re like you.’”²³¹ These voices included LGBTQ+ couples, their families and their children. The campaign also invited actors, sports stars, politicians, and local parish priests to demonstrate their support through posters, radio, and television appearances, often they had no specific ties to the community they were speaking out in support of. Many speculated that these individuals and campaigns were ultimately the most influential, as voters trusted them because they had no personal stake in the issue.²³²

Not all members of the LGBTQ+ community seek or even support institutional marriage. It has long been a subject of intra-community debate. Therefore, some of those who worked hard for its legalisation did not, in fact, wish it for themselves. Unlike many of her fellow activists, Ailbhe Smyth sees marriage as a patriarchal and archaic system generally used to oppress. Recognising its importance to other members of her community and as an important step to equal opportunity, she sought to take part in the movement to bring about its legalisation. Due to her decades of well-known “radical” feminist activism, however, a strategic decision was made to keep her in the background. They worried her “notoriety” would inhibit the project of making this campaign about appeasing and engaging the middle. YES advocates knew they had to ensure the campaign was not about disrupting the conservative family project or its tradition, but rather their desire to join in on it.

Although the campaign avoided direct reference to faith or religious institution, it did stress the importance of having a team to reach out to religious voters. *Faith in Marriage Equality*²³³ assumed this task. However, many members of the campaign believed it was the individual Catholics who came out and told their stories that left the biggest impression on faith-based voters. This included

²³¹ Smyth.

²³² Whelan.

²³³ An organisation comprised of volunteers “from a range of faith backgrounds who have come together as Faith in Marriage Equality to campaign for a YES vote” was developed to address faith issues throughout the 2015 referendum.

fathers who wrote their stories in local newspapers, priests who spoke out against church doctrine, children who spoke about their parents and, “of course, Mary McAleese.” The former Irish president is a well-known and respected Catholic as well as active LGBTQ+ supporter and outspoken advocate. There was a great deal of speculation that, for many older voters, her presence in the campaign allowed them to feel safe and right in their choice to support same-sex marriage.

Post-Legalisation: Concerns About LGBTQ+ Rights Still Not Achieved

In the US, religious exemption cases relating to same-sex marriage have proliferated in recent years.²³⁴ In Ireland, however, despite a couple of largely ignored cases, the issue has remained relatively uncontested. Instead, after the 2015 referendum, a number of activists on both sides of the issue shifted their gaze to abortion, the next major cultural and political debate to be tackled through a referendum. Both pre- and post-legalisation it proved far more contentious, perhaps not entirely surprising since abortion has historically been an issue of greater concern for Catholics than same-sex marriage. Clear that the passage of marriage equality did not mean complete LGBTQ+ equality, many advocates, post-legalisation, directed their work towards anti-bullying, LGBTQ+ youth rights, trans rights, and the decoupling of the Church from the institutions of education and healthcare, two areas where church and state remain deeply intertwined in Ireland.

Reflecting on the debate more broadly, many spoke about the global rise in political and social instability, particularly of religious and nationalistic backlashes to progressive policies. This included discussions on Brexit, Donald Trump, Viktor Orban and Marie Le Pen, among others. Speculation generally dismissed the threat in an Irish context, but the late Noel Whelan, a political analyst who was brought on to the campaign in an advisory capacity, commented:

It would be naive to believe that we are insulated against [it. However.] I think a combination of well-embedded democratic traditions, and our scale [and] our intimacy, are what will help us to avoid [the rise in right-wing populism]. I keep saying the Irish people riot in the ballot box, rather than on the street.²³⁵

By this he seemed to imply the referendums would be satisfactory outlets for citizens to express their views and frustrations with the status quo. Majority opinion, this posits, will be summarily accepted and then “everyone can just move on.”

²³⁴ Douglas NeJaime and Reva Siegel, "Cakes and the Conscience Wars," *Oxford Human Rights Hub* (2018).

²³⁵ Whelan.

Part III: Perceptions of Religion in Today's Public Square

Distrust in the Catholic Church

The significant loss of trust and faith in the Irish Catholic Church has left much of the population wary of being told by it how to vote. Aware of this, the church has sought to distance itself from recent referendums, especially those dealing with contentious socio-cultural issues. Despite the lack of overt engagement, some YES advocates speculated the church had played a secret background role, feeding rhetoric and strategy to civil society organisations. But others decided the church was the one being pressured, preferring not to engage on these issues. It came to be the general consensus that the church participated publicly in the 2015 referendum only reluctantly, and that it was the activities of civil society organisations that presented the most significant hurdle to achieving marriage equality.

Doubting the Sincerity of Religious Justifications

At the individual level, YES advocates often doubted the sincerity of their opponents' commitment to faith and the genuineness of their "deeply held beliefs" citing the way the *Iona Institute* and other conservative faith-based advocates tried to reframe themselves as non-religious:

Those who want to make it a religious-based argument didn't come and make a religious-based argument. They tried to dress it up as some kind of social concern argument...I would have an awful lot more respect for their arguments (I have no disrespect for the individuals) if they would make them as religious arguments.²³⁶

This switch suggested to many YES advocates their opposition believed religious justifications no longer held much weight in public discourse and were no longer considered valid forms of debate. The subterfuge, YES advocates felt, made them question whether NO campaigner's arguments were only prima facie legitimate and not truly grounded in real concern for children, families or society more generally.

Other YES advocates were more accepting of these diverse voices. The late Whelan reflected:

I think everyone deserves to have a voice and is entitled to speak their voice and to be heard. I think sometimes the role of us liberals, in the classical sense rather than in the progressive sense, is to say 'hold on. The conversation is enhanced if

²³⁶ Ibid.

all the voices can be heard' ...it's important to have opposing voices...specifically because they disagree with each other. So, I think it is disappointing to see some of the intolerance of many progressives who don't have enough confidence in their own argument to be able to let the voices that disagree with them be heard. And you see, I'm a big believer in the power of a *rational argument*. So, let them make their point and give them the space to do that. It is often the case that it is very easily undermined. It has a greater potency if you're seen to be trying to close it down.²³⁷

The narrative perpetuated by conservatives about not feeling heard, and their complaints of victimisation at the hands of progressive society, led him to acknowledge: "That's all a key part of the narrative. Now, they overstate it. They exploit it. But is there a grain of truth in it? I think yes. And I think it is counterproductive."²³⁸

Ireland: Anti-Same Sex Marriage Campaigning

The Marriage Equality Referendum had a very narrow set of opposing organisations. The main NO campaigners emerged almost entirely from the *Iona Institute*. Although several of these advocates declined to be interviewed, all took the time to respond to my inquiry and to explain their decisions, for or against involvement in this study. Curiously, several who refused participation explained they did so because they "weren't really involved," or they were only present in a "passive capacity," they only "published a few articles," or "only took part in one debate" and thus would not be valuable additions to this research. This was not, however, entirely true. Many of them had, in fact, played very vocal roles in the referendum. For those NO campaigners who did agree to be interviewed, many demonstrated initial reluctance, but their skepticism did eventually subside. In fact, by the end of our conversations most respondents were quite enthusiastic and encouraged me to follow up with them. One individual even reached out after the Abortion Referendum (2018), a campaign on which he had also worked, wishing to meet and discuss my own reflections on its process and results. This was in stark contrast to their anti-same sex marriage counterparts in California. It is indicative of the more relaxed and open state of relations in Ireland.

The following data is that collected through in-person interviews, email exchanges and social media communications.

²³⁷ Ibid.

²³⁸ Ibid.

Part I: Personal Reflections from a Post-Legalisation Perspective

'Natural Law' and Complementarity: A Religious and Secular Justification

Irish NO advocates, like their American counterparts, decried non-heteronormative marriage as ungrounded in natural law. The “inevitable problem” that arises once you “abandon the notion of a *natural law*,” they warned, is you get competing values, the “anything goes” values “progressives love to propagate.” They argue if gender is not made material in two parent households, “you’re attacking the natural ties. If two men are raising a child, only one can be the natural parent Once you say two men have an equal right to have a child, by whatever means, you’re saying that natural ties *do not matter*. And that just flies in the face of all of human experience.”²³⁹ Notably, the language of natural law has both theological and philosophical resonances. In this case, the language of natural law was largely used as a way of secularising the discourse, although it was clear their arguments had theological underpinnings.

By making childrearing and social stability platform touchstones, NO campaigners were largely able to sidestep the use of overtly religious language. Like natural law, NO campaigners used arguments linked to the concept of complementarity to bridge the religious-secular divide. While the theory of complementarity has religious origins, the concept of two different-sex parents as essential to the well-being of the child has been used in secular ways in recent same-sex marriage debates. The complementarity argument particularly emphasised the “special meaning” of marriage:

It is the coming together of the two opposites that are complementary to each other, and this factor is something which the State and the community should prefer for the upbringing of children, all other things being equal. This makes the relationship between the heterosexual couple different from any other relationship. It has a special value.²⁴⁰

Using the language of “diversity” to support natural law, conservative commentator, policy advocate and founder of the *Iona Institute*, David Quinn proposed: “if we *champion diversity*, it should be ok to ... treat different situations differently ... the union of male and female is so obviously ... distinct it [should be] treated ... in a unique way. That’s not discrimination.”²⁴¹ On the whole, interview subjects kept their arguments simple: the legal, political and, most importantly, social impacts of

²³⁹ David Quinn, interview by Bryana Tunder, 29 Aug 2017, Dublin, IR.

²⁴⁰ Sen. Ronan Mullen, interview by Bryana Tunder, 1 Sept 2017, Dublin, IR.

²⁴¹ Quinn.

same-sex marriage were dangerous to the continued stability of family and society. The theological underpinnings of this view are nuanced, however, and are addressed in Chapter 1.

After initial opposition to the introduction of civil partnerships, NO campaigners reversed course and became qualified proponents of the idea. Their support, however, was contingent on there being no special provisions “just for homosexual couples.” Such special treatment, they argued, was discriminatory against other types of “caring, dependent relationships....Anyone in a caring and dependent relationship should have certain rights and protections irrespective of the nature of the relationship.”²⁴² As such, NO campaigners saw themselves as flexible and willing to compromise: “we opposed the type of civil partnerships that were offered, we were not opposed to civil partnerships per se.”²⁴³ Emphasising a need to “compromise between what *you* want and the rights of *other* people,” conservative Irish Senator and leader of *Human Dignity Alliance*,²⁴⁴ Ronan Mullen, described his opponents as inflexible and complained about their zero sum mentality.²⁴⁵

“I Felt Like I Had To”: A Lack of Enthusiasm for the Subject of Same-Sex Marriage

The campaign *against* same-sex marriage appeared to suffer from a general lack of passion for the issue. This reluctance was observed by YES campaigners. When asked about this, various NO campaigners agreed and linked their own lack of enthusiasm to the fact they “did not harbor dislike or hatred for the LGBT community, [but] simply had a deep concern for social stability and the rights of children.” They felt obligated, if not excited, to be the voice for an underrepresented perspective:

I remember feeling like this is an issue I don't really want to get involved in, because there can be a lot of recrimination. Yet there was something about the way the debate started to play out where I just felt, look there are obvious manipulations here, there are obvious failures to properly reflect on the common good and specifically the rights of children. -*Ronan Mullen*

I didn't have gay marriage in mind at all [when Iona was first set up]. Marriage and the family, yes, but not gay marriage specifically. When gay marriage came up as a big issue...we kind of got drawn into it because there was nobody else...we were one of the only organisations willing to stick our heads out...nearly everyone else was scared. -*David Quinn*

²⁴² Mullen.

²⁴³ Quinn.

²⁴⁴ *HAD* is a pro-life political party Mullen founded in 2018. Its ideology embraces social conservatism. It self-describes itself as falling in line with the “Christian right.” Mullen is its only elected member currently in the Seanad Eireann.

²⁴⁵ Mullen.

I was not going to campaign on this because I, personally, have no difficulty with civil partnership and having marriage-like rights for people who are gay...I was not going to campaign against the marriage referendum until it became clear that there were significant identity rights for children which were going to come into question...that was the only reason I got involved. -Breda O'Brien

Even this level of involvement came at a cost. Conservative journalist and policy advocate, Breda O'Brien spoke emotionally about "the abuse" she and her family received in direct relation to her position within the campaign. It was only the feeling of responsibility, she said, that prodded her to become involved, not enthusiasm. She "had to do it" because if she did not, "who would?"

Emotional Responses to Feelings of Victimisation and Mistreatment by Opponents

Most NO campaigners spoke about feeling victimised through repeated accusations of homophobia and bigotry by LGBTQ+ activists. Breda O'Brien and John Waters, a conservative journalist and activist who appeared frequently at NO campaign events run by *First Family First*²⁴⁶ and *Mothers and Fathers Matter*, spoke emotionally about Ireland's current "progressive anti-religious climate." They complained about being silenced, being ousted from news outlets, abused on social media and in person. Heightened emotional language was used to describe the campaign process in particular. Respondents spoke of being "ambushed" or "assaulted," they were "obliterated," opponents were "ruthless," they were "targeting and eliminating dissenters." NO campaign strategies were being "booby-trapped," while manipulated votes were a "smash and grab" job. Violent metaphors proliferated: "a hungry band of attack dogs lay snarling in the wings, waiting to tear limb from limb the life and reputation of anyone who sought to disagree with them" and "gangs of human Rottweilers [were sent] to attack anyone who dared to dissent from their demands."²⁴⁷ People spoke of being "despised," "despaired" and "shattered" by comments made about them. They described feeling "personally stabbed in the heart"²⁴⁸ by accusations they felt were unfounded.

NO campaigners claimed they were victims of unequal standards in relation to monetary and strategic backing.²⁴⁹ They saw no limits to the amount of public and international support YES advocates

²⁴⁶ *First Family First* was an advocacy group set up by Waters, and two associates, to directly address the 2015 Marriage Equality Referendum by advocating for a 'No' vote. They proposed their own amendment that specifically focused on the rights of children. The organisation garnered little support or media publicity. Thus, Waters worked alongside the *Iona Institute* as well, because they had a bigger national platform.

²⁴⁷ John Waters, email correspondence, 18 Jul 2017.

²⁴⁸ Breda O'Brien, interview by Bryana Tunder, 7 Jun 2018, Dublin, IR.

²⁴⁹ This mostly stemmed from the grant received from Atlantic Philanthropies, before the official campaign launched. But, it also included discussions about social media platforms demonstrating bias, the support of Amnesty International, etc.

could receive, while any whisper of support for their own side was derided and used against them. Perhaps unsurprisingly, then, NO campaigners claimed little or no association with any international movements or organisations. In more extreme reflections, some advocates saw ‘the other’ not just as ideologically or tactically oppositional, but as subversive agents set to destroy those in their way.

Respondents largely criticised and blamed media bias, academic elites and liberal intolerance for the campaign’s unfairness. Waters went so far as to call it a “dictatorship of tolerance that insists it is doing what it is doing in the name of tolerance and love and equality but is actually destroying the civilisation upon which it stands.”²⁵⁰ They spoke about the “dishonest media” who “manipulated the truth.” O’Brien spoke of “activist journalists” who have lost their objectivity. Quinn spoke of “hostile interviewers,” of being made to feel “uncomfortable” because of his view, of being outnumbered, of his opponents having “unchallenged runs” and “soft focus interviews.” Of note was the similarity between NO campaigner and YES advocate accusations, they both complained about biased media and unfair representation in Ireland.

NO campaigners especially derided the notion and proliferation of “safe spaces.”²⁵¹ They saw this as an example of the fragility of progressives. The phrase was often accompanied by physical eye rolls or other facial expressions which demonstrated a distinct lack of respect for the idea. NO campaigners criticised the liberal bubble and coddled academic institutions. In line with this critique were frequent references to the herd mentality of Irish people, “the liberal, unthinking machine”²⁵² and the need for international approval which they argued caused conformity to a greater liberal agenda. The Irish were described as “victims of propaganda,” as “great writers but not great thinkers,” who repeatedly bought into “group think.” This was said with disappointment by some, frustration by others.

NO campaigners warned about the dangers of shutting out or ridiculing minority voices. They seemed not to notice the irony of this in relation to their own dismissal of “safe spaces.” O’Brien commented on what she perceived as the Irish instinct toward conformity to public opinion: “We’re more conformist than Britain or America. So, to stand up against that, people are going to have to become more extreme....people like me who are seen as to the right of Atilla the Hun are going to seem very moderate in years to come.”²⁵³ In this context, they spoke about a silent minority and the

²⁵⁰ John Waters, *Ireland and the End of Debate: A Lecture* (Iona Institute, 19 Jun 2016). min 19:30.

²⁵¹ A Safe Space is a place “free of bias, conflict, criticism or potentially threatening actions, ideas or conversations.” It is an idea that stems from the need for a space where marginalised persons can feel safe and free to express their ideas and experiences without fear or amongst other marginalised persons who will understand. Primarily a western phenomenon, the concept of “safe spaces” has garnered controversy in recent years.

²⁵² Waters.

²⁵³ O’Brien.

climate of fear that surrounded speaking out against general consensus on issues like same-sex marriage. They described a lack of respect for dissenters and the resulting sense of isolation it creates.

Some dismissed the validity of the result because they felt the YES campaign had undermined democracy and the democratic process through their proliferation of liberal subterfuge and propaganda.²⁵⁴ This rhetoric is generally less common in Ireland than in California, however, and the majority of Irish NO campaign respondents agreed that the issue was relatively settled and the nation should move on. As mentioned previously, because of their awareness of this “general consensus,” Irish NO campaigners, like their American counterparts, tended to lower their voices whenever speaking about homosexual or transgender practices and identities. This included comments about “gender dysphoria” or those who are “having issues with their *actual* gender.” Once the case was made, it seemed to be an implicit acknowledgment that it had become too “controversial to say anything against same-sex marriage.”

Part II: Political Strategy Pre- and Post-Legalisation

Communicating Across Rhetorical Borders: Making Views Palatable to the Masses

Like their American counterparts, Irish objections to same-sex marriage centred on the rights of children, surrogacy, the importance of knowing one’s parentage and, peripherally, on the differences between men and women. They distanced their arguments from religion, instead they emphasised tradition, social stability and concern for families, parents and children. They defended their position with nods toward natural law, the historical lineage of the marriage tradition, and biological and/or psychological arguments for the importance of their maintenance and validity.

The challenge, NO campaigners found, was in making their views palatable to an electorate that did not want to be told what to do, most certainly not by the church. The question became:

How do we communicate our values so they are attractive to the non-believer or ‘the other’ [believer]...knowing that we are inspired and at the very least motivated by this religious sense of the dignity of the human person...I think this isn't just a challenge for people of faith, ideas in general are not well understood across society.²⁵⁵

²⁵⁴ Waters.

²⁵⁵ Mullen.

Recognising the increasingly disparate language of believers and non-believers, Senator Ronan Mullen was not the only respondent to express concern about a breakdown of communication across intra-national cultural borders. Acknowledging their struggle to communicate across ideological divides in the 2015 referendum, NO campaigners criticised their opponents use of stories as “emotional manipulations” which, they felt, brought the debate “off topic” and made it harder for them to connect with voters.

Part III: Perceptions of Religion in Today’s Public Square

Religion’s Role in Social and Political Discourse

NO campaigners described religion as “the shaper of social teachings,” “an international gatherer,” a guide for how to “honour the sacredness of human life” in choices we make societally and a “rallier of social conservatives.” For most, it was acknowledged to be one of many options, but unfairly maligned because of its history:

It’s deeply problematic that out of all players in civil society only the ones labelled religious can’t take place in public debate. I mean, what the hell is their ground for doing that? They say ‘well, not everybody agrees with religion, well not everybody agrees with *anything*.’ What’s the point of debate if only people with whom we agree can take part?²⁵⁶

Aware of its role in shaping personal values and social policy, Mullen argued “the freedom to believe something is pretty meaningless unless you have the freedom to express it. Now the freedom to express it doesn't simply mean being able to say what you believe, it also means *acting* according to what you believe.” He later qualified: “This right to act in accordance with your beliefs should only ever be restrained in order to protect public order and morality or the safety of others.”²⁵⁷ Many felt religious people no longer have a place in the public square. By virtue of the foundation of their reasoning, the views of religious adherents have been rendered invalid. It was notable that NO campaigners described religious believers, themselves included, in largely (conservative) monolithic terms, with little recognition of the diversity within faith communities.

²⁵⁶ Quinn.

²⁵⁷ Mullen.

A Loss of Trust in the Institutional Church

Both sides of the debate acknowledged a severe lack of trust in the Irish Church. Violating its role as protector, conservatives said, produced the “*false* narrative of religion as an/the obstacle to Ireland’s modernity and progress.”²⁵⁸ NO campaigners knew going into the referendum that if it “played out in people’s minds as ‘*old Catholic Ireland*’ versus *modernity* then [we lose]...the whole...inferiority complex. The anger at the Catholic Church.”²⁵⁹ This anger, conservatives argued, got conflated in debates with *all* faith-based reasoning and “undercut” or “invalidated” any arguments they made. “It is a standard tactic of the LGBT campaign to depict opposition as fundamentalist, which is to say religious.” Waters accused the YES campaign of seeking an enemy, and “religious people make for an easy target.”²⁶⁰

NO campaigners expressed frustration with the sins of the Church being conflated with the teachings of Jesus and argued the church only gained power in the first place because people wanted it to: “They believed in its ability to guide society; they wanted it to have influence in politics; they wanted it to help shape laws.”²⁶¹ However, they maintained, Irish people are “inclined to reject authority in general,” religion and the Church are just one more in a line of authorities. Some respondents described an all-out “hatred” for religion. David Quinn found it disappointing, but not surprising: “Any idea that becomes dominant ends up crushing certain freedoms. Once religious people did it, now non-religious people are doing it. I just think dominant ideas, by nature, end up becoming illiberal. Something in our nature doesn’t allow actual breathing space for any other point of view.”²⁶²

When asked about religious exemption laws, most respondents dismissed the idea in relation to same-sex marriage rights. In fact, only a few minor challenges to legalisation emerged in the wake of its passing. Similar to US exemption cases, they were exemplified by the Beulah Printers case, in which a gay couple sought to have marriage invitations printed, but they were turned away by the printer who cited religious reasons. Also, of note, is the fact all such cases have been raised by evangelical, not Catholic, Christians.²⁶³ No one case ever gained major attention, however. Since the 2018 Abortion Referendum, many NO campaigners, who were also involved in advocating against the legalisation of abortion, have pursued issues relating to religious freedom and abortion services.

²⁵⁸ Quinn.

²⁵⁹ Ibid.

²⁶⁰ Waters.

²⁶¹ Quinn.

²⁶² Ibid.

²⁶³ Gordon Deegan, "Print Company Ordered to Pay Gay Man €2.5k over Refusal to Print Civil Partnership Invites," *The Journal*, 8 Feb 2019. The case went in favour of the couple.

Their concerns also include the decoupling of religion from schools and hospitals (which includes abortion services), surrogacy and euthanasia.

Conclusion

The data presented above was divided into three main themes: personal reflection, political process and a larger conversation about the place of religion in today's public square. Each nation and group dealt with its own challenges, responded to the process and revealed interesting insights unique to its experiences and positioning on the subject of same-sex marriage. They also demonstrated surprising levels of similarity in their experiences, their reflections and reactions to the personal as well as political process of advocating for or against the rights of same-sex couples to marry.

In California, anti-same sex marriage advocates were suspicious and hesitant to talk. YES advocates were more willing to speak, but many of them maintained wariness in our discussions. They criticised as well as praised fellow advocates and focused most energetically on issues that lay ahead, rather than the experiences of the past. In Ireland, NO campaigners were generally willing to meet with me, spoke primarily about unfairness and victimisation, expressed grievance towards their opponents and a liberal agenda more broadly. YES advocates were enthusiastic to talk about their victory, spoke proudly about process and strategy as well as the support of their fellow citizens.

These findings will be explored and analyzed in greater detail in the following chapters. Chapter 4 will analyse the data from Chapter 3 that reflects on individual experience and the role of personal grievance. Part one will address how campaigner's self-perceptions and perceptions of their opponents played out throughout the campaign process. Noting the different means through which same-sex marriage was legalised in the US and Ireland, it examines the implications these different methods have on feelings of settledness. This research shows that debates continue to take place not only between individuals inside the LGBTQ+ community versus those outside it. Instead, this chapter address the very complex discussions about marriage happening within the LGBTQ+ community itself. The last section of part I examines links between campaign strategies, both financial and rhetorical, in the US and Ireland. Interesting cross-national and cross-positional patterns emerged from the data that shed new light on issues of strategy, rhetoric and political advocacy.

Part two of the following chapter examines, in more depth, how these emotional factors play into our rationalisation of the positions we hold and their influence on our political engagement. Using Jonathan Haidt's *Moral Foundations Theory*, it will examine how moral instincts drive us to see righteousness in ourselves and hypocrisy in those we view as opponents. When not understood

properly, these instincts can create roadblocks to productive discourse, inhibiting our ability to dialogue. Using Haidt's insights, Chapter 4 explores why cross-worldview communication so frequently fails. Lastly, it posits the activation of voters in the "persuadable middle," those who do not hold particularly strong views on the issue of same-sex marriage, may be engaged as a bridge between the extreme edges.

CHAPTER 4: PERSONAL RESPONSES TO AND LESSONS LEARNED FROM THE SAME-SEX MARRIAGE CAMPAIGN PROCESS

...religion and politics really [cause] people to clash, but I would say this is a level deeper than that. This is identity. It's not just what I believe, it's who I feel that I am.

Ken Williams, "Once-Gay Minister" at Bethel Evangelical Church

When the government steps in to regulate your choice of whom to marry and with whom you may create a family, the division between private lives and public politics dissolves. "The personal is political." This slogan, which emerged from the feminist movement in the 1960s, succinctly rejects the possibility of separating the 'public' and 'private' spheres and demands a far more complex vision of public discourse and political participation. This chapter examines the individual, personal reactions to the public political experience of campaigning for and against the rights of same-sex couples to marry and provides analysis of the data presented in Chapter 3 on political framing and the experiential process of that debate.

Part one addresses more fully issues raised in the previous chapter: the personal experiences of campaigners, comparative means of legalisation, the effect of these means on the sense of issue resolution, and similarities and differences in the framing and strategy. Personal reactions to the public practice of campaigning demonstrate the significant effect individual experience can have on political activism, especially when these reactions are grounded in negative emotions like grievance and injustice. Suggesting lessons can be drawn from the varied responses, it places community feelings of exclusion and marginalisation in a wider social and political context. Furthermore, it delves into the historical and current intra-community conflicts that are simmering over marriage and queerness. Finally, tracing the strategic and financial trajectory of same-sex marriage argumentation and campaign tactics, it shows a clear line drawn between American and Irish groups on both sides of the same-sex marriage issue.

Part two employs Haidt's *Moral Foundations Theory* to illuminate the experience of individuals and groups invested in the emotionally complex issue of same-sex marriage, highlighting the role of moral instinct in moral decision making. Haidt's moral psychology can help make sense of the ways in which people structure conflicts and how that affects the development of public debate, including rhetoric and strategy. It provides a framework to better understand how people respond to each other in tense and emotional situations which directly impacted both how the same-sex marriage campaign was shaped, and how it was remembered by its participants. *MFT* is particularly pertinent to moral concerns and responses to those concerns. Its insights illustrate a number of problems currently inhibiting, and in some cases supporting, productive dialogue between those who seek further rights

for members of the LGBTQ+ community and those who see such rights as potential threats to their own personal and religious freedoms and security.

Part I: Comparative Analysis of Personal Reflections and Political Strategy

Much can be learned through the observation of one jurisdictional context. As disclosed through my data, even more can be gleaned through a comparative study. This chapter considers the American (Californian) and Irish conflicts in relation to one another. It highlights and analyses jurisdictional differences through its examination of the experiences and observations of advocates on both sides of the same-sex marriage debate. Further insights are gleaned through an investigation of the different means through which marriage equality was legalised in the US and Ireland and the comparison of campaign strategies across national and ideological lines.

Personal Responses: Individual Emotion and Interactions in Public Political Debates

When examining social conflicts that involve large demographics, we often lose sight of the individuals involved but personal feelings and responses to individual experiences greatly influence campaigners and their ability to move on, to see their opponent clearly, or see their own debate experience as fair. The next section of this chapter addresses the very intimate, personal nature of a very abstract societal debate. Ideology and worldview are necessarily important aspects of the conflict, but data has shown that personalised grievance, hurt and anger play a central role in the inhibition of cross-ideological dialogue.

