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The Editors,
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**Original Article**

# Editorial

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## The Spectre of Violence in Graduate Feminist Research

The line that separates students from independent researchers is blurred during graduate studies. Not yet undertaking fully developed research programmes, as happens during a PhD or when acting as a professional researcher, but moving beyond the descriptive engagement with others' research that characterises much of undergraduate education, graduate researchers are the ghosts of research yet to come. Their passions and interests now, will become the catalyst of research into the future. Recognising the importance of this location in the research field, this journal emerged out of the MA Gender, Globalisation and Rights programme at the University of Galway, as a space to give voice to graduate work. The MA course itself is broad in its scope and draws students from diverse backgrounds, all of whom share a commitment to equality. Building on the core principles of the MA programme, this journal is explicitly feminist, intersectional and international in its scope and interests. Authors in the current volume, many of whom are MA Gender, Globalisation and Rights alumni, engage with a range of topics, connected via a passion to confront inequality and build a more equal world, providing a snapshot of the interests, methods and debates among graduate researchers that will shape the feminist research agenda for years to come.

A common thread that runs through the articles in this fourth edition of Dearcadh is violence, and these articles invite us to reflect on violence as it presents itself to contemporary graduate researchers. Developing expertise on gender-based violence against women and girls is one of the major contributions that feminist research has made to wider social studies, moving from a position of marginality in the twentieth century to now being a significant field of study with its own journals, research institutions and advanced degrees. As the field has expanded, it has inevitably generated differences and sub-fields. It is worthwhile returning to the foundational questions and considering how these are important for contemporary research. Graduate research provides a useful insight into the most pressing issues.

The Istanbul Convention defines "gender-based violence against women" as: 'violence that is directed against a woman because she is a woman or that affects women disproportionately' (Council of Europe, 2011). This definition recognises violence against women as a subset of gender-based violence rather than the things being synonymous, and at the same time acknowledges that a crucial unifying factor in different types of violence committed against women is an inequitable gender system that privileges men over women (Boyle, 2019).

Although violence can seem to be self-defining or easily understood from a common sense perspective (Scriver et al., 2015), it can be difficult to agree on a definition that is sufficiently both broad and precise. By focusing narrowly on individual actions causing injury or death, it is easy to overlook non-physical violence – such as economic, psychological or sexual violence; or violence which is not associated with direct individual victims or perpetrators (Scriver et al., 2015). Galtung's (1969) introduction of the concept of structural violence has proven essential to the field, highlighting both that individual acts of interpersonal violence are often structurally embedded, as is the case for most intimate partner abuse (Boyle, 2019), and that in contexts of structural inequality, the denial of life-chances to certain socially-stratified individuals and groups in itself constitutes a form of violence.

A challenge of studying and understanding this complex topic lies in appreciating the broad range of types of violence and their impacts without equivalising or flattening their differences. While it is true that harassment and femicide are both types of gender-based violence against women, they are significantly different in severity and seriousness. Kelly (1988) introduced the influential concept of the continuum of violence, to note the way in which, under conditions of structural inequality, different life experiences of violence shade into one another in the understanding of individual victim-survivors. Furthermore, violence operates as a continuum across the life course, affecting women in different but cumulatively constituting ways at different life stages (Boyle, 2019).

Notwithstanding considerable research and theorising on violence prevention, protection and response, the crisis of violence against women persists, morphing and reasserting itself in new forms as legislation and cultural representations change. In the twenty-first century, the introduction of the crime of coercive control allows a more nuanced criminal justice response to intimate partner abuse (Stark, 2012) but can equally be seen as evidence of the limitations of preceding responses. Meanwhile, technology-facilitated forms of violence including image-based sexual violence, cyber sexual violence, and new forms of economic abuse demonstrate how pre-existing forms of patriarchal power and control move easily into emerging spaces and tools. Debates persist among feminists about how to tackle structural issues in a way that centres the rights and desires of victim-survivors, with a growing movement away from criminal justice "carceral" responses (Davis, 2013), emerging efforts to identify possibility within transitional justice (Westmarland et al., 2018), and a risk of polarisation between carceral and abolitionist perspectives (McGlynn, 2022). Although there is widespread – though not universal – agreement that gender-based violence is embedded in structural gender inequality, the question of where to place the emphasis in tackling these distinct phenomena continues to provoke debate.

The graduate researchers published in this volume bring a range of insights to problems of gender-based violence and wider structural inequality. Researchers highlight ongoing violence in women's lives, from the direct violence experienced by women in intimate partnerships (Gannon) and more broadly in society (Minah), to new means of enacting this same violence (Hayman). Further, authors draw attention to the ways in which structural violence is embedded in social relations and organisations that continue to oppress women and sexual minorities, even as much changes in the social world (Le Goff, Ruggi, Whelehan). While both structural and direct forms of violence are omnipresent in the works in this volume, authors are not content to simply describe its presence and impact. Gannon and Hayman investigate emerging approaches, both programmatic and legislative, to addressing forms of violence against women and their application to the Irish context. They provide clear guidance on where gaps in research on violence against women remain and the opportunities for further research.

How change happens is a further consideration; the role of feminist activism is identified as a key factor in challenging violence and inequality, as explored in the articles by Ruggi and Minah. Nevertheless, a warning remains: in Le Goff's article we are reminded that violence appears in many guises, and may pose an impossible-to-achieve aspiration. Post-feminism, as presented by Le Goff, is a stark warning that feminism itself may be co-opted and used as part of a patriarchal structure that is conducive to on-going violence. Finally, Whelehan's article takes us that step further by providing a snapshot of what a more inclusive organisation might look like when issues of embedded structural violence and inequality are addressed.

These articles, as described in more detail below, thus make important contributions to both our understandings of violence in the present context and the roads being travelled by graduate researchers as they find their way through a complex and changing landscape.

As we have outlined, articles in this volume range from a focus on specific ways to address gender-based violence, to broader structural violence and the activism that continues to push for transformative and substantive change. Gannon's article is one which focuses on the specific. In her paper, Gannon investigates the usefulness of the Campbell Risk Assessment questionnaire in the Irish context, a risk assessment tool which is used by the Aoibhneas Domestic Abuse Support for Women and Children. In addition, the author examines what the level of risk was of outreach and refuge clients in comparison to the existing literature on domestic abuse and domestic homicide. Despite the increased attention being paid to gender-based violence as a global human rights issue, Gannon's research highlights that in the case of Ireland, there has been a lack of attention paid to domestic homicide and methods for its prevention. This is not for the lack of prevalence of Irish domestic femicide, with 252 deaths reported between 1996-2019. Using the responses to 20 of the Campbell Risk Assessment questionnaires, Gannon analyses how the questionnaire, a tool developed in the U.S., serves (or fails to serve) national and non-national women experiencing violence in an Irish context. The paper concludes with the recommendation that although helpful, Campbell's Risk Assessment requires tailoring to the Irish context, with special attention paid to developing risk assessments for non-nationals living in Ireland. Gannon's contribution is a helpful reminder that, while gender-based violence is a global issue, no universal programmes exist which can successfully address the cultural and intersectional nuances of gender-based violence.

While Gannon focuses on what might be considered more 'traditional' manifestations of gender-based violence (such as domestic homicide and domestic violence), Hayman's work highlights that with newly emerging technologies come new avenues for perpetuating violence, and that Cyber Sexual Violence (CSV), although virtual and non-physical, must be understood as a serious a form of sexual violence under Irish law. Hayman examines the recent advances in CSV legislation in Ireland, a topic which, as the author highlights, has yet to be a subject of any empirical studies in Ireland. The article comes at an important time, as Ireland takes a step forward in addressing CSV, with the new legislation Online Safety and Media Regulation Act (2022) and the Harassment, Harmful Communication and Related Offences Act (2020). Hayman examines Ireland's legislation regarding CSV reporting tools such as Hotline.ie, and awareness raising campaigns, and assesses these contemporary approaches and their limitations. In her findings, the author highlights legislative progress made, but also the limitations that arise with its implementation, and shortcomings of the reporting tools that are currently available for adults who have experienced CSV in Ireland. In terms of legal limitations, the issue of a two-year time limit on reporting is a notable weakness, as is the fact that CSV is not directly linked to sexual violence under Irish law. Hayman highlights that Hotline.ie as a reporting tool for adults is a grey area, as Hotline.ie was set up for children, and this continues to be outlined on their website, possibly deterring adults from reporting via the tool. Finally, she notes that awareness-raising campaigns, such as the government-backed 'No Excuses' campaign, have been effective in raising public awareness of CSV; however, there remain few support services for adult victim-survivors of CSV. Both Gannon and Hayman engage with different approaches to tackling manifestations of gender-based violence in Ireland, in doing so both authors highlight gaps in research and existing data, and the current limitations of tools and legislation that require examination.

When considering an issue such as gender-based violence, it is important to highlight the role of activism and social movements in challenging structural violence. Kaata Minah's study of the Ni Una Menos movement, a feminist movement born on Twitter in response to high rates of femicide in Argentina, focuses on how feminist social movements are mobilised and sustained in the Latin American context. Minah uses document textual analysis of existing literature of social movements and the Ni Una Menos website and manifesto to interrogate the formation and mobilisation of resources of Ni Una Menos using Resource Mobilisation Theory and New Social Movement Theory. The author argues that Ni Una Menos has been successful due to the movement's capitalisation of available socio-organisational resources, such as social media, human resources and moral resources. Combining these resources, Ni Una Menos successfully mobilised a feminist movement in Argentina which then spread to other Latin American countries, all with the aim of changing structural manifestations of violence experienced by women and girls. This article contributes to the growing body of research which focuses on the role that social media can play in feminist activism and mobilisation (see Jackson et al., 2020; De Benedictis and Mendes, 2023). The author challenges the assumption that feminist social media organising is always 'slacktivism', by highlighting the substantive advances that Ni Una Menos facilitated for both gender-based violence and reproductive rights in Argentina and beyond.

Continuing to focus on the importance of collective feminist activism in challenging issues of structural violence, Ruggi addresses the history of systemic gender discrimination in the University of Galway. In the article, Ruggi links the feminist organising surrounding the cases of discrimination faced by Mary Dempsey and Micheline Sheehy-Skeffington to the memories of struggle for women's inclusion in Irish higher education. The author uses a decolonial feminist ethnographic methodology to connect feminist achievements from the '70s and '80s to the issues of gender discrimination raised by women lecturers at the University of Galway in 2014 by examining legal documents relating to both cases. Ruggi argues that three conditions for equality were evident in both historical and contemporary cases examined: these were collective, continuous and combative feminist work. Both Ruggi and Minah underline the importance of what Minah describes as 'human resources' in sustaining feminist work in the face of structural inequalities, with Ruggi underlining that while certain cases can act as a catalyst for protest and calls for change, substantive feminist activism requires communal and often anonymous efforts.

The transformative potential of activism in the face of structural violence is vital to centre in the current moment, in order to counter the rise of popular (and apolitical) feminisms. Le Goff's article examines the interplay between postfeminism and elements of feminist thought that have been co—opted by neoliberalism, with the author arguing that their interaction has evolved into a new phenomenon: the neoliberal feminist. Le Goff's paper explores the commodification of confidence, framed as 'confidence cult(ure)', and stresses that this is a prime example of how the core values of the postfeminist sensibility, such as self-improvement, self-surveillance and discipline, and the psychic effect of neoliberalism, in which the individual is both the problem and the solution, interact. The emergence of neoliberal feminism is explored through two case studies: Girl Power and Successful Girls. The methodology used is theoretical in nature, and employs Gill's (2017) theory of 'postfeminist sensibility' to examine how certain media representations discursively delimit the potentialities of women's lives, while cleverly selling these limitations back to us as a hollowed-out form of 'feminism'. Although dealing with the topic of violence less explicitly than other authors, Le Goff's article acts as a warning to the potential for feminism to be hollowed out and filled with a neoliberal, and patriarchal, agenda, resulting in a widespread, but apolitical, feminism that leaves structural violence unchecked.

In contrast to Le Goff's warning regarding the potential of the increasingly popular neoliberal feminism to undermine structural transformation, Whelehan looks at the potential for countering a different type of structural gender-based violence: systemic discrimination against individuals on the basis of their sexuality. The article focuses on what policies and strategies the Gaelic Athletic Association (GAA) can implement which would foster a more LGBTQ+ inclusive atmosphere. This paper is interesting as it addresses a somewhat taboo subject in Irish society; LGBTQ+ Gaelic Games players. Through five semi-structured interviews conducted by Whelehan with key informants, three main themes were identified as essential for fostering more LGBTQ+ inclusion in the Gaelic games. These were community, dressing room culture, and generational differences. The interviews also highlight means of confronting and addressing this exclusion in order to eliminate the structural violence which the GAA has carried from Ireland's 20$^{th}$ century history. Positively, the paper reported high levels of allyship

among teammates, and therefore is optimistic in its tone for the future of inclusion in what was historically the foundation of an Irish, post-colonial, and strictly heterosexual masculinity.

## Conclusion

As a whole, the articles presented in this volume give a strong sense of the myriad ways in which gender-based violence continues to haunt research on gender, globalisation and rights. Far from receding, violence emerges in new ways and spaces in the current period. Violence even, as identified by LeGoff, hides in the guise of new forms of 'feminism', where post-feminism ultimately reinforces the inequalities that underpin and enable violence, in essence, doing patriarchy's job for it. Research tasked with identifying and addressing inequality, simply cannot avoid the spectre of violence. The authors in this volume, our ghosts of research yet to come, draw out violence and shine a light on it, helping us to find the ways forward. These nascent researchers remind us that violence remains a critical concern of feminist research and a fundamental barrier to true equality.

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**About the Editors:**

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**Roisin Chippendale** completed a placement as assistant copy-editor as part of the MA in Gender, Globalisation and Rights at the University of Galway, and is planning on graduating in the autumn of 2023. Her specific areas of interest are gender-based and sexual violence and feminist social media activism.

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**ORIGINAL ARTICLE**

# Investigating the use of the Danger Assessment (DA) Questionnaire to assess risk at Aoibhneas Domestic Abuse Support for Women and Children.

**Gannon, Robyn**
***Domestic Abuse Keyworker at Aoibhneas Domestic Abuse Support for Women and Children***

**Abstract** Risk assessment is a key facet in supporting victims of domestic abuse and preventing outcomes such as re-assault or domestic homicide. Campbell's Danger Assessment questionnaire is a risk assessment tool that is used specifically to estimate the risk of re-assault or domestic homicide. This article will investigate the use of the Danger Assessment at Aoibhneas Domestic Abuse Support for Women and Children. A literature review will examine the topics of domestic abuse, domestic homicide, Campbell's Danger Assessment, and domestic abuse risk assessment in Ireland. A sample of 20 danger assessments was taken and analysed for trends from the 162 that were conducted by Aoibhneas in 2021. The results showed that Irish nationals in the sample were more likely to score within a higher risk category than foreign nationals. Furthermore, many clients in the sample reported experiencing controlling, stalking and jealous behaviours from their partners. Though the data analysis is based on a small non-representative sample, the results indicate a likely need for further research into the development of a danger assessment variation that takes into account contextual and cultural differences between Ireland and the country of the danger assessment's origin, the USA.

**Key Words: Domestic abuse, gender-based violence, risk assessment, danger assessment, domestic homicide**

## Introduction

Domestic abuse is a global issue which impacts an estimated 1 in 3 women worldwide (UN Women and UNODC, 2022). Domestic homicide (DH) is the homicide of an individual by their current or former intimate partner or a member of their family, and is the most extreme form of domestic abuse (Evans et al. 2022; David & Jaffe 2021; Monckton Smith 2020). Whilst men comprise the primary victims of homicide globally, women are more likely than men to be victims of domestic homicide (Monckton Smith, 2020). In Ireland, 252 women have been murdered since 1996. Of resolved cases, 55% were murdered by a current or former intimate partner, and 63% were murdered in their own home (Women's Aid 2022).

Aoibhneas Domestic Abuse Support for Women and Children is a charity that has been operating in North Dublin since 1986, growing to include helpline, drop-in, outreach, court accompaniment and refuge support for women and children. In 2021, Aoibhneas supported 9,878 callers through their 24-hour Helpline, accommodated 366 women and children experiencing domestic abuse through emergency accommodation supports, supported 899 women and children with outreach services, and provided accompaniment to 423 women and children (Aoibhneas Domestic Abuse Support for Women and Children CLG 2021).

A central component of risk assessment is trying to evaluate the likelihood and potential severity of an incident or accident occurring through data and research. Risk assessment informs risk assessors of things that can go wrong, how likely these things are, and what the impacts could be. When risk is competently assessed, practical and informed steps can be taken to minimise the likelihood of unwanted consequences. It is a fundamental aspect of creating safer environments in a range of contexts. It is vital that risk assessment is grounded in accurate research and is conducted by trained professionals to assess risk as accurately as possible. Risk assessment is a critical component of working with people experiencing domestic abuse. Aoibhneas, as part of this risk assessment, utilises Campbell's Danger Assessment (DA) tool (dangerassessment.org). The DA has been shown to be predictive of further abuse, severe assaults, and DHs (Evans et al. 2022; Messing et al. 2020; Messing et al. 2013).

The purpose of this article is to contextualise and analyse the results of a study that was undertaken to explore the use of the DA at Aoibhneas Domestic Abuse Support for Women and Children. This study involved taking a sample of 20 out of 162 danger assessments completed in 2021, and analysing the responses given to the questionnaire for trends. The aim of this article is to estimate the level of risk held by clients of Aoibhneas by studying this small sample, and to examine the questionnaire responses given in the sample with the wider literature on danger assessment and DH. This is necessary, as there is little research into DH and domestic abuse risk assessment in Ireland compared to other countries, such as the United States of America or the United Kingdom. Given that the DA is a tool that was developed in the USA, it is important to examine the effectiveness of using the danger assessment in the Irish context.

## Literature Review

### *Domestic Abuse, Domestic Homicide, and Gender.*

Domestic abuse is a leading cause of morbidity and mortality globally (Wilson and Websdale, 2006). Research has shown that there are clear links between domestic abuse and domestic homicide (DH).
Coercive control and stalking in abusive relationships are predictive of DH, particularly when control is threatened (Ávila et al. 2021; Monckton Smith 2020; Bows 2018). Monckton Smith (2020) identified several indicators that display a perpetrator's change in thinking in response to a perceived loss of control of their victim, which may result in a decision to commit DH. These indicators include separation, an escalation in control, an escalation in the frequency, severity, or variety of abuse, begging for a victim to return to the relationship, threats of or actual violence, stalking, or suicide threats. This 'coercive control discourse' in relation to DHs suggests that they can be predicted, and hence, prevented (Monckton Smith 2020).

The significance of gender for both victims and offenders of domestic abuse is reflected in global research and data. However, it is important that the limitations of such data are acknowledged; 36% of global data on victims of homicide in 2021 contained no information on the sex of the victim, and 50% contained no contextual information related to the homicide (UN Women & UNODC 2022). Where data is available, males are more frequently identified as both perpetrators (95%) and victims (80%) of homicide globally. However, the data on DH tells a different story - women represent an estimated 82% of victims of DH globally (Monckton Smith 2020). In 2021, an estimated 45,000 women and girls worldwide were murdered by intimate partners or other family members (UN Women & UNODC 2022). DH is the most common cause of violent death for women in Europe (Bows 2018). Between 2016 and 2021 in Ireland, 79% of female victims of homicide were also the victims of a domestic abuse related incident, whilst this figure stood at 24% for male victims of homicide. 31% of male domestic abuse related homicide deaths were children when the incident occurred. Male perpetrators are far more commonly reported than female perpetrators for violent and threatening offences against both genders (74% for women and 88% for men) (An Garda Síochána 2022).

### *History of Domestic Abuse Risk Assessment and Interventions in Ireland*

In the 1970s and 1980s in Ireland, grassroots organisations were established that provided support and advocacy to domestic abuse victims. These services included Women's Aid (1974), the Dublin Rape Crisis Centre (DRCC 1979), and Aoibhneas Domestic Abuse Support for Women and Children (1986). The 1990s ushered in a number of state developments in response to domestic abuse; in 1993, a domestic violence and sexual assault unit was created within An Garda Síochána (AGS), with 1994 seeing the establishment of a policy within AGS

focused on responding to domestic abuse. In 1996, the Domestic Violence Act was passed, which introduced barring orders, interim barring orders, protection orders and safety orders (Fitzgibbon 2022).

These developments continued into the 2000s and 2010s. In 2010, COSC produced the First National Strategy on domestic, sexual and gender-based violence, which highlighted the need to develop a specific risk assessment tool for domestic abuse (COSC 2010). In 2015, a Garda inspectorate report criticised the lack of a standardised and formal risk assessment within AGS to identify potential high-risk cases of domestic abuse. The report recommended the implementation of a new victim centred policy, a risk assessment process, and an analysis of DHs (Fitzgibbon 2022). The same year, the Garda National Protective Services Bureau (GNPSB) was set up within AGS (An Garda Síochána 2023; Williams 2015). In 2016 COSC published their Second National Strategy, which outlined future changes to domestic abuse legislation and mandated AGS with developing a specialised domestic abuse risk assessment (COSC 2016). The AGS Domestic Abuse Intervention Policy was published in 2017, while the Domestic Violence Act of 2018 criminalised coercive control and forced marriage (Fitzgibbon 2022). In 2019, divisional protective services units (DPSUs), offsets of GNPSBs, were established in 29 stations in Ireland (An Garda Síochána 2019).

The 2020s have been characterised to date by both advances and setbacks in state responses to domestic abuse. Setbacks include the developmental delay on the domestic abuse risk assessment tool to be rolled out by AGS, as well as the revelation that over 3,000 emergency calls made in relation to domestic abuse were incorrectly cancelled by AGS since the beginning of 2019 (Lally 2021). However, 2020 also saw Operation Faoiseamh enacted during the Covid-19 lockdown to increase Garda contact with victims of domestic abuse. A report examining the effectiveness of AGS in responding the domestic abuse is expected to be published in June of 2023. Submissions from stakeholder organisations to this report highlight the need for the risk assessment tool in development to be research and evidence based and in accordance with international best practice (O'Keeffe, 2023).

***Risk Assessment and Prevention of Domestic Homicide (DH)***

If the key purpose of risk assessment is gaining an understanding of the likelihood and potential severity of violent incidents, can a risk assessment tool exist that assists victims of domestic abuse to estimate their risk of serious injury or death? Many domestic homicides (DHs) may be preventable, and research has shown that it is possible to extract risk indicators through an analysis of cases of DH that can be accurately applied to the tool to predict the risk of re-assault or homicide (Monckton Smith 2020; Campbell et al 2003). Research indicates that certain perpetrator behaviours and acts within an abusive relationship could indicate a risk for DH, including stalking, controlling behaviours, attempted or actual strangulation, sexual abuse, or the use of a weapon (Monckton Smith 2020; Messing et al. 2020; Spencer and Stith 2020).

Whilst risk assessment is necessary to identify those most at risk of serious injury or domestic homicide, it is vital that this is followed through with supports to minimise risk. A key theme in the literature surrounding DH risk assessment is inadequate levels of cooperation between different state and non-government agencies in relation to assessing risk and putting into place resources to protect high-risk victims. A 2020 study of DH in England and Wales between 2013-2015 found that, of 141 recorded DHs, only 10% of victims had accessed specialist domestic abuse services (Chantler et al. 2020). The importance of a multilevel, cooperative, community approach to domestic abuse has been discussed at length (Evans et al. 2022; UN Women and UNODC, 2022; Stanley, Chantler and Robbins 2019; Wilson and Websdale 2006). There are several community interventions associated with the prevention of DH, including policies and services that reduce contact between victims and alleged perpetrators, reducing the opportunity for violence to occur (known as exposure reduction). However, research has shown that inadequate exposure reduction can be worse than no intervention at all, potentially due to a 'retaliation effect', whereby interventions can invoke aggression by the perpetrator without reducing exposure (Dugan, Nagin, and Rosenfeld 2003). It is hence extremely important for agencies to work together to protect those most at risk, and for risk assessments to be conducted at a multi-agency level.

***Campbell's Danger Assessment***

A validated risk assessment tool that is specifically used to predict domestic homicide (DH) is the Danger Assessment (DA) (Campbell et al. 2003; Campbell et al. 2009). The DA is a tool that is used to support victims of domestic abuse and their advocates to assess the risk in their relationships. It was designed through comparative research into cases of domestic abuse which resulted in serious re-assault or DH with cases that did not. The DA attempts to quantify a prediction of the level of risk for re-assault or DH for victims. The DA is the first validated risk assessment tool that was designed to directly estimate the risk of DH or re-assault occurring from the perspective of the victim. It takes the form of a questionnaire with 20 questions, each focusing on the subject's perception and memories of their relationship, as well as a calendar which aims to assist in remembering the frequency and severity of abusive incidents. It categorises each subject into one of four risk levels based on their score, ranging from variable to extreme danger. Each question has a different weighted score. Behaviours which were more associated with DHs or severe re-assault in the research, such as gun ownership and threats with weapons, are weighted more highly. Hence, a subject who reports these behaviours may be statistically more likely to be killed in a DH, and will score higher than another subject who did not report these behaviours.

