

Arguing for the Self Through Activism: Ireland's Marriage Equality Campaign 2015

Mel Duffy, Dublin City University, Ireland

ABSTRACT

This article focuses on the reflections of negotiating the self—specifically, myself—during the 2015 referendum for Marriage Equality in Ireland. It focuses on the understandings and/or meanings that were conveyed to the LGBT community during the campaign. It could be formulated as the attempts by the last vestiges of societal institutions to shape society to their way of thinking—or rather, to maintain a status quo that had long passed. It was an experience in knowing how, why, and what was thought of the LGBT community, with no avenue for retort. It was the battlefield for the maintenance of a socialisation process which informed us of our place. The referendum became the articulation of the known as seen and embraced by the majority to be one day reproduced by the young. Within this context, a re-examination of the self was forced to emerge battered and bruised, but alive.

KEYWORDS

Campaign Self, Hermeneutic, Lesbian, Marriage Equality, Phenomenology

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INTRODUCTION

On the 30th May 2015, the Vatican Secretary of State, Cardinal Pietro Parolin, called the result of the Irish referendum on Marriage Equality a ‘defeat for humanity’. This was the ultimate conclusion of a belief system concerning the equality gained by the LGBT community. How had we come to this point? At one stage, in Ireland, 98% of citizens espoused the Roman Catholic Church belief system, professing to be believing in or submitting to its proclamations. However, the major concern of Parolin’s statement is his implicit answer to the implied question, ‘What does it mean to be a member of humanity’? For that matter, what is humanity—and more importantly, who embraces this concept of humanity? The referendum campaign that took place in Ireland unpacked this notion—calling into question the perception of the ‘self’ that every lesbian and gay person embraced.

METHODOLOGY

This paper focuses on my reflections, as an older lesbian woman, on the Marriage Equality campaign in Ireland. It is interpreted from a hermeneutic phenomenology perspective. Phenomenology is concerned with how individuals experience, describe, interpret and understand the phenomenon under investigation (Bergum, 1989). Hermeneutical or interpretative phenomenological theory proposes that social experiences, things (inanimate objects), and events have no intrinsic meaning in and of themselves; they only hold meaning because human beings confer them with meaning (Jones, 2003). Phenomenology is not only concerned with attitudes, perceptions, and lived experiences on an individual level, but also strives to investigate the way that meaning is constructed collectively, socially, and culturally—thus describing and interpreting ‘the meaning of the lived experiences for several individuals about a concept or the phenomenon’ (Creswell, 1998, p. 51). As such, phenomenology examines the manner in which singular, or several individuals construct reality based upon the interpretations and meanings they give to previous or similar situations. Therefore, this methodological approach is particularly suited to reflecting on my own experience of participating in this campaign both passively and actively.

The philosophies of both Heidegger (1962) and Sartre (1943/1969) underpin this reflection. The essence of Heidegger’s (1962) hermeneutic phenomenology is ‘Dasein’, which he refers to as the human being in the world. As Heidegger (1962) indicates, ‘Being-in-the-world is a basic state of Dasein’ (p. 86) and therefore ‘The “essence” of Dasein lies in its existence’ (p. 67). Johnson (2000) suggests that Heidegger views the human being as being ‘always involved in the practical world of experience’ (p. 136). Being in-the-world (Dasein) as a lesbian woman, I came to an understanding of society’s attitudes and perceptions towards the LGBT community and, by extension, how I experience that in my life. Sartre (1943/1969) was interested in the question of subjectivity. He suggested that individual freedom, unconstrained by religion or any other controlling factors, is not a means to an end, but rather an end unto itself. In this

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