Grievance: Personal Feelings Significantly Effect Public and Private Discourse

Grievance and victimhood are gaining academic attention lately, including controversial work like the Grievance Studies affair in 2018, which set out to expose “ideologically-motivated” scholarship.²⁶⁴ This examination of the rise of victimhood and grievance attempts to understand why society has so rapidly adopted these two mentalities and what role they play in growing cultural divides.²⁶⁵ Social grievances, studies have found, inhibit the ability to see alternative truths and feed a sense of imbalanced representation in the media, in academics and in society that reinforces a sense of dismissal and ridicule. Grievance, defined in this instance as real or imagined unfair treatment, has emerged as the most common thread amongst all four groups of advocates. A largely unconscious

²⁶⁴ Yascha Mounk, "What an Audacious Hoax Reveals About Academia," *The Atlantic*, 5 Oct 2018.

²⁶⁵ Bradley Campbell and Jason Manning, *The Rise of Victimhood Culture : Microaggressions, Safe Spaces, and the New Culture Wars* (Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillian, 2018).

emotional response, it drove what and how interviewees spoke about same-sex marriage; it undergirded accounts of individual experiences and observations of opponents. Yet the cause of these grievances shifted from group to group.

YES Advocates

YES advocates in California described hurt and frustration with their political opponents as well as with individuals who occupied different tiers of their own movement. They spoke about personally hurtful and demeaning rhetoric and the unfair outsized role of money in campaigning. LGBTQ+ activists complained religious groups were better organised and had access to greater resources, which created an unequal playing field. Looking internally, American grassroots advocates complained about ‘grasstop’ activists co-opting resources better spent on ground games. Grasstop legal and policy accomplishments were said to be glorified, while grassroots work had not received adequate recognition. All YES advocates expressed wariness about religious liberty claims and threats to LGBTQ+ protections in a post-2016 political environment.

Irish YES advocates, on the other hand, complained primarily about the lack of equal resources and media attention to the NO campaign, including equal time requirements leading up to the referendum. They argued NO campaigners received more representation than their proportion of the electorate deserved. Like their American counterparts, they also bemoaned the NO campaign’s use of “fear tactics” and “other denigrating arguments” and spent as much time ridiculing or dismissing their opponents as complaining about them. However, Irish advocates expressed little to no worry about religious liberty challenges. They were, ultimately, the most satisfied and confident group of the several campaigns.

LGBTQ+ activists were not the only ones to talk about unfairness or express grievance. Perhaps unsurprisingly, the “losers” of this legal conflict were the most emotional in their discussions of both issue and process.

NO Campaigners

Suspicion and distrust provided perhaps the greatest hurdle to my engagement with NO campaigners, especially in the US. Initially I was seen as part of the “liberal academic bubble.” They assumed I supported marriage equality, which I do. I acknowledged this in each of my interviews. They lectured me about liberal bias and my own inevitable corruption as a member of the liberal university system. Then they told me stories of being “tricked” into meeting with students who wanted to berate them

for their positions. A couple prefaced our meeting with excuses about having to leave early, although they never did. While in Ireland, access to activists and politicians was, in truth, relatively painless, in California it was nearly impossible. They seemed to view anyone outside their community as either not worth their time or as a potential enemy.

Those with whom I did meet described their campaign experience with frustration, anger, sadness and hurt. All NO campaigners agreed, the worst terms a person can be called today, they noted, are “racist, bigoted or homophobic.” The definition and power of these terms has found itself at the center of recent grievance politics. NO campaigners discussed feeling singled out and victimised for “a legitimate position on a social and political issue.” Asked why they engaged in the campaign considering this, they responded that it was their job to stand up for the “silenced” voices, for individuals who society no longer makes feel welcome. They noted the bravery it took to speak up on this now culturally taboo subject. In many ways, NO campaigners saw themselves as martyrs. David Quinn described Ireland as a “tall poppy” culture, in which those who stick their heads above the others get them whacked off. He saw NO campaigners as today’s tall poppies. The subjects of repeated abuse, public and private accusations of bigotry and homophobia that fell upon such “tall poppies” were “insulting, painful and untrue.” One Irish participant even cried while she described the accusations and associated threats she received.

NO campaigners complained the power of popular culture was disproportionately behind the LGBTQ+ community. They blamed the liberal media, who encouraged this imbalance and unfairly tipped the scales against them. NO campaigners described pro-marriage equality activists, empowered by cultural authority, as being “vicious.” They described being personally targeted for speaking publicly about a position that had been put before the public for discussion. Breda O’Brien and John Waters spoke at length about their victimisation at the hands of “liberal attack dogs.” NO campaigners decried mistreatment at the hands of “activist journalists” and interviewers who “gave the other side soft questions.” Although Quinn and O’Brien have regular columns in each of the two major national newspapers, they felt a hostile environment restricted their ability to fully participate publicly.²⁶⁶ Notably, YES advocates also complained about unfair media bias. Where NO campaigners complained about a *lack* of representation, YES advocates complained about the NO campaign’s unjust *over* representation.

In California, dramatic victim and hero narratives were more obvious than in Ireland. Religious conservatives employed them frequently, describing the “apocalyptic” nature and impending “doom”

²⁶⁶Ronan McGreevy, “Irish Times’ Columnist Says Rte Libel Payment Was Not About the Money,” *The Irish Times*, 3 Feb 2014. Neither were strangers to litigating grievance. They both sued RTE for defamation in 2014. Neither mentioned this past to me.

of progressive politics. Political organisations like the *California Family Council* encouraged “more churches...to speak up for their religious liberty rights...Silence is sending the wrong message to legislators up here.” They warned that “if they don't hear from folks when religious liberty is threatened, they interpret that as – this bill is not that bad.”²⁶⁷ They warned their own communities about potential eradication: “They want us gone.” They “won’t stop until we no longer have any voice at all.” This rhetorical framing is worried about the “total eradication” of a community or “diverse thinking” and created panic that has changed the way religious groups engage in politics, culture and law. Absolutist claims, common in today’s political climate, allow little flexibility or space for negotiation and reinforce sometimes false perceptions of their opponent’s irrationality and inflexibility.

Conservative religious political actors are not the only ones warning their communities about complacency or compromise. Narratives about victimhood, perceived or real, are powerful bonding tools. They encourage voter engagement and citizen activism. They give communities a common purpose and a common enemy. Stories about injustice and inhumanity can elicit powerful feelings of compassion and can, in turn, encourage political mobility. Such tools are being used with increasing frequency by groups on both sides of the same-sex marriage debate in California and Ireland.

The Problematic Rise of Victimhood Culture

The extremely personal nature of marriage rights made the 2015 public debate feel intimate for campaigners on both sides. YES advocates were forced to share their private lives publicly. They faced daily arguments about why they deserved only second-class citizenship. Public criticism of political arguments were often personal. Members of *both* campaigns saw their own group as reasonable, honest and sincere and their opponents as dishonest, manipulative, unfair and liars. If the debate went badly, the adversary was accused of cheating or manipulating the fight. Shifting blame like this encouraged and reinforced a community’s victimhood narrative. It played into stories of villains and victims and obscured the range in between.

Bradley Campbell and Jason Manning talk about the rise of victimhood culture across the liberal/conservative spectrum specifically around “moral culture.” They note the increase in call-out culture and the genuine sense by members of all camps that they are being victimised by the other. This tit for tat cultural mentality makes any comment or action a personal affront which warrants a

²⁶⁷ Heather Sells, "Close to Passing? California Lawmakers Debate Bill That Outlaws Sexual Orientation Change Efforts," *CBN News: The Christian Perspective*, 9 Aug 2018.

highly personal retort. This is not to devalue or dismiss very real experiences of injustice or systematic inequality. It merely recognises that the intense personalisation of public discourse surrounding social and political “moral culture” issues inhibit our ability to approach potentially sensitive and personal issues with any distance.²⁶⁸ A better understanding of how diverse moral foundations affect our social and political engagement can help build a bridge across the worldview gaps that currently keep us apart. Haidt’s *MFT* is used to illuminate this in greater detail in the second half of this chapter.

When we lose, when society shames or humiliates us for our positions, which is how NO campaigners constantly described elite and dominant cultural responses to their positions, we retreat. Humiliation causes us to double down on our position because to admit defeat is shameful. Individuals who experience this kind of social humiliation often feel such political defeats personally. This intense personalisation leads to responses like anger and sadness.²⁶⁹ As a means of protecting one’s sense of worldview cohesion and security, we translate defeat into victimhood, which closes down our ability to see past our own hurt. This sense of victimhood is increasingly evident amongst activists involved in both the support and the rejection of same-sex marriage rights. It manifests in extreme impressions of those lined up on “the other side” as “out to get me or people like me.” As communities become more and more segregated, these impressions, divorced from extended human interactions, become holy truths.

Greater self-reflection and a greater ability to communicate about seemingly intractable issues is essential if we sincerely wish to mitigate the polarisation that is currently dividing citizens along liberal/conservative lines over emotionally complex issues like marriage equality. Instead of the simplistic religious/secular dichotomy frequently assumed in relation to issues like same-sex marriage, my data shows that personal views are divided along a variety of lines, perhaps most significantly a liberal and conservative one, with exceptional fluidity among them. When campaigners made automatic assumptions about their opponents, they shut off potential avenues to discourse. When ridiculed and shamed for the positions they held, NO campaigners, in particular, retreated from any willingness to dialogue. False dichotomies and the importance of moving beyond them for productive dialogical engagement are addressed in detail in Chapter 5.

²⁶⁸ Campbell and Manning, *The Rise of Victimhood Culture : Microaggressions, Safe Spaces, and the New Culture Wars*.

²⁶⁹ Jonathan Haidt, *The Righteous Mind : Why Good People Are Divided by Politics and Religion* (London, UK: Penguin Books, 2013).

Complex Dynamics Surround Minority Advocacy

The language of injustice, victimhood, marginalisation and disadvantage has historically been the prerogative of minorities. They have, more recently, been employed by traditionally dominant groups. Many LGBTQ+ advocates harbour cynical views about such use of victim rhetoric, which they see as self-serving calculation. Claims of victimhood from a group that has traditionally been dominant, they argue, is “absurd.”

However, YES advocates are also eager to point out NO campaigners no longer hold dominant views. They are proud of this shift in power. While both sides admit traditional ideas of marriage and family are increasingly in the minority, when NO campaigners point to this new minority status, they are mocked and ridiculed. YES advocates cite this minority status as the reason why NO campaigners should be given a smaller platform than their own, often complaining about the disproportionate amount of public space NO campaigners are given. In this sense, it seemed YES advocates saw the NO campaign as simultaneously powerful and powerless. They were not the only ones to see them thus. NO campaigners spoke about themselves in similarly complicated ways. They claimed they were victims of liberal cultural dominance and saw themselves as Davids standing up to Goliath. Yet they also claimed to represent “silent majorities,” speaking up for citizens who were being bullied by the YES campaign and its allies. Post-legalisation they continued to posit some YES voters had only been so because they felt culturally and politically muscled into it.

YES advocates were not always in the majority and have long fought hard for equal representation. This shift in power dynamics was a major point of grievance for NO campaigners. They complained LGBTQ+ rights advocates were opportunistic, disingenuous and manipulative. When same-sex marriage was still largely a minority opinion, NO campaigners pointed out, YES advocates sought to make clear that majority opinion does not necessarily mean right opinion. Now that majority opinion aligns with their cause, YES advocates seem to have become proponents of majority rule and see it as evidence of the rightness of their cause. “In other words, the decision shouldn’t be left up to the people, unless the people are in agreement with your viewpoint.”²⁷⁰ Where NO campaigners decried the hypocrisy of this evolution, the anti-same sex marriage campaign has used similarly evolving rhetoric. Initially, they argued traditional marriage should be the only legal definition *because* it was the majority opinion. As limiting marriage to one man and one woman becomes a minority opinion, its defence shifted to its social value regardless of popular opinion.

²⁷⁰ "Changing Views on Marriage: A Conversation between Lorri Jean and Ron Prentice," *Los Angeles Times*, 31 Jul 2007. Ron Prentice was the chief executive of the California Family Council at the time of Prop 8.

Both sides saw themselves simultaneously in majority and minority positions. Neither group appeared to see anything hypocritical in the evolution of their own arguments, but clearly saw hypocrisy in the evolution of their opponents'. So, while both groups recognised the rapid shift in cultural power, those who hold traditional views felt they have had the rug of cultural dominance pulled out from under them. And while loss of privilege is not necessarily the same as oppression, for its "victims" it can feel something like it. These "cultural victims" (conservative religious) blame the "cultural victors" (LGBTQ+) for their loss of dominance. This research shows dismissing feelings does not eradicate them. Likewise, acknowledging their sincerity does not mean validating their objective rightness; it simply means recognising human experience is not always objective, and addressing a person where they are even if they are not where you wish them to be.

A functioning and fair democracy must always allow minority groups to advocate for their own rights and protections, even when a minority group does not fit current or popular narratives about who *deserves* to claim minority status. Religious groups have been central to the development of political activism that seeks respect for the rights of minorities since early days of its development. Narratives about who is a minority evolve and, in the process, reframe political and cultural understandings of power dynamics. Shifting power dynamics between secular queer communities and faith communities with exclusively traditional views on marriage and family are one example of this democratic negotiation.

The Value of Unintentional Familiarity in Media Engagement and Daily Life

YES advocates in California were shocked to hear public debates in Ireland are required by referendum law. They described the prospect of such face-to-face encounters as "a nightmare." Instead, they intentionally avoid direct engagement with their opponents during referendums. YES advocates in California were also baffled at rules requiring equal time and representation as well as the strict restrictions on finance and media use. No official public debates are held in California, in any format, for referendums. YES advocates mentioned only a handful of times they crossed paths with opponents on TV or radio programs. There appears to have been no official communication across ideological borders in California on this or any similar issues.

Engagement across communities and ideologies is being inhibited in the US, far more than in Ireland, by increasingly isolated communities. Bill Bishop's recent work shows Americans sorting themselves into like-minded, homogeneous groups by state, region, city and even neighbourhood.²⁷¹

²⁷¹ Bill Bishop, *The Big Sort: Why the Clustering of Like-Minded Americans Is Tearing Us Apart* (New York City: Mariner Books, 2014).

Coupled with an easily cultivated online world, it undermines our ability to engage with diverse thoughts and the people that hold them. This isolation is present in communities across the political spectrum and is encouraged by increasingly insulating media sources. The conservative media infrastructure in the US, primarily due to monopolies and Republican buy-ins, facilitates a more extreme insular feedback loop than liberal media, however, neither is entirely independent of manipulation. In fact, NO campaigners argued the need for particularly conservative media emerged because of the increase in liberal bias among previously fair news organisations. These narrative bubbles encourage anger and grievance by reinforcing “us and them” identities. This isolation reinforces our own tribal instincts, providing us with resources and narratives through which we more easily create unconscious and instinctual justifications to argue their legitimacy. The role of moral instincts and post hoc justifications in political decision-making are examined through the lens of Haidt’s *MFT* in the second half of this chapter.

While media bubbles exist in Ireland, the country’s both small size and number of major news organisations limit the possibility of such dramatic isolation. It also has a relatively small activist community, the majority of whom are based in Dublin. Most 2015 referendum advocates across the spectrum knew each other personally. This historical acquaintanceship has created an interesting type of respect for one another, personally or intellectually, if not positionally. They knew the other as a parent or a teacher, they wrote for the same newspaper and some had even worked together in the past, although on different issues. Some admitted to meeting up for personal discussions over coffee or to giving political advice on previous campaigns. David Quinn mused, somewhat reluctantly, when asked if there was any benefit to this: “I mean, I think *it humanises each other.*”²⁷² His voice betrayed a sense of amusement at the simplicity of his comment. While the statement is simple, the reality of humanising “the other” is far from it.

This is not to say Irish advocacy or media coverage is flawless. Campaigners on both sides complained about the way media-facilitated mentalities negatively impacted polite or civil debate. They criticised the sensationalism that media coverage created. It “set the debate up as a battle,” “encouraged anger and yelling,” and simplified arguments and positions into an either/or dynamic that left most nuance out. When asked if she had ever sat down privately with any of her opponents, Smyth laughed it off:

²⁷² Quinn.

There's no way I can go to David Quinn and say, 'I'd really love to have a good talk with you about this.' I know what he thinks, and he knows what I think. I know that he's not going to change his mind. And he knows I'm not going to change my mind. At least on the principles of what we stand for. I think he may be a bit more pragmatic than I might, officially, give him credit for. And likewise, I don't know if he knows I'm quite pragmatic too. You don't know these things about people. *All you know is that you are lined up against them.*²⁷³

Years of mutual engagement in politics, the media and the day-to-day sharing of a city has facilitated an unusual relationship in Ireland. It includes familiarity, if not friendship, between opposing advocates. This familiarity allows each to see the other in human terms, not as an abstract face on TV, voice on the radio, or name quoted in an article. Such familiarity should make the practice of bridge building easier. And while it did appear to make engagement less polarising, there appears little real dialogue being done on this or other similarly emotionally complex issues. That being said, even these limited relationships do not seem to exist in California, between opposing sides or within their own.

Personal familiarity was not always a positive addition to the campaign dynamic. Some participants, primarily NO campaigners, complained opponents made it “about the person, not the issue.”²⁷⁴ Generally blaming younger activists, they pointed to social media, more than any other source, as the problem. NO campaigners spoke about the lack of respectful debating, the importance of civility and the dangers of further eroding communication through its disregard. Older YES advocates likewise noted this “less civilised” style of campaigning. They understood that erosion of communication leads to an increased unwillingness to listen to those with differing views. Despite this critique, they praised youthful determination, commitment and bravery.

Political Strategy: Similarities and Differences in Result, Approach, and Framing

While personal experience played a role in inhibiting productive engagement, examination of the political strategy employed by all four groups shows the role framing and strategy play in the perception of same-sex marriage, not just by campaigners but by the wider public. Where each jurisdiction legalised same-sex marriage through diverse means, they shared many campaign strategies and insights. An examination of discussions about marriage within the LGBTQ+ community sheds light on the value of same-sex marriage legalisation, on the one hand, and the challenges its legalisation has presented to achieving full equality, on the other. Finally, the

²⁷³ Smyth.

²⁷⁴ O'Brien.

transnational nature of the same-sex marriage debate, both financially and strategically, shows the increasingly global nature of this particular debate.

Comparative Means of Legalisation: How Methods Influence Results and Acceptance

A change in legal status was, undoubtedly, a positive step forward for LGBTQ+ marriage rights activists. It did not settle the debate, however. Instead, the change in legal status altered the structure, if not the nature of the debate. Pre-legalisation, the right of same-sex couples to marry was the epicentre of the debate. Post-legalisation, focus lies on the religious individual and their right to exemption from participation in or recognition of now legal same-sex marriages. Those who fight for such exemptions feel legalisation has been forced upon them. Many feel bullied into accepting a practice that violates their deeply held sacred truth. Battles over religious liberty and freedom of conscience thus continue to foster grievance, anger and hurt amongst its participants. The next phase of public discourse about sexuality, gender, family and religious expression requires deep, socially delicate discussions and negotiations. The means through which such laws are adopted play a role in how these discussions take shape.

Same-sex marriage was legalised through different means in the US and Ireland. In the US, federal legalisation came through the authority of *Obergefell v. Hodges*, a Supreme Court decision. In Ireland, through a nationwide constitutional referendum. These different means of legalisation played a role in the way individuals feel about same-sex marriage post-legalisation.

In the US, multiple states legalised same-sex marriage through state-wide referendum processes before 2015. Early attempts were largely unsuccessful. But in 2012, they began to win state referendums.²⁷⁵ *Freedom to Marry*, an American organisation dedicated to achieving marriage equality for same-sex couples, led the national strategy beginning in 2003.²⁷⁶ It emphasised connecting with individual voters through personal narratives that emphasised “we are just like you,” in many ways mirroring the Irish campaign in 2015. State referendums allowed for more in-depth and personal grassroots communication. In California, where referendums occur with relative frequency, legalisation was a particularly complex process. Where Prop 8 (a referendum) *illegalised* same-sex marriage, many years and a long court battle later Californians were told their referendum was invalid. It violated the constitution. So, while Californians did participate in a referendum that eventually led to the legalisation of same-sex marriage, it was not as neat a process as the referendum that took place in Ireland. In fact, for those who had voted ‘yes’ for Prop 8 (which was a vote to

²⁷⁵ All passed in the range of 52-54%.

²⁷⁶ Campaigns in Maine, Maryland and Washington, employed this strategy successfully.

enshrine one man/one woman marriage into the California constitution), its overturn at the Supreme Court felt particularly dismissive. They had participated in direct democracy and then told their vote did not count. Worse, they felt they had been told they voted *incorrectly*.

For others, this sense of powerlessness emerged alongside Supreme Court decisions like *Obergefell*. In fact, research has shown Court rulings do and do not affect public opinion.²⁷⁷ Some work shows, following a widely publicised and visible decision dealing with a controversial issue like *Obergefell*, polarisation might occur. Where it leads some groups' opinions to become more positive, it leads others to become more negative.²⁷⁸ The negative reaction is often referred to as backlash. Many claim that evidence of backlash to *Obergefell* lies in the propagation of proposed and passed state legislation that negatively impacts LGBTQ+ individuals in the wake of the ruling.²⁷⁹ Those who opposed the Court's decision viewed it as dictatorial. They claim it ushered in social change *not* aligned with majority public opinion. It is, therefore, just and fair to try and ensure local and state governments protected citizens against unjust Supreme Court rule.²⁸⁰

In Ireland, where legalisation is the result of a single and straightforward referendum, individual citizens generally feel more involved in the decision and decision-making process. This sense of personal participation can, if the campaign process is done well, smooth the way for a more easily accepted mandate. Designed only to address constitutional questions, they can and have been utilised as a political tool repeatedly, with differing results, for the same issue. Divorce (1986, 1995) and abortion (1983, 2018) are two of the most obvious recent examples.²⁸¹ Research shows that initiatives and/or referendums encourage voter participation by making citizens feel more involved in democracy.²⁸² This is especially the case when citizens are asked to legislate on moral issues. In Ireland, the history of relitigation raises interesting questions about the lasting authority of referendum decisions, however. Results that change significantly from one referendum to the next,

²⁷⁷ Jeffery J. Mondak, "Policy Legitimacy and the Supreme Court: The Sources and Contexts of Legitimation," *Political Research Quarterly* 47, no. 3 (1994).; Gerald Rosenberg, *The Hollow Hope: Can Courts Bring About Social Change?*, 2nd ed. (London, UK: The University of Chicago Press, 1991); Valerie J. Hoekstra and Jeffrey A. Segal, "The Shepherding of Local Public Opinion: The Supreme Court and Lamb's Chapel," *The Journal of Politics* 58, no. 4 (1996).

²⁷⁸ Charles H. Franklin and Liane C. Kosaki, "Republican Schoolmaster: The U.S. Supreme Court, Public Opinion, and Abortion," *The American Political Science Review* 83, no. 3 (1989).

²⁷⁹ Valerie Bauerlein and Jon Kamp, "Cities Clash with State Governments over Social and Environmental Policies," *The Wall Street Journal*, 7 Jul 2016.

²⁸⁰ Emily Kazyak, "Disrupting Cultural Selves: Constructing Gay and Lesbian Identities in Rural Locales," *Qualitative Sociology* 34, no. 4 (2011).; Christopher S. Parker and Matt A. Barreto, *Change They Can't Believe In: The Tea Party and Reactionary Politics in America* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2014).

²⁸¹ The first abortion referendum enshrined the foetus, while the second one privileged the life of the mother and stripped the foetus of the rights granted by the first Abortion referendum in 1983. The first divorce referendum failed to legalise divorce.

²⁸² David L. Schecter, "Legislating Morality Outside of the Legislature: Direct Democracy, Voter Participation and Morality Politics," *The Social Science Journal* 46, no. 1.

like those found in the first and second abortion decisions, demonstrate the result itself, not just the sense of voter participation, plays a significant role in a result's authority.

The marriage vote has only been raised one time and is unlikely to be relitigated. NO campaigners made it clear they had no intention of pushing for a second referendum. They acknowledged the majority levels of support and recognised the unlikelihood of a different outcome. They accepted the result, even while they found aspects of the campaign, their experience and government bias, unfair. The LGBTQ+ community and their allies, on the other hand, were clear if the referendum had elicited a 'no' vote, they would have worked unwaveringly for relitigation. The question, then, is why the anti-same sex marriage Irish electorate and advocacy community appeared to accept defeat with little apparent backlash, while much of their American counterparts continue to fight against it. A number of causes for the difference are addressed within this chapter. They include issue framing and campaign strategy, especially grassroots organising, individual levels of passion and enthusiasm, intra-community communication and inter-community familiarity.

The Discussion About Marriage Is Not Over: The Difference Between Legal and Social Acceptance

Discussions about marriage are not over simply because same-sex couples have been granted entrance into its institution. General social consensus, however, determines that outright homophobia, sexism and racism are no longer accepted by the mainstream. This often curtails public expression, including what people tell pollsters, journalists and academics. It is not necessarily indicative of how individuals feel privately. Studies continually find that women, the more highly educated, non-religious individuals, younger generations, and political liberals support same-sex marriage at higher levels than do men, the less educated, religious individuals, older generations, and political conservatives.²⁸³ Unsurprisingly, work has shown that heterosexual people who report having a personal connection to gay, lesbian, and bisexual individuals are more likely to have a positive attitude towards gay rights.²⁸⁴ However, animosity, bigotry and discomfort, whether towards sexual minorities or religious adherents, continue play a significant role in social dynamics. Thus, the mainstream generally decries inequality, but does not require privately held views to follow suit.

²⁸³ Robert Andersen and Tina Fetner, "Economic Inequality and Intolerance: Attitudes toward Homosexuality in 35 Democracies," *American Journal of Political Science* 52, no. 4 (2008).; M. Paz Galupo and Marcia L. Pearl, "Bisexual Attitudes toward Same-Sex Marriage," *Journal of Bisexuality* 7, no. 3-4 (2008).; Charles W. Gossett and Gregory B. Lewis, "Changing Public Opinion on Same-Sex Marriage: The Case of California," *Politics and Policy* 36, no. 1 (2008).

²⁸⁴ Fetner, "Economic Inequality and Intolerance: Attitudes toward Homosexuality in 35 Democracies." Gregory Herek, "Gender Gaps in Public Opinion About Lesbians and Gay Men," *Public Opinion Quarterly* 66, no. 1 (2002).

The 2015 vote in Ireland made many, if not all, members of the heteronormative population feel proud of their country. Seen as a sign of progress in mentalities relating to sexuality, gender and bodily autonomy, it also promoted a sense of finality about LGBTQ+ acceptance. Some LGBTQ+ activists see this sense of finality as problematic. It gives the false sense that homophobia is no longer present in any impactful way.²⁸⁵ Activists in both Ireland and the US who continue to work for LGBTQ+ rights organisations, like Griffith and Campisano, were particularly vocal about such concerns. Apathetic people would stop putting resources into activist organisations, they warned. As resources dwindle, so do opportunities for advocacy. Major holes in LGBTQ+ protections, especially in light of proliferating religious freedom laws, made the work, they admitted, seem never ending.

While the US continues to do battle in courts and statehouses, Ireland seems relatively content with its 2015 vote. Considered “settled,” LGBTQ+ acceptance is now widely assumed inevitable. The 2015 vote in Ireland was seen by YES campaigners as evidence that “showed the world” Ireland is now an inclusive country. This feeling was grounded in the profound political and social transformation Ireland has seen in the last decade. Unfortunately, a single vote is not evidence that homophobia no longer exists. Instead, it encourages the idea that there is little left to do on the project of LGBTQ+ acceptance and makes any homophobic actions or attitudes appear an aberration, an anomaly, not something that needs continued redress.

The continued lack of protections for LGBTQ+ individuals and couples in housing, employment, goods/services and education law proves, many argue, that legal inclusion does not automatically transform into social inclusion. The lack of protections for LGBTQ+ people significantly impacts their real and perceived safety. The US leaves these protections up to individual states. It is perhaps because of this that conversations about LGBTQ+ inclusion and exclusion are more frequent and robust in the US than in Ireland, where protections are nationally dictated and more prevalent.²⁸⁶ It is certainly true in both locales that public displays of physical affection between same-sex partners continue to result in harassment and violence.²⁸⁷ Legalisation provided equal access to marriage as an institution for same-sex couples, although careful legislating can chip away at that access. So, while legalisation has certainly aided in the acceptance of same-sex couples, it has not automatically created equal status or genuine social acceptance.

²⁸⁵ Katie Donohoe, "Panti Bliss Calls on Irish State to Combat Hate Crime Following Homophobic Attack in Dublin," *Gay Community News*, 21 Oct 2019.