It must be highlighted that the DA is not a failsafe predictor, as all risk assessment is based on likelihood rather than certainty. This tool was developed by comparing the risk factors in intimate partner femicide cases with those present in cases where women were abused but not

killed. It is predictive of severe re-assaults and DH with similar or greater accuracy than other domestic abuse risk assessments (Evans et al. 2022; Messing et al. 2020; Messing et al. 2013). The benefits of using this tool include helping a client to recognise the level of risk they are facing, assisting in safety planning, and screening high-risk cases that could progress to DH (Olszowy et al. 2013).

Apart from assessing the research-based risk of re assault or DH, the DA is a multifaceted tool that can act as a consciousness raising exercise. When completed between a client and trained domestic abuse advocate, the 20 questions can act as a way for clients to reflect on their experiences of abuse. The DA questions can act as conversation starters to discuss certain abusive incidents and behaviours, and can be used to facilitate informed discussions between clients and advocates. Furthermore, the DA can be used to monitor increases or decreases in predicted risk over time as abuse escalates or deescalates.

### *Contextual differences in risk assessments*

A key theme in the literature is the importance of risk assessments which are culturally competent (Evans et al., 2022; Ávila et al., 2021; Messing et al., 2020). It is vital to account for differences in the context in which risk assessments are conducted. An intersectional approach to risk assessment must include an acknowledgement that there are local and regional differences in the characteristics of DHs (Avila et al., 2021). For example, the DA, a tool developed in the USA, places gun ownership of an alleged perpetrator as the most highly weighted risk factor. In the USA, rates of firearm homicides are 4.12 per 100,000 population (Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation, 2022). It must be queried whether this can be translated to countries such as Ireland, where firearm homicides are comparatively much lower (0.1-0.2 per 100,000 population) and are largely the result of criminal violence (Campbell et al., 2009).

Furthermore, there may be certain groups who are at a higher risk than others for a variety of reasons. Research indicates that women of colour and immigrant women are generally at a higher risk of DH, and has highlighted flaws in risk assessment such as racial bias (Messing et al. 2020; Olszowy et al. 2013). To improve cultural competency in the danger assessment, various versions have been created to support women of different regions, sexual orientations, and cultural backgrounds. Examples include the DA-I (danger assessment for immigrants in the USA, Appendix 3), the DA-Brazil, and the DA-R (danger assessment for women in same-sex relationships, Appendix 4) (Evans et al. 2022; Messing et al. 2013; Glass et al. 2008).

## Use of the DA at Aoibhneas Domestic Abuse Support for Women and Children

In 2008, Aoibhneas Domestic Abuse Support for Women and Children conducted research with the aim of developing a set of early warning signals and tools to help identify women and children at risk of DH through validated assessments. This research highlighted the importance of risk assessment to prevent further serious violence and death, as well as to inform safety planning and to empower clients to realise their risk level and take action accordingly. The report concluded that there is an ongoing need for further research on risk assessment, the development and testing of such models in an Irish context, and the introduction of training programmes for domestic abuse staff (Murphy and McDonnell 2008). Aoibhneas aims to risk assess clients for further re-assault or DH using the standard 20-question DA as developed by Campbell et al. (Appendix 1 & 2). If a client scores 14 or higher on the DA it is sent, with their consent, to the Garda National Protection Services Bureau (GNPSB) Domestic Abuse Intervention Policy Unit (DAIPU). Through this process, the client will be linked-in with their local Garda station. The DA hence provides a valuable support for clients at Aoibhneas Domestic Abuse Support for Women and Children both during and after their engagement with the service.

## Methodology

Approval was sought from the Management team at Aoibhneas Domestic Abuse Support for Women and Children to conduct this study. The researcher is as a domestic abuse Keyworker at Aoibhneas and has conducted domestic abuse risk assessments with clients, including the DA. The privacy and confidentiality of service users was ensured in this study. No identifying data was used in the research. The only personal information used was whether clients identified as Irish or foreign nationals. The data used included overall DA scores and the yes or no answers to each of the questions (Appendix 1). For ease of access as well as ensuring that assessments were picked at random, the DAs chosen were those of the last 10 outreach and the last 10 refuge clients to be registered on the Aoibhneas database in 2021. If the clients chosen had not completed a DA, the next registered client was chosen. The data was transferred by the researcher into Microsoft Excel, where charts and tables were used to analyse and visualise the data. The results were then compared to the literature on the DA and DH.

A limitation of this study is the small sample size. 20 DAs were reviewed out of a total 162 which were conducted within refuge and outreach services in 2021. The sample represents ~12% of the DAs completed this year. The data cannot be used to make definitive analyses of the scores or answers given by all clients in 2021. Hence, the results constitute an indicative rather than a representative sample of the risk held by Aoibhneas clients in 2021.

## Results

50% of the sampled clients scored within the severe or extreme danger risk category, with 85% scoring with at least an increased risk of danger. These statistics are represented in Figures 1-3.

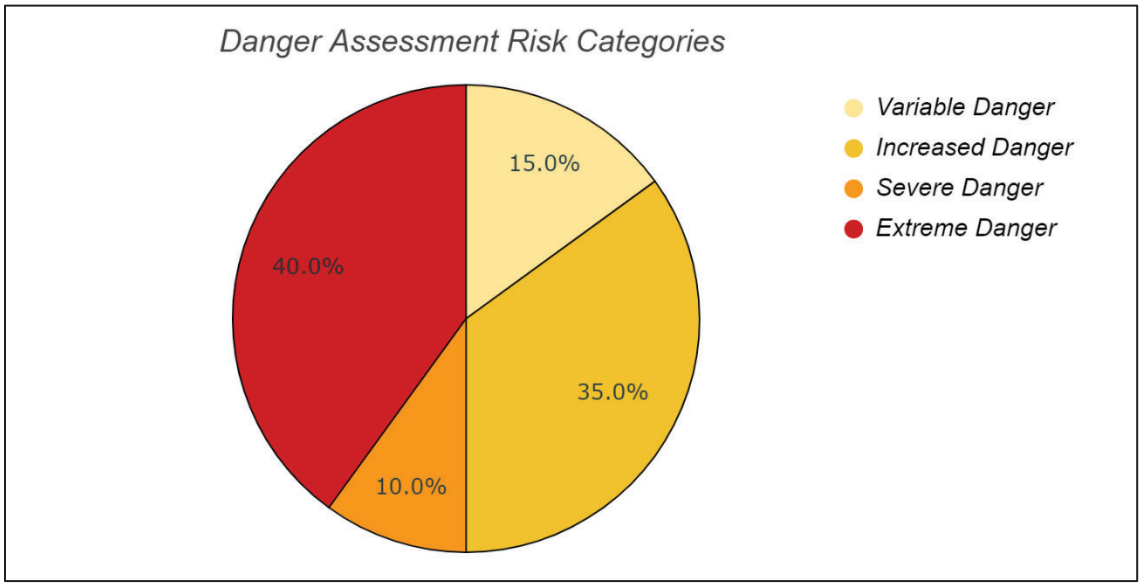


Figure 1: Pie-chart displaying the proportion of the sample who were allocated to each risk-level within the danger assessment (DA)

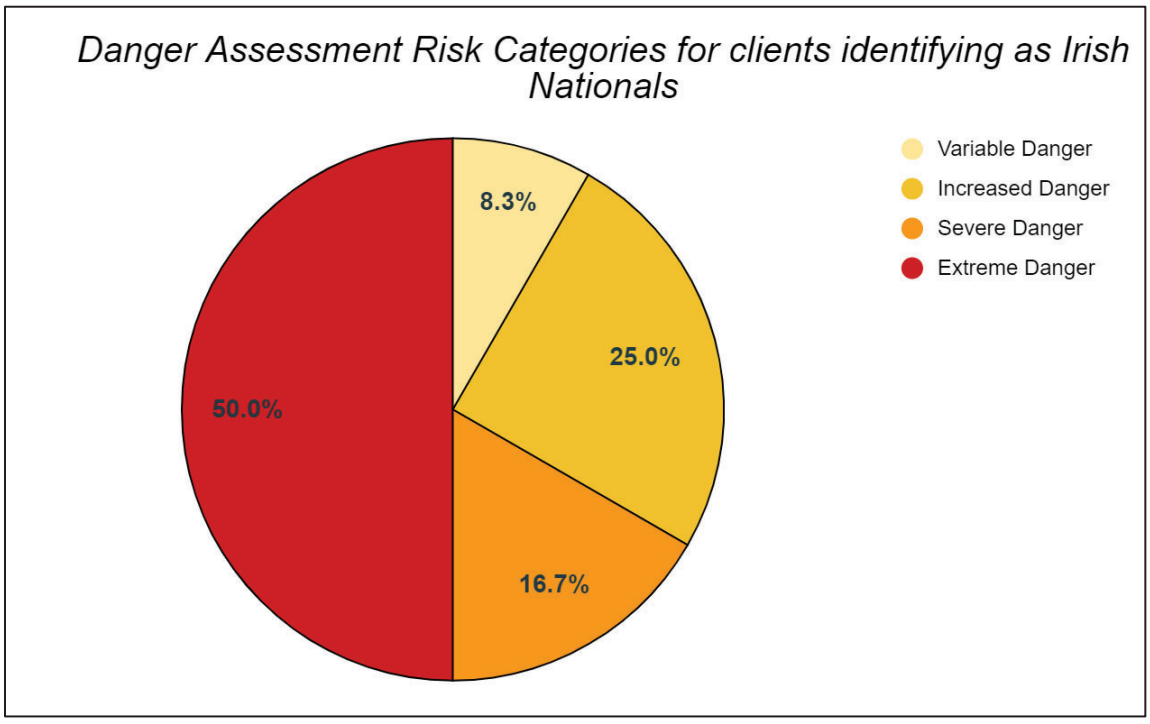


Figure 2: Pie-chart showing the proportion of clients in each risk category for clients identifying as Irish Nationals.

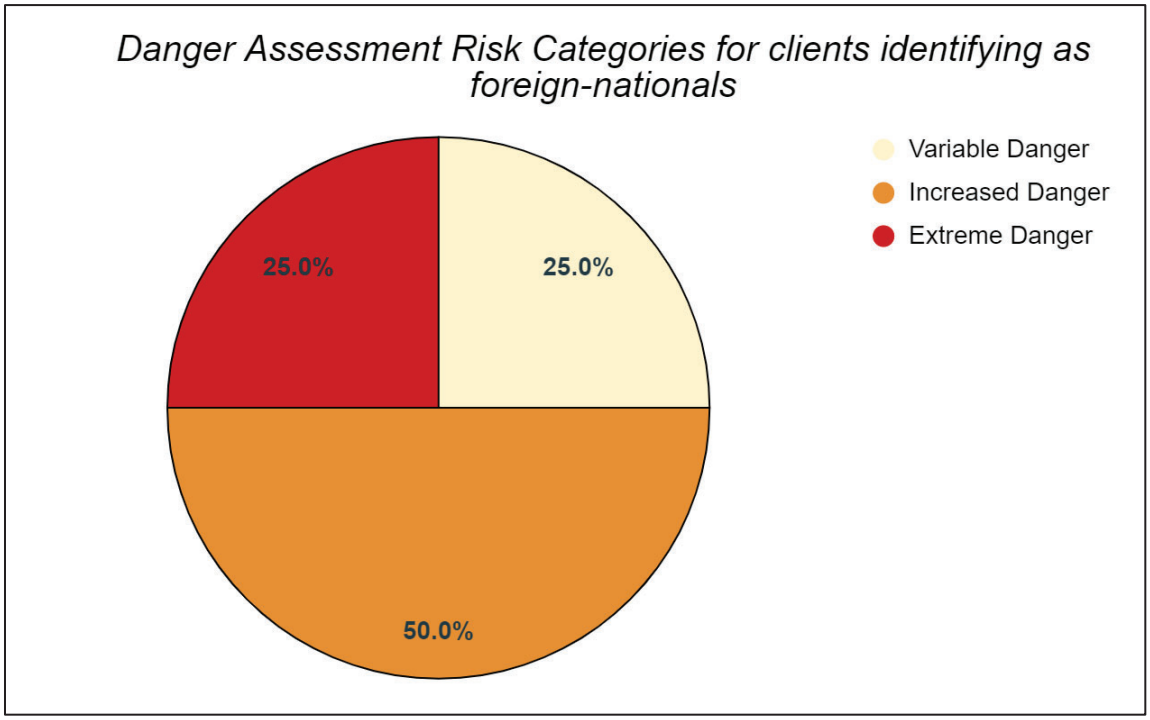


Figure 3: Pie-chart showing the proportion of clients in each risk category for clients identifying as foreign nationals.

Of the sampled clients, 12 identified as Irish nationals, whilst 8 identified as a different nationality. The above chart shows that the sampled Irish-national clients were far more likely score in a higher risk category on the DA, with 50% scoring in the extreme danger category, and 91.7% scoring at least in the increased danger category. In contrast, sampled non-Irish national clients were most likely to score within the increased danger category (50%), with 25% scoring variable danger and 25% scoring extreme danger.

Table 1 below shows a breakdown of the most commonly answered YES questions by %. The weighted score of each answer can be found in Appendix 2.

| DA Questions | % that answered 'yes' |
|---|---|
| Is he violently and constantly jealous of you? | 80% |
| Does he control most or all of your daily activities? | 70% |
| Do you believe he is capable of killing you? | 70% |
| Does he follow or spy on you/leave threatening notes or messages/destroy your property/call you when you don't want him to? | 70% |
| Is he an alcoholic or problem drinker? | 60% |
| Have you left him after living together during the past year? | 55% |

| | |
|---|---|
| Does he threaten to kill you? | 55% |
| Has he avoided being arrested for domestic violence? | 55% |
| Has the physical violence increased in severity or frequency over the past year? | 50% |
| Has he ever forced you to have sex when you did not wish to do so? | 45% |
| Does he ever try to choke/strangle you or cut off your breathing? | 45% |
| Does he use illegal drugs? | 45% |
| Has he ever used a weapon against you or threatened you with a lethal weapon? | 40% |
| Has he ever threatened or tried to commit suicide? | 40% |
| Have you ever threatened or tried to commit suicide? | 40% |
| Is he unemployed? | 35% |
| Do you have a child that is not his? | 35% |
| Have you ever been beaten by him while you were pregnant? | 30%* |
| Does he threaten to harm your children? | 20% |
| Does he own a gun? | 10% |
| *20% of sample never pregnant by A/P | |

Table 1: Table showing the proportion of the sample who answered YES to each question, arranged by most to least frequently answered with YES.

**Discussion**

Figure 1 shows that 85% of the total sampled clients within the study were deemed to be at least at an increased risk for serious re-assault or domestic homicide (DH), with 50% of the clients falling into the severe or extreme risk categories. This result indicates the likely level of risk carried by clients of Aoibhneas. Figure 2 provides an indication that non-Irish nationals may score lower than Irish nationals in the DA. This result could be explained by the literature that highlights the limitations of using one DA questionnaire for clients from different backgrounds. There are tools such as the DA-I which may provide a more accurate estimate of the risk carried by non-Irish national clients. However, similar to the use of the original DA in Ireland, this may not be an appropriate tool as it was developed in the USA, therefore representing a different cultural context.

Table 1 shows that a high proportion of sampled clients identified jealous, controlling, and stalking behaviours from their partners (80%, 70% & 70% respectively). As described by

Monckton Smith (2020), stalking, and controlling behaviours are risk behaviours that can be associated with DH. However, whilst these factors are identified in recent literature as being predictors for DH in the United Kingdom, they are not highly weighted in the scoring of the DA (Appendix 2). The high levels of stalking behaviour disclosed by this sample of clients indicates a likely need for the incoming stalking offence to be implemented in Irish legislation (gov.ie 2022).

Between 40% and 60% of the sampled clients identified that their alleged perpetrator is a problem drinker (60%), uses illegal drugs (45%), and/or that themselves or their abuser have attempted or threatened suicide (40%). This may be indicative of the significance of mental health issues for both victims and perpetrators within abusive relationships. Further research could indicate a potential opening for identifying domestic abuse and working with victims and perpetrators within mental health and addiction support services.

Just over half (55%) of clients identified that their alleged perpetrator had threatened to kill them, and/or that they had recently left the relationship. These are both risk factors associated with DH (Monckton-Smith, 2020; Campbell et al. 2003; Johnson and Hotton 2003). The proportion of sampled clients who were in the process of leaving or had left their relationship may be reflective of the context in which the DAs were performed. These clients were actively engaged in refuge or outreach supports, indicating an awareness of the abuse and, in many cases, a desire to leave. As has been explored by research, leaving a relationship can be the most dangerous time for victims of domestic abuse, and this result may be indicative of the high level of risk that Aoibhneas clients are presenting with (Campbell et al. 2003; Johnson and Hotton 2003).

Between 40% and 60% of the sampled clients disclosed experiences of physical and/or sexual abuse. 50% reported that incidents of physical violence had increased within the last year, and 45% reported sexual abuse. 40% reported being threatened with a lethal weapon and/or had a weapon used against them, and 45% reported experiencing strangling or attempts to cut off their breathing. Based on the experiences within the sample, this may indicate a need for the non-fatal strangulation offence, which is due to be enacted into Irish legislation (gov.ie 2022).

30% of the sampled clients who were pregnant by their abuser experienced physical abuse during their pregnancy. The experience of the sampled clients is reflected in global research, which has highlighted that pregnancy is a time of increased risk of domestic abuse for women. Studies have shown that up to 30% of pregnant women suffer from domestic abuse (James et al. 2013). A 2008 study by Chen and Horen found that DH was the leading cause of death of pregnant women in Maryland USA. 20% of sampled clients disclosed that their abuser had threatened to harm their children. It is important to consider that many victims of domestic abuse can be fearful of disclosing child abuse for fear of alerting state social services such as

Tusla, and often feel pressured by the state to be the primary protective factor for their children (Holt,2016).

A small proportion of the sampled clients reported that their partner has access to or owns a gun (10%). This may be reflective of the cultural context of Ireland, in that guns are not as easily accessible as they are in countries such as the USA or Brazil. As this question is the most heavily weighted of all in the questionnaire (adding 5 points to a client's score, whilst questions surrounding control, stalking and jealousy add only 1 point each), further research may suggest the importance of adapting the DA to the cultural context of the region in which it is being administered. Further research is needed into the dynamics of DHs in Ireland, so that the DA can be examined in this context.

**Conclusion**

Research has shown that domestic homicides (DHs) may be prevented through early identification of potential victims, accompanied with the provision of survivor-centric support and protection (UN Women and UNODC 2022). A vital aspect of reducing DHs is that accurate risk assessment tools are used as part of wrap-around support plans for those experiencing domestic abuse. The Danger Assessment (DA) is a valuable tool for assessing the risk of serious re-assault or DH. It may be necessary to develop specific DAs that are responsive to the cultural context of Ireland.

The results of the non-representative sample of DAs may be indicative of a need for the development of new DAs that are specific to the cultural context of Ireland. Questions which are heavily weighted in the original DA, including that of gun-ownership, may not be as relevant in an Irish context. The large frequency of answers in the sample related to research-identified high-risk behaviours for DH such as stalking and control may also be indicative of a need to adapt the DA, as these questions are not weighted heavily in the original DA.

There is currently a research gap regarding the efficiency of domestic abuse risk assessments in Ireland, such as the DA. Further research is needed into domestic abuse risk assessment and DH in Ireland. This research should focus on identifying commonalities and trends within known DHs in Ireland, highlighting/pinpointing behaviours associated with an increased risk of DH, similar to the work of Ávila et al. (2021) and Monckton-Smith (2020). Furthermore, ongoing research should be conducted with individuals currently experiencing domestic abuse to identify patterns of behaviours which may lead to re-assault or DH, similar to the research of Campbell et al. (2003), and Evans et al. (2022). This research could lead to the development of culturally competent and more efficient DAs reflective of different minority ethnic groups in Ireland, such as non-Irish nationals or the Travelling community, or a specific questionnaire for marginalised groups such undocumented migrants and members of the LGBTQIA+ community.

Further research using a more representative sample will be needed to confirm these conclusions.

**Acknowledgement**

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Investigating the use of the Danger Assessment (DA) Questionnaire to assess risk at Aoibhneas Domestic Abuse Support for Women and Children.

## Appendices

Appendix 1: Danger Assessment (dangerassessment.org)

### DANGER ASSESSMENT

Jacquelyn C. Campbell, Ph.D., R.N. Copyright, 2003; update 2019; www.dangerassessment.com

Several risk factors have been associated with increased risk of homicides (murders) of women and men in violent relationships. We cannot predict what will happen in your case, but we would like you to be aware of the danger of homicide in situations of abuse and for you to see how many of the risk factors apply to your situation.

Using the calendar, please mark the approximate dates during the past year when you were abused by your partner or ex-partner. Write on that date how bad the incident was according to the following scale:

1. Slapping, pushing; no injuries and/or lasting pain
2. Punching, kicking; bruises, cuts, and/or continuing pain
3. "Beating up"; severe contusions, burns, broken bones
4. Threat to use weapon; head injury, internal injury, permanent injury, miscarriage or choking* (use a © in the date to indicate choking/strangulation/cut off your breathing- example 4©)
5. Use of weapon; wounds from weapon

(If **any** of the descriptions for the higher number apply, use the higher number.)

Mark **Yes** or **No** for each of the following. ("He" refers to your husband, partner, ex-husband, ex-partner, or whoever is currently physically hurting you.)

_____ 1. Has the physical violence increased in severity or frequency over the past year?
_____ 2. Does he own a gun?
_____ 3. Have you left him after living together during the past year?
3a. (If you have *never* lived with him, check here: __)
_____ 4. Is he unemployed?
_____ 5. Has he ever used a weapon against you or threatened you with a lethal weapon? (If yes, was the weapon a gun? check here: __)
_____ 6. Does he threaten to kill you?
_____ 7. Has he avoided being arrested for domestic violence?
_____ 8. Do you have a child that is not his?
_____ 9. Has he ever forced you to have sex when you did not wish to do so?
_____ 10. Does he ever try to choke/strangle you or cut off your breathing?
10a. (If yes, has he done it more than once, or did it make you pass out or black out or make you dizzy? check here: __)
_____ 11. Does he use illegal drugs? By drugs, I mean "uppers" or amphetamines, "meth", speed, angel dust, cocaine, "crack", street drugs or mixtures.
_____ 12. Is he an alcoholic or problem drinker?
_____ 13. Does he control most or all of your daily activities? For instance, does he tell you who you can be friends with, when you can see your family, how much money you can use, or when you can take the car? (If he tries, but you do not let him, check here: __)
_____ 14. Is he violently and constantly jealous of you? (For instance, does he say: "If I can't have you, no one can.")
_____ 15. Have you ever been beaten by him while you were pregnant? (If you have never been pregnant by him, check here: __)
_____ 16. Has he ever threatened or tried to commit suicide?
_____ 17. Does he threaten to harm your children?
_____ 18. Do you believe he is capable of killing you?
_____ 19. Does he follow or spy on you, leave threatening notes or messages, destroy your property, or call you when you don't want him to?
_____ 20. Have you ever threatened or tried to commit suicide?

_____ Total "Yes" Answers

**Thank you. Please talk to your nurse, advocate, or counselor about what the Danger Assessment means in your situation.**

Investigating the use of the Danger Assessment (DA) Questionnaire to assess risk at Aoibhneas Domestic Abuse Support for Women and Children.

Appendix 2: Scoring of Danger Assessment (dangerassessment.org)

**Name of Client:** Test

**Scoring**

| | |
|---|---|
| Add total number of "Yes" responses, 1 through 19*: | 19 |
| Add 4 points for a "Yes" to question 2: | 4 |
| Add 3 points for EACH "Yes" to questions 3 and 4: | 6 |
| Add 2 points for EACH "Yes" to questions 5, 6, 7 & 10a: | 8 |
| Add 1 point for EACH "Yes" to questions 8 and 9: | 2 |
| Subtract 3 points if 3a is checked:<br>*Item 20 is not scored | -0 |
| TOTAL: | 39 |

**Danger Assessment Scoring**

- ○ Less than 8 - Variable Danger
- ○ 8-13 - Increased Danger
- ○ 14-17 - Severe Danger
- ◉ 18 or more - Extreme Danger

Investigating the use of the Danger Assessment (DA) Questionnaire to assess risk at Aoibhneas Domestic Abuse Support for Women and Children.

Appendix 3: DA-I (dangerassessment.org)

## DANGER ASSESSMENT for IMMIGRANT WOMEN

*Jill Theresa Messing, MSW, Ph.D., Nancy E. Glass, Ph.D., MPH, RN, Jacquelyn C. Campbell, Ph.D., R.N., FAAN*

Several risk factors have been associated with increased risk of violence, particularly severe and/or life threatening violence, among immigrant women in violent relationships. We cannot predict what will happen in your case, but we would like you to be aware of the danger of repeat and severe violence in situations of abuse and for you to see how many of the risk factors apply to your situation.