²⁸⁶ LGBTQ+ rights concerns include access to adoption and IVF, anti-discrimination protections (including employment, vocational training, advertising, collective agreements, the provision of goods and services, and other publicly available opportunities like incitement to hatred), protections for gender identity and expression (ie ability to change gender on birth certificate), illegalising conversion therapy and inclusive sex education (recently debated in the Dail), and marriage.

²⁸⁷ Tara McKelvey, "Us Top Court Divided as It Ponders Lgbt Rights," *BBC*, 8 Oct 2019.

Both sides expressed post-legislation concerns. NO campaigners are concerned legislation only allows for one view on marriage and family. This time, it is an all-inclusive one. They feel less free to express their views and worry about being socially or even financially penalised. They told me stories about people losing jobs due to the public expression of private positions. Most interviewees accepted the finality of the law, but expressed frustration at being forced to comply with the new norm. They feel derided and shunned for a belief that has been mainstream for most of both Irish and American history. Not looking to repeal same-sex marriage, they were looking to find space to express their views in a society that appears increasingly intolerant of them. The dismissal of NO campaigners as worthy of participation in public discourse or social inclusion removes the right of citizenship for individuals whose beliefs are currently at odds with public favour. Although not illegal, the sense of exclusion is felt with increasing fervour by those who no longer find their voices welcomed or included in national discourse about sexuality, gender or familial relationships. A fair and inclusive democracy, however, should include all participants and insist on equal public space for all those looking to participate whether or not they are in the majority.

Two new discussions find themselves at the centre of a post-legislation reality. The first is how LGBTQ+ individuals maintain and gain further community protections because, while the majority of the LGBTQ+ community expresses enthusiasm for the recent legal changes in marriage law, there remain a myriad of inequalities that have not improved. The second is what role those who reject the inclusion of same-sex couples in the marriage institution can play in today's marriage-inclusive society. This is not an either/or debate. Struggles for inclusion and representation exist in all corners of the communities involved, but unfortunately play an underrated role in the evolution of discourse.

A Problem With The Marriage Agenda: Queer Dissatisfaction and Feelings of Exclusion

Many queer individuals believe acceptance has become predicated on the expectation that, if let into the mainstream, they will act accordingly. That is, they will act "normal" (as normal is defined by the mainstream) and leave off the disruptive behaviour often associated with queerness. Corporations, they believe, have seized on that expectation and are capitalising on it. The Dublin Pride parade in 2018 was largely made up of corporate sponsors flaunting big cheerful rainbow floats and wholesome family imagery. The parade's theme, "we are family," was meant to show "we are just like you." The Marriage Equality campaigns in Ireland and the US were, in fact, designed to be palatable to the widest non-queer audience possible, and demonstrated the political success of such messaging. But this strategy left out members of the LGBTQ+ community who refused to conform to a mainstreaming that disregarded the qualities that made the queer community unique, enduring and transformational. The counterculture that once provided a safe space for non-conforming queer individuals to find refuge, they felt, was sacrificed for acceptance into the mainstream.

Critical activists acknowledged the remarkable shift in attitude that has taken place over the last 50 years, but rejected the emphasis on an “assimilationist” agenda they argued has overtaken the early gay rights movements which envisioned a society that did not (and should not) require outsiders to conform to be accepted. Rather, they were accepted for being different.²⁸⁸ Radical activists argued the movement has sold out. It no longer works to change institutions; it works to join them.

In fact, marriage equality campaigns across the globe have relied heavily on vocabulary that evokes traditional visions of marriage: two person, monogamous, children-oriented family structures. These structures emphasise “we’re just like you.” Evan Wolfson, founder of *Freedom to Marry*, intentionally pushed this vocabulary because “it is used by non-gay people to discuss a variety of important questions beyond actual marriage: questions of love and commitment and dedication and self-sacrifice and family, but also equality and participation and connectedness.”²⁸⁹ Their Messaging Director, Thalia Zepatos, helped craft this idea into political strategy. She knew the biggest challenge was going to be changing straight people’s minds. So, she used language she thought “non-gay people” would best understand. Neither Irish nor American YES advocates were looking to dissolve the institution of marriage. They were looking to be invited into its relatively narrow confines and their campaigns reflected this.

It was frustrating for queer activists to have to, once again, ask permission to be included in their own society. They felt burdened with the responsibility to make themselves intelligible to heteronormative society. “Why is it not *their* responsibility to understand our differentness,” YES advocates asked. Tasked with making themselves and their community ‘familiar enough’ to straight people to gain acceptance, YES advocates were tired of the perpetual expectation that *they* were the ones who needed to change. That they were *still* having to do all the work. In this context, some advocates criticised the “we are just like you” strategy. They saw it as a placation of the straight community that only reinforced the narrative that the best life was one taking place within the traditionally elevated family unit and excluded from legal and social protections anyone seeking to exist outside this unit. Inclusion in the traditional two-partner marriage structure simply allowed non-queer people to feel good about themselves and their inclusion of queer people. It did not require heteronormative society to alter its own cultural dominance but reinforced damaging power structures, including economic and physically violent ones.

²⁸⁸ Martin Duberman, *Has the Gay Movement Failed?* (Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2018), 57.

²⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 58.

All interviewees involved in this project eventually joined the marriage equality fight. However, the concerns and criticisms listed above hovered around the edges of our conversations. Activists like Ailbhe Smyth readily acknowledged her critique of marriage as a heteronormative patriarchal institution, including the marriage event itself, in which, traditionally, a woman was given away by one man to another (father of the bride to the groom), was dressed in virginal white and was expected to sit quietly while the men gave toasts. All these practices reinforced the male role as the head of the household, the breadwinner, the dominant figure to her role as subservient, homemaker. In a same-sex ceremony this dynamic undoubtedly changed, but for Smyth, the legacy of such practices remained.

Furthermore, traditionally marriage led to the creation of a child-centred family. This orientation facilitated and encouraged dynamics that largely reinforced dominant and submissive roles. With the addition of children, women stayed home more frequently. They left the paid workforce, however, continued to work long and exhausting days with little to no financial recognition for their work. This further encouraged power disparity. For many interviewees, marriage was initially seen as a structure that limits gender roles and restricted definitions of love and healthy or meaningful relationships. They spoke about seeing marriage as a fundamentally constricting and thus conservative idea. However, for this reason, they acknowledged that it has been a place where liberals and conservatives have been able to find common ground. Legalisation is, in many ways, an expansion of a conservative institution.²⁹⁰

In Ireland, YES advocates largely rejected the strategy of mainstreaming before Katherine Zappone and Anne Louise Gilligan convinced them otherwise. Many YES advocates expressed hurt and anger over their community's longstanding exclusion from legitimacy. It would take more than passing a single law to make retribution for a long history of abuse and exclusion. Thus, the first hurdle for *Marriage Equality Ireland*, when it was finally formed, was to convince their own community members it was a worthwhile cause. Many members of the LGBTQ+ community in Ireland grew up *before* the decriminalisation of homosexuality. They spent their time outside the mainstream, necessarily forced to its edges. They saw marriage as an exclusivist, patriarchal institution that neither welcomed them nor deserved their participation. Even now, with marriage expanded to include same-sex couples, it is seen by many to dictate where legitimate sex can occur, where all legitimate love should end up, dismissing and demeaning any sexual or loving relationship which occurs outside its confines. Yet, Smyth noted, with some humour, that many who had once been vocal in their rejection of the institution are now married themselves. It seemed it only became a desire, she said, when it became a possibility. We can only dream of that which we can conceive.

²⁹⁰ Theodore B. Olson, "The Conservative Case for Gay Marriage," *Newsweek*, January 8, 2010.

Yet, there remains much agreement that marriage should be viewed as just one step on the path towards equal access to housing, healthcare, partner and children's rights and more. "The problem is not the marriage litigation itself," Kate Redburn argued in her 2016 essay *After Gay Marriage*, "but that it has been prioritised at the expense of directly battling economic inequality and violence."²⁹¹

The dichotomy of religious voters versus the LGBTQ+ community crumbles under real scrutiny. Faith, marriage and sexuality are not limited to two neatly boxed opposing positions. Some LGBTQ+ Christians see their faith co-opted and used against them. Some agree that marriage should be protected for heterosexual couples only.²⁹² Some LGBTQ+ atheists disagree with the idea of marriage but want to see equality achieved, nonetheless. Some disagree with marriage as an institution and see LGBTQ+ participation in its perpetuation as a betrayal of queer culture, the fight for its dissolution and the problematic power structure marriage upholds. As such, it is not religion that appears the greatest divide on this issue, but rather where an individual falls along the liberal/conservative line, irrespective of their religious or non-religious affiliation. The variety of voices involved in this highly emotionally and deeply personal conflict present a host of complexities to its so-called "resolution." The focus of this research on two particular groups is not to discount other voices. It recognises their significant impact on discourse and their value in enhancing the too often simplistic and dualistic public perception of this and other such debates.

Transnational Comparisons: Rhetorical Framing, Perceptions, Judgements, and Impacts

This project looks specifically at debates surrounding same-sex marriage in the context of political campaigns which includes both their public expression and private experience. Public campaign strategies have become increasingly globalised. They are shared, officially and unofficially, between the US, Ireland, and other nations facing similar political negotiations. What follows is an examination of the transnational collaboration between the US and Ireland, including official campaign strategy and design.

²⁹¹ Kate Redburn, "After Gay Marriage," in *The Future We Want : Radical Ideas for a New Century*, ed. Sarah Leonard and Bhaskar Sunkara (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2016).

²⁹² Keith Mills was a prominent spokesperson against the marriage referendum and a founding member of *Mothers and Fathers Matter*. He is gay and an atheist. He argued against same-sex marriage because he believes marriage is uniquely for procreation.

Transnational Narratives and Strategies: From the US to Ireland

Campaigners in Ireland and the US used similar strategies to transform people's perceptions of same-sex marriage over the last decade. Their framing and messaging, in turn, helped determine how both politicians and civilians viewed and engaged with the issue. While a clear line of influence can be traced between the two countries, the willingness of interviewees to discuss this connection varied between parties.

LGBTQ+ activists spoke openly about personal and organisational connections. They acknowledged and praised the globalisation of their movement. If not the only, then the most direct connection between campaigns in the US and Ireland was through Thalia Zepatos. Post-*Obergefell*, her work continued with *Freedom to Marry* as an international consultant and included work with *Marriage Equality Ireland*. She continues to work with LGBTQ+ rights groups around the globe looking to secure marriage equality. Not alone in her effort to share the lessons of past campaigns, *MEI* advocates too stressed the importance of sharing their experiences and insights with groups working for the same cause, including those in Poland, Hungary and Australia. *MEI* acknowledged their use of transnational campaign strategies, especially ones learned from American activists. They were particularly vocal about their use of grassroots organising strategies like the intentional targeting of local politicians and canvassing strategies like one described by Kathleen Campisano called *deep canvassing*. Deep canvassing is discussed in detail later on in this chapter.

The NO campaign, on the other hand, refused to acknowledge any intentional cross-national strategic similarities. Despite their unwillingness to discuss connections, arguments centring on children, the importance of a two different-sex parent household and the sacredness of the procreative family were virtually indistinguishable from similar groups in the US. LGBTQ+ advocates were particularly sceptical of such denials by NO campaigners. They speculated heavily, however, could present no definitive proof. So, while YES advocates openly and wholly embrace a globalised strategy, NO campaigners generally did not. At least not publicly. Notably, YES advocates largely shrugged off or even praised their own transnational engagement. At a minimum, they saw no problem with it. Yet, NO campaigners, who denied any financial or strategic connection, were heavily criticised for it by their opponents. It was a hypocrisy YES advocates appeared not to see, while NO campaigners saw nothing but it.

Pro-Same Sex Marriage Advocacy

Zepatos spoke extensively about the similarities of opposition to same-sex marriage globally. While each culture has its own values surrounding marriage, opposition to its expansion was shockingly

similar. The same stereotypes about LGBTQ+ couples and their love were present, she noted, in California and Ireland. They were also present in the campaigns she has aided since. This consistency is at least partly due to the unintentional and intentional importation of ideas from abroad. Intellectual osmosis happens unintentionally through exposure to debates and discussions in other countries, and intentionally through relationships sought with official organisations that lend financial and strategic advice to local advocacy groups.

Zepatos emphasised the importance of laying groundwork to provide a social environment that makes passing legislation, by way of congress or a referendum, more likely. This happens at the individual, community and political level. One strategy that was designed specifically with this goal in mind was called “out to your senator.” First implemented in the US at the state level in the lead up to state legislation, it was so successful it was adopted by advocacy groups abroad and became one major aspect of Ireland’s campaign. In Ireland, called “out to your TD,”²⁹³ it encouraged constituents to meet with their local representatives face-to-face, and in doing so made an abstract concept tangible. Meeting with representatives replaced an intangible, for some, gay community with a human face. Or, more cynically, they now saw a constituent who could play a role in their re-election. In Ireland, it encouraged TDs to put the issue on the ballot. It also developed a culture that encouraged everyday citizens to get involved in the support of same-sex couples. In the US, it was not only citizens and representatives, but judges who needed to experience this social transformation. While judges are supposed to be above social influence, Zepatos noted, they are not so out of touch with society as to be able to ignore it completely. If “we had not worked to change the culture more broadly,” she argued, *Obergefell* would not have passed.

Advocates in both jurisdictions emphasised the message must come from “the middle.” This helped with the creation of spaces where individuals from varying positions could interact without fear of retribution. The goal was to encourage key demographics to feel safe in coming forward, primarily conservative, older and religious voters. In Ireland, open forum ‘Q&A sessions’ and community events provided a space where people could come and ask questions in a “relaxed, open and non-judgmental environment.” A few of these campaign events sought to address individuals more likely to oppose marriage equality. This included a group called *Faith in Marriage Equality*, which was formed specifically to engage with religious voters. Not directly associated with *MEI*, however, they often appeared quite marginal.

²⁹³ TD stands for Teachta Dála, a member of Dáil Éireann, the lower house of the Oireachtas (Irish Parliament).

In the US, there were fewer open or shared spaces in which undecided voters felt safe to ask questions. However, activists like Campisano emphasised the importance of engaging religious voters and warned against ignoring them. To assume religious voters automatically held conservative views on marriage or that they were unlikely to change their position, she said, meant disregarding whole communities of potential allies. She believed this lack of engagement across secular-religious lines during California's Prop 8 was one of the reasons it failed.

Anti-Same Sex Marriage Campaigning

In both California and Ireland, NO campaigners struggled to translate religious reasoning into secular rhetoric. Steering clear of explicit references to God, the Bible or Christianity, NO campaigners emphasised child welfare and family stability, claiming same-sex marriage would directly lead to marital breakdown and would destabilise families. Since procreation was the central purpose and product of marriage, they feared its destabilisation would have lasting detrimental effects on children.

The use of arguments in Ireland could be traced back to the US. Groups like *Focus on the Family* and the *National Organisation for Marriage* early on honed and employed these translated arguments to varying levels of success in political and legal spheres. In fact, organisations like *California Family Council* had used virtually indistinguishable claims about the dangers of same-sex marriage for over a decade. As early as 2007, in the lead up to Prop 8, members of *CFC* were arguing for the importance of a mother *and* a father to the wellbeing of a child:

My worldview informs me that marriage is far more than two people "in love." Marriage is about generational, societal well-being. Yes, society and its presumed protector, law, continue to support the marriage commitment between a man and a woman because it is the best way to increase the likelihood that children will be raised in a home with both a mother and a father....[O]verwhelming social science research continues to show that children do best when supplied with the benefits of mother *and* father, not just two individuals in a relationship. ²⁹⁴

Their argument was the government intentionally sanctioned heterosexual unions explicitly because of the social stability provided by 'opposite'-sex marriage and childrearing. Traditional marriage advocates in both locales acknowledged that some oppose same-sex marriage because of religious reasons, however, maintained that their campaigns were grounded in legitimate social science research. They "empathised with the feeling of unfairness" their opponents expressed but claimed

²⁹⁴ "Changing Views on Marriage: A Conversation between Lorri Jean and Ron Prentice."

the subjective sense of fairness must not override the historical meaning and purpose of marriage. The good of society must come before the wants of individuals.

YES advocates in Ireland saw a direct line between American, primarily evangelical, and Irish arguments against same-sex marriage. One example, many interviewees pointed to, was an evangelical pamphlet called *77 Non-Religious Reasons to Support Man/Woman Marriage*. Multiple Irish YES advocates noted the shocking similarities between specific language and argumentations in the pamphlet and those used by NO campaigners, like Senator Ronan Mullen and Breda O'Brien. The pamphlet, ostensibly a guide on how to secularise religious arguments relating to the importance and structure of heterosexual marriage, was developed by the *Ruth Institute* which is currently located in Louisiana.²⁹⁵ It has become a useful document for political and social activists alike across the globe. Most arguments centre on the importance of children having a mother and father, that mothers and fathers are not interchangeable and that non-biological parents are not equal to biological parents. This includes arguments that seek to delegitimise social science studies that claim children do just as well with two parents of the same sex. A number of these arguments were raised during the 2015 Marriage Referendum and backfired because they inherently devalued any family that did not adhere to a one father, one mother biological structure. NO campaigners in Ireland learned, through this process, that some arguments were not importable.

Transnational Finances: US Influence on Recent Irish Referendums

While Irish YES advocates are convinced the NO campaign received undeclared financial support from the US, significant financial support has not yet been proven. However, there is no doubt they received verbal support. The *National Organisation for Marriage (NOM)* is a well-funded American evangelical Christian organisation that emerged in 2007 specifically to ensure the passage of Prop 8 in California. They spoke out strongly in support of Ireland's NO campaign, urging evangelical Christians at home and abroad to visit keepmarriage.org.²⁹⁶ In the letter they sent their members, *NOM* wrote:

²⁹⁵The *Ruth Institute* describes itself as "inspiring survivors of the sexual revolution," and as a "global non-profit organization equipping Christians to defend the family and build a civilization of love" through education and research. While the Ruth Institute bills itself as a Christian organisation, it clarifies its work can be useful to individuals and groups from all walks of life, "religious or otherwise, who share our views, in whole or in part, regardless of their positions on other issues." "About," Ruth Institute, <http://www.ruthinstitute.org/about>.

²⁹⁶ It is now a defunct website.

Just like in campaigns for marriage here in America, slanted public opinion polls become fodder to influence and depress supporters of marriage. This is happening in Ireland. If [the NO campaign] can manage to pull off a victory, it will be a tremendous boost to the cause of marriage worldwide. Please do what you can to bring awareness to their efforts.²⁹⁷

Despite this public plea, they have denied giving any money to the Irish NO campaign. The NO campaign has also emphatically denied receiving financial support. It is not surprising. The Irish electorate was clear it did not want American religious extremism involved in their politics. NO campaigners also complained the YES campaign appeared to have plenty of international support and never suffered for it. Ultimately, American organisations that supported a ‘no’ vote were not largely visible during the 2015 Marriage Referendum. They were far more so during the 2018 Abortion Referendum, but even then were not welcome by most campaigners on either side.²⁹⁸

Despite complaints by NO campaigners, the YES campaign did not receive significant sums from non-Irish sources during the official campaign process. YES advocates did receive a grant from Atlantic Philanthropies before they became an established political campaign. In 2004, Chuck Feeney, an Irish-American billionaire, began issuing grants in support of human rights issues in Ireland. His organisation supported hundreds of causes over its thirty year run, marriage equality among them. It was proud to announce that its grant helped “strengthen and expand the Gay and Lesbian Equality Network (GLEN) and Marriage Equality (and its predecessor), two organisations that laid the groundwork for passage of a civil partnership law in 2010.”²⁹⁹ The grant, if nothing else, allowed the movement to grow and freed up money to spend elsewhere, however, it provided no direct financial support for the referendum campaign.

David Quinn, among other NO campaigners complained: “If we had been given such a grant, you can guarantee we would never hear the end of it.”³⁰⁰ Not a grievance they made quietly, YES advocates responded by stating it was used up well before the referendum campaign began. Plus, they pointed out, the official campaign’s financial support came almost entirely from small donors. YES advocates seemed unaware of how their criticisms of US influence on the NO campaign could appear disingenuous and failed to see any problem with the support, strategic or financial, they, themselves, received from US allies. Understandably, NO campaigners bemoaned the injustice of

²⁹⁷ Henry McDonald, "Us Christians 'Bankrolling' No Campaign in Ireland's Gay Marriage Referendum," *The Guardian*, 16 May 2015.

²⁹⁸ During the 2018 Abortion Referendum the more graphic and in-your-face strategies of American activists worked largely turn off Irish voters from the anti-abortion cause. It also turned off Irish anti-abortion advocates who described it as crass and “not the Irish way.”

²⁹⁹ Susan Parker, "The Path to Marriage Equality in Ireland: A Case Study," (2017).

³⁰⁰ Quinn.

liberal groups taking US help without penalisation. Even worse, they noted, international support seemed to validate the YES campaigns' righteousness.³⁰¹

Part II: Examining Same-Sex Marriage Discourse Through the Lens of Jonathan Haidt's *Moral Foundations Theory*

If we wish to bridge ideological divides, we must work to understand individual and community psychologies. Social psychologist, Jonathan Haidt, researches the relationship between positions people hold and the certainty with which they hold them. His work seeks to explain how individuals and groups evolved to have diverse value systems, where these value systems may overlap, and how we may better engage across value system divides. Today's political climate is full of mistrust and absolutes. A number of academics, activists and politicians are scrambling to figure out what we can do to halt, if not repair, the damage such mentalities are doing to the social and institutional fabric. Our inability to see past our own righteousness, Haidt argues, is central to the breakdown of public discourse. This research's data shows how this righteousness negatively impacts same-sex marriage discourse in Ireland and the US. Participants articulate a clear sense of their own "team's" absolute righteousness and a certainty of the absolute insincerity and hypocrisy of the other.

Politicians and advocates too often assume and promote the idea that we rely only on rationality and reason to make decisions. This is not true. Instead, much of what drives political thought and action has to do with visceral responses, not entirely rational thought. YES and NO campaigners both exemplified this integration of emotion and instinct in their debate participation. Thus, instead of clinging to the illusion that intellectual reason is at the centre of opinion formation, improved assessment must recognise the significant role of innate, instinctual reactions to opinion formation, personal interaction and political engagement.

Part II of this chapter examines insights provided by Haidt's *Moral Foundations Theory* that allow for a clearer and deeper analysis of the same-sex marriage debate. His theory assesses the role of intuition in moral decision making and examines the foundations that encourage the development of diverse moral truths. These insights can be applied to improve communication and dialogue between groups whose instincts repel one another. It can help facilitate deeper understanding about and between individuals involved in this and other complex and highly personal issues.

³⁰¹ This same situation appeared true throughout the 2018 Abortion Referendum.

Moral Psychology: *MFT* and the Role of Intuition in Moral-Political Decision Making

Jonathan Haidt, Craig Joseph and Jesse Graham first developed *MFT* in 2007 with the intention of explaining the variations in human moral reasoning. They linked this reasoning to innate, modular functions. Building on work already done by cultural anthropologist, Richard Schweder, it argued 5 (eventually 6) pillars of morality lie at the foundation of all human value systems:

Care/Harm
Fairness/Cheating
Loyalty/Betrayal
Authority/Subversion
Sanctity/Degradation
Liberty/Oppression³⁰²

It was, in part, a rebuttal to work associated with developmental psychologists Lawrence Kohlberg and Jean Piaget. Kohlberg and Piaget believed children's moral reasoning developed over time. The developers of *MFT* felt this assessment of moral reasoning was too cerebral and failed to recognise the power of emotion. *MFT* emphasises, instead, a social intuitional approach to morality which argues quick, intuitive, emotional judgments direct our moral positions. Reasoning is secondary and is applied over time to justify our positions.

MFT is not without its critics. Christopher Suhler and Patricia Churchland argue against the biological plausibility of *MFT*'s emphasis on innate, modular foundations.³⁰³ Chelsea Schein and Kurt Gray argue all six pillars are really just variations on one theme: harm.³⁰⁴ Still others have provided alternative versions of *MFT* which include the Model of Moral Motives, Relationship Regulation Theory or the theory of Morality As Cooperation.³⁰⁵ Nevertheless, Haidt, Joseph, and Graham have shown their theory to have wide application and *MFT* has been adopted by many researchers in the field of moral and political psychology.

³⁰² Liberty/Oppression, added later in Haidt's *The Righteous Mind*, was developed in relation to an observed difference between "proportionality fairness" and "coercion by a dominating power or persons." This was generally a distinction required to understand libertarians in the American sense of the term. Libertarians are, unsurprisingly, grounded primarily in the liberty/oppression foundation.

³⁰³ Patricia Churchland and Christopher Suhler, "Can Innate, Modular 'Foundations' Explain Morality? Challenges for Haidt's Moral Foundations Theory," *Journal of Cognitive Neuroscience* 23, no. 9 (2011).

³⁰⁴ Kurt Gray and Chelsea Schein, "The Theory of Dyadic Morality: Reinventing Moral Judgment by Redefining Harm," *Personality and Social Psychology Review* 22, no. 1 (2017).

³⁰⁵ Nate Carnes and Ronnie Janoff-Bulman, "Surveying the Moral Landscape," *Ibid.* 17, no. 3 (2013). Alan Page Fiske and Tage Shakti Rai, "Moral Psychology Is Relationship Regulation: Moral Motives for Unity, Hierarchy, Equality, and Proportionality," *Psychological Review* 118, no. 1 (2011).; Matthew Chesters, Oliver Scott Curry, and Casper Van Lissa, "Mapping Morality with a Compass: Testing the Theory of 'Morality-as-Cooperation' with a New Questionnaire," *Journal of Research in Personality* 78 (2019).

MFT is particularly relevant because it addresses cultural-political conflicts, like same-sex marriage, through the theory that there exist a variety of legitimate worldviews. Originally developed to examine strict cultural differences, *MFT* has increasingly been used to help explain differences between political ideologies, like those illustrated by the liberal/conservative divide over same-sex marriage. It has been used to explain fundamental divides between the political positions of progressives/liberals, libertarians and conservatives. According to *MFT*, progressives/liberals appear most sensitive to care, fairness and oppression foundations (when linked to their own tribe), while conservatives are more equally sensitive to all six foundations (with a slight increase in sensitivity to authority, loyalty and sanctity). These foundations, it turns out, are better predictors of people's values and political or positional affiliation than demographics, which have long been held up as relative gospel. Values, beliefs and a sense of belonging cut across demographic divides and have implications for how we think about and manage difference. What you believe, not who you are, become central to definitions of identity.³⁰⁶ Moral instincts are the well from which these beliefs spring.

Moral intuitions, according to Haidt, arise automatically before moral reasoning has a chance to begin. He presents a useful, if not flawless, metaphor to explain the connection between moral instinct and reasoning: *the elephant and the rider*. In this metaphor, the mind is divided into two parts: the rider (the “controlled process”) and the elephant (the “automatic process”). The rider evolved to serve the elephant. In service, the rider works to create comprehensible justifications for innate senses about rightness and wrongness, “gut feelings.” Thus, post-hoc justifications *explain* positions. They are not the root cause of opinions. We use them, consciously and unconsciously, to explain to others and ourselves why we develop strong views. When positions reside at an instinctual level, however, reasoned arguments have little hope of gaining traction:

If you think that moral reasoning is something we do to figure out the truth, you'll constantly be frustrated by how foolish, biased, and illogical people become when they disagree with you. But if you think about moral reasoning as a skill we humans evolved to further our social agendas—to justify our own actions and to defend the teams we belong to—then things will make a lot more sense.³⁰⁷

³⁰⁶ In *Mapping the Moral Domain*, Haidt and Graham present their Moral Foundations Questionnaire, which engages individuals from all ages and political beliefs. By understanding which pillars make up a person's moral foundation, we can accurately predict their position on most political positions.

³⁰⁷ Haidt, *The Righteous Mind*, xiv.

Haidt's definition of morality is a combination of innateness and social learning, not abstract reasoning. Views are less about believing than belonging. Congruent with Melissa Michelson and Brian Harrison's findings, opinion is often a means of affirming one's identity and belonging to a group. "We're born to be righteous," Haidt argues, "but we have to learn what, exactly, people like us should be righteous about."³⁰⁸

MFT divides its first 5 foundations into two main clusters: *individualising* (care/harm and fairness/cheating) and group-focused or *binding* (loyalty/betrayal, authority/subversion and sanctity/degradation). In theory, these moral foundations arose to address problems common to our hunter-gatherer ancestors, specifically relating to intertribal and intra-tribal conflicts. The *individualising* foundations ensure we cared for and tended to individuals within our group. They taught us who to care for, who to believe, who to blame. The *binding* foundations developed to help bind groups together, to make them stronger and more unified in the face of intertribal conflicts. Narratives about meaning, purpose and history work to bind groups together. They speak to and support the instincts of community members. They teach us who to believe. They teach us what to be righteous about.

People form convictions through a myriad of personal and public interactions with individuals, communities, authorities and the media.³⁰⁹ The means through which this information is communicated is central to opinion formation. Research done by Michelson and Harrison show a person's views on issues like same-sex marriage are significantly influenced by the views of others with whom they share identity markers. Individuals shift opinion to align with someone they respect.³¹⁰ This was the case during the 2015 Marriage Equality Referendum, YES advocates explained. They believed the actors, sports stars, politicians, and local parish priests who spoke out in favor of same-sex marriage, who did not have specific ties to the community, were ultimately the most influential aspect of the whole campaign. Voters could relate to them through shared identity markers and trusted them because they had no personal stake in the issue. Our opinions, Harrison and Michelson argue in agreement with Haidt, are not nearly as logical or entrenched as we think. Rather, they are primarily tied to our social standing and relationships, which is why we tend to believe the ideas we hold are relatively common and those of our opponent relatively uncommon.

³⁰⁸ Ibid., 30-31.

³⁰⁹ Cindy T. Christen and Albert C. Gunther, "The Influence of Mass Media and Other Culprits on the Projection of Personal Opinion," *Communication Research* 30, no. 4 (2003).; William P. Eveland and Dietram A. Scheufele, "Perceptions of 'Public Opinion' and 'Public' Opinion Expression," *International Journal of Public Opinion Research* 13, no. 1 (2001).; Patricia Moy, David Domke, and Keith Stamm, "The Spiral of Silence and Public Opinion on Affirmative Action," *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly* 78, no. 1 (2001).

³¹⁰ Brian F. Harrison and Melissa R. Michelson, *Listen, We Need to Talk : How to Change Attitudes About LGBT Rights* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017).

Communicating with those outside one's worldview forces a confrontation with the reality of diverse thinking.

Basic exposure to alternative opinions and reasoning can lessen the tendency to conflate one's own opinion with the opinion of the general population.³¹¹ This is not always the case, however, and the inability to see legitimacy or logic in the position of others makes positions that conflict with our own appear hypocritical, manipulative and disingenuous. They make "the other" appear calculated and unworthy of sincere engagement. Hypocrisy and dishonesty were, notably, the two most common terms used by YES advocates to describe their opponent. They called NO campaigners "inauthentic," who "lacked conviction" and were dishonest about the root of their objections. YES advocates thought NO campaigners "didn't really care about the issue" and "refused to acknowledge religion as the basis of their objection." If only NO campaigners had been honest, many claimed, "I would have had respect them." But even when NO campaigners acknowledged the religious aspect of their reasoning, they were ridiculed. "Religion has no place in politics," many YES advocates argued. Besides, religion was "just an excuse." It was really just "bigotry" or, more forgivingly, "discomfort with difference." Ultimately, viewing NO campaigners and their arguments as inauthentic or hypocritical allowed YES advocates to easily dismiss them.

According to *MFT*, members of progressive/conservative camps are, at least to a degree, unable to understand the moral foundations of the other. They see morally driven words or behaviour grounded in foundations they do not understand as the product of some other, self-interested or evil, motivation. Indeed, interviewees saw their own positions as grounded in legitimate and powerful moral truths, however, could see little to no legitimacy or authenticity in those of their opponents'. Rawls's translation requirement in many ways tries to address this problem. In his selection of secular discourse as the common language, however, he limits the ability of some groups to authentically participate. This tension is not helped by often two-dimensional caricatures of difficult, very complex problems. Both sides often reduce those outside their in-group to stereotypes, riddled with stigmas and cultural baggage. The persistence of these dichotomous stereotypes is in large part because they make complex problems and people easy to understand. They allow easy separation into "us" and "them," which often implies "they" are somehow less human, less compassionate, less intelligent or multifaceted than "we" are. Instead, stereotypes are, more often than not, evidence of our *inability* to understand.

³¹¹ Joachim Krueger and Russell W. Clement, "The Truly False Consensus Effect: An Ineradicable and Egocentric Bias in Social Perception," *Journal of personality and social psychology* 67, no. 4 (1994).; Magdalena Wojcieszak and Vincent Price, "What Underlies the False Consensus Effect? How Personal Opinion and Disagreement Affect Perception of Public Opinion," *International Journal of Public Opinion Research* 21, no. 1 (2009).

Shankar Vedantam, who studies the effect of unconscious bias on everyday life, wrote in 2010 about an unsettling trend in American national politics. Today his observation appears increasingly applicable throughout the West. The political right, he observed, is angry. The left is disgusted and full of contempt. The “dominant tone of conservatives is shrill, the dominant tone of liberals is sarcastic...the right is convinced that the left is evil. The left is convinced that the right is [stupid].”³¹² This observation is especially obvious in attitudes present throughout right/left media. In the US, rightwing talk radio and Fox News are littered with raised fists and voices. These contrast sharply with the irony and mockery prevalent among left wing journalists, commentators and in late night news-based shows like those on Comedy Central.

Participants in this project fell along shockingly similar lines. Where NO campaigners gesticulated fiercely, raised their voices and even cried, YES advocates ridiculed and dismissed. The angry roots of rightwing grievance politics appear to be the outgrowth of this sense of belittlement. NO campaigners’ post-legislation perception of “gloating” winners, the winner’s “deal with it” attitude towards them and the sense that “nobody cares about your views” only reinforced their own victimisation narrative. The victimisation narrative, in turn, reinforced their right to be angry. Not alone in their anger, the left too appears angry, but have moved beyond mere anger to outright contempt. Contempt, an emotion that mixes anger with disgust, works to affirm the progressive left’s sense of self-superiority notes Vedantam. Contempt is rooted in revulsion. It is, according to studies, the best predictor of an irreconcilable split between individuals. And while the right and left do not need to love each other, they do need to live with each other. At a national level this seems to make the contempt expressed by the left a greater barrier to dialogue than the anger demonstrated by the right.

Among Haidt’s observations is that the culture of most research institutions leans towards a worldview that values secularism, inquisitiveness, egalitarianism, and individualism.³¹³ They are, predominantly, members of the cultural and political left. A natural by-product of their staffs, it is why, Haidt argues, previous theories of morality had fallen victim to assumptions of the neutrality of such positions. Its result has been the perpetuation of Western, educated elitism in academic work relating to moral developmental psychology. Because moral domains vary by culture, this view dismisses the legitimacy of those cultures and communities that fall outside such a definition. Battles

³¹² Shankar Vedantam, "Angry Conservatives and Contemptuous Liberals: How Unconscious Scripts Shape Our National Conversation," *Psychology Today*, 25 Oct 2010. (The original quote included the term ‘retarded’ instead of ‘stupid’.)

³¹³ *MFT* articulates a general division, globally, between WEIRD (Western, Educated Industrial Rich and Democratic) and non-WEIRD cultures. They discuss the important fact that what most researchers see as standard (i.e. WEIRD) is an anomaly globally. WEIRD cultures are far more *uncommon* globally, but are often the types of cultures that surround universities and thus research institutions and researchers.

over moral truth claims, in fact, lie at the heart of same-sex marriage debates. Individuals on both sides see only one possible moral position, so everything else is deemed immoral. The person who holds another view becomes inherently immoral. Since an immoral person does not require or deserve reasonable consideration, they can be easily dismissed. This logic was used by members of both campaigns to dismiss the legitimacy of their opponents.

Defining a moral system as “interlocking sets of values, virtues, norms, practices, identities, institutions, technologies, and evolved psychological mechanisms that work together to suppress or regulate self-interest and make cooperative societies possible,”³¹⁴ is intentionally functionalist. It does not specify content or what content counts as moral. A functionalist definition declares no single set of moral truths as more or less “right” than others. This work uses descriptive definitions of morality (what people *think* is moral) rather than normative definitions (what *is* moral) because they allow for a more self-reflective and fundamentally non-judgmental approach to sacred truths and moral reasoning.

The most productive way for dialogue between oppositional parties to take place, Haidt argues, is for all members to self-reflect, which requires recognising the fact that we all bring our own assumptions and ‘truths’ to the table. Haidt’s *MFT* explains why “debunking” the beliefs of one’s opponent rarely changes their mind. When pushed, most people are unwilling to change their minds despite an inability to reason their position “rationally.” Thus, moral instinct, Haidt warns, is almost always victorious against an attempt to debunk justifications. One strategy that seems to cut through this positional inflexibility discussed by Haidt, and supported by my data, is the telling of personal stories. This is why engaging respectfully and through personal experience and appropriate emotion do more to connect polarised individuals than ‘rationally’ reasoned arguments. Storytelling speaks to our emotional selves and, in doing so, could bridge divides where ‘facts’ and ‘reason’ could not. Storytelling was, thus, identified by campaigners as a political strategy that had implications beyond any one single campaign. Through its aid in productive dialogical engagement, it could, they argued, have lasting and transformational effects.

³¹⁴ Haidt, *The Righteous Mind*, 314.

Storytelling Makes the Unfamiliar Familiar: Exposing the Public to Same-Sex Families and Attitudinal Change

Prior to the official launch of the same-sex marriage agenda in the early 2000s, most legislative battles surrounded equal employment opportunities.³¹⁵ Political attention to specific LGBTQ+ rights policies, as mediated through news sources, played an important role in changing attitudes on those issues alone, but did not seem to have significant implications for the acceptance of LGBTQ+ individuals more broadly. Same-sex marriage appeared to be the exception to this trend. When the issue of same-sex marriage began to emerge, it swamped all other issues in the national consciousness. It came to represent the totality of LGBTQ+ rights, not just one aspect.³¹⁶ Marriage was not always the most prominent gay and lesbian issue, however. Far outside the realm of possibility in the 1990s, even those who supported the LGBTQ+ community rarely supported marriage rights. This included many LGBTQ+ activists in the US and Ireland. Thus, early proponents of it had to convince their own community members of its worth as a political issue. While part of the queer community still rejects marriage as a valuable institution in its own right, other LGBTQ+ activists had simply never considered the possibility. Once they did, it became a unique symbol, to many, of the inequalities faced by LGBTQ+ people. Securing marriage equality became about more than securing a single piece of legislation. It became about transforming perceptions of LGBTQ+ people for those outside the community. To accomplish this, advocates for marriage equality learned, meant sharing their stories to show their humanity.

Storytelling connects individuals across diverse cultural and political boundaries. They make abstract concepts appear concrete, human and relatable. People respond better to stories than to facts because they speak to individuals on an emotional level; they speak to a person's *instincts*. Storytelling has now become a common strategy in politicking and advocacy, including the movement for marriage equality. Early advocacy rested on arguments about rights and legal equality. And they failed. They failed to connect with those outside the LGBTQ+ community because such arguments did not *show* common humanity. It told voters what to do, however, did not effectively communicate why. Appeal to equal legal rights spoke solely to intellectual reason and logic. Haidt would say, *it spoke to the rider, not the elephant*. After Prop 8 (which legally limited marriage to only different-sex couples) passed in California, LGBTQ+ advocacy groups decided they needed a new strategy. New campaign narratives began to emphasise similarity. Slogans fought to *show, not just tell*, heteronormative citizens: "we are just like you." These campaigns worked with great success to familiarise non-queer

³¹⁵ Garretson, *The Path to Gay Rights: How Activism and Coming out Changed Public Opinion*.

³¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 22.

people with the LGBTQ+ community. They trusted simple exposure to aid in the development of social and political acceptance. Ultimately, advocates who emphasised this strategy were correct.

When marriage equality finally found itself a viable option in the early 2000s, activists were tasked with connecting support for the policy with existing positive affects towards LGBTQ+ people. Exposure to couples and families, instead of unaffiliated individuals, helped encourage this positive connection. Campaign strategies that placed couples and families within wider familial, communal and social networks in which “you could not tell who was gay and who wasn’t,”³¹⁷ worked to familiarise the public with the idea of gay couples and families as “just like us.”

The effect of exposure to previously unfamiliar people and their relationships and communities is, more often than not, one of increased acceptance. Martin Duberman described the effect of initial impressions or experiences as *imprinting*, “the decisive and sometimes indelible stamp that early experience places on our subsequent behaviour.”³¹⁸ Prolonged imprinting can have both positive and negative results.³¹⁹ In the case of LGBTQ+ people, exposure to negative associations and descriptions, as were (and are) prevalent in heteronormative society, inhibited future efforts at changing behaviour. Such affective reactions can make attitudinal changes towards homophobia challenging.³²⁰

Some interviewees worried nothing could significantly dent the indelible human fear of the unfamiliar, in this case non-heteronormativity. The human aversion to that-which-is-unfamiliar evolved to help us navigate the world and keep us safe. However, increased globalisation and migration means increasing engagement with the unfamiliar. We can no longer run away from it or expel it from our group. We are now tasked with facing it. Similarly, that which is unfamiliar may not always be so. Same-sex marriage, something beyond consideration for many members of the LGBTQ+ community just a few decades ago, is now widely supported and considered the norm in the US and Ireland (especially for young people). Survey data shows generational acceptance of LGBTQ+ issues and community members has increased rapidly over the last few decades. We may be born wary of the unfamiliar, but we can work to familiarise the unfamiliar and deplete it of fear, especially for the next generation.

³¹⁷ Grainne Healy, interview by Bryana Tunder, 22 Aug 2017, Dublin, IR.

³¹⁸ Duberman, *Has the Gay Movement Failed?*, 55.

³¹⁹ Jeremy Garretson’s work examines the power of exposure to permanently transformed attitudes towards the LGBTQ+ community by normalising or *familiarising* it. He calls this phenomenon: *affect liberalism*.

³²⁰ David Kinnaman and Gabe Lyons, *UnChristian: What a New Generation Really Thinks About Christianity...and Why It Matters* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2007). Youth liberalisation is one of the most impressive measures of the effects of affective reactions towards LGBTQ+ peoples. The speed with which acceptance has increased in the last couple decades is of great concern to many conservative evangelical groups. Kinnaman and Lyon’s *UnChristian* shows it is the number one reason the evangelical church is losing young people. It is the single thing most likely to turn off people of faith.

The underlying goal of California's *post*-Prop 8 and Ireland's *YES Equality* campaigns was just that: to make the unfamiliar, familiar. They based their strategy on the theory that "exposure to lesbians and gays was the defining factor that caused distinctive change on gay rights attitudes."³²¹ Public support for LGBTQ+ rights has indeed changed significantly in the past few decades, in large part due to increased exposure to the lives of non-heteronormative individuals and families through government acknowledgment, increased visibility on television, film and literature, and to (controversial) corporate backing. LGBTQ+ issues, in democratic societies like the US and Ireland, are regularly discussed in public spaces, on national news and in pop culture. Political figures increasingly endorse laws supporting LGBTQ+ rights. The judicial system increasingly finds anti-gay legislation unconstitutional.³²² The result is that LGBTQ+ people feel more comfortable coming out, telling their stories, making themselves seen *and* heard. This exposure has played a significant role in the passing of rights legislation.

While public opinion has been shown to encourage changes to legislation, legislation can also be a driver of attitudinal change. The cause-and-effect nature of this interrelational dynamic can make understanding the root cause of attitudinal change challenging. Some advocates in California argued strongly in favour of the power of transforming public opinion at a grassroots level, while others maintained top down change, legislative change, was the quickest way to ensure widespread attitudinal transformation. Jeremiah Garretson's work on public opinion transformation on gay rights acknowledged the value of grassroots influence, but ultimately determined that grassroots activism had been the *most* important factor in pushing "rapid, significant, and durable transformation in public opinion."³²³ Unfortunately, the size of California makes the practice of coordinated grassroots work more challenging than in Ireland.

Unrestricted financial and media access in US campaigning dictated that "activism" would take place most visibly from the top down. In Ireland, however, highly restrictive campaign laws limited media use. Without TV or radio ads, most campaigning had to come in the form of posters, fliers and other visual representations. These restrictions inherently supported greater levels of grassroots campaigning. Rules about equal time and representation ensured public debates on TV and in community spaces promoted more robust and engaging discussions. Extensive dialogue-oriented

³²¹ Garretson, *The Path to Gay Rights: How Activism and Coming out Changed Public Opinion*, 6-7.

³²² This is not always due to the personal position of leaders, but their inclination to follow public opinion, their lack of desire to be seen as out of step.

³²³ Garretson, *The Path to Gay Rights: How Activism and Coming out Changed Public Opinion*, 5. Evidence for this position is shown by attitudes towards LGBTQ+ rights becoming more liberal in times of intense media attention as well as when there is almost none. Likewise, attitude changes occur amongst individuals who follow the news regularly as well as among those who do not.

canvassing aimed at engaging and transforming public opinion, also blurred lines between grassroots and grasstop advocacy. Similar strategies, long having been foundational aspects of minority rights activism in the US as well, have in recent years been overwhelmed by moneyed interests there.³²⁴

YES advocates in Ireland spoke about the importance of showing real world relationships on posters and in advertisements, articles and public appearances. They knew authentic exposure would be one of the most important aspects of their campaign. Publicly sharing personal relationships and family stories was terrifying for many who expressed anxiety about so much exposure. YES advocates did it, however, because they believed it was the only way to help non-LGBTQ+ community members understand what accessing marriage meant to them. Attaching real people to the campaign was a way to ensure it was taken seriously. In fact, when Ireland's NO campaign got caught using stock photos during the 2015 referendum, it seriously undercut their authority. Many wondered if it meant the NO campaign did not have sufficient supporters to create authentic photo narratives.³²⁵

The vast attention given to marriage equality in media and politics in both the US and Ireland has made it a proxy, in the mind of many, for all lesbian and gay rights, rather than simply just another specific LGBTQ+ rights policy. Perhaps because homosexuality was presented in later campaigns as a sexual and/or emotional relationship fully analogous to a heterosexual one, more than any other issue, same-sex marriage has seen an astonishingly swift rise in support. But its legalisation has not yet managed to encourage significant progress on other LGBTQ+ protections. This means, for example, that many states in the US which allow same-sex couples to marry still do not include sexual orientation or gender identity in basic anti-discrimination laws. So, while attitudes toward same-sex relationships are becoming increasingly positive, there remains much concern about other LGBTQ+ rights. This is partially because non-LGBTQ+ community members can see that marriage equality in both the US and Ireland has now been realised, and they pat themselves on the back for their part in it. Meanwhile, same-sex married couples continue to get evicted, refused service, denied healthcare and still lack job security.

Exposure to gay and lesbian people has been shown to have a liberalising effect on the general public. It seems, however, to have the opposite effect on conservative elites. While many campaigners opposing same-sex marriage accepted their political defeat, none (at the time of our interviews) had changed their mind on the subject. In fact, residual anger and grievance from their participation in

³²⁴ Kyle G. Volk, *Moral Minorities and the Making of American Democracy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017).

³²⁵ Peter Murtagh, "Couple Denounce Use of Their Image on No Poster," *The Irish Times*, 7 May 2015. One particular photo, of a male and female kissing either cheek of a baby proved especially damaging. The couple, after seeing their photo used on a 'No' poster, came out *in favour* of same-sex marriage. This undercut the authority of the NO campaign.

campaigns seemed to further shut down their desire to engage on the matter. For groups of strong conservative ideologues, exposure to LGBTQ+ people and queer ideas tended to foster political *polarisation* in attitudes about the community. Conservatives were more likely to resist the effect of pro-LGBTQ+ intergroup contact and maintained consistency in holding uniformly ‘conservative’ beliefs.³²⁶ Many pro-same sex marriage advocates described this effort by conservatives as “mental gymnastics” during which they “tied themselves in knots” trying to justify their position. On the other end of the spectrum, liberals, who already held positive affect towards LGBTQ+ people, were more likely to adopt pro-LGTBQ+ positions when exposed to related individuals and ideas.

Haidt calls these mental gymnastics, done by those on both sides of the issue, post-hoc justifications and argues that *everyone* makes them. Described as unconscious, biological automatic responses common to all human beings, they are *not* spiteful manipulations designed intentionally to destroy the happiness and wellbeing of others. Unsurprisingly, we only see justifications as mental gymnastics when our opponents do them. The nature of their process and function make it so we can rarely see them in ourselves. Without passing judgment on the moral claims of interviewees, this project acknowledges the automatic biological responses that drive our minds to make, at times, seemingly contradictory or conflicting claims and arguments. Post-hoc justifications work to create coherent worldviews around inherent moral instincts. They are used to bind communities together, to create in-groups and out-groups, to reinforce what those groups believe and thus must fight for. Justifications on both sides of the same-sex marriage debate manifest in narratives constructed to support *their* tribe and to support *their* own righteousness.

Using Personal Narrative to Engaging Empathy and Initiate Dialogue

Haidt posits that stories are the most effective way to communicate across moral borders. They allow individuals to find common experience and concern beyond blanket moral claims. Stories can undermine rigid moral truth claims and the arguments that have been built up around them. They can force people to see the individual impact of a policy or practice, where abstract arguments generally fail to do so. Engaging emotions and instinct can manipulate intuition which directs voter reasoning in a way “facts” cannot. As Haidt instructs: speak to the *elephant* first, not the rider. Only once a person’s instincts are onboard, he argues, can facts have any real impact. This impact may not result in the change of a person’s moral claim, nor must it, but it can impact an individual’s openness to the possibility of authentic alternative moral claims.

³²⁶ Garretson, *The Path to Gay Rights: How Activism and Coming out Changed Public Opinion*, 180.

Laurent Berlant holds that American popular culture has been built, slowly but steadily, upon the assumption that identifying with “someone else’s stress, pain, or humiliated identity” can change you. “Popular culture relies on keeping sacrosanct this aspect of sentimentality—that ‘underneath’ we are all alike.”³²⁷ Understanding and utilising affective empathy can be a great resource for campaign strategy. It can make people humanise “the other.” For this same reason, it is used extensively in dialogical practice. Too much emotion and empathy, however, can eventually cloud our ability to make reasonable, even thoughtful, decisions. When we feel too much empathy, it inhibits our ability to see past our emotional responses. The challenge is to find balance.³²⁸

Engaging emotion was, in fact, often seen, by opposition in these campaigns, as dishonest manoeuvring or exploitation. Campaigners on both sides of the marriage debate in Ireland and the US complained extensively about a lack of fact-based arguments and opponent reliance on emotion. NO campaigners accused the YES campaign of using stories to “manipulate emotions.” It was “unfair,” made their work especially “challenging” and took the debate “off topic.” Reliance on emotional arguments “clouded people’s vision” to the broader implications of legalising same-sex marriage. The whole debate in Ireland, John Waters argued, was “engineered on the idea of emotions. Simplistic emotions. Facile emotions. Easily manipulated emotions. By making reasonable arguments we were actually defeating our own arguments: you seem to be coldly, dispassionately arguing about legality when we were told, well, love was the issue.”³²⁹

Moral stories can be used to bring people in or shut people out. When applied to specific moral issues, especially in a campaign context, they are used to draw people to one side or the other. So, while they can be used to bring people greater understanding of diversity, they can also be used to divide voters into “for or against.” Into “us or them.” Emotion when used to illicit useful empathy can bring people together. When it is used to create fear, however, it can drive them apart. One seeks to extend the in-group, the other seeks to limit it.

YES advocate complaints in Ireland mirrored those of their opponents. The NO campaign prayed on emotions, relying on fear tactics to rile up the electorate and “clouded people’s ability to see the facts.” The YES campaign used storytelling as their main strategy to combat the proliferation of these “fear tactics.” They told stories to calm and reassure the population that NO campaigners had “sought to rile up.” YES advocates worked to reinforce the idea that the only lives that would be affected by the legalisation of same-sex marriage were members of the LGBTQ+ community who wished to get married and have families and children. “Nobody else’s life would really be impacted.” While

³²⁷ Lauren Gail Berlant, *Cruel Optimism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011).

³²⁸ Paul Bloom, *Against Empathy : The Case for Rational Compassion* (New York: Ecco Press, 2016).

³²⁹ Waters.

advocates on both sides acknowledged the value of connecting to the emotional voter within their own strategy, they simultaneously derided their opponent's use of storytelling as emotional manipulation.

In the US, Ken Williams, a 'religious freedom' advocate, spoke voluminously about the importance of emotion as a means for connection. He was perhaps the most willing interviewee to consider the idea of sincerity in alternative moral foundations. He discussed emotion and storytelling, or "speaking to the elephant," as tools to reach across a divided aisle at elite and grassroots levels. Not simply as a means to a political end, "I honestly feel like these politicians [in the California senate], even those that oppose me, are actually trying to demonstrate their convictions — they are actually trying to vote for what they think will be best for the world." He continued, somewhat uniquely, to point out that while he might disagree with them, "I don't think they're trying to hurt people. I think they actually think that's what is best. I just don't. So, why am I going to be mad at someone for doing what they think is best?"³³⁰ His fellow activists did not generally share this view.

YES advocates learned from early failed campaigns in the US that relied on rights talk and emphasised facts that stories should be central to any campaign seeking to expose heteronormative communities (who, critically, make up the majority of the electorate) to queer ones. Stories make the abstract person, human. They were used to show that lesbian and gay people are "just like us," that *they* love "like us," can be hurt "like us," want a family "like us." The Irish campaign, in particular, used stories instead of facts to create the type of familiarity that complicates dichotomous thinking through the humanisation of that which is previously abstract and unknown. NO campaigners reflected on the great success of the "stories strategy" used by YES advocates. In fact, in Ireland, NO campaigners recognised their loss of the 2015 referendum was, at least in part, due to their own failings at its employment. Many of the same campaigners were involved in devising campaign strategies for the 2018 Abortion Referendum. And one of the most noticeable strategies they employed was, indeed, storytelling. In doing so, they employed the very thing they criticised their opponents for. Despite the employment of this otherwise successful strategy, anti-abortion campaigners lost in 2018.

Normalising rhetoric and imagery worked alongside extensive grassroots-oriented canvassing to foster honest and open dialogue among diverse citizenry. Complexity invites the shattering of stereotypes often reinforced by simplistic messaging. In Ireland, part of this grassroots work was a project developed by the YES campaign called: "*I'm voting yes. Ask me why.*" It invited voters to ask questions about the issue rather than giving them a simple 3-point lecture about why *they, the*

³³⁰ Williams.

voter, should be voting yes. “Our job is not to tell them what to think,” explained one political consultant for the ‘No on Prop 8’ campaign in California. Working with LGBTQ+ rights organisers before and after Prop 8, she emphasised the importance of “*inviting* people to think.”³³¹ At both the elite and grassroots level, advocates have traditionally avoided addressing or discussing issues complexly with voters. This dismissal of an individual’s capacity for understanding and intelligence, unfortunately, undermines public discourse about issues like marriage equality. If people are not allowed to talk and think through complex issues without fear of ridicule and condemnation, public discourse is of little real value.

MEI adopted and altered a variety of grassroots and media campaigns from American marriage equality activists. One, in particular, was born out of post-Prop 8 frustration. Developed by David Fleischer, *deep canvassing* has been applied to same-sex marriage campaigns across the US and was influential in creating a national conversation in Ireland. It is premised on the idea that you can change minds through conversations, especially through the telling of personal stories. The aim is to reach mutual understanding by providing alternative perspectives. In the course of a campaign, deep canvassing requires canvassers to put aside their instincts to “correct” the voter and instead begin a two-way conversation in which voters are asked to share their personal experiences in an open and non-judgmental dialogue. Helping to move the voter and the canvasser beyond labels, this technique is applicable well beyond any single campaign. Whether voters ultimately change their minds on an issue, the sharing of personal stories in the context of dialogue fosters non-judgmental citizen-oriented discourse.

The urgency of an imminent vote makes for a more focused discourse. Thus, deep canvassing is usually employed in relation to a specific bill which helps direct the types of personal stories campaigners use to reach across political divides. It is also, however, a long-term investment. Same-sex marriage advocates saw its use as strategically valuable, but also socially transformative. Changing the minds of voters was essential to eliciting a favourable referendum outcome. But, while laws can influence public discourse and private mentalities, they are neither the beginning nor the end point along a continuous social negotiation. In deep canvassing, the main concern is to start a conversation around an issue, find out what the voter wants and address it through the campaign. The strategy is three-pronged and common to the basic tenants of any productive approach to dialogue: share your personal experience and get the conversation started, listen to voters, get them thinking and sharing and highlight common humanity.

³³¹ Anonymous Californian Pro-Same Sex Marriage Political Consultant, interview by Bryana Tunder, 2 Apr 2019, Internet Meeting (Zoom).