Using the calendar, please mark the approximate dates during the past year when you were abused by your partner or ex partner. Write on that date how bad the incident was according to the following scale:

1. Slapping, pushing; no injuries and/or lasting pain
2. Punching, kicking; bruises, cuts, and/or continuing pain
3. "Beating up"; severe contusions, burns, broken bones
4. Threat to use weapon; head injury, internal injury, permanent injury
5. Use of weapon; wounds from weapon (If **any** of the descriptions for the higher number apply, use the higher number.)

| # | Yes | No | Mark **Yes** or **No** for each of the following ("he" or "him" refers to your husband, partner, ex-husband, ex-partner, or whoever is currently physically hurting you.) |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | | | Do you prefer to answer these questions in English? |
| 2 | | | Has the physical violence increased in severity or frequency over the past year? |
| 3 | | | Has he ever used a weapon against you or threatened you with a lethal weapon? (If yes, was the weapon a gun?____) |
| 4 | | | Does he threaten to kill you? |
| 5 | | | Has he avoided being arrested for domestic violence? |
| 6 | | | Are you married to him? |
| 7 | | * | Do you have any children living with you in your home? |
| 8 | | * | Do you have any children with him? |
| 9 | | | Do you have a child that is not his? |
| 10 | | | Has he ever forced you to have sex when you did not wish to do so? |
| 11 | | | Does he ever try to choke you? |
| 12 | | | Is he an alcoholic or problem drinker? |
| 13 | | | Is he violently and constantly jealous of you? (For instance, does he say "If I can't have you, no one can.") |
| 14 | | | Have you ever been beaten by him while you were pregnant? (If you have never been pregnant by him, check here: ____) |
| 15 | | | Has he ever threatened or tried to commit suicide? |
| 16 | | | Does he threaten to harm your children? |
| 17 | | | Do you believe he is capable of killing you? |
| 18 | | | Does he follow or spy on you, leave threatening notes or messages on voicemail, destroy your property, or call you when you don't want him to? |
| 19 | | | Are you unemployed? |
| 20 | | | Have you attended college, vocational school and/or graduate school? |
| 21 | | * | Do you have another / new partner? |
| 22 | | | Do you hide the truth from others because you are afraid of him? |
| 23 | | | Does he prevent you from going to school, or getting job training, or learning English? |
| 24 | | | Has he threatened to report you to child protective services, immigration, or other authorities? |
| 25 | | | Do you feel ashamed of the things he does to you? |
| 26 | | | Have you ever threatened or tried to commit suicide? |

* indicates that a "no" response increases risk.

**Thank you. Please talk to your social worker, advocate, counselor or nurse about what the Danger Assessment means in terms of your situation.**

Investigating the use of the Danger Assessment (DA) Questionnaire to assess risk at Aoibhneas Domestic Abuse Support for Women and Children.

Appendix 4: DA-R (dangerassessment.org)

**DANGER ASSESSMENT-Revised**
**For Use in Abusive Female Same-Sex Relationships**

Nancy Glass, PhD, MPH, RN & Jacquelyn C. Campbell, PhD, RN, FAAN



Several risk factors have been associated with increased risk of re-assault of women in abusive same-sex relationships. We cannot predict what will happen in your case, but we would like you to be aware of the danger of repeat abuse and for you to see how many of the risk factors apply to your situation.

Using the calendar, please mark the approximate dates during the past year when you were abused by your partner or ex partner. Write on that date how bad the incident was according to the following scale:

1. Slapping, pushing; no injuries and/or lasting pain
2. Punching, kicking; bruises, cuts, and/or continuing pain
3. "Beating up"; severe contusions, burns, broken bones, miscarriage
4. Threat to use weapon; head injury, internal injury, permanent injury, miscarriage
5. Use of weapon; wounds from weapon

(If **any** of the descriptions for the higher number apply, use the higher number.)

Mark **Yes** or **No** for each of the following.

("She" refers to your female partner or ex-partner)

| Yes | No | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| ___ | ___ | 1. | Is she constantly jealous and/or possessive of you? |
| ___ | ___ | 2. | Does she try to isolate you socially? |
| ___ | ___ | 3. | Has the physical violence increased in severity or frequency over the past year? |
| ___ | ___ | 4. | Has she threatened you with a gun over the past year? |
| ___ | ___ | 5. | Have you lived with her in the past year? |
| ___ | ___ | 6. | Has she ever abused or threatened to abuse a previous intimate partner, or their family members or friends? |
| ___ | ___ | 7. | Does she use illegal drugs, (by illegal drugs, I mean "uppers" or amphetamines, "meth," speed, angel dust, cocaine, "crack," street drugs or mixtures) or abuse prescription medication? |
| ___ | ___ | 8. | Is she an alcoholic or problem drinker? |
| ___ | ___ | 9. | Does she try to control/limit your spirituality? |
| ___ | ___ | 10. | Does she constantly blame you and/or put you down? |
| ___ | ___ | 11. | Has she destroyed or threatened to destroy things that belong to you? |
| ___ | ___ | 12. | Has she threatened to harm a: |
| ___ | ___ | . | 12a Pet? |
| ___ | ___ | | 12b Elderly family member? |
| ___ | ___ | | 12c Person you care for with a disability? |
| ___ | ___ | 13. | Has she ever violated a restraining order? |
| ___ | ___ | 14. | Does she stalk you, for example, follow or spy on you, leave threatening notes or messages on answering machine or cell phone, call you when you do not want her to? |
| ___ | ___ | 15. | If you were being abused by her and tried to get help, do you think people would **not** take you seriously? |
| ___ | ___ | 16. | If you were being abused by her, would fear of reinforcing negative stereotypes about female same-sex relationships and/or being discriminated against prevent you from seeking help, for example help from friends, domestic violence advocates, or health care providers? |
| ___ | ___ | 17. | If you were having serious difficulties with her, would you keep it a secret out of fear or shame? |
| ___ | ___ | 18. | Have **you** threatened or tried to kill yourself? |
| | | | Total "Yes" Answers |

**Thank you. Please talk to your nurse, advocate or counselor about what the Danger Assessment-Revised means in terms of your situation.**

**About the Author:** Robyn Gannon graduated with a first-class honours MA in Gender, Globalisation and Rights from the National University of Ireland Galway in 2022. This is Robyn's second published article with Dearcadh. Robyn's research interests include gender-based violence, domestic abuse, and gendered inequalities in society. Robyn has been working with survivors of domestic abuse at Aoibhneas Domestic Abuse Support for Women and Children since 2021, and is interested in pursuing further research into Gender-based violence.

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**ORIGINAL ARTICLE**

# A Critical Analysis of Ireland's Approaches to Addressing Cyber Sexual Violence

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**Abstract** In this review article, I will critically analyse various approaches for addressing Cyber Sexual Violence (CSV) perpetrated against adults in the Republic of Ireland[1]. CSV is cyberspace-located, non-physical and in-direct, non-consensual or coerced acts of a sexualised nature. I examine two research questions: What approaches to addressing CSV perpetrated against adults exist in Ireland? What are the limitations of these approaches? Drawing on the literature, I will analyse Ireland's legal approach to addressing CSV, a CSV reporting tool, and CSV awareness-raising campaigns. Notably, recording, distributing, or publishing intimate images without consent *is illegal* in Ireland. However, Irish laws do not acknowledge this crime as sexual violence. Proving a perpetrator's intent to harm is central to sentencing rather than a focus on the harms experienced by the victim-survivor. Hotline.ie, the tool for the public to report illegal content online outside of the Garda Síochána[2], has seen increased usage but features inconsistent messaging regarding CSV committed against adults. Also, there exists a gap in the support services available for adult victim-survivors of CSV who did not experience physical sexual violence. By analysing approaches to addressing CSV perpetrated against adults, this article supports future responses to CSV in Ireland to avoid and resolve the identified limitations.

**Key Words: Cyber Sexual Violence, Online Violence, Irish Law, Hotline.ie, Awareness Campaigns**

[1] Hereafter identified as Ireland.

[2] Garda Síochána, the Garda, is the national police force in Ireland.

## Introduction

In this review article, I critically analyse various approaches to addressing Cyber Sexual Violence (CSV) perpetrated against adults in Ireland. I answer two research questions: What approaches to addressing CSV perpetrated against adults exist in Ireland? What are the limitations of these approaches? Drawing on the literature, I share details of (1) Ireland's legal responses to CSV, (2) a CSV reporting tool, and (3) the CSV awareness-raising campaigns by Ireland's Government and Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs).

I define CSV as non-physical, cyber-located, non-consensual or coerced acts of a sexualised nature. Contrastingly, traditional conceptualisations of sexual violence perceive it as direct and physical acts, resulting in physical injury (see Gillett 2018). CSV is a form of gendered violence and, when committed against women, an example of Violence Against Women (VAW) (The European Commission 2022; Gavey 2019; Harris and Woodlock 2021; Henry and Powell 2016). The European Commission's (2022) Directive on VAW and Domestic Violence (DV) explained that 'women…more frequently experience cyber violence based on their sex or gender, in particular, sexual forms of cyber violence' (p.2).

CSV sits on a continuum of technology-facilitated violence. It includes Image-Based Sexual Abuse (IBSA) (McGlynn *et al.* 2017). IBSA is colloquially called Revenge Pornography (McGlynn *et al.* 2017), and hereafter referred to as Image-Based Sexual Violence (IBSV) (Women's Aid in Ireland cited in McGlynn *et al.* 2017). IBSV 'encompasses all forms of the non-consensual creation and/or distribution of private sexual images…such as sexualised photoshopping, sexual extortion…upskirting, voyeurism and many other similar forms of sexualised abuse' (McGlynn *et al.* 2017, p.28). The images can be still in photographs and moving in sequence in videos. IBSV is *one aspect* of CSV, however CSV further includes cyber-located sexualised harassment, abuse and hate speech (Henry *et al.* 2017), also known as e-bile (Jane 2014; 2017).

## Context

Sexual violence is of notable concern worldwide. The World Health Organisation (2021) identified one in three women globally 'are subjected to physical or sexual violence by an intimate partner or sexual violence from a non-partner' (para.2). Victim-survivors made 1,104 disclosures of sexual abuse to Women's Aid in Ireland (n.d.) in 2021 (see also Vallières *et al.* 2022). Still, Ireland has a 'poor record' of responding to sexual violence (Scriver and Kennedy 2016, p.1). Scriver and Kennedy (2016) explained that this record is exacerbated by 'Ireland's historically conservative position on sexuality' (p.2). Gannon (2022) identified that sexual violence is widely underreported in Ireland, 'likely influenced by cultural attitudes', including social norms that 'contribute to rape-supportive cultures' (p.8). Guy (2006) explained that in rape-supportive cultures, 'rape happens because there are attitudes and norms that allow it to happen' (p.4). Ireland's rape-supportive culture, poor record of responding to sexual violence, and perpetuation of the norm that sexual violence is always physical, are of particular concern when exploring CSV. As CSV is cyber-located and non-physical, it already faces issues of tolerance and minimisation in society and is not perceived as constituting *actual* violence (Dunn 2021).

However, Ireland has recently taken steps to address CSV perpetrated against adults through laws, policies, and CSV awareness-raising campaigns. The Irish Government recently ratified the Online Safety and Media Regulation Act 2022 (OSMR 2022) and the Harassment, Harmful Communications and Related Offences Act 2020 (HHCRO 2020). Also, the Government's Third National Strategy on Domestic, Sexual, and Gender-based Violence (DSGV) outlines 'a statutory [DSGV] agency under the aegis of the Department of Justice' (Department of Justice 2022, p.8). Recent Irish laws and Governmental policies partially address non-consensual intimate image sharing (IBSV) and threatening or offensive online communications.

Furthermore, organisations supporting victim-survivors of sexual violence have campaigned over the past few years to raise awareness of technology-facilitated violence and its impacts. Women's Aid in Ireland (2022) released a widely circulated report, *It's Time to Talk About Porn*. They found that the 'majority' of 934 people surveyed in the report believed pornography 'is contributing [to] unrealistic sexual expectations…to coercion and [VAW] and girls, and to [IBSV]' (Women's Aid in Ireland 2022, p.2). The recognition that violent pornography may contribute to a culture of VAW is a radical feminist perspective, yet it is widely prevalent in Ireland, indicating a recognition of technology-facilitated violence and its impacts (Women's Aid in Ireland 2022).

## *CSV In Ireland*

No empirical qualitative studies on adults' experiences of CSV exist in Ireland. This lack of data means the nature of CSV, its impact, and how adults respond to CSV in Ireland is unknown. However, the European Union (EU) Fundamental Rights Agency (FRA) (2014) conducted a quantitative survey in 28 EU member states about online abuse and violence. The survey found '11 [percent] of women have received unwanted, offensive sexually explicit emails or SMS messages [and] inappropriate advances on social networking sites', and four percent of '18 to 29-year-old women…have experienced cyberstalking' (FRA 2014, p.28-29). The Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU) (2020) surveyed 4,500 women in countries with 'the largest online populations' (Rogers *et al.* 2022, p.2). EIU (2020) found that 85 percent of women worldwide 'reported witnessing online violence against other women'. Although Europe had the lowest regional percentage, 74 percent of women still reported witnessing this behaviour online (EIU 2020).

Additionally, two studies in Ireland on IBSV featured young people as participants (see Foody *et al.* 2021; McMahon 2021). Foody *et al.* (2021) researched consensual sexting (sexualised messaging) and the non-consensual sharing of intimate images with 848 students aged 15–18. They found that '44 [percent] of the participants had received an unwanted sexual image, and 29.5 [percent] reported that this happened frequently' (Foody *et al.* 2021, p.13). This finding is significant as it suggests that many young people in Ireland have received an unwanted sexualised image, which constitutes CSV (cyberflashing).

McMahon's (2021) study, conducted with 500 young people aged 18-25 in Ireland, found that 15 percent of females reported that a male partner had threatened 'to share sexually explicit/intimate photos/videos', and 17 percent had shared them without consent (p.12). In contrast to McMahon's (2021) findings, the 2016 European Quality of Life Survey found that in the 12 months preceding the survey, four percent of women and three percent of men in Ireland 'experienced online harassment' (Eurofound 2016, 'Life Online' tab). This difference

in findings could relate to the terminology, the lifetime prevalence timeframe, and the COVID-19 context resulting in greater Internet use reflected in McMahon's (2021) study. Nevertheless, while the extent of CSV among the adult population in Ireland is unknown, the Foody *et al.* (2021) and McMahon (2021) studies suggest that CSV behaviours are widespread among Ireland's young people.

Moreover, there have been several significant cases of IBSV in Ireland within the past ten years. Firstly, the non-consensual sharing of sexualised images of women and girls from the messaging platform Discord by over 500 Irish men (Pownall 2020). Secondly, the 2013 IBSV case of the so-called 'Slane Girl' (see Gannon 2022). Gannon (2022) undertook a discourse analysis of Tweets concerning the 'derogatorily dubbed' 17-year-old 'Slane Girl' who was non-consensually filmed giving oral sex (p.9). The girl, a victim-survivor of IBSV, was widely mocked and shamed online (Gannon 2022; Gye 2013). On the other hand, the men in the images, also IBSV victim-survivors, were called 'hero' and 'legend' (Gye 2013, para.3). Gannon (2022) found that 33 percent of Tweets 'contained an element of shaming the [girl]' (p.18). Just 15 percent referenced the men in the images, 'indicating a highly gendered attribution of responsibility for the incident' (Gannon 2022, p.18). Gannon's (2022) findings suggest that in Ireland, heterosexual scripts and victim-blaming attitudes toward CSV are prevalent.

## Research Methodology and Methods

### *Literature Synthesis*

I critically analyse various approaches in Ireland for addressing CSV perpetrated against adults synthesised from existing literature. I am a social science researcher undertaking doctoral research in Global Women's Studies. Hence, in this article, I analysed Irish laws, Hotline.ie, and awareness-raising campaigns in Ireland through a feminist social science lens.

### *Data Collection and Analysis*

I undertook keyword searches on databases Scopus, JSTOR and the University of Galway's online library system. I also searched Google for relevant media articles. CSV in Ireland is often discussed in media articles and reports from civil service organisations rather than academic journals. The keywords I searched for included: Ireland + image-based sexual abuse, cyber violence, cyber sexual violence, digital violence, online violence, revenge pornography, Hotline.ie, Online Safety and Media Regulation Act, and Harassment, Harmful Communications and Related Offences Act. In synthesising the literature, I grouped the approaches for addressing CSV perpetrated against adults into three categories: (1) Irish law, (2) a CSV reporting tool (in addition to the Garda), and (3) CSV awareness-raising campaigns.

### *Limitations in the Research*

Due to this paper's scope, I did not analyse *all* approaches in Ireland for addressing CSV perpetrated against adults. Instead, I include a breadth of key approaches. Future research

should examine Irish laws in greater depth. In the next few years, case law relating to HHCRO (2020) and OSMR (2022) will set precedents for how the Irish legal system addresses CSV.

## Findings and Discussion

Below, I explore two research questions: What approaches to addressing CSV perpetrated against adults exist in Ireland? What are the limitations of these approaches? I share details of HHCRO (2020) and OSMR (2022), Hotine.ie, and CSV awareness-raising campaigns. Afterwards, I identify various limitations of these approaches, including HHCRO's summary offences, Hotline.ie's concern with IBSV perpetrated against children, and a lack of well-funded support services for victim-survivors of CSV.

## Approaches to Addressing CSV in Ireland

### *The Law*

In recent years, there has been significant legal progress in Ireland's commitment to addressing CSV, reflecting greater compliance with the United Nations (UN) Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) (Foley 2022). Jane (2018) identified that exposure to CSV 'is frequently framed [as]…a scenario too personal and idiosyncratic for law' (p.588). However, this framing is shifting in Ireland, with improvements in laws and policies beginning to address the intersections of violence and technology (see Foley 2022).

Since the ratification of HHCRO (2020), Irish law better protects people from CSV, and there has been an increase in the general public's awareness of IBSV. HHCRO (2020) transposes the EU's Audio-Visual Media Services Directive (AVMSD) into Irish law (Government of Ireland 2022). AVMSD requires the 'regulation of video-sharing platform services, such as YouTube, Facebook, and TikTok, under the regulatory framework for online safety' (Government of Ireland 2022, Appendix 7). By March 2023, the Garda commenced 72 prosecutions connected to 49 investigations under HHCRO (2020) (Garda 2023). These prosecutions suggest increased public awareness of CSV and recognition that it is illegal. It also implies a willingness to report CSV to the Garda and the knowledge of applying HHCRO (2020) to CSV investigations within the Garda.

HHCRO (2020) amends existing laws like the Domestic Violence Act 2018 (DVA). The DVA 2018 amendment means that if a CSV victim-survivor and perpetrator were in a relationship, their relationship is an aggravating factor in sentencing. When CSV occurs in DV, victim-survivors have improved access to legal protections. Notably for CSV, as it is non-physical, the DVA 2018 also introduced coercive control as an offence relating to psychological violence.

OSMR (2022) supports the Government in achieving its Third National Strategy on DSGV, specifically the commitment 'to make digital and media spaces safer by introducing robust regulation through legislation' (Government of Ireland 2022, p.24). The Department of Justice (2022) will increasingly focus on promoting 'public awareness of existing legislation…creating awareness of the harm caused by online abuse [and] pornography' (p.26). The Government's DSGV strategy acknowledges that CSV is on a continuum of DV in Ireland

(Department of Justice 2022; see also Kelly 1998a; 1988b). HHCRO (2020) and OSMR (2022) are therefore important in addressing CSV and affirming the Government's commitment to eradicating all forms of VAW. The Government of Ireland (2022) expects these laws to help make 'the online world safe' for women and girls (Appendix 7).

OSMR (2022) established the Coimisiún na Meán[3]. The Coimisiún na Meán can 'address programme material, user-generated content, and other content, which are harmful or illegal' (OSMR 2022, p.20). OSMR (2022) identifies that platform providers must not broadcast or make available 'anything which may reasonably be regarded as causing harm or undue offence' (p.53). Platform providers are organisations or individuals in control of services (e.g., hardware/software) that 're-transmits or makes available…audio-visual media', such as Meta and its Facebook, Instagram, and WhatsApp platforms (OSMR 2022, p.74). Platform providers being held accountable for failing to remove harmful or offensive content in Ireland is an important step in addressing CSV. In the United Kingdom, holding platform providers to account for their role in harmful or offensive content distribution remains a point of contention in the Online Safety Bill (Collins 2023).

Additionally, OSMR (2022) advances the offence of flashing in the Criminal Law (Sexual Offences) Act 2017. OSMR (2022), characterises the offence of *cyber*flashing as 'online content by which a person exposes his or her genitals intending to cause fear, distress or alarm to another person' (p.107). Notably, cyberflashing is now legally punishable in Ireland. The advancement of Irish law in the OSMR (2022) and HHCRO (2020) Acts is a crucial step in the Government taking technology-facilitated violence, like CSV, seriously and demonstrating a commitment to addressing it.

## *Reporting Tool*

In Ireland, individuals can use Hotline.ie (n.d.) to report illegal content online. Hotline.ie (n.d.), established in 1999, responds to online safety concerns raised by the 'Government Working Group on the Illegal and Harmful Use of the Internet' (para.2 'About' tab). In collaboration with the Garda, Hotline.ie (n.d.) seeks to 'reduce the prevalence of illegal content online' (para.1 'Home' tab). Hotline.ie (n.d.) can be used to report online child abuse material, racism and xenophobia, financial scams and exploitation, and intimate image abuse that have originated in Ireland ('What to Report' tab).

Since the ratification of HHCRO (2020), media campaigns have increased the public's awareness of how to respond to CSV through Hotline.ie. Consequently, 2021 was 'the most onerous year in Hotline.ie's 22-years of operation' (Niculescu cited in Hotline.ie 2021, p.1). Hotline.ie offers information on where victim-survivors of CSV can access mental health support and legal advice. Theoretically, if someone reports CSV on Hotline.ie, members of the Internet Service Providers Association of Ireland must remove or disable access to the content. Removal usually occurs within three days. The increased usage of Hotline.ie suggests more awareness in Ireland of the existence of CSV, and knowledge of how to request its removal from the Internet.

[3] Media Commission.

### *Awareness-Raising Campaigns*

Recently there has been an increase in public knowledge of CSV perpetrated against adults, largely due to awareness-raising campaigns. Ireland's National Cyber Security Awareness Task Force (n.d.), launched in 2022, is a cross-sector partnership between technologists in cybersecurity, SAFE Ireland, and academics. The National Cyber Security Awareness Task Force (n.d.) aims to address technology-facilitated violence through an awareness-raising campaign, including national billboards, and resources for professionals working with victim-survivors.

Several other Government-backed media and education campaigns were launched to increase the public's awareness of their rights and legal developments regarding CSV in Ireland. The 2019 'No Excuses' sexual harassment and violence awareness campaign was 'high impact…to reach a national audience' (Department of Justice 2019, para.1). In 2022, the University of Galway (n.d.), in collaboration with the Government, launched the Consent Hub: 'The first-ever publicly available online national resource on consent awareness and learning in Ireland' (para.3). Recently, the Dublin Rape Crisis Centre (2023) launched a three-year awareness-raising campaign, *We-Consent*, after research revealed '70 [percent] of people think we have a problem with consent in Ireland' (para.5).

The National Council for Curriculum and Assessment produced teachers' Toolkits for educating students about 'how to interact safely and respectfully online, gender stereotypes, gender and sexual diversity, sexual consent and much more' (Government of Ireland 2022, p.20). While some of these awareness-raising campaigns in Ireland do not explicitly focus on CSV, the funding and promotion of campaigns concerning consent, sex, sexuality, sexual autonomy, and sexual expression are notable in achieving the cultural shift necessary to address CSV. They recognise the role of cross-sector collaboration and the use of the media and education in achieving the transition away from a rape-supportive culture (see Guy 2006).

## Limitations in the Approaches for Addressing CSV

### *The Law*

As Ireland is a common law system, how legislation is interpreted and applied by the courts and other organisations may differ from the initial intent of the law. Case law consists of 'a series of rules and principles developed by judges' (McMahon n.d., para.1). Over the next few years, case law will set legal precedents relating to HHCRO (2020) and OSMR (2022). Limited CSV case law already exists in Ireland, such as The People v P.K. (2020), which included the perpetrator recording physical rapes (Edwards 2020). However, a concern in case law development is the limited experience within the Garda and judiciary in applying new laws relating to online sexual violence due to the recent HHCRO (2020) and OSMR (2022) ratifications (Douglas *et al.* 2019; Rogers *et al.* 2022). Also, it is challenging for the Garda and judiciary to keep up with the technological innovations that facilitate CSV. Online violence is minimised as not occurring in the *real* world (Dunn 2021).

In 2018, a defence lawyer in Ireland successfully defended her client against the alleged rape of a 17-year-old girl. The lawyer told the jury, 'Look at the way she was dressed. She was wearing a thong with a lace front' (cited in BBC News 2018, para.1). This case led to worldwide protests and the '#ThisIsNotConsent' underwear-sharing campaign (Mezzofiore

2018). However, it demonstrates how the legal system in Ireland and elsewhere uphold the patriarchy and perpetuate rape myths and victim-blaming attitudes. Such misogynistic, sexist attitudes concerning the relevance of women's sexuality and sexual expression relating to their believability as victim-survivors of sexual violence are deeply concerning. This concern is exacerbated with CSV. After all, CSV may include the non-consensual *distribution* of initially consensually shared sexual images.

Furthermore, Women's Aid in Ireland (2021) highlighted that HHCRO (2020) features summary offences for some IBSV acts. With summary offences, 'proceedings must start within two years of the offence being committed' (Women's Aid in Ireland 2021, p.4; see also HHCRO 2020). This timeframe presents an issue for CSV victim-survivors who are initially unaware they have been targeted. Also, a summary conviction results in a 'fine or…imprisonment for a term not exceeding 12 months [or both]' (HHCRO 2020, p.4). Historically, a summary offence was a *petty* offence (Citizens Information n.d.a). In contrast, rape is the second most serious crime in Irish law after murder. Considering the recording, distribution or publishing of intimate images without consent as a summary offence minimises the harm victim-survivors experience. It places IBSV in a hierarchy of harm compared to other acts of sexual violence (Kelly 1988a; 1988b). This hierarchy sends a worrying message to society; some sexual violence is *less serious* and *less punishable* in Ireland.

Henry *et al.* (2020) identified that legal responses to CSV often require the prosecution to prove that the perpetrator intended to cause harm. This requirement is also true for HHCRO (2020). HHCRO (2020) states, 'a person intends to cause harm where he or she…intentionally seriously interferes with the other person's peace and privacy or causes alarm or distress to the other person' (p.5). HHCRO (2020) centres on a perpetrator's intent to *seriously interfere* with another individual. As Bowie (n.d.) explained, 'the fact that the recording [and/or] distribution of the image [were] non-consensual should suffice' in the offence being considered serious and harmful (p.145). A more nuanced approach to harm in Irish law would better address CSV and offer victim-survivors greater legal recourse.

Additionally, Bowie (n.d.) argued that to 'effectuate a broader legal and policy response to [VAW]', Irish law needs to articulate that IBSV is *sexual violence* (p.143). HHCRO (2020) does not state that the non-consensual creation and/or distribution of intimate images is sexual abuse or violence. It refers to psychological harm but fails to recognise the embodied nature of CSV harms (Powell and Henry 2017). This failure is surprising since HHCRO (2020) is known as Coco's Law in honour of Nicole 'Coco' Fox who died by suicide after experiencing an online hate campaign, including CSV (see Murray 2022). As McGlynn and Rackley (2017) identified, 'terminology matters…it informs and shapes our response' to CSV (p.43). I concur with O'Beirne (2022) that 'the categorisation of [IBSV] into a harmful communications [Act] instead of legislation that deals primarily with sexual violence minimises [victim-survivors'] experiences' (para.8). The possibility of a summary conviction for IBSV and the failure to acknowledge it as sexual violence in Irish law concerningly implies IBSV is less harmful than physical sexual violence.

## *Reporting Tool*

Historically, Hotline.ie was concerned with CSV perpetrated against children, not adults. On Hotline.ie (n.d.), it states that members of the Internet Service Providers Association of Ireland

must comply with requests 'for the removal of child sexual abuse and child sexual exploitation from the Internet' (para.1 'Our Members' tab). Hotline.ie (n.d.) also states that 'the removal of child sexual abuse images and videos from the Internet is the **core of our work** [emphasis in original]' (para.1 'About' tab). In April 2023, this declaration and instruction to Service Providers are still live on Hotline.ie. They send a mixed message concerning whether Service Providers must comply with requests for removing CSV perpetrated against adults. Although, the existence of OSMR (2022) may now negate this issue.

Still, the messaging on Hotline.ie could discourage CSV adult victim-survivors from using the tool. As an approach for addressing CSV in Ireland, Hotline.ie can only be used when the content requiring removal originated in Ireland, offering little support for those living in Ireland whose CSV experience crosses national borders. Plus, Hotline.ie does little to address the stigma and shame of experiencing CSV. As Saidléar (2023) identified, the 'takedown [of content] capacity is only a tiny segment of the problem' (para.9). One of the challenges in addressing CSV is that once content exists online, it is difficult to remove entirely; CSV content can be reused to continue victimisation.

### *Awareness-Raising Campaigns*

While Ireland's National Cyber Security Awareness Task Force highlighted the existence and impact of technology-facilitated violence, there is a lack of well-funded services to support CSV victim-survivors. With physical sexual violence, victim-survivors can access support services from Rape Crisis Centres by attending a Sexual Assault Treatment Unit (SATU). However, attending a SATU may not be suitable for a victim-survivor of CSV. The SATU offers medicalised support for gathering forensic evidence and testing for sexually transmitted diseases, which is not as applicable for CSV victim-survivors (see Galway RCC n.d.).

### *Societal Problem with Widespread Impacts*

Although it is not within the scope of this article to explore in-depth, I understand CSV to be a societal problem with widespread impacts (Eikren and Ingram-Waters 2016). The limitations in existing approaches in Ireland for addressing CSV perpetrated against adults reflects 'a culture in which sexual violence is less likely to be recognised, investigated or prosecuted' (McGlynn and Rackley 2016, p.2). Hence, approaches to addressing CSV in Ireland must account for 'historical unequal power relations' between women and men (Department for Justice 2022, p.47). Effective approaches require cross-sector collaboration to support a shift in attitudes that normalise and minimise CSV. However, cross-sector collaboration in addressing CSV is underdeveloped in Ireland, partially because of austerity measures and funding restrictions on organisations supporting victim-survivors of sexual violence (see Foley 2022).

## Conclusion

This review article critically analysed several approaches to addressing CSV perpetrated against adults in Ireland. Ireland's commitment to addressing CSV and protecting individuals online through laws has improved in recent years. The OSMR (2022) established the Coimisiún

na Meán to oversee platform providers' compliance in removing harmful online content. HHCRO (2020) is understood to address IBSV. Since its ratification in 2021, the Garda has commenced 72 prosecutions under HHCRO (2020). Hotline.ie offers a tool to the public to report illegal content online. In 2021, Hotline.ie had the most productive year in its history, but still places the responsibility on the victim-survivor of CSV to report being targeted. HHCRO (2020) focuses on the perpetrator's intent to harm, not the victim-survivors' experience of harm, and does not define the non-consensual sharing of intimate images as *sexual violence*. There is also a lack of well-funded support services in Ireland for victim-survivors of CSV. By critically analysing several approaches in Ireland to addressing CSV perpetrated against adults, this article supports future responses to CSV to avoid and resolve the identified limitations. I highlight the importance of cross-sector collaboration in addressing CSV, as successfully employed in the National Cyber Security Awareness Task Force. CSV is an interdisciplinary societal concern requiring a considered cross-sector response.

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**About the Author** Lorraine Hayman is a Global Women's Studies doctoral researcher at the University of Galway, Ireland. Her interdisciplinary doctoral research explores the lived experiences of women in Ireland concerning Cyber Sexual Violence. Her research draws on multi-stakeholder perspectives in the Garda, technology sector, and women's service providers. Lorraine's doctoral research aims to offer evidence-informed recommendations to guide future laws, policies, and service provision responses to Cyber Sexual Violence in Ireland. She is a Hardiman Research Scholar at the University of Galway and a Rotary Peace Fellow alum from International Christian University, Japan.

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**ORIGINAL ARTICLE**

# Achieving Gender Equality through Feminist Social Movements: A case study of Ni Una Menos (Not One Less)

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**Abstract** The Ni Una Menos (Not One Less) Movement emerged as a direct response to the alarming increase of femicide in Argentina. This paper analyses how the Ni Una Menos movement mobilises various resources for gender equality. It investigates the role of the Ni Una Menos Movement and utilises Social Movement Theory to understand the movement's dynamics within Argentina, South America and beyond. Specifically, Resource Mobilization Theory (RMT) is employed as a framework for analysis. Using New Social Movement Theory (NSMT) as a guide, the research will show how social resources were used to advance the movement's goal. Additionally, the stages of social movements serve as a guide to examining the formation, impact, barriers, and facilitators encountered by the Ni Una Menos movement. By applying these theories, this study aims to shed light on the strategies and tactics employed by the movement, its influence on societal change, and the challenges and opportunities it faces in pursuing gender equality. Through this analysis, the research aims to provide a deeper understanding of how a powerful movement was formed and its implications for gender equality.

**Key Words: Feminist, Social Movements, Ni Una Menos, Femicide, Violence**

## Introduction

On June 3rd, 2015, a life-changing moment occurred in Argentina as more than 200,000 individuals under the banner of Ni Una Menos (Not One Less) came together in anger and frustration to denounce femicide (Leszinsky 2021). This massive protest which originated on social media, sparked by a tweet by prominent radio journalist Marcela Ojeda, served as a rallying cry for women and people of all genders to raise their voices following the brutal murder of 15-year-old Chiara Perez by her boyfriend (Newbery 2016). The alarming prevalence of femicide in Argentina became apparent, with statistics revealing that femicides occurred approximately every 30 hours in the country (Ni Una Menos 2015). The tweet by Ojeda became the catalyst for a feminist movement that emerged as a powerful force, relentlessly holding both society and the Argentine government accountable for the social injustices faced by women and other marginalised groups (Leszinsky 2021).

This research employs the Ni Una Menos movement as a case study to comprehend the formation of feminist social movements and their ability to effect social change, policies, and laws. Building upon the principles of Resource Mobilisation Theory, which posits that social movements emerge when individuals with shared grievances mobilise resources and take collective action (Boundless Sociology n.d.), Using the Ni Una Menos movement as a case study, this research will show how feminist movements are formed and how the effective mobilisation of resources can sustain a movement.

## Methodology

### *Aims*

This research will focus on the case study of the Ni Una Menos movement to deepen understanding of how the movement mobilises resources to impact Argentina and beyond.

### *Objectives*

- Identify, outline and explore a feminist social movement.
- Examine the impact of a feminist social movement in attaining gender equality.
- Consider the facilitators and barriers to the success of the case study movement.

### *Research Design*

This research uses a qualitative research approach. The qualitative research approach enables the description of meanings, concepts and definitions (Lune and Berg 2017). The method is used to understand the quality-of-life events. A form of qualitative research applied in this research is a documentary analysis which looks at major themes from documents to collect and analyse data. Examining the text from websites, books, publications, and social media was used to analyse themes. Additionally, literature was reviewed from these sources to analyse data.

### *Data Collection and Method*

Data was collected from several sources. Data collected on Ni Una Menos (Hox and Boeije 2005) was gathered from the Ni Una Menos Movement's official website. The charter (Ni Una Menos n.d.) was used to clearly describe how the movement operates, the reason for the movement's formation and the guiding principles of the movement. The movement's manifesto (Dillon 2021) was also evaluated, along with the goal(s) and actions of the movement. Literature was reviewed from secondary sources and credible news sources like the Guardian, New York Times and AP Times. Data sources were collected mainly from the internet through the NUIG library search engine and google scholar. These sources provided articles and journals used to analyse the research objective.

### *Data Analysis*

Analysing the data required extensive reading and critical assessment. The data collected was analysed based on the themes of the research. These themes were further analysed using the theories and framework. The cycle of social movements by Blumer (Christiansen, 2008) was used, and the Resource Mobilisation Theory (Crossman 2019) was the central framework used to analyse impact, facilitator and barriers. The first theme of the research is the movement's formation; data was analysed to determine what makes up the movement, what led to its formation, the structure of the movement and how the movement operates. Blumer's framework, as refined by Christiansen (2008), was used mainly to explain the formation of the movement. The second theme examined the mobilisation of resources using the Resource Mobilisation Theory as a framework, providing information on what successes the movement achieved, how the movement has impacted gender equality, and how the movement has contributed to the movements in Latin America and beyond. Analysis determined what barriers hinder movement-building in Argentina and the movement's barriers to achieving gender equality.

### *Limitations*

Qualitative research speaks from people's experiences and beliefs and the dynamics of social relations (Almeida, Queirós and Faria 2017). Throughout the research, I strived for the highest level of objectivity. However, my findings, discussions and analysis are ultimately subjective. There is a possibility of a contrary interpretation of my findings by other researchers based on the angle of research undertaken. I am also aware that selecting Resource Mobilisation Theory as an analytical framework to deepen the understating of the case study may exclude other possibilities. However, the approach contributes to understanding feminist social movements and their successes but does not exclude other factors that this framework may not have considered.

Furthermore, the case study location in Argentina meant I needed more direct access to engage with movement members. My findings of the movements are based mainly on secondary

sources, with the movement website as the main data source. The language barrier in some sources was also a limitation of this research. Some articles were originally in Spanish, and translating them into English might have slightly changed from their original language. This research does not claim to provide a definite answer to the contribution of the Ni Una Menos movement to attaining gender equality but provides relevant insight into the power of social movements to attain change.

## Findings and Analysis

### *Four Stages of Social Movements*

Social movements as organised yet informal entities working towards a specific goal (Christiansen, 2008) is a descriptive definition for the Ni Una Menos movement. Like other social movements, the Ni Una Menos movement was formed to influence change on a social justice issue affecting women (Ni Una Menos n.d.). Social movement scholar Herbert Blumer identified four stages of social movement cycles (Porta and Diani 2006). He described the four stages as the social ferment stage (characterised by unorganised agitation), popular excitement (objectives and actions clearly defined), formalisation (more coordination of strategy) and institutionalisation (becoming an organic part of society) (Porta and Diani 2006). Like other scholars, Christiansen used different terms to explain these stages while maintaining the underlying themes (Christiansen 2008). Christiansen, in line with the underlying themes of Blumer's work, called the four stages emergence, coalescence, bureaucratisation and decline (Christiansen 2008). These stages show the processes by which social movements emerge and decline. To evaluate the formation and evolution of the Ni Una Menos movement, the four stages further redefined by Christiansen (2008) will serve as the analytical framework.

### *Emergence*

Christiansen explains the emergence stage as the initial discontent on a social issue which sparks anger and dissatisfaction. This stage has little or no collective action or organising (Christiansen 2008; Houghton 2019). This cycle is the preliminary stage of the movement, fuelled by discontent with a social issue (Christiansen 2008). Femicide had become a persistent issue with growing numbers of victims. Before the official launch of Ni Una Menos, other groups had organised online and offline to protest against femicide and violence against women (Belotti, Comunello and Corradi 2020). Journalists had launched campaigns like "Fed up with reporting femicides. As journalists, we say #StopViolence," and organised public readings (Belotti, Comunello and Corradi 2020), showing the discontent with the issue of femicide. The movement introduced a more organised approach to combating femicide.

The catalyst that gave birth to the Ni Una Menos movement was the killing of 15-year-old Chiara Paez by her 16-year-old boyfriend (Palmer 2017). This killing, combined with the earlier discontent about the issue of femicide, led to the emergence of the Ni Una Menos movement on May 11th, 2015, when Marcela Ojeda made a call on Twitter, calling women to stand up against persistent femicide in Argentina (Ronan 2015). One woman in Argentina is

killed approximately every 30 hours (Spotlight Initiative 2020). There was an alarming increase in femicide from 2008 to 2014 (Funes 2017). As a journalist, Ojeda reported on many cases of femicide (Palmer 2017), but the killing of Chiara Paez sparked her call for action.

Her tweet read "Actrices, políticas, artistas, empresarias, referentes sociales ... mujeres, todas, bah.. no vamos a levantar la voz? Nos Estan Matando (Actresses, politicians, artists, businesswomen, social referents, women, everyone, bah...are we not going to lift up our voice? THEY ARE KILLING US)" (Ojeda 2015).

On May 11th, 2015, Ojeda's tweet received 316 retweets, 132 quote tweets, and 1,286 likes (Ojeda 2015). This tweet put out the call for mobilisation, which brought together other female journalists, artists, and lawyers in Argentina, including Florencia Etcheves, Florencia Abbate, Valeria Sampedro, Ingrid Beck, Hinde Pomeraniec and Claudia Piñeiro (Rolón 2015). These women used their existing individual Twitter networks to organise a march to publicise the frequent acts of femicide in Argentina (Terzian 2017). Twitter became the resource used to organise a historic demonstration that saw more than 200,000 people march to the capital in Buenos Aries (Pallapothu 2021).

***Coalescence Stage***

Christiansen explains that depending on the issue, most social discontent does not reach the second stage of social movements as these discontents could either be solved or lack the momentum to push further (Christiansen 2008). He described the coalescent stage as the organising stage resulting in widespread mobilisation and as the popular stage, where the unease now has led to the identification of a 'what' and a 'who' to focus on (Christiansen 2008).

The tweet by Ojeda revealed an existing social problem. As Blumer stated, a social problem has to be defined and identified for it to exist as a social problem (Blumer 1971). The identification and definition of the issues of femicide in Argentina were legitimised by the tweet, which was widely retweeted and liked. Legitimising, according to Blumer, means that a social problem exists. The next stage coordinates the initial discontent and identifies who and what is responsible (Christiansen 2008).

In most discontent and social unrest cases, there is a lack of organising or widespread mobilisation (Christiansen 2008) and thus they do not reach the second stage of a social movement. However, Ojeda and other female journalists, activists, and lawyers organised and invited other people who felt similar discontent to join them. The movement then coordinated its first protest through social media using the hashtag #NiUnaMenos. In addition to the 200,000 people who marched in the capital, protests were staged in other cities across the country (Ronan 2015). The hashtag #NiUnaMenos became the campaign message for the protest. The wide use of the internet and social media in Argentina contributed to the success of the June 3rd protest.

### *Bureaucratisation*

According to Christiansen, the bureaucratisation stage has a higher level of organising and strategic thinking (Christiansen 2008). This stage goes beyond mass rallies and one-off coordination; it requires trained staff to carry out the functions of organisations (Christiansen2008).

The historic protest organised by Ni Una Menos on June 3rd, 2015, transformed a one-off protest call into a global movement (Henao and Rey 2017). The number of people that showed up for the June 3rd march surpassed the organisers' expectations, while demonstrations flooded 70 cities in Argentina, calling for an end to the killings (Henao and Rey 2017). Ni Una Menos then became a movement that established itself as a collective (Langlois 2020). The organisation of the movement is popularly known as a collective that operates on the basis ofsolidarity and the recognition of difference (Langlois 2020). Ni Una Menos is an established national, regional and international movement that aims to penetrate the bases of inequality and transform it (Ni Una Menos n.d.). Some of its values acknowledge the plurality of being, as cis and transwomen of all ages, nationalities, sexualities and class share a common goal of achieving justice and equality (Ni Una Menos n.d.). It is a grassroots movement grounded in feminist principles that recognise differences and collective voices based on solidarity without erasing differences (Langlois 2020). According to Blumer, this stage is the formalisation stage in which social movements become institutionalised (Christiansen 2008).

### *Decline*

The final stage of social movements is the decline stage, in which social movements' life cycles decline (Christiansen 2008). However, in social movements, a decline does not necessarily mean the movement has failed. Instead, it can mean repression, co-optation, success or failure or establishment with the mainstream (Christiansen 2008).

Ni Una Menos has not met this stage of the cycle yet: it is still active. As recent as 2020, the movement was instrumental in campaigning and advocating to legalise abortion in Argentina (Ni Una Menos n.d.). One of the most significant successes of the grassroots movement is passing the bill which legalises terminations in the first 14 weeks of pregnancy in Argentina's law (Booth and Goñi 2020). The legalisation of abortion in Argentina opened up a debate for reproductive rights in other Latin American countries and thus spread the green tide across Latin America (Popplewell 2021).

Having used Blumer's framework (in Christianson 2008) to examine the evolution of the Ni Una Menos movement, it is clear that it emerged from identified and defined discontent. However, the decline or institutionalisation stage is not reflected in the Ni Una Menos movement. The movement continues to be a strong force advocating for social justice issues for the feminised body and a powerful political force advocating for reforms to achieve gender equality in Argentina (Ni Una Menos n.d.). In light of the continuing nature of the movement, the Resource Mobilisation Theory will be used to analyse what has kept the movement going and what challenges the movement continues to face.

## Resource Mobilisation Theory and the Ni Una Menos Movement

According to Resource Mobilisation Theory (RMT), obtaining resources and effectively utilising them is key to the success of social movements (Crossman 2019). The theory explains that resources are central to the mobilisation of social movements, but include more than just material resources (Chesters and Welsh 2010). RMT categorises resources into five groups: material resources, human resources, social organisation resources, cultural resources and moral resources (Crossman 2019). Material resources include tangible resources like money, buildings, and stationery supplies (Crossman 2019). Human resources and social organisation resources refer to labour, skills, the internet, social networks, among others (Crossman 2019); moral resources and cultural resources refer to solidarity and support for the movement, knowledge of the cause and the movement's goals (Romary 2017). Ni Una Menos is a prime example of a movement successfully utilising and mobilising resources. Sen (2016) explains how new social movements[4] try to mobilise primarily human resources by appealing to grassroots organisers . The utilisation of human resources and a critical socio-organisational resource, social media, gave birth to the movement and has also sustained the movement thus far.

### *Socio-Organisational Resource*

While studying the emergence of new social movements, social movement theorists have shown that utilising the internet as a resource is common in new social movements (Sen, 2016). Evidence has shown that from Ojeda's first tweet of action on May 11th, 2015, to the first march on June 3rd, 2015, the hashtag #NiUnaMenos got over 958,000 tweets and mentions (Terzian 2017). The movement currently has three hundred and sixty-four thousand followers on its Facebook page (Ni Una Menos n.d.) and eighty-one thousand three hundred Twitter followers (Ni Una Menos n.d.). The effective use of social media as a socio-organisational tool to mobilise human resources and support can partly be attributed to Argentina's relatively widespread use of social media. As of 2015, 60% of Argentina's population uses social media (Belotti, Comunello and Corradi 2020). Additionally, Argentina has the second-highest GDP per capita in Latin America, and 90% of its population lives in urban areas (Belotti, Comunello and Corradi 2020). The extensive use of social media and an adult literacy rate of 99% (Countryeconomy 2016) provide the base for a social justice movement to thrive through social media. It is important to note that the movement's organisers, primarily journalists, artists, and lawyers, had existing individual followers on their respective social media platforms (Terzian 2017). However, bounded by a common goal of raising awareness of femicide, they built a mass of followers into one supportive group (Terzian 2017). The movement's organisers effectively mobilised the socio-organisational resource to mobilise human resources and

[4]New social movements are seen as new in contrast to old movements whose major challenge was capitalism. NSM has a broader organising around gender, race, ethnicity, youth, sexuality, spirituality, countercultures, environmentalism, animal rights, pacifism, human rights, and the like (Buechler, 2022).

structure a protest call that eventually became an established feminist movement (Ni Una Menos n.d.).

***Human Resource Mobilisation***

Resource mobilisation theorists speak about new social movements mobilising human resources by appealing to grassroots organisers (Sen 2016). The Ni Una Menos movement, in this light, fits into grassroots organising. The movement is a grassroots organisation committed to embracing differences while working together to achieve a common goal (Ni Una Menos n.d.). The movement's ability to mobilise collective solidarity across different genders, classes, religions, races, and ethnicities (Pallapothu 2021) shows how it uses its human resource to its advantage. It is broadly seen as an intersectional grassroots movement (Pallapothu 2021) that operates through a collective of unusual alliances (Langlois 2020). These unusual alliances and acceptance of differences have launched a protest call sparked by the murder of Paez into a national, regional, and international movement, that aims to penetrate the bases of inequality (Ni Una Menos n.d.). On March 24th, 2021 Ni Una Menos joined with the mothers and grandmothers of the Plaza De Mayo and women in Peru and Mexico, to stand up against femicide and the abuse of women's bodies (Ni Una Menos n.d.). Similarly, in the June 3rd protest in 2015 protest, the movement drew on celebrity support (Friedman and Tabbush 2016). The movement's demands were read by actress Erika Rivas, actor Juan Minujin, and cartoonist Maitena (Friedman and Tabbush 2016).

Additional support for the June 3rd protest came from members of the government. The then-president Cristina Fernández de Kirchner and Supreme Court Justice Elena Highton de Nolasco publicly supported the movement(Civicus n.d.) The movement's ability to mobilise human resources is seen further in the International Women's Day strike of 2018. The strike was organised with 50 other organisations, including The Argentinian movement of unemployed workers and the Piquetero Movement (Branigan and Palmeiro 2018). The ability to coordinate human resources and build on existing knowledge of movement building shows how Ni Una Menos collaborates with other like-minded organisations and individuals.

***Cultural and Moral Resources***

Furthermore, the movement effectively uses the skills and knowledge of members of the collective through a transitory assembly that host the feminist collective, political parties, union sectors and independent activist to discuss mobilisations and strikes on aggrieved issues (Ni Una Menos n.d.). The movement uses moral resources in fighting against injustices. The immorality of violence against women is a cultural resource the movement uses to push the public to be morally responsible. In their charters, the movement clarifies that patriarchy is the underlying system that encourages violence. The movement brings politics to private life to unearth such systems (Ni Una Menos n.d.).