Deep canvassing discourages the use of labels. Labels excuse us from doing the hard work of getting to know someone as a full and multifaceted human. Labels come with baggage: some society chooses, some individuals embrace. While this baggage cannot be avoided, it can be used to advantage as the starting point for a robust and nuanced conversation. When we decide we have nothing to learn from a person because of “that label”—that we know all there is to know—we more easily buy into the belief that those who oppose us are insidious or ill-informed. This division into enemy groups makes dismissing opponents easy and dialogue hard. Listening does not mean agreeing, it means creating a space in which others can be heard. It is only when others feel heard that they are willing to listen.

Exhausted Majority or Persuadable Middle: Engaging the Bridge Between Extremes

The process of reasoning about values is always personally motivated to some degree. However, individuals highly invested in a pre-determined outcome are driven by that personal motivation, what Haidt calls post-hoc reasoning, to seek out and process more information than an average voter, especially when it confirms their predispositions and reinforces their existing attitudes. Perhaps counter-intuitively, those who are more informed, not less, are statistically more likely to be more rigidly polarised. Aware of this, YES and NO campaigns consciously targeted voters who fell in the middle 60% of the electorate. Middle voters lacked highly defined ideas about marriage and were therefore deemed the most persuadable. In Ireland, they were referred to as the “persuadable middle,” and in the US, the “disaffected middle.” Haidt calls them the “exhausted majority.” For all activists, they were the main targets of the campaign.

Public debate in general has become increasingly dominated by extremes. Social media takes extreme narratives and makes them mainstream: trends on Twitter and Facebook become their own news stories. What begins as fringe arguments and commentary quickly find their way into the headlines. The result is that the conversation becomes defined and led by its most extreme groups. Traditional media and political leaders often cater to these highly energised and very tribal groups. The danger lies in letting the public framing of information be too strongly influenced by the extremes, those on the periphery who, too often, alienate those in the middle.

One of the main problems with the original marriage campaign in California, argued one political consultant, was its poor execution and organisation at the grassroots and grassstop levels. Messaging emerged from activists who were too extreme. Their militancy made many undecided or moderate voters feel ridiculed and alienated. One ad, released by anti-same sex marriage campaigners, neatly encapsulated the frustration and sense of dismissal felt by undecided voters. In it, then-Mayor Gavin

Newsome was shown saying “we’re going to do it, whether you like it or not.”³³² This tapped into feelings of rejection, marginalisation and dismissal. In the consultant’s words, “it really pissed them off.”³³³ They did not feel their concerns were being addressed or even acknowledged. It encouraged feelings of rejection and shut off potential dialogical pathways. The development of new strategies, like *deep canvassing*, was a result of the lessons learned by such mistakes: a campaign that emphasised listening to doubts, instead of rejecting them.

Alternatively, in Ireland, *MEI* worked to address religious voters without targeting them explicitly. They looked to reach demographics most commonly associated with religious adherence through campaigns like “Call Your Granny.” Designed to speak to older generations, statistically more religious, *Call Your Granny* encouraged young voters to call their grandmother or grandfather (great uncle/aunt, etc) to discuss why a ‘Yes’ vote mattered to them personally. It was hugely successful. In not emphasising religion or religious voters explicitly, it did not directly challenge religious ideas or religious adherents. It did not single anyone out because of faith. Instead, it sought to connect with religious voters through their personal relationships.

Not pointing to a particular community as the main hinderance to a ‘Yes’ vote, i.e. naming a “villain,” *MEI* sought to undercut the group instinct to defend itself in the face of accusation and threat. This strategy is one Haidt supports at length in his writings. “If you want to change someone’s mind about a moral or political issue,” he instructs, “*talk to the elephant first*. If you ask people to believe something that violates their intuitions, they will devote their efforts to finding an escape hatch—a reason to doubt your argument or conclusion. They will almost always succeed.”³³⁴ In not directly attacking their identity as a religious person, *Call Your Granny* circumnavigated the need for these voters to find an escape hatch. Ironically, the lack of particular religious address made some religious individuals feel they were being ignored and dismissed.

The exhausted majority, defined by Haidt through a series of in-depth questionnaires, makes up between 60-70% of population. These individuals often see nuance in issues, not because they are highly intellectual or informed about it (although they may be), but because their lived experience allows them to see “yes this, but not that.”³³⁵ Because they are not members of the extreme tribes, they are not required, in their group membership, to believe in a position unquestioningly. *Deep canvassing* and other methods of campaigning that encourage dialogue allow people to have anxieties without being thrust into broad stereotyped categories.

³³² *Yes on 8 Tv Ad: Whether You Like It or Not*, (Youtube.com 15 May 2008).

³³³ Californian Pro-Same Sex Marriage Political Consultant.

³³⁴ Haidt, *The Righteous Mind*, 59.

³³⁵ Smyth.

This “middle strategy” can also have negative effects, however. By focusing *only* on the persuadable middle, it can encourage the idea there is no point in talking to the opposition. It does recognise, however, that those in the middle may have fluency in a cultural language, political or religious, that makes them better able to dialogue across more extreme moral lines. Ailbhe Smyth spoke about the “huge range of people in-between [the] two trenches...those are the people that both sides can talk with. Those people are the kind of intermediary.”³³⁶ She spoke mostly of people divided along the conservative/liberal line, echoing observations made by many of her co-workers. Pro-marriage equality campaigns in both locales recognised that liberal religious actors could be a bridge between supporters and opposers of same-sex marriage. YES advocates found liberal religious actors particularly useful in this capacity as they shared (at least some) political language with liberal LGBTQ+ activists and (at least some) religious language with anti-marriage equality activists.

Perhaps the greatest challenge to the implementation of this strategy is that the “persuadable middle” voter is often disaffected. They are turned off by the constant hostility and anger displayed by a debate’s more extreme participants. Thus, by turning down the debate volume, campaigners may be able to mitigate further alienating middle voters. If the “exhausted majority” can be properly engaged, they have the potential to provide a bridge across a seemingly intractable divide. They can be a valuable pool of potential allies to individuals on both sides of the marriage debate. They can help communicate across significant positional and cultural boundaries. Bringing such disaffected individuals together, however, requires self-reflection on the part of the extremes. It requires a willingness to listen across moral divides. It does not mean giving up on the extremes but finding alternative ways to engage across and within them.

Conclusion

Examining the same-sex marriage conflict across jurisdictions shows a variety of similarities and differences in everything from the means of legalisation to feelings of settledness after its conclusion to the framing and execution of campaigns and the personal experiences of those enmeshed in their process. Where backlash to marriage legalisation is apparent across the United States, it has been virtually non-existent in the Republic of Ireland. This research posits the lack of retaliation to the Marriage Equality Referendum in Ireland is due to a number of things. These include the lack of a significant history of religious freedom litigation, the more inherently democratic process of a referendum decision (than a Supreme Court one), a smaller population size which allows for more

³³⁶ Ibid.

pervasive grassroots work and for greater personal familiarity between advocates on both sides of this and other similarly divisive issues.

While being “settled” can appear to make society less fractured, it can also lead individuals to ignore the more complex, multidimensional aspect of power dynamics, social acceptance and inclusion. Symbolic policy can let people off the hook or can fool people into thinking that a process as complicated and challenging as achieving or defining equality can be solved with a single piece of legislation. A comparative look at the US and Ireland is beneficial because it allows for an examination of what happens when one jurisdiction believes an issue settled and the other does not. This study has shown that the slow, steady and arduous presence of grassroots, individual and localised work is essential to make individuals feel socially included. The most successful results come from joint projects between grassroots or ‘elite’ actors, who have the power to make legislative and structural change, and grassroots actors, who focus on the work of human to human connection. Laws and political support can have positive effects by encouraging acceptance, visibility and awareness and discouraging contempt and persecution. But they cannot do it alone.

The grievance that stems from feelings of marginalisation, ridicule and injustice is having adverse effects on local and national communities. Emerging and evolving insights, like those presented by Haidt’s *MFT*, into moral diversity and intuitionism illuminate some of the reasons activists and advocates appear to be moving further apart socially and politically in recent years. They show the value of respectful communication and dialogical strategies that emphasise asking questions and encouraging dialogue, not lecturing or demonstrating judgment. These are successful because our brains are hardwired to reinforce the beliefs we already have. Yelling ‘truths’ at opponents does little to change minds. In fact, it more often than not encourages them to dig in their heels. It shuts down our ability to listen which makes genuine communication impossible.

Haidt’s *MFT* speaks specifically about ‘post-hoc justifications,’ the reasons we unconsciously create to make sense of our instinctual reactions to the objects, actions and reactions of those around us. He shows how these instincts lead us to decisions that may be confounding to others but make sense to ourselves. He, likewise, demonstrates how these instincts shape concrete policy decisions and are, therefore, at the centre of related debates. Where these instincts lead to positions that appear inexplicable to many, Haidt and others emphasise the value of using stories to connect through emotion across seemingly incomprehensible worldview divides.

Storytelling helps make sense of the inconceivable by explaining the actors and their intentions in human ways.³³⁷ Shankar Vedantam calls these stories ‘scripts.’ Both interpersonal relationships and national conversations follow unconscious scripts that determine how we talk and argue. When these unconscious scripts cause us to treat others badly, to dismiss their rights as citizens to participate in discourse, our “hidden brains” inhibit our ability to see problems within our own behaviour. We see the righteousness of our own position and no possibility of rightness in the position of the other. Furthermore, we tell stories to ourselves and others to construct narratives of our past, present and future, of our purpose and our value, of our place within society. Done, consciously and unconsciously, to create, maintain and transform our community, rhetorical framing dictates who is the victim and who has the power. As society evolves, so do the stories we tell to make sense of it. When cleverly framed, social narratives become the scripts within which we personally and nationally converse about an issue. As such, specific rhetoric and framing can have significant impacts on the content and environment within which such discourse takes place. To this end, my data shows that individuals who fall into the less extreme and thus less polarised middle can prove particularly helpful to mitigating division.

Productive dialogue is often uncomfortable, and we must learn to be ok with discomfort. A ‘crush them’/‘we win’ style of communication has proven unsuccessful in maintaining social stability. However, self-reflection and worldview-interrogation can help us recognise the importance of laying such assumptions and ownership of neutrality aside. The passage of marriage equality legislation is in most ways a step towards real inclusion. It is not the final stop. There is much work left to be done in the creation of a society that provides authentic space for *all* citizen participation.

Chapter 4 analysed data that addressed the personal experience and strategy of same-sex marriage campaigns in the United States and Ireland. Part one of the chapter discussed the impact of personal and emotional experiences on official political engagement, especially the outsized role grievance appears to play in today’s polarisation. It then examined the different means through which marriage equality became legal in each jurisdiction and the debates that have and continue to surround marriage by members within the LGBTQ+ community. Finally, it investigated the movement of rhetoric, strategy and financial support from the US to Ireland, examining the ties between both YES and NO campaigns on both sides of the Atlantic. Part two analysed data through the lens of Jonathan Haidt’s *Moral Foundations Theory*. It discussed the role of intuition in moral-political decision making and the power of storytelling to humanise policy debates by making that which was once unfamiliar, familiar. Haidt’s work helps illuminate the same-sex marriage debate campaigner experience and points to potential ways for future bridge building. One such bridge, the data shows,

³³⁷ Jerome S. Bruner, *Acts of Meaning* (London, UK: Harvard University Press, 1990), 49.

may be members of the “exhausted majority,” voters in the persuadable middle whose political engagement can aid in the mitigation of today’s continued polarisation.

The following chapter outlines the challenges our current political environment presents to real and inclusive pluralism. Through critical examination of John Rawls’s theory of *liberalism* it examines what the Irish and American public spheres currently look like, pointing out a number of problems such ‘liberal’ practices present to pluralism. Jürgen Habermas’s *post-secular theory* seeks to redress some of these problems. His insights have much to add to debates like those about same-sex marriage, although the data presented in this work challenges at least one of its major claims. The final part of the next chapter posits that the purpose of dialogue is to create a space in which neither group *must* agree with the other, but that does recognise the weight of what each group feels is at stake. Only then, can dialogue help each constituency to understand and respect the issue’s significance to the other.

CHAPTER 5: ENGAGING ACROSS IDEOLOGICAL DIVIDES

Secularists are wrong when they ask believers to leave their religion at the door before entering into the public square...to say that men and women should not inject their 'personal morality' into public policy debates is a practical absurdity. Our law is by definition a codification of morality, much of it grounded in the Judeo-Christian tradition.

Barack Obama, 'Call to Renewal' Keynote Address, 28 June 2006

This chapter challenges the idea that religious engagement in politics is less appropriate than non-religious engagement. Chapter 3's third theme, "Perceptions of Religion in Today's Public Square," asked each of the four groups interviewed to reflect on the role religion played in their advocacy, as well as the role they perceived it to have played in others'. Chapter 5 now considers the broader question of religion in public discourse, specifically in the context of same-sex marriage in the US and Ireland, and suggests ideas for more harmonious dialogical practices.

Where Chapter 4 analysed personal experience and political strategy, Chapter 5 focuses on divisions and conflicts between and within secular and religious worldviews, exemplified in the use of religious language and reasoning in American and Irish same-sex marriage debates. Part one argues that although the US and Ireland claimed to provide spaces in which the limits of tolerance can be debated, in fact this space was not truly inclusive because it operated on the basis of a Rawlsian secular neutral space which, to people who operated outside its parameters, appeared inherently exclusionary. Even when individuals "translated" their religious convictions into that which was deemed "neutral" language they were largely regarded as duplicitous, since moral values with origins in religious values were often deemed suspect. A better understanding of the relationship between religion and morality will be essential to informed discussions about what legitimate morality should be.

The re-emergence of religion as a significant force in the public square has necessitated the rethinking of today's dominant secularisation orientation. Although religion has not become *the* dominant force in modern society, the continued complexity of religious and secular pluralism has become a mainstream issue. Post-secular theory has emerged to try to address this complexity, but it has created complications of its own. Part two introduces what a political order with deep respect for sacred values, religious or not, could look like, even if the practical outcomes would likely still be contentious. This limited research indicates that divisions *within* rather than *between* religious and secular groups are perhaps even more problematic, exposing the limitations of both the Rawlsian neutral and post-secular frameworks. The neutral framework falters because it obligates religious debaters to translate their arguments into secular terms, and the post-secular falters over its assumption that the religious/secular divide is the most significant moral conflict today.

Part three examines thoughts on how we can live more respectfully with our religious, secular, liberal and conservative differences. Erin Wilson's *relational dialogism*, for example, suggests a framework wherein false dichotomous views of identity are recognised as a significant problem to complex dialogue. Her *both/and* framework, by creating space for individuals beyond those limited identities, admits to the discussion without prejudice the wide and multifaceted range of human belief and expression enabling a more authentic dialogue between individuals of fundamentally diverse worldviews. Liberal religious voices can be particularly valuable in these debates due to their ability to speak across typical lines of division.

Part I: Problems of Accommodation Involving Proponents and Opponents of Same-Sex Marriage in the US and Ireland

Part one of this chapter examines some of the social, political and linguistic challenges to a religious actor's authentic participation in Ireland and America's liberal secular framework. It addresses the dismissal of religious reasoning and the problem of Rawlsian claims about secular neutrality, including the strategic use or avoidance of overtly religious language. Respondents had diverse and often convoluted understandings about the relationship between religion and morality. Examination of their views are placed alongside thinking on this issue by individuals across a range of positions. Central to much of the grievance expressed by individuals on both sides of the debate were arguments about disproportionate levels of expectations surrounding civility. Finally, it addresses perceptions of homophobia and common assumptions about religion as antithetical to queer identity.

Dismissing Religious Reasoning: The Limits of Political Liberalism

According to the Rawlsian theory of democracy, all citizens have the right to participate in public discourse, but only on constitutional matters and basic justice. Rawls emphasises the importance of including a plurality of "reasonable comprehensive doctrines"³³⁸ in today's normative modern democratic culture. However, participation in these public debates requires citizens to relinquish their personal interests to democratically prescribed rules. He acknowledges a "diversity of opposing and irreconcilable religious, philosophical, and moral doctrines"³³⁹ more than one of which are "perfectly reasonable" despite being in conflict with one another, but, while citizens have the right

³³⁸ John Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, vol. 2nd edition (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), xli. Rawls defines these concepts as those which articulate "what is value in human life, and ideals of personal character, as well as ideals of friendship and of familial and associational relationships, and much else that is to inform our conduct, and in the limit to our life as a whole." (13)

³³⁹ *Ibid.*, 3-4.

to hold their own *comprehensive doctrines*, they must refrain from imposing their own comprehensive doctrines on others.

If such a doctrine is made public practice, it presents questions about what the bonds of citizenship in a liberal society are actually based on and whether or not such a framework can secure the allegiance of, or a sense of common citizenship among, individuals whose primary moral ideals are rooted in a different reality. Raymond Plant points out the “thicker and richer and thus more perfectionist the justification of a liberal political order is, the less authority it will have over religious members of such a society given that their beliefs may well be very different from those invoked in such a perfectionist justification of liberalism?”³⁴⁰ If the main idea expressed to justify political liberalism is that of individual autonomy, it becomes difficult to secure the allegiance of religious people whose primary moral framework may not, in fact, include autonomy as a value.

This problem is clearly exemplified in discourses surrounding public policies relating to sexual identity and sexual practice in Western societies. Individual choice, autonomy and equal rights have become the default position of liberalism in modern society, but religious individuals or communities do not necessarily regard individual autonomy as the most important argument in debates over moral, ethical or social concerns. For many religious adherents, the concept of rights divorced from any particular moral framework other than mutual non-interference lacks reasonable justification. They understand issues relating to sex, especially homosexuality and abortion, as relating to specific and religiously grounded concepts of the good. Such tensions between the *good* and the *right* currently underscores the challenge to liberalism’s success.

Rawls’s liberalism grants the right of individuals to hold positions that diverge from broad consensus, however their public participation is predicated on their ability to translate such positions into ‘neutral’ language. This, of course, is not limited to religious voices, but includes any who fall outside the dominant framework. Rawls’s requirements for translation stems from his belief that a liberal polity can successfully create “an overlapping consensus” on essential political matters between people with diverse religious and philosophical beliefs.³⁴¹ It should be employed, he argues, in all matters of constitutional concern. Such a requirement automatically assumes mutual incompatibility of comprehensive doctrines. It further assumes the only way to manage such fundamental differences is through the restraint of their expression, “ensuring they are aired only either in private or in the

³⁴⁰ Raymond Plant, "Citizenship, Religion, and Political Liberalism," in *Religious Voices in Public Places*, ed. Nigel Biggar and Linda Hogan (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2009), 38.

³⁴¹ John Rawls, "The Idea of Public Reason," in *The Law of Peoples* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), 132.

background culture of civil society.”³⁴² While Rawls ultimately determines all citizens may introduce some aspects of their comprehensive doctrines, religious or not, into political discussion at any time, he simultaneously requires that they provide proper public reasons in support of these principles as well. He calls this “the proviso.”

The “proviso” is at the heart of frustrations felt by religious actors involved in the same-sex marriage debate. For many people, religious or otherwise, belief demands some form of public articulation or consideration. The sacrifice that Rawlsian secular neutrality requires feels especially personal and disproportionate to religious actors, because even when they do abide by this agreement, they face suspicion and dismissal. Nevertheless, participants in this research generally understood the theory and logic behind limiting religious reasoning in public forums. They understood the value of and need for a common democratic language.

Participants who campaigned against the legalisation of same-sex marriage, although holding views contrary to current liberal moral positions, did not outright reject Rawls’s *overlapping consensus*. In fact, in one sense the post-legalisation framework showed religious actors’ conscientious attempt to work within established social confines. Using legal avenues to secure their own rights required recognition of the rights of others, and that the public square is the common space for social negotiation. It demonstrated a certain willingness to abide by a social contract, even if minimally. Where groups like *Save California* and *Youth Defence*, conservative religious organisations that object to same-sex marriage, flat out refused Rawls’s “proviso,” *California Family Council* and *Iona Institute* did not.³⁴³ Despite existing on the fringes of, and complaining extensively about, today’s social and political *overlapping consensus*, individuals associated with both latter organisations agreed to work within its confines. In spite of, or perhaps because of, their willingness to accept Rawls’s proviso, interviewees felt they were forced to make disproportionate sacrifices in the public square. This appeared mostly due to the hypocrisy they saw in requiring translation for some citizens and not others.

Rejection of their translations as duplicitous was infuriating, demoralising and made many wonder if their “continued sacrifice” was worth their agreement to Rawls’s “proviso”. YES campaigners did,

³⁴² Linda Hogan, "Introduction," in *Religious Voices in Public Places*, ed. Nigel Biggar and Linda Hogan (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2009), 7.

³⁴³ *Save California* is a non-profit organisation that was founded in 1999, by Randy Thomasson, to support the “Campaign for Children and Families.” It works to influence public policy on a variety of social issues, primarily those involving sexuality, gender and family values. It is more extreme in its rhetoric, if not ultimately the positions it holds, than the *California Family Council* and, as such, is not welcomed to participate in state house events or in the media to the same degree as *CFC*. *Youth Defence* is an Irish Catholic group primarily concerned with abortion, although it takes traditional positions on a range of issues relating to sexuality, gender and family life. Like *Save California*, it exists largely outside of the mainstream and is not invited to participate in political events or in the media like the *Iona Institute*.

in fact, describe “public reason” arguments made by the NO campaign as disingenuous, manipulative and false. Even when translated, they were deemed invalid because “they were not grounded in honesty.” Non-religious advocates, admitting “personal faith is part of who you are, how your views are formed and how you’re shaped,” claimed their problem was not with the religiosity of their opponents, but with “the subterfuge.”³⁴⁴ Considered inauthentic if they chose one option, unacceptable if they chose the other, there was little reflection on how religious individuals *should* navigate the shifting space between sincere belief and political legitimacy. YES advocates appeared not to notice the conundrum it produced for their opponents.

There must, therefore, be a defence of liberalism that makes the maintenance of liberal institutions more compatible with deeply held moral convictions like those embedded in the lives of religious believers. If liberal institutions are to be justified solely on a set of value that are *not* in line with, or at least not in the language of, the primary values of substantial moral communities, they will be unlikely to ever gain allegiance from them, their members feeling relegated to the margins and resentful. Left too long in this space, grievance can turn bitter and violent. The challenge liberalism ultimately faces is:

...how to build a justification for liberal institutions [towards] which citizens can have a sense of allegiance in the context of pluralism, and which will be rich and compelling enough to make liberalism more than a way of coping; while at the same time not being so rich as to override, subordinate, and weaken the allegiance of those who hold one or other of plurality of moral outlooks.³⁴⁵

Perhaps the biggest problem that emerges out of the concept of Rawls’s *liberal democracy* is its expectation that religious groups treat their moral or metaphysical objections to same-sex marriage as private belief. Religious believers, like all other members of a liberal polity, wish to treat their convictions as having more than mere personal salience.

Unlike other political theories which seek to address conflicts which arise out of commitments to incommensurable moral values and comprehensive (religious) doctrines in purely practical terms, Rawls pushes the importance of overlapping consensus.³⁴⁶ His theory emphasises the value of creating adherence to a common set of moral or political principles in an ideal sense, with the goal of arriving at “deeper and richer conceptions of the truth in its many-sidedness and complexity.”³⁴⁷

³⁴⁴ Moninne Griffith, interview by Bryana Tunder, 6 Jul, 2017, Dublin, Ireland.

³⁴⁵ Plant, "Citizenship, Religion, and Political Liberalism," 40.

³⁴⁶ John Horton, "Realism, Liberal Moralism and a Political Theory of Modus Vivendi," *European Journal of Political Theory* 9, no. 4 (2010).

³⁴⁷ Plant, "Citizenship, Religion, and Political Liberalism," 4.

Without this collective buy in, compromise stems from each side simply recognising the limits of power and mutual vulnerability, while retaining confidence in their own truth. These theories do not work to alter participants belief in the rightness of their own position or that their beliefs *should* be that which shapes public policy. So, while such theories require basic tolerance, they require no understanding of difference.

It is possible, of course, that through the process of negotiation and principled agreement simple exposure to new or different ideas will create a greater sense of respect and tolerance for such views. Through exposure and interaction, the result of political negotiation, tolerance may emerge. But this research shows that the stability of prudent agreement breaks down when addressing emotionally fraught public policy issues like same-sex marriage. Not simple policy decisions agreed upon in an abstract constitutional framework, they are fundamental to the framework itself: whose rights get made priority and who makes that determination.

Liberal society largely views issues like same-sex marriage as one of rights and equality. YES campaigns in the US and Ireland, although steering clear of explicit rights talk (which they argued were too abstract to connect with average voters), emphasised equality as the major injustice being faced by the LGBTQ+ community pre-legalisation. The title of the referendum, *Marriage Equality*, itself demonstrated the governments acceptance of this claim. It was, in fact, a point of great frustration for many NO campaigners who saw such a conceptualisation of the issue as biased and unfair. They did not view the issue in terms of autonomous rights and equality, but as a question about what is best for the future stability of their own society.

Rawls does recognise the danger of liberalism itself becoming a comprehensive doctrine, i.e. a position with what Plant calls “thick moral content” that grounds itself in concepts like autonomy, equality and rights. Instead arguing for the use of free-standing concepts like freedom, equality and justice, he believes they can be endorsed by people loyal to competing or incompatible comprehensive doctrines. In this way, adherents to comprehensive doctrines can hold their own beliefs to be true while accepting it is reasonable for others to disagree with them, which, he believes will lead them to accept that their own beliefs cannot be the sole foundation for public institutions and public policy.³⁴⁸ The job of public reason is to “arrive through deliberation at a set of principles which do not rely on any specific comprehensive doctrine, but which can be agreed upon via an overlapping consensus between those who adhere to reasonably comprehensive doctrines.”³⁴⁹

³⁴⁸ Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, 48-54.

³⁴⁹ Plant, "Citizenship, Religion, and Political Liberalism," 46.

Where Rawls primarily focuses on the constitutional basis of the liberal state, it must be acknowledged that similar expectations are set for debates about public policy. This is where it gets more challenging, however. If policies have to be justified by public reason it significantly limits the use of ideas individuals may draw from their own comprehensive doctrines. This problem was clearly evident in the debates over same-sex marriage. Access to marriage is a policy with constitutional implications. It also has implications for basic human rights. As public law expands and more policy issues come under its purview, the requirements for argumentation supported by public reason rather than those rooted in private comprehensive doctrines exclude an increasing number of actors from public discourse. But Rawls continues to dismiss individuals who do not buy in, who are *unreasonable*, from inclusion in public discourse.

Rawls sees an intrinsic link between reasonableness and his basic principles of political liberalism. But those who accept “reasonable” views of their own beliefs are already liberals. This exposes one of the greatest challenges to Rawls’s theory: unless a person is already committed to liberal principles, he does not make a compelling argument for their adherence. *Political Liberalism* is, in this sense, addressing individuals who are already political liberals. His doctrine of overlapping consensus does not address those outside this already agreed upon liberal moral framework. So, while participants in this research are not, themselves, entirely outside his framework, they do exist at its margins. Continued dismissal and ridicule of such marginal actors may, in fact, serve to push them beyond its borders. Such exclusion should be worrying as it plays a role in fostering extremism. In this context, his case for liberalism becomes a comprehensive doctrine in itself. It requires specific beliefs about the best way to create a fair public realm. To arrive at an overlapping consensus a single idea of “reasonableness” has to be accepted by, or imposed on, incompatible comprehensive doctrines. For those seeking to participate in public policy debates who are constrained by liberal agreements about public reason, the navigation of public discourse is frustrating and problematic.

Using Overtly Religious Language in Public Discourse: Ireland vs California (US)

In Ireland and California, secular political frameworks have restrained the use of religious rhetoric. Groups in both locales describe struggling to navigate an increasingly inhospitable public forum.

Ireland: Less Overtly Religious Language

The distinct lack of religious language in referendums concerned with abortion, marriage equality and divorce in Ireland was striking. The Catholic Church, having played a very visible role in earlier divorce and abortion referendums, stayed largely silent this time around. Explicitly Christian rhetoric

has lost its place, even among campaigners, and certainly with the public in general. Instead, arguments had to emphasise the stability of the family unit, the welfare of children and the rights of foetuses.

In Ireland, lay NO campaigners generally avoided using religious language of any kind in their objection to same-sex marriage. In fact, they expressly sought to decouple anti-religious animosity from opposition to same-sex marriage. On social media, individuals emphasised “liberal elite’s” cultural co-option and their “relativist” approaches to definitions of sexuality, gender, relationships, and bodily autonomy. They decried the injustice of being a marginalised voice in the modern secular cultural-political framework. Periodically steering into economic and international policy, the majority of their focus remained on family, children, sex and conscience objection. Organisations, like the *Iona Institute*, when speaking in major newspapers, on national television and radio shows intentionally minimised their use of religious rhetoric to allow for wider appeal. *Iona* discussed its interest in the promotion of “marriage and religion in society,” funding for diverse denominational and non-denominational schools, freedom of conscience, and supporting a diverse society. They did not, however, expressly mention Christianity or God, although in private they admitted to their own personal views on the subjects.

A long and complex historical relationship with religion and the Catholic Church has created a distinct sense of mistrust of institutional religion in Ireland. Such distrust has various political ramifications. On one side, it has encouraged a movement seeking the removal of church power from all societal and governmental institutions. On the other, a group of conservative faith-based advocates have emerged who worry about the loss of Irish identity and culture such a decoupling is creating. Organisations, like the *Iona Institute* and *Mothers and Fathers Matter*, have sought to pick up where the church left off. They see themselves filling a void.

Despite intentional distancing from religious rhetoric, such organisations appear much closer to evangelical lobbying groups in the US than traditional institutional (church) religious engagement in politics in Ireland. Run by citizens, not religious institutions, they claim general political goals. They seek to represent Christianity broadly, not as a single denomination. They are participating in individual, rather than institutional, advocacy. This hinges on their ability to divorce themselves from negative historical-cultural associations with the Catholic Church. Decoupling arguments from religious language is one means of doing this. And, it is essential to their continued social and political inclusion.

California (US): More Overtly Religious Language

American campaigns also rely more heavily on human rights language and social science evidence than they did a decade ago. Faith-based advocacy groups in the US have largely moved away from more explicit religious arguments, however less so than their Irish counterparts. While fringe organisations continue to employ strict religious reasoning in both locales, they generally hold little real social or political sway. They are seen as wholly “unreasonable” actors, ones Rawlsian liberalism allows the polity to legitimately reject.³⁵⁰ Those who wish to find resonance within the mainstream, however, learn to adapt, to distance themselves from these more extreme groups and draw a secular veil over all manner of public interactions.

California Family Council, one of the most significant Christian lobbying groups in California, has clear associations with the well-established evangelical group, *Focus on the Family*. *CFC* emphasises social concerns, alongside religious and ideological ones. Despite the secularising of some of its arguments, it remains an overtly Christian organisation and claims it seeks to “Advanc[e] God’s Design for Life, Family, & Liberty through California’s Church, Community, Capitol, & Culture” and a vision of “God’s people living as principled citizens of both heaven and earth.”³⁵¹ Their blogs, radio shows, public appearances, and articles generally address the reader as a “fellow Christian.” Meant to inform more than to convince, their audience is largely made up of Christian believers. They do not seek to reach further. Because of this, as well as the size and insular nature of California’s evangelical community, they maintain a greater use of overtly religious language than comparable Irish organisations.

The self-contained nature of the practicing evangelical community in California is, at least, partly responsible for their own sense of exclusion from broader media, government and politics. They are, however, quoted in mainstream newspapers, although they do not have their own columns, whereas Irish campaigners, David Quinn and Breda O’Brien, do. Californian activists are interviewed on TV and welcomed into state congressional meetings to testify. They are not ignored in this sense. However, they feel this attention is largely pro forma, their continued participation in the public forum resting on their agreement to keep their comprehensive doctrines tucked away. In California, where the majority of the state and its representatives are clearly liberal, many conservative religious

³⁵⁰ For example: *Save California*, which supported Prop 8, states as its mission: “Challenging liberal lies with God’s timeless moral truths.” In emails designed to galvanize supporters, they talk about working “to cleanse California of sin,” repeatedly employing fire and brimstone rhetoric to promote fear over state policies. In doing so, they encourage polarising attitudes in the electorate, their newsletters unapologetically using dramatic and damning language (“unnatural, unhealthy, unbiblical, tyrannical agendas” and “homosexual-activist floor jockey”). They were labelled an anti-gay hate group by the Southern Poverty Law Centre in 2012.

³⁵¹ “About Us,” California Family Council, <https://californiafamily.org/about/>

actors feel tokenised. “They have to show themselves to be representative,” Ken Williams noted, even if they have no interest in actually being representative. So, while allowed to participate in public discourse, they do not feel heard.

Religious Belief and Moral Conviction: Arguments, Complications, and Conflations

Complications relating to the relationship between religious and moral conviction emerged throughout this research in interesting and unexpected ways. Many respondents appeared to see a division *between* religious belief and moral conviction. Some saw morality as rooted in religious belief, others as *one component of* religious belief, still others as entirely non-religious in nature. But all saw issues like same-sex marriage as issues of public moral concern—religious or otherwise, because such issues determine how we define essential social structures like family, child-rearing, sexuality and gender identities. Recent court decisions and referendums have forced individuals, religious and non-religious, to think more deeply about these issues than ever before. They have forced institutions, religious and non-religious, to contemplate how they will or will not adapt to new cultural understandings and definitions of ideas like marriage and family.

Moralities are always grounded in broader philosophical, cultural and/or religious contexts, and while some aspects of morality—*beliefs about what is or is not moral, and why one is or should be moral*—may be shared across cultures and traditions, some will inevitably be unique to a particular belief. Religions provide their adherents with a particular context for moral belief. These justify to believers why they should act according to the moral positions laid out in their particular belief systems. This includes macro questions about ultimate justification and micro ones about specific values. Religion can provide all aspects of an adherent’s moral framework. However, while individuals may label moral convictions religious, they are not all the same as religious belief. Religion is a lens through which some individuals interpret what is morally right and good, but it is more complicated than that.

Examining the relationship between religion and morality allows us to think about what it means to be moral. A unique combination of community practices and individual experience, personal morality is the product of external influences and personal instincts. Such a combination creates unique worldviews within each of us. It is why our moral positions can change over time. All people draw from their own beliefs, religious or otherwise, to justify their understanding of morality. Because of this, all moral worldviews are unique. Despite having wildly varied accents to their presentation, moralities all function in the same way for the individuals who hold them. Religiously grounded moralities are no more or less legitimate than those grounded in any other worldview simply because of their religious grounding.

This research is particularly concerned with the morality grounded in Christian belief and experience because it is cited by many participants as central to their concern over changing definitions of marriage and family. Christian ethics is primarily concerned with: “(1) the reasons for being moral, (2) the character of the moral agent, and (3) the points of reference used to determine conduct.”³⁵² Christianity provides the reasons for morality itself as well as the reasons a person should be moral. However, in the Christian experience, as well as in a number of other religiously based moral frameworks, religious dimensions are sometimes privileged over moral ones. “The existence of God is not posited in order to have an ultimate ground for morality; rather the reality of God is experienced, and this experience requires morality.”³⁵³

For many Christians, moral acts are also religiously significant acts. In this sense, when one acts to gain justice for those who are oppressed, both moral and religious acts have been done. This religious-moral reasoning is seen to represent an act of honour and devotion to God. In Protestant theology, the term “good” is often used to make this point. Sometimes, the theologically good and morally good are collapsed into one another such as in the Lutheran belief that only an act done “in faith” can truly be good. Such an understanding seems to resonate particularly well with evangelical advocates in California who see their activism as morally right specifically because it is done “in faith”. Others see this collapse as too extreme, however.

In California, the connection between religious and social morality was expressed explicitly: the religious rules, they said, about marriage, family and sexuality were “designed by god to keep us safe, to allow us to live our best lives. Denying marriage rights to same-sex couples [was] not His way of being cruel, but of keeping us safe.”³⁵⁴ Williams spoke at length about God’s guidance and its direct impact on social structure and communal safety. For him, and many fellow advocates, there can be no divorce between religious belief, moral conviction and social reality. They asked questions like: “If one is moral for these reasons, what sorts of moral action ought one to do?”³⁵⁵ Such faith-based activists argue moral, social and political arguments are, in fact, expressions of religious values, and these values are seeking specific political goals. Therefore, asking them to divide moral belief from action misunderstands the relationship between the two.

³⁵² James M. Gustafson, "Can Ethics Be Christian? Some Conclusions," in *Introduction to Christian Ethics : A Reader*, ed. Ronald P. Hamel and Kenneth B. Himes (New York: Paulist Press, 1989), 7.

³⁵³ *Ibid.*, 135.

³⁵⁴ Williams.

³⁵⁵ Gustafson, "Introduction to Christian Ethics," 136.

Faith-based campaigners in both Ireland and California saw no possible division between the two and felt perpetually disadvantaged because of the interconnectivity of their religiosity and morality. It was a point of particular frustration for NO campaigners. Many YES advocates saw non-religiously specific moral claims against same-sex marriage as *less* legitimate than religiously explicit ones of the same persuasion. Their logic for such thinking divided religiousness from morality and privileged religious conviction over non-religious moral claims. So, while YES advocates dismissed secular moral claims made by NO campaigners because they *lacked* religious justification, religion was simultaneously dismissed as a legitimate source of moral-political justification.

James Gustafson argues that while a moral act is qualified by its religious importance, this does not necessarily collapse the two into a single “good.” They may overlap, but they maintain their own distinct qualities: it is a good act because of its consequences, and it is a good act for “the more ultimate ‘theological’ and ‘religious’ reasons it was done.”³⁵⁶ So, while theology provides the “ultimate grounds” upon which its adherents understand morality, religious belief alone does not justify the principles or values adherents hold, but only helps them understand how to prioritise and interpret them.

Since religious dimensions always have priority over moral ones, the experience of God does not automatically shore up one’s moral character. Rather, the experience of God *requires* individuals to have characteristics that make them admirable moral agents. The experience of God “has consequences for the moral ‘sort of person’ one is becoming.”³⁵⁷ And so, the “sort of person” Christians should strive to be, argues Gustafson, is influenced and informed by both the experience of God and the Christian story. In this sense, it is impossible to divide the religious and moral characteristics of a Christian person.

Richard McCormick argues more pointedly for the idea of *essential* ethics which he sees as fundamental moral positions shared by Christians and non-Christians alike. Not ignoring the significance of Christianity to both the theory and practice of morality for many, he determines Christian morality is distinct in the “*style of life*, the manner of accomplishing the moral tasks common to all persons,”³⁵⁸ not the tasks themselves. In this sense, he posits, Christian morality is, in its practical form, human morality because the theological study of morality begins from the human being in all its fullness. In this way, Christianity does not bypass human deliberation. It reminds

³⁵⁶ Ibid., 135.

³⁵⁷ Ibid., 136.

³⁵⁸ Richard A. McCormick, "Does Religious Faith Add to Ethical Perception?," Ibid., 143.

adherents that what God intends for them is an affirmation of themselves as humans. It is, thus, in the human *and* religious experience that moral understanding is formed.

Theologians traditionally speak about moral knowledge as originating in “reason *informed* by faith,” not reason replaced by it. In this way, McCormick’s discussion of the origins of moral judgments mirrors many of Jonathan Haidt’s insights presented in *Moral Foundations Theory*. While Haidt describes moral *instincts*, McCormick describes *inclinations* towards values (good or bad). He qualifies this by suggesting our reasoning processes can, and generally are, “distorted by cultural biases.”³⁵⁹ Thus, Christian theology and its teachings do not immediately inscribe us with moral norms or rules for moral decision-making, but they do affect them. In doing so, Christian moral teachings help hone personal instincts by grounding them in particularly Christian beliefs about human flourishing. In the process, they affect one’s perspectives and further embed associated reasoning in the belief holder. In turn, as individuals face new moral questions, some in the form of concrete policies (like same-sex marriage), they use this embedded reasoning to understand how best to service the world according to their own values. McCormick argues one does not find concrete answers in the Christian tradition. Rather, it plays a role in the development of one’s worldview and, therefore, ultimately informs reasoning.

Similarly concerned with the practical application of Christian ethics, Gustafson argues that distinct points of Christian reference serve as a guide for assertive moral action. Theological concepts and religious symbols are used by practitioners to aid in the interpretation of meaning. They aid in the understanding and evaluation of events and actions that take place outside the personal religious sphere. They help one to recognise, name and frame important moral issues at the political, social and personal level. Because of this, some Christians suggest their faith provides a morally superior set of guidelines to all others, that they have special insight into what constitutes right moral practice. This research observes the view of Christian moral superiority as prevalent in many of its participants, especially in relation to issues of sexuality and gender. This belief can, in fact, be found woven throughout a host of current political debates about how best to structure and maintain a moral society. Alarm over the legalisation of same-sex marriage in recent years is just one example.

Unfortunately, this view is prevalent enough that many see it as the only form of Christian moral belief. Thus, there continues to be widespread misunderstandings of religious morality as singularly and exclusively conservative. Not the case, there are a wide variety of alternative Christian understandings of sexuality, gender and the institution of marriage. For example, theologians like Rowan Williams present alternative views on the practice and purpose of marriage. His emphasis on

³⁵⁹ Ibid., 144.

“the body’s grace” presents a vision of a person’s ability to mirror the moment of grace, received through justification, in healthy, intentional and meaningful human relationships. Taking evidence from the fact that Jesus engaged in friendship with both sinners and disciples, any discussion of scriptures, to be truly Christian, must therefore take place within a Church context that welcomes the marginalised other. Recognising Jesus as God’s most perfect expression of acceptance and grace, his existence demonstrates that “embracing the outsider is the [very] shape of grace.”³⁶⁰ Although the ways we act out this gifted identity may change or be unclear because of our social, cultural or even religious context, the identity itself may not be disputed, because it is not negotiated, but simply given.³⁶¹

Like Williams, Elizabeth Stuart argues a true Christian understanding of humanity and radical equality is found in the eradication of subjective identity, and consequently is the practitioner’s responsibility to share through demonstration to the rest of humankind. As proclaimed by Paul himself, in his desire to allow both Jews and Gentiles, slaves and free, male and female, to forget such human constructs in favour of their newly acquired identity as members of the Body of Christ: true grace can only be found in the radical eradication of our socially constructed identities and in the discriminatory injustice they often beget.³⁶²

Similarly, Margaret A. Farley’s *Just Love: A Framework for Christian Sexual Ethics* builds on Paul’s mandate of equality in Christ. She defines *worthy* love as that which is born out of a relationship built on equality and as such, on justice, indicating that those involved in a relationship must be treated and must treat each other with unequivocal parity. She emphasises equality of men and women, hetero- and homo-sexual relationships alike. In doing so, she directly undermines the very possibility of hierarchical relationships as divinely sanctioned, like those put forward by many NO campaigners. Farley says this revised ethical framework must be the strictest moral norm for evaluating the appropriateness of all sexual relations, indicating that it is not the homosexual or heterosexual nature of relationships, but the moral criterion of equality and justice that Christian notions of appositeness and morality can be found.³⁶³

Despite ideas like those presented by Williams, Stuart and Farley, many still think religious morality does not or cannot support LGBTQ+ rights. Illuminated in many YES advocates’ arguments about religion as *the* hinderance to LGBTQ+ rights, there remains a significant lack of understanding among non-religious actors about the valuable insight religion can add to human rights discourse.

³⁶⁰ Elizabeth Stuart, *Gay and Lesbian Theologies: Repetitions with Critical Difference* (London, UK: Routledge, 2003), 91.

³⁶¹ Rowan Williams, *On Christian Theology* (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley-Blackwell, 2000), 182-221.

³⁶² Stuart, *Gay and Lesbian Theologies: Repetitions with Critical Difference*.

³⁶³ Farley, *Just Love: A Framework for Christian Sexual Ethics*.

Abstract concepts of human rights, *life*, *liberty* and *property*, need to be grounded in community, human belief and action if they are to be put into practice. This is where religious scholars and theologians argue that religion, and its contribution to rights discourse, can be invaluable. For many, religious narratives ground Human Rights norms, providing visions and values of human communities that potentially give content and coherence to these otherwise abstract ideals. Religious narratives, likewise, need human rights norms to protect them, as well as to critique them, making those involved look critically at their respective contents and practices.

There is a significant debate about the relationship between human rights and faith, which includes a debate between human rights and theology. While many theologians emphasise that human rights are grounded in earlier theological or religious concepts of human dignity and autonomy, others emphasise the disruption of this earlier version of human rights by the Enlightenment tradition. These two strands find particular resonance in the debate about same-sex marriage, where the association of rights with liberal individuals seems contrary, for some, to communitarian arguments about duties and sacrifice.

In fact, the association of rights with liberal individualism seems contrary, Roger Ruston observes, to the community ethos of the church, privileging the abstract individual rather than the common good. Ruston maintains, “the individual person of this authentically Christian individualism is not on their own, a totally unrestrained agent acting solely for their own interest before agreements are made with others.”³⁶⁴ Many within the Christian faith see reducing morality to a set of individual rights as detrimental to the common good. Such arguments were central to religious arguments against the legalisation of same-sex marriage. Concerns grounded in the belief that same-sex marriage will have degrading effects on the stability of the marriage institution, family relationships and child-rearing all undergird NO arguments that the desire of homosexual couples to marry is a selfish one. Their belief maintains that while an individual, or many, may feel constrained in their ability to act according to their desires, i.e. marry a person of the same sex, it is just one of the many sacrifices we must make for the greater common good. So, while rigid adherence to individual rights can lead to further cultural clashes, a common set of beliefs is central to supporting the maintenance of community and the creation of a united identity.³⁶⁵

The Catholic paradigm of rights begins, Ruston contends, from the social person, made in God’s image (*Imago Dei*), not the autonomous individual. Human beings can tell the difference between objective good and “evil” because they have been *endowed* with reason and freedom of choice. This

³⁶⁴ Roger Ruston, *Human Rights and the Image of God* (London, UK: SCM Press, 2004), 288.

³⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 284-86.

endowment arises from human nature as built on relationships, with God and human beings. We are designed to respect these relationships and those involved, in order not to degrade them. This relational state gives rise to rights and duties. A duty to speak the truth implies a right to be given it. Derived from communal human flourishing rather than a sovereign individual choice, rights that are exercised within a community should only facilitate the taking of one's worth within the context of the collective.³⁶⁶ Morality is thus derived from the way in which we relate collectively, not as autonomous individuals doing what is right for oneself.

We are all fallible, Jeremy Waldron maintains, and therefore susceptible to mistaken or harmful convictions without the collective to keep us responsible for our actions. The collective, although capable of fallacy, because of its size, has a greater grip on moral checks and balances.³⁶⁷ This idea drives NO arguments about the lessons history and tradition have to teach us about how best to define marriage for the good of society. Moreover, they see secular human rights claims, like those put forth by LGBTQ+ activists, as foundationless. Grounded in disassociated individualism, they described modern rights discourse as selfish and even dangerous. With no regard for the health and stability of society, it simply "allows people to do whatever they want, with no consideration of the greater good."³⁶⁸ They see "restrictive" laws about marriage as governmental protections placed on society for its own good. Where same-sex relationships are now largely accepted, even if not always condoned, NO campaign participants see the marriage institution as essential to their nation's social fabric and thus something that should be beyond the whims of current liberal trends.

Tim Winter fears many Christians today are impatient with theology in their desire to change the world. Due to an internalisation of the Enlightenment definition of human dignity and worth, he argues, they often focus on specific issues (like marriage equality and abortion), rather than overarching ones, like individualism.³⁶⁹ Paradoxically, individual conscience is the central focus of many current religious freedom cases. Religious individuals want the right to follow their own conscience, despite the fact it no longer aligns with broad social consensus about the human dignity and worth of, for example, queer people. However, if conscience comes through community, emphasising the rights of individual members and the execution of fair treatment toward them, morality is, in itself, a subjective and relational matter.

³⁶⁶ Jeremy Waldron, "The Image of God: Rights, Reason and Order," in *Christianity and Human Rights: An Introduction*, ed. John Witte Jr. and Frank S. Alexander (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 216-21.

³⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 226-35.

³⁶⁸ Quinn.

³⁶⁹ Tim Winter and Jane Dammen McAuliffe, "Humanity and Gender," in *Humanity: Texts and Contexts*, ed. Michael Ipgrave and David Marshall (Washington DC: Georgetown University Press, 2011).

Beyond a disregard of the collective good or any particular social concern, NO campaigners also argued for a divine context for human creation and purpose. Without it, they posited, rights are merely a social construction, potentially transient and not therefore inalienable. A significant point of conflict for many religious adherents concerned with human rights law, it is debated at activist and academic levels. Ruston argues human rights law without religious grounding is simply the “exaltation of the human will”, a groundless assertion of rights independent of obligations.”³⁷⁰ To remove God from the topic of human dignity and worth is to remove the very thing that endows those same gifts to us, making them indelible truths. He argues that when Christian ethics shifted the moral field towards rights rather than duty, it did not necessarily deny that these same rights are natural parts of a larger whole, but that sometimes the common good is more important than the private needs of its individual parts.³⁷¹

In the context of same-sex marriage, individuals on either side worry about limitations being put on their own individual and communal rights. Individuals across the board saw their own community as disadvantaged and in need of protections against the other. Each group saw its position to be morally superior and their justifications more legitimate than their opponents. So, while religion is a lens through which some individuals interpret morality, it neither has only one focus nor is it the only means of interpreting morality. It is unsurprising, then, that questions about which lenses should be considered legitimate continue to reside at the centre of same-sex marriage debates.

YES advocates viewed religion, on the one hand, as static and determined. Yet at the same time, they also saw it often as biased and manipulated, its adherents interpreting theology or religious texts to suit their own pre-determined biases. They critiqued the special status given to religious belief and practitioners, expressed displeasure at the unique protections given to religion in our current legal system, but begrudgingly recognised the need to respect its practice. This did not mean it should be considered a legitimate public justification, they argued. However, when religious actors sought to make moral claims divorced from their religious beliefs, as is required by the Rawlsian proviso, such moral claims were dismissed as illegitimate, as solely grounded in “homophobia and bigotry.” Non-religious actors determined moral claims *not* grounded in religion when made by *religious* actors were illegitimate. In this sense, non-religious actors elevated *religiously* grounded moral claims above all others, but only when made by religious actors, and as long as they were excluded from policy defence. Ultimately, YES advocates posited religious thinking and argumentation should be acknowledged publicly, but also should not play a role in public discourse.

³⁷⁰ Ruston, *Human Rights and the Image of God*, 218.

³⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 12.

Minority Responsibility and Civility: Frustrations and Observations

Conservative religious voters expressed frustration at always being expected to defend their right to public participation. Simultaneously, LGBTQ+ advocates expressed frustration and pain at repeatedly having to defend their own inherent human worth. Both sides complained about continually having to “help others understand.” The people used to being labelled, they argued, should not have to do the hard work of peeling those labels off. Both sides discussed feeling perpetually misunderstood, politically disadvantaged and socially marginalised. Each side saw their own as the victim, the one unjustly treated, perpetually defending their right to exist and be included.

Individuals on both sides felt themselves a minority and complained about having to make themselves intelligible to the majority. LGBTQ+ advocates pointed out that discussions of rights and inclusion go to the very heart of what it means to be accepted into a society long dominated by heteronormativity. They see themselves as victims of intentional persecution, their exclusion the denial, not just of equal rights, but of their very humanity. They are “tired of being the bigger person.” Where LGBTQ+ advocates expressed frustration at having to translate into heteronormative rhetoric (i.e. two-person, monogamous, child-oriented relationships), religiously adherent participants were frustrated having to constantly translate their convictions into secular rhetoric. This sense of frustration fed feelings of grievance and marginalisation which made respectful discourse challenging. Emotions can, when felt strongly, inhibit our ability to gain perspective and communicate.

Making that process even more difficult is the growing sense of mistrust. Suspicion and trepidation get compounded when faced with someone who belongs to “the other side.” Being the first to reach out or listen can be detrimental to a person’s status within their own group: “You are enabling them,” “giving them a platform” or “lending their arguments credence,” giving them this gift without getting anything back in return. Dialogue gets dismissed because the act alone may inherently legitimise the views of opposing participants. Going first can mean giving up power or giving someone else the power one has fought hard for. Yet, going first can also be empowering. It allows one to set the expectations and tone. Ultimately, if “they” will not go first and “you” will not go first, dialogue gets stuck at an impasse. In order to listen, you must be willing to listen. In order to be heard, you must be willing to hear.

A host of new literature argues for the value of civility in political and social discourse.³⁷² More than politeness, it is a baseline of respect between citizens. It is something we “owe one another in a public life...when people talk about a crisis in civility, they usually are reporting their sense that there is not a shared understanding of what that baseline of respect ought to be.”³⁷³ It is a social contract, a common agreement on what *acceptable* public behaviour looks like and who deserves respect. For many, this social contract feels broken. No one can agree on facts, let alone on *how* to argue or what to argue about. When this kind of social trust is broken, it is very difficult for either citizens or politicians to compromise. Lack of trust in the goodwill of fellow citizens is destructive of the ability to communicate, especially about highly sensitive and controversial issues.

This does not deny the significant problems that exist in uncritical approaches to civility. In some cases, civility can simply make those *with* power feel safe, while allowing for the ridicule and dismissal of those *without* power. Sometimes civility can be about “making sure that the status quo, the hierarchy of the status quo at the moment, which means racial inequality, gender inequality, class inequality, stays permanent.”³⁷⁴ In doing so, it simply re-inscribes the injustice civil discourse should seek to address.³⁷⁵ In this way, not being civil can bring about necessary change. Furthermore, if its restoration is to move beyond a static or regressive definition, it must focus on who gets to redefine it. In such cases, the outcome of “incivility” can be a positive rewriting of our social contract. Done productively, it can lead to better inclusion of people who were discounted and dismissed in the past.³⁷⁶ Calls for civility can feel, for those previously left out, like an effort to stifle outrage over injustice or hate. However, “civility can be a tool to build or a weapon to silence.”³⁷⁷ When employed carefully and productively, it can aid in the negotiation of challenging and emotionally complex issues.

In particular, civility can be a useful tool in grassroots work like that undertaken by advocates during state-wide campaigns in America as well as the 2015 Referendum in Ireland. Members of *Marriage Equality Ireland* noted that, despite frustrating interactions, a measured means of communication opened up pathways to productive discourse. Uncertain voters felt safe to ask questions. They engaged with new ideas without fear of retribution, anger or dismissal. Constantly reminded to “bite

³⁷² Lilliana Mason, *Uncivil Agreement : How Politics Became Our Identity* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2018).

³⁷³ (Keith Bybee quoted in) Leila Fadel, "In These Divided Times, Is Civility under Siege?," *NPR*, 12 Mar 2019.

³⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁷⁵ Teresa M. Bejan, *Mere Civility : Disagreement and the Limits of Toleration* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2017).

³⁷⁶ Examples include the civil rights movement (i.e. Rosa Parks and sit ins), the women’s movement, and the LGBT movement (i.e. ACT UP). All of these included many acts of incivility that were necessary to break the dominant social power structure.

³⁷⁷ Fadel, "In These Divided Times, Is Civility under Siege?."

their tongue” and “keep it polite,” YES advocates acknowledge it often felt frustrating. However, they feared turning voters off with anger or heightened emotion. They knew overtly emotional responses would have shut down open communication. Instead, calmness allowed undecided voters to open up to new ideas. YES advocates in Ireland specifically sought to contrast *Iona’s* lecturing tone, which many saw as belittling. It turned voters off who felt they had the right and capacity to think critically about arguments being put before them. NO campaigners rarely spoke about the need for respectful listening, except when they did not feel respected or heard themselves.

Many activists spoke about the “importance of hearing both sides” or allowing space for diverse participation. They theorised about the importance of listening and feeling heard in the dialogical and healing process, however, actual practice was often less sanguine. When faced with a real world example, responses were less sympathetic: “I think it's interesting that at the end of the day he didn't care one way or the other, just that people were nice to him.”³⁷⁸ This advocate equated “being respectfully listened to” with “just people being nice to him,” demonstrating that it was easier to discuss the process in the abstract than to practice it. Face to face, giving nothing more than theoretical space to others undermines authenticity, reinforcing rather than alleviating feelings of ridicule and dismissal, only entrenching individuals further in their own positions.

Lack of self-reflection is often central to this breakdown in discourse between individuals who hold different worldviews. Unfortunately, we often see worldview as perspective in our opponents, but truth in ourselves. Likewise, we see injustice and inequality for our community, but privilege and power for our opponent’s. Complaints about injustice and underrepresentation are well documented by historically marginalised groups. For individuals on both sides of this debate, perceptions of victimhood can and do appear similar and shared.

Homophobia and Religion’s “Image Problem”: Perceptions and Tensions

Religious groups, insulated or not, are generally *aware* of what is going on beyond their community walls. Much of the American Evangelical community is aware of and concerned about their “image problem,” particularly in relation to LGBTQ+ issues. *The Barna Group*, an evangelical Christian data firm, explicitly addresses the need for evangelical “rebranding.”³⁷⁹ Aware of the increasing unacceptability of homophobia, many religious objectors to same-sex marriage sought to distance themselves from the stereotype of the religious person as bigoted, homophobic and racist. In this

³⁷⁸ Kendell.