## Impact of Mobilising Resources

The socio-organisational resource of social media was the primary resource used to mobilise the Ni Una Menos movement. Technological advancements of the 21st century saw the

emergence of social media platforms like Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and TikTok, to name a few (Bartleby Research n.d.). Facebook is regarded as the largest social media platform globally, with 2.4 billion users (Ortiz-Ospina 2019). It is estimated that at least 3.5 billion of the world's 7.7 billion people use the Internet (Ortiz-Ospina 2019). The use of social media has become an essential tool in the mobilisation of social justice movements. Social media is a vital tool contemporary grassroots movements use to organise collective action and express identity claims (Belotti, Comunello and Corradi 2020). Twitter, a social media network, was the primary socio-organisational resource used by the movement. This resource was used to create a base for support for the movement as required by Resource Mobilisation Theory in the mobilisation process (Golhasani and Hosseinirad 2017). Between the three weeks of mobilisation and the day after the protest, the hashtag #NiUnaMenos got 958,000 mentions and retweets (Terzian 2017). The movement then built on this momentum to increase its visibility on social media through campaigns and messages. The new media played a significant role in mobilising other protest and campaign messages, and the movement continues using its social media pages to promote its feminist agendas.

The movement also drew on moral outrage as a resource. This content is visible in the number of people participating in the 2014 protest. The organisers mobilised more than 200,00 people through Twitter to march in Buenos Aires, the capital (Pallapothu 2021), with other cities and towns nationwide joining in the protest (Ronan 2015). The immediate impact of this protest was the realisation of a potential base of support to mobilise a movement. It is important to note, however, that before the emergence of the Ni Una Menos movement, issues of violence against women were reported, which sparked both online and offline protests (Belotti, Comunello and Corradi 2020), but these protests were an immediate reaction of discontent to emerging issues (Belotti, Comunello and Corradi 2020) that did not necessarily give birth to a movement. The tweet of Ojeda made the hashtag #NiUnaMenos a trending topic which the movement leaders tapped into and used the exciting socio-organisational resource to their advantage, laying the foundation for a call of support to their cause (Belotti, Comunello and Corradi 2020). As the movement's charter reiterates, the name of the movement Ni Una Menos ‘is simply saying enough in a way that moves everyone’ (Ni Una Menos n.d.). The capitalisation of a large base of aggrieved people gave rise to the movement. The large numbers and protests legitimised the force of the movement. Evidence of this is seen just immediately after their first protest. The Supreme Court announced a task force to collect data on violence against women. The Argentinian government passed legislation to protect women who are verbally or physically abused on the streets (Henao and Re 2017).

Additionally, the movement brought to light and made public issues of male violence and disrupted assumptions about it (Langlois 2020). This created a platform for women like Mariana Madiana to speak out about the horrors of intimate partner violence. She was burnt by her husband in 2011 and had to undergo fifty-nine surgeries (Henao and Re 2017). Women like Mariana, who could not find the courage to speak about their abuse, were now speaking up. In her own words, she states: ‘With Ni Una Menos, women are no longer hiding,’... ‘Before, we would not talk,’. She says ‘I do not know if it was fear or shame, or feeling that justice was not on your side...I like it that it is now out in the open’ (Henao and Re 2017). Ni Una Menos

became an integral platform for holding the state and individuals accountable for acts of violence against women. It was a medium for survivors to speak out about abuse and for victims' families to express their loss (Henao and Re 2017). This was achieved by mobilising both human and moral resources. Unlike traditional social movement theories, which argue that movements are primarily born from discontent (Jenkins 1983), the Ni Una Menos movement challenged this notion by establishing the movement as more than reactionary discontent, but also a feminist movement with the aim of tackling other injustices. The mobilisation of both human resources and moral resources was vital to achieving this impact.

A significant impact of the movement's mobilisation of resources was the historic win in passing the bill which legalised pregnancy terminations in Argentinian law for up to the first 14 weeks (Booth and Goñi 2020). This impact is significant because of the rise of what is now called the "Green Tide" that has swept Latin America. The Green Tide is feminist activism advocating for reproductive rights, especially abortion rights (Cicco 2018). The national campaign in Argentina for the right to legal, safe and accessible abortion was launched in 2015, and its symbol is the green headscarf (Centre for Feminist Foreign Policy 2020).

Ni Una Menos has successfully coordinated and managed human resources, including the skills and knowledge of members of the movement. This is seen in the ability of the movement to expand from advocating against femicide to other social justice issues (Daby and Moseley 2021). The Ni Una Menos collective built credibility nationally, regionally and internationally, becoming a central mobilisation platform for abortion rights discussion (Daby and Moseley 2021). The diversity of the collective, its ability to collaborate with other like-minded organisations to achieve a common goal, and its successful history of launching social media campaigns branded the movement as a powerful force (Daby and Moseley 2021). The impact the Green Tide had in Argentina sparked a debate over reproductive rights in other Latin American countries (Popplewell 2021). The Ni Una Menos collective has maintained its roots in feminist practice (Ni Una Menos n.d.) while acknowledging the plurality of being as women (Ni Una Menos n.d.). The Ni Una Menos movement’s ability to mobilise under a transversal form of activism, paying attention to varying and interesting forms of oppression and inequality (Langlois 2020), has proved to be a revolutionary force that disrupts unequal power relations among different groups, gender and race (Langlois 2020). This unique feature of the movement draws from fourth-wave feminism and concepts of intersectionality. Intersectionality and its consideration of class, race, age and gender and its intersecting position of discrimination and privilege (Zimmerman, 2017) are core considerations of the movement. Different writers have considered Ni Una Menos as a feminist intersectional grassroots movement that mobilises collective solidarity across different genders, classes, religions, races and ethnicities (Pallapothu 2021). The transversal approach to feminist activism, paying attention to solidarity without erasing differences (Langlois 2020), removes barriers to participation, thus increasing human resources, skills, and knowledge.

### *Challenges to sustaining the movement*

The lack of financial commitment to adequately sustain the implementation of these laws remains a barrier to the movement (Funes 2017). Recent data shows that the rates of femicide

continue to increase in Argentina; in 2015 the number of femicide victims was 137 (Statista 2020). This number grew to 322 in 2016 and increased to 327 in 2019 (Statista 2020). This shows that despite the mass mobilisation of the movement and the ongoing campaigns to end violence against women, the lack of concrete commitment by the government remains a barrier to the movement's successes.

Another barrier faced by the movement is backlash from conservatives. The backlash comes from conservative circles of evangelists and Catholics (Chambers 2021). Notably, in legalising abortion in Argentina, activists who regard themselves as pro-life have vehemently spoken against the law and how it affects preserving life (Chambers 2021). This is a major concern for conservative and religious sectors who view abortion as an evil act, which is tied to the perceived sexual transgression of women and girls (Boesten 2018). A significant barrier, then, is changing such narratives. Abortion has been legalised, but it has also been reported that some healthcare professionals, due to their beliefs, do not perform an abortion, and that has affected the lives of women and girls (Chambers 2021).

## Conclusion

This study demonstrates how a movement grows, develops, sustains itself and makes an impact. The Ni Una Menos movement has largely succeeded in making public violence against women and advocating for equality and the end of social injustices. It also shows how feminist ideals of intersectionality play a significant role in the movement's success. Recognising differences between people and generations gives the movement the unique advantage of appealing to different generations. The movement advocates ending violence against women and marginalised groups (Langlois 2020). It has successfully lobbied for the creation of a Ministry of Women, Gender and Diversity, ensured government compile and publish official statistics on violence against women, advocate and ensure the protection and justice of women, the provision shelters for victims, and the inclusion of sex education in school curriculums (Palmer 2017). Arguably, the greatest impact of the movement is the mobilisation and campaign that saw abortion rights granted in Latin America's biggest country (Cicco 2018), subsequently opening up a debate for reproductive rights in other Latin American countries and spreading the Green Tide across Latin America (Popplewell 2021).

However, regardless of the strides made by the movement, it is clear that in order to achieve actual change for gender equality, it has to be backed by all forces. Commitment towards achieving equality should include financial commitments by governments. In the case of Argentina, movements like the case study have pressured the government to change legislation and policies. However, the evidence shows that these policies' existence is not backed by financial commitments to implement these policies adequately.

Finally, Ni Una Menos is still an active movement and a force to be reckoned with in Argentina and Latin America. The recognition of difference and the mobilisation under the umbrella of feminist solidarity remain the essential resources that have maintained and sustained the Ni Una Menos movement.

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**ORIGINAL ARTICLE**

# Three conditions for equality: feminist organising at the University of Galway

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**Abstract** This article investigates the recent history of the University of Galway and its controversial gender crisis. The current prioritisation of equality, diversity, and inclusion in Irish higher education policy was accomplished by long-term feminist efforts. The analysis connects political action from the 1970s and 1980s to contemporary organising in work-related campaigning. In examining two high-profile legal cases of gender discrimination and the subsequent activism, the paper argues that collective, continuous, and combative feminist work are conditions to change the power relations and produce gender knowledge. The long-term roots of the local collective feminist struggle show that demands for equality are daily sustained by efforts that are necessarily communal and often anonymous, in which we can all take part.

**Key Words: Feminist organising, Equality, Diversity and Inclusion in higher education, University of Galway, history of Irish higher education, memories of struggle.**

## Introduction

> 'The people who lead change are the people for whom change is needed'.
> (Hodgins 2021, p. 15)

Conservative historical perspectives explain women's historic exclusion from universities as an effect of 'restrictive Victorian social attitudes' that 'prescribed traditional gender roles' (Walsh 2018, p.16, p.119). The implicit understanding guiding such framing is that 'progress' has since then been achieved, so much so that current inequalities can only be read as unusual anachronisms in contemporary societies, as exemplified in the following account: 'It was striking (…) that the traditional pattern of female under-representation at senior levels persisted even with the gradual modernisation of Irish society and the decline of religious influence in higher education' (Walsh 2018, p.355, italics added). This reading of change as the 'progress' that overcomes tradition in the name of modernity denies the existence of structures of exploitation based on gender in the present. It thus blurs the long-term conflict required to ensure the success of aspirations for equality. Political organising has always been crucial to transform institutional rules and grant gender parity in higher education (HE). Indeed, research demonstrates that late 19th and early 20th century campaigners directly influenced legislation of women's access to HE (Breathnach 1987, Broderick 2001, Pašeta 2010).

Inspired by scholarship on the origins of transformation (O'Connor 2014, Chemaly 2018, McAlevey 2018, Ahmed 2021, Berry and Worthen 2021, Hodgins 2021), this paper examines the recent history of the University of Galway to argue that the current prioritisation of gender equality in Irish HE policy (HEA 2018) was a result of long-term feminist organising. The empirical analysis raises questions on widespread assumptions that change is a prerogative of leadership or senior management (O'Connor 2020, Bailey and Drew 2021). Instead, it shows that to transform injustices suffered by individuals into demands for equality, political work needs to identify, criticise, and challenge unequal systems. Moreover, it focuses on 'memories of struggle' (Rivera Cusicanqui 2015), which are taken as important tools to help us understand where to place our hopes and our efforts. The three conditions for equality identified in the study relate to such collective, continuous, and combative feminist work.

A parallel argument sustained in the paper emphasises the role of conflict in producing knowledge. The increasingly sophisticated analysis of academic gender inequality done in Ireland is a direct legacy of the 2010s gender crisis at the University of Galway. Hence, the shape and availability of data are enmeshed in political struggles (Scott 1998) and directly related to how far the gender policy reaches and where it focuses. The recent history of the University of Galway demonstrates the importance of persistent attention to what is knowledgeable and how knowledge can be used (McGoey 2019).

## Methodology and Methods

This paper is part of a PhD study on equality, diversity, and inclusion efforts at the University of Galway. The research is based on a decolonial feminist ethnographic methodology (Leyva

et al. 2018), encompassing four years of on-site and on-line participant observation, document analysis, and interviews with staff (Ruggi 2022). The account offered here draws primarily from written sources to describe feminist actions at the university in terms of work-related activism. It connects episodes in the 1970s and 1980s to a momentous gender crisis emerging in 2014, focusing on the legal complaints of gender discrimination raised by women lecturers. The references intentionally divert from prominent international scholarship to highlight the work done in Ireland to challenge discrimination in HE. The study aims to show that equality demands have roots in the local collective feminist struggle.

## Memories of feminist struggle

### *1977 Admin strike*

Galway was the stage for the first public sector administrative staff strike in Ireland. The strike began on 17 January, 1977, involving 85 workers, primarily women. They fought to have their newly established union branch[5] recognised by the university and to negotiate several demands, including parity on working hours with staff in other universities, internal advertising of new positions, and formalised maternity leave (Gibbons 2020). The decision to strike was taken after a year of unsuccessful written communication with senior management. Gibbons states that the need to strike was an 'oddity' (2020, p.1) because unions were then readily recognised in the public sector. The hostility to collectively bargain with the administrative staff seems to have been partially driven by misogyny and workers declared that senior management treated them 'like little girls' (Cooke 2013 cited in Gibbons 2020, p.3). Uí Chionna (2019, p.223) explains the antecedents:

> [T]he almost exclusively female administrative staff began to be supplemented with male graduates, who were invariably given more senior positions. With the prospect of advancement for women – most of whom had their Leaving Certs and secretarial college training but no third-level qualifications – effectively stymied by the arrival of male graduates, there was increasing support from among the female workforce to secure a better deal for themselves.

Strikers described withholding the university keys and picketing the gates in a collective action that became increasingly entrenched and supported by many academics, fellow university workers, and the Students' Union. The effort resulted in a 'resounding victory' (Uí Chionna 2019, p.226) and a 'complete caving in by the College' (Unity cited in Gibbons 2020, p.8). In a labour court mediation, most demands were met. Mary Cooke, an administrator who took part in the negotiations, celebrates the outcome: 'we got a thing that was very unique, that they couldn't advertise posts without internal notice, that posts should be advertised internally, and

[5] A part-time branch within ITGWU (*Irish Transport and General Workers Union*). As explained by Gibbons (2020, p.2) part-time branches were 'located in the workplace and the functions of union organiser and administrative support were undertaken by members of the branch rather than by full-time paid staff of the union'. In 1990, ITGWU merged with the FWUI (Federated Workers' Union of Ireland) to form SIPTU (Services, Industrial, Professional and Technical Union).

that was a big coup. And we couldn't be transferred either without consultation. And we got a consultative committee' (quoted in Uí Chionna 2019, p.226). Catherine Lyons describes how, in the aftermath of the strike, six or eight women organised a walk-in to occupy the 'staff room', a space previously off-limits for administrative staff:

> [A]ll the old professors were there, and they nearly died, when they saw us marching in. And we marched up and ordered our tea and coffee and we sat down. And they used to have these kind of seats in the centre, that's where the academics sat, you know, the satellites would be outside. But we sat down in the middle, we were just making a point. (…) Nobody said anything to us. And so we established a right to go there, that's how that right came about. Well, it said staff room and we said well we're staff (quoted in Uí Chionna 2019, p.228, italics added).

These accounts reveal legacies of resistance that sustain ongoing struggles for transformation, and demonstrate the collective intergenerational, and often the anonymous, character of political work. The university's history reveals that women's activism has been an important dimension for institutional transformation.

### *Demanding and monitoring policy*

HE policy was consistently incited and monitored by feminist scholars. In 1984, a study showed that 'women are not formally excluded from the academic profession but (…) are most surely confined to a small and powerless space within it' (cited in Smyth 1996, p.16). This resulted in the creation of a Committee on the Position of Women Academics in Third-Level Education that, although denying the existence of overt discrimination, acknowledged that 'procedures, processes and attitudes' retarded 'desirable change' (Hayden 1995, p.9).

The creation of Women's Studies centres in the early 1990s established critical anchorage to produce knowledge and promote change (Lynch 1995, Byrne 2022, Scriver et al. 2021). Feminists condemned the 'Times Heals All' syndrome (Clune 1996), raising the need to examine institutional commitment and policy efficacy[6]. Funds from the state, from philanthropical donations, and from unions helped ensure the continuation of efforts (O'Connor 2014). Feminist academics publicly criticised their institutions (The Irish Times 17/06/1998, Liberty 10/05/2018, Pollak, The Irish Times, 8/03/2019) and several initiated legal action against their employers. Such efforts were sustained by 'tenuous but effective' networks of solidarity from colleagues, students, and peers, administrators, and outsourced personnel (O'Connor 2001, Hodgins 2021) who developed 'coherent communities' (Rich 2003, p.28) or 'complaint collectives' (Ahmed 2021) capable of denaturalising gender inequality.

[6] One question related to 'why UCG [University College Galway], for example, ha[d] an extremely active Equal Opportunities Committee which has produced one of the best documents on Sexual Harassment, but so far ha[d] not succeeded in securing a creche' (Clune 1996, p.143). Indeed, Uí Chionna (2019) explains the realisation of the crèche depended on the initiative of the Student's Union, and its management is currently outsourced.

The Higher Education Equality Unit (HEEA[7]) held a conference in Galway in 1995. Debates encompassed constraints faced by women academics in terms of horizontal segregation, barriers to promotion, and maternity leave, as well as the gendered dimensions of the work of administrative staff, librarians, caterers, and cleaners (Egan 1996[8]). Amongst the hundred or so participants listed in the proceedings feature the names of Mary Dempsey and Micheline Sheehy-Skeffington, whose cases changed Irish HE two decades later, as discussed below.

The history of Irish HE demonstrates the relentless need to assert the existence of gender inequality is directly related to the institutional instability, a sign that despite feminist efforts, change 'is not inevitable, total or permanent' (O'Connor 2017: 106) and 'gender equality in higher education has been neither simple nor linear' (Drew and Canavan 2021: 13). Grummell et al. (2009) point out that the enactment of equality legislation partially silenced gender debates; this was not because of highly successful outcomes of 1980s policy but a sign that 'the issue of gender (in)equality in 2010 has largely become invisible' and lost legitimacy. Thus, many younger academics in the early 21st century 'were shocked when they learned of the current low levels of female representation at senior levels of academia' (Linehan et al. 2009, p.414). For most senior managers, gender equality was 'done with' and 'off the agenda'. Critically-oriented disciplines (like equality, disability and development studies) were defunded and in danger of closure by the late 2000s (Lynch and Ivancheva 2016, p.74). Most Women's Studies Centres in Ireland (including the one in Galway) were merged into mainstream disciplines and left without a 'intellectual home of their own', becoming relatively invisible.

In 2002, the HEA terminated the HEEU and did not reallocate its remit until 2014 (O'Connor 2014). Despite a 2004 report recommending institutions to produce Gender Equality Action Plans, no structure was put in place to monitor its implementation (O'Connor 2008). From 2004 to 2012, no data was collected or published about the gender breakdown of HE staff (O'Connor 2017). In 2012, HE gender data could only be obtained through Freedom of Information Request (Coate and Howson 2014). In this sense, 'data' should not be understood as a given or as pre-existing activism, as if it was simply 'collected' by researchers and policy makers;data is a tool in political disputes. Indeed, two high profile legal cases were necessary to bring gender inequality back into the public discussion.

## Recent legal cases of gender discrimination

### *Mary Dempsey's Case*

In May 2014, the Equality Tribunal (now Workplace Relations Commission) upheld Mary Dempsey's complaint that she had been discriminated against on the grounds of gender and disability (the complaint of discrimination on the grounds of family status was dismissed). She was subjected to ongoing discrimination affecting her contract and conditions of employment

[7] Unit that replaced the National Unit on Equal Opportunities at Third Level in 1992 with a remit that included 'gender, socio-economic background, disability, sexual orientation, race, ethnic origin and religion' (Symth 1996, p.18).

[8] Thanks to Pat Morgan for generously facilitating my access to this and other mostly inaccessible publications.

and recurring unfair treatment and intimidation by managers. Dempsey was awarded €81,000 compensation and the right to have the title of lecturer restored to her contract. The university appealed the Decision but later reached an agreement. It is instructive to detail her experience as presented in the legal case.

The first woman to teach in the Industrial Engineering Department, Dempsey started working in the university in 1994 in a series of temporary positions that lasted for more than ten years. She was the only academic kept in such precarious contracts for so long in the Department and had a heavier teaching load than her colleagues. In 2004, Human Resources conceded she had the right to permanent employment under the Protection of Employees (Part-Time Work) Act, 2003. However, the contract she was offered in 2005 removed 'lecturer' from her title and, therefore, revoked her entitlement to participate and vote at faculty meetings, apply for research funding, or avail of sabbatical leave. She signed it under duress, being on maternity-related sick leave when it was negotiated. In 2007, Dempsey was offered a contract as a 'University Teacher' that similarly did not reinstall her lecturer title, even though she was named as such on the university's website.

Heard by the Equality Tribunal, the Director of Human Resources said that 'the post of Lecturer is filled by open competition following an interview and having demonstrated competence in teaching and research' (cited in Duffy 2014, n/p). Despite verbal promises and a mention in the Strategic Plan for the Department (2003-2007), the university never advertised a post on Dempsey's area of expertise. Due to the 'new downgraded contract', her teaching load increased, resulting in less time to engage in other activities. Paradoxically, in 2006 she applied to move from teacher below the bar to teacher above the bar but was denied because she was deemed to fail in the area of research and contribution. She successfully appealed this decision, despite continued hostility from her line managers. In her complaint, Dempsey offers the example a 'male comparator' who received more favourable treatment. He joined the Department around the same time as herself, also as a Temporary Teaching Appointment (TTA), but was placed on a higher point of the increment scale.

> She raised this issue with the HOD [Head of Department] and she maintains he made a comment to her that "he had a family to support" and "be happy with what you have got". She said that this male colleague was facilitated throughout his career, his post was eventually advertised and he was successful in becoming a Junior Lecturer in or about 1999. He was also facilitated with 2 paid sabbaticals and uninterrupted periods for research purposes to do his PhD while she was not facilitated (…) During 2001/2002 she said that her lecturing hours were increased to facilitate the above-mentioned male lecturer to take a sabbatical. (…) She was asked by the HOD Professor to carry out work during her maternity leave, including correcting examination scripts and presenting a lecture for another Professor who was also on a sabbatical. She said that she then applied for unpaid maternity leave, putting together a list of all the work she had done during her maternity leave and sought additional time off in lieu for from HR. In or around April 2002 while she was still on maternity leave she refused to do some work for the HOD and he made a comment that he did not know how the University would give her another contract in lieu of all the time she was taking off and that he had a Department to run. She believes this amounted to a threat not to renew her contract (Duffy 2014, n/p).

Dempsey continuously sought to remedy the issue internally, seeking help from her union, Human Resources, and the university president. In 2008, the University Equality Policy introduced a provision for staff members to raise grievances, and Dempsey presented her case. She was, however, prevented from appealing the unfavourable outcome delivered in printed correspondence because she was out of the country on work-related projects and, once she returned to work, the 10 days for appeal had already expired. Ironically, the university's legal rebut to the Equality Tribunal in 2009 relied on the statute of limitation – arguing that Dempsey's complaint was outside the statutory time limits of 6 months.

Dempsey provided a detailed and consistent timeline for the ongoing discrimination and compiled a record of official documents to build her case. A review of Industrial Engineering in 2002, cited in her complaint, states that the '[d]epartment should be aware that it was relying on a non-permanent staff of a particular gender, i.e. females, to fulfil its teaching duties' (cited in Duffy 2014, n/p). The Senior Lecturer Appeal Board, also a part of her complaint, openly stated that Dempsey 'suffered uncertainty about the continuation of her employment – during a period when the University did not cover itself in glory in relation to the treatment of TTAs. (…) [and she] suffered a number of indignities at the hands of the University, the Department and one colleague at least' (cited in Duffy 2014, n/p, italics removed).

It is important to foreground the effort involved in compiling a discrimination archive, to keep track of institutional shifts in titles and procedures, and to translate the functioning of a university into legal terms. It is part of the long-term labour of making inequality visible. The records Dempsey compiled show the internal power struggles and the slow work of creating a practical institutional agenda for equality. Many unidentified people were involved in composing the documents acknowledging Dempsey's unfair treatment. The legal decision offers, thus, meaningful insights about the accumulation of disputes materialised in internal documents like the ones Dempsey presents in her complaint. This underlines the meaningful role of the everyday bureaucratic acts of countless nameless people working within the system to transform it. Dempsey's case, although unique in many aspects, is revelatory of ongoing structural gender inequality, as other cases demonstrated.

### *Micheline Sheehy-Skeffington's Case*

A second legal decision against the University of Galway was issued in November 2014 and involved the botanist Micheline Sheehy-Skeffington, an employee since 1980. After her fourth failed attempt at promotion to Senior Lecturer in the 2008-9 round, she learned that only one of the 17 successful applicants was a woman. The Equality Tribunal found she had been discriminated against on the grounds of gender and the redress instructed the university to retrospectively promote Sheehy-Skeffington, pay her a €70,000 compensation, and review the policy and procedures in the promotion schemes for senior lecturers.

Sheehy-Skeffington's complaint asserted that 'the over-emphasis on research to the detriment of teaching is deeply gendered. (…) [W]omen carry the bulk of the university's teaching load, allowing the men to focus on their research and, therefore, are promoted more quickly' (cited Mannion 2014, n/p). She maintained that informal male networks – old boys' clubs – mentored male applicants, providing them with an unfair advantage and facilitating their entry to leadership roles. The prevalence of men in senior positions and decision-making bodies (87% of the professors and 81% of the Academic Council in 2014) reinforced the imbalance in the composition of the promotion panels. Six men and one woman interviewed Sheehy-Skeffington. The Equality Tribunal condemned the self-contained circularity of power structures and the lack of autonomy: 'the Registrar was on Dr Sheehy-Skeffington's interview board and was also involved in hearing her appeal. It would have been preferable if somebody independent of the interview process heard the appeal.' Sheehy-Skeffington affirmed the internal appeal process was merely a 'tick box exercise' (cited in Mannion 2014, n/p).

Giving evidence to the Equality Tribunal, the external referee that participated in the Sheehy-Skeffington promotion panel said that he sought previous access to the marking scheme and the assessment guidelines but got no response from the university. There was no training, no pre-interview meeting, and the collective mark was awarded against his recommendation. The lack of planning and transparency in the process made it very hard to even place a complaint against it. Sheehy-Skeffington (2016, p.22) explains that:

> The university offered very little written evidence on how exactly I or any of the candidates were marked. Candidates were scored in three different categories: Teaching, Research and Contribution to University/Society. Under an FOI [Freedom of Information Request], all I received were notes of what I said in my interview, with three scores (one per category) at the end, as well as the scores for each category for each ranked candite. There was no rationale or explanation, even for my own scores (…). In addition to this dearth of information and evidence from the university on how candidates were scored, my lawyers advised me that I had to prove that I was better than or equal to at least one other person who was successful. To achieve this, I needed access to all the shortlisted candidates' applications. The university refused to supply this, on grounds of breach of privacy, but was eventually required by the Tribunal to hand over the information on all the shortlisted candidates. What I received was heavily redacted, with identifying details removed. (…) I then collated all the information from the files, and compiled a matrix in Excel for each candidate, including myself, under each category sub-heading, as per the application form.

The requirement of a legal mandate to access the information necessary to evaluate the promotion scheme seems to reveal the lack of transparency in decision-making processes. Remarkably, the Equality Officer made a point of expressing her 'gratitude to whoever went through the thirty voluminous application forms and obscured the personal information (over 2000 pages) which greatly assisted this investigation' (Mannion 2014, n/p). Comparing the applications, Sheehy-Skeffington proved the criteria were inconsistently applied, which demonstrates direct discrimination. Under the Teaching and Examination criteria, for instance,

three successful male candidates had less than the 150-contact hours with students (which the guidelines present as a minimum requirement per annum). Still, they got higher scores than Sheehy-Skeffington. One of the successful male candidates had not even reached the top point of the college lecturer scale by the application deadline, so he was not eligible to apply. Although Sheehy-Skeffington's complaint of indirect discrimination due to gendered working patterns was dismissed due to lack of evidence, the Equality Officer identified evidence of indirect discrimination related to disclosing caring responsibilities.

The legal decision highlighted the importance of gender data: '[p]erhaps the most significant frailty to the respondent's rebuttal is the statistical evidence (…) [demonstrating] that male applicants have a one in two chance of being promoted to Senior Lecturer while women who apply have less than a one in three chance of the same promotion' (Mannion 2014, n/p). Sheehy-Skeffington submitted quantitative evidence of gender imbalance in the career ladder referencing the 'Report of the Working Group on Academic Career Advancement in NUI Galway' (Doherty and Cooke 2011). Interestingly, as explained in the Introduction to the Report, the Working Group was constituted because 'concerns were raised at Údarás na hOllscoile [the Governing Authority] regarding the progression of women to senior academic posts' after the 2008-9 promotion panel (Doherty and Cooke 2011, p.3). This is a telling example of the compounding efforts for transformation: the 'concerns' originated the data that was crucial to the legal decision.

The documents collected to support both cases give evidence of the efforts to transform the institution from within, and to identify different groups communicating and exerting pressure on each other. Indeed, the two legal decisions had a significant impact on the university's internal relations and created the momentum for the feminist campaigns described in the next Section.

## Discussion

### *Feminist organising*

Gender equality demands in HE gained momentum after the two legal decisions described above. Keeping in mind Strathearn's (2006) suggestion that documents are tools in power struggles, it is worth following them around to verify how they were used. For the promotion of gender equality in Irish HE, no document was more fruitful than Micheline Sheehy-Skeffington's. According to Quinlivan (2017, p.12), it 'disrupted the status quo' and became a landmark case that shifted power balances within the sector. The first person to use the case as a tool was Micheline herself, who went to newspapers before the moratorium period suggested by the Equality Tribunal was over. This is possibly one of the reasons why the university did not appeal her decision.

As a direct consequence of her disclosure, five other women who had been shortlisted in the 2008-9 senior lecturer round but not promoted started their own cases against the university

with the support of the academic unions. Elizabeth Tilley pursued the issue in the Labour Court whilst Sylvie Lannegrand, Róisín Healy, Margaret Hodgins, and Adrienne Gorman took their cases to the High Court. The placards 'Promote the Five' and 'Promote Women Lecturers' in the picture below address their cause. Sheehy-Skeffington supported her colleagues by donating her award and publicly speaking against gender inequality in the media.

Figure 1: Feminist demonstration


Source: O'Shaughnessy in Siggins (The Irish Times, 31/01/2015).

This feminist demonstration in the garden of the Quadrangle building is a key event in the history of the university. Gender relations became an institutional priority because of collective effort. Although the media did not widely advertise Dempsey's case, it was known by local campaigners. When I interviewed staff in 2020 and 2021, some people remembered the chants that said: *'Mary Dempsey won her case! Mary Dempsey won her case!'*. Several mentioned how the legal decisions '*brought so much out into the open, [that] they couldn't hide from it any longer*', and that the gender crisis '*was all over the news and very much part of what everybody was talking about*'.

Indeed, an investigation of Irish newspapers corroborates the public interest. More than one hundred news articles were published between January 2014 and February 2019 (Oliveira Filha and Ruggi 2019). The initial reports expressed surprise and outrage, revealing gender inequality was not recognised in Irish HE; the journalistic interest was sustained during the following years due to the conflict between different stakeholders and the creation of Micheline Sheehy-Skeffington as a public personality. Newspapers developed a version of the events closely related to memories of feminism, drawing from her family history[9]. Micheline also emphasised her ancestor's legacy in media statements: 'I am from a family of feminists. I took this case to honour them' (cited in Boland, The Irish Times, 6/12/14). Indeed, the feminist

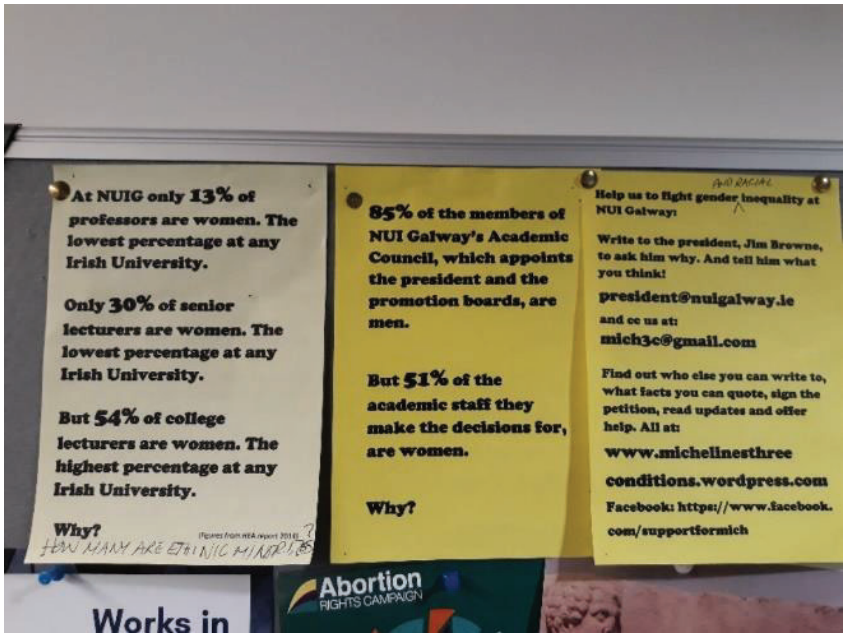
[9] Micheline's grandparents, Hanna Sheehy (1877-1946) and Francis Skeffington (1978-1916), were married in 1903, creating the equalitarian surname. Among the many feats of their lives, their fight for women's rights to education was prominent. Hanna was a member of the Irish Association of Women Graduates and Candidate Graduates (IAWG), founded in 1902, which defended the 'radical' agenda of full gender parity in education and professions. Francis resigned from his job as Registrar in University College Dublin in 1894 on a point of principle to support the admission of women to the college on equal footing to men (Broderick 2001, Pašeta 2010, p.190).

identity she claimed was crucial to collectivise her experience and it was also highlighted by feminist campaigners:

> Micheline's win was the first time any woman in academia in Ireland or the UK had proved gender discrimination in relation to promotion. It was major news in both countries on TV and radio and in newspapers and was followed by the release in early December 2014 of statistics gathered by Ireland's Higher Education Authority, showing the percentage of women at each level in Irish universities. The low percentage of women in senior academic positions resulted in another massive amount of publicity and genuine shock that Ireland was so poor in this sector, which had been assumed to be more enlightened. In fact, Ireland proved to be one of the worst countries in Europe for the university glass ceiling index, which puts a spotlight on the lack of women in senior academic posts (mich3c 2015, n/p).

When Sheehy-Skeffington's name was suggested as a member of an institutional Gender Equality Task Force, established in response to the gender crises, she placed three conditions to join: (i) promote the five women discriminated in the same scheme as herself, (ii) ensure gender balance in the subsequent promotion round to senior lecturer, and (iii) address gender imbalance in senior posts through quotas. The failure of the university to agree with the demands resulted in the creation of a campaign known as *Micheline's Three Conditions*. This activist group self describes as: 'not NUI Galway staff, but students, former students and others (…) able to organise things which would have been difficult for staff to undertake' (mich3c 2015, n/p). They launched a petition that gathered 4,233 signatures, fundraised to cover legal expenses, organised demonstrations, systematically generated media content and coordinated collective activism. Their blog was crucial for this research and undoubtedly very important to circulate information during the dispute. In the first semester of 2018, material from their campaign was visible on the university walls.

Figure 2: Campaigners' posters at the Hardiman Research Building




Source: Picture by the author, March 2018

Senior management's response to the gender crisis was antagonistic. The declaration that it was impossible to retrospectively promote the five lecturers outside the formal schemes was considered a lie and seen as a sign of unwillingness to address gender inequality. The campaigners were specially dismayed by the fact that the university applied at the High Court for a trial of preliminary legal issues, a stalling strategy that increase the costs and the duration of the legal process. The promotion of the lecturers became one of the catalysts for action. Several people followed the ongoing negotiations with senior management and the insulting comments about them 'not deserving promotion.' The settlement offers made were considered disrespectful. Firstly, because it proposed a 'route for promotion', that is, not a remedy to the discriminatory scheme, but a new assessment. Secondly, because the promotion would not be backdated to 2008/9. One of the lecturers, who was taking a Labour Court case, accepted this offer. The other four opted to continue the legal route. Only the appointment of a new president in 2018 made it possible for senior management to meet their demands for justice. Commenting on this, Sheehy-Skeffington said the new president 'settled these cases so easily and so soon after coming into office gives the lie to all those claims by the previous regime that there was nothing they could do!' (mich3c 2019, n/p).

The relationship between campaigners and senior management produced plenty of controversies and media coverage. Indeed, public attention was crucial to precipitate change. In May 2016, the university threatened legal action over a *Micheline Three Conditions* Blog post that allegedly 'damaged its reputation' (O'Brian, The Irish Times, 31/05/2016). An exhibition of the Secret Cartoonist organised by the Student Union was removed overnight in April 2015, even though permission had been properly obtained, generating another wave of public scandal. The comic strips themselves give a vivid account of the disputes around reputation. They use irony to denounce superficial initiatives that prioritise the university's public image instead of changing the power structure. Indeed, campaigners criticised management 'hypocrisy' and denounced the actions proposed, stating they were 'merely window dressing' and that '[r]eality speaks louder than public relations drivel, no matter how you spin it' (mich3c 2017, n/p).

Figure 3: The Secret Cartoonist I

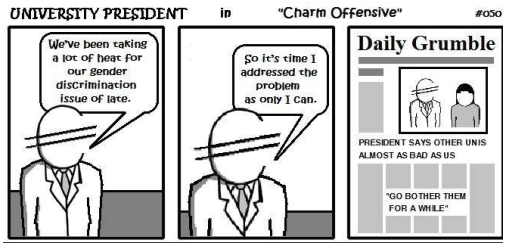



Figure 4: The Secret Cartoonist II


Source: mich3c (Micheline's Three Conditions Blog) (2018 n/p).

A piece published in the Student Union's newspaper shows the levels of antagonism and mistrust reached by the crisis: 'I think it's fair to say that the President is unnerved by the frequented negative publicity that the University has been at the receiving end of, recently. However, his recent attempts to address these issues of gender discrimination have only shed light on a need to control and orchestrate progress within the narrow remit of maintaining the status quo' (Treanor 2015). Indeed, feminist demands were partially responded to and re-purposed, shaped by what Walsh (2018) calls 'constructive ambiguity', that is, a willingness to accommodate conflict through partial concessions. In the national policy, gender equality became synonymous with breaking the glass ceiling (Ruggi and Duvvury 2022). Such policy approach naturalised a unidimensional understanding of gender that ignores intersectional dynamics. This was actively being disputed during the gender crisis, and campaigners themselves were challenged, as shown in the detail of the posters previously shown, where handwritten additions called for the broadening of the activist agenda (Figures 8 and 9). It seems fair to state that one of the main objects of disputes in gender equality politics has to do with what can be known.

Figure 8: Detail of campaigners' poster I

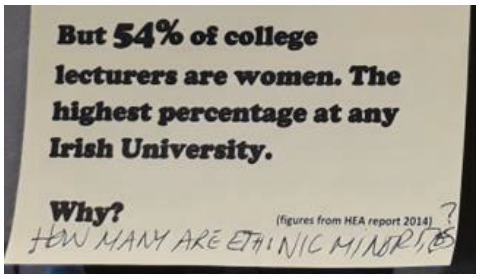



Figure 9: Detail of campaigners' poster II


Source: Picture by the author, March 2018.

Many other stakeholders assembled around the gender equality crisis, participating in the public debates at different moments of the protracted dispute. They included the Students' Union; at least 33 students' societies; both academic staff unions (SIPTU and IFUT); the academic cluster Gender ARC (Advanced Research Consortium on Gender, Culture and the Knowledge Society); the Galway Feminist Collective; the HEA and local TDs. One of the main groups whose importance grew due to the gender crisis was the University Women's Network (UWN). Established in 2012 by approximately ten women, the network was involved in raising awareness about the lack of women in senior positions. They worked to encourage women to stand for election for the Governing Authority, and negotiated with the Gender Equality Task Force to implement an institutional policy, ensuring gender balance in committees and assessment panels.

During the same period as the legal cases were publicised, the integration of St. Angela's College in Sligo into the University of Galway was about to be completed. The incorporation

proposal demoted St. Angela's academic status from lectures to 'University teachers.' This was the same contract offered to Dempsey; it did not include a promotion route to professorship nor offered research grants or sabbaticals. Since the third-level courses offered at St. Angela's (nursing, education, and home economics) were mainly taught by women, the proposal was discriminatory.

Due to senior management's lack of engagement in negotiations, on 10 February 2015, the Teachers' Union of Ireland (TUI) organised a one-day strike in St. Angela's with the support of 95% of its membership (McDonagh 2015). TUI's president stressed that the 'high-handed, undemocratic and confrontational approach [for the integration] is the product of an elitist mindset and from a university which has a proven track record when it comes to issues of gender inequality' (Quinn cited in The Sligo Champion 2015). Like the administrative strike described before, this movement was successful. St. Angela's academic staff maintained the title of 'lecturers', although with a caveat. A new type of contract (Lecturer A) was created emphasising classroom work (60% Teaching, 20% Teaching-related Research and 20% Admin/Contribution), differentiated from the traditional Lecture B (40% Teaching, 40% Research and 20% Admin/Contribution). Data from 2016 shows that the majority of type A lecturers (71%) are women, which again indicates 'constructive ambiguity' (Walsh 2018).

The collective effort created a successful feminist mobilisation. It empowered people to denounce improper actions and demand change. Irregularities in the appointments to senior academic and management positions were denounced by a senior member of the administration who made a complaint under the Whistle-blower Act (Village Magazine 2016, mich3c 2016). An invasive HR questionnaire requesting information about menstrual periods, breast and prostate problems was leaked to a local newspaper, resulting in its withdrawal (Bradley 2015). These examples are a sign of a larger movement challenging the university power structure.

It is important to highlight the role of activists in the production and monitoring of gender data. More than only scandals, the gender crisis created an unprecedented amount of knowledge about gender relations at the University of Galway and the whole Irish HE sector. It assured public scrutiny of data, budgets, senior appointments, and public relations. Campaigners verified the EU Glass Ceiling Index calculated by SHE Figures and spotted a mistake in data provision by the HEA, showing an inaccurate improvement of the Irish position between 2009 and 2015. This was rectified thanks to activists' monitoring (mich3c, 2016, n/p).

Within the institution, feminists questioned the gender imbalance of the newly appointed Deans (all men), of the new directors of Institutes and research programmes (95% male), and the enduring gender inequity in the Academic Council (more than 80%). Throughout the gender crisis, campaigners estimated the costs to promote the five lecturers, drawing attention to the accumulated loss they faced for not being able to apply for professorship grades and correlated pension loss (mich3c 2017, n/p). They also underscored that most of the 16 men promoted in the 2008-9 round had become professors by 2017. Campaigners monitored the university's Athena Swan applications and demanded a transparent process. They objected to the university receiving an award while the lecturers' cases were ongoing and urged supporters to follow

Sheehy-Skeffington's initiative, sending letters of objection to the Equality Challenge Unit (mich3c 2017, n/p). In summary, the availability of statistics, their interpretation and their wider circulation were essential in developing and deepening the institutional gender crisis. The reverse is also true: converging tension and attention were essential for gender analysis.

## Conclusion

This paper sustained two main arguments. Firstly, that transformation was achieved through collective, long-term feminist organising. Secondly, that the tension created by such demand for equality was crucial to producing knowledge about gender relations in Irish higher education. Indeed, a research interviewee stated:

> There have been changes, and there have been changes because of two high profile cases taken against the university in Galway. Based on those two cases, subsequent cases were taken. I honestly feel that if those cases had not been taken, we wouldn't have even seen the kind of change we're seeing now. After those cases, the university put in a Task Force, appointed a Vice President of Equality, Diversity and Inclusion. Other universities followed suit. The universities started to engage with the Athena Swan initiative. A national Task Force was put in place, recommendations were put in place. For the first time, data was made available publicly about the different levels of gender imbalance for professorial post, senior lectureship, and so on. All of that has been prompted by people who took litigation. (Phil [fictious name])

The recent history of the University of Galway teaches significant lessons about the origin and ownership of change. Political work is an effort that requires collectivising private issues in long-term intergenerational processes. Aspirations for equality blossom from the bottom, and they are a locus of knowledge production in cycles of engaged co-theorising (Leyva et al. 2018). The shift in power relations that resulted in the implementation of a new national policy for gender equality was an outcome of feminist action. This story relates to institutional 'identity'. Instead of taking the gender crisis as reputational damage, there is an opportunity to embrace and honour internal disputes that overflowed the university and transformed Irish higher education.

This study was developed under the premise that 'memories of struggle' (Rivera Cusicanqui 2015) constitute an important political resource for contemporary feminism. Contrary to historical approaches that frame transformation in gender relations as outcomes of 'progress' (Walsh 2018), the investigation foregrounded the ongoing fight against work inequality. It showed the efforts that made possible to build cases of discrimination on the grounds of gender and how the legal cases became themselves tools to further feminist mobilisation. It demonstrated that transformation was achieved through collective, continuous, and combative organising – the three conditions for equality. The description provided aspires to circulate memories of struggle to help feminists discern where to place our hopes and our efforts.

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**ORIGINAL ARTICLE**

# The Confidence Cult(ure): from Postfeminism to Neoliberal Feminism

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**Abstract** In this article, I explore how the conflation of neoliberalism, postfeminism and selected elements of a broader feminist discourse brought forth a new type of feminism that is amenable to patriarchal neoliberalism: neoliberal feminism. I argue that this has been possible because of two main factors: the confidence cult(ure) and feminism entering the mainstream Anglo-Saxon media. Relying heavily on a postfeminist sensibility yet rebranding itself as feminism, the confidence cult(ure) fostered a new form of neoliberal affective governance directed at women. In doing so, the confidence cult(ure) achieved the tour de force of blending together neoliberalism, postfeminism and specific feminist claims. Cleansed of its radical and transformative power, this hyper-individualized form of feminism has been more easily popularized and embraced by a wider audience within mainstream Anglo-Saxon media. This made it possible to bring forth the new apolitical, patriarchy-friendly neoliberal feminist.

**Key Words: Postfeminism, Neoliberalism, Neoliberal Feminism, the Confidence Cult(ure), Girl Power**

## Introduction

In this essay, I take a closer look at postfeminism's entanglement with the neoliberal paradigm and its later unexpected espousal of a feminist discourse. I look into how the conflation of neoliberalism, postfeminism and specific feminist claims and issues aims at crafting an apolitical, patriarchy-friendly neoliberal female subject.

In an attempt to understand how this development unfolded, I first expose the psychological life of neoliberalism and the makeover paradigm that lies at its core. I then turn to the postfeminist sensibility, as theorized by Rosalind Gill, which I analyse through its disconcerting resemblance to the neoliberal paradigm. I then explore a new form of affective governance and self-regulation aiming at reconstructing women's selves: the injunction to confidence. The confidence cult(ure) that stems from such an injunction rests upon key postfeminist elements while being enmeshed in distinctively neoliberal features. It is, however, unabashedly articulated in feminist terms and is, indeed, assumed as feminist. From there, I argue that we are witnessing the emergence of a new strand of patriarchy-friendly feminism essentially stripped of its political origin and essence: neoliberal feminism. Finally, two case studies, Girl Power and Successful Girls, are called upon to exemplify the actualization of this emerging type of feminism.

## Constituting the Neoliberal Female Subject

### *The Psychological Life of Neoliberalism*

Extending far beyond mere economic policies, today's neoliberalism can be understood as a political rationality whose reach stretches from running the state to crafting the inner life of the subject (Banet-Weiser, Gill & Rottenberg 2019). As it recasts individuals as capital, the pervasive market rationale infiltrates every single aspect of life – including the most private ones (Banet-Weiser, Gill & Rottenberg 2019). Moving beyond personal changes in appearance, skills or sex life, contemporary neoliberalism has come to regard the self as a product of interest. Taking a psychological turn, it endeavours to inform people's inner lives through establishing 'injunctions and prohibitions on how to feel' (Gill & Kanai 2018, p.320), which is referred to as 'affective governance' (Jupp et al. 2016, cited in Gill & Orgad 2018, p.480). Indeed, the 'affective and psychic life of neoliberalism' (Gill & Kanai, 2018, p.320) sensitizes people to the right feelings and dispositions (Gill & Kanai 2018); specifically, it teaches dissatisfaction and frames the solution as one of voluntary self-transformation to be undertaken by the individual through a 'makeover paradigm' (Gill & Kanai 2018, p.4). This makeover aims at developing some key dispositions: the ruling-out and reframing of negative feelings into a constant positive and upbeat attitude upheld by inspirational discourses; the development of resilience and confidence; the brief acknowledgment of injury and vulnerability only to repudiate them; and the ability to adapt and to refigure hardships as beneficial learning experiences, if not opportunities for growth (Banet-Weiser, Gill & Rottenberg 2019; Gill & Kanai 2018). According to this discourse, both the source of one's problems as well as their solutions are to be found within oneself, eclipsing structural inequalities and the need for social

change (Gill & Orgad 2018). The essential elements enabling this makeover, needless to say, must be purchased. We are thereby witnessing the commodification of feelings in an era of emotional capitalism (Illouz 2007, cited in Gill & Kanai 2018).

More specifically, the notion of resilience has made itself astonishingly prominent across a whole range of domains such as education, employment, health and welfare (Gill & Orgad 2018). It must be understood as one of the essential qualities and dispositions needed to thrive (if not survive) in a neoliberal order fraught with pervasive inequality and injustice that a focus on hyper-individualization obliterates (Gill & Orgad 2018). Indeed, the hailing of resilience is to be appreciated against a backdrop of employment precariousness and social austerity pushed by neoliberal policies. Although the resilient subject may not be able to avoid the hardships of a tough life, they manage to make it through as they adopt the right feelings, attitudes and dispositions. Failure to do so becomes a matter of personal responsibility and insufficiency (Gill & Kanai 2018; Gill & Orgad 2018), consequently creating a dichotomy between either worthy or disposable human capital (Banet-Weiser, Gill & Rottenberg 2019). Interestingly however, Gill and Orgad (2018) point out that in a deft narrative twist relying upon the media, resilience is not merely coerced by the state upon its subjects but voluntarily taken up by people themselves, sometimes enthusiastically, as a "free" and self-determined act of empowerment, embraced for the sake of one's own pleasure and happiness.