³⁷⁹ Kinnaman and Lyons, *Unchristian: What a New Generation Really Thinks About Christianity...and Why It Matters*.

way, research participants exemplified a larger tension present among religious actors: the desire to be recognised for their religiosity, but not wishing to be limited by it.

In fact, many who campaigned *against* same-sex marriage believed they had a “great compassion and love for gay people.”³⁸⁰ They saw no conflict between their policy position and this claim. Yet, negative rhetoric used to argue against same-sex marriage, from accusations of “perversion” to assessments of “insufficient parenting,” inherently suggested that to be homosexual is to be bad or, at least, not good enough. The existence of ideas and organisations like Williams’ once-gay ministry suggested one could and should seek to change oneself. Furthering such negative associations with homosexuality only played into existing stereotypes. Yet, Williams did not see himself as hateful of gay people. Like his American and Irish contemporaries who expressed sadness and hurt at being labeled homophobic, Williams understood his own position to be one of compassion and respect. Gay people were “welcome to ‘choose’ that lifestyle or identity,”³⁸¹ however, he would not wish it for himself.

Hurtful and confounding, such statements made many LGBTQ+ advocates reject the idea of engaging with people like Williams or his organisation in any way. Despite occasional willingness to “just let it go,” or more accurately to “agree that we don’t like you, but we’ll just leave you alone and good luck in life,”³⁸² broad consensus among LGBTQ+ rights activists was that there could be no accommodation of Williams or those who held his viewpoint. Concession was dangerous. It opened the door to a flood of discriminatory practices and laws. In Ireland, although less concerned about religious exemption laws, there was equal emphasis on such views’ unacceptability.

Religion, indeed, has played a significant role in the rejection of the LGBTQ+ community. From limiting participation in the institution of marriage to limiting denominational church participation, religion has much to answer for. However, religion is neither the only justification used to reject queer people, nor is religion inherently anti-queer. Many interviewees, across the board, associated being religious with conservative views on LGBTQ+ rights. Most YES advocates saw traditional religion as antiquated or foolish, associating anti-LGBTQ+ sentiments almost exclusively with religious voters. Likewise, NO campaigners saw their interpretation of faith as the only real or authentic one, decrying the *motivated misinterpretations* of Christian liberals. “Just because we want a thing to be true does not make it so.”³⁸³ In this sense, both YES and NO campaigns had similarly limited ideas of what it means to be religious.

³⁸⁰ Williams.

³⁸¹ Ibid.

³⁸² Kendell.

³⁸³ Quinn.

The widespread view of religious and LGBTQ+ communities as polar opposites is a major hinderance to the dialogical progress. Moreover, as this research makes clear, the religious-secular divide is not the most problematic chasm between worldviews.

Part II: The Post-Secular Framework: Limitations and Problems

Secular political terms seek to provide a framework of at least “minimal cooperation amid social realities of increasing religious, ethnic, and moral diversity.”³⁸⁴ Opposing notions of how people ought to live their lives should be tolerated and permitted to peacefully coexist assuming they conform to certain basic, minimal rights and laws. As such, liberal definitions of tolerance and democracy are considered the great corner stones of modern society. Their application seems to break down, however, when faced with those voices who refuse to abide by their broadly agreed upon definitions. Liberal scholars often argue that “secular grounds are the only acceptable justifications because they are rational and universal.”³⁸⁵ However, secular grounds are seen to be rational and universal “precisely because they are made within a particular cultural setting that establishes secular thought as rational, universal and acceptable.”³⁸⁶ Christopher Eberle explicitly notes “secular grounds, then, are cultural grounds, grounds we find plausible, in large part because we have been socialised into one culture and another.”³⁸⁷

Rawlsian *liberal democracy* supports similar notions of secular reasoning as the only acceptable grounds for public discourse as they manifest in and pertain to systems of governance. It does not mean religion has not, does not, or will not be used in much the same way: to dominate, unify or homogenise. Rather, the view of secularism as neutral often obfuscates honest assessments of its cultural and political assumptions. So, while tolerance is a prerequisite to maintaining a pluralistic society in which a multiplicity of options necessarily exist in tandem, tolerance and pluralism tend to assert themselves hegemonically in these contexts, as they subscribe to the Western liberal secular framework. This has led cultural conservatives, like anti-same sex marriage advocates, to see a liberal framework as inherently dismissive of, even disdainful towards, their most significant, identity-constitutive values and commitments. This sensation is at the heart of the continued conflict between proponents and opponents of LGBTQ+ rights in the US and Ireland. The post-secular theory seeks

³⁸⁴ Jason A. Springs, "On Giving Religious Intolerance Its Due: Prospects for Transforming Conflict in a Post-Secular Society," *The Journal of Religion* (2012): 4.

³⁸⁵ Erin K. Wilson, *After Secularism: Rethinking Religion in Global Politics* (London, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 144.

³⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁸⁷ Christopher J. Eberle, *Religious Conviction in Liberal Politics* (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 314.

to address this inequality by expanding public space to those participants most frequently left out by the requirements of secular liberal democracies.

Habermas and the Post-Secular Theory: Engaging Religious Actors in Public Discourse

Post-secularism not only recognises religion as alive and well, but as something society will have to contend with for a long time. Habermas, like many of his contemporaries, initially argued the case for secularisation as a sociological concept applicable and appropriate to the modern age.³⁸⁸ However, when secularism exiled religion from public discourse, religion adapted to the new contexts and frameworks by altering its methods of communication and engagement rather than die out. Thus, while the prefix “post-” seems to portray the notion that religion, having died, is now alive again, in fact, religion never went away.

Post-secularism is post, not because of a time frame, a renewal or even reinvigoration of religion in the public sphere, but a change in attitude towards the recognition of religion and religious actors.³⁸⁹ In this understanding, religion and secularism do not exist as mutually exclusive concepts, but rather as concurrent ones. In fact, they cannot exist devoid of one another since each has been constructed against the backdrop of the other. Habermas’s shift toward post-secularism, his “revised reading,”³⁹⁰ exemplifies this increasingly common change in consciousness. Although his work primarily cites revivals in non-western nations, such as Islam in sub-Saharan Africa and Evangelicals in Latin America, resurgences are not solely relegated to non-Western nations.³⁹¹ The presence of religion, religious actors and religious influence in the public square is alive and well in many Western nations, not just the US and Ireland, where they exist clearly in the public *and* private sphere.³⁹² Post-secular “changes in consciousness,”³⁹³ or recognition of the necessary inclusion of religion into public

³⁸⁸ Jürgen Habermas, "Notes on Post-Secular Society," *NPQ: New Perspectives Quarterly* 25, no. 4 (Fall 2008): 1. He saw this evidenced by three things: the increase in scientific and technologic processes as explanations for what was once mysterious; religious institutions’ loss of power, due to increasing privatisation which resulted in their diminished influence in the public sphere; and faith as no longer deemed a necessary coping mechanism due to reduced risks to life in a post-industrial society.

³⁸⁹ H. de Vries, "Introduction: Before, around, and Beyond the Theologico-Political," in *Political Theologies: Religion in a Post-Secular World*, ed. H. de Vries and L. E. Sullivan (New York: Fordham University Press, 2006), 3.

³⁹⁰ Habermas, "Notes on Post-Secular Society," 17. He observes evidence of religious resurgence in the world in three ways: missionary expansion, fundamentalist radicalisation and political instrumentalisation of potential for violence in many world religions.

³⁹¹ *Ibid.*

³⁹² "Faith and the 2016 Campaign," Pew Research Center, <https://www.pewforum.org/2016/01/27/faith-and-the-2016-campaign/>; "Many Americans Hear Politics from the Pulpit," Pew Research Center, <https://www.pewforum.org/2016/08/08/many-americans-hear-politics-from-the-pulpit/>; "Churches in Court," Pew Research Center, <https://www.pewforum.org/2011/03/31/churches-in-court1/>.

³⁹³ Habermas, "Notes on Post-Secular Society," 17.

discourse, is the result of this increased awareness of encroaching religious elements in modern Western society. As such, religious actors are becoming increasingly vocal and engaged in public policy debates on issues ranging from abortion and LGBTQ+ rights to textbooks and prayer in school.

The increase in individual public policy issues addressing revised understandings of sexuality and gender necessarily engage individuals from a wide variety of comprehensive doctrines. Rawls's well-established doctrine of overlapping consensus calls for individuals to partake in discourse using public reason, rather than reasons rooted in their own comprehensive doctrines. Habermas, instead, argues against the acceptance of irreconcilable differences as inevitable by-products of pluralism and modernity. He sees the task of reason as a call to all participants to self-reflect. Distinguishing between *moral reasons*, which can be shared by both religious and non-religious citizens, and *worldviews*, which should be respected and included by the neutral state regardless of their religious or secular orientation, Habermas argues that comprehensive doctrines attached to *worldviews* should not and need not be translated. Instead, he believes their articulation can in fact lend itself to a productive and open-ended conversation. Ultimately, for communication to be free of repression, it must be symmetrical.³⁹⁴

Critical of Rawls and early Habermasian approaches, Jason Springs likewise observes the "unnecessary and unfair justificatory burden upon tradition-specific forms of reasoning, speech, and action."³⁹⁵ The assumption that one's identity can be separated from social or cultural context proves the great misunderstanding of the secular political theory. So, where dualistic thinking within secularism has promoted a limited understanding of religion in political theory as primarily "institutional, individual and irrational,"³⁹⁶ post-secularism seeks to promote a more expansive and inclusive public space. Habermas agrees with Rawls's insistence that religious worldviews be reflective and aware of competing truth claims. Where he diverges is in his insistence that such reflection be required of all public participants. A stable society must be built on more than simple overlapping reason. It must find agreement through the struggle for moral insights that necessarily emerge from arguments shared between diverse worldviews.

Critical of Rawls's *proviso*, rather than asking citizens to avoid using language rooted in their own personal truth claims, which puts the burden of adjustment primarily on those outside the liberal secular framework, Habermas insists we should place value on the integrity of each participant's

³⁹⁴ Jurgen Habermas, *Between Naturalism and Religion* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2008).

³⁹⁵ Springs, "On Giving Religious Intolerance Its Due: Prospects for Transforming Conflict in a Post-Secular Society," 7.

³⁹⁶ Wilson, *After Secularism: Rethinking Religion in Global Politics*, 5.

view. This presents the task of explaining and translating for each other the motivations and insights that emerge from all citizen's worldviews. This process would encourage them to simultaneously argue the truth of their position and in doing so, create space for *mutual* translation.³⁹⁷ To ask for citizens to split their worldview into secular and religious parts is, after all, inherently secularist.

Post-secularism, by recognising the co-existence of faith and reason in everyday lives, allows for a more nuanced understanding of what happens when religion enters public space. Allowing religion to participate in national dialogue gives voice to those grounded in faith who wish to use faith-based reasoning toward inclusive, constructive and emancipatory causes because they will not be forced to choose one over the other. Post-secularism, *if* recognised correctly, can also play a role in giving a voice to those outside the current androcentric, heteronormative framework. It has the potential to provide space through which secular political actors and advocates can begin to break down barriers and consider both religious and "modern" perspectives of citizens concerned with policy surrounding issues of identity and belief liberty. In this sense, public space should be seen, not as one primarily constructed of liberties, but one in which diverse players can work out laws to which they can consent.

Recognising the need to accept excluded voices into public discourse, "irrespective of whether their arguments are convincing or objectionable," Habermas proposed as a solution *complementary learning*.³⁹⁸ In order for openness to exist, he said, all actors must adapt and re-imagine the public sphere—no single position is to be invested with neutrality. Such an investiture was clearly in place during the debates on same-sex marriage in the US and Ireland. As a consequence, even after the right to marriage itself was settled by the court in America and by national referendum in Ireland, discussions about the place of faith, identity and reason in social and political discourse remain contentious. A better, more balanced method of dialogical engagement is necessary going forward if greater inter-community communication is ever to occur.

Critical of the unfair burden Rawls's *proviso* places on actors outside the mainstream, Habermas reflects many of the complaints interviewees expressed. His work's recognition of their experience would undoubtedly go a long way to making them feel heard. And, while his recognition that the experience of religiously motivated advocates is one of disproportionate exclusion, this research has shed light on a couple of major problems that limit its usefulness as a practical political model.

³⁹⁷ Habermas, *Between Naturalism and Religion*.

³⁹⁸ "Notes on Post-Secular Society," 18.

Limits to and Problems with the Post-Secular Framework

Post-secularism is, ultimately, a framework designed to help facilitate better national engagement and public discourse. In this sense, it does not exist in the US or Ireland as both locales operate in a Rawlsian liberal secular framework. In adopting a Rawlsian context, authentic participation in discourse by those beyond its secular confines is limited. Neither has opened or provided truly post-secular spaces.

In Ireland, a nation historically famous for its religiosity, the social and political influence of religion appears dramatically on the decline. In the US, despite constitutional separations between Church and State, religion and religious voices do play a significant role in determining policy, especially relating to family, gender and reproduction. However, despite the power of religious voices to determine policy, non-secular voices are often excluded from authentic participation in public discourse. The limits placed on the type of reason participants can use in debates over same-sex marriage at institutional and cultural levels make it clear both nations continue to function in a purely secular framework. There were no steps taken at a governmental level to authentically engage with those voices such a framework leaves out. And, while Habermas's post-secular theory seeks to create a new, more inclusive one, there appears little evidence of its practical or potential implementation in the near future.

Perhaps the greatest problem this research exposes in the post-secular theory, however, is its continued insistence that the greatest chasm between worldviews lies along a religious/secular divide. Religious and secular mentalities are often pitted automatically against each other while no conflict is seen within them. LGBTQ+ rights conflict can, in fact, be found along the entire secular-religious continuum. *Faith in Marriage Equality* in Ireland sought to disrupt this narrative by supporting same-sex marriage through religious reasoning. In contrast, *Mothers and Fathers Matter*, set up to oppose marriage equality in Ireland had, as its main spokesman, a gay man who touted his atheist credentials. In fact, *Iona's* leader, David Quinn, used this fact to emphasise his institution's own righteousness, to legitimatise his own position. Likewise, YES advocates were happy to lend credence to and find legitimacy in religious actors who supported their own viewpoint. They had no problem with *those* individuals using faith to underscore their reason. Advocates across the board expressed solidarity with individuals who held the same or similar policy positions, while delegitimising their opponents, with no concern for their religiousness or secularity.

This research shows that the greatest divide is not between religious and secular worldviews, it is, rather, between liberal and conservative ones, regardless of their religious or non-religious affiliation. The liberal viewpoint accepted, even encouraged change, while the conservative one placed more value on maintaining traditions. The term post-secular is misleading in its assumption that the major divide polarising today's national discourse is the religious/secular one. Secularism, in the US, historically sought to separate the two spheres in public and political spaces, a protection of the religious freedom upon which the US was founded. However, such a policy that was once broadly accepted, when some form of Christianity was clearly dominant, has evolved into a problem of extreme diversity well beyond the traditional sectarianism. The radical dissimilarities across modern society, along with a growing abandonment of the church in any form, have strained for the conservative-minded the institutional religious/secular divide to the breaking point. So, instead of the multifaceted approach to worldviews, which allows for a wide range of religious and secular perspectives, the tendency has become to see a dichotomy solely between religion and secularism. In doing so, it re-inscribes a false dichotomy and limits the possibility for productive and nuanced dialogue.

Despite misplacing the divide, however, Habermas's theory about the importance of providing real space for diverse worldview expressions has much to teach. He posits that democracy should be that which is built on the "moral act of mutual recognition which is expressed in taking one's fellow citizens' perspective and learning from it."³⁹⁹ Unlike Rawls's strategy of avoidance, Habermas includes, rather than brackets off, the convictions of others. Further, he sees this task of public engagement as a process through which antagonistic perspectives can learn from one another. We are neither living in a secular nor a religious age, but a pluralist one. The challenge is, then, how to best co-exist in this pluralist space. From Rawls's *political liberalism* to Habermas's *post-secular theory*, academics and politicians alike are trying to imagine what a fair, inclusive and representative political society can and should look like. Ultimately, we continue to struggle as to how we can best live, both practically and ethically, with difference and diversity. Data from this research can provide a number of insights to how we can better respond to each other as fellow citizens.

³⁹⁹ Maureen Junker-Kenny, "Between Postsecular Society and the Neutral State: Religion as a Resource for Public Reason," in *Religious Voices in Public Places*, ed. Nigel Biggar and Linda Hogan (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2009), 62.

Part III: Challenges to Living with Difference, the Value of Authentic Dialogue

The post-secular reimagining, while generally absent at national and governmental levels, can be seen, in some form, amidst individual actors and grassroots organisations that are working hard to create shared spaces. A third space, like that entertained by Habermas, can encourage us to reimagine *personal relationships*, even if we are yet unable to implement reimagined *political frameworks*. Examination of the Irish and American conflict over LGBTQ+ rights has shown a number of potentially productive grassroots efforts, like *deep canvassing* which emphasised non-judgmental dialogue, and inclusive spaces, like the open *Q and A* sessions held by *Marriage Equality Ireland* leading up to the 2015 referendum. They underscore the value of personal and community spaces that allow for authentic dialogue between individuals of fundamentally diverse worldviews. That being said, there is a long way to go in the project of inclusive discourse on issues relating to LGBTQ+ rights post-legalisation.

There is clear need for accommodation of those who would be intolerant toward views that oppose their own. The marginalisation or complete rejection of such views as irrational, irrelevant, or unsustainable simply because they stand at odds with “the necessity of mutual toleration” inherently alienates some cultural subgroups. Charles Taylor’s observation that “the sense ‘we’re not being heard’ is close to the sense: ‘we can’t talk to those people; we can only defeat them.’” This was mirrored time and again in the experience of same-sex marriage detractors and supporters in both the US and Ireland. “People engage in politics on issues which have aroused this reaction rather as though they were engaging in a war. The other side has to be wiped out or totally neutralised. The goal is...to root them out, or subjugate them, so that one does not have to deal with what they stand for anymore.”⁴⁰⁰ Evocative of the zero-sum mentality that appeared to drive advocacy on both sides, this battle metaphor was discussed at length in Chapter 3.

The mentality of total eradication, present on both sides, is a clear hinderance to productive engagement. Individuals, rather, need to be understood on their own terms. This means appreciating, respecting and negotiating, instead of flat-out dismissing them as “puerile, evil, or simply irrational or unreasonable.”⁴⁰¹ Tolerance is, indeed, a prerequisite to maintaining a pluralistic society in which a multiplicity of options necessarily exist in tandem. The perceived marginalisation by conservative religious actors of their voices in the “discourse of tolerance,”⁴⁰² however, has resulted in a culture

⁴⁰⁰ Charles Taylor, "Living with Difference," in *Debating Democracy's Discontents*, ed. Anita Allen and Milton Regan (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1999), 215.

⁴⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 217.

⁴⁰² Springs, "On Giving Religious Intolerance Its Due: Prospects for Transforming Conflict in a Post-Secular Society," 8.

of alienation that encourages its members to believe unquestioningly in their own disenfranchisement. This does little more than exacerbate the very same disruptions the framework of tolerant pluralism claims to constrain.

Towards Inclusive Dialogue: Moving Away from the Either/Or Narrative, Towards a Both/And

Erin Wilson's *relational dialogism* seeks to address inequities in power by moving a step beyond Habermas's *complementary learning*. It places the responsibility for reconceptualising the relationship between religious and secular actors in international and political systems on the shoulders of non-religious actors, a radical notion in the modern liberal state. Instead of "viewing the relationship between secularism and religion as 'either/or,' contemporary political activism encourages us, perhaps even requires us, to view this relationship as a 'both/and'—both religious and secular—and many other things besides."⁴⁰³ Wilson seeks to highlight the influence of religious ideas, values, and narratives on community and identity, something lacking in modern "secular dualistic" approaches. A recognition of religion's influence, she believes, is vital to accommodate citizens who value their religious beliefs and identity in equal parts to their identities as a nation's citizens.

One of the goals of *relational dialogism* is to overcome the limitations put upon religion by secular dualism, the notion that religious and secular exist in two separate and non-intersecting realms.⁴⁰⁴ On the one hand, this research demonstrates an over-inflation of the religious/secular divide. On the other hand, it does not deny such limitations are undoubtedly problematic. Instead, it shows the limits placed on religious participation in public discourse appear to constrict conservative participants more than their liberal counterparts. Where conservative religious justifications are rejected as "personal opinion" or "wholly relativist," liberal religious justifications are accepted as the "correct" or "right interpretation." The support of liberal religious justifications does not necessarily come from those with similarly religious views. Instead, such support comes from actors who share policy positions on moral issues regardless of their religious or secular affiliation. The religious aspect of liberal reasoning is seen as inessential to moral conclusions, by liberal secular actors, while conservative religious reasoning is seen as a central problem by them. This leaves the common either/or narrative largely in place.

⁴⁰³ Wilson, *After Secularism: Rethinking Religion in Global Politics*, 227.

⁴⁰⁴ Ibid.

A consequence of this unintegrated dualism, observes Wilson, is a world viewed through “practical oppositions, one side of each opposition becomes privileged and the other subordinated.”⁴⁰⁵ In the modern secular context, only one side has been forced to adapt its intellectual reason in engagement with “the other.” Communication requires two-way action, however, which means liberal secular actors, too, must actively reach out and engage with those outside their purview. Such a shift in secular thinking would refute the notion that secular dominance is the only reasonable mindset within political discourse and policy engagement.⁴⁰⁶ Reconceptualising the discursive framework to engage with those frequently excluded is valuable in its exposure of such assumptions. Lessons from post-secular theory are applicable here, in that they encourage those operating in a majority liberal secular paradigm to self-reflect in consideration of their approaches to communication. The ultimate goal being to improve interactions between those not situated within the same paradigm. Such recognition is important for individuals of faith on both sides of this debate.

Haidt writes in detail about the importance of not singling out any one community as the villain. Discussions of disadvantage and minority status are particularly complicated in this context, where the group claiming cultural minority status has retained significant institutional power. Even more noticeable, is the fact this newly designated “minority” were, themselves, in the majority until very recently. This underlines the problem in giving any one group blanket access to uncritical compassion. Nevertheless, Haidt’s insights into feelings of victimisation apply precisely because they are primarily predicated on self-perception. Our righteous minds, he notes, shift quickly into combat mode or performance mode when faced with opposition. We demonstrate our righteousness in a way that impresses our friends and shows our allies that we are committed members of the team. Thus, we are combating the enemy, while simultaneously performing for friends. The goal of any successful communicator must, thus, be to convey respect and openness. It disarms the opponent’s combat mode.

Wilson’s *relational dialogism*, like Haidt’s *MFT*, emphasises the need for intellectual openness to the consideration of other truth claims. That does not mean being religiously biased simply to assuage members of one religious community. In fact, it does not require one to take on any views, religious or not, that do not align with one’s own moral convictions. This project is not asking actors to adopt views or practices of others, but instead to simply halt the marginalisation and privatisation of those who do not fit within the liberal secular paradigm. Reducing the space for “unreasonable” voices may make public discourse easier; it does not make it better.

⁴⁰⁵ Ibid. 11.

⁴⁰⁶ Habermas, “Notes on Post-Secular Society,” 19.

To that end, the culmination of dialogue need not be resolution. It may, in all likelihood, result in mutually understood disagreement. As such, the focus should be on the *process*, instead of the *outcome* of engagement because it is reasonable to assume conflicting parties will emerge from the engagement with enriched and altered ways of seeing one another and the world in which they must coexist. The potentiality of this type of modification in one's convictions holds out the prospect for constructive mediation of seemingly unmanageable points of conflict.

This research shows that, despite occasional cross-community engagement, there has been little *complementary learning* done in the US and Ireland around the issue of LGBTQ+ rights. This is because of the continued view of many that religious positions are either/or, instead of both/and. Wilson's *relational dialogism* may, therefore, be uniquely positioned to help facilitate better discourse between and within communities concerned with issue of identity, faith and reason. This includes those involved in the NO campaign in the US and Ireland who see their nation's history, and thereby their own identity, as directly influenced by and fundamental to Christianity. It includes YES advocates who see faith as identity creating, affirming and emancipatory. And it includes those that see faith as the greatest obstacle to their own freedom. Moving past the false dichotomy of *either* religion *or* the LGBTQ+ community, or other such narratives propagated by ill-informed citizens and assumptive politicians, this research, instead, suggests religious actors should be seen as valuable and underutilised assets in the future of grassroots dialogue and inter-communal engagement.

One of the goals of relational dialogism is to overcome the restrictions of secular dualism which separates the religious and secular into two non-intersecting realms. This study affirms the limits placed on religious participation in public discourse, but also has found there to have been an over-inflation of the fundamental nature of the religious/secular divide. The liberal/conservative divide was equally in evidence in the campaigns studied. For example, where conservative religious justifications were rejected as "personal opinion" or "wholly relativist" by the YES campaign, liberal religious justifications were accepted as the "correct interpretation." Similarly, a gay male atheist was put forth by Mothers and Fathers Matter to serve the NO campaign. Liberal religious justifications came from actors who shared policy positions with secular actors on moral issues, and conservative secular justifications came, not surprisingly, from actors who shared policy positions with conservative religious actors. The religious aspect of reasoning is seen as inessential to moral conclusions when the case is being made for policy positions that secular actors agree with. Yet, the common either/or narrative remains largely in place.

Engaging Religious Voters: Liberal Religious Voices May Be One Bridge Across the Divide

Faith and faith communities are still broadly associated with opposition to marriage equality and other LGBTQ+ rights issues. Religious voters are often ignored by liberal campaigns which seem to believe that “if you're a person of faith, you're not with gay people. And that's wrong.”⁴⁰⁷ Californian LGBTQ+ advocate, Kathleen Campisano, sees them instead as valuable potential allies. She has frequently and frustratedly pointed out that ignoring religious voters was a major factor in Prop 8's failure in California. It continues to be, she warns, a great hole in LGBTQ+ activism across the board.

Faith coordinators, in fact, proved instrumental to local marriage equality campaign victories in Massachusetts, Connecticut, Iowa, and Vermont, which were the first four successful marriage equality campaigns in the US. Recognising their value, Campisano said: “A lot of people don't think that faith had that much to do with it, but I think faith had everything to do with it.”⁴⁰⁸ She has expressly worked to create allies who could speak the language of undecided voters. While her goal was specifically to change the minds of these voters, in believing it to be a possibility, she inherently recognised their worth as participatory citizens.

In Ireland, *Faith in Marriage Equality* worked to bridge the rhetorical gap between religious voters and the main campaign organisation set up to advocate for the passage of same-sex marriage in 2015.⁴⁰⁹ However, it seemed *Marriage Equality Ireland* mainly saw *Faith in Marriage Equality* as a convenient side project, one that would “take care of the religious people.” They recognised the value of including religious actors in their fight, however, dismissed their own responsibility towards engaging them. For many, this was because they did not “have the time or inclination.” Some interviewees acknowledged their own lack of religious fluency as the problem and expressed gratefulness someone else did. More often than not, however, religious voters were, broadly speaking, perceived as a “problem” or “hinderance.”

LGBTQ+ advocacy groups in both locales ultimately came to a limited understanding of the value of religious allies. Individuals who could instinctually better speak to the culture and experience of others were seen to be politically advantageous. Very rarely, however, did it appear YES campaigners saw liberal religious actors as anything more than a means to an end. Instead of valuing their contribution as *liberal* and *religious* actors, religiousness was seen simply as an adjacent flare

⁴⁰⁷ Campisano.

⁴⁰⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁰⁹ Aoife Barry, "People of Faith Urged To "Be Brave" And Vote Yes in Same-Sex Marriage Referendum," *The Journal*, 15 Feb 2015.

to their more fundamental liberal identity. Such a limited view of religious voters meant YES advocates largely dismissed conservative religious voters as a necessary burden and liberal religious voters as a semi-useful novelty.

It is by acknowledging and celebrating the reality of multiple identities that a wider and more complex dialogical space may be created. Those individuals with both religious and liberal identities can bring valuable nuance to debates by engaging a spectrum of people rarely acknowledged or included in the discussion. In an untapped similarity, queer religious voices and conservative religious voices both find themselves fighting for representation in dominant secular discourse. It is possible, then, this shared understanding of exclusion from public space can be an overlap on which shared discourse can draw. Supporting such a theory, this research suggests liberal religious citizens may be uniquely qualified to help facilitate discourse around issues that fall along both religious/secular and liberal/conservative lines. As such, their ability to translate across worldview divides is particularly valuable to the debate about same-sex marriage.