### *Postfeminism's Entanglement with Neoliberalism*

Postfeminism is a concept that builds on the premise that women have been empowered through the waves of feminism spurred by previous generations and that, consequently, feminism is passé (Budgeon 2011). However, there has been a lack of agreement upon what postfeminism exactly is and what it encompasses as well as regarding its contradictory use (Gill 2007). In this regard, Gill (2007) argues that the concept is best apprehended not as an epistemological perspective, a historical shift in a somewhat linear unfolding of feminism (therefore questioning the relevance of the "post") or a well-specified backlash against feminism – but rather as a 'sensibility' (Gill 2007, p.148). This notion stresses the inherent contradiction of the postfeminist discourse: its entanglement with both feminist and anti-feminist contents (Gill 2007). This postfeminist sensibility is made up of steady core features that locate a woman's power both in her (sexual) body and in her psychic life, which we will examine through its dismaying proximity to the psychological life of neoliberalism.

Postfeminism re-centres the body at the heart of women's lives with a striking obsession, becoming the defining feature of womanhood (Gill 2007). Femininity has become a bodily property where the sexy body is the most valuable source of a woman's identity and power: 'It is her asset, her product, her brand and her gateway to freedom and empowerment in a neoliberal market economy' (Gill 2017, p.616). Yet this ideal body that a woman must diligently work her way towards is presented as inherently unruly, needing to be harnessed through constant monitoring, discipline and self-surveillance in an attempt to approximate ever narrower criteria of female attractiveness (Gill 2007). Although self-surveillance is nothing new in women's lives, for Gill (2017) it has dramatically increased in intensity as well as in extensiveness – now including peer or horizontal surveillance such as the 'girlfriend gaze' (Gill 2017, p.617) where women and girls police each other. The relocation of femininity and female

power almost exclusively within the body goes hand in hand with the pervasive sexualization of contemporary cultures, achieved through the shift from objectification to subjectification (Gill 2007).

Wilkes (2015) contends that female proponents of postfeminism engage, to different extents, in the uninhibited display of hypersexualization and emancipated sexuality as a way to make themselves visible and negotiate power and privilege within the neoliberal realm – a route to power that arguably endorses, even celebrates, patriarchal norms and gender subjugation (Wilkes 2015; Bae 2011). For Gill (2007), although women are not downright sexually objectified within the postfeminist framework that she developed, they are depicted as active subjects, endeavouring towards the embodiment of the sexual subject, and internalizing the male gaze (Showden 2009). Here, women are given agency on the condition that it be used to construct themselves as resembling the epitome of the male fantasy, which 'represents a [deeper] form of exploitation than objectification' (Gill 2007, p.152). The postfeminist sensitivity seeks to instil in women that such power and emancipation are acquired through the purchase of goods – notably luxury goods – and services in the market to beautify themselves and enhance their sexual appeal (Wilkes 2015) – much so to the taste of neoliberal patriarchy. Despite being articulated around traditional, patriarchal gender power relations and forms of representation that denote the resurgence of natural sexual differences, postfeminist sexual subjectivities are presented as progressive (Showden 2009). They portray sexual differences as sexy (thereby eroticizing power relations) and potentially crystallize existing gender inequalities – depicting the latter as inevitable and, indeed, pleasurable (Gill 2007).

Yet postfeminism doesn't circumscribe itself to the policing of the body; just like neoliberalism before it, it has spread through and claimed a new realm: the self (Gill 2017). As stated by Gill (2017) and in keeping with the psychological life of neoliberalism, women's selves now need to be assessed, advised, disciplined and/or improved. Predicated on the allegation that women's inner lives are inherently flawed but are amenable to transformation – a transformation whose sole responsibility is attributed to women themselves (Gill 2017) – postfeminism offers particular forms of modern and upgraded subjectivities which are presented as the solution to women's contemporary dilemmas and issues (Gill 2007). It comes as no surprise that this upgrade occurs through purchasing necessary goods and services from the market such as self-help books/advice and therapies (Gill & Orgad 2018). These constitute the makeover paradigm the postfeminist sensibility relies upon. This thorough makeover aims at policing not only women's bodies – compelling them to approximate ever narrower criteria of female attractiveness – but also feelings, dictating which must be suppressed, which are allowed and how they should be displayed, in line with the neoliberal affective governance (Gill 2017; Gill & Orgad 2018). Most importantly, all this is couched in terms of conscious individual choice expressing or leading to empowerment through "pleasing oneself" and "taking control" (Gill 2007). There is a remarkable degree of fit here between the postfeminist and neoliberal paradigms: the core tenet of choice and autonomy lies at the heart of both, while the focus on hyper-individualism frames personal experiences of hardship or failure as a matter of personal responsibility, successfully erasing any structural need for change (Gill & Orgad 2018).

### *The Confidence Cult(ure)*

The notion of resilience is intimately constructed around that of confidence; indeed, Gill and Orgad (2016, p.331) refer to "resilience" as the tougher sister of "confidence." In fact, I argue that the two notions are fundamentally intertwined: while the neoliberal notion of resilience commands the appealing display of confidence in the face of hardship, confidence is built and developed through enhancing one's resilience. In the neoliberal paradigm, however, resilience has a markedly gendered address (Gill & Orgad 2018). Thus, the almost exclusive address to female subjects in the neoliberal turn to resilience further entrenches the popular belief that women suffer from an intrinsic deficit of confidence (Gill & Kanai 2018). In a resolutely postfeminist tone, this confidence deficit is claimed to be the very cause of gender inequality (Gill & Orgad 2017). It is framed as the root of women's ills in the world, as it holds them back in their personal and professional achievements and must be overturned through a diligent remaking of women's subjectivities (Gill & Orgad 2017): the 'confidence cult(ure)' project (Gill & Orgad 2016, p.331).

In the face of this pervasive imperative to be confident across all domains in both their professional and private lives, women are enjoined to practice power poses, to lean in, "to fake it until they make it", to love their bodies and to develop the ability to let go so as to thrive (Gill & Orgad 2017). To achieve these goals, they are offered a myriad of self-help manuals, smartphone apps, and other market services. Here, the confidence cult(ure) proves to be complicit with, rather than critical of, patriarchal neoliberalism as it obliterates both 'the brutal effects' (Gill & Orgad 2017, p.28) of patriarchy and institutionalized sexism in the form of violence, blame, hate speech or debasing addresses directed at women and their impact on women's confidence (Gill & Orgad 2017), as well as their role in upholding and reproducing power imbalance and injustice (Budgeon 2011). Therefore, the confidence cult(ure) operates within, rather than against, the patriarchal structures that condition women's minds and material realities (Gill & Orgad 2017). In fact, within the confidence cult(ure) framework, self-confidence becomes women's best ally to navigate structural inequalities and sexism. Calling upon minor, easy and, importantly, non-disruptive personal adjustments in the face of structural problems (Gill & Orgad 2016), the confidence cult(ure) undermines the potential for collective social and political actions that presuppose an awareness of structural inequalities and oppression (Pomerantz, Raby & Stefanik 2013).

The confidence cult(ure) represents a new form of affective governance and self-regulation aiming at reconstructing women's selves by means of ever more pervasive interventions and intrusions into their private lives (Gill & Orgad 2016). Resting upon key elements of the psychic life of postfeminism, it stands out for the 'intensiveness, extensiveness and coherence of its proposed interventions' (Gill & Orgad 2017, p.34), which range from surface injunctions such as 'love your body' to astonishingly detailed practices demanding careful monitoring and diligent self-corrections said to bring forth the long-awaited confident woman (Gill & Orgad 2017). In doing so, the confidence cult(ure) seeks to redirect women's attention away from politics, towards the neoliberal fantasy of success and happiness (Budgeon 2011; Gill & Orgad 2017). What makes the confidence cult(ure) remarkably distinctive, however, is its determined espousal of a feminist discourse: its postfeminist address is articulated and celebrated in

feminist terms of empowerment and is unashamedly assumed to be, indeed, feminism (Gill & Orgad 2016; Gill & Orgad 2017). For Gill & Orgad (2017), this is likely due to the new visibility and embrace garnered by certain kinds of feminism through media platforms over the last decade, combined with the entanglement and overlap of feminism, postfeminism and neoliberalism in these visible strands of feminism. To this we now turn.

### *Feminism & Media Visibility*

In the past, feminist discourses were independent, critical voices expressed through avenues external to the media (Gill 2007). Over the last decade however, feminism has made itself prominent throughout a diversity of Anglo-Saxon mainstream media such as digital media, social media (Instagram, Tumblr, Facebook, and Twitter), broadcast media (television) as well as in commercial advertising (Banet-Weiser, Gill & Rottenberg 2019). These have been instrumental in crafting new modes of affective subjectivities available to women (such as the confidence cult(ure)), presenting them as desirable to women (Gill & Kanai 2018; Gill & Orgad 2017) and disseminating them (Wilkes 2015). Yet this does not imply that the media has endorsed a comprehensive feminist perspective where the many strands of feminism (queer, decolonial, intersectional or liberal feminism, to name a few) all come to the fore to push a comprehensive agenda; rather, it entails that 'the feminist discourse is incorporated, revised and depoliticized through the media' (Gill 2007, p.161). In fact, the nature of the specific feminist discourse promoted in the media intermingles both feminist and anti-feminist sentiments and values, conferring a distinctly postfeminist stance upon it (Gill 2007).

Favouring wide circulation over contents, media platforms shape the feminist essence that garners visibility and, therefore, popularity (Banet-Weiser, Gill & Rottenberg 2019). However, visibility doesn't amount to transformation: debates on rights and social justice are remarkably absent from the issues tackled while happiness, work-family balance, body-positivity, self-confidence, or gender equality expressed in capitalist terms (the gender pay gap) take centre stage (Banet-Weiser, Gill & Rottenberg 2019). Overall, the type of feminist content that has garnered the greatest attention and media visibility emphasizes 'a strong sense of female autonomy, agency and choice' (Banet-Weiser, Gill & Rottenberg 2019, p.5) and is about individual success and uplift, not about taking apart patriarchal structures, systemic violence or intersectional discrimination (Banet-Weiser, Gill & Rottenberg 2019). It promotes a focus on individualism and empowerment, in stark alignment with the postfeminist sensibility, except that it carries with it an assertive, even defiant, endorsement of feminism (Banet-Weiser, Gill & Rottenberg 2019). Therefore, through increasing yet skewed media visibility, selected feminist ideas and ideals have been conflated and enmeshed into a postfeminist sensibility and the neoliberal rhetoric of choice and agency, properly entangled in discourses of individualism and consumerism (Wilkes 2015). Rendered palatable through the cleansing of its radical and transformative dimension, this hyper-individualized type of feminism that encourages women to focus on themselves and their own aspirations is more easily popularized, distributed and affectionately embraced by a wider audience (Banet-Weiser, Gill & Rottenberg 2019).

### *The Emergence of Neoliberal Feminism*

Thanks to widespread diffusion and embrace within mainstream Anglo-Saxon media, the confidence cult(ure) achieved the tour de force which consists of blending together a postfeminist tenor with handpicked feminist claims and aspirations while steeping it all into a markedly contemporary neoliberal agenda. We are consequently witnessing the emergence of a new kind of apolitical, neoliberal feminism, stripped of any radical and transformative content and agenda, that takes its roots in a postfeminist narrative of empowerment, individualism and consumerism (Gill & Orgad 2016). Within this neoliberal feminism framework, an atmosphere of assertiveness displaces politics. A vague and diffuse boldness (Budgeon 2011), a sense of 'hollow defiance' (Banet-Weiser, Gill & Rottenberg 2019, p.14) and a spirit of rebellion without a cause (Gill & Kana, 2018) are enacted on media platforms through assertions of individualism such as "Love your body" or "Be who you want to be" (Gill & Orgad 2017). Yet they have no specified target nor calls for any kind of social, economic or political change (Gill & Kanai 2018). Although these acts may convey a sense of empowerment and provide an experience of resistance, they are not political in and of themselves – politics cannot be reduced to mere bold self-expression, regardless of its form or content (Budgeon 2011). This type of hollow defiance requires cheek and self-belief but indeed, not political or societal change (Gill & Kanai 2018).

In light of this, Gill & Orgad (2017 p.32) argue that the confidence cult(ure) project is 'simultaneously political, psychological and aesthetic.' Political because in outlawing so-called negative feelings, the confidence cult(ure) prohibits affects deemed political such as indignation, complaint and, most importantly, anger (Gill & Orgad 2018). These feelings are repudiated and must be constantly reframed in an upbeat and resilient manner through diligent self-work (Gill & Kanai 2018). Psychological because it is deeply implicated in transforming women's subjectivities – their relationships to themselves, their minds and their emotions (Gill & Kanai 2018; Gill & Orgad 2017; Gill & Orgad 2018). Aesthetic because this new strand of neoliberal feminism must be presented not as a political movement but rather as an appealing and stylish identity (Gill & Orgad 2017); this is carried out by figuring a feminist as beautiful within and without, self-possessed, warm, successful and positive, in stark contrast with previous portrayals of feminists as either unkempt or angry – the notorious feminist killjoy (Ahmed 2010, cited in Gill & Orgad 2017). Here, the political, the psychological and the aesthetic merge together to bring into being the patriarchy-friendly neoliberal feminist: nonthreatening, resilient, uncomplaining, and appealing (Gill & Orgad 2017).

## Two Case Studies

### *Girl Power*

Pomerantz, Raby and Stefanik (2013) and Gonick (2006) trace the origin of Girl Power back to the early 1990s, to an emerging underground feminist punk movement from the United States' punk scene: the Riot Grrrls. Originally associated with assertiveness and dynamism, Girl Power used to celebrate 'the fierce and aggressive potential of girls' (Gonick 2006, p.7). The term subsequently extended to feminist blogs, newsletters, magazines, concerts and

websites determined to help young women organize to fight social injustice. However, the political and social intention behind these words began to lose its original transformative power when marketers realized that female empowerment was 'an easily digested form of pseudo-feminist branding' (Pomerantz, Raby & Stefanik 2013, p.189). From then on, Girl Power entered the American mainstream cultural arenas through an incredible array of products and services such as the music industry, the film industry, television series or products targeted at very young girls; it even infiltrated policy initiatives and education debates in the United States (Gonick 2006). The essence of Girl Power proved to be conveniently accommodating to the use and goals of whoever called upon it as it adapted (and still does) to the very contexts and objectives of its articulation (Gonick 2006). This inevitably entailed that its increasingly widespread adoption led to the dilution of its original meaning and intent (Pomerantz, Raby & Stefanik 2013).

Yet of all actors, it is most likely the Spice Girls, the British all-girl band, that took Girl Power to its climax – and with it, embedded its defining features into a resolutely postfeminist tone (Bae 2011). In the Spice Girls' care, Girl Power came to signify a female subject who is self-reliant, highly (even defiantly) confident, ambitious and independent (Pomerantz, Raby & Stefanik 2013) as well as 'assertive, dynamic and unbound from the constraint of passive femininity' (Gonick 2006, p.2) and victimhood (Pomerantz, Raby & Stefanik 2013). Portraying a female individual as empowered and as an active agent in her self-construction (Gonick 2006), Girl Power became a discourse of individualized female freedom and empowerment. However, this power was to be claimed and expressed through the demonstration of excessive femininity enacted through a hypersexualized self (Pomerantz, Raby & Stefanik 2013). Women who adhered to this Girl Power discourse were encouraged to become 'worshipers of feminine beauty' in the name of feminism (Bae 2011, p.28) and, paradoxically, to reclaim power over patriarchy by means of sexual attractiveness (Bae 2011).

How did this take hold in Western society? Unsurprisingly, through the mainstream media. While the Riot Grrrls's Girl Power was looked down upon, the Spice Girls' was celebrated – The Village Voice wrote that the Spice Girls 'have done the seemingly impossible: they have made feminism, with all its implied threat, cuddly, sexy, safe, and most importantly, sellable' (Press & Nichols 1997, p.10, cited in Gonick 2006, p.9). The all-girl band provided the ultimate springboard that made it possible to turn Girl Power into a marketable – indeed, lucrative – concept which intermingled successful femininity with consumerism and individualism – the hallmark of neoliberalism. Besides its commercial potential, Girl Power was, at the same time, promoting and endorsing the new female ideal subject that neoliberalism demanded (Gonick 2006): resilient, confident and responsible for their individual successes and failures – an apt and convenient answer to the pervasive neoliberal injunction to succeed in the face of all adversities. Yet, most interestingly, there is a last point that explains the widespread embrace of the Spice Girls' embodiment of Girl Power: it was, in this form, 'the gentle, non-political, and non-threatening alternative to [radical] feminism' (Gonick 2006, p.10). This enabled women and girls to relate to their feelings in a non-political way and to think of womanhood and girlhood as a space outside of social and political action (Pomerantz, Raby & Stefanik 2013). In a nutshell, and in Gonick's (2006, p.10) words: 'Girl Power's popularity is credited

to its very lack of threat to the status quo.' Emptied out of the collective and transformative power it once had, Girl Power came to shape the essence of the neoliberal feminist.

### *Successful Girls*

Successful Girls, for its part, is attributed to the remaking of North American girlhood since the 1970s. Feminist interventions were designed to enable girls to see themselves as winners who were proud of their being female. Because of their impressive educational and workplace successes, "girl" became synonymous with social mobility and social change (Pomerantz, Raby & Stefanik 2013). The Successful Girls narrative constructed girlhood and womanhood as beyond sexism and, in fact, portrayed girls as 'the new dominant sex' (Pomerantz, Raby & Stefanik 2013, p.191). Therefore, it took the postfeminist assertion that feminism is passé and no longer relevant a step further: not only are gender inequalities rendered non-existent, the playing field is now tilted in girls' favour. Pomerantz, Raby and Stefanik (2013) describe the Successful Girls subject as follows: flexible, highly versatile and adaptable (fundamental neoliberal dispositions); independent and in charge of her own decision-making (the choice and empowerment discourse); and engaged in the process of self-transformation (the makeover paradigm). As she garners all key neoliberal dispositions and qualities, she is able to achieve everything – whether in relationships, the workplace or education – and thrives effortlessly in all circumstances, merely bouncing back when faced with setbacks, misfortune or tribulations (Pomerantz, Raby & Stefanik 2013). Successful Girls are the unqualified winners of the neoliberal order, much so to the detriment of the boys who do not even stand a chance; they have unlimited choice and live in a post-sexist, post-oppressive society because feminism has achieved its goals (Pomerantz, Raby & Stefanik 2013).

Taken together, Girl Power and Successful Girls discourses insidiously suggest that women and girls "have it all" and that the female subject is the best position to inhabit within the neoliberal order (Pomerantz, Raby & Stefanik 2013). However, according to Gonick (2006), although these narratives enable women and girls to feel strong, competent and empowered – claiming choice, autonomy and agency rather than victimhood – they also eclipse structural inequalities and oppression and, with that, the requirement for change. Behind a pretence of self-determination and agency, female emancipation is framed by individualism and consumerism; feminine identity becomes unthinkable outside consumption; "empowerment", which is conditional on self-confidence and sexual attractiveness, is constructed through rather than against society's patriarchal structure; and a woman's success signifies her embodiment of the ideal neoliberal subject: the neoliberal feminist (Bae 2011; Gonick 2006).

## Conclusion

In this essay, I shed light on the emergence of a new type of feminism that is amenable to patriarchal neoliberalism: neoliberal feminism. The latter draws from postfeminism and selected elements of a broader feminist discourse – which emphasizes autonomy, choice and empowerment – properly entangled in the neoliberal paradigm of consumerism and individualism. Such unexpected conflation of seemingly contradictory sources was rendered possible through the confidence cult(ure) – which, despite its resolutely postfeminist

foundation, unabashedly rebrands itself as feminist – and notably by means of its widespread diffusion and embrace within mainstream Anglo-Saxon media. Behind a facade of concern for women's well-being, neoliberal feminism turns out to be a political, psychological and aesthetic project aiming at the crafting of the new apolitical, patriarchy-friendly neoliberal female subject: the neoliberal feminist.

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**ORIGINAL ARTICLE**

# 'An Inclusive Playing Field': How can Gaelic Games Organisations Promote the Active Inclusion of Their LGBTQ+ Players?

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**Abstract** In 2015, the Republic of Ireland became the first country in the world to legalise same-sex marriage through a public referendum. It represented a dramatic shift in societal values. At the heart of this country is the highly influential institution of the GAA. Present in every community in the country, the GAA is not just a sporting organisation but rather an institution that represents Irish traditions and values. Yet, this same institution has few major role models its male LGBTQ+ players can look up to. The fact that there are currently no 'out' gay or bisexual male players in the intercounty game suggests that a taboo still exists around the presence of such players in the organisation. This research explores the reasons for this and what strategies Gaelic Games organisations could pursue to encourage the open participation of LGBTQ+ players. It considers the degree to which the temporalities of Irish LGBTQ+ progress have become embedded in the GAA. These findings are supplemented with the insights of five individuals who have experience in the GAA's quest to become a more LGBTQ+ friendly sports organisation. These findings are then collated to produce a theory of change that can help guide the GAA's welfare and inclusion policy in the years to come.

**Key Words: LGBTQ+, Sport, Gaelic Games, GAA, Allyship**

## Introduction

Ireland has experienced a wave of societal progress over the past decade. Referenda related to the topics of gay marriage and abortion are testament to this. However, many researchers such as Kondakov (2021) feel that LGBTQ+ issues relating to sporting organisations such as the GAA remains a taboo subject. This creates a paradox that is somewhat unwelcome. Irish society could potentially turn into a battleground where traditional and (post)modern ideas compete with each other if the country's cultural evolution fails to integrate its values into the GAA (Free and Ging 2016). There are no examples of any current ‘out’ male intercounty players in the GAA. In a survey conducted by Newstalk (2022), only 10% of male intercounty players reported being aware of a gay or bisexual teammate, compared with 69% of female players. Those statistics alone demonstrate that being a member of the LGBTQ+ community could be quite isolating, particularly for young male players coming to terms with their sexuality.

Gaelic Games are undoubtedly one of the most dominant sporting, and indeed societal, traditions in Ireland. Since the foundation of the state, Gaelic Games have played a crucial role in the establishment of a modern Irish identity, which goes so far as to link it to masculinity (Free and Ging 2016). This link with masculinity, many academics argue, is the reason that the GAA, like most sporting organisations, has struggled to break the ‘taboo’ relating to its LGBTQ+ members. In 2019, the GAA was represented for the first time in the Dublin Pride Parade. ‘Na Gaeil Aeracha’ was established the same year, becoming the Gaelic Games’ first LGBTQ+ focused club. The ‘GAA For All Committee’ was also established that year to work towards the active inclusion of minority groups, including the LGBTQ+ community.

This article will focus primarily on determining what policies and strategies the GAA should pursue in order to encourage the open participation of the LGBTQ+ community in their games. There is extensive literature that we can initially draw on to consider the findings of other academics in this field. Such literature will help us to frame the issue in a uniquely Irish context.

From a qualitative perspective, this research article will acknowledge the value of connecting with the lived experiences of the players themselves within the Gaelic Games. The research will consider the insights that players, both past and present, can provide to help inform an appropriate policy/ approach. By focusing part of our research around such qualitative data, the article also highlights the everyday slights that communicate excluding messages to LGBTQ+ members in the organisations based on their identity (Sue 2010).

## Context

Gaelic Games are made up of three organisations. The GAA (Gaelic Athletic Association), which is concerned exclusively with men’s football and hurling, The LGFA (Ladies Gaelic Football Association), which is concerned exclusively with women’s football and finally the

Camogie Association which is concerned exclusively with the female-only sport of Camogie. The GAA was founded in 1884. As an organisation, it represented grassroots Irish nationalism characterised by decolonial values. Since its establishment, the GAA has become rooted in communities across the island of Ireland. The GAA itself played a crucial role in the reconstruction of a postcolonial Irish identity. It was a leading organisation in the ‘remasculinisation’ of Ireland after generations of occupations and famine (Free and Ging 2016). Nash (1996) explains how the GAA was used to reconstruct Irish identity toward the more robust, masculine ideal of the Gael. The discourse relating to the organisation was dominated by themes of masculinity, born out of a nation that for generations had been emasculated (Nash 1996).

This context brings us fittingly to the purpose of this research in helping us to understand the role of the GAA in an ever diversifying, progressive Ireland. More specifically, how can the LGBTQ+ community find its place within the GAA, given its traditional, masculine, heteronormative roots? The Republic of Ireland became the first country in the world to vote in favour of marriage equality via a public referendum in 2015. This signalled what academics such as Nolan (2018) described as the increasingly declining influence of conservative Catholic Church teachings in Ireland. The referendum was carried with 62% voting in favour. A strong majority, which demonstrated the greater levels of inclusion in Irish society being afforded to the LGBTQ+ community.

The GAA is a significant area of Irish society which has been influenced by the shift in Irish societal values to a much lesser degree. There are currently no examples of an ‘out’ gay male intercounty GAA player. For context, an intercounty player is one that represents their county in the All-Ireland series. It is the highest possible level a player can play at, and is the level which traditionally affords the most recognition. There are some examples of out gay male players at the local club-level game. This however would not be considered ‘significant’ on the national scale. Club-level games would be played within a county between neighbouring communities. Only particularly skilled and talented players would then be selected to represent their county at intercounty level. For further context, Dónal Óg Cusack, who played at an intercounty level for the Cork hurling team between 1996 and 2013, came out as gay in 2009 in his personal autobiography ‘Come What May’. He remains the only male player in the intercounty game to ever identify as LGBTQ+ openly.