Conclusion

Ultimately, same-sex marriage is a phenomenon that stubbornly belies the widespread presumption that courts can settle contentious policy issues without encumbering particular citizens with “an asymmetrical burden.”⁴¹⁰ Rawls’s “proviso,” as adopted in Ireland and the US, places a disproportionate responsibility on religious actors to translate themselves into ‘neutral’ rhetoric. It asks them to keep their faith in the private sphere, at least rhetorically. However, as politics pervades all spheres of life, even those who once spent little time thinking about its consequences find it unavoidable.

A 2016 Pew Research Centre survey shows nearly two-thirds of recent American churchgoers claim to have observed social-political issues being spoken about in church by clergy, most typically those relating to religious liberty (40%) and homosexuality (39%). Likewise, in Ireland, despite the clear decline in religiousness, as of 2016, 78.3% of the population still identified as Catholic on the national census.⁴¹¹ Even more to the point, “issue politics” have become a regular fixture of the pulpit.⁴¹² Such overtly encouraged conflation of political and religious life make the idea of keeping religion private or separate from politics increasingly non-viable. The growing visibility of non-heteronormative individuals and communities has placed discussions about gender, sexuality, family

⁴¹⁰ Jürgen Habermas, "Religion in the Public Sphere," *European Journal of Philosophy* 14, no. 1 (2006): 15.

⁴¹¹ "Number with No Religion Continues to Rise," Central Statistics Office, <https://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/ep/p-cp8iter/p8iter/p8rrc/>.

⁴¹² "Many Americans Hear Politics from the Pulpit."

and identity, long present in the dark, in full public view. Forced to consider and publicly address such beliefs, the public finds itself split.⁴¹³ Recognising this to be the inevitable product of living in a pluralist world, the question becomes how best to facilitate discourse along this split.

One of the greatest inequities found in today's secular liberal framework is the requirement of religious actors to translate their positions into public reason. If the burden of communication is made less asymmetrical, religious actors may, through renewed, sincere efforts at engagement by secular actors, feel less politically and culturally marginalised. Insights from Haidt demonstrate how important it is to feel heard, safe and encouraged in the dialogical process. Mitigating grievance and resentment that results from systematic marginalization opens up the possibility for greater tolerance toward opposing views. One solution, Spring suggests, is "to acknowledge liberalism's anti-religious proclivities" and "cultivate self-reflectiveness about its 'intolerance of intolerance.'"⁴¹⁴

Because issues presented in debates like same-sex marriage are not solely about laws, but about the nature of society and direction of culture, the discussion does not end when legislation gets passed. "It is not enough to just win cases; we must change the culture."⁴¹⁵ A zero-sum, all or nothing mentality endangers national political and social cohesion.⁴¹⁶ A better framework must be constructed that allows individuals caught between the legally sanctioned, socially approved and theologically condemned right to marriage equality a better chance to articulate their beliefs through more fruitful dialogue. In response to growing cultural and political divides globally, there is a real need for dialogue's ability to humanise relationships and to ease the demonisation of the other that even well-meaning citizens sometimes fall prey to. Addressing polarisation means addressing concerns, beliefs and instincts towards unfamiliar worldviews. It means digging deep into uncomfortable discussions and allowing the space for those uncomfortable discussions to take place.

⁴¹³ "Where the Public Stands on Religious Liberty Vs. Nondiscrimination," Pew Research Center, <http://www.pewforum.org/2016/09/28/where-the-public-stands-on-religious-liberty-vs-nondiscrimination/>.

Beliefs, for example, about transgender bathroom laws or requiring religious individuals to provide services or employment to LGBTQ+ couples, are close to equally divided among American citizens. The percentage of individuals who express sympathy for *both* perspectives remains minimal. White Evangelical Protestant respondents were the most one-sided in their response to the issues presented above, in opposition to Black Protestants and Catholics, who were more evenly split.

⁴¹⁴ Springs, "On Giving Religious Intolerance Its Due: Prospects for Transforming Conflict in a Post-Secular Society," 5-6.

⁴¹⁵ *Alliance Defending Freedom*, a Christian-based 'Religious Freedom' advocacy group in the US, made this statement, however, similar claims of social attitudinal transformation lay at the heart of Marriage Equality campaigns in both the US and Ireland generally.

⁴¹⁶ Initiatives that seek to bring conservative religious leaders and LGBTQ+ rights advocates together to produce "rights legislature" have begun to emerge over the last decade. *Fairness for All* is an organisation dedicated to a collaborative process between LGBTQ+ rights and 'Religious Liberty' advocates across the US. Originally established in Utah, *Fairness for All* succeeded in crafting and passing legislature approved of by both Mormon leaders and LGBTQ+ rights activists in 2015.

The great variety of voices, religious and non-religious, gay and straight, demonstrate how complex and challenging it is to try and define any group as monolithic. This research has shown it is futile to frame the debate about LGBTQ+ rights as a religious/secular one. To do so does a disservice to the dialogical process. Reimagining the conflict as one between liberal and conservative worldviews can allow for better and more appropriate analysis and engage more points of view in the debate.

In the wake of same-sex marriage legalisation, new challenges continue to arise that undermine the creation of a bridge across the seemingly intractable divide between LGBTQ+ rights activists and those who see their progress as directly linked to diminishing “religious freedoms.” Without a bridge, the national pitfalls of polarisation relating to this and similar issues will continue to widen and destroy the bonds of common citizenship. California’s *deep canvassing* strategies and Ireland’s *I’m Voting Yes, Ask Me Why* campaign show that individual actors and selective organisations can engage in respectful discourse at the grassroots level and narrow that divide. Nevertheless, fundamentally different worldviews remain, and these opposing positions have significant consequences for LGBTQ+ relationships. Ultimately, despite the right of democratic citizens to have contrary commitments, a diverse nation-state can only have one set of laws. It is therefore not a question of eradicating difference, but rather learning to live more productively with it.

CONCLUSION

To conclude this thesis, a review of the work is presented as it pertains to initial research objectives. This section will offer its main conclusions, final recommendations, and ideas for further study. Concerned, broadly, with gaining a more in-depth understanding of the same-sex marriage debate and those involved in it, this research more specifically addressed post-legalisation reflections on the campaign process to legalise same-sex marriage in Ireland and California (US). There is much work documenting the theological, social and/or biological reasoning that undergirds both the opposition to, and support of, same-sex marriage, but the focus here is on the campaign itself, its content and process, especially through the experience of individuals involved in its execution. Its interest lies in the human component of an often abstract or depersonalised debate about sexuality, religion and the family construct. The evidence is clear that the experience of political (i.e. legal and social) advocacy, and the resulting sense of loss or victory that follows, has proved a major inhibitor to further dialogical engagement post-legalisation.

This dissertation began by drawing together political history, theology and social practice to create a more robust understanding of two significant groups involved in debates about LGBTQ+ rights and the role of religion in political discourse in Ireland and California. In detailing the cultural, political and religious history of these two jurisdictions, it sought to place current debates in a wider social context. Chapter 1 introduced the context from which the campaign process and post-legalisation debates were examined, and justified the appropriateness of the case studies selected to the overall research question.

The review of literature in Chapter 1 helped set guidelines for the development of research questions and the overall project design. The methodology, presented in Chapter 2, included what interview questions were asked and which interview subjects were selected. The focus on a single subject of debate, in the context of legal and judicial rulings, allowed an examination of similar events from different worldviews and in different political and cultural contexts. Conflicting narratives were explored to gain a fuller and more complex understanding of the process and experiences that have produced *and* been produced by that debate. My effort to mitigate a number of obstacles to the research was then addressed and the ethical standards for good research practices that were adopted were detailed to certify that this research did not cause harm to its participants. My own bias on the subject was acknowledged, including its potential influence on the research itself, and my mitigation strategies were explained.

The primary objective of data collection in this research was to seek a deeper understanding of the campaigns for and against same-sex marriage in each locale. Chapter 3 presented the content of the campaigns and the first-hand experience of those involved in their execution as gathered through

semi-structured interviews. Through the careful coding of qualitative interview data, three major themes emerged as central, with a special focus on the role of religion in public discourse in both locales. The findings, while not claiming these factors to be definitive, demonstrate that the current constructions of secular political systems and their employ in specific cultural contexts can be a hinderance to productive communication.

An examination of the campaigns' process, results, and strategies was presented, primarily, through the eyes of its participants. Data gathered indicated that emotion played an outsized role in the continued polarisation between these two groups and, by inference, suggested that emotion plays a significant role in all such complex issues for those who feel directly affected by their outcomes. This aspect of campaign engagement should, in the future, be allotted more consideration. An assessment of transnational campaign strategies evinced a number of bad practices, however, it also highlighted a number of strategies already in use that employed better and more effective dialogical practices. *Deep Canvassing*, for example, provided space for discourse that encouraged the sharing of personal narrative without judgment. Employed in some form in both California and Ireland, it has proven a successful means of engaging average citizens without alienating them. Advocacy groups are increasingly consulting with psychologists, like the one interviewed for this project, to gain better understanding of the deeply instinctual concerns of voters about specific issues like same-sex marriage.

Haidt's *Moral Foundations Theory*, which addresses the role of intuition on our moral decision-making, was introduced to illuminate the deep psychology underlying our inability to see authenticity or honesty in the moral-political beliefs of our opponents. Our own feelings of righteousness, it proposes, can cause the breakdown of communication between groups that fall particularly far apart on moral issues, like same-sex marriage. These insights, and others, from psychology, can help to unravel the diverse and intuitional concerns of voters. Psychological insights can also prove beneficial when applied to the campaigners themselves, not just the voters, as it aids in the analysis and understanding of the framing and evolution of public discourse about same-sex marriage and similar emotionally complex debates.

In the last decade, those citizens seeking to maintain a strict heteronormative order are no longer dominant in the culture at large. As this paradigm continues to shift, they have struggled to find accommodation and "equality" within an increasingly exclusionary dominant framework. Habermas's *post-secular theory* was used to address this conflict in two different national contexts. Habermas is not without his detractors, however, and alternative thinkers, such as Charles Taylor, have put forth valuable ideas. However, Habermas seemed more relevant than Taylor to the secular activists engaged here, because he was less likely to be suspected of advocating too much for the

religious voice (there is nothing inherently wrong with that, but in this case did not seem the right choice). The secularists in this study decried the impact of religion on the same-sex marriage debate and on those who campaigned against its legalisation; they were adamant that religion abide by the limits and rules of the ‘neutral’ public sphere. It is to this impasse, that this work is directed as it seeks to present theories and methods that may have a practical impact on mitigation.

YES advocates detailed their problems with religion in same-sex marriage discourse. They deemed the Rawlsian “proviso” necessarily secular because the secular provided a higher degree of impartiality and neutrality. Such thinking, however, did not foster productive cross-worldview dialogue, which became a major theme in the second half of this dissertation. Although people’s right to religious belief was respected when practiced “inside a church or temple or mosque,” their right to bring it into their political advocacy was largely dismissed, by the YES campaign, within the debate format over same-sex marriage. Respect toward the religious worldview was widely acknowledge to be one of the more abstract elements of political engagement in which discourse could be improved.

A Rawlsian-style secularism continues to hold the two sides apart. Habermasian post-secularism may, however, not go far enough in encouraging secularists to allow more openness to the religious point of view. Erin Wilson’s relational dialogism has further engaged with this dilemma. Combined with the framework of Habermasian post-secularism, her insistence on a *both/and* framework for understanding social actors supports the multifaceted nature of the same-sex marriage debate. In fact, it reflects a major finding of this research: that the main worldview divide inhibiting respectful engagement about same-sex marriage is not a religious/secular one; it is, rather, a liberal/conservative one. The results of this study made clear that religious actors are not limited to conservative views on LGBTQ+ rights, and neither are secular actors wholly liberal in their support. Thus, Wilson’s *both/and* framework better encapsulates the multidimensional nature of both the conflict itself, and the individuals affected by its debate. Its employment as a dialogical practice is recommended because of its ability to disassemble stereotypes and the restrictive labels they rely on.

Political theories, like Rawlsian *liberalism* and Habermasian *post-secularism*, have provided a theoretical context in which the data collected has been interpreted. The post-secular approach required acknowledging the limitations of absorption in a single outlook and promoted the necessity of “complementary learning” by those holding conflicting positions. One of the most promising recommendations in this regard, is the creation of physical shared spaces in which individuals with a range of worldview perspectives can meet. The presence of a skilful facilitator allows for the encouragement of self-reflection. Such a meeting need not serve any particular end, other than to open lines of communication between those normally isolated from each other. A particularly good

implementation of this strategy were the *Q&A sessions* held by pro-same sex marriage advocates in Ireland. They sought to create a space where all citizens could feel welcome and in which they could ask questions and express doubt without fear of retribution or judgment.

This research does not seek to advocate for any one position, however, while affirming my role as a largely secular researcher, this study has demonstrated the inadequacies of a secularised system in which faith communities, that exist on the margins of their nations' liberal overlapping consensus, have become increasingly marginalised in public discourse. As such, the findings of this research suggest encouraging secular 'neutrality' to become more engaged with religious responses to challenges to modern society.

Looking forward, there are a number of avenues for further study that would be of value in relation to this project. In California, and the US more broadly, conflicts continue to proliferate.⁴¹⁷ And, while backlash to the addition of the 34th amendment to the Irish constitution has not been evident in Ireland, broader social friction is visible in fights over the introduction of abortion access, immigration and greater visibility of far right candidates in the 2019 local and EU elections.⁴¹⁸ So, while a repeal of the law is unlikely, lessons from the US demonstrate the importance of recognising continued social negotiations that take place after a law is passed. False comfort can lead to the glossing over of an issue post-legalisation, while continued conflict can force individuals and communities to do the deeper and more challenging work of profound dialogue.⁴¹⁹ The courtroom, unlike grassroots work, constricts some of the more creative ways rights discourse can be furthered and can at the same time limit the validation of social movements.

Further research is warranted into other conflict scenarios that similarly involve the complexities of religion as a significant factor in moral positioning and decision-making. A project that explores the actors involved in these cases and the source of their worldviews, as well as the issues involved, can provide more nuanced insights into the way the issues may be brought to settlement.

A number of other jurisdictions have recently gone through similar national discourses about the nature and make up of marriage and family. National policy debates about same-sex marriage have occurred in Australia and Taiwan, for example, in the few years since legalisation in Ireland and the

⁴¹⁷ This includes battles over 'Drag Queen Hour' in the library, the addition of LGBTQ+ history in elementary school curricula and the illegalising of voluntary conversion therapy.

⁴¹⁸ This includes debates over trans rights, LGBTQ+ youth anti-bullying and mental health issues. The successful formation of a new conservative party, *Renua Ireland*, and the attempted (but failed) inauguration of *Identity Ireland*, in the same year as the Marriage Equality Referendum, raises questions about conservative unrest.

⁴¹⁹ Anti-racism laws in the US did not cure racism, but they did gloss over it. So, while they eliminated some of the overt, legally sanctioned racism, through that guise, they allowed people to trust that policy or judicial ruling alone could eradicate deep seated prejudice.

US. Legalised in both locations, activists involved in YES campaigns in the US and Ireland also played a role in shaping campaign strategies and messaging there. So too, western conservative Christian actors played a significant role in the spread of anti-same sex rhetoric globally. They are far more secretive about it than their pro-same sex marriage counterparts, however, it is clear they have played an substantial role in the development of globalised anti-LGBTQ+ rights strategies. Examination of other such contexts in which this issue is current, using the same research project methodology, could provide a broader and more comprehensive idea of the global debate. Tracking larger trends could provide greater insight into this and other similar debates, especially if the individuals and organisations that create and facilitate them are brought into the study.

As a result of this research, I would urge the continuing development of a post-secular theoretical framework for pluralism in public discourse. The wide variety of global debates involving the world's religions were outside the bounds of Habermas's original conceptualisation of the post-secular in Europe, but his general thesis may have fruitful application in similar conflicts worldwide. Its implementation, in small group work, could be particularly beneficial to the study of the practicality of his theoretical dialogical constructs.

One more area suggesting interesting avenues of research, is the use of psychology to assess the impact of campaigning for deeply personal and emotional issues on the campaign actors themselves, and the implications for the continuing political process once the campaigns are over. Although it remains understudied, political psychology is increasingly finding favour in today's fraught political climate. As voting behaviour, decision-making and the evolution of political beliefs are frequent subjects of political psychological studies, the direct experience of the individuals involved in campaigns that address voters, influence their decision-making and shape their political beliefs deserves further scrutiny. Its study could be of value to social discussions more broadly as it addresses issues at the public/political level.

I began this research to better understand why people felt so strongly about the issue of same-sex marriage, in particular why those who objected to it did so with such vehemence. I wanted to know what the rationale behind their objection was, what aspect of their faith spoke most significantly to them about this issue, and why it mattered so much to people who, in large part, seemed to be unaffected by its reality. Through the research and interview process, I discovered I had been searching in the wrong place for answers. I was looking for an intellectual, cerebral, carefully reasoned answer, when, in fact, such foundational aspects of ourselves, our sexuality, our morality, our beliefs about who we are and the world that surrounds us, are neither intellectual, nor carefully reasoned. They are the product of something much deeper and more irrational. They are grounded in instincts that lead us to foundational conclusions about right and wrong, identity and belonging.

Thus, the pragmatic world of campaigning and political advocacy led me, not to ‘rationality’ and ‘reason,’ but to passion, emotion, instinct and storytelling.

Storytelling is how we see the world, it is how we construct identities, both individual and collective, and it speaks to those most foundational aspects of our worldview. This research project has shown that efforts to appreciate and engage with people’s beliefs and religious practices in public discourse about political issues are both necessary and beneficial to secular actors engaged in policy debates with them. Doing so will both enhance the experience and understanding of the issue and provide a social environment that, through the inclusion of frequently marginalised voices, is more truly pluralist. Storytelling played a significant role in communicating across worldview divides throughout campaigns in both jurisdictions. Its employment, and its underlying humanity, is recommended as a strategy in any dialogue that brings together individuals who struggle to find common ground.

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Appendix 1: Interview Subject Biographies

Group 1: Irish Pro-Same Sex Marriage Advocates

Ronan Farren was the deputy political director (2013-2014) and director of strategy and planning (2015-2016) for Ireland's Labour Party in the years leading up to the Marriage Equality Referendum. He simultaneously worked as a political consultant for *Marriage Equality Ireland*. Farren is currently the director of public affairs and communications for The Coca-Cola Company in Ireland.

Moninne Griffith has spent two decades in the fields of advocacy, law and social justice in Ireland. She is a former chairperson of the National Women's Council of Ireland and served as the director of *Marriage Equality Ireland* for eight years. Griffith is a qualified lawyer and spent a decade working as a solicitor in general practice. She is now the executive director of *BeLonG To Youth Services*, an Irish organisation that advocates for LGBTQ+ youth.

Dr. Grainne Healy is well known for her work as an advocate for social justice in Ireland. Her areas of expertise include gender equality, violence against women, LGBTQ+ rights, leadership skills and strategy and social inclusion in Ireland and the EU. Healy was the co-founder and chairwoman of *Marriage Equality Ireland* from 2007 and became co-director of the *YES Equality Campaign* when disparate LGBTQ+ rights organisations decided to join forces in the final days leading up to the referendum. She is a former chair of the National Women's Council of Ireland, and a member of the board of the Equality Authority of Ireland as well as the Women's Health Council of Ireland. Healy was recently appointed the new chair of the Collaborative Forum on Mother and Baby Homes.

Orla Howard was deputy chair of *Marriage Equality Ireland*. She and her wife were involved in the campaign along with their two daughters, and their family story was used in early campaigns to familiarise Irish voters with same-sex parent households. Formerly a board member of the National LGBT Federation, she currently works for Howard and Associates doing portfolio consultancy and tutoring negotiation skills.

Brian Sheehan has been involved in LGBTQ+ rights advocacy in Ireland for almost two decades. He was the executive director of the *Gay and Lesbian Equality Network (GLEN)* for nearly 10 years. Although *GLEN* advocated for civil *partnerships*, they did not join the fight for civil *marriage* until the very end. Sheehan became the co-director of the *YES Equality Campaign* in 2015 and is now the general secretary of the Social Democrats Party in Ireland.

Ailbhe Smyth has been involved in social justice advocacy since the 1970s and is a well-known Irish academic, feminist and lesbian activist. She started the department of Women's Studies at University College Dublin (UCD) in 1990 and served as its head until 2006. She was also a founding director of the Women's Education, Resource and Research Centre, UCD, as well as a founding member of *Marriage Equality Ireland*. She is a former chair of the National LGBT Federation and received the 'Lifetime Achievement' award at the GALAS 2015, Ireland's LGBTQ+ awards ceremony. Smyth went on to be a convener for the successful Coalition to Repeal the Eighth Amendment in Ireland and was the director of *Together for YES* (the 'YES campaign' for the 2018 Abortion Referendum). She is currently working as a strategy consultant.

Michelle Thomas worked as a communications strategist for the Marriage Equality campaign in Ireland. She lectures in media communications at Dublin Institute of Technology and is the director of Media Communications.

Noel Whelan was a barrister and political advisor for the Fianna Fáil party in Ireland. He was a well-respected political analyst and wrote a weekly column in *The Irish Times*. He worked on a number of campaigns concerned with social justice issues and was a strategist for the Marriage Equality campaign. Whelan passed away on July 10, 2019.

Group 2: Irish Anti-Same Sex Marriage Campaigners

Sen. Ronan Mullen was elected to the Seanad Éireann (the upper house of the Irish Legislature) in 2007. He is currently a member of the Joint Health Committee and Comhchoiste na Gaeilge, na Gaeltachta agus na nOileán. Mullen was a vocal proponent of the ‘No’ vote during the 2015 Marriage Equality Referendum. In the aftermath of the Abortion Referendum, he formed a new pro-life political party in Ireland in 2018, the Human Dignity Alliance.

Breda O’Brien is a secondary school teacher in Ireland. She also writes a weekly opinion column for *The Irish Times*. A ‘patron’ of the *Iona Institute*, she has participated in a number of political campaigns. She was a vocal opponent of same-sex marriage and abortion during both referendums and was frequently seen on TV and heard on the radio as a spokesperson for both these positions.

David Quinn is an Irish social and religious commentator. He served as the religious and social affairs correspondent for the *Irish Independent* from 2003-2005 and is now a regular contributor to the Irish edition of *The Sunday Times* and *The Irish Catholic*. Quinn founded and became the director of the *Iona Institute* in 2007. He has been involved in campaigns that advocate against the legalisation of same-sex marriage, abortion and euthanasia, and continues to be involved in advocacy for traditional family structures and religion in society.

John Waters is an Irish columnist and author who primarily writes about the role and importance of religion and faith in society. He wrote a weekly column for *The Irish Times* for more than two decades, leaving in 2014. After that he began writing columns for the *Sunday Independent* and *Irish Independent*. Waters has given lectures for the *Iona Institute* and was a founding member of *First Families First*, which called for a ‘No’ vote in the Marriage Equality Referendum. He is a permanent research fellow at the Center for Ethics and Culture at the University of Notre Dame.

Group 3: Californian Pro-Same Sex Marriage Advocates

Anonymous Political Consultant for ‘No on Prop 8’ campaign. This participant is a psychologist and political consultant who has worked on campaigns in California for over a decade. They continue to consult on political campaigns that deal with emotionally complex issues. They particularly work on the development of canvassing strategy.

Kathleen Campisano has been involved in social justice work throughout the US. She was previously a faith organising manager for the *National LGBTQ Task Force* (formerly the *National Gay and Lesbian Task Force*) and was a senior field organiser with them) during the campaign to defeat Proposition 8 (Prop 8) in California. Campisano now serves as the deputy director of the *Los Angeles LGBT Center*, which provides services for LGBTQ+ people. Its programs, services and global advocacy include everything from health and social services/housing to culture and education, leadership and advocacy.

Kate Kendell was the executive director of the *National Center for Lesbian Rights* (NCLR) from 1994-2018. The *NCLR* is a national organisation that fights for the civil and human rights of LGBTQ+ people. There, she focused on litigation, public policy advocacy and public education. Kendell is a nationally recognised LGBTQ+ rights spokesperson and has appeared in local and national media. She has won multiple awards for her work as an LGBTQ+ rights activist, including the Del Martin/Phyllis Lyon Marriage Equality Award at *Equality California’s* 2004 San Francisco Equality Awards. Kendell and the *NCLR* were major players in the ‘No on Prop 8’ campaign in California leading up to the 2008 vote.

Thalia Zepatos is a political and strategic consultant and author. She is the director of public engagement for *Freedom to Marry*. She previously worked as their director of research and messaging (2010-2015). She was the deputy director/director of organising and training for the *National Gay and Lesbian Task Force* and worked on the ‘No on Prop 8’ campaign in that capacity. She consulted with *Marriage Equality Ireland* in the lead up to the 2015 referendum and continues to advise marriage equality campaigns all over the world.

Group 4: Californian Anti-Same Sex Marriage Campaigners

Anonymous Member of *California Family Council*. This participant has worked for the *CFC*, which played a significant role in the ‘Yes on Prop 8’ campaign, for a number of years and is involved in the day-to-day workings of the organisation. The subject has worked at various levels of administration in political advocacy for over a decade. They engage frequently with both the press and with politicians as a spokesperson for their organisation and for their movement more broadly.

Anonymous Former Member of the *National Organisation for Marriage*. This participant was involved in *NOM* as a political consultant for many years, including during the ‘No on Prop 8’ campaign. They continue to work in advocacy, primarily challenging laws that grant rights to LGBTQ+ people, in states across the US.

Rev. Ken Williams is the co-founder of *Equipped to Love*, a Christian organisation that advocates the idea that lesbian and gay people can become heterosexual through conversion counselling. He describes himself as a ‘once-gay’ minister and is a pastor at Bethel Church, a non-denominational charismatic megachurch, in Redding, CA. He works with *Moral Revolution*, an organisation that develops resources for conservative Christians about morality and sexuality, as a full-time author, lecturer, and minister. He has testified to the California Assembly Judiciary Committee, alongside members of the *California Family Council*, a number of times, most recently against bill AB 2943 (2018) and resolution ACR-99 (2019), both of which dealt with laws regarding conversion therapy.

Appendix 2: Interview Questions

Guideline for LGBTQ+ Rights Advocacy Interviews:

Institution and Policy Specific:

- 1) What is the mission of your institution? What does it seek to accomplish?
- 2) Do you feel the issue of Same-sex Marriage is settled? If not, what do you still hold concern over? What are the next major issues to be faced?
- 3) What made you believe that Ireland/America was ready to pass Same-Sex Marriage? Why do you think the Referendum/Supreme Court decision happen now?
- 4) How did you decided to frame your argument? Was it successful?
- 5) What, if any, moralistic/ethical arguments did you use? Which have been most successful?
- 6) Did the framing change as your encountered the opposition and their position evolved? Did you look to other nations or debates for guidance in your strategy?
- 7) What do you understand to be the main points of opposition to same-sex marriage and LGBTQ+ rights in general in Ireland/America?
- 8) Have you ever interacted, spoken or worked with your opponents? IF NOT, why?

General Issues:

- 9) Do you see any chance for dialogue in the future? Do you see any overlapping concerns on issues other than same-sex marriage?
- 10) What role do you think the Church/religion played in the same-sex marriage debate? What role should it have had if any?
- 11) How do you envisage religion's role in politics and policy making more broadly?

Guideline for Faith-Based Advocacy Interviews:

Institution and Policy Specific:

- 1) What is the mission of your institution? What does it seek to accomplish?
- 2) Do you feel the issue of Same-sex marriage is settled? If not, why not? Do you see this as a catalyst for other social issues or social justice issues?
- 3) What challenges to religious freedom does same-sex marriage pose?
- 4) What do you see as the next set of issues or policies to be addressed? Where do you see potential for setbacks/challenges to 'Religious Freedom' in Ireland/America?
- 5) Why do you believe that Ireland/America passed same-sex marriage now? What has changed culturally or legally?
- 6) How did you frame your argument? What, if any, moralistic/ethical arguments did you use? Which have been most successful? Did you use religious language? If so, how?
- 7) Did the framing change as you encountered the opposition and their position evolved? Did you look to other nations or debates for guidance in your strategy?
- 8) What do you understand to be the main points of support for same-sex marriage and LGBTQ+ rights in general in Ireland/America?
- 9) Have you ever interacted, spoken or worked with your opponents? IF NOT, why?

General Issues:

- 10) Do you see any chance for dialogue in the future? Do you see any overlapping concerns on issues other than same-sex marriage?
- 11) What role do you think the Church/religion played in the same-sex marriage debate? What role should it have?
- 13) How do you envisage religion's role in politics and policy making more broadly?