A survey was conducted in 2022 by Newstalk, which examined LGBTQ+ attitudes among intercounty players. 714 players were surveyed from 93% of the country’s intercounty teams. 99% of participants said that they would support a teammate coming out. 69% of female participants said that they were aware of a member of the LGBTQ+ community within their intercounty squad. However, this figure drops to just 10% amongst male players (Newstalk 2022). 50% of players believe a teammate would face discrimination if they came out. However, this figure drops to just 18% amongst the cohort who reported being aware of a teammate who was a member of the LGBTQ+ community (Newstalk 2022). Encouragingly, this perhaps suggests a much more positive experience for ‘out’ players than what was

expected. Regardless, these findings are quite encouraging and support similar findings by Magrath et al. (2021) and Bush et al. (2012). However, the fact that only 10% of male intercounty players are aware of an LGBTQ+ teammate suggests it is an area that needs attention. It also highlights that there are indeed gay or bisexual male players playing at an intercounty level, and for various reasons, have decided not to disclose this publicly.

## Literature Review

### *Qualitative Studies*

Fortunately, several studies have already been carried out relating to the topic of tolerance for the LGBTQ+ community in sport. Prominent studies include those by Adams et al. (2010) and Magrath et al. (2021). A semi-professional football team in England was the focus of the study conducted by Adams et al. (2010). This study considered how coaches and players constructed and regulated masculinity in organised sport. The authors approached this study conscious of the hegemonic masculine identity that had come to dominate sport up until the early 2000s. The socially rewarded masculine identity required athletes not only to demonstrate heterosexuality, but also to police it in their peers (Adams et al. 2010). Studies by Kimmel (1994) and Pascoe (2005) examined the ways boys and men policed sexuality through discourse. Kimmel's (1994) study found teammates threatening to expose each other as 'poofs', 'sissies' and other homosexual epithets. Players who failed to live up to the subscribed notions of masculinity were likely subjected to physical dominance and ridicule (Kimmel 1994).

Adams et al. (2010) considered the role played by coaches in facilitating this masculine, heteronormative environment. Coaches often used discourses that drew on themes such as war, gender and sexuality to motivate their players. One coach was recorded asking players who hadn't played particularly well if they were 'poofs' and that they should 'grow a pair' (Adams et al. 2010, p. 280).

The study by Magrath et al. (2021) investigated the attitudes towards homosexuality amongst 243 male undergraduate students in the UK. The authors reference a study conducted by Bush et al. (2012), which proposed the idea in a questionnaire of having a gay coach or teammate to 216 male students at a prestigious British university. The results revealed very little homophobia amongst the participants. Homophobia was virtually non-existent among the group by the time they graduated. This led the authors to write that "it is no longer sociologically responsible to generalize all sports, and all men who play them as homophobic. Increasingly, it appears to be the opposite" (Bush et al. 2012, p. 116). The subsequent study by Magrath et al. (2021) sought to build on this research by examining participants' attitudes towards gay men in general. Attitudinal dispositions of homophobia were found to be minimal amongst first year students in this more recent research. The students' attitudes only improved as they matured and neared graduation. The authors attribute much of these positive outcomes to the fact that most of these young men were raised in an LGBTQ+ friendly society. The findings also support the central premise of Anderson's (2010) inclusive masculinity theory

(IMT), which points to improved attitudes towards homosexuality among young men from a lower socioeconomic status. Finally, Anderson (2010, p. 94) contends that the hegemonic form of masculinity that dominated youth settings throughout the 1980’s and early 1990’s has been replaced by a ‘softer, more inclusive version’.

### *Framing the Research in an Irish Context*

An article by Free and Ging (2016) is one of the few pieces of academic research that directly considers the issue of LGBTQ+ rights within the GAA. Their article considers the significance of Dónal Óg Cusack’s coming out in 2009 and what this signalled for the evolution of Irish society. Free and Ging (2016, p. 219) argue that it represented the coexistence of ‘traditional and (post)modern concepts of gender and sexuality’ in Ireland. We should also note that this happened just twenty years on from the 1980s; a decade where conservative political responses to the AIDS crisis in Ireland and the UK demonised the gay community who were blamed for the spread of the virus (Weeks 1991). The 1980s represented a time where most of society viewed LGBTQ+ behaviour as morally wrong (Magrath et al. 2021). This hostility undoubtedly forced many LGBTQ+ citizens out of team sports and those who remained generally concealed their sexuality (Plummer 2006).

Nolan (2018) similarly attempts to understand the effects of the AIDS epidemic on the evolution of LGBTQ+ rights in Ireland. Ireland in the 1980s was already a country struggling with the issues of divorce and contraceptives. It certainly did not seem to be a country ready to discuss LGBTQ+ rights, and the AIDS epidemic likely worsened such discrimination. The epidemic did however accelerate secular efforts to introduce a sex-education programme to secondary schools. This move was fiercely opposed by the Catholic Church (Nolan 2018). The entrenchment of the Church in education meant that the promotion of sex-ed programmes were blocked by their moral authority. This was in contrast to other Western European countries, many of whom had introduced such programmes in the aftermath of World War II. The Church defined sex outside of marriage as a ‘grave disorder’, masturbation a ‘deviation’ and homosexuality an ‘objective disorder’ (Catholic Truth Society 1983). This undoubtedly had a tremendous influence on the Irish population, of which 85% identified as Roman Catholic at the time. It could also be a significant factor in homosexuality remaining illegal in Ireland until 1993 (McCarthy 2020).

Although not specifically interlinked, many social historians point to the strong relationship between the Catholic Church and the GAA, particularly during the period between the 1930s and the 1980s. Keating and Reynolds (2018) discuss how it was the imperative for the GAA during this period to maintain its status and influence with ‘Fianna Fáil and the Church’, both of whom were woven into the GAA’s power structures. Murphy (2016, p. 154) describes the GAA and the Catholic Church as ‘the guardians of the spirit of the nation’, along with Fianna Fáil and Guinness. The GAA was therefore very unlikely to openly challenge the Church’s position on homosexuality throughout this period.

This context is important to understand the overall evolution of LGBTQ+ rights in Ireland. Perhaps more noteworthy, as McWilliams (2018) suggests, is the pace at which Catholic Church teachings became less influential in Irish society, leading to the 2015 Marriage Equality referendum. As Nolan (2018) suggests, the relationship between the GAA and the Catholic Church for such a significant period should be considered when attempting to understand perhaps why the organisation 'lags' behind the rest of Irish society when it comes to LGBTQ+ inclusion.

There are other pieces of literature produced in recent years that can also help us understand the progress of LGBTQ+ rights in Ireland. For example, Kondakov (2021) questions the progressiveness of 'Queer Ireland' for a number of reasons. Kondakov (2021) highlights how the decriminalisation of homosexuality in Ireland in 1993 is often heralded as a success of the strong civil society, while many historical accounts fail to give account for the substantial pressure being placed on the Irish state by European institutions at the time. Kondakov (2021) also points to the lack of appropriate hate crime legislation in Ireland as a reason as to why reported incidences of homophobia appear much lower than they are in reality. This research causes those who read it to give pause and consider how far Ireland really has come in eliminating, or at least reducing, incidences of homophobia. Neary and Rasmussen (2020) also produced a fascinating study which offers an account of the lag time between marriage equality being introduced and progress being felt by LGBTQ+ people on a daily basis. They do this through analysing the entanglements of sexual progress and childhood innocence in Irish primary schools. One child, on hearing that a classmate's aunt was marrying a woman, described the aunt as 'mad'. One parent was quoted as saying that she felt the 'Yes' side came across 'very pushy' during the campaign and that she felt the 'No' side was almost silenced (Neary and Rasmussen 2020). This study reminded its audience in a very distinct way that 37.9% of the electorate did vote against marriage equality in 2015 and social progress should not be taken 'as a given'.

## Methodology

### *Theoretical Framework*

The theoretical framework for this research is concerned primarily with the Theory of Change. The Theory of Change is a comprehensive description of how and why a desired change is expected to happen in a particular context. It does this by first identifying long-term goals and then working back to identify all the conditions that must be in place for this goal to be achieved (Smith 2010). In the context of this research, an inclusive and open GAA where LGBTQ+ players can freely identify without fear of prejudice is the long-term goal. The specific conditions that must be in place for this to be achieved is therefore the focus of this research. What is uncovered through the interviews is then summarised in my Gaelic Games Theory of Change table included at the end of this article.

### *Data Collection*

The findings are drawn from the five semi-structured interviews undertaken as part of this research, considering the two components of personal experience within the GAA and the appropriate policies the organisation now needs to pursue to create a more open and tolerant environment for its LGBTQ+ players.

Each participant was selected due to their own unique background and experience with the issue of LGBTQ+ involvement in the GAA. I became aware of each of the participants' work through their own advocacy in the media on the issue of diversity within Gaelic Games, with a particular focus on the LGBTQ+ community.

The interviewees each bring their own unique perspective to this conversation. Aisling Maher is a current Dublin Camogie player and passionate LGBTQ+ advocate. Gemma Begley was recently announced as the Gaelic Players' Association's (GPA) first ever Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Officer. Cathal O'Sullivan conducted a similar study to this last year, considering the lived experiences of gay GAA players. He also has experienced coming out to his own club, Portlaoise, a few years ago. Emma Loo is the Vice-Chair of Na Gaeil Aeracha, Gaelic Games' first explicitly LGBTQ+ inclusive team. She also completed a study two years ago examining the theme of LGBTQ+ inclusion in sports media. Brian Fennell recently appeared in an article for *Off The Ball* discussing his own positive experience of being an out GAA player with his club, Arklow Geraldines Ballymoney.

### *Data Analysis*

The data analysis of this research began with the audio recordings of the interviews. The method of thematic content analysis was then used to organise the discussions. In the context of this research, thematic content analysis is used to organise the content of the interviews into individual categories, allowing for the identification of common themes and messages across all participants (Vaismoradi et al. 2013).

### *Ethical Considerations*

It is acknowledged that the nature of this research may be a sensitive issue in some cases to research participants. Participants were aware of their right to anonymity and their right to refuse participation at any stage if they wished. It was also ensured that any information collected during the research study was stored in a way that protected the research participant's anonymity, if that was their wish. However, each participant consented to being named in the research.

## Findings

### *Personal Experiences of the GAA/ LGFA/ Camogie Association*

#### *'You're not just coming out to your team, you're coming out to your community'*

The GAA is arguably one of the most unique sporting organisations in the world because of its community-based nature, and the fact that it is an amateur sport. Having its roots in local communities across the country is a key factor to consider when trying to align progressive values with the organisation's decolonial origins. During our interview, Brian raised the point that coming out to a GAA team is arguably very different than coming out to a rugby team, or any other sports team for that matter. The interlinking of the game with its local community means that the knowledge of a club member coming out would likely extend beyond the confines of the team. This is a significant factor for any player to consider, especially if they don't want to be seen as 'different' from the people they've grown up with.

> You simply don't just come out to your team, you come out to the community. It's fair to say the GAA is the backbone to many communities in Ireland, especially rural Ireland. It's almost like a religion. This can make coming out daunting. The team might react well, but people in the wider community mightn't react well.

Emma builds on this point by claiming that this very nature of the GAA has meant that much of the LGBTQ+ progress within the organisation that has been made so far has come from grassroots activism. Progress has been quite rapid when it comes to LGBTQ+ inclusion in Irish society in recent years. When it comes to the GAA, LGFA or Camogie Association, grassroots activism will likely be a prime source of progress in years to come.

> It starts at grassroots… It has to come from a low level and a high level at the same time. So the likes of bringing education to coaches and people across the board. It's a slow process definitely, but it's getting there.

### *'Dressing Room Culture'*

I was eager to understand why some of the interviewees felt there was such a gap between the women's and men's game when it came to the levels of openness to the LGBTQ+ community. Camogie and Ladies' Football have far more LGBTQ+ role models, while a significant 69% of female players are aware of a gay or bisexual teammate, compared with just 10% for males (Newstalk 2022). Aisling believes that toxic masculinity has a role to play in this and maintains that many dressing rooms still pressurise players into filling the role of the 'alpha-male' without deviation (Adams et al. 2010). The common, and mostly unconscious, use of homophobic slurs such as 'faggot' would also surely make LGBTQ+ players who have not yet disclosed their sexuality feel unwelcome.

> If you're a young guy or a young girl in a dressing room and people are using the word 'faggot' or whatever it is, it's only the person who's sensitive who's going to take that on board. So everybody else who's straight or has never questioned their sexuality is probably never going to hear it but the one person that it will impact is the person who's already a little bit uncomfortable being there or are already a little unsure of whether or not they're welcome in that environment.

Cathal also expressed a view that the women's game could be considered a more tolerant space for the LGBTQ+ community. The findings by Newstalk (2022) do suggest this. Cathal believes a lot of this could be traced to the fact that there are many LGBTQ+ role models in the women's game (such as Aisling Maher and Valerie Mulcahy), but the same cannot be said for the men's game. Reflecting on this, he also believes this may contribute to an environment of fear or uncertainty for a male player considering coming out, given how unprecedented it would be.

> The likes of Valerie Mulcahy are role models for young women coming out in the sport. [For young men] It's probably a fear thing, it's vulnerability.

### *"It's a Generation Thing"*

One thing that is quite striking about two of the world's few 'out' professional soccer players is their age. Joshua Cavallo was just 21 when he came out in 2022, while Blackpool's Jake Daniels was only 17. Sports organisations are increasingly becoming more welcoming environments for the LGBTQ+ community. This phenomenon, in large part, appears to be thanks to the emergence of a new, tolerant generation (Magrath et al. 2021). This sentiment was shared by many of the interviewees. Cathal, who is only 23 (and was considerably younger when he first came out to his teammates) believes the society in which the current generation of players (born from the mid-1990s onwards) were raised has played a huge role. He also believes the first current-day male intercounty player to come out will probably be in their early twenties.

> We go off to college, NUIG or UL, you meet loads of people in the queer community. I think it's definitely a generational thing because we know, we're aware of queer people. We're more self-aware that they're around us. It comes back to educating that older cohort.

On the topic of age, Aisling also made an interesting point in that many older gay players in their late twenties and early thirties may have already stepped away from the game because of the casual homophobia experienced during their playing careers (Plummer 2006). Statistically, that would mean this age cohort may be less represented than younger players who are members of the LGBTQ+ community. She reflects on conversations with some of her friends who are involved in male intercounty teams around the topic of potentially having a gay or bisexual teammate. In their reflections, they admitted that the atmosphere of the team would rarely, if ever, have been a welcoming environment for a gay player.

> [Her friends reflecting] If somebody came out now in our team setup, just looking back on what our dressing room has been like for the last ten years, I'd feel really oppressed. That'd be incredible that they managed to stick around through that type of thing. If I was gay, I don't think I would've been able for that or I don't think that would've felt like a safe environment for me.

Aisling also stressed that this wouldn't have been done out of any malice or bad intent on the players' behalf. It simply reflected the lack of education that existed in these types of environments at that time.

> If you call them up on it being like hey don't be saying that man, I guarantee you 9 times out of 10 they'll be like 'oh no no, Jesus I didn't mean it like that'.

## Policies for an Inclusive Future

### *The Role of Education*

In attempting to create more open and tolerant environments, sporting organisations often consider what role workshops and basic education can play. Cathal maintains that workshops such as these would play a key role in fostering a more inclusive environment. It would help start a conversation while also training coaches, players and supporters alike in how to support a gay or bisexual club member. Reflecting on his own experience of coming out to his teammates, Cathal recalls how he was forthcoming in answering any questions his teammates may have had. The education he was subsequently able to provide helped to make his club, Portlaoise, a strong ally of the LGBTQ+ community.

> I was happy enough to talk about it [his sexuality]. A lot of people mightn't be, and that's OK too. But if the right regiment is in place for people to come out and the education is there amongst coaches and players to use the right language or to approach the situation in the right way, then I think we can start moving forward and becoming a more inclusive organisation across the board. The interlinking of role models and education is key.

Aisling similarly echoed the sentiment that education is key. She feels it may be more beneficial to have consistent reminders to club members of the types of values they're striving for, as opposed to sitting members down one weekend a year and talking about the issue of inclusion at length.

> Maybe just a talk, maybe just a 20-minute piece that's added on to those coaching workshops. I think if we can start to integrate coaches, managers and players, kids at a young age, then hopefully we can have more and more generations where nothing else is accepted and that's just the standard and what they expect to see.

When it comes to education, Emma believes there is significant potential for the GAA to partner up with organisations such as BeLonG To or LGBT Ireland to help roll out educational resources and workshops.

> The LGFA do training courses in how to be a PRO or how to be a chairperson. I could see in a year's time, 'How to be an LGBTQ+ Ally'. Simple as that. There are the likes of LGBT Ireland, TENI or BeLonG To who do these workshops all the time. That could be brought into the sporting world. I don't see why it couldn't be.

### *A Need for Role Models and Allyship*

The predominant theme emerging from each of the interviews relates to the importance of not just education, but that there are role models for younger players to follow. As mentioned, the survey conducted by Newstalk found that 99% of intercounty players would support a teammate coming out. Aisling believes this presents a unique opportunity for the GAA to

realise the role intercounty players can play in promoting inclusivity and tolerance in their respective clubs, particularly if homophobic language has unconsciously been regularly used.

> If you have the high-profile county stars coming back in (to their clubs) and saying 'don't be saying that man', 'are you thinking about what you're saying there?' or 'why not use this word instead?' or whatever kind of small thing it is, I would say the person who's responsible or the person who said it is going to go 'Oh Jesus I didn't mean that, I didn't mean that at all'.

Aisling also proposed the idea that there needs to be more straight male allies in the game as opposed to just waiting for, and putting pressure on, a male intercounty player to come out. Every county has its own stars who could be hugely influential allies.

> I would question why we can't have straight male high-profile players occupying that space, just verbalising and articulating the fact that they're supportive and they're allies and that if anybody on their team was to come out that they would be supportive of them and be welcoming of them.

Brian similarly echoed this sentiment by arguing that having a prominent out male intercounty star is not something we can push or force. There is no guarantee that this will happen in the next ten years.

> It's not something that we as a community can push to happen. That's not how it works. We can't just wait and rely on someone to do it. We're just going to have to get people who are not necessarily part of the community to publicly support inclusion.

Gemma also reflected on a working group discussion that was hosted by the GPA (Gaelic Players Association) as part of Pride events last year in Dublin. The group discussed how to increase LGBTQ+ representation in Gaelic Games. Gemma claimed the predominant consensus from the group was that the issue is a 'straight players' problem. She personally felt that there is strong allyship already within the male players' game and the task now is to simply make this more apparent.

> There's a perception there [teammates wouldn't be supportive], that maybe doesn't match the reality. They're the ones [straight players] that need to change the culture, change the inclusiveness, change the language and the messaging used.

## Discussion and Conclusion

Perhaps the most striking theme that this research identified is that the degree to which Gaelic Games is embedded in communities across Ireland presents the GAA with a unique opportunity. In their assessment, Hansen et al. (2022) proposes that the lack of a global consensus on LGBTQ+ rights is playing a role in discouraging global sporting organisations from adequately addressing the issue of LGBTQ+ inclusion. By comparison, Gaelic Games is not a world-renowned sport and does not have to cater for the cultural differences of a global audience. In addition, research findings of Magrath et al. (2021) and Bush et al. (2012) point to emerging generations of young sports people in countries such as Ireland who are

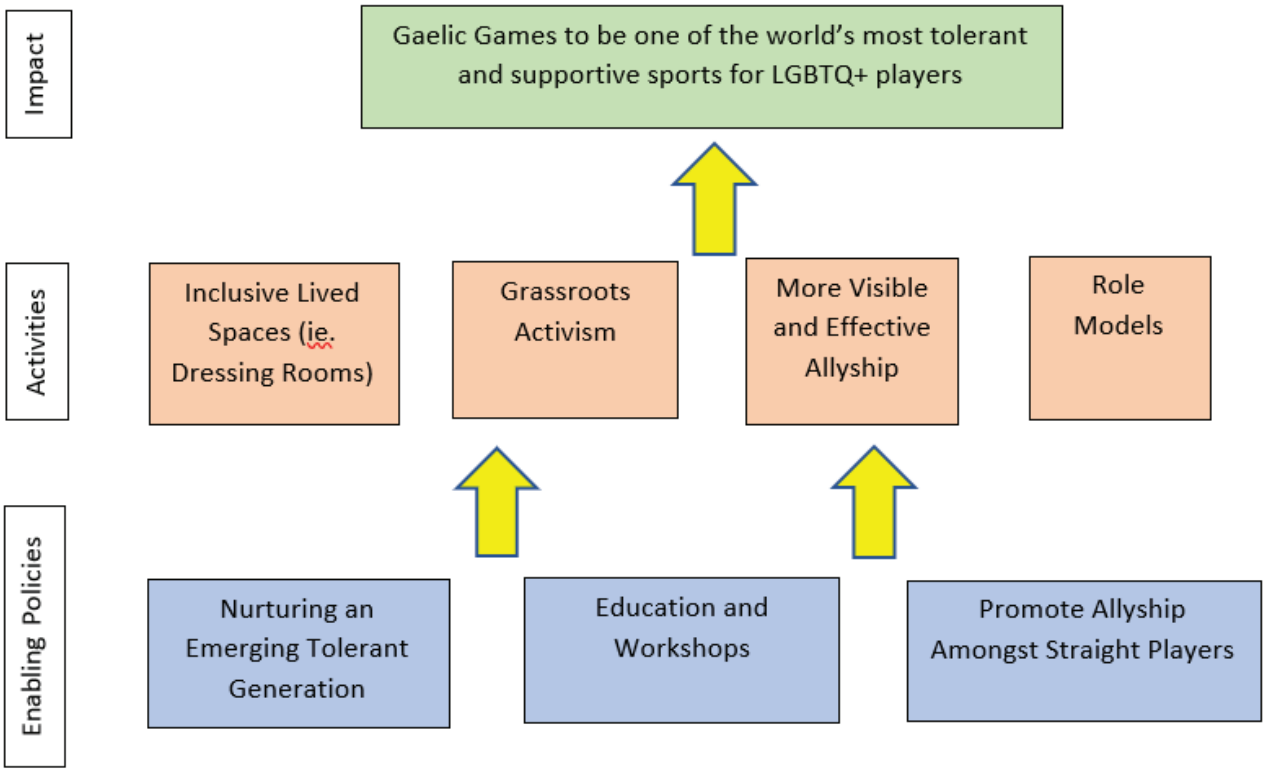
dramatically more LGBTQ+ inclusive than the generations that went before them. The belief therefore that team sports are hostile environments for LGBTQ+ players is wholly antiquated (Bush et al. 2012). This reflects Aisling's point in that casual homophobic comments are usually mistakenly made rather than heartfelt.

It stands to reason that a consensus existed amongst the interviewees that progress does not lie in large-scale marketing campaigns (although welcome), but in grassroots activism. Gaelic Games thrive in local communities. As Lawley (2019) argues, engagement needs to occur in the lived spaces (such as dressing rooms) where LGBTQ+ players may on occasion be inadvertently made to feel unwelcome. As noted by Murphy (2016) and Healy et al. (2015), it was grassroots activism promoted by regional Yes Equality groups that ultimately led to a 'Yes' campaign victory in the 2015 marriage equality referendum. It is that type of grassroots activism that the interviewees have now called for in Gaelic Games. The Theory of Change that is emerging here is reflecting the lessons learned from the marriage equality referendum campaign. When Brian said, *'You're not just coming out to your team, you're coming out to your community',* he hinted at the unique opportunity Gaelic Games has in meaningfully tackling homophobia and LGBTQ+ inclusion in communities across Ireland. The need for education and the subsequent benefits of educational workshops is a topic that could now be considered. Ideally this type of education should supplement mainstream coaching workshops and should not be treated as a standalone issue. Gemma helped to identify a key area where this can begin. Young players who are starting out in intercounty squads for the first time are required to undertake a personal development workshop to qualify for the GPA's sporting grant. It is Gemma's ambition that from 2024, a diversity and inclusion module will be included as part of this training. This would be a significant step towards producing a generation of intercounty players committed to the principles of tolerance and inclusion.

As a final observation, the interviewees predominantly presented an optimistic view of the direction Gaelic Games is heading in with regards to LGBTQ+ inclusion. As a sport, Gaelic Games reflects many of the cultures and traditions that make up Irish society. The findings by the GPA and *Newstalk* suggest that support for the LGBTQ+ community amongst the game's top players is almost unanimous. Allyship is quite clearly presented. Policy now needs to utilise this allyship to make the organisation the best version it can be. Education and allyship presents the best path forward without placing the burden for progress back on the LGBTQ+ community. As Gemma concluded, the ambition of the GPA now is to truly create an environment where each player feels they can bring their whole selves to the field.

The collection of these findings can therefore help us to produce our Gaelic Games Theory of Change. The need for Gaelic Games to become a sport where the LGBTQ+ community can openly participate and thrive in is the aim. That includes proactive allyship, inclusive lived spaces (such as dressing rooms), role models and grassroots activism. To achieve this, allyship needs to be promoted among straight players who are part of an increasingly tolerant emerging generation.

## An Overview of the Gaelic Games Theory of Change

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